In the long and chequered history of the society of the Madurai kingdom, there have been periods of progress, reform, regeneration, decay, dissolution and degeneration. The period of the Nayaks rule had its exemplary society which was earmarked for stability, prosperity, unity, security and tolerance. Hence the kingdom of the Nayaks was the cradle of Dravidian civilization and their capital Madurai, was the gateway to Dravidian culture, and also their people were Dravidian stock.¹ The majority Hindu population spoke any one of the Dravidian languages like Telugu, Kannerese, Tamil and Malayalam. The Urdu speaking Muslims and European Christians formed the minority in the society. The emigrants, from Vijayanagar Empire to Madurai along with the Nayak rulers, were Telugu speaking people. According to Robert Caldwell, Telugu is a Dravidian language and most of the people in the Tamil country are speaking Telugu language.² Even now, people of different castes, such as Brahmins, Chettiyars, Naidus or Nayaks, Rajus, Reddiyars, Kammalars, Chakkiliyars, Ottars, Melakaras etc., are speaking Telugu in Tamil Nadu. The ascendancy of the Nayaks initiated and encouraged the settlement of the Telugus mostly in the Madurai Kingdom. The Nayaks of Madurai bestowed peace, prosperity, political tranquility and cultural advancement. This sort of political, religious and

economic changes had considerable influence over the social organisation and structure of the society. The Muslims, the Christians and the emigrants accepted the process of assimilation and absorption, and created the ground for the rise of composite and cosmopolitan society which respected the values of catholicity, tolerance and adaptability. Besides that religion too had exercised great influence on their social ways and habits. As the advent of Nayak rule gave a boon of religious freedom and these rulers were found to be patrons of Hinduism, the people felt unity, despite regional, linguistic barriers in the society. Though the Nayaks were aliens they became part and parcel of the Tamil society, which passed through numerous changes due to the policies and reforms of the Nayak rulers. Thus society was not isolated to political developments. But it began to assume a rigid and petrified form and irrational social practices became conspicuous feature of this period. The extreme dependence of people on rituals, ceremonies, customs, traditions enabled the priestly class to impose or follow rigid rules and practices, which paved the way for social hierarchy, sectarianism and orthodoxy. The Hindus, tolerated all external religions with quiet indifference within themselves, yet they were not interested to accept social equality and unity among them, due to rigidity in caste system and complex. Thus the society was a caste ridden one and the

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4 Ibid., pp.415 and 422.
5 Ibid., p.417.
6 Ibid., p430.
caste system was one of the controversial social institutions. Socially, the caste system, divided the society into watertight compartments but economically, it enabled each caste or the sub-caste, to be allotted with an occupation. As a consequence, those occupational groups or castes, along with their livelihood, promoted lot for the preservation of arts, crafts, skill, techniques, besides religion, literature and philosophy. The religious ceremonies, rituals, sacrifices and festivities of the Nayak age, had their echo in their social life. Greater stress was there to external form of religion than inner reality; hence the religious superstitions which were more and numerous began to pervade in all aspects of their social life. The dominance of priestly class became acute. Amidst ignorance and blind belief, the dangerous religious oriented social customs were accepted by all. So child marriage, polygamy, sati, devadasi system, concubinage, slavery, untouchability and seclusion of women were some of the evil customs which prevailed in that society.

Social stratification

The society was differentiated on the basis of the occupations and vocational activities of the people. With the support of the Nayaks the old traditional social set up continued without much change. There existed various social units, which had separate identity and distinctions. They were stratified in the social hierarchy as high and low. The high castes at the top level of the social ladder claimed utmost reverence and privileges whereas the members of

8 Ibid., p.10
10 Somalay, Madurai Maavattam (in Tamil), Vedaranyam, 1980, p.94.
the lowest groups were unprivileged, secluded or isolated. Among them there existed numerous grades depending on the nature of caste profession.\textsuperscript{11} In such a social system, the individual’s life and occupation were determined at his birth irrespective of his tastes, talent and inborn qualities that lay behind beneath the caste.\textsuperscript{12} They avoided interdining with other castes or touching the hands of others etc. Generally caste restrictions were severe and if anybody broke the rules, they faced social excommunication.\textsuperscript{13} The fear of losing one’s own caste was great, among the people. While the upper castes expressed caste purity, the practice of untouchability was observed by all in the society. In the society, there were touchables and untouchables. The concept of human equality, which was upheld by all religions, was valueless in the context of social relations. The untouchables were denied of specific privileges such as prevention from using the common tanks, wells, inns and temples, which are meant for upper caste people.\textsuperscript{14} Separate villages or streets with wells and other facilities were provided to them. The existence of certain names to villages such as Pallapatty near Nilakottai, Chakkilipatty near Thirupparankundram and Kammalar mettu theru or street at Thirupparankundram reveal that, people belonged to lower social units or castes were isolated or separated and they lived within their habitation. The Nayak kings enforced rules and orders in order to retain the old traditional set up of the society. The \textbf{Kammalars} or the artisan group, also known as \textbf{Pancha Kammalars} viz., blacksmith, goldsmith, brass-smith, idol-\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, p.96.
\textsuperscript{12} E. Thurston, \textit{op.cit.}, p.190.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p.191.
\textsuperscript{14} Somalay, \textit{op.cit.}, p.101.
makers and carpenters were not allowed to inter-mingle with each other during the Nayak period. Hence they were exemplary in their character. An inscription of 1623 A.D, reveals the prohibition of communal fellowship.\textsuperscript{15} The Nayak rulers recognized the priestly class with special privileges. Religious studies and education were imparted and restricted only to the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{16} As a consequence, the status, occupations, duties and privileges of the people of each caste and sub caste, were enforced and differentiated. Each social unit or caste had its own individualistic status, dignity and role in the society. There existed several social groups called priestly class, martial class, the official class, related to royalty, vocational classes based on occupations such as agriculture, cattle rearing, fishing, hunting, washing, weaving, etc.\textsuperscript{17} There were groups of people engaged in fine arts such as dancing, playing musical instruments, singing, etc. The very same age-old traditional structure of the society prevailed and the Nayak rulers did not disturb them.\textsuperscript{18} The rigidity of the caste system was visible from the prevalence of caste supremacy, untouchability, unapproachability and caste hierarchy in the society. The ancestors of the Nayak rulers of Madurai were army captains and noble men, notable for their military services. They lived in pomp and show, observed dignity and decorum, travelled in style and maintained a large harem. They inaugurated the festivals and observed pilgrimages. They were attached to \textbf{Rajagurus and Purohita}. Thirumalai Nayak in 1653 A.D. granted lands to a person for his hospitable reception and loyalty

\textsuperscript{15} A.R.E., Madras, 309 and 378 of 1916.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Archaeological Survey of India Report}, 1911-12, p.195.

\textsuperscript{17} Idem.

\textsuperscript{18} Robert Sewell, \textit{Lists of Antiquities}, No.56.
while he was touring the kingdom.\textsuperscript{19} The Nayak kings obtained reverence from their subjects. They appointed their relatives, Viceroy's to the newly conquered territories. When Krishnappa Nayak I invaded and conquered Ceylon, he appointed his brother-in-law, Vijaya Gopala Nayak as its Viceroy, who paid the tribute regularly.\textsuperscript{20} After the death of Thirumalai Nayak, his successor, Muthu Virappa Nayak II, gave the administrative charge of Sivakasi and Tinnevelly to Kumara Muthu the younger brother of Thirumalai Nayak.\textsuperscript{21} When Chokkanatha Nayak captured Tanjore, he appointed his foster-brother, Alagiri Nayak its Viceroy.\textsuperscript{22} When Rani Meenakshi, came to the throne in 1732 A.D, after the death of her husband, her brother Venkata Perumal Nayak, assisted and supported her in the administration.\textsuperscript{23} These Viceroy's or the agents of the Nayak rulers too lived extravagantly, as a separate set of people and enjoyed the status of a king and also had high command over the people in their sphere of territories.

**The officials and differences**

The Nayak kings were assisted by set of ministers and officials. Dalavay, Pradhani and Rayasam, formed the trio of the king’s council.\textsuperscript{24} The other chief officials were Kanakkan, the accountant and Sthanapathi, the foreign

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., No.92.

\textsuperscript{20} R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *op.cit.*, pp.70-71.

\textsuperscript{21} W. Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, ii, Madras, 1857, pp.177 and 183.

\textsuperscript{22} *Indian Antiquary*, 1917, pp.58-62.

