Chapter IV
Historian’s Craft in South India under Colonialism - A Methodological Critique

In the field of representation of past, modernity revealed the distinction between historical literature and history. By defining what is history, and how it should be written, modernity defined a space between historical literature and history. This space is the context of this chapter. This was a domain of dogmatism. Specific rules and principles were popularised as the necessary conditions for the writing of legitimate history. This chapter is a reassessment of historical methodology in South India under colonialism. This chapter attempts to study the conceptual models, theories of history, assumptions and interpretations behind the craft of historians. The analytical procedure employed by historians and the role of historical interpretations in the making of the past are examined.

This chapter is not concerned with an evaluation of truth or falsity of the contents of the historical texts in Keralam and Tamilakam under colonialism. With due respect for these early historians, this is not an attempt to minimise their meticulous studies or their sense of dedication to true history. This chapter attempts to trace this transition from traditional forms of
representation of past to the eurocentric, modern forms of representation of Past. So this chapter illustrates the assumptions, interpretations and methods of study which rendered this transition sensible and acceptable.

This attempt also reveals that in spite of the general agreement on elements essential for the writing of scientific history, even historians who followed the same historical methodology, brought forth contradictory conclusions on certain issues which were termed by historians as “historical questions.”

Defining scientific writing of History

India has no past, whatever it has is illconstructed past. Indian literature at least of the ancient and medieval times sadly lack any chronological framework worth the name. It is tainted with a profuse and indiscriminate intermixture of all sorts of legendary and mythical stuff and what is more provoking than these to one engaged in the construction of a scientific history of the past is to find the generality of the Indian people exhibiting an incidental prowess to accept any work of literature as sober history of their past and a tendency to anathematize those who disbelieve the veracity of their literature.”

In this extract the author points out the absence of scientific history in India and the reasons for this absence of history. He also illustrates the ahistorical sense of Indians and affirms the need for the scientific writing of history in India. The absence of history in the southern regions of India is recognised in the broader

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The context of India. What is recognised as absence of history is not the absence of the means (source materials) to produce history. The indigenous literature was criticised not for the dearth of historical information but for the lack of coherence, order and continuity. The ill constructed past refers to the absence of scientifically validated, written history in the context of India which is also relevant to the south of India. The ill constructed past is regarded as the feature of ancient and medieval periods of India. The modern age is exempted "as the age for the study of which scientifically validated documents are available." The colonial historians illustrated two orders of writing history. The fictive order which characterised the indigenous representation of past, and the scientific order which characterised Western history.

The self reflexivity of historians revealed their sense of distinction between history and literature. "The facts of ancient Tamil history enshrined in early poems and set in a highly artificial grouping were not quarried systematically nor sifted and

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Coherence, chronological ordering of events and continuity are regarded as the essential components of historical texts. But post modernism consider these as a sort of linked and mistaken assumptions based on the conviction that all the phenomena of a period has its own laws of cohesion; they have their own systems of homogeneous relations and networks of casualty. Focault points out that there is contradiction in this new history because the new history focuses on series, divisions etc. and there by challenges the above sated assumptions. For the relevant discussion see Michele Barrett (ed.) The Politics of Truth From Marx to Foucault. London, 1991. pp.121-123. Lyn Hunt attributed this notion of unity of the text which existed among historians of modernity to the philosophy of the Age of Reason by which "narratives in symbolic language gave way to facts in the essentialist language" Lyn Hunt, (ed) The New Cultural History. London, 1989, 120.

chronologically so as to enable readers to get a clear consecutive and intelligible account of a past."\(^4\) The dominant assumption of colonial historiography was that truth could be produced only by finding out and eliminating errors and contradictions in indigenous literature. The historians believed that "through confirmatory evidence the historians should separate the facts from the figments of imagination in which they are embedded."\(^5\) The historians also realised that literary sources should be approached with caution. They asserted that finding out history (facts) from traditional literature was very difficult. "It is difficult to workout a connected history from Sangam literature due to the precedence of literary style and descriptions."\(^6\) Thus the colonial historians visualised two domains in the indigenous literature of their regions—the domain of literary imagination and a domain of historical facts.

The faith and mission of colonial historians of Tamilakam and Keralam was to write history truthfully and objectively. They also defined history as "the connected study of the past."\(^7\) Thus the

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\(^5\) S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *The Beginnings of South Indian History*, Madras, 1918, p. 32.

\(^6\) Fact was one among the key issues discussed in the critical philosophy of History. E.H. Carr regards facts as the outcome of the choice of historians. This was opposed by other scholars. To cite an example "Factual history is not a science as the naive positivism fancied. It is an integral part of history as an indispensable technique" Joseph Evans on *the philosophy of History*, London, 1959, p. 131.


The life cycle of cultures proposed by Oswald Spengler greatly influenced the historians of 18th century. It was criticised as being based on speculative philosophy of history. Spengler derived these ideas from comparative morphology. He was accused of 'biologizing history.' This term is borrowed from William Dray. He states 'Historiography was interested in knowing causal connection of the events and a relativism developed. This epoch understands history by analogy with nature. It has taken over the idea of evolution through only with regard to single epochs and spheres of culture and not with regard to history as a whole.' William Dray, *Perspectives in History*, New York, 1982, p. 94 and also see the similar trend in Bultmann D. Rudolf *History And Eschatology*, London, 1957, p. 78.
idea of a coherent history with in the framework of chronology dominated colonial historiography. The absence of “a connected history” was recognised by the historians of Tamilakam and Keralam. The connected history’ of Tamilakam/Keralam was recognised as a social responsibility by the historians of Tamilakam and Keralam. There was renewed interest for finding out “connected history” from indigenous literature. This was not considered as an impossible task.

