INTRODUCTION

The present Kanyakumari district comprising the four revenue taluks of Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Agasteeswaram and Thovalai is a region of rich tradition and greater historical antiquity. Once, it formed the southernmost region of the erstwhile princely State of Travancore. Later it seceded from Travancore to accede to the Madras State by the State Reorganisation Act of 1st November 1956. This district, being close to the equator, generally enjoys a tropical climate. However, it is made unique by its geographical location and suitability for human habitation. Ever since the formation of the district Nagercoil has been the district headquarters. It is said that two hundred years ago this Nagercoil had been quite an inconspicuous hamlet in the region. At the same time the adjacent Kottar flourished as a commercial cum political centre of international repute.

Kottar

In the ancient days Kottar was famous for its trade and religion. Its historical significance needs to be highlighted because it is now neglected.

and more or less forgotten. Nagercoil was but an unknown hamlet when Ptolemy in the first century visited Kottar and referred it as a ‘metropolis’ with considerable amount of trade.\(^4\) Recognising its significance as a centre of multifarious activities Villavarayan develops the idea that Kottar was the capital and the main centre of Venad. Under the Venad administration all the chief thoroughfares leading to both the fishing coast and the Travancore seaboard passed through this Kottar.\(^5\) Ptolemy also refers to Kottar as Kottiyyara in his travel accounts.\(^6\)

History tells that Kottar was a famous business centre even before the rise of Christianity. It is interesting to know that Kottar in those days was a vast area stretching to many places like Vadasery and Vadiveeswaram. Twelve inscriptions of the Naga Raja Temple could find entry in the records of the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Department. Nine of them belonging to the 16\(^{th}\) century and one to the seventeenth century A.D. mentioned the place of location of the Nagaraja Temple as Kottar.\(^7\) This clearly indicates the fact that the present city of Nagercoil, which is believed to have taken its name from the Nagaraja Temple, did not exist in those days.

The Vadasery of today, noted for its vegetable market and other shopping centres, was once part of Kottar. It is said that this Vadasery could

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5. Ibid., p.17.
attain independent entity from the eleventh century A.D and this fact is backed by some inscriptional evidences. The place name Vadasery is found in the inscription of the Chola Raja Temple of the twelfth century A.D constructed at Vadasery. In various inscriptions the name of Vadasery is mentioned in different ways. For example, in the Puravaseri Perumal Temple inscription of the fourteenth century A.D Vadasery is depicted as “Vadasseriyana Mummudi Chola Nalloor”. The inscriptions found in the Krishnankoil Temple at Vadasery of the fifteenth century A.D also bears the name Vadasery. From these evidences it is clearly known that the northern part of Kottar was popularly known as Vadasery from the eleventh century A.D onwards.8

Kottar, the one time capital of the Venad kings, acted as the seat of Jainism in the south. One inscription of the year A.D 1520 bearing the name of the Venad king Poothala Udayamarthanda (1503-1546) describes the Nagaraja Temple of Nagercoil as a Jain Palli.9 It is evident that the king donated a piece of land to the Palli. The names of the two Jain monks – Kunaveera Pandithan and Kamala Vahana Pandithan found in the inscription highlight the fact that Jainism flourished in Kottar.10 During the

9. Palli is a word found in the Tamil and Malayalam languages. In Tamil it means school and in Malayalam it means place of worship. As for as this inscription is concerned it must have been a school or worshipping house. Otherwise it must have served the purpose of both school and Temple.
period of Sambandar Kottar was famous as a Jain Centre. The Jain settlement that flourished at Kottar is now known as Nagercoil. An academy of art is also said to have flourished at Kottar.\textsuperscript{11}

One of the inscriptions in the Nagaraja Temple shows that till the sixteenth century A.D this temple functioned as a Jain Palli and that Jainism flourished in the area. Some other inscriptions in the temple are witness to the fact of the royal gift of land to the Palli for its maintenance and for the welfare of its adherents. Recently an inscription was found in the Mutharamman Thiru Koil owned by the washerman community locally known as Agaliar (Dobi) community. The temple is situated close to the St. Xavier’s church at Kottar. This inscription belongs to the kollem year 990, ie A.D 1815 and bears the name “Kottar” among its contents.\textsuperscript{12} Hence it is proved that throughout the region, Kottar was the only central place and the place with the name Nagercoil was yet to be born.

Dr. Caldwell in his ‘Oppilakkanam’ describes the popularity of Kottar. The foreign missionary St. Bartholomy also praises the commercial greatness of the Pazhayar bank from where the river turns southward to reach the sea. The place situated on the bank of the river at this turning point got the Tamil name Kottara. It was the capital of Venad and had been the scene of many pitched battles for a long time.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} S. Padbanabhan: The Hindu, dated 23.03.1993, p.3.
\textsuperscript{12} Dinamalar, (Tamil Daily), 08.12.2000.
Kottar attained prominence in the annals of religious history because of St. Xavier. St. Xavier developed Kottar into a seat of Catholic faith in the region. At Kottar the parathas were the first Catholic converts, whose mass conversion took place between 1535 and 1537. Along with the St. Xavier’s Christians of Kottar there were also a few St. Thomas Christians in the region. They claim greater antiquity than the former and were mainly merchants by profession. Among the Nadars who lived in the interior regions of Kottar a few had embraced the faith of St. Xavier. Subsequently, casting twilight on Kottar, a discarded place came to limelight in the name of Nagercoil.