\textsuperscript{23} R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *op.cit.*, p.232.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.238.
secretary. Besides them, there were governors for the large provinces, viz., Trichinopoly, Tinnevelly and Satyamangalam. Among these three provincial governors, the governor of Tinnevelly enjoyed high status and exercised large powers. Below the governors, there were powerful poligars. Among them the poligars of Manamadurai, Sendamangalam, Maramangalam, Salem and Dharapuram were powerful and the poligar of Kannivadi was considered the chief of the eighteen poligars of Dindigul. As they were conferred with a dignified status with hereditary right and definite proprietary rights over the land, they enjoyed vast powers and privileges and acted independently for the welfare and uplift of the society. The Nayak kings appointed Telugu and Tamil chieftains poligars indiscriminately in order to foster unity, solidarity and peace within the regions of the Madurai Kingdom. The poligars claimed themselves as sole rulers of the Palayams and it was their primary duty to promote the welfare of their subjects. Each poligar had nominal officers called Pradhan and Sherogars and village councilors or Kavalkars. As such the poligars too were responsible for creating different grades of officials and distinctive sets of people in the society, because it was possible for them as they were only administering their Palayams independently. The poligars gained 50% share of


26 Idem.


28 S. Clement, Main Currents of Vijayanagar History, Madurai, 1974, p.115.

29 R. Caldwell, History of Tirunelvely, Madras, 1881, p.58.

30 K. Rajayyan, Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1974, p.1.
total output of the inhabitants and in addition, they also collected Kaval fees and made it as manual or permanent.\textsuperscript{31} The inhabitants did not feel it as oppressive and would have felt that their Palayam was a place of asylum and shelter, from the over exploitation and plunder of the invaders. The state officers were granted villages as sarvamanyam.\textsuperscript{32} So it is obvious that administrative measures too created gradations and disparities among the officials and they too maintained their individual qualities and status in the society.

\textbf{The Caste Hierarchy}

The Nayaks migrated to Madurai kingdom, during the ascendency of the rule of Visvanatha Nayak and surpassed the other caste people in efficiency and valour.\textsuperscript{33} Though they were permitted to participate in the administration, as chief military commanders and poligars, bulk of their community took to their traditional occupation, viz., the agriculture. They mostly settled at river banks and fertile areas, where black or karisal soil and sheval or red soil lands were available in plenty.\textsuperscript{34} They cultivated the traditional crops, such as paddy, cotton, plaintain and grains like ragi and kambu and cereals like blackgram and bengalgram, in plenty. Even now the Naidu or the Nayakkar caste in the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item S.R. Lushington, \textit{Report to the Board of Revenue}, Madras, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 1799, pp.9-14.
\item A.R.E., Madras, 615 of 1915.
\item K. Rajayyan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.8.
\item Interview with Sekaran, A farmer, Sattur, on 15.01.2000.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
villages, are mainly cultivating these crops.\textsuperscript{35} The \textbf{Nayaks} or the \textbf{Nayakkars} or the \textbf{Naidu}s have lot of branches of sub-castes but all speak Telugu language. They were \textbf{Kammavar}, \textbf{Baliza} or \textbf{Vadugar}, \textbf{Vellama}, \textbf{Thottiya}, \textbf{Kambalattar} and \textbf{Valayalkara}. The \textbf{Kammavars}, \textbf{Balizas} and \textbf{Kambalattars} topped the list, as poligars, agriculturists and merchants of par excellence. They also served as officials, chiefs and soldiers of the army. The kings of Madurai, their governors and most of the poligars in the Madurai kingdom were supposed to be the ancestors of these castes.\textsuperscript{36} Ramabadra Nayak, the military chief of Visvanatha Nayak was appointed the first poligar of Vadakarai or Periyakulam \textbf{Palayam}.\textsuperscript{37} Ramabadra Nayak and his successors hailed from \textbf{Baliza} or \textbf{Vadugar} division of that Telugu Nayakkar caste.\textsuperscript{38} Matchi Nayak, the poligar of Vadakarai proved his valour and mastery over archery infront of Thirumalai Nayak. To commorate his memory, even today the descendents of Matchi Nayak, are celebrating a festival called \textbf{matchi Nayakkar Vettai} or hunting at Periyakulam.\textsuperscript{39} There were 26 \textbf{palayams} in the Dindigul \textbf{Seemai} or \textbf{Nadu} and amongst them around four \textbf{palayams} namely Vadakarai, Tevaram, Thottiyankottai, Viruppathi were

\textsuperscript{35} Interview with Perumal, an agriculturist, Kandamanayakanur, on 20.08.2001.
\textsuperscript{37} R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, \textit{op.cit}. , p.55.
\textsuperscript{38} Somalay, \textit{op.cit}., p.94.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Idem}.
under the control of Baliza or Vaduga caste poligars. At about 21 palayams, viz., Edayakottai, Mambarai, Santaiyur, Eriyodu, Madur, Ayagudi or Palani, Sukkampatty, Kudalur, Kambam, Devathanapatty, Ambadurai, Amaiyanayakkanur, Bodinayakkanur, Eeakkapuram, Erasakkanayakkanur, Kandamanayakkanur, Kannivadi, Marulutthu, Nilakkottai, Kovakkapatty and Davasimadai were under the control of poligars of Kambalatthu Nayak caste and only one palayam called Kombai was under the control of a Kannerese or Kannadiga poligar. Thus the Nayakar caste poligars were popular and still their descendants are there in those Palayam areas. Visvanatha Nayak appointed one of his relatives, namely Chokkalinga Nayak, as the first poligar of Natham Palayam, near Madurai. The descendants of this Natham poligar became zamindars during the British rule. Still, the Naidus or the Telugu people were found in bulk in that area. Among the Telugu speaking Naidu or Nayakkars caste, the Kambalattars or the Thottiars were prominent and dominant in the court of the Nayaks, especially during the rule of king Thirumalai Nayak. They, due to their valour, punctuality and obedience, were appointed as poligars in most of the palayams in Dindigul, Madurai, Tinneveli areas. So, people, belonged to the Telugu Kambalattar caste, lived in bulk in those places. They

40 Ibid., p.93.
41 Ibid., p.309.
42 Samad copy of the title deed of Velliyan Kunram Zamindar, dated 7, November 1871.
enjoyed more privileges in the society. As they had a Kambalam or blanket they were named Kambalattars or Tottiars. All the sub castes in the Naidu or Nayakkar caste were mostly Vaishnavaites and were distinguished by their manners, customs, ceremonies, traditions and forms of worship. Sourastras or the pattunulkarans were another prominent caste people in the society who migrated from Vijayanagar and settled at Madurai, Periyakulam, Ramanathapuram and Aruppukottai and its suburbs. As, Thirumalai Nayak, was fond of wearing gorgeous silk clothes of various types, he invited these skillful traditional weavers and provided them with all the facilities for their stay at Madurai. Even now this caste people are habitated in and around Thirumalai Nayak Palace and Mariamman Teppakulam at Madurai. As this artisan group of weavers were patronised and granted with many privileges, they were determinant in the society. The Nayak kings promoted their weaving industry and provided employment opportunities to them. An inscription of Visvanatha Nayak, dated 1560 A.D, at Anniyur, Madurai, reveals that the Nayak king relaxed the taxes imposed on the weaving looms of the sourastras. Those people were rich and influential in the society. Rani Mangammal restored their social status on par with Brahmins with regard to their ceremony Yajur upakarma. Their women were well versed in fine arts too. They followed the customs and manners of the Brahmins and most of them were Vaishnavaites.

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44 Ibid., p.82.

45 A.R.E., Madras, 622 of 1915.
The Prasanna Venkatesa Perumal temple in the South Masi Street was constructed by the Nayak rulers, exclusively for them. Even now the traditional hereditary priest or **battar** of this temple, belonging to Sourastra community, got the special religious privilege of taking the **Sadari** of God Kallazhagar, during the **Chithirai** festival at Madurai.\(^{46}\) As this festival was organised by king Thirumalai Nayak, perhaps this privilege was granted by him to the Sourastra priest, hence his descendants still enjoy that right.\(^{47}\) The Sourashtras were under the royal custody and patronage. Though they differed in dialects, traditions and customs, they were orthodox and staunch Hindus and served lot for the promotion of economy and social harmony in the Nayak kingdom.

The most prominent caste in the society was the Brahmins and during the Nayak period, the Brahmins were the most respected members of the society.\(^{48}\) As priests, most of them were attached to temples and few of them became administrators and generals to the Nayak kings. Most of the **Dalavays** of the Nayaks were Brahmins and the most famous among them were Ramappaiya in the reign of Thirumalai Nayak and Narasappaiya in the reign of Queen Mangammal.\(^{49}\) It is worth to note that from the time of king Chokkanatha, the Brahmins occupied the office of **Dalavay** in succession. Their services were beneficial for the welfare of the state. It was during the rule of Thirumalai

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\(^{46}\) Somalay, *op.cit.*, p.289.

\(^{47}\) Interview with the Chief Priest of Sri Veeraragava Perumal temple, Madurai, on 10.4.2001.

\(^{48}\) K. Rajaram, *op.cit.*, p.81.

