

# **The Occupational Caste Groups and the English East India Company in Madras, 1640 - 1720 A.D.**

**Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
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**Master of Philosophy**



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2005**

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Date: 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2005

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation titled “ **The Occupational Caste Groups and the English East India Company in Madras, 1640-1720 A.D.**” submitted by **Vikram Harijan** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is his original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this University or any other university.

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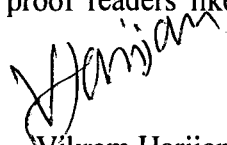
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## Glossary and abbreviations

Bahar	unit of weight usually 400 pounds
Betilla	a muslin woven in the Coromandel
Candy	a unit of weight usually 500 pounds
Cash (kasu)	copper coin, 80 cash=1 fanam.
Choultry	in Madras a public building or resting place, from Tamil <i>chavadi</i>
Corge	a score (20 pieces)
Dubash	lit. Interpreter; in the Coromandel: local merchant who were agents and man of affairs for the European.
Fanam (panam)	a gold coin, 36 fanam=1 pagoda (in madras until the 1750)
Garce	grace, in Eng; volumetric measures 400 marakal=1 karisai
Pagoda (varahan)	a gold coin worth 9 shillings or 3.5 rupees or 4.2-4.5 guilders
Shroff	money changer
Talaiyari	a head watchman
Tashrif	presents given on ceremonial occasions
Company	English East India company
IESHR	Indian Economic and Social Historical Review
MAS	Modern Asian Studies
AES	Asian Educational Services

## Maps

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# Introduction

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The study of the occupational caste groups and their activities in India in the early modern phase is an important theme of study. It is equally difficult to state with exactitude about the occupational caste groups because of this complexity and their changing states especially in South India. To define 'occupational caste groups' is problematic. Generally, Sudras, untouchables, artisans, different caste groups (Left and Right Hand), who were engaged in different factories, agriculture fields as a laborers, workers, slaves, servants, etc., on the basis of their accumulated hereditary works or different occupations or set by the society, may called 'occupational caste group'. However, these occupational caste groups competed to get the 'noble' and 'clean' professions. As such with this process, the occupational caste groups gradually gained new identity in course of time. This work intend to study the occupational caste groups, their activities and functions, their relationship with the English Company and conflicts between the left and right hand castes in Madras in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## **The English Company in Madras**

The English East India Company was an organization founded to engage in commercial enterprise. Basically, they were merchants inspired by the Portuguese and the Dutch. As such like the latter two nations the English also wanted to share in the riches of the Indian trade. This very motive had brought them, at last, in the Indian Ocean especially for cottons textiles and generally for spices, jewels, perfumed, rice and other profitable



commodities.<sup>1</sup> By getting a grant from Venkatappa, the Naik of Chingleput, who controlled the Coromandel Coast from Pulicat to San Thome, Mr. Francis Day and Mr. Cogan (both of whom became Governor of Madras in later times), got an offer to erect a Fort at Madras in 1639.<sup>2</sup> The English Company thereafter settled near the old village of Chinnapatnam and constructed the Fort St. George in 1640. Fort St. George later became the residence of their President and Council which controlled all the trades of Bay of Bengal and the south East Asian Countries.<sup>3</sup> Along with this grant, the English company had also got free custom duties on their imports and exports in the port town. They were allowed to exercise extra territorial power in Madras.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the English Company since the beginning of their settlement in the town played significant roles in the trade and commerce of the region.

My study and particularly the third chapter deals with the commercial relations between the occupational castes and the English Company. It shows how they were dependent upon each other for the growth of trade and commerce in Madras. Of course, there was also tension between the two as both tried to bargain from the other for their vested commercial and financial interests. The English Company gave them new economic opportunities, without which these caste groups would never have got the chance to become rich. However, at the same time the Company was not in a position to conduct its commerce without the help and support of the local caste groups. For instance, due to the new opportunities provided by the Company many sudras and untouchable caste group could get opportunities to develop their economic conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Talboys Wheelers, *Madras in the Olden Time*, in 3 volumes complete in one, AES, New Delhi, Madras, 1993, pp.1-4.