The methods, concepts and logic employed by colonial historians to extract history from indigenous literature were derived from methods, concepts and reasoning which were employed for the study of natural sciences in the enlightened scientific era. To the colonial historians the fictive structure and discontinuities in traditional narratives were problematic. The objective/neutral language was regarded as the necessary condition for the writing of objective history. Poetic exaggerations and fables in traditional narratives were disqualified as that which obliterated historical truth. They believed that there “is intricate relationship between

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8 To cite an example “I am surprised to find that the political history of this principality is a blank all beyond the immediate present ----- while several even of the minor barons of Great Britain are able to trace their blueblood twice that period. How long are we to remain in this lamentable if not disgraceful condition of ignorance” P. Sundarampillai Some Early Soverigns of Travancore, Madras, 1894, p. xxvi.

9 “While we have histories of the Pandya and chola kingdoms we have no separate history of Keralam apart from the Cheras.” P. Shungoony Menon History of Travancore From the Earliest Times To 1867 A.D 1878 p. 52.

form of presentation and content." Thus colonial historians disqualified the autonomy of the author which was manifested through the fictive structures in traditional narratives. But the autonomy of the author reappears in historical texts. Selection of sources, interpretation of sources, and historical methods employed by the historians reveal the autonomy of historians.

Historiographical reflections in the texts of Keralam and Tamilakam illustrate that each historian attempted to represent past with in a framework of his own choice. In spite of the mission to write history objectively there were differences of opinion among historians in their attitude to sources. The historians of Travancore stated that in addition to traditional literature they scrutinised a variety of documents, official correspondences, epigraphic inscriptions, settlement registers of palaces, treaties, property documents, private papers were employed by them as sources.


12 Richard White criticises that this negation of autonomy of the author is a feature of continental philosophy. He states that from Kant to existentialists 'subject' was one of the major themes of study. Different terms were used to indicate subject (transcendental ego, being, self etc.) in their writings. Their individual sovereignty still remains problematic. For further discussions on the autonomy of the author as self see Richard White "Autonomy As Foundational in High J. Silverman (ed) *Truth/Subjectivity/Culture*, London, 1993, pp. 87-140.

Contrary to this the post modern writers reveal the benefits of autonomy of the author. They prefer archival research (diaries, private papers etc.) Carolyn Ellis states that this method stems from openness and is in contrast to ideological interpretations. This is illustrated by her by presenting four versions of the story of William Gilbert. For further details see Carolyn Ellis "Archival Research in Intertextual Analysis" in Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaberty (ed) *Investigating subjectivity: Research on Lived Experiences*, California 1992. Wendy C. Wickevise states that it is the written history which has limitations and is problematic. He illustrates this by illustrating the stories which survive in memory about the British explorer Fraser, among the tribals in Phillipines. For further details see Wendy C. Wick Wise, "To see ourselves as the others: Nlakapanwy contact Narratives" in *The Canadian Historical Review* Vol. XXV No. 1 March 1994 pp. 178-195.
The pioneer historian Pacchu Moothathu stated that in addition to these he also consulted the opinions of men of reputation as confirmatory evidence for the clarification of specific events. Diwan Madhava Rao also narrated the different categories of sources scrutinised by him for the writing of his text on Travancore. These pioneer historians assumed that a "true, connected history of the kings of Travancore" was a necessity. They believed that the scattered fragments of indigenous literature which were the only available sources were false accounts as they were fictitious in nature.

There was a hierarchical ordering of these different categories of sources in terms of their authenticity which was determined by the convictions of historians Pacchu Moothathu and Diwan Madava Rao. They considered the epics and puranas as more reliable than the local narratives. The epics and puranas were scrutinised by these historians as sources which explained the origin of the dynasty of Travancore. Kanakasabhai the pioneer historian of Tamilakam believed that the descriptions of the origin of Chera, Chola and Pandyan kingdoms as found in the epics were

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13 The pioneer historian of Keralam Pacchu Moothathu believed that history was the biography of great men. He considered that a true and connected history of the kings of Travancore was a necessity because the existing versions about the kings and royal family contained greater amount of elements of fiction as these were based on fragments of literature Pacchu Moothathu Thiruvithamcore Charithram (Mal) Trivandrum, 1867 pp 4-7 and also see K.P. Padmanaba Menon, Thiruvithamcore (venadu) Rajavamsam (Mal) Thirssur, 1989 (Reprint) p. 9.

14 P. Shangoony Menon, History of Travancore From the Earliest Times To 1867 AD. Madras, 1878. p. 18.
true accounts of the past. Kanakasabhai narrated "The pandyan king called himself panchavan (the descendants of the five) and kaurian (of the line of the Kurus) names which clearly indicate his origin from the pandus who were five brothers. The city of Madura retains to this day its ancient name and thus bears living testimony to the fact that the descendants of the pandus who ruled in Muttra had in early times established their power in the southern most parts of the Peninsula." There were historians who evaluated these sections in the Mahabharata as interpolations "Historicity and even plausibility are not needed for an assessment of the historical worth of the statements found in them."

The historiographical reflections of Keralam reveal the ambivalent approach of historians to traditional literature. The author of History of Travancore from the Earliest Times to 1867 A.D. considered the local narratives as "full of imagination" but he considered puranas as "reliable sources." On the basis of puranas he traced the origin of the dynasty of Travancore "to the beginnings of the World." Through the descriptions in puranas he traced the origin of the dynasty from Yayathi and illustrated that the dynasty of Travancore continued to rule many hundred thousands of years

\[15\] V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago Madras 1904, p. 124.
\[16\] T.N. Subramanian, History of Tamilnadu To 1565 A.D. Madurai.
\[17\] P. Shangoony Menon, History of Travancore From the Earliest Times To 1867 A.D., Madras, 1878. p. 13.