**Emergence of the Place in the Name of Nagercoil**

A probe into the various facets of the history of the region shows that Kottar had developed in all walks of life. When Kottar was at the zenith of its fame and popularity there existed no place with the name Nagercoil. Hence the very name Nagercoil could only to be a later development and its origin is attributed to the Nagaraja Temple of Nanginlad. However, its rise to eminence is attributed to the establishment of the London Missionary Society.

14. Ibid.
17. London Missionary Society herein after to be referred as L.M.S.
The Silesia born William Tobias Ringletaube\textsuperscript{18} was the first Protestant missionary to step into South Travancore in the name of L.M.S. With the assistance of a native of Mylody,\textsuperscript{19} Ringletaube started the Mission work at Mylody in 1806.\textsuperscript{20} The endeavour of Ringletaube resulted in the formation of seven congregations and a few subordinate activities of the church. He left the Mylody Mission in 1816 to be succeeded by Charles Mead\textsuperscript{21} in 1817. Perceiving that Mylody lacked the potential for much development Mead shifted the Mission centre in 1818 from Mylody to a hamlet in Kottar which was to be known later as Nagercoil.\textsuperscript{22} With this, the Mission entered upon a new era of expansion and growth.

The name of the place Nagercoil officially appears first in a letter of Mead sent to the London headquarters of the L.M.S in 1818. This

\textsuperscript{18} William Tobias Ringletaube was born on 8 August 1770 at Scheidelwitz in South Prussia. In 1789 he joined the Theological College at Halle. He was ordained on 26 July 1796. In 1797 he came to Calcutta as a missionary of the society for promoting Christian knowledge. There his health was severely affected and so he resigned his post and wanted to go back home on 16 July 1799. There he joined the L.M.S and reached South Travancore in 1804. (Rev. John A. Jacob, History of the London Missionary Society in South Travancore (Tamil) Nagercoil, 1956, p.30).

\textsuperscript{19} Mylody is the first mission centre of the L.M.S in Travancore. It is located 10 k.m. South East of Nagercoil. Maharasan Vethamanickam the first convert belonged to Mylody in South Travancore.

\textsuperscript{20} C.M. Agur, Church History of Travancore, Madras, 1903, pp.17-19.


\textsuperscript{22} L.M.S. Report for the year 1819, p.54.
may be the earliest and the first document to bear the official name of the
place Nagercoil.23 The name Nagercoil was derived from the Hindu Temple
called Nagarammankoil. It is said that the gift of the Devasthanam lands
enabled Mead to start the work of the L.M.S in the new place. Besides the
gifted lands Mead also purchased two acres of land. He donated the
purchased land to the poor Christians to build their houses with the help of
the Mission. Thus emerged the Christian village of Nagercoil.24 With this
the fame and prestige enjoyed by Kottar began to fade and it eventually
merged with the newly developing Nagercoil centre. Later the Nagercoil
centre emerged as the headquarters of a revenue district as well as the
nucleus of a municipality, a revenue village and a few Christian churches and
their establishments.

The ancient town of Kottar is now absorbed into the new
municipal town of Nagercoil.25 In 1828 William Muller the L.M.S.
missionary along with his wife Mary Muller came to Nagercoil for Mission
work. During their stay in the place she died on 21.01.1828 and was buried
in the graveyard of the Kalkoil. The inscription on her tomb bears the place
name Nagercoil.26 This may be the first of the inscriptions to bear the place

23. Charles Mead, L.M.S. Nagercoil, 24 April 1818, Letter to the Home Board,
L.M.S. London.
25. J.M. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.34.
26. Inscription on the tomb of Mary Muller, Kalkoil graveyard, Nagercoil, dated
21.01.1828.
name of Nagercoil. Further, this fact is backed by literary and Archaeological evidences.

Thus, the evidence received from different sources helps us to know that by the beginning of the nineteenth century Nagercoil began to rise to eminence whereas Kottar was reduced to a subordinate position. The promulgation of the Travancore municipal Act of 1891 A.D. added a new feather in the cap of Nagercoil. Following that, in 1893 the Travancore Government built a Clock Tower at a spot in between the L.M.S church and the Nagaraja Temple. It further enhanced the status and prestige of the newly developed Nagercoil centre making Kottar just its tail end portion.

In 1894 based on the Municipal Act of 1891 an improvement committee was constituted to develop the sanitary condition of Nagercoil town. This committee consisted of Government officers as advised by the Travancore king. The tax imposing power hitherto denied to the committee was granted in 1901. However, Nagercoil became a municipality only in 1920.

**Formation of Nagercoil Municipality**

Once Nagercoil became a municipality importance was given to sanitation of the area and a sanitary inspector was appointed to look after the sanitation of the municipality. In the initial stage an overseer was

28. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
appointed on Rs.12 per month.\textsuperscript{32} In 1923 an additional sanitary inspector was also appointed. He channelised the work of the overseer and peons of the municipality for the improvement of the area.\textsuperscript{33} In the same year a daily market was opened in the Nagercoil town. It helped the agriculturists to sell their produce and the consumers to purchase them as they pleased.\textsuperscript{34} The number of the members of the Nagercoil municipality was raised from 2 to 20 in 1925.\textsuperscript{35} In 1926 the municipality got the right to collect professional tax.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1942 a commissioner was appointed to head the administration of the Nagercoil municipality. In 1947 the Travancore Government upgraded it as a first grade municipality.\textsuperscript{37} In 1956 when this region was merged with the Madras State, the Madras administration reverted it into a second grade municipality. Later in 1961 it was upgraded into a first grade municipality.\textsuperscript{38} Nagercoil, the headquarters of the Kanyakumari Revenue District, includes places like Krishnankoil, Vadasery, Ozhuginachery, Meenakshipuram, Vadiveeswaram, Kottar, Edalakudi,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., No.8, File 451/1922 Municipal and Local, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., No.11, File 267/1923 Municipal and Local, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., No.12, File 380/1923 Municipal and Local, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., No.16, File 6/1925 Municipal and Local, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., No.22, File 302/1926 Municipal and Local, English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{37} T. Velazhagan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
Putheri, Parvathipuram and Asaripallam. Its present growth and glory owe much to the efforts of the Christian missionaries of the L.M.S. Now Nagercoil is a selection grade municipality administered by an elected council.

