Chapter 2
History of Tamil Nadu

In ancient times the temples formed the religious and socio economic centres. The temples were not just places of worship. They were the centres of several activities. The kings, queens and ministers spent a considerable portion of the state wealth in constructing and maintaining these temples. The temples in turn were places of worship, centres of Vedic studies, centres of festive celebrations, centres for social gatherings and also provided employment to a lot of people. Finest of architects and sculptors were appointed to construct these temples. A large part of people’s lives centred around the temples.

Kumbakonam is known for its temples and Mathas (monasteries which were centres of Brahmanical learning). There are around 188 Hindu temples in and around the town of Kumbakonam. Apart from these, there are several thousand temples around the town thereby giving the town the name "Temple Town" and "City of temples." “Kudandai or Kumbakonam is one such place where every street can boast of a temple.”

“Adi Kumbeswarar Temple is considered to be the oldest Shaiva shrine in the town, believed to be constructed by the Cholas in the 7th century. The Nageswarar Temple has a separate shrine for the Sun god Surya who is believed to have worshipped Shiva at this place. Adi Kumbeswarar temple, Nageswaraswami temple and Kasi Viswanathar temple are Shiva temples in the town revered in the Tevaram- a Tamil Shaiva canonical work of the 7th–8th century.”

Someśvarar temple is another temple built by the Cholas in the 13th century dedicated to Lord Śiva. Kumbakonam also has one of the few temples dedicated to god Brahma. Śārṅgapāṇi temple is the largest Vaiṣṇava shrine present in Kumbakonam and was built by the medieval Cholas. It has a nine storey high Gopuram rising to a height of 150 ft. This temple was renovated by Nayaka Kings in the 15th century. It is one of the "Divya Deśams", the 108 temples of Viṣṇu revered by the 12 Āḻwār saint-poets. In the words of Narayanaswamy, “Of the 108 Divya Desas the most important is Thiruvarangam. Next comes Tirumalai and the third is this Kumbakonam.”

In the Sthala Purāṇa ‘ Makamaka Makiyum’ it is stated that the Rāmasyāmi temple, was extended by Govinda Dikshitar, the minister of successive Nayaka rulers, Accutappa Nayakaa and Raghunatha Nayakaa. This temple has scenes
from the Hindu epic Rāmāyaṇa depicted on its walls. The Sthala Purāṇa also describes the greatness of the Mahāmaham tank. Pilgrims from all parts of India take a holy dip once every 12 years during the Mahāmaham festival. “Govinda Dikshita is credited with the repair and construction of the sixteen manḍapas (shrines) on the banks of Mahāmagam tank in the Kumbēśvara temple at Kumbakoṇam.”

“The Dhenupurishwarar Temple at Patteeswaram, the Oppiliappan Kovil, the Swamimalai Murugan temple and the Airateswarar temple at Darasuram are all located in the vicinity of Kumbakonam.”

Madhavan in her book History and Culture of Tamil Nadu says -

“A proper reconstruction of the history of the Tamil country in the ancient and medieval periods is not possible without an in-depth study and analysis of the inscriptions of those periods which offer detailed information, not provided by any other sources.”

The science of study of these inscriptions made on rocks, pillars, temple walls, copper plates and other writing material is called epigraphy. The medieval Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas ruled over the Tamil country from 500 C.E.–1400 C.E. and left behind very rich legacy in the form of thousands of inscriptions which have given us information about the conditions which existed at that time. In the words of Sircar, “The great importance of inscriptions lies in the fact that they offer information about personages and events about which nothing is known from any other source.”

Political History of Tamil Nadu with a Cultural and Socio-Economic Perspective

The Tamil civilization is amongst the oldest in the world. This region was ruled by the four empires namely the Cheras, Cholas, Pallavas and Pandyas. They ruled over the Tamil kingdom with utmost pride and uniqueness in terms of culture, administration, language, economic life etc. Some of the most amazing and great literature came into existence during this period. Though the Tamil history goes back thousands of years before the known Saṅgam period before which much of the works on music, dance and drama is believed to have been lost by two great deluges.

“Names of works on music, dance and drama have survived, though texts themselves have been lost in the huge deluges. A single text Tholkappium, on ancient Tamil grammar, with references to dance and drama, credited with being the composition of a disciple of Agastya and belonging to the Second Sangam Age has come down to posterity.”
The Saṅgam Period: The Saṅgam period is believed to have lasted from 300 B.C.E. until 300 C.E. During the Saṅgam Age, the three empires that ruled the South of India were that of early Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. As Agarwal points out-

“Some of the contents of the Sangam literature are corroborated by the writings of some Greek and Roman classical writers of the first and second century A.D., leading us to fix the period of Sangam age roughly between third century B.C. to third century A.D. So most of the Sangam literature also must have been produced during this period.”

Saṅgam literature is one of the main sources used for documenting the early history of the ancient Tamil country. The Saṅgam poems which form the bulk of Saṅgam literature mention numerous Kings and princes, the existence of some of whom have been confirmed through archaeological evidence. Saṅgam literature is still the main source of information for the early Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras. The social conditions during the Saṅgam period, is as we understand from the Saṅgam literature. The ancient Tamil country was fed by Kāvērī river and there was plentiful of water and grains for all. The following description gives an idea about the royal courts during the Saṅgam period-

“The royal courts were mostly places of social gathering rather than places of dispensation of authority; they were centres for distribution of resources. Gradually the rulers came under the spell of North Indian influence and Vedic ideology, which encouraged performance of sacrifices to enhance the status of the ruler.”

Though there were constant wars among the different Kings for dominion of states and territory, they were all promoters of literature and other classical literary works. Under their rule, Indian art and culture flourished prosperously. The earliest Chola Kings of whom we have tangible evidence are those mentioned in the Saṅgam literature Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai, written in the period 200 B.C.E.–300 C.E. In the words of Zvelebil “A literary period is not an ideal type or an abstract pattern of a series of class concept but an actual time section dominated by a whole system of norms and the history of a period should consist in tracing the changes from one system of norms to another.”

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to piece together an internal chronology of the Saṅgam works. Due to this, we know of several rulers, but not their
chronology. The early Cholas were anxious to connect themselves with the Mahābhārata to prove their antiquity, as is evident from the Saṅgam works. All three Kings have been portrayed as fighting the war or involved in feeding both the armies at that legendary war. The inscriptions of the medieval Cholas are replete with legends about the mythical early Chola kings. In the words of Sastri “Some attention maybe given to the legends about the mythical Cōla kings known to this literature. The Cōlas were even then looked upon as descended from the sun.” 12 These myths speak of the Chola King Kantaman (supposed contemporary of the sage Agastya), the story of the King Manu and King Śibi who are all part the early Chola legends.

“The early Pandyas were one of the dynasties that ruled the ancient Tamil country from the pre-Christian era to about 200 AD. The Saṅgam works such as Maturaikkanci, Netunalvatai and the Purananuru collection give a lot of information about the life and habits of the people during this age.” 13

As Sastri discusses in his book about the Early Pândyan Kingdom. “The earliest historical kings of the Pândya country are those mentioned in the early Tamil works that have come down to us in the form of collections known as Saṅgam works.” 14

“The Tamil society during the early Pandyan age had several class distinctions among the people. The highest class below the king, among the Tamils, was the Arivar or the sages. They were the ascetics that renounced materialism and mostly lived outside the cities. Next in rank were the Ulavar or the farmers. Following the Ulavar were the Poruppan or the armed warriors, then comes Ayar or shepherds, then comes Vedduvar or hunters, followed by artisans such as goldsmiths, blacksmiths etc., then the Valayar or fishermen and finally the Pulayar or the scavengers.” 15

Saṅgam literature comprises of some of the oldest Tamil Literature, and deals with love, war, governance, trade and bereavement during that period. The higher classes enjoyed more privileges than the lower classes - for example, when the higher classes passed in the streets, the lower classes made way for them. The Pulayan, for example, bowed in supplication if he met a nobleman. The class distinctions were quite conspicuous in many aspects of life - the dress worn by the people, the way they groomed themselves and the kind of food they subsisted on were all different from
one class to another. In spite of such class-based social inequalities, there was no slavery in the society.

“These twin epics, the Cilappatikāram and Manimēkalai can be likened in certain respects to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and are invaluable sources for reconstructing the history of the ancient Tamil land.”