<sup>2</sup> H.A. Newall, *Madras: the birth places of British India*, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol.I, pp.17-18.

Through these opportunities, these occupational groups became more focused on professional matters such as the question of wage labour and salaries. They lived in a milieu which was free from the sharper prejudice in a traditional Indian town, and got close to the English Company and the dominant upper caste groups. This closeness gave them occupational mobility in the town.

Regarding the English Company my fourth chapter deals with their involvement in caste riots and disputes. The Company although called it as 'foolish' and 'madness,'<sup>5</sup> but to secure their commercial interest, they got involved in the ensuing disputes. As the ruler of Madras, they tried to stop the riots as soon as possible and therefore they gave orders to the caste groups not to cross the limits set by the government. Various instances and example show that the English Company tried all means to stop caste conflicts. Therefore, the role of the Company for the growth and development of Madras become very important during our period of study.

### **The Geographical settings of Madras**

Thomas Bowrey<sup>6</sup> mentions its climatic conditions and its situation in the following words.<sup>7</sup> "The beginning of my residence, or first part of my arrival was at Fort St. George,<sup>8</sup> an English Garrison upon the coast of Coromandel. This coast begineth at Nagapatnam, formerly a place subject to the kinge of Portugal, but some years since taken from them by the Dutch, who now possess it with great force and splendor. It extendeth itselpe to point Goodaware, on the south side of the bay Corango, which by

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<sup>5</sup> Foster, *English Factories in India, 1651-1654*, p.155.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries round the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679*, edited by R.C.Temple, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.2.

computation is in length 400 English miles, containe many great and eminent places of traffic and commerce. This Fort and Towne which is very considerable, is scituated very near the sea. This Fort legeth in latitude North 13'-10", and is not at any time very cold or on the contrary very hot, havinge the full benefit of all sea breezes of wind, but in these following months, May and June, although there be for the most part fresh Gales, yet is something sulphurous, which may most of all be alleged to the heat of the sun. It blowinge then for the most part at west and N. West, beinge hot and dry winds. The coldest season of the yeare is September, October, and November, yet not much colder then the middle of summer is in England, but affordeth raine in great abundance. But, in line, it is a very healthy and moderate climate, much exceedinge many places both in India and South Seas, and consisteth of as great traffick both by sea and land as any one place or more upon all this coast."<sup>9</sup>

Madras city was said to be a sandy place.<sup>10</sup> The mouth of the river, which run through Madras opened into the sea. Fryer says that he landed wet but the sand was scalding hot, which made him recollect his steps.<sup>11</sup> Despite the country being sandy, he commented that there were good gardens where pottage, stews, herbs for salad and some few flowers as jasmine for beauty and delight; flourish pleasant tops of plantains, cocoes, gavava, a kind of pear, jawks, mangoes, bananas, beetle, cane, green nuts and so on.<sup>12</sup>

Again, the outskirts of Madras were embellished with many gardens and fields. It had a river which gave freshness to the air by following in many canals and small channels through the large wood, round the village and in the neighbouring country,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.2-5.

<sup>10</sup> John Fryer, *Travels in India in the 17th Century*, Asian Education Services, New Delhi, Madras, 1993, p.197.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.191.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.195-196.

which had many palm trees and little woods, which round several villages. Here an infinite number of little streams which came through sea or river.<sup>13</sup> Manucci<sup>14</sup> also points out that Madras was a sandy city but after some time, it becomes very famous.<sup>15</sup>

Francois Martin, a French employee stayed in Madras and described the environments as he crossed the river Kunimedu. During the rainy season river produced immense water. There were several small towns such as Alamporwa, Chingour, village Patenour, village Tirupaloor, village Valachery and so on. There were fruit bearing trees all along the roads. The most common among these were coconut trees and species of palm which yielded a substance called *Toddy* which was sugar-like substance. There were also many sugar yielding palm trees. The countryside was full of these and other fruit bearing trees.<sup>16</sup>

Speaking about the climatic conditions of Madras, all records of Fort St. George diary and consultation books referred rain, storm, and sea encroachment to the town. For instance in 1682 the record mentioned that: "The sea having for about 10 days past incroacht upon this (town) and wee hoping as it is usuall that it would retreat again of itself forbore any remedys to keep it off ...."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Governor had ordered to workers to work day and night to save the Fort.<sup>18</sup> As for the severe rainfall, the Records said that: "having this fornoone viewed the mudd points and walls about the black towne made by the late President Yule, they appeare to be so worne ruined, and wasted away by

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<sup>13</sup> *The travels of Abbe Carre in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674*, vol. II, AES, new Delhi, Madras, 1990, p.376.

