CHAPTER II

SOURCES

Generally historians working on Indian history complain about the paucity of source materials for a correct appraisal of the social and economic conditions of the ancient and medieval periods. Such lament regarding the 'poverty of information' for the social history of India is applicable to social history of the Kongu country as well. Writing of social history is difficult, especially the history of agrarian society. Marc Block pointed out that more than all others, those who devote themselves to agrarian studies must under threat of being unable to decipher the scrawl of the past, more often than not, write real history in reverse.  

The historians are forced to turn to workshop studies and studies on the urban centres of trade, due to lack of source materials to enquire into rural society. That research in Kongu studies is replete with such problems is case in point. Even literature and epigraphy speak
sparingly of the Kongu country.

The period before the tenth century A.D. witnessed an unstable life in the Kongu country. People subsisted mainly by cattle-breeding that necessitated a nomadic way of life. When the whole society was on the move, no thought was given to the writing of permanent records. But the period under study saw a settled way of life and permanent records began to emerge.

In writing history, whether political or social, literature, epigraphy, numismatics and excavated antiquities are invariably the major sources. Literary men in those days being court poets and poet laureats, their writings dwelt upon the people of higher echelons of society. Likewise the charters too were about the higher stratafolks. Hence, these two evidences, viz., literature and charters, are subjected to strict scrutiny before final acceptance.

Tamil literary traditions had a distinct cultural blossom even as early as the first century B.C.⁴ Caṅkam literature mirrored the life of the Tamils during those ages. Barring Bhakti literature, post-Caṅkam classics did not bestow much attention to reflecting the life of the people though these literary works do not help us in fixing the chronology of dynastic events, they come in handy for delineating the social fabric of those times.
Caṅkam poets picturise the realistic life of people in their works. While singing the five-fold division of the country, they describe the life of those people in true colours. However, Caṅkam classics are not of assistance to the present study, as they are replete with historical contradictions. Nevertheless the Mullai and Kuṟiṇci Thiṅais of Caṅkam literature give reliable evidence regarding the life of the Kuṟiṇci and Mullai people in the Koṅgu country prior to the entry of the Vellāḷas. The life of the Koṅgu people from Caṅkam period till the advent of the Vellāḷ settlement retained its unique character. Though the period of the present research is ten centuries after the Caṅkam age, the Caṅkam classics are a distinct pointer to the life of the ancient Koṅgu people. Though cattle-breeding was their main occupation till the tenth century A.D., contemporary evidence regarding such life was but fragmentary. As the people led a quiet life for ten centuries, it is not amiss to refer to, the fragmentary evidences to understand their life. The unaltered and quiet life enabled them to retain a minor deity cult of prehistoric times. 5

The poet Koṅguvēlir of the Koṅgu country, who hailed from Vijayamaṅgalam, rendered into Tamil, the Sanskrit classic Brahatkatha, entitled Perukatai. This work is assigned to the beginning of the seventh century A.D. The first work purported to be in the Paicacci language and the first
Sanskrit text are not extant. It records the place and events in the distant north. Though nothing is mentioned about the Kongu country, descriptions of Mullai and Kurinji, flora and fauna in it are helpful to our field of research. The life of the Veṭṭuvas of the Kongu country might have influenced the author when he described the life of the hunters of the north.

Bhakthi literature flourished from the sixth century A.D. Songs in praise of gods set to musical notes were composed for popular consumption with a sprinkling of local idioms and usages. Of the author of Tēvāram hymns, Thirugnana-sambandar and Sundarar while singing the deities in their peregrination, also make pointed reference to the ecology of the area and the life of the people in the temple precincts. Thirugnana-sambandar has the local idioms interspersed in his songs, besides throwing light on folk's life. In the Kongu country seven shrines are mentioned as sung by Tēvāram hymnists. But a scrutiny reveals more than seven shrines. Thirugnana-sambandar has sung about shrines on the banks of Cauvery in the Kongu country. Sundarar has sung about the shrines on the ancient highways. The shrines sung on the highways, depict the trade boom. Sundarar calls Veṭṭamāṅkudal and Thirumuruganpoondi as Mānakar (big cities). Thirugnana-sambandar calls Tirucēṅgōdu as Kodimādaceṅguppu. Though these places were rich in trade the highways leading to
these cities were infested by highway men—'ṛalaikalvar'. Sundarar's Thirumuruganpoondi hymns attest to this fact. Besides the Koṅgu villages of Tēvāram days were inhabited by the Vēṟṟuvas, who thrived on robbery and hunting. Worship of Siva and construction of temples had become the hallmark of those places where social life got a stable foothold due to agriculture.