The area selected for the present study has an area of 24.27 sq.kms and it is self ruled by the Nagercoil municipality. The total population of the area according to the census report of 2001 is 208149 with 103075 males and 105074 females. This municipality has 51 wards and the Clock Tower Junction comes in the 36th ward. The town is bounded on the western and southern sides by the Anandanar Channel. The Pazhayar flowing on the eastern side forms the eastern boundary of the Nagercoil municipality. The paddy fields stretching up to the Putheri tank at the foot of the low lying Western Ghats mark the northern boundary of the Nagercoil of our study. A peep into the geographical features of the area may be of some help to this study. It may give an insight to the readers and a new look to the theme. Hence an attempt is made to analyse the geography of the area to some extent.

**Geography of the Area**

The Travancore State was located near the equator lies between

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40. Ibid.
76°14’ and 77°.38’ of the eastern longitude and 8°.4’ and 10°.22’ of the northern latitude. Abundance of rainfall, moderate heat and the cool sea breeze help to maintain a uniform temperature throughout the year. The rainfall of the present Kanyakumari district is higher than in Tirunelveli but lower than in the hill stations of Kerala State. Nagercoil being part of this district too is endowed with a pleasant climate. Surrounded by river and other water sources like tanks and canals the place is good for human habitation as well as the flora and the fauna.

Agasteeswaram is the revenue taluk in which Nagercoil is situated. Agasteeswaram and Thovalai taluks have the traditional name of Nanchil Nadu. Pazhayar, one of the main rivers of the district flows through Vadasery and hence it is called Vadaseri river. The Nagercoil region receives water from Pechipparai. There are a variety of plants in the district. Trees are used for commercial and fuel purposes. A graft variety of the mango and the supporta are the specialities of the region. Large quantities are exported to foreign countries.

47. Pechipparai Dam: This Dam is built across the Kodayar river at Pechipparai during the period of Srimulam Thirunal (1885-1924). It provides water facilities to Nagercoil.
48. Report on the administration of Travancore, 1941-1942, Trivandrum, 1943, p.3.
49. Ibid., 1942-1943, p.89.
Language

Kanyakumari district is a bilingual area, where Tamil and Malayalam are spoken languages. However, Tamil is the language of the majority people of this area. 50

Economy

The economy of the area is not highly agrarian but most of the people are agriculturists. Paddy is the chief of the crops raised in the area. 51 Vegetables are rarely cultivated, but dumped into Nagercoil from different places in and out of the district.

Religion

Hindus, Christians and Muslims are the three major religious groups in Nagercoil. Others like the Jains, the Zorastrians and the Buddhist are believed to have existed once. 52

Social Divisions in Nagercoil

The social scenario of Nagercoil varies from that in the other parts of the country. Various communal groups like the Brahmins, Nairs, Vellalas, Nadars, Chaliyas, Muslims, Kurups, Mukkuvas, Parayas and Pulayams live in the same street. 53 Society is kept divided by caste and religion. The Non-Hindu section of the society consists of Christians and

53. Travancore Administrative Report, 1941-1942, Trivandrum, p.3.
Mohammedans of the place. Based on caste, Hindus were divided into high caste and low castes. Brahmins, Nairs and the Vellala inhabitants of Nanchil Nadu came under the category of Caste Hindus. Ezhavas, Nadars, Kamalas, Fishermen, Pallar, Pulayar and Parayar were treated as low caste.

**Brahmins**

Brahmins were not the original inhabitants of the place. They came here taking advantage of the confusion created by the Chola invasion of the Chera country. It is said that at the beginning of the eleventh century the Cholas defeated the Cheras at Kottar and brought the Nanchil Nadu under their control. This marked the end of the Nanchil kings. The Chola influence caused confusion and affected the regular life of the people. Taking advantage of the flight of the Chera kings the Brahmins (Vaediar) of Cholamandalam came to Nanchil Nadu and took control of the temples. The Chola kings patronised them with grants and concessions and kept them at the top of the social ladder.

The Brahmins of Travancore were found divided into Namboothiries or Malayali Brahmins and Foreign Brahmins or Non-Malayali Brahmins and the former claimed superiority. Though they

(Namboothiries) were few in number they occupied a higher status in the religious and state hierarchies than the foreign Brahmins.\textsuperscript{59}

The Brahmins who came from Maharashtra, Tulu, Tamil nadu and Kanara and settled in Travancore were called Foreign Brahmins.\textsuperscript{60} The Brahmin intruders mingled with the Naga Natives of Nanchil Nadu. They diplomatically trapped the Nagas by worshipping the Naga Gods and marrying Naga girls to their younger sons.\textsuperscript{61} In due course, the good relationship of the Naga natives with the Brahmin intruders caused a transformation in the society.\textsuperscript{62}