Unfortunately much of the Saṅgam literature is lost. The literature currently available from this period is perhaps just a fraction of the wealth of material produced during this golden age of Tamil civilisation. During the Saṅgam period, Tamil language had reached a level of maturity and began to serve as a powerful and elegant medium of literary expression. It had already developed an elaborate code of conventions governing the portrayal of social life in literature. During the Saṅgam period trade was maintained with ancient Greece and Rome. “Internal and external trade was well organised and active. Evidence from both archaeology and literature speaks of a flourishing foreign trade with the Yavanas (Greeks).” The Saṅgam age ended around the 3rd century C.E. with the invasion of Kaḷabhras (from the north).

The Chera Dynasty ruled over the Tamil Kingdom from 300 B.C.E. – 250 C.E. Their dynasty perished in 300 C.E. The Chera Dynasty was a Dravidian Tamil dynasty that ruled in Southern India from before the Saṅgam era. Kālitokai, a Sanga work describes Cheras as Viḷḷavar (hunter) people. Chera Flag had bow and arrow the insignia of Viḷḷavar people. The early Cheras ruled Kerala and Kongu Nadu. Their capital was Vanci Muthur, the present-day Karur in Tamil Nadu. In the words of Nagaswamy “The city is described as a fertile region, abounding in paddy fields and cultivating sugarcanes, plantains, coconuts, betel nut trees, jack fruits, turmeric, ginger, vanhi and Konrai flowers.”

The different kingdoms during the Saṅgam period flourished with well developed trade with foreign land. People seemed happy though caste system prevailed. The kingdoms were fed by Kāvērī river and there seem to be plenty of food and grains. Some master pieces in the form of literature were written during Saṅgam age. This shows that the rulers enjoyed supported art and literature.

Medieval Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas (400–900 C.E.):

“During the latter half of 4th century, Pallavas the great temple builders emerged into prominence and dominated the south for another 400 years. A large portion of Tamil Nadu was ruled by them with
Kanchipuram as their base. In the 6th century they defeated the Cholas and ruled as far as Sri Lanka. Among the greatest Pallava rulers were Mahendravarman-I and his son Narasimhavarman.”

The last Pallava King was Aparajitha and he was defeated by Aditya Chola towards the end of the 9th century. The Pallavas are known to have been great architects who have left behind a rich legacy in the form of some magnificent temples. Dravidian architecture reached its epitome during Pallava rule.

“The greatest accomplishments of the Pallava architecture are the rock-cut temples at Mahabalipuram. There are excavated pillared halls and monolithic shrines known as Rathas in Mahabalipuram. Early temples were mostly dedicated to Śiva. The Kailāsanātha temple in Kanchipuram built by Narasimhavarman II also known as Rajasimha is a fine example of the Pallava style temple. Mention must be made here of the Shore Temple constructed by Narasimhavarman II near Mahabalipuram which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.”

Late Medieval History (900–1400 C.E.): With the advent of Aditya I (850 – 907 C.E.) the Pallava King Aparajita was overthrown and marked the beginning of Cholas rise. His son Parantaka 1 ruled for 48 years (907 – 955 C.E.) and put an end to the Pandyan independence. Under Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola, the Cholas again rose as a notable power in 9th century in South India. The Chola empire extended to the central Indian states like, Orissa and parts of West Bengal.

“With the accession of Rājarāja we enter upon a century of grandeur and glory for the dynasty of the Cōḷas. Quite obviously, the personal ability of the first Rājarāja, in some respects the greatest of all the Cōḷa rulers of the Vijayālaya line, laid the foundation for the splendid achievements of his son and successor Rājendra I, under whom the empire attained its greatest extent and carried its arms beyond the seas. The thirty years of Rājarāja rule constitute the formative period in the history of the Cōḷa monarchy.”

Rajaraja Chola conquered the eastern Chalukya kingdom by defeating the Cheras and also occupied parts of Ceylon by defeating the Pandyas. Rajendra Chola went beyond, occupying the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Sumatra, Java, Malaya and the islands of Pegu with his fleet of ships. He defeated Mahipala, the King of Bihar and Bengal, and to mark his victory he built a new
capital called Gangaikonda Cholapuram. The Cholas started losing their power around the 13th century. Almost all the Chola Kings built magnificent temples. Brhadisvara temple or more popularly called as the Big Temple in Tanjavur is a classical example of the magnificent architecture of the Chola kingdom. Other Chola marvels include the Ādi Kumbēśvarar temple at Kumbakonam, Paśupatināthar temple at Pullamangai, Gangaikoṇḍacōleśvaram at Gangaikonda Cholapuram, Airāvateśvar temple at Darasuram and Kumbaharesvar temple at Tirubuvanam.

“The general features of the Chola Temples are the main temple in sanctum tower known as Srivimana or Sri Koil, Garbha Graha, an Ardhamandapa and a Mahamandapa. The construction of the basements in high platform is the predominant feature of this period for the majestic look of the temple.” 22

As Cholas declined, the Pandyas once again emerged as a power, in the early 14th century. But this was short lived and soon they were subdued by Muslim Khilji invaders from the north in 1316 C.E. The city of Madurai was plundered and completely destroyed by them. The invasion destroyed the Chola and Pandya dynasties and led to the establishment of Bahmani Kingdom in the northern Deccan.

**The Rise of the Vijayanagara Empire:** Due to the 14th century invasion by the Mughals, the Hindus retaliated in reaction and rallied to build a strong new kingdom, called the Vijayanagara Empire under Kumarakampanna who was a ruler par excellence. This empire included all the strongholds of Cholas and other local Hindu rulers to check the Muslims.

“The Tanjore Nayaks were first appointed to regulate changes in the Chola country by the Vijayanagara emperor Achyutadevaraya. Cevappa Nayak who had distinguished himself by the valour in wars, was appointed to the governorship of Tanjore which called for a strong ruler at that time.” 23

Vijayanagara Empire was the most prosperous dynasty in the south, with Hampi as the Capital. In the battle of Talikota, the empire came to an end at the hands of Deccan Sultans. The empire dismantled into many parts and was given to the Nayakas to rule. Under the Telugu Nayakas the Tamil Country was peaceful and prosperous. The Nayakas of Madurai and Tanjavur were most prominent of them all, who reconstructed some of the oldest temples in the country. In the words of Eshwar,
“They built the tower of Arunachaleshwar temple at Tiruvannamalai, Vridhagiriswara temple at Vriddhachalam with beautiful figures showing the Karanas and the Virupaksha temple at Hampi.” 24

Maratha Conquest of Tanjavur: After the Chola rule came to an end the Pandyas ruled Tanjavur for about a century. Malik Kafur invaded Tanjavur country and it fell into disorder. The rule of the Delhi Sultanate lasted for half a century before Pandya chieftains tried to rise again.

“Soon afterwards, however, they were conquered by the Vijayanagara Empire. The supremacy of Vijayanagara was challenged by the Nayakas of Madurai who eventually conquered Tanjavur in 1646. The rule of the Tanjavur Nayakas lasted until 1673 when Chokkanatha Nayaka the ruler of Madurai invaded Tanjavur and killed the ruler Vijayaraghava. Chokkanatha placed his brother Alagiri on the throne of Tanjavur, but within a year the latter threw off his allegiance, and Chokkanatha was forced to recognise the independence of Tanjavur. A son of Vijayaraghava induced the Bijapur Sultan to help him get back the Tanjavur throne. In 1675, the Sultan of Bijapur sent a force commanded by the Maratha general Venkoji (alias Ekoji) to recapture the kingdom from the new invader. Venkoji defeated Alagiri with ease, and occupied Tanjavur. He did not, however, place his protege on the throne as instructed by the Bijapur Sultan, but seized the kingdom and made himself king. Thus began the rule of the Marathas over Tanjavur.” 25

Venkoji, was the first Raja of Tanjavur from the Bhonsle dynasty and he ruled for 10 years till 1684. Sahaji I was the eldest son of Venkoji and he ascended the throne at the age of twelve. The Mughals who occupied the Coromandel coast and Tiruchirapalli forced Sahaji I to pay tribute to them. Sahaji was a patron of literature. Serfoji I was a younger son of Venkoji and he ruled from 1712 to 1728. There was a lot of warfare during his rule. Tukkoji, a younger brother of Serfoji I ruled Tanjavur from 1728 to 1736. During his rule Chanda Sahib invaded Tanjavur and he withstood the invasion bravely. After Tukkoji, Pratapsingh succeeded to the throne in 1739. He ruled up to 1763. He aided the British against the French in the Carnatic Wars and the Seven Years War. Tulajaji the last independent ruler of Tanjavur was known to be a very weak ruler. In 1773, Tanjavur was annexed by the Nawab of the Carnatic and he
ruled till 1786. **Tulajaji** was succeeded by his teenage son **Serfoji II** in 1787. Soon his uncle **Amarsingh** seized the throne for himself. With the help of the British, **Serfoji II** recovered the throne.