Compared to the rest of Tamil Nadu, shrines sung by hymnists are few in number so far as the Koṅgu country is concerned, the obvious reason being, the non-proliferation of agriculture during Tēvāram period. Yet these hymns record in ample measure the social structure and the people who lived during their periods. Medieval Tamil Nadu saw the spurt of great Kāvyas and Bhakthi literature that abound in literary excellence. Tamil literature grew to competitive level with the literature of the rest of the world, Kamban's work being the outstanding example. World renowned Tamil literature speaks sparingly of Vellālas and agriculture. The collection and codification of data regarding Vellālas and their occupation from among the literature is an uphill task. The literature of the medieval period offers meagre information about the people and their agriculture while agriculture was at its peak. Knowledge gained from the medieval Tamil literature about the Koṅgu country is in general sketchy. The reason is that during
Caṅkam period, men of letters were patronised by heroic kings. *Tolkāppiyam* calls it 'Pāṇkaṭan'.

But in medieval period men of letters were patronised by chieftains and village headmen. Kambar's patron Sadaiyappa vali is an example. In the Koṅgu country of medieval times there were neither prosperous villages nor prominent landowners to lead them. Consequently there were no men of letters of repute in the medieval Koṅgu country. Besides the medieval Koṅgu country was characterised by fluid political and social conditions. Consequently there was a lull in the literary production especially the classics that demand a period of strife-free governance. Such a state of affairs, runs contrary to the peaceful living conditions that obtained in the rest of the Tamil country thereby enabling the birth of literature. But towards the end of the medieval period Koṅgu literature got a definite shape of its own mostly due to chieftains and Paṭṭakkārars who held the reins of power. They patronised to a considerable extent Koṅgu Tamil literature.

Post-Tēvāram literature speaks meagrely of the Koṅgu country. Some references are found in *Periyapurāṇam* and *Viruthondar Tiruvandhadi*, but in others there are not sufficient reference to understand the social history of the Koṅgu country. It is surprising to note that Cēkkilār compiled the life and times of Saiva savants with meticulous care to true historical perspective has not made
any references to Koṅgu people. After the twelfth century A.D. we get meagre references about the Koṅgu country from the songs of the Arunagirināthar who lived in the fifteenth century A.D.\(^{13}\) From fifteenth century onwards literature pertaining to the Koṅgu country were produced in plenty. They are in the nature of Sthalapuranas (traditional and puranic accounts of the temple of a place) and purānic accounts of castes. But they lack literary qualities and historic sense. Despite this certain interesting information is discernible provided an inquiring look is made into them. This only shows that some facts have got mixed up with many fictions in these stories.\(^{14}\)

The earliest literary evidence after the fifteenth century A.D. is one by name ŌdālakkuravaṆci alias Alagumalai kuravaṆci. In this work of the seventeenth century A.D., the heroic deeds of Periya Perumāl of Ōdāḷa clan are being sung. The events in the story and the battles described may be fictitious but the incidence of migration of the people from the Čōḷa country to new places in the Koṅgu country and the resistance of the natives to the new immigrants are matters merits a closer study. The early tribes of the Koṅgu country are fully described in this work as also the systematic enumeration of the clans of the Koṅgu Veḷḷālas.

In the history of Tamil Nadu literary tradition, itaka series began to emerge from the eleventh century A.D.\(^{15}\)
It flourished in the Tamil country in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries A.D. Satak literature is of three kinds, viz., Historical Satakas, Devotional Satakas and Didactic Satakas. Of these only historical Satakas are useful for our study. Rājarāja I divided his empire into mandalas for administrative convenience. With the passage of time each mandalam developed into a unique centre. Hence from the fifteenth century A.D. onwards works of Satak series about mandalas began to spring. Works like Kārmandala Satak, Pāndi mandala Satak, Čōla mandala Satak and Tondaimandala Satak, were written to eulogise the respective mandalams. In this fashion three Satakas emerged on Kōṅgu mandalam. The third Satak is not yet published.

