Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The only type of economic structure in which government is free, and in which the human spirit is free is one in which commerce is free.

-T.W.Arnold
SOUTH INDIA
DURING THE
2ND CENTURY A.D.

Source: Dikshitar. (Tr.) The Cilappatikāram p.xxi
INTRODUCTION

 SOURCES

The present study on the "Trade and Commerce in Ancient Tamilnadu – A Historical Perspective" has for it the Eight Anthologies viz. Nārriṇai, Kuruntokai, Aiṅkūṟunūṟu, Patirṟuppattu, Paripāṭal, Kalittokai, Akanāṉūṟu, and Puranāṉūṟu; the Ten Idylls viz. Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai, Porunaraṟṟuppaṭai, Cirupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai, Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai, Mullaippāṭṭu, Maturaikkāṇci, Neṭunaiyātai, Kuriṅciippāṭṭu, Paṭṭinappālai, and Malaiṟṟuppaṭai: the Tirukkūṟai, Cilappatikāram and Maṉimēkālai as the primary sources.

The secondary sources include the Foreign Notices of Pliny, Ptolemy, Strabo and the unknown author of Periplus as also works by prominent authors of the twentieth century on the history of South India, particularly that of Tamilnadu which are listed in the Bibliography at the end of the thesis.

Some of the books are in Tamil language. The passages from these books wherever used and the lines from ancient Tamil literature sparingly quoted here and there are translated mostly by the author of this thesis unless otherwise specifically mentioned.

Since the thesis is based on historical perspective, due care has been taken to quote eminent writers and scholars who are authorities on the subject wherever necessary.
The study has been restricted to just five chapters owing to the constraints of time and space, leaving certain topics such as Management, Administration, Industries, etc. connected with trade and commerce to be pursued by the researchers in future.

TAMILNADU

"History in India begins in the south. It has begun in the south everywhere else in the world, in Europe, in America, in Asia. The only apparent exception is Africa, but northern coastal Africa really belongs geographically and historically to southern Europe. On account of its more agreeable climate, its greater wealth of wood and water, its nearness to the sea, the south is the first rung in the ladder of civilization and culture in any country. It was so in India." ¹

So said Prof.M.Ruthnaswamy. This observation is fully applicable to the southern part of India that is Tamilnadu.

Tamilnadu, now a southern state in the Indian sub-continent, two millennium years ago, spread over the entire land, south of Venkatam i.e. Tiruppati. All the four southern states including Pondicherry were its components and were ruled for many centuries by Ceras, Colas and Pantiyas. It is also said that Tamilnadu in primordial times extended in the east and south beyond the Cape Comorin and was called Kumarikkantam (or the Lost

Lemuria). This ancient Tamil land which was spread over the Indian Ocean up to the tip of Australia was named Gondwana by the geologists and archaeologists; It comprised of forty nine major states and had mountains like Kumari Mountains and rivers like Pakru. All of them were submerged before 2500 B.C. by many oceanic deluges.

For our study we have recorded evidences only from the later part of first millennium B.C. by which time the land was reduced to a great extent, Kanyakumari and Venkataam being the south and north boundaries and Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea on East and West. In reality this is the portion of land consisting of the present states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Pondicherry. This region which once had Tamil as the sole language now consists of people speaking Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada apart from the native Tamil.

The people who lived in this part of peninsular India were called Dravidians. As for the origin of Tamils, the foremost among the Dravidians, there are many schools of thought, each differing from other. Though it is beyond the scope of our study, it is imminent to take into account the facts behind them.

On the basis of the affinity between the languages, Dr. Robert Caldwell proposed that the Tamils had their origin from Scythians or Turanians.
Reighnhold Rost, Prof. Julian Vinson, Charles F. Gover and Farrar have however contradicted this view.

Dr. Oppert suggested that Tamils should have come from Mesapatamia and were of Sumerian origin. Not many takers are there for this view.

It is the considered opinion of Dr. Slater that the Tamils should have come from the Mediterranean region. The similarity in the method of burying the dead among the Tamils and the Greeks, Babylonians and Cyprans was the reason for his view. Dr. S.K. Chatterjee thinks that the Tamils had come from Greece via Asia Minor, Mesapatamia and settled in the Indus Valley.

The most acceptable view is that the Tamils had their origin in the Lemuria, which once existed as a big mass of land connecting India, South Africa, Australia and China. Geologists called this land or continent Gondwana and ancient Tamils called Nāvalan Tīvu or Kumarik kaṇṭam.