“**Serfoji** ascended the throne in 1798. **Serfoji** devoted his life to the pursuit of culture and Thanjavur became renowned as a seat of learning. He erected a monument in marble in the chapel at Thanjavur for Schwartz, the missionary who introduced him to western learning. **Serfoji**’s love of learning and thirst for knowledge led him to enrich **Sarasvati Mahal Library**, which was a Palace Library. He evinced keen interest in the development of the Library. He purchased around 4000 books from abroad at his own cost, read them and left them in the Library. Medical treatises in the library collection contained his remarks alongside, in English. His library included treatises on Vedanta, grammar, music, dance and drama, architecture, astronomy, medicine, training of elephants and horses etc.”

The Tanjavur Maratha **Rajas** favoured Sanskrit and Telugu to such an extent that classical Tamil began to decline. Most of the plays were in Sanskrit. **Venkoji**, the first ruler of the **Bhonsle dynasty** composed a ’**Dvipada**’ Ramayana in Telugu. His son **Shahaji** was a great patron of learning and literature. Most of the Tanjavur Maratha literature is from his period. Most of them were versions of the **Rāmāyana** or plays and short stories of a historical nature. Sanskrit and Telugu were the languages used in most of these plays while there were some Tamil ’**Kūttu**’ as well. **Advaita Kīrtana** is one of the prominent works from this period. Later Tanjavur rulers like **Serfoji II** and **Shivaji** immersed themselves in learning and literary pursuits when they were dispossessed of their empire. **Serfoji** built the **Sarasvati Mahal Library** within the precincts of the palace to house his enormous book and manuscript collection.

“The Tanjavur Maharaja’s **Sarasvati Mahal Library** is one among the few medieval libraries that exist in the world. It is an unbounded repository of culture and inexhaustible treasure house of knowledge built by successful dynasties of Nayaks and Marathas of Tanjavur. It contains very rare and valuable collection manuscripts, books, maps and paintings on all aspects of Arts, Culture and Literature. The
Encyclopedia of Britannica in its survey of libraries of the world mentions this as the most remarkable library in India.”  

**Modern History (from 17th century):** The British, under the British East India Company, established a settlement further south, in present day Chennai, in the year 1639. The British took advantage of the petty quarrels among the provincial rulers to expand their area of power. The British fought with the various European powers, notably the French at Vandavasi (Wandiwash) in 1760, and the Dutch at Tarangambadi driving the Dutch away entirely, and reducing the French dominions in India to Pondicherry. The British also fought four wars with the kingdom of Mysore under **Hyder Ali** and later his son **Tipu Sultan**, which led to their eventual domination of India’s south. They consolidated southern India into the Madras Presidency. After India gained independence in 1947, Madras Presidency became Madras State, comprising of present day Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh, Northern Kerala, and the Southwest coast of Karnataka. The state was later divided on the basis of linguistic lines into different states.  

A study of the history of medieval times brings to light that all the **Pallavas** and **Cholas** were great temple builders. A lot of wealth was put into temple building. The further dynasties also took special care to expand and add to the existing temples. This shows that the temples were of great importance. In the olden days they served as the modern day clubs where people gathered to socialize, meet and enjoy though it had a devotional touch to it. Dance and music naturally was a part of celebration and devotion. The wealthy kings loved art and hence patronized them. This saw to the development of the art form.  

**Administration and Socio-Economic Conditions during the Ancient Saṅgam, the Medieval Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas**  

In ancient and medieval India, monarchy was the most common form of government. The King was the highest authority in the land and was the focal point of highest authority in administration also. As Madhavan describes,  

“The *Dharmaśāstras* give a good guideline as to the qualities which a king was supposed to posses. The *Manusmṛiti* clearly states that a king should possess qualities such as wisdom, enthusiasm, personal ability, modesty and humility.”  

These qualities of a king are enumerated in the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Kural* (a work of *Saṅgam* period). These texts also spoke of the vices a king should not have
like anger, lust, gambling and drinking. These texts emphasized that the kings should be righteous, truthful and educated who ruled with the welfare of their subjects upmost in their minds. As Madhavan points out both Manusmriti and Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya speak of the divine origin of the rulers. The Pallavas are believed to have descended from Aśvathāma. The Pandyas are believed to be belonging to the lunar dynasty with the moon as their divine ancestor and the Cholas claimed to belong to the solar dynasty with the Sun as their ancestor. Both in Manusmriti and Arthaśāstra, the highest duty of a king is described as protection of his subjects. The king also considered his people as his children. He cared for his subjects as a father.

Caste was the basis of Tamil society. According to Subramanian, “Even in Tolkāppiyam there is reference to 4 caste divisions- Ararac, Anthar, Vānikar and Vēḷār.” The king’s family, noble ones, petty kings, landlords and warriors enjoyed the status of Ararac. The Priest, Scholars, Poets, Astrologers and like people enjoyed Anthar status. The trade men like Chettis, Manaikan, Masatuvans and like people enjoyed Vānikar status, as they engage in business. The final subjects who farm the land and do menial works come under Vēḷār. The higher classes enjoyed more privileges than the lower classes - for example, when the higher classes passed in the streets, the lower classes made way for them.

Succession of the kings was hereditary in the Tamil country. Usually the eldest son was heir to the throne. During all the rules i.e. of the Pallavas, Cholas and the Pandyas this system of succession seemed to have been followed. The kings of the Tamil country adopted some imperial titles. “Mahārāja, Dharma-Mahārāja, Mahārājādhirāja, DharmaMahārājādhirāja were some of the titles borne by the early Pallava rulers. The Cōḷa rulers adopted the titles like rājakesari and parakesari alternatively on ascending the throne.”

The ruling dynasties used particular symbols as emblems which adorned all official documents of the state for the purpose administration. The Pallavas used the bull as the official symbol of the dynasty. The following is the description of the Pallava king Rajasimha in the South Indian Inscriptions: “He whose power is rising. He whose fame is rising. He who boasts of the bull (as his sign). He who possesses the sign of the bull.”

The Cholas used the tiger as the crest of their dynasty. The Pandyas used the figure of fish as the royal emblem. Madhavan explains in her book, that the Kings of Tamil country ruled effectively with the help of ministers, generals, advisors, high
officials of the King and superintendents. The King was the highest judicial authority in ancient India. He imparted justice according to the Dharmaśāstra with the help of his ministers who were well versed in it. Dharmaśāstras are Sanskrit texts relating to religious and legal duties. The king had to impart impartial justice. The Manuṣmṛiti also spoke of imparting proper justice and punishment of guilty. Apart from the royal court there were several small Sabhas which settled disputes at the village level.

Punishment was considered as necessary for maintaining law and order in the country. Corporal punishment given by the king was popular during the Pallava period. Even Pandyas were known to strictly execute justice. Sometimes even death was granted to criminals. In Cilappatikāram translated by Dikshitar the justice meted out to to Kovalan is described as follows—

“The goldsmith went post haste to the palace, informed the king that he had found out the thief who had stolen the queen’s anklet and handed it over to the king. Without bestowing a moment’s thought on the matter the king ordered his executioners to behead the thief.”

The kings of the Tamil country gave a lot of importance to giving gifts. Gifts in the form of land (Bhūmidāna) was given to Brahmins (Brahmadeya) and a lot of wealth was given as charity to temples (Devadāna) for their construction and maintainence. Tulābāradānam was an existing practice of the kings. In the words of Dikshitar,“The Tulābāradānam was a redeeming feature of the royal festivities. It was a gift of gold to the deserving, generally a sṛōtriya, equal to the donor’s weight.”

The imposition of taxes was considered as lawful means of revenue administration. The Dharmaśāstras also permitted the collection of taxes by the king from his subjects in a just manner. The kings during the Pallava, Chola and Pandya periods also levied taxes on their subjects. The gift of land given to learned Brahmins were exempted from taxes (Parihāra). As Dikshitar describes

“Among the communities the Brahmans received much respect for their learning in the sacred lore and for their continuance of the fire rites. They were often awarded rich presents both in cash and kind.”