The earliest of these is by poet Kārmēgam. This work after describing the natural and environmental scenic of the Kōṅgu country deals with the kings, paṭṭakkārars and poets. Details found in Satak literature have any value only for later political history, as material for social history is not found in it. The unique features of the Kōṅgu country, the historical norms, etc., are not faithfully reflected. This work eulogised its patron. In spite of all these drawbacks certain useful information for our study is found in this work.

Following him, the Kōṅgu mandala Satak of
Valasundara Kavirāyar furnishes similar information. These two are useful in assessing later political history but not the social history. Yet Vālasundara Kavirāyar has described the ashmoung (Sāmbal mēdu), a place later subjected to scientific investigation. The reason adduced by Kavirāyar for the emergence of ashmound has no intellectual base. In fact ashmound was the creation of cattle-breeders and shepherds in the neo-lithic period. That the Kongu country was foremost in cattle-breeding in earlier times is a noteworthy feature. Cattle-breeders collected the cowdung at one place and burnt them up before moving their cattle to other pastures. Then both the cattle and men walked over the burning embers with a belief that fire had qualities to ward off diseases.

In the eighteenth century A.D., Kacchiappamuniwar wrote the Pērūr Purāṇam. It is an admixture of historical and puranic details. The 'Nāṭṭupadalam', the earlier part of this work describes in detail the various facets of agricultural operations that prevailed in the Kongu country. The king mentioned is Karikāla; his name occurs in the Pērūr and Syāmalāpuram inscriptions. That people from different places migrated and settled in the Kongu country in his reign is gleaned from CPP. The transplantation operations in agriculture are mentioned in the section 'Pallan and Palli padalam'. In this padalam entire agricultural operations
right from seeding to harvesting are enacted in the form of a drama.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D., the work Cencōttupallu was written by Ponnūr Chelliah Barathi. References to agricultural operations are useful guides for our research study. Seeds, agricultural implements, irrigation aspects, agricultural operations in tune with the seasons, etc., point to the established agricultural methods from the Cōla period to the period of the work. Therefore this work is the best specimen of Cōla agrarian traditions that are handed down the ages.

The work Vēllāla purāṇam is the product of the beginning of the present century. Even the scanty details obtainable in Pārūr purāṇa are not found here. This work lacks historical sense and literary merit and is a heterogeneous mixture of ancient purānic stories with the fertile imagination of the author. It is a panegyric of some Vellālas of the time written in order to teach a lesson to some who have deprecated the Vellālas. Yet the chapter 'Erpadalam' gives some information regarding agricultural operations.

Certain charters written after the fifteenth century A.D. have been noticed in the Koṅgu country. A state of confusion reigned then. These charters are the outcome of the
superiority of one caste over the others and also for emphasising its rights over certain areas. Some charters are engraved on copper plates and others on palm leaves. The historical authenticity of these charters without the royal seals or signatures is open to question. Nevertheless, they are not true sources of political history, yet social gleanings can be had from them. The information from these charters can be accepted only with corroborative evidence.

Of the charters that of Kōṅgudēsa Rājākāl is the foremost. The historical details of the work are indeed a boon to historians. In the words of Rev. Fr. Tylor 'One of the best in the whole Mackenzi's collection being free from fable and supported by dates.' The date of this charter is the seventeenth century A.D.

Charter details are of extraordinary histriocity. Details about Gaṅga kings that are found in Kōṅgudēsa Rājākāl are identical with Gaṅga inscription. This unique charter has led Lewis Rice to exclaim 'The utility of the Kōṅgudēsa Rājākāl is even greater than that of the inscriptions.' This work deals at length with the political history of the Koṅgu country from Christian era upto the seventeenth century A.D. Surely there must have existed in the Koṅgu country a tradition in codifying the political history. Details have been collected and presented cogently. The regnal periods of kings are notified in saka era.
The histriocity of the book is further authenticated by the similarity of the dated inscriptions of the kings mentioned in the work. Besides events of political history, there is a profuse sprinkling of cultural history. These details help us in ascertaining the social set up of the Koṅgu country before the advent of the Cōḷas.

Cōḷas defeated the Vēṭṭuvās of the Koṅgu country and created the Brahmadeyās.²⁵ It is surprising to note that no mention is made of the Pāṇḍyas who repeatedly attacked the Koṅgu country and conquered it. Maybe the author of this work is of Karnāṭaka origin, hence he is prejudiced in favour of giving more details about Karnāṭaka. References to Mysore kings bear a close similarity to the inscriptions relating to those kings.