An Englishman Sclater, gave the name Lemuria for the submerged continent after the monkey like animal, Lemur, which existed there in large numbers. According to Sir Walter Raleigh this was the cradle of mankind.

---


3 N.S.K. Pillai, p.7

4 N.S.K. Pillai, p.9

John Evans and Haeckel are also of the view that Lemuria was the original home of the homo sapiens.\(^6\)

Scott Elliot speaks of five deluges, the first of which occurred some ten thousand years ago. The last of the floods swallowed the Lemurian continent, of which South India, Ceylon and certain other parts of the region survived its wrath.\(^7\) Legends say that some 15000 years ago in Kumari Nāṭu, which was a part of Lemurian continent, there were many mountains (Kumarik kōṭu) and rivers like Pakruḷi and Kumariyāru. The great Pantiyan kings who enriched the Tamil language ruled this region by patronising Tamil Academies known as Sangam.\(^8\)

The research on *Mohenjadaro* and *Harappa* by Sir John Marshall and others prove another important landmark in the history of Tamils. The culture and civilisation found there were not Aryan, but that of Dravidian. In all probability, Tamils should have proceeded towards north in search of food, job and settlements. One such settlement was *Mohenjadaro*. Later by 2000 B.C. Aryans from west entered North India with their cattle through the Himalayan Passes, and slowly displaced the Tamils.

Regarding the inter-mixture of Aryan-Dravidian culture, K.A. Nilakanta Sastri says:

\(^6\) K.K.Pillay, p.43, fn.
\(^7\) K.K.Pillay, p.43, fn.
\(^8\) K.K.Pillay, p.47.
"Epic tradition of Agastya and Rama are the only peeps we get into the process of Aryanisation of the South, a continuing historical process for which the name 'Sanskritization' has been suggested by some modern anthropologists".  

In spite of this, the Dravidians, particularly Tamils enjoyed a unique and indigenous culture and civilisation. In language, literature, arts, vocations, castes and classes, religion, customs, love and warfare, the Tamils totally differed from the Aryans. On this point T.R. Sesha Iyengar has this to say:

"The influence of the Dravidians on the culture of India has been ignored, because the literature, which records the development of the Hindu religion in India, was the work of a hostile priesthood whose only object was to magnify its own pretensions, and decry everything Dravidian. But the truth is that the Dravidians had already developed a civilisation of their own, long before the Aryan civilisation was transplanted into their midst".

As for the Dravidian and Aryan connection it is proper to quote the views of a scholar here:

---


"In general, the culture of India" says Hall, "is pre-Aryan in origin: as in Greece, the conquered civilized the conquerors. The Aryan Indian owed his civilization and his degeneration to the Dravidians, as the Aryan Greek did in the Mycenaean."

**GEOGRAPHY**

Coming to the Geography of the Sangam Age i.e. the period of our study starting from 300 B.C. to 200 A.D., the features of Tamilnadu were ideally suited for the commercial activities in all directions within the land and over the seas. Since the Tamil land was peninsular in character it was possible for the people of this hoary tradition to have contacts with the people of equally great traditions in the West, viz. Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and the Chinese in the East.

The Bay of Bengal on the East and the Arabian Sea on the West were subdued by the early Tamils who sailed fearlessly on different types of boats and ships with heavy loads of various commodities. Similarly it was also possible for the merchants of Italy, Greece, Arabia, Egypt, China and other countries to reach the Coromandal and the Western Coasts, wherein lay scores of small and big ports.

According to K.K.Pillay, the Tamil land was geographically ideal and well situated for a brisk trade on all sides. He says:

---

11 Quoted in Thaninayagam, p.201.
"Situated almost midway on the maritime routes between China and the Mediterranean sea, Tamilakam was admirably located for the purpose of embarking on active sea borne commerce with lands on the west and east."  

South India has indeed a very long coast both on the east and west: though there were no natural harbours big enough to anchor huge ships, it was possible for them to deal with the comparatively small vessels in those days.

On the East, the coast was uniform whereas in the West there were some broken edges and lagoons. The backwaters here were useful for internal trade.

Stormy winds on either side made it impossible to build or maintain big harbours: it is to be noted that several cyclonic storms had developed many good centres of trade like Pūmpukăr, Korkai, Pondicherry, etc.