The Nagas in Travancore were called Nairs. The Brahmins found that the Nairs were clever and cunning and called them Sudras\textsuperscript{63} They also accepted them as high caste in the society. Later the Nairs and the Brahmins started ill treating the low castes. With the Brahmin and Nair hegemony firmly established caste system started taking deep root in the soil of Travancore society. This was reflected in the economic and cultural life.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{59} A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{A Survey of Kerala History}, Kottayam, 1967, p.275.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, New York, 1871, p.29.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Joy Gnanadhason, \textit{A Forgotten History}, Madurai, 1998, p.20.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p.21.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Sudras: In the four fold division of the Vedic Society the Sudras stood at the bottom. But in the history of Travancore society, the Sudra section did not form the counterpart of the Vedic Society. Here the exact term is Sootra and not Sudra. Sootra means cunning. As the Brahmin intruders saw the native Nagas as cunning and intelligent they called them as sootras, that in course of time became Sudra. This Sudra or Naga section is popularly known as Nair.
\end{itemize}
of the people. The Brahmin inhabitants of Nanchil Nadu were Tamil Brahmins and are called Iyer. They had greater allegiance to the Temple and religious matters than to the political administration. This priestly class was treated with high esteem in the society. They enjoyed free meals in the Oottupuras.

Most of the Brahmin settlements in Nagercoil are found on the south of Zillah court in the form of streets called gramams. Besides this the Brahmins are found at Krishnankoil, Meenakshipuram, Ooluginasery, Nagarammankoil and Vadasery. As per the missionary records Vadiveeswaram area was thickly populated by Brahmins. This is frequently mentioned in the letters of Mead.

The Brahmins were trustees of the temple and they brought the temple property under their control. The low caste people who lived under wretched conditions, sold their land to the Brahmins. Thus the Brahmins became landlords and this situation led to the creation of the institutions of

65. Ibid., p.22.
66. Ootiupuras are the free feeding centres meant for the Brahmins, usually attached with the temples.
67. Annual Report of the Travancore District Committee (herein after to be referred as TDC) Travancore Mission Hospital, 1876, p.14.
70. A. Sreedharamenon, A Survey of Kerala History, p.165.
land lordship (Jamni system) and feudalism.\textsuperscript{71} The Nairs stood next to the Brahmins in the social ladder of the Nagercoil region.

**Nairs**

Nairs formed a section of the high caste Hindus. They are known by the titles of Pillai, Thampi, Nair, Kartha, Kaimal, Kurup and Menon after their names.\textsuperscript{72} The common name was Malayali. They were warriors by profession and largely found in government services.\textsuperscript{73} As a reward for their military service they were occupying the arable lands of the country paying no tax to the state. Their Marumakkathayam or Matrilineal system of inheritance facilitated protection of the family property without division.\textsuperscript{74} Most of them were landed aristocrats.

Based on feudalism Travancore or Venad was divided into Nadus. Nadus were divided into Desams and were in turn divided into Karais. A Nadu was supervised by Naduvazhi and Desam by Desavazhi. They were Nairs. As landlords the Nairs were also called Janmies.\textsuperscript{75} The Nair women were pretty and the Namboothiri Brahmins were attracted to them. Hence the aged Namboothiries made concubines of the young Nair

\textsuperscript{71} A. Sreedharamenon, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, New Delhi, 1979, p.76.

\textsuperscript{72} V. Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, p.347.

\textsuperscript{73} Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.V, Delhi, 1975, p.293.

\textsuperscript{74} V. Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol.1, p.363.

\textsuperscript{75} A. Sreedharamenon, *Social and Cutural History of Kerala*, p.77.
girls. This liaison helped the Nairs to gain an exalted position in the society.\textsuperscript{76}

Karai was again divided into many Tharas. Each Thara given to a Nair was called Tarawad.\textsuperscript{77} The low castes cultivated the lands of Tarawad and paid rent to the head of the Tarawad called the Karnavar. The Karnavar collected all dues and remitted the same to the Desavazhi and the Desavazhi in turn remitted it to the Government.\textsuperscript{78} In the social history of Travancore Tarawad remained as a major feature with an organisation of its own.

The set back caused to the Nair ascendancy during the reign of Martanda Varma (1729-1758) was made good during the reigns of subsequent kings. Their practice of concubinage with the Nair ladies resulted in setting up of Ammaveedus.\textsuperscript{79} As the days passed by their traditional glory began to fade and the later generations came to the towns

\textsuperscript{76} R.N. Yesudhas, Peoples Revolt in Travancore, Trivandrum, 1973, p.18.

\textsuperscript{77} Tarawad: The Nair family obtained Tharai from the Royal family. The Karnavar or the head of the Nair family divided the Tharai again to give it to the low caste people for cultivation. At the expense of the Royal family a house made of wood was constructed with all facilities to the Nair family. This was originally called Tarapadu to be termed as Tarawad later.

\textsuperscript{78} Thrivikraman Thampi, Thekkan Pattukal Chila Adisthana Chinthakal (Malayalam), Trivandrum, 2000, p.165.

\textsuperscript{79} Ammaveedu: The formation of Ammaveedu is attributed to Travancore king's concubinage with the Nair ladies. The Maharajas gave vast areas of arable land as tax free to such concubines. Most of the areas were coconut groves and paddy fields. In the midst of such beautiful village lands the royal concubines constructed comfortable houses. Such houses were called Ammaveedu.
for education and employment. The Vellalas of Nagercoil were in no way inferior to the Nairs of South Travancore.