The CPP of the eighteenth century A.D. by an unknown author speaks of Cōḷa kingdom and its people.²⁶ The work while speaking about Cōḷa kings is given to exaggeration and flattery. But while touching upon social movements and the life of the common people, it is devoid of any such exaggeration. CPP is an important source which throws light on the emigration of the Vāḷḷāḷas from the Cōḷa country to the Koṅgu country. It refers to the Vēṭṭuvās as Irular and Mannādi, viz., one who rules over the land.²⁷
The information given in the Paṭṭayam is of antiquarian value and Karikāla Cōla mentioned in the work is none other than Kulōthunga III. After the conquest of the Koṅgu by Āditya, people migrated to the Koṅgu country for reasons of trade, commerce and religion. Hence a pattern of society similar to the one that obtained in the Cōla country had to be created afresh in the Koṅgu country. The wavy migration of the Cōla people into the Koṅgu country reached consummation after a stage. And the charter is the result of such migration. Prior to the advent of the Cōlas, the Koṅgu country was thinly populated. Herein the Kāviliar, the Pūviliar, the Kuṟumbas of the Iruḷa and the Vēṭṭuva tribes lived a nomadic life. At the advent of the Cōla people, only certain villages on the highways were inhabited. Karikāla had carried out renovations in these villages. Besides this, Paṭṭayam mentions that Karikāla had created villages and introduced new village administrative system. The social and historical data provided by the Paṭṭayam are credible. Moreover the social aspects of the Koṅgu country obtained from the CPP are more reliable than the political facts.

Ten years ago VPP was obtained from the Vēṭṭuvas from a village by name Tennilai near Pugalur. Though it is not possible to ascertain with any certainty the date of the charter, the style and content of the charter point to a
situation that obtained in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries A.D. The work speaks of the seven agreements between the Tennilai Vēṭṭuvas and that of the Velālas, wherein the former sold to the latter 'Kāniyāṭci' and 'Ūrāṭci'. That the parties to the exchange were given the title 'gowender' can also be gleaned from it. There are two reasons for such a change over. The first is driving out Okkaliga tribes from Tennilai and the second is the sale of the 'Kāniyāṭci' and 'Ūrāṭci' for thousand kāsus. The Paṭṭayam details the economic decadence of the Vēṭṭuvas, the ancient inhabitants and the gradual economic ascendancy of the Velālas, the settlers. The charter can be utilised for further research.

Another charter entitled Mkp deals with the agreement between the Velālas and the Kulaḷas. According to the charter, after the migration of the Velālas the Kulaḷas (Vēṭkōvāz), out of necessity migrated to the Koṅgu country. Except marriage alliance, all the other customs of the two communities were similar. In addition, the charter also describes the Velāla customs in detail. These customs were in vogue from the twelfth century A.D. onwards. The Kali era and Saka era mentioned in the work do not coincide. Hence it is difficult to fix the date of the work. It projects the Velāla customs and is therefore useful for our present study.
The remarkable charter of the eighteenth century A.D. known as Mudavandi Pattayam unfolds a unique trait of the Koṅgu Veḷḷalas in providing succour and sustenance to the handicapped. The Veḷḷalas have certain medalities to cope with the domestic problem posed by the handicapped without affecting their avocation.

In addition to these charters, those discovered by the Archaeology department which are unpublished, need careful study. Of those mention may be made of Thirumurugan Poondi charters and Mōrūr Kāṁkaya charters. Three Koṅgu Čola kings are mentioned in the former. They are Viṟacōla, Kūḷōṭṭungacōla, and Viḻṟamaacōla in order. The charter is spoken of as having been issued in the period of Kūḷōṭhuṅga; but the paleography of the charter points to the seventeenth century A.D. The charter gives information about the migration of the Veḷḷalas from Toṅdai and Čola maṇḍalas as well as their clan organisation and their nomenclature. It also says that poet Kambar had introduced the practice of the Koṅgu country in naming their clans.