This is supported in the Arthaśāstra also. It is said that those who perform sacrifices, are well versed in Vedas, spiritual teachers and priests should be given land as gift and exempted from taxes. An important means of revenue was also the booty captured from the defeated king during conquests. This include the king’s crown, treasury, his army, his wife, his daughter etc.
The state expenditure of the kings during the times of the *Pallavas*, *Cholas* and *Pandyas* were many. A large amount of wealth was spent in maintain defence systems since frequent wars were waged. A large number of sacrifices were performed by the kings like *Ashvamedha*, *Rājasūya*, *Tulābhāra*. Madhavan says that that this is revealed by Sanskrit inscriptions. All these ceremonies were elaborate and incurred large expenditures. The inscriptions further reveal that a lot of the state money was also spent towards construction of wells and tanks, building of hospitals and temples and their maintenance. Maintenance of officials in various departments, allowances to queens and other members of the royal families were part of state expenditure. A lot of money was also given to poor and needy and the learned Brahmins. “The above is revealed by the inscriptions,” says Madhavan.

Agriculture was the most common occupation of the people in the Tamil country during the reign of *Pallavas*, *Pandyas* and *Cholas*. An entire chapter in *Kuraḷ* supports this says Madhavan. Artisans like weavers, goldsmith, blacksmith, carpenters were held in high esteem. The really skilled workers were exempted from taxes by the king. The architectural marvels during the time of *Pallavas*, *Cholas* and *Pandyas* show that during these times there existed very highly skilled architects. In addition to building temples these architects must have also built magnificent palaces of the kings. The architects during these times were well versed in *Śilpa Śāstra* and *Vāstu Śāstra* and the also had a good knowledge of mathematics and several sciences. All this information is supported by Sanskrit inscriptions says Madhavan. Religion played a very important role right from the time of ancient Tamils. This manifested itself in the construction of magnificent temples. As Balasubramanyam puts it “*Chola* kings of late Saṅgam period built many Śiva and Viṣṇu temples in Tamil land.”

“All the great royal ventures were only for Siva. The royal temples of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I were built in capital cities of Tanjavur and Gangaikondacolapuram. Such magnificent monuments glorified Siva as the Supreme Lord.”

The temples also played a very important role in the socio economic sphere. Temples were not only places of worship but gradually created a lot of jobs for the people. The temple maintenance needed priests, accountants, cleaners, sweepers, masons, artisans etc. The temple became the hub of socio economic life in villages. The temples also served as centres for Vedic learning says Madhavan.
The *Brahmins* formed a very important part of the society right from the *Saṅgam* age. They occupied a very honoured place in the society. They were mainly priests and teacher. According to *Manusmṛiti* “Teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them are the six acts prescribed for a *Brāhmaṇ*.” 37 Sometimes the *Brahmins* followed other professions like the minister in the government. They were very well versed in *Śastras*, *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas*. They were even equated with gods on earth (*Bhūdeva*). All during the *Pallava*, *Chola* and *Pandya* period gifting of land to the *Brahmins* was considered as a meritorious act.

“Among the communities the Brahmans received much respect specially for their learning in the sacred lore and for their continuance of the fire rites. They were often awarded rich presents both in cash and kind.” 38

There were numerous instances where *Bhūmi Dāna* was done to the *Brahmins* by the kings and ministers. Though the *Brahmin* belonged to the highly learned strata of the society sometimes they strayed into other professions says Madhavan. During the rule of *Cholas*, *Aniruddha*, a Brahmin by birth held the position of a minister in the court of the king *Sundara Chola*. He held the title of *Brahmādhirāja*. This information is supported by the Anbil plates of *Sundara Chola* says Sastri. According to Madhavan the other castes which existed was that of *Kṣatriya*, *Vaiśyas*, *Śūdras* and certain sub sects which arose due to intercaste marriages like *Māhiṣya*, *Rathakāras*, *Karaṇīs*. There was social harmony amongst the castes says N.Sastri.

“There is practically no evidence of ugly social conflicts and jealousies such as those between the right-hand and left hand castes, between Brahmins and non-Brahmins of more recent times. The general impression derived is one of social harmony, removed alike from the placid content which knows no ambition and the blind and ruthless pursuit of class-interests.” 39

The women had a more passive role to play in the society. They never achieved the same status as men but achieved high levels excellence in the cultural spheres. From *Saṅgam* age through the rule of *Pallavas*, *Pandyas* and *Cholas*, the women remained subordinate to men. The practice of *Sati* was prevalent right from the *Saṅgam* period. Several women including queens were known to have committed *Sati* after the death of their husbands. There were also other customs where the wives
removed all their ornaments after the death of their husbands. The following is from the translation of the *Tiruvalangadu* copper plates of the sixth year of *Rajendra Chola I* -

“I am determined to follow my lord Sundara (i.e. the beautiful) before *(he)* is coveted by the celestial damsels,” so saying zealously, his devoted queen the glorious Vanavanmahadevi, a very Arundhati in *(her)* manifold good qualities, abandoned her own people and followed him as [night] the day to heaven, afraid as it were of the allurement (of her husband) by celestial nymphs and (desirous consequently of) being near (him) even there.”

The queens of the Tamil country did not take active part in administration says Madhavan. Instead they were actively involved in building temples, installing deities and made contributions to temples. Many of the queens were endowed with great beauty, high character and virtues. The kings of the Tamil countries were polygamists. They had more than one wife. The kings gave an honourable position to the queens. Out of the many wives one would be the favourite or the chief queen. In contrast to the treatment given to their own queens the fate of the captured queens was quite harsh. “An epigraph of Rājarāja I mentions the plight of the queens of the Keraḷa king who was vanquished by this Coḷa ruler and who were forced to take refuge at his feet.”

The socio economic condition of the people during medieval times was good. The Kings who ruled during this time were upholders of justice and strictly followed the *Dharmasāstra*. People were generally happy and prosperous under the great Kings. Kings spent a lot of wealth in constructing and maintaining temples and they being well versed in music supported the evolution of dance forms in the temples. Temples got filled with sculptures.

**Art and Architecture during the Rule of Medieval Pallavas**: *Pallavas* were a prominent dynasty that ruled South India for nearly 500 years and have left a permanent mark in the field of art and architecture. They were followers of *Vedic* religion and later Kings were great conquerors and builders. The Dravidian or *Pallava* style was introduced during the *Pallava* rule. The earlier form of this style is seen in the rock cut temples or *Rathas* of Mahabalipuram built by *Narasimhavarman I*. Known as the Seven *Rathas* and named after *Gaṇesha*, *Draupadi* and the Five *Pāndava* brothers, these temples are cut out of solid rock, have *Maṇḍapas* or pillared...
halls. They are monolithic shrines. The Maṇḍapas and Rathas are adorned with beautiful sculptured figures and panels. The most beautiful and well-known of these is that showing the ‘Penance of Arjuna’ or as described by some artists as the ‘Descent of Ganga’. Kamat says that according to Grousset, "This relief is a master piece of classic art in the breadth of its composition, the sincerity of its impulse which draws all creatures together round the beneficent waters, and its deep, fresh love of nature." 42

As A. Shastri describes the Shore temple at Mahabalipuram—

"The Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram, built during the reign of Narasimha II is on the seashore. Facing east, the temple has a small Gopuram with a Pradakshina path between the temple and the outer wall. The main shrine contains a broken fluted Shiva Linga. Opposite the Gopuram is the Dhvaja Sthamba. The outer walls of the temple are covered with carved panels separated by lions. Many of these have been destroyed by the dashing waves of the sea. Behind this shrine is another cell with a figure of Vishnu reclining on the serpent Sesha. Next to this and facing west is another shrine dedicated to Shiva. Opposite the Temple is the Balipitha or altar. The courtyard is surrounded by rows of Nandis. Rocks carved with the eight-armed Durga on a lion can also be seen near the temple." 43

Further A. Sastri enumerates that the second phase of Pallava art begins towards the end of the 7th century C.E. and continues in the 8th century C.E. in the form of structural monuments. Splendid temples were constructed during this period. The characteristic feature of these temples is the high Śikharas ascending tier upon tier, diminishing in size. The most beautiful examples of this style are the Kailasanatha Temple dedicated to Śiva and the Vaikunṭha Perumāl Temple to Viṣṇu both located at Kanchipuram.