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The historiographical reflections of Keralam reveal that this notion of antiquity was an obsession which the historians found it impossible to shed off.

He criticised Pacchu Moothathu for his reliance on Sanskrit works and local narratives and for his want of literary diligence. He asserted the absence of a true connected history of Travancore. The pre-existing texts are regarded as accounts, which contained information which had no historical accuracy as they employed local narratives. But this historian also incorporated local narratives occasionally. The origin of Kollam era is traced to a local narrative and the origin of Kollam era is historicised as Udayamarthadan incident.

There were differences of opinion among scholars as to the reliability of traditional Sanskrit literature as a source. P. Shangoony Menon asserted "on such a work as the *Keralolpathi* little reliance can be placed." *Keralolpathi* is assessed as a composition in Sanskrit "embellished with ideas and statements supplied by imagination a practice among Sanskrit scholars." But historians like Sathianatha Aiyar recognised the historical content in legends. Legends were regarded as sources which mixed up facts

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and fiction.\textsuperscript{23} As such popular traditions were reiterated in the historiography of Keralam and Tamilakam. The tradition of \textit{Cheraman Perumal} and the tradition of \textit{Perumals} by dint of reiteration came to be regarded as correct.\textsuperscript{24}

The compositions of Sanskrit were regarded as works being “written by cultured men who had free access to all necessary information.”\textsuperscript{25} But the epics were rated as secondary to other categories or sources “The future historian of ancient South India will seek his material in the numismatic, epigraphic, literacy linguistic, traditional and archaeological records of the Dravidian people rather than in the epics of Aryan India.”\textsuperscript{26} It was also believed that “the native chronicles and memories of later ages should be approached with caution.”\textsuperscript{27}

There were historians who discredited Sanskrit literature as a source for writings the history of Tamilakam. “The \textit{itihasas} have undergone continuous embellishments so that any attempts to derive history from these sources will be as Nilakanta Sastri says...

\textsuperscript{23} “Contemporary literature and traditions as transmitted in literary records supply as with materials with which we have to construct history.” R. Sathianatha Aiyar \textit{History of the Nayaks of Madura}, Madras, 1924, p. 259. The possibility for the presence of factual contents in tradition of Cherain Perumal was pointed out by many historians. To cite a few examples Velayudhan Parikkasseri, \textit{Keralam Perumakkannarude Kalathu} (Mal) Quilon, 1963 and also C. Atchutha Menon \textit{Cochin State Manual, Ernakulam,} 1911 pp. 96-97.

\textsuperscript{24} Elankulam P.N. Kuryanpillai, \textit{Cherasamrajyam Onpathum Pathum Nootandukalil} (Mal), Kottayam, 1961.

\textsuperscript{25} R. Sathianatha Aiyar, \textit{History of the Nayaks of Madura}, Madras, 1924, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{26} P.T. Srinivasa Aiyangar, \textit{History of The Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A.D.} Madras, 1931, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{27} R. Sathianatha Aiyar, \textit{History of the Nayaks of Madura}, Maduras, 1924, p. 21.
like trying to read history in the Arthusian legends." There were historians who prioritised indigenous literature over Sanskrit literature. "Indigenous literature of early unsophisticated stages of literature which existed long before the rise of the much later artificial poetry of Sanskrit and Tamil were based on the actual customs and manners of the people. Poetry was a mirror of the hope led by the people of those times." Literary works of especially religious literature of later ages were viewed with suspicion. "The local puranas most of them being purely mythical put us on the wrong scent and in some cases operate as counteracting agent in our researches. Indigenous astronomical calculations are regarded as "leading more to confusion than to conclusion." The historiographical reflections of Tamilakam reveal that scholars held different views on the Tamil epics *Chilappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* as sources for the writing of history. The pioneer historians V. Kanakasabhai, and P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar employed them as sources which contained information about the social practices of Tamil in the third century A.D. P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar narrates from *Manimekalai* the five methods of disposing of the dead which prevailed among the Tamils in the third century. One of

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28 T.N. Subramanian, History of Tamil Nadu to 1565 A.D. Madurai, 1911, p. 64.
the methods described was the practice of disposing the corpse in an open place to be eaten by vultures. He concluded that since Persia “was the only early nation who exposed the dead in this fashion the Tamil Dravidians in his march towards India must have lived in Persia and moved with Persians sufficiently long to adopt the above custom.”

Tamil epics as sources

There were differences of opinion among historians on the role of Tamil classics-Chilappathikaram, Manimekalai and Tholkappiyam as sources for the writing of history of Tamilakam. An analytical reading of traditional narratives was the early methodology which was known to the pioneer scholars. V. Kankasabhai accepted the contents of Chilappathikaram and Tholkappiyam as historical truth. He reiterated the story of the heroic valour of Cheran Chenkudduvan as truth. “One of the Chera kings called Chenkudduvan who was contemporary with Gajabahu of Ceylon is said to have been on intimate terms of friendship with the Karna emperors of Magadha and with their assistance he attacked the Aryas near the Himalayas.” There were historical narratives in Keralam during the colonial period. The authors

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33 V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, Madras, 1914, p. 248.
translated the contents of traditional literature and represented them as truth. These historical narratives attracted the common people. The story of Chenkudduvan was thus historicised.\textsuperscript{34}

This was evaluated as the methodological error committed by Kanakasabhai in the writing of history.\textsuperscript{35} The chronological ordering of kings by Kanakasabhai on the basis of Chilappathikaram was also questioned. He identified Nirrangaran in Chilappathikaram as satakarni. This is regarded as "highly untenable as no foreigner has ever dealt with proper name in this fashion."\textsuperscript{36} There were endless discussions among historians on the truth/falsity on the identification of rulers and the chronological ordering of kings.

