CHAPTER TWO

SPACE TO PLACE: THE TAMILS AND THE CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF NATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Nature is essentially spatial as it extends over every point on this earth. That Nature is the material which human societies work upon to transform their lives was shown in the earlier chapter. Nature provides human societies with material goods and envelopes them in its embrace so completely that humans could not but use it as the main reference point to build their belief structures and economic life. In the process of transforming Nature, human societies themselves get transformed. A cultural system and tradition evolves in the process and societies are identified by their particular cultural system. At various points in space, Nature presents itself in different ways. Human societies confronting the dominant element of Nature evolve a culture system around that dominant element. In South India, five types of ecological regions are found where five specific cultures evolved, each possessing a different tribal society. Tracing the cultural beliefs of each tribal group in their specific cultural region which coincides with the ecological region, this chapter attempts to bring out the understanding of
Nature in the tribal societies of South India. The Tamil cosmology, the nature of each tribal society, their economic activities, religious beliefs, and representation of nature in their belief system will be elaborated. Through their elaboration the concept of place in ancient Tamizlagam will be expounded.

2.1 "INDIA" IN NEOLITHIC AGE

The earliest evidence of human presence in India is found in Bori in Maharashtra and is dated around 1.4 million years ago. As in other parts of the world, the early man in India lived by hunting and gathering until commencement of the Neolithic Age in 4700 B.P. Many paleolithic sites have been discovered in many hilly slopes and river valleys. In Bhimbetka, forty-five kilometres, south of Bhopal caves and rock shelters along with stone age implements, used by the Paleolithic man have been discovered.

The Neolithic period saw the beginning of plant culture in India. It is generally understood that the appearance of agriculture in the Indian sub-continent is belated in comparison to other parts of Asia, for many plants cultivated in India had long been domesticated in West Asia and by this time were on their way towards diffusion from the centres of origin. Archeological evidence is yet wanting regarding implements used in
cultivation and methods of cultivation. But it is generally thought that India could have been the centre of domestication of rice. The Neolithic sites of Chirand, Singhbhum and Oriyup in Bihar and Baidipur in Orissa have yielded evidence of wild rice and rice. From Eastern India, it is believed that rice could have spread to Southeastern Asia.

2.2 "SOUTH INDIA" IN ANCIENT TIMES:

"South India" is understood as the country South of Narmada and geologically was the oldest part in India extending from Raichur in the North to Rameshwaram in South; and contains the land between the coasts. For the purposes of this study the territory "South India" will be limited to the region where the Dravidian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam are spoken.

As in other parts of the globe the Paleolithic man of South India lived by hunting and food gathering as evolved by the large number of paleolithic tools which have been found in and around Madras in the Chinglepet district, Rallakalava near Renigunta and Chittor District and from several sites in Kurnool District. By around 4000 B.C. the Stone Age Man had taken a step towards domestication of plants and animals. Evidences of different types of items particularly the sickle, found in the fossil sand dunes of Tirunelveli in far south show that the South Indian had
acquired some sort of economic self-sufficiency though still directly dependent on Nature for his survival.

The first conscious steps towards creation of settlements, preparing of land for sowing and watering land with some kind of irrigation were taken on the numerous granite hills of South India at a height of 300 to 600 feet, in the districts of Raichur, Bellary, North Arcot, Chitaldurg, Salem, Madras, Anantapur and parts of Cuddapah, some 5000 years ago. H.D. Sankalia describes the settlements he visited as,

"They (settlements) look like castles from a distance, there are huge boulders perched on one another as if placed by man - some seemingly about to fall at any moment. But these have been there for the last 5000 years or more, and if one takes the trouble to climb these hills which are 300 to 600 feet high..., then one finds a beautifully enclosed area, yet fairly flat. They are the earliest settlements of man.

These people, besides making use of natural rock-shelters on these hills built "houses", indeed small huts, which were usually round, supported by round wooden posts (about 2 to 3 feet in diameter). These huts were covered with split bamboo screen, and occasionally the walls were
partly or wholly plastered with clay mixed with cow-dung. The roofs were presumably conical and invariably thatched. Some of the huts were 15 ft. (about 5 meters) in width. The floors were levelled by placing flat-topped stones and then bonded with clay and finally plastered with lime... At a rough estimate at least five to six people could live in these small round huts and we find that in a terrace at Sangankal or at Tekkalkota (near Bellary District), there would be at least ten to fifteen such round huts. From this we can say that a small community of eighty to hundred lived on each terrace and on a hill like Tekkalkota, where there are no less than twenty such terraces, could be accommodated a population of about 20 x 100 (2000) people at the minimum. There are numerous such hills spread from Mahabubnagar in Andhra to North Arcot District or Salem in Madras through Anantapur and parts of Cuddappah.  