**Vellalars**

The Vellalars were not the natives of Nanchil Nadu or Nagercoil. Having migrated from other places of the Tamil country like Kumbakonam, Madurai, Tanjore and Tirunelveli they settled in the Thovalai and Agasteeswaram taluks. They were basically agriculturists and it is said that at the request of the Venad king they adopted the marumakkathayam. The Vellalars along with the Nadars helped Martanda Varma in 1729 against the Nair Lords and Ettuvettupillaimars. In turn the king granted irrigation facilities to the Nanchil Nattu Vellalars and also appointed them as Valiamelazhuthu. They were men of artistic skills. Among them the names of N.S. Krishnan of Oozhukinaseri, D.K. Shunmugam and T.K. Brothers are worth mentioning.

The Vellalars formed an association called “Vellala Association” to safeguard their interest and communal solidarity.

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81. Valiamelazhuthu: It means Account General or Finance Secretary. The Vellalars were called Kanakku. Hence they were known in the names like Kanakku Thankappan Pillai S/o Kanakku Perumal Pillai. Now it is a Non-existent title.
82. N.S. Krishnan: N.S. Krishnan was a famous cinema actor and belonged to Oozhuhinachery. In honour of him the Government High School at Oozhugunachery was named after his name as KNSK Government High School, Oozhuganechery.
83. Interview with P. Yogeeswaran Rtd. Professor in Tamil Presidency College, Madras, dated 19.05.2004.
T.M. Chidambarathanupillai, a freedom fighter was a member of the Vellalar association. Sivathanoo Pillai who took active part in the Tamil Nadu Congress Movement belonged to the Vellalar Community. The State Congress supporter Dr. S. Muthukaruppa pillai was also a Vellalar. Vellalars, like the Nairs, used the surname Pillai after their names and appeared equally dominant in the area. Yet, most of the Vellalars, because of their marriage alliance with the Nairs, gave up the surname Pillai and assumed the surname 'Nanchil Nattu Nair'. A majority of the Vellalars, almost identified themselves with the Malayali Nairs and adopted their culture. They accepted the marumakkathayam system of inheritance like the Nairs and came to be known as marumakkathaya Vellalars. Generally Vellalars were land owners. They adopted Brahminical rituals and kept themselves aloof from the low castes. There is a Vellalar colony at the right hand side of the Nagercoil Collectorate. Vellalars also live in Vadasery and Oozhukinachery in large numbers.

**Nadars**

Nadars formed the upper layer of the lower strata of the society. Till 1921 they were called Shanars and thereafter called as Nadars. They

89. G.O. No.785, 7 July 1921 Law (General) Department Government of Madras.
predominantly occupied Vilavancode, Kalkulam and Agasteeswaram Taluks.\textsuperscript{90} Some Nadars worked in the lands of the Nairs and Vellalars as agricultural labourers. The Nadars of South Travancore came from Tirunelveli and Ramnad districts of the Tamil country. They formed the majority community. They were palmyrah climbers by occupation.\textsuperscript{91}

Nadars had a low place in society and did not enjoy equality with the other communities. Restrictions were imposed on them in matters of clothing and ornaments and Nadar women were forbidden to wear upper clothes.\textsuperscript{92} They were not allowed to carry pots of water on their hips. Nadars were prevented from domesticating milk yielding cows and using vehicles and foot wear. They were considered as an unprivileged class and prevented from possessing houses with more than one storey.\textsuperscript{93}

Economically Nadars faced many sufferings. Numerous taxes were collected from the Nadar community. One of them was poll tax. This tax was collected from those between the age sixteen to sixty. Tax was also imposed on the palmyrah tree from which the Nadar’s drew toddy to earn their livelihood.\textsuperscript{94}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{90} D. Daniel, \textit{Travancore Tamils Struggle for Identity 1938-1956-Part I}, Madurai, 1992, p.4.
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Proceedings of Church Missionary Society 1823-1824, p.227.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Cover File No.1231, Report of V. Rama Rao Dewan peishar of Quilon to Madhava Rao Dewan of Travancore 30 September 1869. English Records, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, p.57.
  \item \textsuperscript{94} Samuel Mateer, \textit{Native Life in Travancore}, 1991, p.292.
\end{itemize}
The Government collected pattom\textsuperscript{95} tax from the Nadars and compelled them to render Uliyam\textsuperscript{96} to the Sircar. Fees were levied on their marriages. Prayachittam\textsuperscript{97} and Purusantaram\textsuperscript{98} were also collected from them. Those who failed to remit the taxes were severely punished and forced to do work without wages. It was this repression that led the Nadars to embrace Christianity in South Travancore. In short the early L.M.S. missionaries Ringletaube and Mead found a rich ground in them for evangelisation.\textsuperscript{99}

In Nagercoil the Hindu Nadar habitations are found largely at Vetturmimadam, Kattayan vilai, (North east of the Kaliankadu C.S.I church) Kesavapuram, (South east of the Kaliankadu C.S.I church) Thalavapuram, Punnakkadu, (Surrounding areas of S.T. Hindu College) and Ramanputhur. Similarly Christian Nadars are settled at Christu Nagar, Bungalavady (North east of Women’s Christian College) Vetturmimadam near Holy Cross Hospital, Puthukudiruppu and Kurusady\textsuperscript{100} (West of Chettykulam). The Nadars were not the only community to be downtrodden. The Ezhavas were their fellow sufferers.