Through new evidences from inscriptions, historians falsified the assumptions of early historians that the rulers and poets mentioned in these Tamil epics were contemporary. On the basis of evidences in inscriptions, it was pointed out that interpolations in literary compositions were common. It was asserted that "Although Chilappathikaram and Manimekalai are classed among the Sangam works. Serious doubts may justly be entertained as to whether they speak of contemporary kings and events; and therefore great caution is necessary before utilising wholesale the material consisted in them. Several savants of Tamil literature would not

\textsuperscript{34} To cite a few examples P. Thanupillai, Chenguttva Perumal (Mal), Sucheendran, 1934. Aattoor Narayana Pisharadi, Keralacharithram (Mal), Trichur, 1937, pp. 32-43.
\textsuperscript{35} For the relevant discussion see. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, The Beginnings of South Indian History, Madras, 1914, p. 24.
like this remark."\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Manimekalai} and \textit{Chilappathikaram} are judged as "Compositions of story tellers."\textsuperscript{38}

The chief criticism against the Tamil epics was that they were compositions which had no chronological frame work. So these literary works were regarded as "full of improbabilities impossibilities and inconsistencies."\textsuperscript{39} The attempts made by the pioneer historian of Tamilakam V. Kanakasabhai are evaluated as "rather destructive in the sense of being imaginative."\textsuperscript{40} The pioneer historical texts are regarded as mere translations from literary compositions.

Later it was found out that the information derived from the traditional literary compositions should be considered as true only if it is supported by evidences from inscriptions. Thus critical study of literacy sources alone was later considered as insufficient for the writing of objective history.\textsuperscript{41} The evidences from inscriptions were termed as "Corroborative evidence."\textsuperscript{42} This method was largely employed in the writing of monographs. Identifying rulers, Chronological ordering of dynasties, administrative reforms, military exploits were the themes of study in these monographs.

The publication of Velvikudi plates, Veluvapalayamplates, Dandakottan Plates, Trichnopoly Rock inscriptions was an

\textsuperscript{38} T. N. Subramanian, \textit{History of Tamil Nadu to 1565 A.D.}, Madurai, 1914, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{39} P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, \textit{The History of Tamils from Early Times to 600 A.D.}, Madras, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{40} S. Krishnan Swami Aiyangar, \textit{The Beginnings of South Indian History}, Madras, 1918, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{41} Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Sanikarathinte Nazhika Kallukal} (Mal), Trichur, 1958, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{42} This term was employed by S. Krishna Swami Aiyangar, T. N. Subramanian and Venkataramanayya. These historians followed a methodology which integrated inscriptions and literacy sources.
incentive for the writing of objective history. These inscriptions were considered as genuine accounts. If the pioneer historical texts translated the contents of traditional literature as true accounts of past, the monographs adopted the contents of inscriptions as truth. Without scrutiny the historians of monographs accepted the contents of prasastis as truth. The prasastis described military exploits of rulers. These details of war were historicised as evidences for territorial ambitions and sovereignty of rulers. But “history of the wars and circumstances under which the rulers came in to conflict with the enemies are generally unknown.”43 Another explanation was offered “The denigration in power and personal ability encouraged the border kingdoms to throw off the imperial yoke.”44 Through speculative interpretations45 the historians of Tamilakam and Keralam attempted to establish continuity in the dynasties of Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas from the beginnings of Christian era.


43 Venkata Ramanayya, Early Muslim Expansion in India, Madras, 1943, p.94.
45 E.H. Carr states that phenomenological speculations of the enlightenment era paved the way for the new dimensions of scientific enquiry. The new science set the model for the study of social sciences also. E.H. Carr What is History? London, 1959, p.73. Professor K. A. Nilakantasastri employs speculations to find out the causes and results of the expedition of Rajendra Chola against Kadaram “As we can get no direct answer to these questions from contemporary records we have to depend on the possibilities suggested by the Makuuvn and relevant facts.” K.A. Nilakantasastri, The Colas, Madras, 1935, p.265. Speculation was the device employed for the creation of chronological ordering of the Chera, Chola, Pandy dynasties of the Sangam age. Often the regnal years and year of accession are based on speculation. This is visible in the historical texts Historical sketches of Ancient Dekhan, The Chronology of the Early Tamils and History of Tamilnad To 1565 A.D.
Kings of the Sangam period (K.G. Shesha Aiyar: 1937), Administration and Social Life under the Pallavas (C. Minakshi: 1935), Pallva Varalaru (Tamil) (M. Rajamanikkam Pillai: 1944). Early Muslim Expansion in India (N. Venkataramanayya: 1943) are the historical texts which deal with a specific dynasty. These monographs integrated literary and epigraphical sources. They narrated the accounts on the origin of dynasties from traditional literature. These were labelled as traditions. These were narrated as traditional explanations for the origin of dynasties and for the early phases of kingdoms. Attempts were made by historians to create chronological ordering of rulers with the evidences from epigraphs.

The theoretical positions in colonial historiography of Tamilakam and Keralam are based the following assumptions.


b. The life forces of this power structure were the ruler, his personal qualities, and the extent of territory under his authority.

c. Material and cultural conditions depended on the presence/absence of state (Kingdom/empire).

d. There were constant battles and revolts among the rulers and feudatories in Tamilakam and Keralam. These internal dissensions often brought the decline of the state.
This theoretical position suffers from the limitations of (a) determinism (b) ambivalent attitude towards centralised authority and the dispersion of power. The evidences point out the existence of dispersion of power which is accommodated through the model of autonomous villages.