The people of these settlements cultivated ragi (millet) and horsegram which flourished on the sandy, 

lateritic soil and even hilly areas. To water these plants, they organised primitive rain water harvesting systems and collected rain water (to be used for irrigation) was led from one terrace to another. By the time of Neolithic period a well-organised way of life, living partly on agriculture and partly on stock-breeding and hunting was established in South India. As in other parts of the world, eventually in South India too, the society started developing rapidly as other crafts and specialisation started taking root in the society during the Chalcolithic period. Huge megalithic tombs were constructed with great care, planning and organisation. The construction of these megaliths show the participation of the priest, architect, artisans and potters. "Surveys of Megalithic sites of Chalcolithic age which ended about 900 B.C., in Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Mysore point to an occurrence of such magnitude which has played an immense role in the organisation and expansion of the later Tamil Society until the advent of the British. Chalcolithic period is characterised by river valley civilizations in every part of the world excepting in South India. Almost without exception every megalithic site of this period found is in the semi-arid zone of South India, particularly

in barren rocky terrain, and studding these megalithic habitations are artificially created ponds. Surveys of the sites in Chinglepet District in Tamil Nadu, show that "these artificial ponds were first made by the megalithic people and here for the first time we find irrigation conducted with the help of these ponds." The concept of constructing artificial ponds was scientifically advanced and refined in course of time that in the entire semi-arid region of South India, various kings took to building of artificial tanks so large in magnitude and so advanced in technology for irrigation that it had become impossible for the colonial British Government or the Indian Government to do much to improve these tanks. This mode of irrigation played a major role in the expansion of Tamil culture, population and creation of new settlements or places. These artificial tanks called eris, remained the major focus of the village society for centuries and around them the village colony was organised and through them Nature also was continuously changed.

In spite of the fact that neolithic settlements were scattered all over India, existing evidence demonstrates that, materially, these cultures did not differ much until about 4000 years ago. The beginnings of the Chalcolithic

3. H.D. Sankalia, op.cit., p.35.
cultures varied in many places and in South India, it started at a much later period. But a civilization as unique as the Sumerian, Egyptian or Indus, grew up in these semi-arid tracts watered mainly by seasonal rivers. This Dravidian civilization developed "according to its peculiar environment, namely castellated hills, looking down red, rocky plains, occasionally interspersed with stretches of rich fertile soil". It was in this unfavourable environment that the Dravidian cultures especially that of the Tamil culture took root and the people of this region strove to modify space and Nature to create an environment suitable both for settlement and for survival, given the fact that the entire area fell in the rain shadow region, water and its sources became the ultimate in the society and water became the object of worship as in other civilizations and societies, but more so in the Dravidian Society.

2.3 TAMIZLAGAM

Prior to the establishment of large politics with distinct territorial extent, small chieftaincies merged. It was only by the Third Century B.C., three major kingdoms - the Chera, Chola and Pandya - came to be established in the southern most part of India in an area comprising

4. Ibid., p.36
approximately the modern Tamil Nadu and Kerala; the southern part of Andhra and Karnataka and this area came to be clearly identified and referred to as Tamizlagam as the Tamil language came to be spoken by the people of this region. In Tamizlagam poets and scholars had a rare honour of being able to travel into and across various principalities right from the earliest times, that is even before the establishment of strong monasteries and kingdoms. The poems written by a "wide spectrum of poets of different occupations, social and economic standing" and pointed to a bardic tradition. The bards enjoying the advantage of travel, not being subjected to territorial impediments were in a unique position to be observers of various social, economic and political happenings. The events of daily life, though written in a romantic fashion, nevertheless is considered to be an authentic record. This idea is conveyed quite precisely in the introduction of Kamil Zvelebil's monograph:

"Again, literature is not created out of nothing, nor does the poet exist in vacuum. There is the society of which the poet is a member; there is a tradition from which he seeks guidance, both positive and negative; and there is his inner urge

to express himself. Literature is a product of all these factors, though in varying degrees. The literary artist cannot divorce himself from the life of the people. He creates a work of art which, of necessity, is representative of the life of either his immediate fellow men or his cosmic brotherhood."

The poets hailing from all such strata of society and of both genders, were sensitive to various sections of society, therefore, were able to describe the dravidian society with a deep understanding and their verses reveal an early Tamil society totally devoid of Vedic or Sanskritic influences of caste and religion. The poems of these bards have come down to us in the form of Sangam classics. Under the aegis of the Pandya kings, three 'Sangams' or meetings of scholars and poets of the entire Tamil country is said to have been held in Madurai. The fact that three Sangams have been held is evidence that the Tamil civilization had advanced rapidly and had attained a certain level of pre-eminence. The Sangam period

6. Ibid., pp. v-vi.

considered the classical age of the Tamils commenced prior to the Christian Era, spanned several centuries and was marked by a high level of linguistic sophistication and maturity that could compare with the most advanced linguistic cultures of the day. This classical period is marked by a corpus of literary works which were compiled by various scholars and poets. Unfortunately the works of the first and second Sangams have been lost but that of the third Sangam which shows certain distinct influence of Sanskrit, is nevertheless, a valuable work about the life of Tamils.

