

## **Social History of Perungulam in Thoothukudi District**

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### **Abstract**

The term "Perunkulam" denotes big pond. Perunkulam is situated on the southern bank of big pond. That is why it is called as Perunkulam. Perunkulam is one of the reputed Mukthi shetras to reach the abode of lord Siva. Perunkulam is situated (18) Eighteen k.m from Srivaikuntam on the Northern bank of river Thamiraparani in a size of 20.48 sq.km. Perunkulam was one of the revenue divisions created by the British Governor. The village administration of Perunkulam is governed by the village administrative officer. Major portions of the population of Perunkulam consists of the Brahmins, the Vellalars, the Maravars, the Yadavas, the Kammalas, the Pallas, the Parayas and the Chakkiliyas. The other caste people are living in limited numbers. This paper Social History of Perungulam.

### **Introduction**

The Perunkulam region sustained and nurtured an ancient civilization. The archaeological excavations conducted at Adichanallur, Srivaikuntam and Kongaraya Kurichi assessed that there have been Pre historic Dravidian settlements in this region. The golden worth closers and the cock symbol on the Trident discovered in Adichallur burial urns, closely resemble the Mohenjadaros symbols and might be relics of early Murugan Cult.

Major portions of the population of Perunkulam consists of the Brahmins, the Vellalars, the Maravars, the Yadavas, the Kammalas, the Pallas, the Parayas and the Chakkiliyas. The other caste people are living in limited numbers.

### **The Brahmins**

The Brahmins are of high caste people in the social set up. Their place of inhabitations were known as Agraharam. They are known as Iyers, Iyengars and Pattars who are temple priests. Pattars do puja to Saivatic temple and Iyengars doing pujas in Vaisnava temple and are known as Pattacharis.

They reside close to the temples in the Street opposite to the valuthiswarar temple on both side of North and South, East car street and West car streets.

The Iyngars live around the Mayakoothar Temple. The Vaishnavities used to go the area of Saivites during the Tamil month of Markazhi. Generally the Brahmin of Perunkulam have spacious houses with considerable ground left behind as backyard. They never allowed dogs and fowls to enter their houses.

### **The Vellalas**

The Vellalas occupied the second position. They hesitate, in granting liberty and equality to the downtrodden section of society. By race the Vellalas were Dravidians. The holders of big estates formed the mobility and were called Vellalas (lords of the flood) expressive of their skill in controlling flood and storing water for agricultural purposes. The Pandya, Chola and Chera kings belonged to this class. Vellalas are from poor families who became cultivate peasants were called Veerakudi Vellalars cultivators from fallen ruined families.

In Perunkulam, Vellalars are rich land owning class. They were agriculturists and Saivitas . They were Pandya Vellalas who enjoyed high political influence and held the post of village accounts, kanakkan and village munsif. Indeed there are a number of subsects among the Vellalas namely Saiva Vellalas, Namathari Pillaimar and Kottamar.

The Vellalas perform worship in their houses and study the writings of the Tamil Saiva saints (Tinamurai) as Brahmins read Vedas. In their marriages the Vellalas employ gurukkal of their own caste and not the Brahmins. They reside at Pillaimar west street, west car street, south car street and east street.

### **The Kottamars**

By caste, the Kottamars were the brick layers. They were the traditional servants of Kottai Vellalas of Srivaikundam. Kottamars followed their masters from the original homeland of the latter. They reside at the eastern end of the Sannathi Street. They respected the rulings of their master and were paid. They performed the menial duties. At the funeral they took out dead bodies to the burning ghat. Because of the court verdict, in 1839, Kottamar shifted their residence outside the Srivaikundam mud forts. Then they spread to many villages of erstwhile Tirunelveli district including Perunkulam. The Namathari Vellalas reside in middle Street.

## **Devadasi**

Dance is also a kind of fine arts most popular from the age of Sangam in Tamil Nadu. In the Post Sangam age dance became a classical one. But art of dance as a classical one among the minds of the Tamils became familiar from the days of the Pallavas. The institution of Devadasi began during the Pallava period and reached its zenith under the Imperial Cholas. The concept of Natyasastra by Bharathamuni is portrayed in a manner of Panels on the Vimana of Tanjore Temple by Rajaraja and Nataraja temple at Chidambaram by Vijayanagar rulers. Eventhough dance is familiar in Tamil Nadu, the basic concept of Bharatha Natya perhaps be migrated from North to Tamil country. Kathakali, the traditional dance of Kerala is performed even today in the southern tip of Tamil Nadu. Bhagavathamela, a kind of dance, of course, migrated from Andra is enacted even today at Milattur a village in Thanjavur district. All the above evidences prove that dance is also drifting in nature.

Devadasi System is also existed in Perunkulam. Thiruvalluvar temple at early Pandya and Chola period, served as the evidence of that system prevailed there. Hindu revivalism and royal patronage contributed to this trend. Besides worship and ceremonies Devadasi took keen interest in the promotion of music, dance drama and learning. Young and attractive woman were requisitioned to make the functions colourful, to raise funds in support of worship and help the priests. In response there began the practice of nominating girls for service to gods in temple to as making endowments in land and jewels.