Similarly the characterisation of the Cola state as highly centralised and bureaucratised, at the same time comparing the local institutions to the autonomous townships of Roman Gual (K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*) is one of the themes of reassessment. While it is criticised as an attempt to glorify the Cola state (T.N. Subramanian, *A History of Tamil Nadu To 1565 A.D.*) it is viewed as the result of inadequate premises in colonial historiography. It is pointed out that due to the conviction in the existence of a centralised state in South of India under the Colas the historians of South of India committed logical fallacies in the interpretation of political evidences from inscriptions. Even eminent historians such as Appadorai, K.A. Nilakantasastrī and T.V. Mahalingam assumed that the conditions in the state of economy, society and polity were uniform and static throughout the period of the Chola empire which extended over centuries. The presuppositions on the nature of state as centralised bureaucracy

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47 *Op cit.*, p.69.

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were derived from the traditional text. It is pointed out that evidences were selected from inscriptions which suited these presuppositions. The changes which acquire in the terms in inscriptions are not analysed. Similarly the state organization was studied in the order of central-provincial and the local. Selective evidences for political organisation without considering the evidences from the same sources to analyse the role of socio-economic order in the state is pointed out as a major methodological error in colonial historiography. The assertions of Nilakandasastri about “the almost Byzantine royalty of Raja Raja and his successors,” and “a nice balance struck between centralised control and local initiative” are criticised as inappropriate explanations of the nature of the state. On the contrary, the evidence on the links between local networks, social hierarchy and

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Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan focused on a comparative analysis of the studies on the state of the colas by the American Scholar Burton steen and the Japanese scholar Karashima. The first is characterized by him as theory with out evidence. The speculative nature of the study is characterised as ‘sensational formulations” which only created confusion in academic circles. He favours the studies on south Indian society and state in south India by Noboru Karashima which is regarded as better equipped with statistical information and evidences for his premises. This work is also regarded as being based on an exhaustive analysis of revenue terms on cola inscriptions. The study of the trading activities in the cola state by south hall is criticised by thus” Halls construct of marketing hierarchy and of the nature of the changes the structure underwent rest on premises which are themselves questionable. Hall also failed t provide linkage between nadu, nagaram and mahanagaram and other supra, regional centres of commerce.”

Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan sectional President’s address SIHC proceedings 5th annual session Mysore, 1955, pp. 110-118. *The studies on south Indian History and society* (studies from inscriptions A.D. 850-1800 by Karashima) is regarded as the text which contains new kinds of enquiry on the statistical and merely informative. The lack of uniformity in the usage of terms and the absence of precise meaning of words are pointed out as the limitations. For a review of this text see Dr. D.N. Jha “Studies in early Indian Economic History.” In The Indian Historical Review Vol. No. 1-3 July 1983-Jan 1984, New Delhi, 1984, p. 185.

the formal institutions are illustrated to reveal that the cola state depended on these agencies and it was not a centralised state.\[^{51}\]

The limitations in colonial historiography of south India are attributed to the selection of themes by the historians. The historians based their studies on inscriptions. The identification rulers, chronological ordering of events were considered as the primary functions of historians. They viewed that this type of history was objective and non argumentative.\[^{52}\]

It was pointed out that a full fledged economic history of Southern India had to be attempted. It is true that on the model initiated by Gilbert Slater, (Some South Indian Villages, 1918) and Southern India its political and economic problems (1913), a few attempts were made by economists. Economic conditions of South India 1000-1500 A.D. (A. Appadourai: 1936). Some South Indian Villages: A Resurvey (P.T. Thomas: 1940) The Co-operative Movement in the Madras Presidency, (B.V. Narayanaswamy Naidu: 1933) Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850, (Sarada Raju: 1941) The Handloom Industry in South India (1940) are rated as texts which focused on specific aspects and failed to view South India as a single unit. The Economic Conditions In South India 1000-1500 A.D. is regarded as being (a) based on random samples (b) limited to the core regions of Tamilakam. The qualitative

\[^{51}\] For further details see Burton Stein, "The State and Agrarian order in Medieval South India" in Burton Stain, (ed) Essays on South India, New Delhi, 1975, pp.74-79.

\[^{52}\] The notion of objectivity is regarded as impractical in the writing of history Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan by exposing the sentimental attachment to region, language and race in historiography states. "In my opinion pure and complete objectivity in the 19th century sense of Ranke is a myth. The assertion of a subject object relationship is impractical. It is the historical study of the past in the light of romantic ideas fostered by 19th century Indologists." Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan. Presidential Address, IHC Proceedings 29th Annual Session, Hyderabad, 1978, p. 13.
assessment of the historiography of the colonial south attribute lack of development in historical studies due to the absence of new methodologies and new approaches.

The attitude to power as expressed in the colonial historiography characterises battles and wars as revolts for independence. The revolts are also described with details as the causes for the decline of Pandyas, Cholas, Pallavas and Chalukyas. These descriptions often had an under tone that subjection was better than independence. Allegiance to central authority was hailed as essential for the solidarity of an empire. But the experiences in pre-colonial India reveal a situation of constant battles. "It is because of our contacts with the English that we have discovered for the first time the true basis of liberty and national solidarity."

Verram and Arram are regarded as the attributes of rulers. The rulers aspired for the spiritual welfare of the subjects through acts of benevolence (Arram). This can be regarded as common both to the historical writings on Tamilakam and Keralam. In the historical writings on Keralam it was 'Rajyadharma.' These attributes originated from an alliance between religion and philosophy in the sacred traditions of India. The construction of temples is elaborately discussed in the historical writings of Tamilakam. In the historical works on Keralam the king is depicted as the patron

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of brahmanas. He invokes the blessings of guardian deity through ceremonies of Murajabam, Tulapurshadana, Hiranya Garbha and acts of charity. “The central philosophical foundation of the overwhelming part of religious beliefs in India including Buddhism lies in the philosophy of Sankya which focuses on other worldliness and fatalism.”