The bards of earlier period had left behind a vivid record of the social life of the people, their agricultural activities, economic activities, philosophy, religious practices, and a brief history of the Kings and Chieftains who ruled various principalities. Most important of all the poets have left for posterity a chromatic portrait of Tamil society's ecological understanding; the division of Tamizlagam into five ecological regions and the way the early Tamil society existed in congruence with Nature through the Sangam classics.

2.4 NATURE AND SOCIETY IN EARLY TAMIZLAGAM:

2.4.1 The Concept of Tinai: A Preliminary Note

Unlike the modern world which looks at environment as a resource or commodity, based on the use value, ancient
cultures looked at Nature not as an inanimate object but as a living entity which was deeply entwined with their emotional world.

The pre-Vedic Tamil civilization described its geographically natural world and the emotional attitude it inspired, by the unique concept 'tinai'. According to Tolkappiyam, a Sangam period treatise on language, literature and life and Ettutokai or Eight Anthologies and Pattupattu or Ten Songs which together form a literary corpus, 'tinai' as a concept was a poetic convention corresponding to the ecological division of land and dealing with the themes of love and war, particular to each ecological division. The main characteristics of tinai were: (a) terrain or the geophysical aspect of each region and time; (b) food, flora, fauna, the drum, religion, the economic activity, the musical note and the water source; and (c) the behaviour pattern that is characteristic to each region. All these can be seen in the following description of tinai.

The geographical extent of ancient Tamil country is identified as roughly including the southern most part of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, the modern Kerala and Tamil

Nadu. This area was divided into five ecological divisions, each having a distinct physical landscape and appropriate human experience. The Tamil country has within its embrace a variety of landscape. This diversity of landscape gave rise to the ecological divisions which became fundamental to Tamil poetry, society and activities. Basing on the differences in topography, climate, vegetation, soil, water sources, animal life and human activities the landscape was divided into five distinct types or tinais. A culture distinctly indigenous to each of these divisions emerged from the human activities.

The mountain and hilly regions were known as 'kurinji' -- a flower (strobilanthus) which was native to these mountains. The kurinji included the Western Ghats, the Nilgiris, the Palani, the Annaimalai, the Yelagiri and the Javadi hills. The inhabitants of this region were called 'kuravar' -- a tribal group still found in the hilly tracts of Tamil Nadu. The Ghats were abundant with the tropical forest called the 'sholas' and wild animals such as elephants, tigers, bears, deer, wild boar and iguanas; birds such as peacocks and other species were found in plenty. The main water sources were streams, where fishes and crocodiles thrived. The Kuravars were mainly hunters and food-gatherers as the terrain was unsuitable for any sustained cultivation. The forests offered them flesh of animals, honey, wild fruits, nuts, roots and fishes for
food and Hill slopes if found suitable were used for cultivation of millet - the principal grain in the region. The kuravars lived in small nucleated settlements on the hill slopes and valleys. These settlements were very small and were called 'Citukuti'. The religious beliefs essentially focused on animism and worship of Mayon or Murugan, who is even today a principal deity of the Tamil people. In worship, honey, flowers and millet were given as offerings and ritual dances were performed to the music of flute and drums during festive occasions. The poets of Sangam period associated kurinji as a place evoking tender emotions and as the ideal place for courtship and sexual union of lovers when singing in praise of love. Kurinji was the setting for declaration of War. Warriors adorning themselves with Vetel flower (Iccora Coccina) went out to capture cattle as a prelude to War.

2.4.3 Mullai

The 'Mullai' was the pasture lands, named after the fragrant white jasmine flower (Jasminium Trichotomum). *This region included the undulating meadows and scrub forest lands in the modern Trichirapalli, Salem, Coimbatore and Madurai districts. The inhabitants of this region were called 'aayar' or 'iTaiyar', terms which signified the occupational character of the people as herding. The mullai lands supported extensive herds of cattle buffaloes,
goats and sheep which were reared for their dairy produce. The dietary habits naturally centered around milk and ghee. Deer, rabbits and wild birds were hunted and their flesh eaten. The excess dairy products were bartered for rice and millets from the neighbouring regions. Though water sources were not perennial, some cultivation of coarse grains and ragi was undertaken near the river bank areas. The people were semi-nomadic and lived in compact groups in small and simple structures and their settlements were referred to as 'ceeri'.