Nature was at its greatest mercy in Tamilnadu as far as the vegetations are concerned. Pepper, ginger, incense timbers and many other valuable commodities grew abundantly at many places in the ghats, which made the maritime trade a boon for the merchants.

Nilgiris, the Āṇamalai Hills, the Paḷani Hills, the Shevroy Hills, Kodaikkāṇal Hills, Pothiyil Hills and the Javadhu Hills are to be mentioned here. To a large extent, the North-East Monsoon and to a smaller proportion

---

12 K.K. Pillay, p.17.
the South-West Monsoon provide periodic rainfalls to cultivate the lands and to grow necessary grains, vegetables and plants.

Kāvēri, Vaikai, Peṇṇai, Tambraparanī, Pāḷāru and Periyāru are the important rivers which provide water for irrigation throughout the year. Apart from these, tanks, lakes and canals were made use of whenever necessity arose. At dry places, artesian wells and other sources of water were used.

AREA

The area of Tamilnadu during the period of the Sangam days was not the same as the area of present day Tamilnadu. Ancient Tamilnadu consisted of all the three southern states and Pondicherry: Sea-erosion had its own share of decreasing the area of the land. Considering the latest statistics the area of all the four states and Pondicherry is approximately 64,900 sq.Km. (Andhra Pradesh 27,500 sq.km. Kerala 39,000 sq.km and Pondicherry 500 sq.km.). Since all these states formed the ancient land of Tamilnadu, the total area of Tamilnadu during the Sangam days could have been around 67,500 sq.km approximately.

POPULATION

As for the population of ancient Tamilnadu, no clue is available anywhere in Tamil literature. There were changes in the administrative frontiers since many kings and chieftains went on adding or losing portions of

---

their country. Another aspect was that no recorded evidence of any census taken is available. The population has to be surmised on belief, or some rough calculation. The latest available population figures of the southern states come to 198 millions (Andhra Pradesh 66.5; Tamilnadu 55.9; Karnataka 45; Kerala 29.7; Pondicherry 0.8 in millions) in 1981. In the year 1961, according to the census report, the population of Tamilnadu alone was 33.7 millions.

M.E. Manickavasagam Pillai submitted a paper on population of Tamilagam during the Sangam Age at the Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies when the International Tamil Research Conference was held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in April 1966. On the basis of that paper K.K.Pillay arrived at the following conclusion:

"... the population of Tamilagam is estimated to have been about six lakhs during the earlier part of the Sangam age i.e about the beginning of the 1st century A.D. and about 11 lakhs at the end of 3rd century. At best, this reckoning can be taken to be a very rough calculation, almost bordering on a piece of guess work." 14.

Any system of mathematical calculation, neither Arithmetic Progression nor Geometric progression, can give a satisfactory answer to this problem. What Bharathi sang in the first decade of this century on the population of the whole of India "muppatu köṭi caṇaṅkālum" 15 comes to our mind: The

14 K.K.Pillay, p.38.
population of Tamilnadu then was around 3 crores, i.e. one tenth of the total population of India.

When we take into account the vigorous family planning campaign, the increase of birth rate and the decrease of death rate due to the vast improvement in the medical field, and the mortality during famines, wars and other natural calamities, no one can come to any judicious conclusion, but hang on to some guess work.

The mean age of a Tamilian during the pre-Christian era was around one hundred years according to old saying "maniitarkku vayatu nāralla tillai". The fertility rate of begetting children was also high. The phrase oru makan allatu illol (Puram 279/10) shows the rarity of a "single child" family. The words of a Pantiyan king "mittōn varuka ennātu" (Puram 183/6) also suggests that there were many children in a family. It was also possible to say that every person might have had more than one wife and which may result in higher population.

The per capita income and the self-sufficiency on the food front are also decided on population basis. The stress given to agriculture by the Sangam poets (Puram 18) and Tiruvalluvar (Kural, Ch.104) suggests that the failure on the agricultural activities will lead to food scarcity as the population was always on the increase.
It is also to be kept in mind that South Indian states always had the problem of over population and high birth rate (as per 1961 census) as also lower mortality rate compared to the up-country states of India.

Though on a calculation there is an increase of three times in the population of India from the days of Bharati(30 crores) to the present day (around 90 crores) in a span of one hundred years, this cannot be taken back correspondingly to every hundredth year. Taking into consideration of all the facts in the previous paragraphs, we can come to a rough conclusion that the population of Tamilnadu in the Sangam Age could have been far less than one crore.