The charter of Mōrūr Kāṁkayas now under the custody of Pollachi taluk police station, reveals the hardship of the Veḷḷalas at the hands of the Viṟṟuvas even after the firm entrenchment of the former. There arose a breach of caste norms and conflict between the Kannakula Veḷḷalas.
and the Veṭṭuvas in Kannivādi region, resulting in the migration of former from Kannivādi to the north-east. They settled some of their fellowmen in Kannapuram and Kādaiyūr. Finally they settled in Mōrūr and ruled it, assuming the title 'Kān-Kāyar'. The dating of the charter is quite easy as there is the mention of the king’s name along with the Saka era. The Saka era is 1422 corresponding to 1490 A.D. At that time the reins of power was held by King Rāmarāya. Hence, only the regnal year is wrongly mentioned. Further the charter specifically states that it was issued in the period of Rāmarāya ruling at Maduraī, before Thirumalai Nāyak.

There are two historical ballads with identical theme: (i) Kepp ammanai and (ii) Amš kattai. They are very familiar to the Vellāla community and contain the crux of information for our subject matter. Western scholars have clearly defined the idiom, grammar and origin of such historical ballads. According to them, the ballad provides 'entertainment for the folk community.' 32 Another encyclopaedia reflects the same sentiment thus: 'Ballad, a compact, simple narrative poem of a single episode, intended to be sung or recited.' 33 If examined on the touchstone of the ballad idiom, both these historical ballads were found to have been sung within the accepted framework.
All the ballad singers had detailed knowledge of their time whether fictional or factual and the details are interwoven in the ballad to gain mass popularity. Stories of warfare centre round a single hero's exploits. These traits are found in ample measure in the above mentioned ballads of the Kongu country. The heroes of these ballads successfully overcame the impediments imposed on the settlement of the Vellāla community by their self-effacing sacrificial deeds. In short these ballads describe at length the confrontation between the Vellālas and the Vēttuvas.

These two ballads provide copious historical information. Hence the observation of S. K. Chatterji that "To the students of history and to the students of colloquial Tamil, the ballads of Tamil Nadu are veritable mines of information." is quite apt. Of these two KEP Ammānai of unknown authorship is the earliest. It is predominantly devoted to the migration and settlement of the Kongu Vellālas on the basis of which alone the dating of the work is impossible. AMS katal of poet Pitchan gives a vivid picture not only of the conflict between the Vēttuvas and the Vellālas but also emphasises the customs and practices of the settlers. The references in this work enable us to determine the period of the work, unlike the other one.
The *AMS katal* belongs to the Moghul period. The description of drapery and ornaments worn by *Annapār*, their arsenal, etc., are helpful in determining the date of this work. The reference to the times of Muslim rule in the north and that of the Nāyak rule in the south brings home the point that whereas the events portrayed in the work belong to the fifteenth century A.D., the date of the work is the seventeenth century A.D.

Both traditions and literature abound in the Koṅgu country in larger measure than the rest of Tamil Nadu. The advent of modern concepts is responsible for the perceptible changes in the social framework; yet ancient traditional beliefs and rituals are still found in the rural life. Folk literature has a perennial appeal extending to the domains of time and space. They preserve in their pristine purity and glory, ideas and beliefs that have taken deep roots two thousand years ago.

The Sūnthu songs sung in the Koṅgu villages during the festival of Kārtikai deepam is an outstanding proof. The socio-anthropological traditions behind the sūnthu songs will be useful for our study. These sūnthu songs are but remnants of pre-historic man's fertility rites in those days.
A recorded song on the migration of the Veḷḷāḷa is usually sung on the day succeeding pongal. That song reminds us of the migration in medieval times. Folk songs of the Koṅgu country reflect the habits and customs of the people and the place. Another aspect of the Koṅgu Veḷḷāḷa social history is that it is based on the beginnings of matriarchal society. This in effect means that considerable delay was exercised in giving out women in marriage. But the present position is different.

Evidence from excavated antiquities is of a different nature. Ancient habitats got buried in the debris either due to nature's fury or due to alien invasion. The ruins of ancient cities and villages contain in their wombs evidences for the kind of life led by the people of the area in the past.

Systematic and scientific excavations have been carried out in the Koṅgu country only from the 1970s. Haphazard attempts at digging of the past have been carried out in the last quarter of the previous century and in the early quarter of the present century. The predominant antiquities unearthed in those earlier attempts were mainly Roman coins and European antiquarian artefacts. Recent excavations reveal only an urban civilization stratum. Excavations carried out at Karūr, Pērūr and Pōluvāmpatti brought to light the trade boom, besides the urban cultural sequences.
Exploration carried out at Kodumaṇal in Periyar district yielded shreds of Roman amphorae.