The ecology limiting the economic activity, the focus of social and religious life characteristically became the cattle, which were worshipped with many rituals and ceremonies the main deity was Ceyon.

2.4.4 Marutham

'Marutham' constituted the riverine plains and the delta region of the rivers Kaveri, Pennar, Tamparabaram, Palar and Vaigai. The marutham (Terminalia Tomentosa) is the flower of the myrtle tree usually found on the banks of rivers and tanks. The fairly perennial supply of water made it possible for agriculture to take root and more numerous and permanent settlements to rise. The people of marutham were called 'Ulzhavar' or tillers of soil. Technology in terms of irrigation was highly developed, tanks were built for water harvesting and lift irrigation
using simple mechanical devices using bullocks called 'aampi' was developed. Paddy and sugar cane were the chief crops and the technique for cultivation was elaborate and complex and continued with minor changes until recently. Rice was the staple food and was extensively cultivated and bartered for cattle, honey and goods of other regions.

The permanency of agriculture served as an impetus for conducting elaborate social and religious practices. Water festivals gained much religious significance and tanks, rivers and the seasonal rains were worshipped as it was realised that the agrarian economy could survive only if water was available. Other ceremonies linked to agriculture were also held and they are in existence till today throughout Tamil nadu. Goats were sacrificed to Vantan, the rain God and offerings of flowers and toddy were made. It was in this region of Marutham that permanent settlements in the form of villages arose. The villages were called 'Ur' - a term which is used even today. The division of labour was more pronounced in the marutham region, as agriculture and the more complex style of living demanded it. Trade with other regions was carried on. Rice, pottery, handicrafts and other implements were bartered for honey, nuts, wild herbs, deer flesh, salt, fish, butter, cows, bullocks etc. - the produce of other regions. The marutham was the richest of all the tinais as it was able to produce larger surplus in form of food
grains. Able to support a large population, the Marutham soon went beyond tribal organisation of society and the first political entities in form of kingdoms arose in this region. The Kaveri delta region gave birth to the Chola Kingdom with capital as Uraiyur; the Vaigai belt commenced the Pandya Kingdom with Madurai as capital; the Kanchi on the banks of the Palai became the capital for the Pallavas and the Chera Kingdom arose on the banks of the Kaveri. The rise of strong and competing political authority in the Marutham region induced pioneering and vigorous colonisation of land for agriculture and to extend authority territorially.

2.4.5 Neythal

The littoral region on the Bay of Bengal in the east and the Arabian Sea and its backwaters in the west were called 'Neythal' after a flower (Nymphae lotus alpa) of an aquatic plant that grew in the backwaters. The sandy tracts were water logged in the low lying areas and were covered with aquatic plants and mangrove swamps in the western side. The eastern littoral region was mostly bare and only shrubs and palms were found extensively in these lands. The continental shelf surrounding the coastal lands, a natural area of fish breeding helped to make fishing the main occupation. Based on the implements they used to catch fish, the Fisher folk were called
'nhulhaiyar' or people who caught fish using lines, valainjar or fishermen who used nets and thirdly parathavar. The fishing activity necessitated and influenced the construction of different types of boats some of which till date is used in Kerala for inland fishing and the Kattumaran (Catamaran) of Tamil Nadu is still famous. The Bay of Bengal being a very rough sea with heavy surf washing all the way to the shores did not permit easy launching of boats. The catamaran, which was three or four logs tied together was the only vessel which could navigate the surf. The coconut and 'panai' or the palm tree played a major role in the lives of the people of neythal. The palm trees grew in abundance in the poor sandy soil of the eastern coast and every part of the palm was used in a variety of ways. The timber was used for rooting, while the logs were for the catamarans. The leaves provided cover for the huts and the stem was torn into long threads and woven into ropes. The fruit was of great nutritive value and was used in many ways. The germinated roots of the fruit were dried and eaten during the lean periods when fishing was not possible. Toddy was tapped from the palm and the sap of the tree was used to prepare jaggery or country sugar. The palm, recognised for its resilience and usefulness became a symbol of kingship in ancient times. The flowers of the 'panai' or palm tree were considered as the titulary flowers of the Chera
kings. The tree was considered sacred and cutting it down even by an enemy was considered to be a matter of shame.

Salt production was the secondary activity in Neythal. The people who produced salt were called 'Uppilliar' or salt makers. The low humidity, high temperature and the high salinity of the waters of Bay of Bengal combined to make this region especially productive in salt. "Vast areas of land touching the sea and the subsoil soaked in brine play a vital role in the high production of salt" writes Prabha Naresh. The production of salt involved, as Vandana Shiva expounds, Nature as the female principle. "Nature, both animate and inanimate, is ... an expression of ... the female and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle..., creates the world". Salt making involves preparation of two fields of lands - one called 'aan paathi' or the male field and other the 'penn paathi or the female field'. The saline water from the sea is let into first the male field.


for a period of time, for evaporation. Then this water is transferred into the female field where it undergoes gestation before crystals of salt form.