**FIVE REGIONS**

Physiographically the Tamil land was divided into five regions i.e. *tinais*. They were *Kurinći*, the hilly region, *Mullai*, the forest region, *Marutam*, the fertile plains, *Neytal*, the coastal region and *Pālai*, the dry tracts.

Each *tina* had its own features of deity, the clan, the bird, the animal, the water, the village, the music, the instrument, the vocation, etc. For instance, *Kurinći* had *Murukan* as its deity, *cilampan* or *nūtan*, the inhabitant, the peacock, the tiger, the spring water, *cirukuti* (village), *Kurinći* music and *yāl* instrument as its components. Similarly every region had its own lists as *karuppuru*. The season for *Kurinći* was the cold ones viz. *Kūtir* and *Munpani* (the winter season) and *yāmam* (midnight) the part of the day. The principal
feature of love in Kuriñci is the first phase in kaḷavu, which includes attraction, courtship and consummation.

Similarly each region was given the regional features as that of Kuriñci and the pattern of love-making as karu and uri. The most important was the different stages of love-life: if it is consummation (punartal and allied activities) in Kuriñci, separation for Pālai, expectation of the arrival of the hero for Mullai, the sorrowful state of the lady love on the hero's temporary separation in Neytal and the separation of the hero residing with another lady for a short duration in Marutam. The five stages of love making consummation, separation, expectation, sorrowful waiting and quarrel on feign dislike were allotted to Kuriñci, Pālai, Mullai, Neytal and Marutam respectively. 1863 of 2831 of Sangam poems deal with love (or Akam) and the rest with other than love viz. war, politics, charity etc. (or Puram).

Regarding the commercial life of the people in the five regions it is dealt with in the section under 'Internal Trade' in chapter III.

**OCCUPATION**

The main occupation of the people in the Sangam Age was agriculture: it was given the pride of place among all occupations. Many poets including Tiruvalluvar have praised this profession and its importance for the welfare of the society. Valluvar says "whirl as the work will, it must after all rely on the plough. Therefore agriculture is the noblest of all occupations". (Kural 1031). Even Ilañkō Aṭikal while narrating the story of Kaṉṇaki speaks at one
place about agriculture: "the appeasement of the poorman’s appetite as well as the sustenance of the king’s prowess are dependent on the successful pursuit of their occupation."(Cila. 10/148-150).

The importance of this occupation made the kings, viz, Karikāl Cola and others to order for the reclamation of land on a large scale and improve on the irrigation system with several new lakes, tanks, dams and canals.

Weaving was the second prominent occupation in those days. According to the legends, Valluvar himself was a weavear. Clothes of the highest quality in cotton were woven. They were often compared with the ‘slough of the smoke’, ‘the foam of milk’, ‘the cast-off skin of a snake’ and ‘the torrent of water falling from the hills’. 16 Cilappatikutaram at one place refers to thirty two types of clothes, all made of cotton (Cila.6/88).

Many other occupations are mentioned in Sangam literature. They include construction of buildings, carpentry, ship building, pottery, fishery, etc. There were artisans like goldsmiths, blacksmiths, gem carvers, cobblers, tailors, barbers, hunters, toddy tappers, fishermen and others. (Cila.5).

THE LIFE OF THE TAMILS

Keeping in mind the detailed descriptions of cities and villages, capitals and harbours we can very briefly sketch the day-to-day life of the Tamils in the Sangam Age. The three basic necessities in one’s life are ppelin (food), uṭai

---

16 K.K.Pillay, p.203.
(dress) and *uraiyul* (shelter or housing). Then follows hospitality, charity, beliefs, customs and manners.

**FOOD**

The staple food of the Tamils is rice. Hence all poets, as seen earlier, had a liking for the agriculture and praised it. Apart from rice, maize, millet and other grains too were produced. Fish and meat had an important role to play in the food habits of the Tamils.

It is left for the rich to consume pure cooked rice along with several side-dishes. Usually all items were cooked in mud pots: cooking utensils of any other metal were not used. A reference is made in *Kuruntokai* of a lady cooking white rice (*veṇcōru*) with sauce (*kulampu*) made of tamarind, curd and spices. It was served after giving finishing touches with mustard and oil, on a plantain leaf. (*Kuru*. 167).