\(^{49}\) Letter of Fr. Peter Marlin to Fr. Gobien at Aoor, dated 11 December, 1700.
Nayak, the Dalavay, Ramappaiyan, fought many battles and brought victory in all fronts. He was famous for his statesmanship, ability and efficiency. The achievements and exploits of him find place in a folk literature, called *Ramappaiyyan Ammanai*.\(^{50}\) The Brahmins commanded great respect and authority in the politics as well as society. The life of the people was thoroughly ritualised and a series of ceremonies from birth to death was observed by the Sourastras, Nayakkars, Mudaliyars, Pillais, Chettiyars, Amabalakarars, Maravars, Konars, Goundars etc. The Brahmins got the veneration from these groups. The distinctive natural groups came into a single community under the framework of Hindu community, due to the observance of rituals, rites and ceremonies. The attitude towards religious traditions and adoration to Brahmins, naturally initiated rigidity in the caste system. The Nayak kings permitted caste hierarchy and emphasized strict social order in the society. The Brahmins confined themselves to the righteous life. The Nayak rulers bowed to none but to the Brahmins, due to their religious fervour and enthusiasm. They bestowed hamlets, villages, fertile lands and cattle to them. They also built temples, tanks and gave strong stimulus to their habitation and migration to the Madurai kingdom. As a consequence numerous beautiful villages, streets and towns sprang up to accommodate the Brahmins in the kingdom. The Telugu Brahmins got settled in a street in front of *Pudumandapam* called *Elukadal Agraharam* at Madurai, but later on, they were shifted to the hamlets in the *Battarmar* or Brahmin priests streets, situated in front of the north entrance tower of Meenakshi temple. Even now, these streets are completely occupied by the

\(^{50}\) T.V. Mahalingam, *Administration and Social Life under Vijayanagar*, Part II, Madras, 1975, p.121.
houses of the Brahmin priests of Meenakshi temple.\textsuperscript{51} The villages or the streets, allotted to the Brahmins by the Nayak rulers were called \textit{agraharams}. Even now, there is a Telugu Brahmin \textit{agraharam} at Palanganatham, Madurai, where a Hanuman temple was constructed by king Thirumalai Nayak for them.\textsuperscript{52} There is a Brahmin \textit{agraharam} at Villachery in Madurai and the Brahmin occupants are still serving as priests to Lord Subaramanya swamy temple at Thirupparankundram.\textsuperscript{53} The villages or towns of the Brahmin settlements had the suffix \textit{Samudram} and \textit{mangalam}.\textsuperscript{54} Even now in and around Madurai, there were numerous villages and towns where still the Brahmin population found in bulk, are bearing names such as Cholachadurvedimangalam or Cholavandan, Vikramangalam, Kodimangalam, Nattamangalam, Mannadimangalam and Kulamangalam. Such villages also existed during the Nayak period too. An inscription of Virappa Nayak, dated 1570 A.D, at Ambasamudram, mentions that a village called \textit{Adittavanma Chaturvedimangalam} alias Pappakudi was given to Brahmins and a hereditary accountant was appointed to a temple in that village by king Virappa Nayaka.\textsuperscript{55}

Virappa Nayaka’s another inscription dated 1586 A.D, reveals that he granted a village Virabhupalasamudram alias Gangavarpatti near Periyakulam to

\textsuperscript{51} Somalay, \textit{op.cit.}, p.75 and Interview with Baskara Bhattar, the priest of Sri Meenakshi temple who has the house in the Battarmar street in front of North Tower, on 22.01.2001.

\textsuperscript{52} Interview with Pattabiraman, a Telugu Brahman in the Palanganatham \textit{Agraharam} on 23.01.2001.

\textsuperscript{53} Interview with Ganesan, a Brahmin priest of Villachery, on 23.01.2001.


\textsuperscript{55} \textit{A.R.E.}, Madras, 478 of 1916.
Brahmins. King Thirumalai Nayak’s inscription dated 1643 A.D at Madura, mentions his gift of the village called Tirumalasamudram alias Pudur to the Brahmin priests of Chokkanathaswamy temple at Madurai. Thus the Brahmins were patronised by the Nayak rulers and were settled in separate towns or villages, exclusively assigned for their caste only and the unanimous suffixes available behind the names of the villages will attest this fact.

The Mudaliyars who had royal support were a group of social unit in the high strata of the society. Dalavay and Pradhani Ariyanatha, who served under the first four Nayak rulers, were responsible for the settlement of this caste groups at Cholavandan and Thirumangalam near Madurai and at Uttamapalayam near Kambam. Ariyanatha called his relatives from Kanchivaram and setted them at Tirumangalam, Cholavandan and Uthamapalayam villages. He built houses and temples for their habitation and settlement, by providing all their needs and requirements. He and his son Kalatti Mudali constructed mandapams to Meenakshi temple, Madurai. Even now Mudaliar caste people are found in bulk at Cholavandan in a area, called mudaliar kottai.

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56 Epigraphia Indica, xii, pp. 159-87.
57 A.R.E., Madras, 395 of 1914.
58 Indian Aniquary, 1916, pp.87 to 102.
60 Idem.
The Mudaliyars received royal patronage and the Mudaliyar servants of the Chokkanathaswamy temple were exempted from paying taxes.\textsuperscript{61} Another inscription of Virappa Nayak-I dated 1570 A.D, at Ambasamudram, mentions that besides Ariyanatha Mudaliyar, Viraraghavamudaliyar had served as King’s agent.\textsuperscript{62} The Mudaliyar caste enjoyed a high esteem, next to the royalty in the society. Even now they are called \textbf{Tondaimandala Mudaliars} as they hailed from Kanchipuram, a renowned ancient historical region called Tondaimandalam.\textsuperscript{63}

The Pillai caste people also enjoyed enormous privileges during the Nayak period with royal patronage. The Dharapuram inscription of Virappa Nayak I dated 1572 A.D, reveals that Virappa Nayak I appointed Tambigu Pillai as the agent or Poligar.\textsuperscript{64} Ambasamudram inscription of Thirumalai Nayak, dated 1647 A.D, reveals that Emberuman Pillai was an official of the Nayak Court.\textsuperscript{65} The Pillai or Vellala caste was prominent in the cities like Tinnevelly, Coimbatore, Periyakulam, Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Palani and its suburbs. They were agriculturists and carried out the cultivation, throughout the year with the use of well water. They had sub-divisions like \textit{Kongu vellala, Solia vellala} and \textit{Pandiya vellala}. Apart from agriculture, they engaged themselves in fine arts. A family of Pillai caste came from Dharmapuram and settled at Madurai,

\textsuperscript{61} Burgess and Natesa Sastri, \textit{Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions}, No.93, pp.109-110.
\textsuperscript{62} A.R.E., Madras, 478 of 1916.
\textsuperscript{63} K. Rajaram, \textit{op.cit.}, p.84.
\textsuperscript{64} A.R.E., Madras, 147 of 1920.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 285 of 1916.
during the rule of King Thirumalai Nayak, and started singing Devaram hymns daily at Meenakshi temple, hereditarily and they called themselves othuvars of the temple.\(^{66}\)

There were Goundars, Maravars, Kallans, Ambalakarans, Chettiyyars, Kammalars, Reddiyars, Kaikolars or weavers, Idaiyans or Konars in the Nayak society. They formed the upper strata in the society and they were neither neglected nor patronized by the royalty but were recognized and their services were utilised for the welfare of the society. Among the palayams, the Kambai palayam was put under the control of a Goundar caste poligar.\(^{67}\) The Goundars were the Kannarese or Kannada speaking people who migrated from Vijayanagar empire, after the ascendancy of the Nayaks in Madurai. An inscription of Thirumalai Nayak, dated, 1653, refers to a grant of lands to a Goundan of Nallamaram, for his loyalty and hospitality to the king.\(^{68}\) The Sethupathis of Ramnad, the petty chieftains and feudatories of the Nayak rulers belonged to Marava caste. The Maravars rendered valuable military services to the Nayak rulers.\(^{69}\) As they were known for valour and loyalty, most of the kings of Madurai gave prime importance to this group, while recruiting their army.\(^{70}\) When Thirumalai Nayak was sick, Kanthirava Narasa Raja of Mysore, invaded

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\(^{66}\) Interview with Gurusamy Desikar, the Othuvar of Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, on 25.01.2001.

\(^{67}\) Somalay, \textit{op.cit.}, p.93.

\(^{68}\) Robert Sewell \textit{Lists of Antiquities}, Madras, 11, No.92.


the Madurai Kingdom, in 1656 A.D. At that time, Ragunatha Setupathi, the king of Ramnad and a vassal of the Nayaks took an army of 25,000 maravas and saved Madurai from the Mysore army.\footnote{R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.135.}

Kallans or Ambalakarans was another social unit, mostly found in bulk in Nattam, Melur and Sivagangai areas. The Pallimadam inscription of Thirumalai Nayak, dated 1650 A.D., reveals that, he gave a copper plate charter to an Ambalakaran.\footnote{M.E.R., 1911, p.89.} The caste of Kallar or Ambalakaran is also called Ambalam. Veliyankundram was one of the 72 palayams of the Nayaks and was located 13 K.M away to the North East of Madurai. It was located, on the road, between Alagarkovil and Madurai. The Poligar of this palayam, belonged to Ambalakaran or Kallar caste and was entrusted with the responsibility of Kaval or security of Alagarkovil temple, throughout the year. He and his caste people had to also provide security, to the deity Lord Kallzhgar, on his visit to Madurai for Chithirai festival every year. Still the same political tradition of that Kaval responsibility or providing security is carried out by the descendants of that Poligar.\footnote{Somalay, \textit{op.cit.}, p.255.} Moreover, they assisted and helped the Nayak rulers at times of Muhammadan invasions. During the rule of King Thirumalai Nayak, the army of Golkonda or the Muhammadans entered the Madurai kingdom and wrought incalculable havoc. At that time, the Kallans or the Ambalakarans of Natham and Melur assisted the Nayak army, routed and repulsed the Muhammadans
from the Nayak kingdom. Thus Kallars rendered valuable military services and police duties and assisted the Nayaks to maintain peace and security.