In the 28th regional year 1218 AD of Kulasekara I period Nakkan Aludaiyal alias Rupasundari Talikkoli received tenancy rights of Devadana lands in Iluppaikudi from the Devakammis of Tiruvalluvisvaram Udiyar Temple.

In the 4th regional year of Sundra-Chola-Pandya JSt 1220 A.D, Nakkan Ulagudaiyal alias Devaga Sundara Talikkoli granted sheep for twilight lamp before image of the deity set up in the temple by Nakkan pillaiyalvi alias Nanadesi Talikkoliyar, another Padiyilar of the temple.

In subsequent period as the Hindu power went out Muslim and Christians occupied their place, endowments to temples declined. Prostitution became the source of income and all devadasis were considered as prostitutes. On 7.3.1901 Perina, a devadasi of Tiruvalluvisvarar temple escaped from there and got assylum in Christian church at Panaivilai. Paster Rev.Walker and Amy Carmicheal saved her life. Amy Carmicheal started a home for escaped devadasis at Donavor. In 1922 the

Panagal ministry abolished the Devadasis System in Madras Presidency. By this way Devadasi System was also abolished in Tiruvaludisvarar temple at Perunkulam.

### **The Maravas**

Another important caste living in Perunkulam is the Maravas. They are considered as the sub caste of Tevars. In the past they were the Warrior class. They occupied the social status next below the Vellalas. They are meat eaters and exchange hospitality with Idayans. They are wearing the sacred ashes of Siva and professing to be adherents of Vishnu.

The Maravas engaged themselves in the Kaval duties of the temples at Perunkulam and in the nearest villages. Maravas reside in Maravar Street. Their settlements in Perunkulam has increased recently. The Yadavas community is also an important caste group upto 1935. They were called as Idayans or Konars. The Yadavas of Perunkulam considered Perunkulam as their homeland. By their profession they are cattle rears. They sell milk, curd, butter and ghee. They are peace loving people and follow the rituals of Vishnava sect. In Perunkulam they are living in the Yadava street.

### **The Kammalars**

The Kammalars in general occupy a position similar to that of the Yadavas, Maravas etc. The communities maintain friendly relations and consider themselves as equal. Yet in the recent past the Kammalas comprised of the sections namely the goldsmith, the brasssmith, the blacksmith, the carpenter and the stone archy. They wear the sacred thread and many of them observe the regular thread investiture ceremony like Brahmins. Both men and woman of this caste wear cloth in style of Saivite Brahmins. Many of them are strict vegetarians. They take place in pursuing the customs and manners of Brahmins. New vegetarians among them are increasing now. They suffer much economically except the goldsmith.

### **The Depressed Class**

The important branches among the depressed classes are Pallas, Valluvas, Chackkilayas etc. They form a considerable portion of the society of Perunkulam. In the past they were educationally, economically and socially backward. The Adidraavidars are sewing, agricultural labourers and as coolies of various purposes. As they are tillers of the soil till now, they have been engaged by the Vellalas and Brahmins for their land cultivations.

The condition of the Chakkaliyas or Arunthathiyars is entirely different from the Adidraavidas. They are serving as scavengers and sweepers in the local administrative offices and government and

private hospitals. They speak Telugu and mixed Tamil. They are very low in the economic and social standards than the Adidravidas. They have no property.

The other important minority people living in Perunkulam area are the Ambatters, the Barbars, the Dhobies, the Kuyavars, the Pandarams and the Kaniyans. The Ambatters are also known as Muruthuvars. They attend the maternity cases in village sides and even in the orthodox families of Perunkulam. They used to take care of bathing children for certain matters. The Barbers are engaged in the funeral functions of the Hindus.

The Dhobis (vannans) wash dirty clothes. The Pandarams are the temple servants who assist the Brahmins in decorating the deities. They decorate the deities by making garlands of flower. They pick up or pluck flowers in the temples gardens (Nandavanams) and other gardens. They are living at the end of the Mutharamman Koil Street. The Kaniyans are the folk musical players and dancers. They play musical instruments by telling stories of the village deities. They have been living in thatched houses without any facilities. Originally till 1937 depressed class people were not allowed to enter in to Hindu temples.

## **Conclusion**

The Perunkulam locale is occupied by different networks, as Vellalas, Iyer, Aiyengars, Yadavas, Maravas, and Artician Calsses. The Brahmins are of high caste people in the social set up. Their place of inhabitations were known as Agraharam. In Perunkulam, Vellalars are rich land owning class. They were agriculturists and Saivitas. Devadasi System is also existed in Perunkulam. Another important caste living in Perunkulam is the Maravas. They are considered as the sub caste of Tevars. The Kammalers in general occupy a position similar to that of the Yadavas, Maravas etc. The important branches among the depressed classes are Pallas, Valluvas, Chackkilayas etc. They form a considerable portion of the society of Perunkulam.

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