People used oils, butter, ghee, buttermilk, milk, grains, pulses, greens, vegetables, like beans and bitter gourd, etc. as foodstuffs. Every region had its own products and vegetation and people of the region used them mostly out of necessity. Some had to satisfy themselves with rice gruel and greens available near their houses. That was poor people's simple food. (*Puram* 399)

Most of the people, it seems, were non-vegetarians. They took meat and fish of many varieties. The flesh of hare, deer, ram and fowl, porcupine, pig and boar were eaten. Sometimes the flesh of white rats, elephants and tortoise
were also consumed. (cf. Puram .319; Malaipatu 153-188; 246-252, etc.: Porunr. 103-106; Nar. 83-85, 114; Pattna. 64; Puram. 390, etc.). Since there were seas, rivers, lakes, tanks and canals in large numbers there was no shortage of various kinds of fish.

People used to take fruits and their juices whenever required. Gooseberry, mango, plantain, jack fruit, tender cocoanut, pomegranate, black plum, etc. were also served as catables.

Maṇimēkalai speaks of the essential six tastes in the food taken by the people. They are: sweetness, saltishness, sourness, bitterness, acridity and astringent. If the meals supplied contained all the six tastes it was very much appreciated (Maṇi. 28/116).

Whenever the people were in merry, they used to take some sort of toddy, which was available in plenty in every region. The kings, the poets, the warriors, the merchants and the commoners all used to take such kind of intoxicants. They were called in different names viz. kaḷ (Perumpaṇ. 213: maṭṭu, matu (Pattna. 108), tōppi (Malai 172), naravu (Cirupan. 51, tēral (Akam. 2), palmyrah juice, fermented honey, sugarcane juice (Kuṇiṇci. 156; Akam. 150; Perumpaṇ. 262). Drinking was found to be common even among womenfolk. (Perumpaṇ. 386).

As for the food habits it may be said that the people mostly consumed essential and hygienic stuffs as warned by Tiruvalluvar (Kural 942.943). However, most of the people did not pay heed to the words of Tiruvalluvar who
was vociferous in condemning eating of flesh (Kuruḻ, Ch. 26) and drinking of intoxicants (Kuruḻ, Ch. 93). Though these two were considered to be evils, almost all the people, rich and poor, male and female, kings and merchants, Brahmans and lower castes, continued to take flesh and drinks. Eating of the flesh of animals and drinking of intoxicants must have been the regular habits of Tamils for a very long time, until the invent of Buddhism and Jainism. Till then they were never considered to be sin nor condemnable evils.

**DRESS**

As for the dress was concerned the people generally used two pieces of clothes, one as upper cloth and the other around the waist (Puram, 189). Fine cotton clothes (Puram, 398), silk (Akam.236: Paṭṭina.107) and Kaliṅgam, a cloth imported from Kaliṅka Nātu (Akam 86,136: Kuru.167) were worn by rich people.

Some poets and downtrodden people used to wear torn clothes. When they approached the benefactors, they magnanimously gave them high class clothes like silk to wear and alleviated their poverty with some gifts. This is a recurring incident in Aṟṟuḷpaṭṭai literature.

While the kings and other rich people wore different kinds of glittering dresses, always washed and starched, the yavana people who came from Rome and Greece wore a kind of loose shirt, usually called 'meypai' (Mullai.60). Clothes made of leather (Maturai.310: Perumpān.89) and wool (Cila.14/205) were also used by some.
Women too wore two clothes, the upper cloth which adorned their breasts was called ‘kaccu’ and the cloth around their waist ‘putaivai’. They had special interest in decorating their hair. Some had knots (Akam.73), some spreaded like that of peacock (Nar.265) and some made it into five plaits called ‘aimpāl’; (Nar.96; Kali.32; Kuriñci.139).

The ladies decorated themselves with different kinds of flowers of which ninety nine types were listed by Kapilar in the Kuriñcipāṭṭu (Kuriñci.ll.61-95). Men too were fond of wearing flowers and garlands (Akam.127). A young child had blue coloured neytal flower on its head (Akam.5). Of all the flowers, Mullai was considered to be the symbol of chastity.