\textsuperscript{95} Pattom is the amount given to the owner of the property by the tenant as rent.
\textsuperscript{96} Oliyam is a type of wage free work to masters or Lords.
\textsuperscript{97} Prayachittam is a fine imposed on the inhabitants for any supposed or any real offence.
\textsuperscript{98} Puru Santaram is an undefined tax upon the inheritance of property.
\textsuperscript{99} I.H. Hacker, \textit{op.cit.}, p.34.
\textsuperscript{100} Interview with Thrivikraman Thampi, Rtd. Teacher, Parvathipuram, Nagercoil, dated 5.1.2005.
Ezhavars

Ezhavars are called Panikar or Vaniyar. Being considered as low caste, they were not allowed to go near the high castes.\textsuperscript{101} Most of them in South Travancore were agriculturists while in north Travancore they were coconut toddy tappers.\textsuperscript{102} In Nagercoil they are found at Kottar to the west of St. Xavier Church and also scattered over the other places.\textsuperscript{103} Like the Ezhavas a large number of Kammalars are also there in Nagercoil.

Kammalars

The Kammala community consists of five sub-divisions. They are Goldsmith, Kannaan, Carpenter, Kalthatchan and blacksmith.\textsuperscript{104} Though they were considered as low castes they adopted the customs of the upper castes. Goldsmiths are largely found at Vadasery.\textsuperscript{105} Unlike the other communal groups, the silk weaving community called Chaliyas is unique to Nagercoil.

Chaliyas

Chaliyas are weavers by profession and are found at Oozhuginachery, Vadasery and Krishnankoil. It is believed that they migrated to South India from their original home of Maharashtra in North

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\textsuperscript{101} Robert L. Hardgrave, \textit{op.cit.}, p.57.
\textsuperscript{103} Travancore Administrative Report 1941-1942, Trivandrum, p.3.
\textsuperscript{104} Census of India, 1931, \textit{op.cit.}, p.373.
\textsuperscript{105} T.D.C., Report of Nagercoil Mission District for the year 1894, p.13.
India. A large number of them settled at Vadasery are silk weavers by occupation. They are said to have come from Valliyoor and Poothapandi. At Vadasery we can see five types of Chaliyars. They are Vadakku Chaliyar, Valliyoor Chaliyar, Kudumi Chaliyar, Malaival Chaliyar and Chinnarachingar Chaliyar. The Chaliyars developed 47 streets in the Vadasery region to live in. Besides their traditional occupation of weaving some are engaged in agriculture, business and carpentry. Government employees are very rarely found among them. For the development of this people Srimoolam Ramavarma started a school at Vadasery and now it has grown into a higher secondary school.

The pioneer family is the top most Chaliya family of Nagercoil. Its founder Kumaraswamy was a good industrialist. His family also started a college at Vetturnimadam in Nagercoil called Pioneer Kumaraswamy College. The famous merchant Nallaperumal of Nagercoil also belongs to this caste. This minority community has great solidarity. To make use of this solidarity for their common development all the five groups have joined together to form one society called Chaliyar Sangam. The Chaliyars are

110. Ibid., pp.16-18.
111. This school is located 1 km. North-west of Clock Tower Junction, Nagercoil.
112. This College is located 1.5 km. West of Clock Tower Junction, Nagercoil.
saivites and worship Siva and Ganapathi.\textsuperscript{113}

**Mohammedans**

Traditon says that during the 8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. the Arab traders came to Nagercoil for horse trade and settled at Kottar and Vadasery.\textsuperscript{114} They have a mosque near Kottar built by Sheik Moortheen.\textsuperscript{115} In Nagercoil a large number of Muslim habitations are found at Edalakudy.\textsuperscript{116} They are also found at Vadasery and Haneefa Nagar.

**Pulayas**

Pulayas were once the most repressed section of society. They bore their degradation patiently and were subjected to the evils of untouchability and unapproachability\textsuperscript{117}, but are rarely found in the Nagercoil area.

**Parayas**

Parayas were called Parayans and Sambavar.\textsuperscript{118} They were subjected to slavery and servitude at the hands of the high castes.\textsuperscript{119} Though

\textsuperscript{113} T. Thangappan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.20.


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., September 2004, p.26.

\textsuperscript{116} T.D.C., Report of Nagercoil Mission District for the year 1860, p.18.

\textsuperscript{117} V. Nagam Aiya, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol.II, p.403.

\textsuperscript{118} Tamil Nadu Adi Dravida Schedule Tribe Welfare Department Beneficiaries List: Backward Class S.No. 56.

\textsuperscript{119} C. Darwin, Malankara Syrian Catholic Church in Kanyakumari District – A Study (Unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation), Tirunelveli, 1995, p.5.
they were the back bone of agriculture, they lived as slaves and are largely settled at Putheri near the Catherine Booth Hospital.

**Chakliyas**

Chakliyas are called Arunthathiyar in official records. They are largely settled at Krishnankoil, Kamarajapuram and Henrypuram. They are at the threshold of progress and seek employment opportunities in the government. In order to safeguard their interests they have formed a society called “Arunthathiyar Sangam.”

Thus the detailed study of the social divisions of Nagercoil shows the presence of all the social groups in the place. It has also brought to light the fact that many had migrated from other places in the country. From the very early times the place must have appeared attractive to many an outsider. The Clock Tower, the S.L.B. School, the Filter House and the Electricity Transformer Station are sure to have been source of attraction to them. These are dealt with in detail under a separate sub-heading.