Trading can be said to have originated in the region of Neythal. Food situation being precarious as the land was wholly unproductive and the reliance on fishing was not possible in monsoon periods, many of the Parathavars took to trading with salt and fish, being the commodities. Salt was rated highly in Marutham and was used as payment for labour as was rice and also as a primary commodity for barter. Moreover, plying boats, the parathavars became skilled navigators of the sea and soon came into contact with Arabs, Chinese, Romans and Greeks who came for trade. This contact accelerated the process of urbanisation along the sea coast and many cities grew up in the Neythal region.

The parathavars lived in settlements built close to the sea called pakkams. When the pakkams grew large on account of trade, they were called pattinams. Religion was based on worship of sea and Varunan was the main god to whom offerings of fish and salt were made.

2.4.6 Paalai

Paalai was the arid and semi-arid tracts of land. Though the other four terms denoted specific geographic
regions, the people of ancient Tamil country were aware that if the monsoon fails the Kurinji and Mullai region could become arid and desert like with dried vegetation and drought conditions would prevail. The poets transposed the theme of separation on paalai, as the terrain being scorching, parched and hostile, the husband was forced to separate from his wife in search of food and fortune. As the physical well being suffers the emotional state becomes hostile due to separation, and the traveler, trader and people of other regions were subjected to attacks, and cattle lifting and robbing of grains became the prime activity.

The southern tip of the peninsula consisting of the districts of Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram was highly susceptible to drought and was referred to as Paalai. Known as Maravars, the people were hardy and were famous for their fighting skills. The bow and arrow was their main weapon and the houses were adorned with these weapons. Religious rites were performed with martial dances and 'Kottavai' the God of victory, was worshipped. Flesh of animals which were hunted were offered to the God.

2.4.7 Concluding Remarks

This account shows that the people of ancient Tamil country were aware of the different ecological conditions of the landscape and evolved appropriate human responses to
the landscape. Some of the features described above have survived until now as religion and occupation. The people of Marutham and Neythal played an important role in colonisation and spread of Tamil culture in Tamil Nadu and South and South East Asia, when the political entities in terms of kingdoms emerged.

The above brief exposition of the concept 'tinai' even in simple terms, would not fail to provoke one's mind to the importance of the concept. With regard to the evolution of Tamil civilization and their concept of Nature. The concept of 'tinai' has proved to be of great significance historically as it has provided clues to the pre-history of South India. Sociologically, tinai points to development of the South Indian society prior to the Aryan influence. Many practices and traditions of today have their roots embedded in the practices which were in vogue during the period when South India was in tribal stage. Worship of Murugan and his recognition as God of beauty and Tamil; the notion of the importance of place, of local fixation of the divine; and the notion of puja, non-fire sacrifice to idols in temples may have originated during this period, as a Dravidian practice and have continued till date in the same form.\textsuperscript{12} More importantly

\textsuperscript{12} Zvelebil, op.cit., p.86.
the tinai concept brings to attention the existence of five tribes which could be distinguished according to the ecological classification of the Tamil landscape and these five tribes are supposed to have existed in five different stages of evolution. There are enough evidence to believe that these five stages of evolution existed simultaneously as lines 143-202 of the Cirupanarrupatai of the Pattuppattu or Ten Long Idylls describe the various places the bard had to pass through before arriving at the place of the patron. What makes tinai concept wholly valid is that even in the twentieth century many tribes are found living in a phase which modern society has long ago passed. The validity of tinai becomes all the more completely unquestionable as not only is Tamil Nadu ecologically and geographically diverse also socially one can identify the existence of fishing communities (parathavars), the Kuravars, and Maravars as caste groups in modern Tamil Nadu.

2.5 THE CONCEPT OF TINAI: AN ELABORATE VIEW

2.5.1 Representation of Nature in Tinai

Each tinai or landscape was considered by Tholkappiyar the author of "Tholkappiyam" as a natural "world" of its own. Each region differed from the other in flora, fauna, and other basic matters as food and economic pursuit in such vast degree that the inhabitants given the level of technology were only able to pursue a life-style which was
materially well contained within the natural boundaries. In Kurinji, mullai and neythal the level of development is comparatively lower than marutham — where domestication of plant for cultivation, adoption of plough and other mechanical devices are more in evidence and the dependence on Nature is in a lesser degree. Whereas, in Kurinji, the earliest stage of development of human society, that of the palaeolithic stage is manifestly evident.