Young ladies covered their breasts with cool sandal-paste (Nar.168) and sometimes drew some designs on their chest called ‘toyyil’ (Nar.225). For their eyes they used collyrium called ‘mai’ with a small stick or a brush named ‘ēlutun kōl’. Both men and women used to wear ornaments made of gold, silver and other gems. From the head to the toe there were many types of ornaments worn by the ladies. It is to be mentioned here the twin epics Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai had their names after the jewels viz. Cilampu (anklet) and mēkalai (the waist jewel made of eight pearls or other gems). The latter epics Čivaka cintāmaṇi, Valaiyāpati and Kuṇṭalakēci, which along with Cilappatikāram and Maṇimēkalai were called ‘five great epics’ too have their titles after ornaments viz. head jewel (Cintāmaṇi), bangle (vaḷai) and kuṇṭalam (ear ring).
The ornaments worn by women, men, children, kings and others were numerous: It is indeed a topic for a separate study. Even elephants and horses also were adorned with ornaments and clothing with different designs.

**DWELLING**

The third important necessity for the people is dwelling place. Different kinds of houses were built according to the availability of the materials in the regions concerned. In *kurinci* a type of hut called *kurampai* (*Akam.12*) was built with the use of grass. In the *neytal* region the fishermen had their own thatched houses made up of sea side *kurai* grass. Huts built of mud and houses built of baked bricks were seen at almost all regions. Dogs, calves, deers and squirrels were used to play in front of the courtyard of a house: The people kept cows, buffaloes, goats in the backyard.

Wealthy people, including the kings and the merchants living in the big towns and ports used to have palatial buildings which were described in works like *Netunalvarai* (*Netu.76-100*). Big constructions having seven floors called *elunilai matam* were in towns of cosmopolitan nature.

The houses of rich people built with baked bricks and mortar had splendid decorations and ornamentation. The builders were adept in building various types of houses for well-to-do people. The big houses had windows in the shape of deer and the wood work was excellent. The paintings on the walls and ceilings added beauty to the well-constructed houses.
There were separate streets and dwelling places for artisans, agriculturists, goldsmiths, tailors, etc. It was for their convenience according to their vocation and not to discriminate them.

**OTHER CUSTOMS**

The people used to wake up early in the morning and took to bathing mostly in the nearby rivers or tanks; while bathing they used to go in groups; they indulged in all sorts of plays in water and made merriment. Occasionally, oil-bath was taken by women in particular for purification of oneself with bathing after confinement of child-birth and monthly menstruation. *(Maturai.603; Puram.299).*

In the evening, people worshipped the lamp which they lit in their houses with paddy and flowers. Sometimes they went to nearby temples. Many kinds of temples belonging to various religions were mentioned in *Cilappatikāram* *(Cila. 9/9-13).* But Sangam literature does not speak much of this practice though there were few mentions of *Murukan, Civān* and *Korra vai* with different names.

In the five regions, particularly in the villages, people lived a simple life, men taking to their jobs like hunting, grazing, cultivating, fishing and all other odd jobs seriously and sincerely. While women did their duties both in the house and outside, they used to sell flowers, salt, fish, milk, curd, paddy, etc. and came back with necessary articles needed for their house in exchange of the commodities they sold.
It seems that women enjoyed freedom in all walks of life. There were queens taking their own decisions; poetesses numbering more than forty penned beautiful verses; out of them poetess Avvaiyār had a unique place. Young ladies were allowed to move about freely and only when their love was not accepted they were confined to their houses. Love marriage was very much prevalent and even elders and scholars readily approved it. Many a times, when parents refused to accept the chosen persons, the ladies preferred to elope and settle either in the house of the boy or live separately. Bringing up children, caring for them, playing with them, educating them and even sending them to the war-front were willingly done by women. Prostitution was also found prevalent in those days. It was not considered contemptuous. In spite of the freedom given to the women, they preferred to be good housewives. The life of widows who were referred to in a poem as ‘paruttip pēṇṭir’ was a miserable one. (Puṟam.125); It seems that they used to sit in a corner spinning the wheels to make threads from cotton and made dresses to wear for themselves and other members of the family.

People usually wanted to lead a calm life without any strife. When the call for a war was made they never shrunk to face enemies in the battlefront; But, poets like Avvaiyār tried to pacify the concerned kings and bring peace.

The administration of the state was mostly to the satisfaction and benefit of the public. If the public had any grievances they need not grudge; they can straight away go to the palace and appeal for redressel;. Most of the kings were generous and munificent. When the question of succession arose the
general practice was to crown the eldest; however sometimes the well-behaved and intelligent son was awarded with the kingdom.