In her article on Indian Architecture, A. Sastri further talks of the Kailasanātha Temple of Śiva which was built by Rajasimha Pallava and his son Mahendravarman. The temple has a courtyard on all four sides in which there is a row of fifty four small shrines. A temple wall encloses the temple complex. The inner and outer walls of these shrines are adorned with fresco paintings while the walls of the main temple are profusely decorated with sculptures.
The *Vaikuṇṭha Perumāl* temple which was constructed by *Nandivarnam* in 7th century C.E. is dedicated to Lord *Viṣṇu*. It is built on a plan similar to the *Kailasanātha* Temple. Built of sandstone and granite, it is a large square temple with a four storeyed *Vimāṇa*. The temple contains three *Garbhā-Grahas* or sanctum cells, with an idol of *Viṣṇu* sitting, standing and reclining.

**Medieval Chola Art and Architecture:** The Imperial *Chola* rulers of Tanjavur developed the Dravidian style of temple architecture almost to perfection. Their works taken up on a stupendous scale include irrigation schemes, embankment of artificial lakes, dams across the *Kavērī* and well planned cities. A special feature of the *Chola* architecture is the purity of artistic tradition. “The two magnificent temples at Tanjore and Gangaikonda Cholapuram in Tiruchirapalli District built in early 11th century A.D. show the best of Chola art.”  

The *Bṛhādīśvara or Rājarājesvara* temple of Śiva in Tanjavur built by *Rajaraja Chola* in 1010 C.E. is the largest and highest of *Chola* temples and stands as a symbol of greatness. The temple of Śiva at Gangaikonda Cholapuram built by *Rajendra Chola* I (1018–1033 C.E) is another line piece of temple architecture. Massive grandeur and huge structures decorated with minute sculptures are characteristics of *Chola* art. The above points are discussed in detail in the book on Chola Marvels by Kannan and Tambiah.

Another achievement of the *Cōḷas* is the plastic art of *Cōḷa* bronzes. Exquisite idols of Hindu gods and goddesses exhibit the superb workmanship of the craftsmen. The most famous of these is the figure of dancing Śiva portraying the Cosmic dance of Śiva. In the words of Sivaramamurti “The Lord Cholas were by far the most important dynasty that contributed towards the enrichment of the visual form of the dancing.”

**Medieval Pandya Art and Architecture:**

“Pandya architecture includes both rock-cut and structural temples. The early rock-cut temples have monolithic Vimanas. The structural ones are small stone temples and have all the features of bigger temples i.e. Viman, Mandapa and Shikhara. Groups of small temples are to be seen at Tiruchirapalli district of Tamil Nadu. The Shiva temples have a Nandi in front of the Maha Maṇḍapa.”

The later *Pandya* rulers developed of elegant *Vimāṇas* with finely sculptured idols and the *Gopurams* or portals of the temples. The rectangular entrance or towers of the temple are called the *Gopurams*. The portions above the entrance is pyramidal
in shape. Gradually the *Gopurams* were given more importance than the *Śikharas*. While the former were higher and more imposing, the latter declined in height. Lofty *Gopurams* of great proportions with lavish decoration were constructed by succeeding dynasties. “The *Pāṇḍyan* empire was home to temples including *Minākshi Ammā* temple in Madurai and *Nellaiappar* temple built on the bank of the river *Tamirabaraṇi* in Tirunelveli.”  

**Religion during the Rule of Medieval Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas:**

*Pallavas* were followers of Hinduism and made gifts of land to gods and *Brahmins*. In line with the prevalent customs, some of the rulers performed the *Aśvamedha* and other Vedic sacrifices. “The Brahmin families who continued to transmit sacred texts orally from one generation to another were of great importance in this context.”  

These are the words of Kulke and Rothermund. The Pallavas were, however, tolerant of other faiths. “Although Mahendravarman I was a devout Šaivite, he also built temples in honour of other gods.”  

The Chinese monk Xuanzang who visited Kanchipuram during the reign of *Narasimhavarman* I reported that there were 100 Buddhist monasteries, and 80 temples in Kanchipuram says Madhavan. *Mahendravarman* I was initially a patron of the Jain faith. He later re-converted to Hinduism under the influence of the Šaiva saint *Appar* with the revival of Hinduism during the *Bhaktī* movement in South India.

The *Cholas* on the other hand were followers of Hinduism. They were staunch Šaivites but were also supportive of *Vaiṣṇavites*. *Aditya* I, the *Chola* King built several temples for Lord Šiva but is also known to have built *Viṣṇu* temples.

“Speaking generally, the religious temper of the period, particularly in the first half of it is by no means narrow or sectarian. Not only did the kings, as a rule tolerate religions and sects other than their own, but they often patronized all persuasions in equal measure.”  

While it is true that the biggest and grandest temples of the *Cholas* were dedicated to Lord Šiva, all *Chola* Kings especially from *Aditya* to *Rajendra* IV not only built great temples for Lord *Viṣṇu* but also gave numerous grants and gifts to them.

“*Aditya* I regularly gave many endowments to the Sri Ranganatha Temple at Srirangam around CE 896 and issued an inscriptive dictat pronouncing that the great temples of Śiva and the Ranganatha temple at Srirangam to be the 'Kuladhanam' of the Chola emperors.”
During the period of later Cholas, there were assumed to be instances of intolerance towards Vaiṣṇavites, especially towards Ramanuja, the Acārya of the Vaiṣṇavites. Kulothunga Chola II, a staunch Śaivite, is said to have removed a statue of Viṣṇu from the Śiva temple at Chidambaram, though there are no epigraphical evidences to support this theory.

In the early Pandyan Kingdom (at the time of Cilappatikāram) there prevailed the orthodox religions of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism but both these sects prevailed in harmony. There was no hatred.

“Even here the bitter hatred of Caiva and Vaiśñavā cults as separate sects, which was only a later growth in the tree of Indian religion, is totally absent in the Cilappatikāram. It is not possible to say whether in the days of the epic a certain person was a Caiva or Vaiśñavā in his creed.”

Later they were influenced by Jain and Buddhist teachings. With the invasion of Kalabhras Jainism flourished. The existence of these religions in the Pandyan kingdom is found in old Tamil literature. With the advent of Bhakti movement, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism resurfaced. Many Śaivites believed themselves to be descendants of Śiva and Goddess Pārvatī.

Grand temples were constructed by the Kings. As we have understood construction of such massive temples required wealth which the kings readily parted with for the construction. The massive temples were centres for different activities including dance and sculptures. If such temples did not exist then dance would not have had a chance to develop.

**Education and Art during the Rule of Medieval Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas:** Education was given a lot of importance during the rule of the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas. Education was primarily religious and was based in the study of Vedas and Vedāṅgas. Apart from this importance was given to technical education and fine arts. The kings of the Tamil country were very just and highly learned. They were well read in Vedas and other Sanskrit literature. The king was trained in political administration and various arts including training in horse riding, elephant riding, usage of weapons, archery, sword fight. He was also trained in fine arts like dance, music painting etc. The kings were patrons of education. They promoted Brahmanical system of learning.
“The maṭha, the paḷḷi, the vihāra were centres for learning which often owned large libraries and transmitted by successive copyings a vast mass of manuscript literature on a variety of topics which increased in volume and diversity from generation to generation.”

They set up Agrahāras which were residential areas of Brahmins. The common man could also attain education by listening to Purāṇas and Ithihāsas.

“According to a Tamil inscription of the eleventh century belonging to Rajendra Chola I, the temples in those days were not only places of worship but were also places where Vedic studies, philosophy, grammar and other subjects were taught by learned Brahmins.”

Education included Vedic studies. Religion played a very important role in the lives of the people. Religion which flourished in temples laid the foundation for the Devadāsī system where god had to be pleased with dance and music besides prayers.

**Administration and Socio Economic Conditions during Vijayanagara Empire, Nayakas, later Pandyas and Marathas (1310–1885 C.E.)**

The kings during these times were upholders of social order. As Madhavan discusses it was the duty of the King to see to it that Varṇāśrama Dharma is maintained and the people function according to their Varṇas based on the authority of the Vedas. The Vijayanagara Kings claimed to belong to the Yudu race who had originated from the moon- Sōmavaṁśa. This is supported by the Vijayanagara inscriptions.

“These epigraphs also provide some of the titles which the Kings of this dynasty bore such as mahārāja, mahārājādhirāja, rājaparamēśwara, pararāja- bhayaṅkara and hindurāya - suratrāṇa.”