<sup>14</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storio do Magor*, edited by William Irvine, Oriental Book Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1981, Vol.III.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>16</sup> *Memoirs of Francois Martin, 1674-1681, India in the 17th Century*, Edited by Lotika Varadarajan, Manohar, 1983, Vol.I, Part 2, pp.736-740.

<sup>17</sup> *St. Fort George Records, Dairy and Consultations Books of 1682*, p.14. Hereafter referred to as *Diary and Consultations*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

the raines...”<sup>19</sup> Therefore we found that, Monsoon was unpredictable as wind did not come according to season. But it was true that storm, high seas and floods of rain did made the changes from one monsoon to another and which on the Coromandel coast lasted from about the middle of October to the middle of December.<sup>20</sup>

Abbe Carre mentioned that Madras had a pleasant river which name was probably Cooum. This pleasant river watered the walls of Madras. The river was passing between Fort St. George and the Island called formerly as the Elambore. It was flowing parallel to the fort along the West side of the city.<sup>21</sup> Francois Martin also referred another river near Madras. He says river Kunimedu was dangerous in rainy seasons. Further, the river bed was very flat as a result of which the surrounding countryside was flooded during the rainy season.<sup>22</sup> Records also mentioned that “Our River” broke and blown beyond recovery during rainy season<sup>23</sup> but it was almost completely dry during the summer time.<sup>24</sup> S.Arasaratnam points out that the Cooum river flowed into the sea which was so near the Fort. He said in most of the year it was useless. Not only this, it did not serve any useful for commercial purpose.<sup>25</sup>

### **Population of Madras**

In its origin, it was just a sandy beach but through the effort of the English Government and giving to the freedom of all merchants of all nations, it became very well populated

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<sup>19</sup> *Dairy and Consultations*, 1693, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> H.D.Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, AES, New Delhi, 1996, Vol.III, p.558.

<sup>21</sup> *The travels of Abbe Carre*, vol.II, p.448n. In 1802, it was converted into Cochrane’s canal, now forming part of the Buckingham canal.

<sup>22</sup> *Memoirs of Francois Martin*, Vol.I, part 2, p.736.

<sup>23</sup> *Dairy and Consultations*, 1684, pp.131-132.

<sup>24</sup> *Memoirs of Francois Martin*, Vol.I, part 2, p.737.

<sup>25</sup> S.Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p.21.

town.<sup>26</sup> During the time of Thomas Bowrey, who lived in Madras in the 1670s, Madras was said to have been very populous, inhabited by the English, Portuguese, merchants who paid customs; servants and soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Fryer informed us that the different races who were staying in Masulipatnam were the same people staying in the Madras.<sup>28</sup> That means, the Moors, Persians, Gentiles, Sojourners, Armenians, Portuguese, Dutch, English and some French who were staying in Masulipatnam, were also staying in Madras.<sup>29</sup> Fryer also had given number of people: English were probably 3000, Portuguese 1000, and so on.<sup>30</sup> He also pointed out that there were many distinguished tribes by there occupations such as goldsmiths, carpenters, refiners, etc.<sup>31</sup>

### **Scope of the study**

This work intends to study the occupational caste groups, their mercantile activities, and their relationship with the English Company in Madras during 1640-1720. The period chosen was especially important as most of the occupational caste groups' activities were seen to be well documented. Also that the growth of Madras town from its humble beginning in 1639 came to attained a full fledged commercial port towns by 1720. So one can see the transformation of the city all along, with changes in the social and political outlook of the people within this period. The work covers four important facets of changes in Madras such as the occupational caste groups; the rise of Madras; the

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<sup>26</sup> Manucci, *Storio do Magor*, vol.III, p.92.