The king had aimperunkulu and enperayam to help in the administration. Severe punishments were given to the crimes and thus the state tried to avert crimes in future. Poets were given due importance in the running of the Government. Many a times they were considered the ‘friend, philosopher and guide’ to the kings.

A close study of the above details is enough to say that the Tamils in Sangam days had a peaceful life in general; they worked hard, toiled in the fields, sailed on the rough seas to catch fish, dived deep into the sea to bring pearls and conches, climbed mountains to get honey, sandal, ivory and other things, hunted fearlessly in the forests and did all sorts of odd jobs. They were richly rewarded for their hard work. In any family, the people welcomed whoever came as visitors. The guests were moved by their hospitality and they showered praises on them. This is one factor in which the ancient Tamils excelled.

Neither religion nor caste-system prevented them from mingling with one another. They had every right to do all sorts of legitimate duties and jobs. The motto was ‘yatum üré, yāvarum kēlr’ (Every village is my village; All people were my kinsmen. Puram.192) and it was followed in the right spirit.

This state of affairs in the three kingdoms viz. Cera, Cola and Pantiya was enough for the merchants to excel in the field of commerce and trade
which they accomplished and the same is acknowledged by the foreigners who have noted down with awe and wonder.

It is imperative to explain the concept and meaning of trade and commerce in the light of the proposed study. Commerce is a business activity which facilitates the exchange of goods by removing various kinds of hindrances such as hindrances of person, hindrances of place, hindrances of transportation and hindrances of time and knowledge, whereas trade is a part of commerce which is the nucleus of commerce. It refers to the sale, transfer or exchange of goods.

The stages in the development of commerce are many; the first was household economy for which self sufficiency within the family is the basis; the second was barter economy where exchange of articles was rare and restricted; the third stage was when new commodities appeared in the market by which time the trader found an opportunity for his goods to the people. At this stage money appeared as an instrument of trade. At the next stage, the period of town economy in which markets developed in the town and division of labour became important; the last stage was concerned with international trade where commercial activity in large scale took place leading to the exchange of articles between countries.

This research work aims at establishing the evidences which are found abundantly in the Sangam literature. During the Sangam age merchants were held in high esteem. They were next only to the rulers in social status. Some of them lived a luxurious life like Kōvalan of Cilappatikāram.
Many of the merchants, apart from the business, were adepts in writing verses. They were second to none in the field of literature. The epic *Maṇimekalai* was authored by a merchant of grains by name *Maturai Kulavāṇikan Cittalai Cāttanār*. He was a Buddhist and a poet besides being an advisor to the king Cēran Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ and a merchant who headed a group (*Cāttu*).

There were more than five hundred and fifty poets during the Sangam period. Of these, more than thirty belonged to mercantile community. Most of them had the word ‘cāttan’ in their names. The epithets and some other details along with the name of some poets give some clues of their profession.

Their names are:

1. *Ālici Naccāttanār*
2. *Āṭuturai Mācāttanār*
3. *Ālampēri Cāttanār*
4. *Āvūrk Kāvitikāl Cāṭevanār*
5. *Aruvai Vaṇikan Ilavēttanār*
6. *Ilampullūrk Kāviti*
7. *Uraiyr Ilampon vaṇikanār*
8. *Uraiyr Katuvāyc Cāttanār*
9. *Uraiyr Mutukannan Cāttanār*
10. *Okkūr Mācāttanār*
11. *Okkūr Mācāttiyār*
12. *Karuvūrk Katappillaic Cāttonār*
13. Karuwürc Cēramān Cāttan
14. Karuwürp Pūtan Cāttanār
15. Cāttan
16. Cāttantaiyār
17. Cītalaic Cāttanār
(also known as Maturai Kūlavānīkān Cāttanār)
18. Ceyti Valluvan Perūncāttan
19. Ceyalār Iḷampon Cāttan Korran
20. Toṇtīyamūrc Cāttanār
21. Pirān Cāttanār
22. Perūncāttanār
23. Peruntalaic Cāttanār
24. Āvūr Mūlahkilār Makaṇār Perūncāttan
25. Peruntōṯ Kuruṇcāttan
26. Vatama Vanṇakkan Pēri Cāttanār
27. Maturai Poncey Kollan Venṇakanār
28. Maruṅkūrp Pākai Cāttan Pūtanār
29. Möci Cāttanār
30. Kāvirippūmpatṭināttup Ponvanikan Makaṇār Nappūtanār
31. Perūncōli Nāykan makaḷ Nakkaṇṇaiyār
32. Maturaip Pāṇṭa Vanṇikan Ilantevanār
33. Vatama Vannakkan Perūncāttanār
A close study of these names reveals certain interesting informations. The first thing is that most of them were identified with their places. The second thing is that their mercantile status is also mentioned along with their names such as cāttan, mācāttan, vanikan, kāviti, etc. Thirdly, some of the poets were named after the particular field of business they undertook like Aruval vanikan (cloth merchant), Pon vanikan (Gold Merchant). Fourthly, some of the poets were named along with their names of their father. Fifthly, some were identified with their physical deformities like Peruntilalai Cāttan (a merchant with a big head), Katuvayc Cāttan (a merchant with some scar); sixthly, the title for a few were mentioned with their names (Ilampullurk Kāviti and Āvārk Kāviti kal Cātēvanār). Lastly, the most interesting of them is the one with the title ‘vanṇakkan’ which means the person who testifies the genuineness of the coins (nānaya cōtakan).