The concept of 'tinai' was used by the early tamils not only to reveal their internal perception of the world around them in ecological terms but as explained earlier, it was also employed to reveal the behaviour patterns and the code of conduct in love and war, as appropriate to each landscape. Each region was contingent to evoke certain singularly distinct emotions in the state of love and these emotional states or "interior landscapes" were in correspondence with the exterior landscape which was the geographical reality. The treatment of each emotion and situation of love and war was symbolised with Nature being the constant medium. The symbolization was essential as "Man lives in a world of two orders, partly in actual physical world and partly in the symbolic - cultural world.

of his imagination and abstraction." Moreover, according to Raymond Firth, "A Symbol is a 'device for enabling us to make abstractions', but with some end in view - a symbol has instrumental value. ...Our concept of what a symbol is depends on our view of the Nature of reality". Symbols facilitate communication through minimum verbalization and maximum use of imaginary. Ideas are shared more easily and over time as symbols serve as stores of meaning and obviate to some extent the need for reformation of ideas. To the bardic poet, symbolization becomes instinctive, for journeying through various principalities, geographic areas and ecological entities, encountering numerous tribes and occupational groups, is compelled out of necessity to communicate in a facile and implied manner using symbols which facilitate understanding. Towards this goal, the bards employed Nature as it was the reality which was dominant in the life of the people and also the bard's mental concepts, images and fantasies fused with the facts of Nature making the concrete image and abstract idea, an indivisible entity which is flexible, convenient and easily understood.


2.5.2 Tinai and Tamil Cosmology

The early Tamils understood that the universe had a spatial element which is inseparable from time and this time-space continuum is indispensable as they constitute the "basic, first entities in terms of which the phenomenal world may be described" and "everything must be perceived and conceived within the time-space coordinates". The time continuum was perpetual and changing in form of the major seasons of the year and the minor times of day and night.

There are six seasons or six major times of the year when an event in human life can take place. The six seasons are: rainy season in August-September; winter season in October-November; early dew season in December-January; late dew season in February-March; the season of "young warmth" in April-May and the Season of "ripe heat" in June-July. There are also six minor times of day and night consisting of our hours each: dawn, sunrise, midday, sunset, nightfall, and dead of night. The space continuum was the stage for humans to "fight and mate" and comprised of the five elements: the earth, water, fire, wind and sky, which were the essential elements of the ecological

regions which corresponded to the physiographic divisions and the cultural landscape of Tamil people. The drama of life unfolded in the stage of these five ecological regions and the regions had their manifestations in a framework which is conceived as concrete representations of the "native" or "things born" termed in Tamil as "Karu". The "native" elements were broadly divided into two namely the Gods and Nature - both of which were considered to be strongly local and indigenous to each region. Nature was further classified into Human and Non-Human Nature. Tribes, chieftains, occupations, arts, way of life, customs, musical instruments etc. were considered to be human and treated as such. Whereas non-human Nature was of two types : animate and inanimate. Birds and beasts were animate while flowers, trees, objects, forms of water (whether a mountain - rivulet, a broad river, the sea, ponds, waterfalls, etc) were described as inanimate Nature.

Nature, as can be deduced from the chart, had a prominent place in the bardic poets. The bards portrayed Nature as a metaphor, and symbolic of human realities. But, nowhere was Nature awarded a primary place nor were these representations of Nature exclusive; Nature was always integral but a subordinate component which was organically blended with those of human, living and its relatedness. The human life was adjusted to be endowed with a relationship which was undifferentiated from the
universe. Zvelebil writes,

"such a conception of human reality in terms of Natural phenomena could verily be called 'hylozoistic' in so far as the ancient Tamil poets apprehended the worlds of man and Nature by the same mode of cognition."17

Nature, furthermore, was depicted in a forceful and typically abbreviated style, as the goal of the poet was mainly to present the human life and its struggles. Therefore, Nature is never found to be described or praised for its own sake. Natural phenomena, behaviour of beasts and birds, and descriptions of natural scenery, the changing climate, the time in terms of day and night, the different water forms etc., were more expressively used in a 'symbolic indicative and inferential' style to convey the human feelings and actions. This style also demonstrates the constancy of Nature, the centrality and the harmonious role it played in the lives of the ancient Tamils. What is perceptibly apparent in these poems is, the primacy of Nature in the development and its dictation of the course of the life situations of the early Tamils.