An analysis of the contents relating to the origin of dynasties reveal that these sections are entirely different from the sections which narrate the modernisation of kingdoms. This section was the area defined by inscriptions. Further the history of inscriptions in the Tamilakam and Keralam showed tremendous differences.

Another historical method was to consider inscriptions as the only reliable source for the writing of objective history. In Keralam this was initiated by P. Sundaram Pillai. He was concerned with the writing of a “genuine account of the rulers of Travancore in the 5th and 6th centuries of Malayalam era.” On the basis of epigraphs in the regions of Thiruvithamcode he stated that the rulers of Travancore exercised authority in these regions from 1144. Thus he falsified the assumptions of Shangoony Menon that the kings of Travancore ruled these regions from the 14th century. But he neither attempted to glorify the royal family of Travancore nor to present a

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56 P. Sundaram Pillai, Some Early Sovereigns of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1894.
'connected history' of Travancore. He limited his interpretations to statements in epigraphs. So description of incidents were very few.\(^5\)

The historical texts on Keralam under colonialism consisted of two mutually independent epistemic orders. The textual strategies of historians enabled them to combine these two orders. Thus they attempted to illustrate continuity of royal dynasties in the native kingdoms of Travancore Cochin and Calicut. Since indigenous literature was the available source, the historians presented the information derived from different sources. Itihasas, Puranas, dominant local traditions such as Keralolpathi, Keralamahatmyam, Palace records (Granthavari) were consulted. While Pacchu Moothathu and P. Shangoony Menon, reiterated the legends as explanations for the origin of royal dynasties the historians of later ages combined with this the tradition of Cheraman Perumal as the explanatory model for the origin of royal dynasties. The Zamorins of Calicut From The Earliest Times to A.D. 1806 (K.V. Krishna Aiyar: 1938) describes the origin of the Nediyiruppai Swaroopam and the royal ceremonies such as Ariyittuvaccha, Hiranyakarbhham and Thulapurushadanam. The sources are kilippattu, keralolpathi, legends and granthavaris.

\(^5\) To cite few examples S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Cheran Vanji, Madras, 1942 Elankulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, Cheramsanrajyam, Trivandrum, 1961.
The second part of this text (Chapter VIII to XV) is based exclusively on official records. It narrates the coming of the Europeans, their relations, and treaties with the Zamorins. The invasions of Malabar by Mysore and the treaties of Zamorins with the British are also studied.

*Kochi Rajya Charithram* (K.P. Padmanaba Menon: 1914) narrates the origin of the royal family of Cochin and the royal ceremonies. The chief sources are *puranas*, traditional Sanskrit literature, local traditions and *Vanjeri Granthavary*. As distinct from other historians he expresses serious doubts about the credibility of these sources.58 *The Progress of Cochin* (T.K. Krishna Menon, 1932) narrates the history of Cochin “from the very beginnings.”59 The first two chapters narrate the origin of royal family of Cochin in the tone of traditional historiography. Other chapters (II to VIII) narrate the history of the rulers and their administrative reforms. The focus is on the regulations and developments in the different departments of the Kingdom of Cochin deriving the colonial period. Thus it resembles the state manuals of Travancore.60

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The author of *Cochin State Manual* stated that “there may be truth content in traditions. So traditions must not be dispensed away.”

The State Manuals were rather considered as compilations of facts about the land and people. They were not considered as adequate historical descriptions of the land and people. Historians of Keralam believed that the primary function of historical text was to impart knowledge, instil love of mother country and pride in its antiquity and identity of the native state. They believed that the manuals imparted only knowledge and could not carry out these functions of historical texts.

**Sangam age and historiography of Tamilakam**

'Sangam age' is a major theme in the historiography of Tamilakam. What is Sangam? What is the chronological framework of Sangam were considered as significant historical questions in the historiography of South India. Due to the meticulous studies of the literary compositions of the Sangam age a large body of literature was made available. Sangam literature was utilised as a major

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61 For the relevant discussion on the tradition of Cheraman Perumal. See Atchutha Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam, 1934, pp. 34-35. This was opposed by Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and he ascertained that this was the result of inadequate methodology. Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai *Chila Kerala Charithra Prasanangal* (Mal), Kottayam, 1955, p. 29.

source by the linguistic historians and freelance writers. Historians pursued different methodologies to derive an objective history of Sangam age. The extent of Sangam age, socio-economic life, nature of literary compositions, and political history were studied extensively. There were differences of opinion among historians though critical reading of the literary compositions was the chief method of study employed by them. T.N. Subramanian refuted the views held by the earlier scholars P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, V.R. Ramachandra Dikshit and K.A. Nilakantasastri. He defined Sangam as an association of poets. According to P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar the idea of Sangam often translated as academy is a modern one and he argued that to transfer it to many hundreds of years before is an anachronism. He assigned the influence of heterodox religions in the term Sangam. It was asserted by T.N. Subramanian that prior to the term Sangam it was known as Avaiyam or Kudal. Historians presented contradictory opinions on the origin of Sangam age. They never mentioned the