The Kammalars were artisans and with royal patronage, they promoted the development of performing arts in the Temples and fine arts in the kingdom. There is still a street at Thirupparakundram called Kammalar mettutheru. There were five divisions among Kammalars and by the order of the Nayak king, they were prohibited from communal fellowship. The Nayak king, Virappa Nayak also gave gifts to blacksmiths and carpenters of Kallidaikurichchi. The Kammalars were encouraged and royal patronage was provided in order to develop their artistic skill.

The Reddiyars, who spoke Telugu also migrated from Andra and settled in the suburbs of Madurai, Dindigul, Tirumangalam and Aruppukkottai. Many villages in the Madurai kingdom had the name of this caste, where this group of people live in bulk, viz., Reddiyapatty near Sattur, Reddiyarchattiram near Dindigul.

The Chettiyars also have Telugu as their mother tongue. The subdivisions among them were Vaishya chettiyars, Vanian chettiyars and Devanga chettiyars. The large number of Vaishya chettiyars engaged in trade are found in

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74 R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, op.cit., p.130.
75 A.R.E., Madras, 113 of 1907.
76 Somalay, op.cit.,p.105 and p.317.
77 Ibid., p.216.
bulk at Madurai, Theni, Tevaram and Aundipatty. The Vanian chettiyars or the Chekkars had the occupation of oil pressing and oil trade. They had their settlement at Chekkanur and now it is called Chekkanurani near Madurai. The Devanga chettiyars migrated to Madurai kingdom from Vijayanagar empire. Still this caste people have a choultry or chathiram at Hampi, the popular city of the Vijayanagar rulers. In a town called Palanichettiyapatty near Theni, most of the people are Devanga chettiyars. Even now, the dhotis and sarees from Chinnalapatty near Dindigul are very famous and popular among the South Indians and these clothes are woven by the weavers who belonged to Devanga chettiyar caste. These people are concentrated in the Aruppukottai region also. Another social unit in the upper strata of the society, in the Nayak kingdom, was the Kaikolas or the artisans famous for weaving clothes. They are found in large number at Jakkampatty and T. Subbulapuram near Aundipatty, Aruppukottai, Palani, Madurai and Dindigul. They provided coarse varieties of handloom clothes and promoted the cloth trade in the Nayak kingdom. As their clothes were rough, it was obvious that they were not skilled enough to weave fine varieties of clothes.

The Yadavas or the Konars were another popular group in the society and they were also called Idayans. Their main occupation was cattle rearing and they originally belonged to Tinnevelly. During the rule of Thirumalai Nayak, they came and settled at Madurai and its suburbs. In order to get more milk and

78 Ibid., p.360.
79 Idem.
ghee for the **poojas** (rituals) and ceremonies in the temples and to fulfill the needs of the Brahmins and also to offer the excreta of the cattles as manure for lands to enrich the fertility of the soil they were required. Thirumalai Nayak assigned hamlets to this migrated Yadavas or Idayans of Tinnevelly, at North Masi Street, in Madurai, where still this caste people are living in plenty. He also built **Ramayana Chavadi** where they could perform, sing and enact scenes, connected with God Vishnu in the epics of **Ramayana** and **Mahabharatha**. Still that Choultry is under the custody of the Yadava people and the street is called **Ramayana Chavadi** street.\(^{80}\) As the Yadavas or Konars were staunch Vaishnavaites, the Nayak kings constructed the Navaneetha Krishnan temple at North Masi Street in Madurai, and granted lands and a pond at Thiruppalai village, to this temple for its maintenance and for the celebration of the **Thirthavari** festival or **Theppam** festival. Even now the deity God Navaneetha Krishnan is taken to the pond at Thiruppalai for this **Thirthavari** festival.\(^{81}\) In some villages, called Idayakottai and Idayapatty near Usilampatty, these groups of people live in large number. Even now, Idayankottai is famous for cattle-rearing and dairy milk - farming in the Madurai district.\(^{82}\) The Yadavas or Konars or Idayans promoted the growth of agriculture and cattle-rearing in the Nayak kingdom. The Nayakkars or Naidus who settled at Ayakudi near Palani were Kammavars, who too are famous for cattle rearing and dairy-milk farming.\(^{83}\)

\(^{80}\) Somalay, *op.cit.*, p.244.

\(^{81}\) Interview with Kannan, the priest of Navaneetha Krishnan Koil, on 25.01.2001.

\(^{82}\) Somalay, *op.cit.*, p.110.

The lower strata of the society had several social groups, categorised as servicing castes called **Oddans, Dombaras, Vannans, Ambattans, Kusavans, Valaiyans, Saluppans, Kuravans, Chakkilians, Pallans** and the **Paravas**. Among these minority groups, the Oddans, the Chakkilians, the Dombaras and the Kuravans had Telugu as their mother tongue and they were emigrants from Andhra to Madurai. The oddans were efficient in stone-cutting and digging wells or tanks. During the period of Thirumalai Nayak, they rendered innumerable services of digging out the great Mariamman Teppakulam. They assisted the Nayak kings to construct choultries, ponds and **mandapams** to the temples at Madurai, Thirupparankundram and Srivilliputtur. They were strong and hardworking people and they settled in almost all the **seemais** of the Nayak kingdom. The town called Oddanchathiram near Palani is even now inhabited by this group of people. The **Chakkilians** who came from Andhra and settled in Madurai too spoke Telugu. They prepared leather pipe bags for getting water from the well and made slippers and other leather articles. With their arrival only, the natives of Madurai learnt the practice of irrigating the agricultural fields with the help of **kamalai** system in which a set of bullocks were used for taking water from the well, with the use of a leather pipe bag. These leather pipe bags are even now used by the pilgrims during the

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85 *Idem*.
87 Somalay, *op.cit.*, p. 104.
celebration of Chithirai festival for sprinkiling water in the streets at Madurai.\textsuperscript{88}

The Dombars were the Telugu jugglers and conjurers who largely used snakes, monkeys and bullocks for earning money by providing entertainment to the people. They were engaged in sooth-saying and witch-crafts.\textsuperscript{89} They were nomads and street-mongers. The Kuravans were a tribe of homeless nomads who wandered through the kingdom like gypsies.\textsuperscript{90} There are stone sculptures of gypsies at 1000 pillared hall in the Meenakshi Temple, Madurai. The Vannans were washermen and Ambattans were barbers who too were considered untouchables by the high caste people. The Kusavans were potters and they also made idols and dolls in clay.\textsuperscript{91} The Saluppans were gunny bag makers and were weavers of coarse fabrics.\textsuperscript{92} The Valaiyans were strong people who lift palanquins and pull temple cars or chariots during festivals. Moreover they had their hereditary occupation of fishing and they were also called fishermen.\textsuperscript{93} They were also entrusted with the responsibility to accompany the Nayak kings during their visits or tours in the kingdom as armed escorts.\textsuperscript{94} This group of people were found at Madurai and its suburbs. The village called Valayankulam near Madurai is inhabited by these caste people. The Parayas or the Pallans

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p.105.
\textsuperscript{89} N.H. Nelson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.88.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p.69.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p.75.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., p.71.
\textsuperscript{93} R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.186.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p.187.
were engaged in agricultural activities as labourers and they had the occupation of digging wells, tanks and burial grounds. Some of them were famous for the performance of the folk art called, **Thappattam**, during the death ceremonies of the high class people. Even now in many villages, such a folk tradition is in vogue. The **Paravas** or the inhabitants of the coastal areas had the occupation of pearl-fishing, catching fish, producing salt and trading with Ceylon and Malabar coasts. The Nayak kings did not concentrate on the coastal regions and they left them to the influence of the Dutch and the Portuguese traders and Christian Missionaries.

The names of the streets at Madurai, especially around the Meenakshi temple reveal that there were innumerable sub-castes and the inhabitants had their own specific profession and on the basis of their occupation and castes, they settled in those streets. Some of the names of the streets are given below, which are still in existence:

1. **Chittrakarrar theru** (painter's street)
2. **Pachcharisikarar theru** (raw rice seller's street)
3. **Pookarar theru** (flower vendor's street)
4. **Valaiyalkarar theru** (bangle seller's street)
5. **Chunnambukarar theru** (limestone seller's street)
6. **Ezhuttanikarar theru** (manuscript writer's street)

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95 Interview with Mariappan, the sweeper, Thirupparamkundram Panchayat Union, on 30.02.2001.