**Some Highlights of the Place:**

**Sethu Lekshmi Bai English High School**

Sethu Lekshmi Bai English High School is one of the important High schools for boys in the Nagercoil area. This school located in the Ramavarmapuram ward of Nagercoil municipality was known as English

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120. Interview with S. Kumaravel, President, Arunthathiyar Sangam, Kamarajapuram, Nagercoil, dated 20.01.2005.
High School Kottar. \(^{121}\) As per the report of the Headmaster the school had already existed for a fifty years in 1923. If it is so, then it should have been established in 1873. As per state records during the academic year 1874-1875, 166 boys from various caste and religion attended the school. \(^{122}\) The existing building soon became insufficient to accommodate the increasing strength. So in 1913 the Government sanctioned rupees 185000 for the construction of a new school building and the work was started in that year itself. But the outbreak of the First World War caused a heavy hike in the cost of labour and materials. So in 1921 the estimate was revised to Rs.303185. In the meantime in 1923 the then Headmaster of this school sent a request to the Government to erect a rubble wall around the school as the old one made of mud was damaged by the frequent cyclone. \(^{123}\)

Acting on the request of the headmaster the Government sanctioned Rs.19200 to construct a compound wall, level the ground and terrace the premises of the school. \(^{124}\) In 1926 the revised estimate of the school construction work was submitted to the government. In 1928 the Nagercoil municipality passed a resolution to name the newly built English

\(^{121}\) Letter No.1801 dated 10.05.1928 President Municipal Council, Nagercoil to the Chief Secretary to Government, Travancore.

\(^{122}\) Travancore Administrative Report 1874-1875, Travancore, p.44.

\(^{123}\) Letter No.104/E2 Director of Public Instruction, Travancore dated 24.01.1923 to the Chief Secretary to Government.

School as Sethu Lekshmi Bai English High School, Nagercoil. The Government also accepted the request of the municipality and royal sanction was given to name the school as “Sethu Lekshmi Bai English High School, Nagercoil.” Following that, in 1930 the revised estimate of Rs.303185 submitted to the Government was sanctioned by Her Highness the Maha Rani Regent. The chief engineer of Travancore requested the Government to provide a maintenance amount to keep the school neat and tidy. Responding to this, the same the Government sanctioned an annual maintenance grant of Rs.1375 to the school for repair works.

Today, the imposing buildings of the Sethu Lekshmi Bai English School Nagercoil stands as a monument to the generosity of the Rani. It is also a standing monument for the concern and interest of the Travancore administration for higher education. Adjacent to this campus there is the District Court with buildings in the same architectural style. Having been designed by European engineers these buildings seem to combine the East and the West.

125. A Copy of Resolution No.XXX of the Nagercoil Municipal Council dated 5.5.1928.
Clock Tower

The Nagercoil Clock Tower is another star attraction of the place. It was erected in 1893, during the period of Srimoolam Thirunal. A five member committee consisting of Rev. Duthie, the L.M.S. missionary, Hugewerb and Horsley the European engineers and the state officers Krishna Iyer and Retna Swamy Iyer was entrusted with the construction of the Clock Tower. Its foundation stone was laid in 1891. The work was completed in 1892. The Tower was inaugurated by the king in 1893. The total cost for the construction was Rs.3258, 9 chakkaram and 12 kasu. This tower stand at the exact centre of Nagercoil town from where roads run to Kanyakumari on the south, Trivandrum on the north, L.M.S. church on the west and the Nagaramman temple on the east.

In course of time this area developed rapidly. Buildings and other structures sprang up around the clock tower junction causing traffic problems. To avoid traffic jams, the Government made arrangements to widen the area by acquiring some private lands around the Clock Tower. An estimate was prepared for the acquisition of the required land and Rs.687

131. Ibid.
132. Ibid.
was sanctioned for the said purpose. The Government requested the municipal council Nagercoil to bear a moiety of the cost for improving and widening the road near the clock tower junction. The council promised to do so by a resolution of the council. Near the clock tower 4.577 cents of land was acquired for widening the road. This acquired land bore the survey number of 1382/730 of Nagercoil pakuthy of Agasteeswaram taluk. With the co-operation of the people and the financial assistance of the state and the municipal council the area was widened to the convenience of the public.

**Filter House**

The Filter House at Krishnankoil is yet another jewel in the crown of the town. In 1892 the question of supply of wholesome water to the town roused the state’s attention. On 6th August 1892 Mr. H.H. Jacob the then chief engineer of Travancore reported to the Government about the feasibility of supplying water to Nagercoil, Kottar and Suchindrum by the construction of a reservoir in the Olakarai Valley. But he also pointed out that the venture would be a very expensive one costing approximately about four lakhs of rupees. But Horsely, an executive engineer of Southern Division, submitted a report to the chief engineer on 24th September 1892 stating that a reservoir at Olakarai Valley was impracticable. Hence he

134. R.O.C No. 2586/28 PW Chief Engineer, Trivandrum dated 5.5.1928 to the Chief Secretary to Government.
recommended the construction of a reservoir at Thadikkaramkonam at an estimated cost of Rs.5 ¼ lakhs.\textsuperscript{138}

In the eleventh session of the Assembly Manthra Moorthi Pillai, a member, made a suggestion. He requested that a sub-committee be set up to devise a small experimental water supply scheme at an expense of about Rs.10000 to supply filtered water in parts of Vadiveeswaram and Kottar. The Dewan favoured this representation and promised State consideration for the same.\textsuperscript{139}