2.6 **THE CONCEPT OF PLACE IN ANCIENT TAMIZLAGAM**

This is perhaps the best juncture to inquire into the meaning of place in ancient Tamizlagam. Tuan states,

"Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning."18

Sack firmly believes that place incorporates four interconnected realms which help constitute each other. The realms are Nature, meaning, social relations which include economic activity and human agency.19 For Giddens,

"Place...always involves an appropriation and transformation of space and Nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space."20


The above three definitions establish distinctly that 'place' is not just a physical setting involving territory or boundary, but includes principally, appropriation and transformation of Nature and space. This appropriation and transformation essentially becomes valid and real in the process of formation of place only when meanings are attributed by the human agency. Individuals, groups and communities lay claim to space by carrying out certain routine: every day functions. Performance of which necessitates frequent encounters with Nature. Such encounters subjectively and intrinsically increase the experiential essence of space and Nature and in course of time meanings are ascribed and get built into the milieux as the routine day to day functions become established practices. Through these practices a certain sense of permanence, continuation, attachment and identification is transformed on to the spatial milieux through the vehicle of culture and thus places are created. Michael A. Godkin acknowledges that,

"places in a person's world are more than entities which provide the physical stage for life's drama. Some are profound centres of meanings and symbols of experience. As such, they lie at the core of human
In Tamizlagam, Nature had played an important and a predominant role in the formation of places. Four regions possessing distinct features physiographically, ecologically and socially existed as separate entities with diverse economic activities which lent itself for reproduction of cultures specific to the region. The tribal character and beliefs constructed on the basis of the dominant ecological element were also reinforced and reified the culture specific to each region. In the Kurinji or the mountain region we find cultivation of millet is combined with hunting and gathering as economic activity and the cultural sphere is specified and symbolised by the drum called tontaka and the mountain lute. In mullai, the forest and pasture region the spirit of the itaiyar and aayar are underlined by the erru (drum) and the forest lute along with bull fighting and kuruva dance both of which personified the pastoral occupation and marginal cultivation. The landscape of marutham being fertile plains which lend itself for proper agricultural activities is also culturally the most sophisticated region with festivals where the mana and kinai - two types of drums are beaten particularly during the marriage and paddy

harvesting time. It is here that appropriation of space and Nature by the human agency is at the pinnacle compared to the other ecological regions and the increasing imprint of the human society on Nature is made visible through the mode of production which reveals a certain specialisation and existence of a division of labour which has modified the tribal existence and had ushered in a class society.

This social stratification of the marutham region based on class was duly reflected on the land holding pattern and the appellation used for the inhabitants: Kataiyar or men considered to be of lowest status, a qualification caused by the tendency to perform wage labour and Ulavar or ploughmen or agriculturist who possessed land. The littoral region people are deeply involved with the marine activities for their survival as the land is not suitable for productive activities. Essentially surviving on subsistence economy as fishing or salt making is not possible during monsoon season, the people here resort to trade in salt and dry fish. Their culture specific symbol is the 'pampai', the drum of fish-caught and the boat drum; and the vilari or lute which sounds like the call of the sea-breeze. The cognomen of the coastal people as in every other region attested to the authenticity of and approbation to their technology. The technological differentiation conformed to the land-sea assemblage and
divergence, that is where the sea penetrated the land to form backwaters the fisherman used nets (valai) to catch fishes and so were called 'valainar'; fishing in ponds, lakes, rivers and streams, were carried on with fishing-lines, therefore, these people who fished in land were called 'nulaiyar', those who went to sea to catch fishes were known as parathavar, while salt manufacturers were known as 'uppilair'. The paalai or desert region, people by the 'maravar' committed robbery, raided the marutham, Kurinji and mullai for cattle and food, attacked the salt and fish traders of neythal became famous for their martial skills. The young men of paalai were called 'mili' literally meaning 'the strong one', 'the valiant one' 'the fighter'; or 'ritalai' meaning 'the young bull' or 'kalai' literally 'the bull or steer'. The utukkai drum and the desert lute symbolised their existence as a martial tribe in the inhospitable region.

This account demonstrates the fact that in the 'tinai' concept the "cognitive structuring of space and Nature is linked to the actual ecological characteristics".22 Tinai also gives substance to Lovell's contention that "in primitive societies it often seems that spatial concepts are rooted in the language developed to describe 'concrete

and personal situations'. By attributing specific meanings to the each physiographic and ecological areas, a particular type of society with distinct social and economic activities which appropriated certain space and Nature existed. The mental construct of the ecological world organised with an exactitude of attitudes, believes, cultural artifacts and symbols present a 'place' which seem to be territorially large. The social relations created by the human agency in each specific place of nethal, mullai, kurinji and paalai, exhibit largely a tribal society and polity except in the marutham area.