96 R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *op.cit.*, pp.300 and 327.

| 7.  | Kothan theru  | (mason's street) |
| 8.  | Mettukamalars theru  | (artisan's street) |
| 9.  | Vengallakadai theru  | (bronze vessels seller's street) |
| 10. | Chinnakadai uppukaran theru  | (salt vendors street) |
| 11. | Andharvanam thannirpandal theru  | (water supplier's street) |
| 12. | Kollanpattarai theru  | (goldsmith's street) |
| 13. | Bhattarmar theru  | (temple priest's street) |
| 14. | Vadampokki theru  | (temple’s car rope puller’s street) |
| 15. | Vadakkukavalkunda theru  | (security or guard's street) |
| 16. | Kudirailada theru  | (stable maintainer's street) |
| 17. | Naickerpudu theru  | (Nayakar's new street) |
| 18. | Vaduga Thattara sandhu  | (Carpenter’s street) |
| 19. | Maravar chavadi Theru  | (Soldier’s street) |
| 20. | Dalavai theru  | (Dalavay’s street) |
| 21. | Mahal theru  | (King's palace street) |
| 22. | Poonthottam theru  | (flower garden maintainer’s street) |
| 23. | Yannaikarar theru  | (mahout’s street) |
| 24. | Navabatkana theru  | (musician's street) |
| 25. | Thannapamudali theru  | (Thannapamudali street) |
| 26. | Sembian kinattrru sandhu  | (brass vessels and idols maker's street) |
| 27. | Sayakkarrar sandhu  | (colour-dyer's street) |
| 28. | Paavukarrar sandhu  | (weaver's street) |
| 29. | Othuvar sandhu  | (temple musician’s street) |
| 30. | Vanniyan Kinattrru sandhu  | (oil crusher’s and seller’s street) |
| 31. | Vettrilai kadai sandhu  | (beetal leaves seller’s street) |
| 32. | Adimulam pillai agravaram  | (Adimulam pillai’s street) |
| 33. | Sourastras sandhu  | (Sourastra's street) |
| 34. | Parpanar kinarru sandhu  | (Brahmin's street) |
| 35. | Ramayana chaavadi konnar sandhu  | (konnar street) |
The above names of the streets reveal the occupations and castes of the people and their settlements which were the commemorative achievements of the Nayak rulers. **Teppakulam theru** is a street leading to **teppakulam** or a big tank which was constructed by king Thirumalai Nayak.98 **Thirumalairayar Padithurai veedi** is a street where **Puttu thiruvila** (one of the festivals of Meenakshi temple was revived by King Thirumalai Nayak) was celebrated every year on the banks of river Vaigai. **Tamukkam salai** is a street leading to a place called **Tamukkam** where Thirumalai Nayak had martial amusements with soldiers and wild animals.99 Now this place is utilised for conducting exhibition, fairs and functions. Another street near **Mahal** is called **Pathu-thun sandhu** where ten huge and massive pillars of the remnant palace are standing there.100 As this street has ten such pillars, it is called **Pathu-thun sandhu**.101 They are notable for the skill and architectural beauty of the Nayak age.

The name of the streets at Madurai reveal the separation or isolation of castes in different streets. It testifies the encouragement given to the caste system and its rigidity. It is also visible and clear from the arrangement of temple's festivals, allotment of hamlets and renaming of the villages or settlements. The society was organised on a feudal basis during the Nayak age. The king was the head of the social system and enjoyed an unparalleled status. As he was the ultimate authority, he was the fountain of honours and favours.

101 **Pathu thun Sandhu** (in Tamil) had the meaning as Ten Pillars Street found near Villakuthun in the South Masi Street, Madurai.
He assigned specific roles to the castes in the social and religious functions, temple festivals and temple administration. Each caste had its prominent place or status and duties or rights. Almost all castes were involved in the social activities. As the people cooperated with the Nayak rulers, who in turn assisted them in their recreation and entertainment. The people, irrespective of their caste divisions and inequalities in the society, concentrated and involved themselves in the temple festivals arranged at regular intervals. In order to provide opportunity to all sections of the society, to have the darshan or seek the blessings of God, the Nayak rulers arranged the temple festivals on a massive scale with pomp and extravagance and observed the tradition of the procession of deities, outside the streets of the temples, everyday, during the occasion of annual festivals or brahmorchavam of the temples. During the procession of deities, arrangements were made for the deity to visit each mandapam, belonging to a particular prominent caste people, each day. Even now such tradition is observed at Tiruparankundram temple during the brahmorchavam festival which is celebrated in the Tamil month of Pankuni every year.\(^{102}\) There are several mandapams at Tiruparankundram and each one belongs to a particular caste. During the occasion of Pankuni festival, Lord Subramaniaswamy and his consorts are taken out in a procession around the streets of the temple and procession visits the mandapams each day in the course of that festival for about 14 days.\(^{103}\) The mandapams and the name of the castes for which it belonged to, are as follows:

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\(^{103}\) Ibid., p.41.
Sethusamasthana mandapam for Maravas, Kaveraya Pillai mandapam for Pillais, Akkayanayakkar mandapam for Nayaks, the Reddiyar mandapam for Reddies, the Seniyar mandapam for Vanniyars, the Ramayana Chavadi Yadava mandapam for Konnars, the Aiyira Vaisiyar mandapam for Chettiar, the Kammalar mandapam for the artisans especially the carpenters and blacksmiths. Lot of epigraphical sources of the Nayak age, reveal the existence of the above popular castes in the society. There was another popular festival called Chithirai festival, which was popularly celebrated at Madurai and commonly observed by almost all people of Madurai. It was also celebrated at all Vaishnavites temples, located on the river beds of Vaigai from Kandamanayakkanur to Manamadurai even now. During Chithirai festival Lord Kallazhagar from Alagarkovil visited Madurai on a procession to Madurai and on his return, the deity, would visit all the mandapams belonging to different castes. The people have spiritual happiness, mental satisfaction, social amity, cultural restoration of religious traditions and sharing of wealth, promotion of trade and more than above all, the people got the opportunity to come together on the one fold as Hindus and celebrated the Chithirai festival with gay and extravagance. Thirumalai Nayak is not only immortal in the pages of cultural history but also is still cherished in the minds of the people of Madurai. It will be testified by the Chithirai festival which is celebrated with that age old religious traditions and customs.

104 Idem.
105 T. Paramasivan, Alagarkoil, Madurai, 1989, p.45.
In the arrangement of temple administration, the castes had their prominent role. The Brahmins were entrusted with the duties of performing **poojas** and rituals. The Mudaliyars and Pillais were mostly appointed temple accountants and musicians. The Maravas and Kallans served as guards or securities. The Vanniyans and the Konars had the responsibility of providing oil and milk products respectively. The Kaikolas or weavers and the Sourastras had to provide clothes. The Kammalars or the artisans, were the goldsmiths blacksmiths or the carpenters entrusted with the activities of beautifying the temples with their arts and skill. Kannars and the sculptors had the duty to beautify the temples with their architectural skill and mastery. The **Valayalkaranayaks** offered the materials needed for the rituals such as turmeric, coconut and so on. The Telugu **melakara vaduga nayaks** were performers of the musical instruments like **nagaramelam, nathaswaram** every day at **nagara mandapam**, constructed by Rani Mangammal in front of the **Amman sannathi** east entrance of Meenakshi temple. Even now, these hereditary musicians namely T.Balraj and his family members A.Baskaran, B.Nagaraj and Seenivasan are performing the same.\(^\text{106}\) Rani Mangammal had provided hamlets to this family and called them **Asthana nagara** Musicians of Meenakshi Temple at **yanaikara sandhu** near Meenakshi Temple.\(^\text{107}\) The Valaiyans were engaged for carrying lamps, vehicles of deities and dragging temple cars. Inspite of the rigidity of the caste system, the people of almost all

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\(^{106}\) Interview with T.Balraj, the drum or nagara musician, at Meenakshi Temple, Madurai on 20-01-2000.

\(^{107}\) Interview with B.Nagaraj, the musician, Nagara Mandapam, Madurai, on 22-01-2000.
the prominent castes in the society were engaged by the Nayak rulers for temple activities, in order to promote unity among them. But with regard to the status and privileges, the royalty and his officials lived extravagantly and maintained large establishments. The officials especially the poligars, who belonged to different regions, different castes, different linguistics, different sects of Hindu religion and were observing different customs and traditions, were brought together into a fold, as local administrators by the Nayak rulers. The royal officials both at the central government and local government, enjoyed vast powers and copied their Nayak kings in their extravagance and luxuries.