We come across three verses in Puranānūru which were sung on the people belonging to the mercantile community. They were:

1. Antuvan Cāttan (Puram 71)
2. Ollaiyūr Kilār makan Peruṅcāttan (Puram 242)
3. Čōlanāttup Pitavūr Kilār makan Peruṅcāttan (Puram 395)

This shows that these people were very much in the good books of the people. The first among the three, Antuvan Cāttan had all the praise of one particular king, Ollaiyūr tanta Pūtappāṇṭiyon. The king while making a vow
on destroying the enemies says let me lose the friendship of great men; one
among them is Antuwan Cāttan.

A poet, Kūṭavāyir Kirattanār, in elegiac verse praises Ollaiyūr kilār
makan Peruṅcāttan, a merchant who was both magnanimous and valorous:

"The youth won’t wear garlands;
The lasses won’t pluck flowers;
The bard won’t bend his lyre
To have and wear them;
And the lady-bard too;
When the great Cāttan who with
His lance killed the enemies, is dead,
Why do you blossom, MULLAI,
In the Ollaiyur Country?" (Puram.242)

The third one, Peruṅcāttan, was sung by the great poet Nakkiṇān in
which all his greatness, hospitality, magnanimity, friendliness, etc. were found
praised.

The merchants apart from local trading in villages and smaller cities,
had their own busy centres of trade. The capitals, the port-cities, the villages
and cities on the coastal region were very ideal for them to carry on their
business. The cities like Pukār and Maturai had their own business centres,
Nālaṅkāṭi and Allaṅkāṭi with separate streets for each and every commodity.
Korhāi, Tōnti, Muciri, Vañci, Kañci, Poduke, Nākappaṭṭinam and
Marunkürppattinam are some of the busy towns which were much frequented by merchants from foreign countries with ship loads of articles.

Both on the export front and import front the Tamils excelled in their trade. They were able to collect commodities which were mostly wanted by the foreigners and when they were in short they procured them from the Far East countries and supplied to the Western merchants. Pearls, pepper and scores of other items were exported and in return they received huge amount of gold coins. Similarly on the side of imports their job was commendable in procuring all that was needed for the local people. The bags imported and exported bore the insignia of the kings.

Taxes due to the state were paid by the merchants in right earnest and the officials worked day in and night, keeping a watch on the trade vigilantly. The rulers were reasonable in levying the taxes on the articles. The officials too, though vigilant did not fleece the people. The Taxation policy was well within the grips of the king and the merchants on their part had nothing to complain about. Similarly, all facilities for transportation were made available to the convenience of the merchants. The goods were carried form one place to another by various modes according to the needs. Carts drawn by bullocks were used to transport goods from one place to other. Big ships were there in the harbours for export and import trade. Godowns and warehouses existed in towns like Pukār.

The businessmen were of exemplary character and never resorted to cheating any one. All business ethics and values were followed by them. Profit
is not the only thing they sought for, their commodities were always clean, good and original; they never used to sell adulterated goods or spurious ones. Even in the gems trade there were people who tested the genuineness of each and every costly gem. The defects in diamond, topaz etc. were tested and the defective gems were thrown out.

All those things have been studied in the following pages in detail.