Place, in ancient Tamizlagam it can be asserted, appears to be an outcome of meanings attributed to the dominant Natural element by the human agency whose activities - economic and cultural along with the behavioral patterns have meshed to mould the concept of place. Zvelebil is correct when he remarked that,

"the 'tinai' has been frequently described in a rather one-sided and incorrect manner as 'landscape', 'region', etc., as a geographic category ...where events take place. This, however, is only one face of the 'tinai', since 'tinai' is a unity of behaviour-patterns and

23. David Harvey, op.cit., p.194.
appropriate landscapes"\textsuperscript{24}.

The idea that 'tinai' refers to 'place' is given substance by the term 'tinai nilaippeyar' whose primary meaning is 'settlement' or 'clan'. It can be argued that 'settlement' would refer to the different types of settlements such as 'cirukuti' in the Kurinji; 'pati' in mullai; 'perur' and 'mutur' in marutham, 'pakkam' and 'pattinam' in neythal and 'kurumpu' in paalai; which could be defined as the Nature, meaning, social relations and human agency operate continuously to form a 'place'. Here, the other meaning of 'tinai nilaippeyar' which is 'clan' assumes importance as it denotes a spatial spread and given the fact that the different activities - economic and social - particular that of the hunter-gatherer, the semi-nomad and the raider automatically demand a spatial spread it is clear that only 'tinai' can be accepted as 'place' and not those settlements, which unlike tinai do not explain the behavioural patterns, attitudes, beliefs, and activities of the human agency.

In the concept of 'tinai', Nature is seen as a predominant force which moulds and dictates the social, religious and economic life of the people of each region. But, 'tinai' also contained within it at the embryonic

\textsuperscript{24} Kamil Zvelebil, \textit{Tamil Literature}, Wiesbaden : Otto Harassowitz, 1974, p.36.
stage the seeds of change. The 'place' in the concept 'tinai' is a territorially large entity with blurred boundaries, political decentralization, casteless society, with minimal external influences and with different modes of production, which signified an uneven development and social values. Land on its own was not significant element in the concept of tinai but was gaining prominence in the marutham region (on account of its ability to produce surplus). The Marutham, both in social organisation and in economic activities was far advanced in comparison to the other regions and was evolving politically into kingdoms with definite territories, monarchies and corresponding values which not only permitted growth of feudalism but also colonisation. Neythal was another region which had the potential for change in terms of urbanisation. The fisher folk in course of time developed an interest towards maritime trade due to frequent contacts with the Greek, Roman, Chinese and Arab traders. These foreign trade contacts, the coming of the Brahmins and possibility to increase the production of surplus contributed immensely to radically transform the concept of place.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In the 'tinai' concept, the discovery of Nature by the different tribes in Tamizlagam is disclosed. It is also conspicuously demonstrated that the early Tamils
shared a symbiotic relationship with Nature and neither did they separate Nature from rest of their universe nor was Nature considered as object outside, fixed and ready for exploration independent for its existence from them. The symbiotic identification with Nature was so intense and binding that the Tamils expressed themselves as part of Nature in their behavioural patterns. Though the process of humanising the landscape was continuous, the objectification of Nature did not occur, until outside forces and influences impinged to bring about a radical change.

The *tinai* concept conclusively demonstrated that the early societies in South India lived a spatially extensive and predominantly a semi-nomadic existence. In accordance to their existence, each society and tribe attempted to define the nature they encountered and attributed specific meanings to the nature in an attempt to convert it into an environment for habitation as 'meanings are not inherent in the nature of things'.\(^{25}\) It is explicit that in each of the ecological region the environment, the environment created by human acts became symbolic as it was,

"conferring meaning to nature and the environment,

of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision, and through a special filter of values and beliefs."

On each of the ecological regions what is apparent is that there existed a primordial relation between each of the tribes and the space where they carried out their religious, social and economic activity and this primordial relationship brought into play identities specific to that ecological region. This relationship with nature also was reflected in the self-definitions and in the cultural context as exemplified by the type of drum and religious activity of the people of each of the tinai regions. Therefore, tinai exemplified the subjective symbols and meanings through which the kuravars of kurinji the maravars of paalai, the itayars and aayers of mullai, the parathavars of neythal and the uzlavars of marutham, attempted to construct a place. Places in ancient Tamizlagam thus were more of self definitions and cultural identities of each of the tribes than about the natural environment alone. Considering places as an extension of themselves each tribe exercised specific means of adaptation to each ecological region. The modes of adaptation of each tribe not only point out the symbols and meanings that comprised places but also reflected what

people of each tinai defined as to be proper and improper relations amongst themselves and between themselves and nature. Viewed this way, tinai becomes an exposition of not only Nature, space and place but also about place being social and not just physical. Thus the places of each tinai embody the ethos of the ancient Tamil tribal society.

In the next chapter, the change in the concept of place will be traced. Places become a projection of the social structure in the medieval Tamil Society. Placement of people in space corresponds to the organisation of society which is on the basis of caste. Moreover, the placement of people enhances the power and use of the natural sources of particular caste groups while other caste groups are permitted restrictive use of the sources. At the macro spatial level, a typology of places emerge which correspond closely the caste structure, while at the micro spatial level residential space and environmental space are ordered in a fashion which shows an adherence to the principle of purity or impurity. The next chapter also highlights how people transform their settlement space into place by using cultures.