The stone statue of Dalavay, Ariyanatha mudali at 1000 pillared-mandapam and the statue of a minister, Achchaiya of Rani Mangammal at nagara mandapam at Madurai, express their luxurious appearance with rich costumes and ornaments, as well as their royal posture and description.\textsuperscript{108} The major section of the population in the society led simple life and their belongings were limited. Their division mainly comprised of cultivators, artisans, traders, shopkeepers, household servants and bonded slaves. Since no enough work was available in one village, they had to migrate in search of work in different villages, in order to meet their livelihood. Even in a village or hamlet, there were separate streets or areas for each caste. The working class were considered as low caste and had to reside in remote areas of the village. For example, at Thiruparankundram, the Brahmins had their hamlets in front of the temple. The Pillais and Mudaliyars had their settlements next to them. The

\textsuperscript{108} Statues found at Meenakshi Temple, Madurai.
Kallans or Maravans or the Agamudayars had their settlements and their street was called **Kottai theru**. After that, there was a street, called the **mettu theru**, where all the serving communities such as washermen, artisans, barbers etc were settled during the Nayak period. Even now, one can see the existence of such arrangements at Tiruparankundram near Madurai. Though, there existed caste ridden society with rigidity and inequality, it was remarkable to note that the people lived without severe communal clashes and revolts. The Nayak kings tolerated castism, divisions and inequalities and paid due heed to the welfare of all sections of people. By that, they brought social harmony and unity in the society, which in turn served as a cause for stabilizing and strengthening their kingdom. They did their best for sheltering the Hindus, the vast majority in the society. Above all, the Tamil society comprised of all sections of people, who were mostly self-centred and never interfered with the activities of others. In general, it was a society known for its submissive attitude and religious sentiments.

**Communal harmony**

The policy of reconciliation and toleration of the Nayaks served as a unifying force to promote peace and harmony. The Tamil country was a land of ethnological ascendancy, during the Nayak period, which contributed lot for the introduction of new dialects and languages and inclusion of new clans or communities in the society which became a **pluralistic** one with composite culture. The inflow of immigrants from within the country and the advent of European traders and missionaries further enabled the society to experience the
existence of composite culture. Though each group had its own identity and customary practices with its traditions, faiths and ways of life, there was amity and co-existence without any friction and religious riots in the society.

The Nayaks were aware of the fact that religions keep discipline and morality and protect the people from the evil ways and means. They also believed that the religions would lead them to achieve peace and harmony. By preserving the old religious traditions, customs and festivals they preached and promoted harmony among the people of different religious faiths, traditions, communal divisions and economic stratifications. The Nayaks had the faith that by religious integration, harmony and unity could be achieved. Thus the rulers and ruled had the spirit to observe tolerance and to assimilate and interact with each other, by way of mutual understanding, respect and love, which yielded communal harmony. They arranged religious festivals, renovated the old temples and constructed new ones. They made proper arrangements for the regular conduct of rituals, poojas and festivals, thereby, they, diplomatically, achieved peace and reconciliation in their state. They provided opportunities to the people to get accommodated and to develop a composite culture. **Chithirai** festival at Madurai and **Teppam** festivals in almost all popular temples in the Madurai Kingdom could be cited as suitable illustrations for that. By this, the Nayak kings were able to bring the Saivaites and Vaishnavites nearer to each other and in a festive mood to participate in these festivals.

Islam and Christianity also thrived due to their religious policy of co-existence. The Christian missionaries had their advent during the Nayak rule and
established Madura Mission. The interests of the people were perceived through the spectacles of their religious groupings or divisions. In order to bring all these groups under a homogeneous community, they tried through their policies of good will, equal respect, mutual love and tolerance. They even paid due heed to the human values, virtues and concepts such as brotherhood, dedication, devotion, selflessness etc., which are defined and explained by all religions. The ethical codes and basic philosophies of religions were observed, respected and adopted. Such facts introduced drastic changes and transformations in the Tamil society.

The Nayak kings, brought the people under the banner of their religious faiths and institutions, which were the outcome of their policies of religious freedom and toleration. The most important cultural ingredient of the Nayak age was the religious pluralism, because all the three important and major religions of today, viz., Hinduism, Islam and Christianity existed then and they had their role in the society. Though Hinduism had its deep roots since the age of Sangam, Islam penetrated into this kingdom through Arab traders and Muslim invaders, Christianity had its advent in the Tamil country only during the rule of the Nayaks. Though, only a minor population in the society, had faith in Islam or Christianity, they too were granted liberty and religious freedom. The intrusion of alien religions had its own impact in the culture of the kingdom. The Muslims, though spoke Urdu language, many of them were proud to claim Tamil as their language and made substantial contributions to the development of Tamil literature and language. For instance Sirappuranam added glory to
Tamil literature. The Islamic style of architecture such as domes and arches in
the buildings of the Nayak age, was mainly because the synthesis of Islamic
culture with the natives. Though the Nayaks checked and obstructed the
invasions of the Muslims in their territories, they never failed to protect the
Muslim inhabitants, who settled and had religious practices on their own. Thus
they allowed them to remain in their Kingdom. They even allowed the Muslims
to construct masjids or dargas. The Nayak rulers also permitted the Christian
Missionaries, especially the Jesuit priests, to construct churches and granted
permissions to them to propagate their religious philosophy.

The Nayaks revived the Hindu Bakthi Movement after the Nayannars and Alwars, through their religious activities of revival of rituals, festivals and
renewal of Hindu morals and philosophies. Humanism was given priority with
regard to religion. The Nayak kings were not at all aggressors but were only
reformers, but, on the other hand, they were cruel in imposing law and order and
also in collecting taxes. Such attitudes of the Nayaks enabled their subjects to be
rule oriented.

The Nayak rulers accepted the basic ethical codes, so they tolerated the
alien religions and rendered valuable services. During the reign of Virappa
Nayak (1572-1595 A.D.), there was a dispute with regard to a large part of land
assigned to a masjid at Goripalayam in Madurai. An inscription of Virappa
Nayak, dated, 1574 A.D. at Goripalaiyam, suggests that he acted as an impartial

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109 A.R.E., Madras, 77 of 1905.
ruler, conducted an elaborate inquiry, and confirmed the old grant given by Kun Pandya, to the Muhammadans and thereby, he put an end to that dispute and gave that land to the masjid at Goripalayam in Madurai which still respects his glory.\(^{110}\) Thus Muhammadans were encouraged to construct masjids, during the reign of Virappa Nayak. During the Chithirai festival, Lord Kallazhagar of Alagarkovil, always visits a Thulukka Nachiyar or a Muhammadan lady devotee of him at Vandiyur in Madurai and so the deity of Lord Kallzhagar would be taken as a procession on the banks of river Vaigai to Vandiyur. On that day, both the Muslims and Hindus celebrate this festival with gay and happiness. In order to bring union of hearts and religious amity between the minority Islam sects and majority Hindu sects, king Thirumalai Nayak introduced this tradition. This tradition is observed even today with same religious fervour and interest by the people of Madurai and its suburbs during the Chithirai festival every year, in the month of April or May.\(^{111}\) The caste disparities and communal variations were all dropped by means of religious festival traditions.

During the regency period of Rani Mangammal, the Muhammadans were patronised. She was equally considerate towards all religions, especially she did not alienate her Muhammadan subjects.\(^{112}\) She was very liberal and gave gifts and donations to religious abodes. A copper plate inscription of Queen

\(^{110}\) J.H. Nelson, *The Madura Country Manual*, Madras, 1868, p.67. This inscription is found there on a pillar set up within the Masjid at Goripalaiyam in Madurai.

\(^{111}\) Interview with Minor Battar, the Chief priest of Prasanna Venkatasalapathy Temple, Tallakulam in Madurai, on 18-04-2000.

Mangamal, dated 1692 A.D., reveals that she issued a grant of lands for the maintenance of a mosque at Tinnevelly to Muhammads. Another of her inscription of her, dated 1701 A.D., reveals that, she made a gift of some villages near Trichinopoly to a Muhammadan daraga. Queen Minakshi, the wife of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak, assigned lands to a mosque at Trichinopoly. Thus the successive rulers of this Nayak line had continued the traditions of their predecessors and followed the policy of religious tolerance. Though they supported religions other than Hinduism, still, it is same extent of Hinduism, but up to their needs and expectations. They forgot the atrocities of the Muhammadans in the pre-Nayak rule at Madura country and gave grants and gifts to Muslim mosques. The usurpation of Rustam Khan, a Muhammadan, in the reign of Chokkanatha Nayak, was a possible proof for the favour shown to the Muhammadans by the Nayak rulers. There is no trace of religious riots or holy wars or any religious persecutions in the Madurai Kingdom during the period of the Nayaks. Though there were petty disputes among the various sects, they were not serious enough to disturb their harmonious social relations and co-operations for their common ends. As a traditional feature, the Nayak rulers observed contionously the policies of reconciliation and toleration in order to retain peaceful religious trend in the society.

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113 M.E.R., 1911, p.89.
114 Idem.
116 H. Elliot, History of India, Vol.VII, Delhi, 1929, p.139.
117 Idem.
Regarding Christianity, the Nayaks had continuous interaction with Christian Missionaries, only towards the close of Virappa Nayak’s reign at about 1592 A.D. The Jesuits established a Mission in Madura under Father G. Fernandez, to convert the people to Christianity. Thus Christianity had its advent and contributed lot for the prevalence of composite culture in the country. Though each religious sect began to assert the purity of their respective cultures for generating specific defined identities, they in due course, liberally borrowed from each other’s traditions, the cuisine, attires, art and architecture of their age.