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63 It was pointed out that Sangam literature was only partially utilised even by historians like K.A. Nilakantasastri. He mentioned the necessity of a monograph on Sangam polity but that was materialised by him only at a later date (Sangam Age: its Cults and Cultures, 1972). T.N. Subramanian is credited with having made a meaningful attempt to draw out history from Sangam literature (The Administration and Social life of the Sangam Tamils: 1966, South Indian Polity, 1956). "His effort was praiseworthy because the Sangam literature in contrast to the theoretical and idyllic life of the sacred vedic and post vedic literature was directly related to an age whose patrons authors, environs and ethos are better known to us concretely related to our history." S. Settar, Some Aspects of South Indian Historiography, SIHC proceedings, 8th Annual Session. Pune, 1988, p.210.
upper limit of this age.\textsuperscript{64} Definition of the period of Sangam age and the literary compositions were matters of controversy. T.N. Subramanian disagreed with V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar and P.T. Srinivasa lyengar who assigned this to the 5\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. he assigned them to an early period as the literary compositions of Sangam age were regarded as unusually complete and largely realistic picture of the very ancient Tamil country.\textsuperscript{65} Similarly there were contradictory opinions among historians as to literary compositions which are to be included in the genre 'Sangam literature.' Often perspectives in literary compositions which are interpreted as Aryan elements to determine whether the literary compositions belong to the Sangam age.\textsuperscript{66} Though aryanisation is offered as the explanatory model to characterise the glories of Sangam age contradictory opinions were presented. V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar and S. Vaiyapuri Pillai asserted that the system of four fold division of caste spread in Keralam and Tamilakam towards the end of the Sangam period. Aryanisation as the explanatory model for the four fold division of caste is reputed by some scholars.

\textsuperscript{64} Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, \textit{Keralam Anchus, Aarum Noottandukalil (Mal)} Trivandrum, 1961, p.30.

\textsuperscript{65} For details see T.N. Subramanian, \textit{History of Tamil Nadu To 1565 A.D.}, Madurai, 1914, pp.61-62.

\textsuperscript{66} There were serious discussions on the upperlimit of the Sangam age. The literary composition by Mamulanar and Tholkapiyam are extensively studied for this historical problem. P.T. Srinivasa Aiyangar believed that the literary composition by mamulanar belonged to the post Sangam age. Later historians Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai and T.H.P. Chentharasseri contradicted this. They asserted that the text illustrates the attempts to introduce Aryan cult in the South of India. For the relevant discussion see Elam Kunjan Pillai \textit{Samskarathinte Nazhikakallukal (Mal)}, Trichur, 1958. T.H.P Chentharassery \textit{Elamkulavum Kerala Charithravum (Mal)} Trivandrum, 1988, pp. 220-224.
T.K. Venkata Subramanian illustrates evidences from the Sangam literature that there were divisions in the Tamil society which resembled *jati*. He argues that there were castes in the social structure of the Tamil society from very early times and the speculation that the four fold division of caste had its roots in the *varna* system is an anachronism. But P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar based his conclusion on the critical reading of the literary compositions by *mamulanar* and *Tolkappiyam*. He stated that these texts revealed the beginning of aryанизation. This historian asserted that aryанизation existed in Keralam at an early age than Tamilakam. There were also attempts to identify the extent of Tamilakam from Sangam literature.

The perspectives of Aryan culture especially the references to the divisions of caste are identified as the beginnings of distinctiveness of Keralam. Elamkulam considered that the study of Sangam age was necessary for a proper understanding of the early history of Keralam. He found that the studies of Sangam age by Kanakasabhai, Sivaraja Pillai, P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar are

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67 For further details see T.K. Venkata Subramanian “Social Roots of Tamil Ideology” in *IHC proceedings*, Vol.I, 29th annual session, Hyderabad, 1978, pp.180-198. Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan argues that Aryanisation/Sanskritisation are inadequate to explain the complex network which was not uniform everywhere in the South. He stated that such terms echoed a sense of impositions/invasions which were not real. He argues that Jatikarana was the ultimate result. Dr. M.G.S. Narayanan, Presidential Address, *IHC proceedings*, Vol.I, 29th Annual session, Hyderabad, 1978, p.12.


69 V. Kanakasabai, *The Tamils One Thousand Years Ago*, Madras, 1914, pp. 124-129.
inadequate as these scholars lacked good knowledge of Sanskrit. He also believed that the popular assumption that there were three Sangams was an obsession of the historians of Tamilakam. This obsession prevented enquiry into the development of literature after the so defined 'third sangam.' Historians differed in their conclusions on the definitions of Sangam. Sangam was defined as an academy which existed in the early centuries of Christian era. So the early centuries of Christian era were defined as the Sangam age. The age of Sangam, its origin and end were some of the questions for which the historians had no satisfactory explanation. Because the dominant assumption was that the rulers and poets in these literary compositions were contemporaries.

The political history drawn out from Tamil heroic poems popularly known as the Sangam literature suffered from obvious limitations. Chronological ordering of dynasties, wars, interdynastic relations, kings, queens, courtiers were the themes dealt with by the historians of the colonial south. It was assumed that the ancient dynasties continued without break or ruptures. The chieftancies of one age are considered as the monarchies of other. The dynastic drifts, the splits and the branching off of the dynasties are

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70 These ideas are reiterated by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai in his writings. To cite a few examples Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai. *Annathe Keralam* (Mal) Trivandrum, *Sanskarathinte Nazhikakallukal* (Mal), Trichur, 1958

71 Sangam age was defined as the age of indigenous culture. This was defined as Dravidian/Tamil culture.
described. But substantial themes such as the ethnic basis and the socio-economic circumstances behind the transformation into monarchical state, the upward political and social mobility of groups were left out. It was pointed out that political history was the favourite craft of historians of the colonial South. The writing of history was undertaken by them as a sort of game of riddles which they played well. It was also pointed out that in spite of the availability of epigraphs the history of dynasties such as Satavahanas the Gangas, the Kadambas the Chalukyas and minor feudatories were not well considered. Besides, a comprehensive socio-economic history even a comprehensive political history of South India did not engage the attention of the historians of the colonial South. It is pointed out that the colonial historiography of the South created the impression that South India did not have of its own history in the ancient period and that the historic period started with the Pallavas and ended with the Cholas.