The coronation ceremony of the King was a very important function which was performed with utmost grandeur. The eldest son was the heir to the throne and was crowned as the Yuvarāja. He was also put in charge of administration of a part of the kingdom. The other sons and family members were appointed in charge of other provinces as governors and viceroys. The imperial dynasties of ancient India had emblems on their banners which was also found in their official documents and royal records. The Vijayanagara kings had the emblem of a boar surmounted by a sword or dagger and that of sun and moon.
The special cognizance of the Pandyans was the figure of a fish in various combinations. The king's title was Minavan (the fish-one), and the name of the tutelary deity worshipped in the great temple was Minatchi (Minakshi, "fish-eyed").

The Vijayanagara kings and Nayakas appointed several ministers who were considered as one of the seven limbs of the nation. Madhavan discusses that the Sanskrit records of that period show that these ministers were known by many titles like Mantri, Mahāmantri, Pradānī, Mahāpradānī, Upapradānī and Daṇḍanāyaka. The ministers did lots of charity work other than being advisors to the king. “The most famous of the Nayaka ministers is Govinda Dikṣita who served Sevappa Nayaka and his successors Accutappa and Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjavur.”

During the time of Vijayanagara kings and the Nayakas, there were not only the four main castes according to the Varnāśrama but there were also several sub castes. The Kings took upon themselves the responsibility of protecting all the castes. The Brahmins enjoyed a very high and important position in the society. “The Brahman received much respect from the king and was often given gifts of wealth and cattle.”

They were honoured by the society and rulers both since they were considered to be custodians of sacred Vedic literature. But not all Brahmins devoted themselves to the sacred profession. Many Brahmins served as ministers and officials to the Kings and served as generals in the army. One of the best known examples of Brahmin ministers is Govinda Dikṣita. He was an excellent administrator and also an authority on Dharmaśāstras. He received several gifts from the king for his merit. Many Brahmins were in charge of temples, some were merchants, some lived on their own land by growing crops, some held high place in the government. The queens during the rule of Vijayanagara, Nayakas and Marathas did not participate in administration. The Sanskrit inscriptions Tamil Nadu of the periods mention about the royal queens.

“These royal ladies, although they did not play any major role in the administration, are actively participating in the spheres of religion and culture. The numerous temples of the Tamil country, as well as the deserving scholarly folk received gifts in the form of land and money from these ladies. From their descriptions in the epigraphs, it can be seen that many of them were extremely well versed in the fine arts and also enjoyed an exalted position in their respective kingdoms as elsewhere in south India at that time.”
Madhavan further discusses that the temples were religious centres during the Vijayanagara, Nayaka and Maratha period. Besides this the temples were also the hub of social and economic activities. The Kings during these times spent a lot of money in constructing and maintaining the temples. They made a lot of contributions to the temple and also donated several villages to the temples. The temples in turn offered employment to several people. There were priests, accountants, treasurer, manager, watchmen and others. Also a large number of suppliers were making puja articles for the temples.

The Vijayanagara kings, the Nayakas, later Pandyas and Marathas were all great patrons of education, art and music. Under their rule all these flourished. Several of these Kings were themselves scholars and authored several plays and dramatic works. They supported Vedic learning and they gifted several villages or Agrahāras to educated Brahmins so that they could continue with their scholarly pursuits without much disturbance. The languages during these times were Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu.

**History of Tanjavur**

History of Tanjavur throws light on the important historical and chronological events that had an impact on the social, political and cultural scenario during the ancient times. Tanjavur has been the cradle of civilization during the traditional period. The ancient city of Tanjavur rose to prominence in the 12th and 13th centuries under the able rulers of the Chola dynasty. Under the patronage of the Chola kings, Tanjavur flourished in the fields of art, literature and architecture. Sastrī states in his book that in Saṅgam age among the mighty rulers of the Chola dynasty, Karikala and Koccengan were the most successful administrators who helped in the development of Saṅgam Literature. The rulers of the Chola dynasty constructed beautiful temples and monuments that added to the grandeur of Tanjavur. Vijayalaya was another prominent ruler of the Chola dynasty who further conquered new territories and expanded the province of Tanjavur.

“The Anbil plates state that the chief glory of the rule of Aditya 1 was that he covered the banks of Kāvēri along its whole course from the mountain to the sea with a number of lofty and impregnable temples built of stone and dedicated to Śiva.”  

*Rajaraja* I was the most successful ruler of the Cholas who was a brilliant administrator and had erected the famous Rājarājeśvara temple. However during the
period of 1120–1163 C.E., the Cholas lost power and the Pandya kings gained importance. After a short rule of the Pandya rulers, the reins of administration of Tanjavur went to the hands of the Muslim rulers. During the 14th century, the Vijayanagara rulers took over the administration of the ancient city that lasted till the 17th century. The Marathas ruled over Tanjavur for a short time span. Tanjavur was ultimately taken over by the British rulers by the Treaty of 1799. The history of the ancient city provides information about Tanjavur during the ancient period.

Today Tanjavur is well known throughout the world for its Big Temple or the Brihasdīśvara temple, magnificent Palace, the famous Raja Serfoji’ Sarasvati Mahal Library, Art Gallery and also known for its exquisite handicrafts, like Art plate, Pith work, bronze icons, Tanjavur paintings and classical south Indian musical instruments.

In Tanjavur, starting from the rule of Cholas to Marathas, enlightened kings surrounded by great poets and scholars, skilled builders and master craftsmen combined to create a very sophisticated and advanced civilization. Temples of grand designs and majestic proportions, embellished with the works of skilled sculptors, are the visible manifestations of the spirit and culture, priorities and principles, cherished values and beliefs of the people who lived in those days.

Social and Political History of Kumbakonam

Kumbakonam is a town in Tanjavur with a special grade municipality. The town is bound by Kāvērī river to the north and Arasalar river to the south. Kumbakonam history dates back to the Saṅgam period when it was ruled by the early Cholas. Later on the Pallavas, the later Cholas, the Pandyas, the Vijayanagara empire, the Madurai Nayakas, the Tanjavur Nayakas, the Tanjavur Marathas ruled over Kumbakonam. During the time of the medieval Cholas (700 C.E. – 900 C.E.) it served as their capital. In the Sthala Purāṇa book Makamaka Makiyum the greatness of all the temples in Kumbakonam is discussed along with the stories attached. According to the Sthala Purāṇa, the belief is that, “Kumbha is the mythical pot of Brahmā containing the seed of all living beings on earth, which was displaced during Prajāya or deluge. It floated and came to rest where Kumbakonam now stands. Mahāmaham festival is held here every 12 years to commemorate this. Kumbakonam was formerly known by Tamil names of Kuḍamūkku, Bhāskarakṣetram and Tirukuḍandai.” 62
According to Pillai, the region around Kumbakonam was inhabited as early as the *Saṅgam* Age (300 B.C.E.–300 C.E.). “The present-day Kumbakonam is believed to be the site of the ancient town of Kudavayil where the Chola king Karikala held his court.” 63 “Kumbakonam was the site of a battle between the Pallava king and the Pandya king, Śrī Vallabha in 859 C.E. and between the Pandya king Srimara Pandya and a confederacy of the Cholas and Gangas.” 64

According to Ramaswami, “Kumbakonam came into limelight during the rule of the Medieval Cholas who ruled from the 900 C.E. to the 1200 C.E. The town of Pazhaiyarai, 8 kilometres from Kumbakonam was the capital of the Chola Empire in the 9th century.” 65

Following the decline of the Chola kingdom, Kumbakonam was conquered by the Pandyas in 1290 C.E. Following the demise of the Pandya king in the 14th century, Kumbakonam was conquered by the Vijayanagara Empire. Krishnadevaraya, the emperor of Vijayanagara visited the town in 1524 C.E. and is believed to have bathed in the famous *Mahāmaham* tank during the *Mahāmaham* festival. Kumbakonam was ruled by the Madurai Nayakas and the Tanjavur Nayakas from 1535 to 1673 when it fell to the Marathas. Each of these foreign dynasties had a considerable impact on the demographics and culture of the region. When the Vijayanagara Empire fell in 1565, there was a mass influx of poets, musicians and cultural artists from the kingdom.

Kumbakonam is known for its temples and *Mathās*. Around 188 Hindu temples are present within the limits of Kumbakonam and around Kumbakonam. Hence it gets its name as temple town. The most important temples in Kumbakonam are Śārṅgapāṇi, Rāmasvāmi and Ādi Kumbeśvarar temples. The Kumbeśvarar temple is the oldest of the Śaivite temples dating back to the medieval Cholas. It was constructed in the 700 C.E. Narayanaswamy brings to light that the Nayaka kings renovated the Śārṅgapāṇi temple and Rāmasvāmi temples in the 15th and 16th centuries respectively.

As far as the economic life of the people goes, agriculture was the main occupation.