The most important Jesuit priest who contributed lot for Tamil literature was Robert-de-Nobili. He not only got the support of Thirumalai Nayak for his Missionary activities, but also received all sorts of help from the poligars. He established Missionary centres and constructed churches at Sendamangalam with the assistance of the poligar Ramachandra Nayak and also at Salem with the help of the poligar Salapathi Nayak. Robert-de-Nobili was influenced by Hindu customs. He changed his mode of life style in the way of wearing dresses and taking food like the Brahmni priests, and thereby he attracted the native Hindus to Christianity. He established a Church at Tiruchi in 1627 A.D. He was invited with much hospitality and was granted with many gifts by King

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118 A.R.E., Madras, 77 of 1905 and 35 of 1908.
120 Ibid., p.41.
Thirumalai Nayak in his palace at Madurai in 1639 A.D.\textsuperscript{121} The poligars too followed the policy of religious tolerance towards the Christian missionaries. As a consequence, many Jesuit priests rendered valuable services to the growth of Tamil literature. Moreover their letters and accounts, serve as valuable source materials in writing the history of the contemporary period. Jesuit priests who visited and lived in the Nayak period, were Antonio Vico, Robert-de-Nobili, Balthazar-De-Costa, Father Alvarez, Father Proenza and Antony Robiha.\textsuperscript{122} They have left a detailed account about the condition of the Nayak Kingdom, in their letters and diaries. They dedicated their lives for the spread of Christianity and paved the way for the arrival of many more Christian missionaries to this Kingdom. As a consequence, the American Madura Mission had its advent at Madurai in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and built several educational institutions, under priest William Tracy.\textsuperscript{123} The policy of assistance and encouragement of the Nayaks towards Christian missionaries was a boon to the growth and spread of the Christianity in the Tamil Country. But occasionally religious persecutions occurred due to the influence of the furious cruel deeds of the Hindu religious fanatic people and by the King of Ramnad who killed a Jesuit priest by name John-de-Britto. Generally, religious persecution was not encouraged by the Nayak rulers, who were rather generous and considerate. They allowed the Christians to construct Churches, in their Kingdom. Among the rulers of

\begin{footnotesize}
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    \item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{Idem}.
    \item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}, p.42.
    \item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{The Newspaper, The Hindu}, Madurai, dated 5, November 2005, p.3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Madurai Kingdom, the Nayaks rank as the foremost, because in the atmosphere of fanaticism and intolerance, prevalent in the South India, it was this line of Kings, challenged the situation, accepted the arrival of alien religions, Islam and Christianity and revived Hinduism in their Kingdom, with their policy of toleration, reconciliation and assimilation. They imprinted their names in the cultural history, as reformers and benevolent kings, who brought a new awakening and vitality to the culture of the Tamils.

**Trade and industries**

The age of the Nayaks, in the cultural history of Madurai kingdom, was considered a period of restoration of economy, accumulation of wealth and imitation of agricultural activities. The benevolent reign of Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagar was imitated by the Nayaks of Madurai.\(^{124}\) The Nayak rulers were vitally interested in the regular overseas supply of war horses and especially they demanded the bahri horses or the best quality of horses from Arabia, Egypt and Persia.\(^ {125}\) These war horses were fit for their royal stables and it also strengthened their cavalry in the army. The hostilities between the kings in the south of Tamil country, compelled the Nayaks to have a steady demand for such horses in order to equip their army. Thus these horses were imported to the Konkan harbours at Calicut, Quilon and Cannanore. Such trade brought economic prosperity to the Tamil society.

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\(^{124}\) A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Rupa and Co., Calcutta, 1967, p.76.

The Portuguese expansion in the Eastern coast at Tuticorin, Kanyakumari and Rameswaram, promoted trade and also led the coastal people to convert to a new religion called Christianity and new European lingra-franca, during the period of the Nayaks,\textsuperscript{126} contributed towards the process of greater intermingling of cultures.\textsuperscript{127} The Europeans too were attracted towards the native tradition of sprinkling water on the streets and decorating them with coconut, mango leaves and plantain trees, during the occasions of child birth, marriage etc.\textsuperscript{128} The Sourastras too contributed lot for the growth of trade. According to Father Martin, a Jesuit Priest in his letter in 1699 A.D., wrote that the Portuguese and the Dutch merchants in the coastal region, provided, what was required for the Nayak Kingdom.\textsuperscript{129} Horses were imported from Ormuz, Persia and king Krishnadeva Raya purchased from there at about 13,000 horses every year.\textsuperscript{130} The Portuguese governor Albuquerque supplied horses to Nayak kings from the port of Goa for fabulous prices.\textsuperscript{131} So, in order to facilitate, smooth transportation of imported horses, and elephants, the Nayak rulers concentrated more on, laying and maintaining proper roads to Calicut, and so they also took efforts to retain their feudatory control over the king of Travancore, who assisted them in promoting internal trade. King Thirumalai Nayak had cordial


\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}, p.23.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}, p104.

\textsuperscript{129} John, Lockman, \textit{Travels of the Jesuits}, 2 volumes, 1762, p.5.


\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid.}, p382.
relations with the Portuguese and he gave them rights to enjoy free access in the Eastern coast of the Nayak kingdom.\textsuperscript{132}

As these Portuguese merchants were well-versed masters in navigation, ship-building and naval war tactics, and in the use of gun-power, Thirumalai Nayak in order to utilise their services, allowed the Portuguese to have free monopolistic trade.\textsuperscript{133} Krishnappa Nayak I (1564-1572) utilised the services of the Portuguese, for his campaign against the king of Ceylon. More than 10,000 Portuguese were engaged by him, in the battle-field at Auranagam, the old capital of Ceylon and won victory.\textsuperscript{134} Besides, that he appointed his brother-in-law, Vijaya Gopala Nayaka as his viceroy in Ceylon and received the regular payment of tribute, thereby, he enriched his treasury with this source of income from Ceylon.\textsuperscript{135} This also caused economic prosperity.

The Portuguese merchants carried out exclusively the principal trade in pearls and conch.\textsuperscript{136} Leather and spices were exchanged for Madura linen clothes.\textsuperscript{137} The Sourastra weavers manufactured fine qualities of silk clothes and they promoted the exports of clothes. The Danish merchants from Denmark, settled at Tranquebar or Tarangambadi on the coromondal coast, moved to Malabar coast for pepper, teak, cloves and cardamom trade. These spices were

\textsuperscript{132} K.S. Mathew, \textit{op.cit.}, p.184.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}, p.185.
\textsuperscript{135} R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.71.
\textsuperscript{136} J. Bertrand, \textit{La Mission du Madure}, Volume IV, p.44.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Idem}. 
transported by local merchants to the Danes at Tranquebar and so vigorous internal trade took place in 1620 A.D.\textsuperscript{138}

Thus textiles, sandalwood and cloves were taken by the Europeans, specially the Portuguese and the Danes for export purpose. The Danes exported to Tamil country, the silver and bullion coins and metals.\textsuperscript{139} The Portuguese agents came to Tuticorin to purchase salt petre in exchange for elephants.\textsuperscript{140} As the Nayaks, fostered the cloth manufacturing industry, fine calico-painting clothes, silk clothes of fine varieties were exported from Madura.\textsuperscript{141} However, the Nayak rulers concentrated more on political rather religious activities and internal reforms than encouraging foreign trade and commerce. They were also not keen to equip their navy, instead they concentrated on army, specially cavalry. The sculptures of horses in several temples with the pose of galloping army men,\textsuperscript{142} and lifting the wheels of the chariots\textsuperscript{143} prove the importance of the use of horses by the Nayak rulers who carved those sculptures.

During the period of the Nayaks, Surat was the most important port in the western coast of India, and also it served as a prime ship-building centre. In order to construct ships, at Surat, teak, timber, coir and husk of co-conut were

\textsuperscript{138} K.S. Mathew, \textit{op.cit.}, p.126.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.}, p.127.

\textsuperscript{140} F.C. Danvers, \textit{The Portuguese in India}, Volume II, 1894, p.53.

\textsuperscript{141} Nieuhoff, John, \textit{Voyages and Travels into Brasil and the East Indies}, Volume II, 1703, p.295.

\textsuperscript{142} At, Pudumandapam and 1000 pillared Mandapam in Meenakshi Temple, Madurai and at Asthana Mandapam, Thirupparankundram.

\textsuperscript{143} At, Thiruvatchi Mandapam, Thirupparankundram.
taken from Travancore, the feudatory kingdom of the Nayaks. The teak wood, found in Travancore region, was harder and was better in quality for ship-building and also it had the capacity to resist water more than any other wood. So, Travancore, earned much profit out of this trade, which was an indirect source of income to Nayaks, who collected the regular tribute.\textsuperscript{144} Besides that, the Travancore government had prosperous trade on spices, timber and coconut which enriched its treasury through this internal trade.\textsuperscript{145} Though the Portuguese, Danes and Dutch enriched themselves at the expense of the Nayaks, who tolerated their misdeeds, these European traders and missionaries had contributed much for cultural interregnum or synthesis.