In September 1920 the Dewan visited Nagercoil town and observed the need for water supply scheme for the town.\textsuperscript{140} The Nagercoil Municipal Council also passed a resolution requesting the Government for a water supply scheme to provide pure water all the months in a year.\textsuperscript{141} To that effect Kuriyan the Chief Engineer suggested filtering Kodayar water for the drinking purpose of the Nagercoil town at the expense of the Nagercoil municipality.\textsuperscript{142} The Government also promised its share to the municipality in the form of a large grant and a large loan repayable in equal instalments.\textsuperscript{143} Several schemes suggested by the Government at various periods could not be carried out owing to their prohibitive cost. But the municipality in its

\begin{itemize}
\item[138.] Ibid.
\item[139.] Ibid.
\item[140.] Bundle No. 376 File R. Dis 1478/24 PW Kerala State Archieves, Trivandrum.
\item[141.] Resolution No. 1, Nagercoil Municipal Council, dated 6.4.1923.
\item[142.] Report of the President, Municipal Council, Nagercoil, dated 24.01.1921.
\item[143.] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
council meeting dated 6-4-1923 decided to have a Comprehensive Scheme at a cost of about Rs.18500.\textsuperscript{144} The council viewed it imperative to provide protected drinking water to all the thirteen wards at the earliest.\textsuperscript{145} The President of the Nagercoil Municipal Council assured that the municipality would do its best to find funds for a part of the cost. At last, as per the request of the Nagercoil Municipal Council, a filter house was built in 1943 at Krishnankoil 2 km. north west of Nagercoil.\textsuperscript{146} In the same year filtering arrangement was started to the supply of pure piped water for the lower areas of Nagercoil.

This scheme made Nagercoil the second to get protected drinking water with the help of a filter house, while Trivandrum stood first in the field. Today, due to the wider expansion of the town and its over population, the scheme has become inadequate. Yet the filter house adds attraction to the Nagercoil town. Similar to the filter house at Krishnankoil, the Electricity Transformer Station is another milestone development in the history of the Nagercoil town.

\textbf{Supply of Electricity to Nagercoil Town}

S. Kumaraswamy, the proprietor of Pioneer Motors, Nagercoil applied for a license to supply electricity to the Nagercoil town. He submitted a detailed application as required by section 38 of the Travancore

\textsuperscript{144} Nagercoil Municipal Council Meeting dated 6.4.1923.

\textsuperscript{145} Letter No.1238 dated 12.04.1923, President, Nagercoil Municipal Council to Revenue and L.G Section, Trivandrum.

\textsuperscript{146} Inscription on the Wall of the Filter House, Krishnankoil, Nagercoil.
Electricity Regulation I of 1907.\textsuperscript{147}

The lands acquired for the purpose were comprised in Survey Nos. 1316, 1317 and 1318 in the Nagercoil pakuthy, Agasteeswaram taluk. They were bounded on the north by Survey Nos. 1313 and 1314, on the east by distillery road, on the south by Survey Nos. 1321 and 1322 and on the west by Survey Nos. 1315, 1319 and 1320. The approximate amount proposed for the undertaking stood Rs.195000.\textsuperscript{148} Under the Travancore Electricity Regulation of 1097 license was granted to Kumaraswamy to supply electrical energy in the Nagercoil Town with powers and upon the terms and conditions all specified clearly.

The license was titled as "The Nagercoil Electric Supply Corporation" Electric license 1105. It stipulated the area of supply as the whole of municipal area of Nagercoil, bounded on North-Puthery tank, East-Pazhayar and Parakaykal upto Anapalam toll-gate, South municipal Toll gate on Kottar Parakay road, Catholic Boarding School on Nagercoil – Rajakamangalam road and Rev. Allen’s Bungalow on Nagercoil – Santhapuram road west – Ananthankal channel.\textsuperscript{149}

The draft license mentioned the specific roads to supply electric energy. They were the Balamore road from the Catherine Booth Hospital to

\begin{enumerate}
\item[147.] Letter, Kumaraswamy, Proprietor, Pioneer Motor Service, Nagercoil, South Travancore, South India, dated 16th April 1, 1930 to the Chief Secretary to Government of Travancore, Trivandrum.
\item[148.] Ibid.
\item[149.] Draft License, under the Travancore Electricity Regulation of 1097 dated 16.04.1930 signed by S. Kumaraswamy Proprietor, Pioneer Motors, Nagercoil.
\end{enumerate}
Clock Tower, the Cape Road from the Clock tower to Agasteeswaram taluk cutchery, the road from the Clock Tower to Vettoornimadam toll gate and the road from Clock Tower to the Ramavarmapuram palace. The Chief Secretary to the Government asked the Nagercoil Municipality to give a no objection certificate to grant license to Mr. Kumaraswamy. The municipal president duly submitted a no objection certificate by a Resolution of the Nagercoil municipal council.

The Draft license to supply Electrical Energy within the Nagercoil municipal area had been published in “The Travancore Times” and “Trivandrum Daily News”. As per the draft forwarded to the Government, Her Highness the Maha Rani Regent sanctioned the grant of a license to supply electricity to Nagercoil town. In the pages of the history of Nagercoil town, the name of the individual Kumaraswamy is inscribed in golden letters as a pioneer industrialist.

In the eighteenth century various western Christian missionary organisations accelerated their proselytisation activities in the region. The Christian missionaries, through arduous efforts, converted large number of people to Christianity and set up various establishments to their advantages.

150. Ibid.
152. ‘The Travancore Times’ was the oldest English newspaper in Travancore, Published every Tuesday.
154. Bundle No.428 Fiel 92/31/PW Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.
The Catholics did spade work in the area. The L.M.S. which started its work at Mylody in 1806 later shifted the centre to Nagercoil in 1818. It did yeomen service to people. The Salvation Army that came to Travancore in 1889 continued its work by organising activities like hospital, orphanages and vocational training centres. The Lutherans made an entry into South Travancore in 1907 and made Vadasery their nerve centre to accelerate their mission activities. These churches had provided a strong background for the rise and glory of the present Nagercoil.