“The Sanskrit epigraphs repeatedly mention that villages were granted by the kings to the learned brāhmaṇas as agrahāras in recognition of their scholarship and for their livelihood. Similarly the rulers also gifted many villages to temples as a source of income. These villages
were often situated near rivers and were very fertile, yielding an abundance of crops.”

Many kings of Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas took a lot of interest in building tanks and reservoirs to store water and also dug reservoirs and irrigation canals in order to irrigate the fields. The temples were wealthy institutions during the reign of the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandyas. Since many villages had been gifted to the temples, the income got through the villages were used for the activities of the temples, including worship, celebration of the festivals, decoration of deities etc. The temples were thus not just religious centres but were also hubs of social and economic life. Religion played a very important role in medieval Tamil country.

“The temple and the maṭha were the two great gifts of medieval Hinduism to Southern India. It was under the Cōḷas that these institutions entered on a process of gradual expansion and adaptation, which attracted the imagination of the populace and benefactions of the rich.”

The Vedic religion had firmly established itself. The rulers supported the Vedic religion by building innumerable temples and gifting the learned Brahmins with gold, jewels and livestock. Though the Vedic religion prevailed as the main religion in the Tamil country besides Buddhism and Jainism, different offshoots came up in Hinduism. These were Śaiva, Vaiṣṇa and Śakta cult. From 500–800 C.E. Buddhism and Jainism had spread in Tamil Nadu before a forceful Śaiva Bhakti movement arose. Between the seventh and ninth centuries, pilgrim saints such as Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar used songs (bhajan) of Śiva’s greatness to refute concepts of Buddhism and Jainism. Manikkavācakar's heart-melting verses, called Tiruvācakam, are full of visionary experience, divine love and urgent striving for Truth. The songs of these four saints are part of the compendium known as Tirumurai which, along with the Vedas, Siddhānta Śastrās and Śaiva Āgamas, are now considered to form the scriptural basis of the Śaiva Siddhānta in Tamil Nadu. It seems probable that the devotional literature was not, however, considered to belong to the Śaiva Siddhānta at the time when it was first composed. The hymns themselves appear to make no such claim for themselves. In the words of Goodall-

“Some of the devotional Tamil hymns by certain of the Nāyanmārs maybe contemporaneous with some of the earliest surviving Sanskrit
Saidhāntika writings. It is as literary expressions of devotion that they were cherished by subsequent Tamil thinkers and so canonical." 68

In continuation he says that Tēvāram and Tiruvācagam (like the Prabandam of the Āḻvārs) constitute, the Tamil Upanishads.

On the other hand the Vaiṣṇavas worship Viṣṇu in his various forms. They form one of the three major groups of Hinduism. Vaiṣṇavism is a tradition of Hinduism, distinguished from other schools by its worship of Viṣṇu or his associated Avatārs, principally as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, as the original and supreme God. This worship in different perspectives or historical traditions addresses God under the names of Nārāyaṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Vāsudeva or more often "Viṣṇu", and their associated Avatārs. Its beliefs and practices, especially the concepts of Bhakti and Bhaktī Yoga, are based largely on the Upaniṣads, and associated with the Vedas and Purānic texts such as the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Padma, Viṣṇu and Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

“But it has a series of sacred books, called Purāṇas, each of which professes to be a direct revelation from the Supreme being and each of which may be used as an authority for the establishment of almost any kind of doctrine.” 69

The followers of Vaiṣṇavism are referred to as Vaiṣṇava(s) or Vaiṣṇavites. A large percentage of Hindus are Vaiṣṇavas, with the vast majority living in India.

Śāktism ("doctrine of power" or "doctrine of the Goddess") is a denomination of Hinduism that focuses worship upon Śakti or Devī – the Hindu Divine Mother – as the absolute, ultimate Godhead. It is, along with Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, one of the three primary schools of Hinduism.

“Śāktism regards Devī (the Goddess) as the Supreme Brahman itself, the "one without a second", with all other forms of divinity, female or male, considered to be merely her diverse manifestations. In the details of its philosophy and practice, Śāktism resembles Śaivism. However, Śāktas are pactoriners of Śāktism, focus most or all worship on Śakti, as the dynamic feminine aspect of the Supreme Divine.” 70

Śiva, the masculine aspect of divinity, is considered solely transcendent, and his worship is usually relegated to an auxiliary role. The roots of Śāktism penetrate deep into India's prehistory. From the Goddess's earliest known appearance in Indian paleolithic settlements dating back to 22,000 B.C.E., through the refinement of her cult in the Indus Valley Civilization, her partial eclipse during the Vedic period, and
her subsequent resurfacing and expansion in the classical Sanskrit tradition of *Vedic* period. Over the course of its history, *Śāktism* has inspired great works of Sanskrit literature and Hindu philosophy, and it continues to strongly influence popular Hinduism today. *Śāktism* is practiced throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond, in countless forms, both *Tāntric* and non-*Tāntric*. “Shaktism encompasses nearly endless variety of practices from primitive animism to philosophical speculation of the highest order that seek to access the Shakti or Divine Energy or Power.”

Two of its largest and most visible schools are the *Srīkula* (family of *Srī*), strongest in South India, and the *Kālikula* (family of *Kāli*), which prevails in northern and eastern India.

The strong emergence of the three main cults *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism* and *Śāktism* can be seen in temples of Kumbakonam. These temples functioned according to the respective *Āgamas*. The bigger temples supported temple dance and temple dancers since the rulers took special care to do so.

**Dance and Music in *Saṅgam* Age**

Ritual singing and dancing was a part of religious worship. The classic *Cilappatikāram* gives us information about the practice of dancing in the *Saṅgam* period. As Dikshitar discusses in his translation of *Cilappatikāram*, “*Krṣṇa* is known to have performed 10 different kinds of dances of which some are mentioned in the text - *Kūṭṭu, Mallāṭal, Kuṭakkūṭtu*. *Śiva* is said to have danced *Koṭukoṭṭi* and *Pāṇṭarankam*. *Durga*’s dance is *Marakkāl* and *Lakṣmi*’s dance was called *Pāvai* after her victory over *Asurās*.” Further Dikshitar says,

“There were other kinds of dance like *Nilainūṟāṭal* (a dance fixing oneself in a place) and *Pātam Viḻiṅḍāṭal* (moving). In addition *Kuravaikūṭṭu* was performed extensively by women of cowherd communities.”

*Cilappatikāram* also shows an advanced form of dancing by *Mātavi* the courtesan due to profound influence of *Bharatā’s Nāṭya Śāstra*. “Some dances mentioned in *Tolkāppiyam* (the earliest tamil grammar literature) and *Saṅgam* works are *Varikkūṭṭu, Karunkūṭṭu, Vaḷḷikkūṭṭu, Kazhanilaikkūṭṭu* and *Tunangai*. These are examples of *Desi* elements of dance of the ancient Tamils.” Subrahmanyam further says that, “The astounding similarities between the *Cilappatikāram* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* marks the percolation of *Nāṭyaśāstra* in Tamil culture.” Also *Cilappatikāram* had become a common heritage of *Chera, Chola and Pandya* kingdoms and hence an
influence of the Nāṭyaśāstra in all these regions in the ancient Saṅgam age. In the ancient Tamil land music was highly developed. In the words of Dikshitar

“The ancient Tamils like the ancient Greeks had a highly developed art of music. There were musicians of both sexes. The male singers were called pāṇars and the female singers were called viralis and pāṭinis. They went from place to place displaying their musical talents and earning livelihood.”

About dance he says, “A qualified actress underwent seven years of training from her fifth year to twelfth and exhibited her skill on the public stage to win the appreciation and approval of the king.” Popular musical instruments seem to have Vīnā, flute and Mrdangam.

**Dance and Music during Medieval Pallavas (550–900 C.E.)**

Many Pallava Kings were well trained in music and patronized it. Mahendravarma I is attributed to having contributed Sāṅkīrṇjāti (a musical time of nine counts) to music. The Pallava ruler Rajasimha was also well versed in music. He enjoyed the titles- Vādyavidyādharah (one who is knowledgeable in instruments), Śrī Āṭōdyā Tumburu (one who is like Tumburu in his knowledge of musical instruments) and Śrī Vīṇā Nārada (one whose plays Vīṇā like Nārada). In the translation of inscriptions given by Hultzsch the description of Rajasimha is as follows-

“(He who resembles) Tumburu (in the knowledge of) musical instruments. He whose authority is the (Śaiva) doctrine. He who is adorned with the power of issuing orders. He who is fond of legends.”