These evidences point to a flourishing trade centre with the Kongu country. As agriculture had gained ascendancy in the tenth century A.D., symbolic vestiges of plough and bullocks were unearthed.42

The beginnings of this century saw the emergence of epigraphs as prime sources for the historical research. Of the sixty thousand inscriptions all over Tamil Nadu, about twenty thousand have been copied and of them only seven thousand texts have been printed while the rest appear in the pages of annual archaeological reviews and epigraphy reports in the form of summaries.

Inscriptions, though strewn all over Tamil Nadu, were plentiful only after the seventh century A.D. Inscriptions of earlier periods, are few and hence there is a lack of details on social framework. As the copper plates are in the nature of King's direct orders, the details are meticulous and are a direct aid in assessing the dynastic history and the social structure of these periods. They give us proof more reliable and accurate than any literary text as their dates are determined on sound archaeological principles.43
Inscriptions are of immense help in assessing the cultural trends in the Pallava, Çaḷa and Pāṇḍya periods.  As the inscriptions speak volumes about the period of their incision, social historians have to rely completely on these sources. It is also emphasised in this statement. 'It may be added that these records often yield information of value relating to land tenure, public revenues, village administration and generally the state of social and political life, affairs and activities.'

Till date about thousand five hundred inscriptions of the Koṅgu country have been copied but texts published are hardly a hundred while the rest still remain in the nature of summaries. Summaries in the report generally refer to gift of land, gold and lamp, etc. These do only help in further shrinking the already depleted exposition of epigraphy materials. Such references are not aids in the proper sense in reconstructing social history. This necessitates a study of the texts of unpublished inscriptions to understand the history of the Koṅgu to the full extent.

Four Brahmi inscription sites were located in the Koṅgu country so far. They are Velāyuthampālayam near Karūr, Arasālūr - hillock near Érōde, AmmankSilpatṭṭi near Salem and Aiyārmalai - near Kulīthalai. Their antiquity is established on the basis of paleography, diction, names of personages mentioned and also the authors of inscriptions.
Araccallūr record refers to one Mañivannakkan Dēvan Sāttan. The term Mañivannakkan points to trade in precious stones and gems. Ammaṅkōilpatti record mentions about one Viyakkāṅkōpan, son of Varamban Kōgūr Kilān. The epithet 'Kilān' refers to Vellāla but in reality it is an honorific title conferring rights and leadership. The recent epoch-making discovery of Pūlāṅkurīchic record deserves special attention for serious enquiry along this line. There are two views expressed over the date of the Pūlāṅkurīcchic record. However, the record belongs to the fifth century A.D. It throws valuable light on the events supposed to have taken place in the dark ages of Tamil history.

Moreover it comes in handy in the proper enunciation of the Koṅgu social history. The expression 'Koṅga nāṭṭum avar Kārānmai' found in the inscription leads to only conjecture as till now the epigraph has not been given a satisfactory reading. The expression however, is a pointer to the nature and state of agrarian interest that existed in the Koṅgu country as early as the fifth century A.D. The agricultural operational patterns, the levies realised on agriculture, etc., are epitomised in the term 'Kārānmai'. In the later day inscriptions this term is quite frequently used.

Indeed there is a lack of inscriptive evidence for the period fifth-ninth centuries A.D. for the Koṅgu country.
After the ninth century A.D. inscriptions of Čōra, Čōla
Pāṇḍya, Hoysala and Vijayanagara dynasties proliferated
the regions. Nearly ninety percent of the epigraphs are
in Tamil while some are in Sanskrit and others in Telugu.
The Tamil epigraphs employed Vatteluttu script in the earlier
stages but later on switched over to Tamil script. Kings
of various dynasties eulogised their own language in their
records. References to reclamation of lands and their sub-
sequent donation to temples are in plenty from the tenth centur\(\)y
A.D. onwards. The inscriptional records of the Koṅgu
country were written by a select brand of scribes. The
administrative divisions of the Koṅgu were evident from the
twelfth century A.D. This proves that the mentions of adminis-
trative divisions are but a few in the earlier period. Copious references to the Koṅgu Vellālas regarding their
frequent village assemblies, congregation, urban assembly
proceedings and their donations to temples and gifts to
societies are to be found in these inscriptions. The Koṅgu
Vellālas are specifically referred to as Vellālas in their
records. Besides the deserted villages, creation of new
ones, gift of villages for common causes, etc., are definite
pointers to our study of the social history of the terrain.