With their advent, new architectural style, new religious thoughts, new languages, influenced the people and new sections of people emerged in the Tamil society as Europeans. Several sea-ports in the eastern coast of the Nayak kingdom, namely, Tuticorin, Punnaikayal, Mannarkudi or Thanuskodi, Kayalpattinam, Kanniayakumari, Thiruchendur and Attur had developed.\textsuperscript{146} Moreover, the Portuguese built forts and garrisoned their men and helped the Nayaks in their war campaigns against the Dutch and Sethupathy kings of Ramnad.\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{144} A. Appadurai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.133.

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Ibid.}, p.134.

\textsuperscript{146} Nieuhoff, John, \textit{op.cit.}, p.265.

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid.}, p.294.
Moreover, the pearl fishing of the native inhabitants was boosted. As the eastern coast from Rameswaram to Cape Comorin had pearl banks it was called Pearl-coast.\textsuperscript{148} This coast was brought under the Portuguese, who reconciled with Thirumalai Nayak and paid regular tribute to him.\textsuperscript{149} Thus the Nayak rulers not only enriched their treasury but also paved way for economic prosperity of the society which became a developing one and free from famine and starvation.

Amids religious persecution and molestation, the Jesuit priests namely Robert-de-Nobili, Antonio Vico, Fernandez, Proenza, Alvarez, Balthazar Da Costa, carried out their religious campaign of conversion and propagation of Christianity,\textsuperscript{150} especially in the coastal region, where majority of population, called Paravas who had the occupation of diving and fishing, embraced Christianity. Thereby Christian population increased in the coastal region. It was mainly due to the advent of the European traders. Even now one can view that majority of people in that region are Christians.

The Indo-European contact during the reign of the Nayaks, influenced the textile industries of the Madura Kingdom. The Jevits, namely Coeurdoux, Beaulieu tried to study and learn the calico-painting, printing, dyeing and manufacturing techniques, professional secrets and skills and they passed on, these ideas to European countries and in return, the people of the Nayak kingdom learnt about navigation, ship-building and naval war tactics from the

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p.297.
\textsuperscript{150} J. Bertrand, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol.iii, p.55.
Europeans. Constantine Joseph Beschi or Viramamunivar (1680-1747), was a Jesuit who lived wholly in Tamilian fashion and attained complete mastery over Tamil language and composed Tembavani, a long poem about the Bible Testaments, in ornamentally beautiful Tamil.\textsuperscript{151} It is because of the European trading contacts, king Thirumalai Nayak, was able to utilise the artistic skills of the masons and artisans of Europe, to construct his magnificent palace at Madurai, in 1636 A.D.\textsuperscript{152} It is a good specimen of Indo-Islamic architecture, and the whole of its ornamentation is worked out in the exquisitely fine stucco called Chunnam or shell lime.\textsuperscript{153} The Italian architects and Persian artisans were employed by Thirumalai Nayak, in designing this building which has a peculiar combination of Dravidian and Western styles of art and architecture.\textsuperscript{154}

Thirumalai Nayak, notable for his chivalrous qualities, aesthetic sense and great talents, put forth, the creative skills and engineering technology of indigeneous and foreign masons and artisans, which were reflected in their workmanship and elegance that were enshrined in his palace at Madurai. Moreover, he was the pioneer, among the Nayaks, to accept the ethics of humanism, found in a Tamil proverb, \textit{Yathum Urue, Yavarum Kelir}, which means that all places and all people were to be accepted and respected. So he gave favours, privileges and all possible rights to the foreigners for their

\textsuperscript{151} A.L. Basham, \textit{op.cit.}, p.334.
\textsuperscript{152} James Fergusson, \textit{History of Indian and Eastern Architecture}, New Delhi, 1972, p.412.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, p.413.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Thirumalai Nayak Palace}, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Madurai, 2000, p.1.
progress and welfare which indirectly paved way for the promotion of economic prosperity and developments in the kingdom. In order to promote trade, the Nayak rulers observed the practice of opening new accounts on the day of Deepavali festival, every year, thereby they started their financial statements, from that day onwards.\footnote{155} Since then, the traders and merchants, especially, the Sourastras are observing that practice and are opening new accounts on that auspicious day of lights. The Nayak kings, retained their hereditary occupational title even after, they assumed real sovereignty, which were entitled as a suffix to their names, as Nayak by all male rulers. Like wise, the Sourastras, who attained equal status with Brahmins by a charter of Rani Mangammal,\footnote{156} were the original inhabitants of Kathiawar or Sourastiram in Gujarat,\footnote{157} had the practice of explaining Bovlas or their migration history, at their betrothal ceremony.\footnote{158} Even now the Sourastras are observing the Bovla tradition at Madurai.\footnote{159}

Thus, this section of people who promoted weaving industries and clothes trade, had separate identity but were subjected to the influence of local cultural life. The word Lohanaya, which means iron was a Telugu word, found

\footnote{155} M. Rajamanikkanar, \textit{Tamilar Varalarum, Tamilar Panbadum} (in Tamil), Madurai, 1974, p.146.  
\footnote{158} \textit{Idem.}  
\footnote{159} Interview with T.V.Kubendran, the Sourastra 97-B. West Masi Street, Madurai on 25-02-2000.
The lavish use of silk clothes by the Nayak Kings, their courtiers, army men, and their caparisoned horses and elephants in the army, and the artists, during festivals and special royal functions and even by the common man for attire, created a great demand for Sourastra clothes and products.\(^{161}\) So they vigorously involved themselves in the cloth manufacturing activity and its lucrative trade, which enabled them to be richer and wealthier in the community, and their regular payment of taxes for looms\(^{162}\) and for exports and imports of trade, became the mainstay of public revenue to Nayak rulers.\(^{163}\)

The Nayak kings favoured the growth of indigenous, small scale industries, such as manufacturing agricultural implements and tools, fishing, rearing cattles, weaving, dying clothes, pot and other utensils making, bricks making, painting and oil-crushing, etc. So the artisans and the masons of the Nayak age, transmitted their skill and workmanship to their generations and thereby they established the hereditary system of occupations and employments.\(^{164}\) As both men and women were adorned with gold ornaments, the art of jewellery manufacturing, too was encouraged. As the Nayak kings gave due consideration to the works and reforms on irrigation system and agricultural activities, which they considered noblest of all charities, they undertook massive works on irrigation such as digging wells, constructing tanks


\(^{162}\) A.R.E., Madras, 622 of 1915.


\(^{164}\) Nieuhoff, John, *op.cit.*, p.327.
or reservoirs and they in turn, caused the production of materials for agriculture. As a consequence, large number of people were engaged in agricultural works. The Nayak rulers were interested in structural building activities and public works and so they offered the scope of employment opportunities for masons, sculptors, carpenters and gold smiths and utilised their knowledge, in the respective profession and thereby these professionals earned lot and lived content.

Thirumalai Nayak constructed many tanks and the most popular one was the Marriamman Teppakulam, the largest beautiful tank in South India. Muthu Virappa III, renovated many tanks and repaired a tank in Perambalur in Trichinopoly in 1686 A.D. Rani Mangammal, another benevolent ruler of the Nayak line of kings, built Uyyakkondan canal in river Cauvery and also constructed a sluice, and thereby she arranged the perennial water supply to tanks and ponds in the suburbs of Papanasam near Tanjore. The fertility of the region on these river bed areas and cities, attracted the settlements of agricultural labourers and artisans to seek employments and so many villages sprang up with pastural lands and grooves which added prosperity to the kingdom. Moreover all the basic needs of the people such as water, wood, cereals, grains, fruits, edible products such as co-conut, seasamum, groundnut were manufactured, to meet the demands of the people and their domestic animals. In spite of the richness and prosperity, there occurred famines due to

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166 A.R.E., Madras, 394 of 1907.
Muslim aggression and failure of monsoons during the reigns of Muthu Virappa Nayak II, Chokkanatha Nayak and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak.\(^{168}\) The Nayak rulers undertook many relief measures such as providing free food or annadhanam, reducing tax burdens and creating employment opportunities by renovating temples and tanks.\(^{169}\) However, during the visits of these natural havocs, people suffered lot. But in other times and normal period, most of the articles needed for consumption in the country were locally produced.\(^{170}\) Thus, through benevolent measures, the Nayak Kings fostered industries, and internal trade in their kingdom.

From the above facts, it is evident that the Tamil society met with transitions and transformations due to the advent of the Nayak rule and also due to their policies. The society based on tradition was still progressive due to the efforts of the Nayak rulers who devoted much time and brought multifarious activities of promotional nature. The Tamils, known for their qualities of adjustment and adaptability approved, acknowledged and accepted all the activities of the Nayak rulers. Thus the Nayaks’ contribution to social upliftment, economic prosperity, artistic supremacy and so on, certainly had their own impacts and impressions in the Tamil society.