Nandivarman Pallavamalla was also proficient in music. The walls of Kailāsnatha temple in Kanchipuram depict Lord Śiva in several dance poses as described in the Nāṭya Śāstra showing the development of dance during the Pallavas. Kalaran in her book Bharatanatyam in Tamil Nadu says that, “The males were the conductors of dance and called as Taṭṭalivukōṭṭuvor and female courtesans practised and preserved the dance.” The icon of Naṭarāja also emerged during this period.

**Dance and Music during Medieval Cholas (850–1300 C.E.)**

The Cholas were known to have been great sculptors, great temple builders and great patrons of art and music. As described by Ramaswami, some of the greatest temples were built during their period like the Brhadiśvara temple in Tanjavur, Airāvateśvara temple in Darasuram, Paśupatināthar temple in Pullamangai,
The Naṭarāja image in its various forms holds the first place amongst the Chola bronzes. The Cholas maintained several dancing girls in the temple premises who were well versed in the art of Nāṭya Šāstra. These girls were dedicated to the temples and were assigned duties in the temple rituals besides their job of performing Nṛtta before the deity on all festive occasions. The Karaṇas described in the Nāṭya Šāstra are beautifully depicted in the sculptures in the temple Gopurams in Chidambaram, Tanjavur and Kumbakonam.

In the Śārṅgapāṇi temple in Kumbakonam dance sculptures depicting different Karaṇas of Natya Šāstra with labels below (describing the Karaṇas) are found in the entrance Gopuram. But these Karaṇas are of Śiva and not of Viṣṇu and belong to a Śaiva shrine and not of Viṣṇu who is the principal deity of the temple of Śārṅgapāṇi. Vatsayan argues-

“This is borne out by the manner in which they have been inserted and their stylistic features which have little in common with the other bold reliefs which occupy the other storeys of the Gopuram.”

A study of the dance sculptures in these South Indian temples shows that the dance was highly developed during those times and followed the path laid in the Nāṭya Šāstra. The kings and queens who contributed richly to the building and maintaining of the temples were well versed in music and dance and if not they were deeply interested and involved in preserving the dance form by making sculptures of dance poses in the temple walls and Gopurams. Vatsayan further analyses that “Karaṇas are also found in the Nāgeśvara temple in Kumbakonam arranged vertically in the entrance wall but has been washed away and unclear.”

Kalarani in her book explains that the dance recitals in olden days were accompanied by a musical troupe which consisted of vocalist and a variety of instruments like wind, stringed and percussion. She says that, “Every pure Nṛtta item was accompanied by specific instruments to give a special a better effect to the particular dance.” The dance and musical group was headed by a Naṭṭuvanār who conducted dance recitals. There are many sculptures which show the dancers holding musical instruments of that time like Nāgaswaram, Tāvil, Iḍakkai, Uḍukkai, Maddalam, Muzhavu, Vēnā etc. All of them were maintained by the kings of the age. The dancing girls were independent educated girls who held a special status in the South Indian society.
Dance and Music during the Nayaka and Maratha rule (1300–1800 C.E.)

Kalarani discusses that, “With the demise of Adirajendra, Kulotunga I of the eastern Chalukyas of Vengi ascended the throne in Gangaikondacholapuram in 1070 C.E. This marked the fusion of Tamil and Telugu cultures with inter marriages happening.” 84 The Nayakas were appointed to govern the Chola country by Accuta Devaraya. Cevappa Nayaka was appointed and ascended the throne in Tanjavur and ruled from 1532–1560 C.E. During his time the famous minister Govinda Dikshita was appointed.

Madhavan says in her book that, he was an orthodox Kannada Brahmin who performed the Agnihotra.

“He is credited with repair and construction of 16 Maṇḍapas on the bank of Mahāmaham tank of Ādikumbeśvara temple in Kumbakonam. He extended the existing temples by adding Maṇḍapas with exotic sculptures as in Rāmasvāmi temple Kumbakonam, made additions to Paṭṭīśwaram temple, Śārṅgasvāmi temple Kumbakonam, and several others.” 85

The golden rule of the Nayakas was during Raguṇatha Nayaka during whose time literature and art flourished and Tanjore became a centre for learning literature, painting, music and dance. He was an authority on Carnatic music and played the Viṇā. After him Tanjore had Vijayaraghava Nayaka and Azhagiri Nayaka as rulers. The Maratha rule began with the succession of the throne by Ekoji after Azhagiri was defeated. Kalarani discusses that

“The Nayakas brought with them the glorious tradition of music and dance. Kuravanji dance dramas, Yakṣagāṇās, Bhagvatamēḷa Nāṭakam, Taranginī were produced and performed in the court. The dancing girls moved from just being temple dancers to court dancers. The dancers were generously rewarded and maintained by the kings.” 86

According to Kalarani Raghunatha Nayaka is attributed with some of the most famous literary works like Saṅgīta Sudhā, Pārijātapaharaṇam, Gajendramokṣam, Nalacaritam etc. all of which have been adopted into dance.

The Maratha (1676–1855 C.E.) rule was established by Ekoji I who was a scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu. Maratha rule brought with it an influence of Hindustani music which was incorporated into Carnatic as new Rāgas. The Maratha Kings of Tanjavur were also great patrons of music and dance. The courtesans still
performed and court musicians were also maintained. But money flow was less due to British rule and plundering done by Mughal rulers. Several great works in the form of Padams, Darus and Svarajatis came into existence during Tulaja I.

“He donated liberal gifts to scholars, musicians, dancers and poets. Apart from Carnatic music he gave scope for Hindustani musicians in his court. He composed a Telugu dance drama Sivakama Sundari Parinayam in Yakshgana style. The darus and slokas are excellent in this dance drama.”  

He composed several other dance dramas. The courts were filled with a galaxy of musicians and dancers. Bhagyalekshmy discusses that

“During the Maratha rule dance was coined as Sadir or Nautch. During Serfoji’s rule the four Tanjore brothers Chinnaiah, Ponnaiah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu refined the dance performed by the courtesans and gave it a form and shape and laid the foundation for modern Bharatanatyam.”

Eshwar brings out in her book that,

“With the fall of the kingdoms and with the advent of British rule the conditions of the Devadāsīs deteriorated as the patrons in the form of kings did not exist anymore and many of them seeped into poverty. The Devadāsīs came to be regarded as mere courtesans to satisfy the rich and powerful. Their art in the true sense got buried in these dark times. The British passed an Anti Nautch bill to ban the Devadāsī system.”

Dance and music existed as a part of the culture right from Saṅgam age though in a different forms. The early Pandyas, Pallavas and Cholas took special care to support dance and music. The later Pandyas and Nayakas renovated a lot of the existing temples. The Maratha kings were also very well versed in art and music. They contributed a lot to the rich collection of dance dramas and Padams to the existing repertoire of the temple dancers. Dance would not have survived if not for the temples.

**From Temples to Stage**

With years of exploitation by the rich and wealthy men including the rulers, Zamindars and Brahmns and further with restrictions passed by the British, the status of the Devadāsīs had really fallen into poverty and the dance form was getting lost.
But the 20th century saw a revival of classical dance Bharatanatyam under great people like E.Krishna Iyer and Rakminidevi Arundale who worked towards bringing back the lost glory to the dance form. Balasaraswati and Mylapore Gowri Ammal are veterans from the Dāsī families who contributed to the upliftment of the art during this time. The 20th century also saw an upsurge of a whole lot of dancers like Kalanidhi Narayan, Kamala Lakshman, Mrinalini Sarabhai, Ram Gopal and many others from respectable families taking to the profession adding a totally different perspective to the whole dance form and taking it to different heights. Today classical dance has moved from temples to stages and many from are taking it up as a profession. The dance form is now enriched with both traditional old and new choreographies. With grand stages, complex lights and sound technologies to support and explore the dance form has reached new heights.

From the above study of History of Tamil Nadu we can conclude that all the rulers of the Tamil land were great patrons of art and promoted dance and music which flourished since ancient times in the temples they built. All the dynastic rulers left behind a rich legacy in of the form magnificent temples. They took utmost care to make the temples and preserve the sculptures. Each successive dynasty either preserved or extended the existing temples and added their own dimensions to them. They maintained dancing girls as Devadāsīs in the temples who turn preserved classical dance and music. Plus dancers as courtesans and court musicians were also prevalent who excelled in classical dance and music. Many rulers were themselves well versed in music.

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