The copper plates being King's direct orders the
subject matter of these were recorded with meticulous accuracy
hence can be relied upon entirely. Nevertheless as these
are records of events regarding the upper strata of society, they may not refer to agrarian stratum in its true perspective. They also have favourable slant towards the higher echelons of society. Hence, the need for the closer scrutiny of these charters arises. Early Pāṇdyā and Gaṅga copper plates refer to the Koṅgu country. Yet even these mention only about the warring kings. As such no evidence for agrarian system can be had from these records. Certain copper plates dating back to the ninth century A.D. were issued in the Koṅgu country itself. The Salem plates of Gaṅga Śri Pruṣha refers to the gift of Kumāramāṅgalam as Brahmadēya. Whether the details of the plate do really have a connection to Salem Kumāramāṅgalam is open to scrutiny. The Nāmakkal Vīracōla Plate traces the king's genealogy and the Kumāramāṅgalam plate of Ravi-kōṭhai refers to Brahmadeya gift in Ponnādu. These plates speak of kings and Brahmins with hardly any reference to the Vellālas.

Vestiges of ancient coin are another primary source material for writing political history. Certain Indian dynasties have been chronologically codified on the basis of numismatics alone. In early times only kings had the exclusive right of coinage. On certain occasions the merchant guilds got that right from the kings. But till date the Vellālas enjoyed no such right. The coins of different denominations issued were more or less uniform in the Koṅgu
country. Historians generally agree that trade and coinage suffered a setback after the eighth century A.D.

After the eighth century A.D., it was a general pattern all over India that land was endowed to temples and to Government officials in lieu of their salary. However in the Koṅgu country, the gift of coins predominated to the extent of seventy percent of the endowments till the twelfth century A.D. Except kings and Manrādiars, the rest of the society donated only coins. Numismatic collection of the period under research though do not have a direct bearing yet by their fluctuating circulation represent the socio-economic formation or otherwise of the period. A study of these different practices could bring out the unique facts of the agrarian system.

Mackenzie's collection about Pālayapāṭṭus needs mention here. These collections look like fairy tales woven round meagre sources of history devoid of historicity.

As a stranger Mackenzie was too eager to know everything about the newly conquered country by the British. Hence he simply collected everything about their ancestry despite the mythological aura that surrounded it. Yet these collections provide ample evidence to the conditions that prevailed from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries A.D. in the Koṅgu country. Sifting of details results in identifying
certain facts. The first is that the early inhabitants before the Vellalas were the Vetuvvas. The second is that many of the oligarchs had migrated to the Kongu country. Thirdly it picturises the system of social institutions during the Nayak period.

Several materials serve as sources in the sociological studies of the recent past. Among these mention may be made of interviews, habits and customs of the people, the proverbs, etc. These proverbs, habits and customs are an important source as they are an integral part of the life of the people. The frequent changes in them over the ages, made little impact over the folk memory. Some customs of the people, certain words and phrases found in ancient literature and inscriptions may not truly interpret the habits and customs of the bygone ages. Nor literature of succeeding ages and inscriptions may throw light on them. Under such circumstances the ancient habits can be explained on the basis of extant practices. This process is known as retrodiction. In the words of Professor Satish Chandra "In view of the paucity of the available sources for the social and economic life of the peasants, the attempt at retrodiction was perhaps the only method available." The dynastic changes of several centuries have not fundamentally altered the demographic propensities. This in effect means that time alone changes but not traditions.
It is no gainsaying the fact that the past is to be understood in the light of the present. Hence the necessity for retrodiction.

In the present study the discussions with the head of the Veṭṭuva gowendas, an old woman of Muḷukkāṭaṇ clan, a Mūḍavāṇḍi gowendaṇ, an Arumaikāran, a village headman, a Koṅgu barber, a paṇṭāram, an āsāri and a Koṅgumāṭāri, have been incorporated. Besides, the recent research findings have been added for a proper comprehension of certain customs of the Koṅgu Veḷḷālas. They are studied in comparison with the similar traits of other tribes and conclusions arrived at.
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