This is attributed to the peculiar trends in the craft of historians of the colonial South. The early phase (before 1920s) is characterised as the age of emergence of historiography as a part of national historiography. The first generation of South Indian historians though expressed resentment at the inadequate representation of south India in the imperial and national

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72 G.S. Dikshit, Presidential Address, SIHC proceedings, 15th annual Session, Berhampur, 1995, pp.21-34.
historiography "attempted to uphold Indian identity and honour of the nation."\(^7\) The post colonial historians assert that a broad framework of history in the colonial South was not acceptable. It is pointed out that though several historical texts were titled after South India, "South India and Deccan meant to each of the zonal historians nothing more than his own linguistic area."\(^7\) Of course a few texts were recognised as exemptions: *Economic conditions of South India* (A. Appadourai, 1936) *South India and Her Muhammeden Invaders* (S Krishnaswami Aiyangar, 1921). It is pointed out that the first comprehensive history of peninsular India from the pre-history to the fall of the *Vijayanagara* appeared only in Independent India (A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 1955).

What is problematic for the post independent historians with the texts mentioned earlier is

a) The former centre around the regions which often appear as 'core' in political histories of the colonial south.

b) Though S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar repeatedly defined South India as the regions south of the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers, his studies were confined to the Madras Province. His titles (*Some Contributions of South India to Indian Culture* (1923) *Ancient India And South Indian History and Culture* (1941) are more concerned with the geographical extent of the Tamil South and thus the contents of did not justify the titles.

\(^7\) Ashok Settar, N. Subramanians, *Studies in South Indian History: A Historiographic Critique in the proceedings of SIHC*. 12\textsuperscript{th} session, Dharwad, 1992, p.126.
\(^7\) *Op. cit* p.129.
It was observed that the dilemma of historiography of South India was “whether or not to fall into Pan Indian Social frame work of the varma, jati, asramas, family, marriage and womanhood.” This became evident in the second phase of south Indian historiography. This second phase is “characterised by an extremely narrow vision of political history. The regional histories are rated as consisting of the factual details of political history. The frontiers of south Indian as envisaged in the historical texts are found to be shrinking. It is pointed out that the pages devoted to the historical account of minor dynasties outside the orbit of Kaveri delta are scanty. “From the Satavahanas to the Hoysalas with the Sangam age, the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Pandyas occupying the centre stage and the other dynasties pushed to the side wings.” The sentimental attachment to Tamilakam in the subsequent historical texts was on the pretext that “a definitive history of India can be thought of only when the histories of its regions have been written exhaustively.” It is pointed out as an extension of the justification for regional history put forward by the historians of Bengal, Maharashtra and other regions. The claim “as regional histories are written by the local people whose competence to write them includes their belonging to the local ethos and so have insights not easily gained by outsiders” is dispensed away as biased interpretation of history.

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76 S. Settar, Some Aspects of South Indian Historiography SIHC Proceedings, 18th Annual Session, Pune, 1988, p. 147.
77 T. N. Subramaniam, History of Tamilnad to 1565 A.D., Madurai 1914, p. 3.
79 T. N. Subramaniam, History of Tamilnad to 1336, Madurai, 1972.
The causes for this trend are attributed to the poor linguistic skills of the second generation of historians who were also not used to the meticulous efforts of the first generation of historians. The second generation of historians are rated as “lacking competence even in own region and also not sure of the sources at hand.” This is regarded “as a by product of the swelling tide of regional sub-national sentiments in Free India which has percolated in to academic circles.”\(^{81}\) It is pointed out that the pioneer historians only aspired to search political and cultural roots of the people of their own regions that reared them”.\(^ {82}\) It was also admitted that later on “regional enthusiasm and language chauvinism became determinants” in south Indian historiography.\(^ {83}\) Similarly, the emergence of monographs is attributed to the general trend which existed during this period. *The Rastrakutas And their Times* (A.S. Attekar 1934) *Gangas of Talakad* (M.V. Krishna Rao 1936) the studies of Vijayanagar empire are regarded as factors which fascinated the historians of South of India.\(^ {84}\) One of the drawbacks of south of India it was felt that the indigenous historians had little concern “to look at the recent background of their regions.”\(^ {85}\) Hence it was observed that researchers who explored the colonial period were the scholars from America and England.\(^ {86}\)

\(^ {82}\) Dr. S. Kadhivel sectional President’s address, *SIHC Proceedings*, XVIII Annual session, Kalady, 1988, p. 110.
To conclude, the absence of interdisciplinary approach, the absence of integrated study attributed to colonial historiography should be viewed as not the shortcomings of historians but they were limits beyond the control of historians as these analytical tools were contributions of modern epistemology. It is found that “in conventional Tamilian historiography the absence of theorizing, conceptualisation analytical framework are regarded as drawbacks. The recently developed techniques of textual criticism such as the post structuralism were unknown to them. The application of interdisciplinary approach and the recent developments in archaeology anthropology and sociology were also absent.” It is impossible for any historian to examine all the sources as there are additions to new sources and new perspectives emerge. Thus as a human being the historian can not transcend over the epistemological shifts from time to time. As any other human being the historian also is subjected to the constraints of “being in the world.” One significant point of difference of colonial historiography from the post colonial historiography is that the texts in the colonial period did not aspire to be the last word. They were intended to be texts more for general readers. They wanted to instil values, models of states from the West. They attempted to remind the present generations of the missing faces of ancient heroes and the bygone golden ages.

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