<sup>27</sup> Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries round the Bay of Bengal*, pp.3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Fryer, *Travels in India*, p.196.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.175-176. H.D.Love computed the numbers of persons staying in Madras from different sources as 7000 in 1639; 19,00 in 1646; 15,000 in 1648, 40,000 in 1670; 33,300 in 1673; 50,000 in 1674, 200,000 in 1681; 300,000 in 1685; 400,000 in 1691; 100,000 in 1715 and 80,000 in 1720. See, Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol. III, p.557.

relationship between the occupational caste groups and the English Company; and lastly I look into caste conflicts. These chapters were taken to give the holistic understanding of caste, commerce and culture in the port town of Madras.

In chapter one definitions of occupational caste groups were taken up. This is very problematic as several records are commonly agreed that sudras in which various artisan castes, untouchable castes and some merchant groups were corresponds to the occupational caste groups. The right hand caste (valangai) and the left hand caste (idangai) were also referred to as the occupational castes. This chapter examine the definitional terms 'caste' in relation to occupations and most importantly to the occupational mobility. Different authors used the term "caste mobility". I, however, understand that there was no such 'caste mobility' because caste remains static and stagnant while occupation is like a class which has been changing throughout the history. Therefore, I use the term "caste occupational mobility". Regarding this controversies, the first chapter also explores the relationship between occupation and power. The occupation decides what you are and what your positions in the society. Through occupation, one can change the power equation. The first chapter signified the role of occupations and power, the power-relation corresponds to all four chapters by various instances and examples.

Chapter two looks into the numbers of occupational caste groups, their functions and outlooks. It gives the broader understanding about their social status and economic position in society.

Chapter three deals with the commercial activities of the occupational caste groups in Madras. These groups played a very important role in commerce and were

indispensable for the English Company. The new economic policy of the Company gave new impetus to the caste groups. The Komatis, Chettis and Weavers communities' role was very significant. Even artisan groups and services or skilled and unskilled labourer played important roles in the Company's trade. Untouchable groups were also engaging in the Company's services. More importantly, many castes were leaving their traditional caste occupations and took up for various other works available in the town. For instance watchmen, washermen, barbers, some Komatis, Chettis were adopting the weaving jobs and so on. Not only this, they were engaged in textiles, shipping, as sea-labourers and so on. Therefore, my third chapter deals the commercial aspects of the occupational caste groups and their relationships with the Company.

Chapter four deals with various instances of caste conflicts in Madras between the left hand and right hand castes. Pertaining to the caste conflicts, disputes and riots, the occupational caste groups played tremendous roles and disturb the peaceful situations of the town. There were four major riots at Madras which were in 1651-52; 1707-1708; 1716-1717 and in 1720. This chapter also deals with the origin of the left-right hand caste their numerical strength and differences between the right-left castes and also controversies regarding their origin and identity. It also deals that what were the responsible causes for the riots.

### **Sources**

For the primary source materials, I relied mainly on the English factory records, reports, census, diaries, travelogues and some missionary's accounts. Especially I have mainly



relied on the Fort St. George Records located in the DSA Library, JNU, which are listed here under:

*Dispatches: from England: 1670-1677 to 1711-17 (11 vols) and*

*to England: 1701-01 to 1710-1711 (1 vol) and 1722-1714 to 1727 (3 vols).*

*Diaries and Consultation Books: 1672-78 to 1720 (41 vols.).*

*Letters from Fort St. George: 1689-1711 (11 vols).*

*Letters to Fort St. George: 1681-82 to 1719 (14 vols.).*

Especially the Diary and Consultation books are tremendously helpful for my work as most of the activities of the occupational caste groups and the minutes of the Council of the company are included in it. Apart from that, the daily activities of the Company's servants, merchants, the various caste groups who are working for the company were documented. These records pertaining to the Caste disputes, riots and other skirmishes in the town of Madras are documented very thoroughly. As such, the Diary and Consultations along with the dispatches and letters formed the bulks of the primary sources for this work.

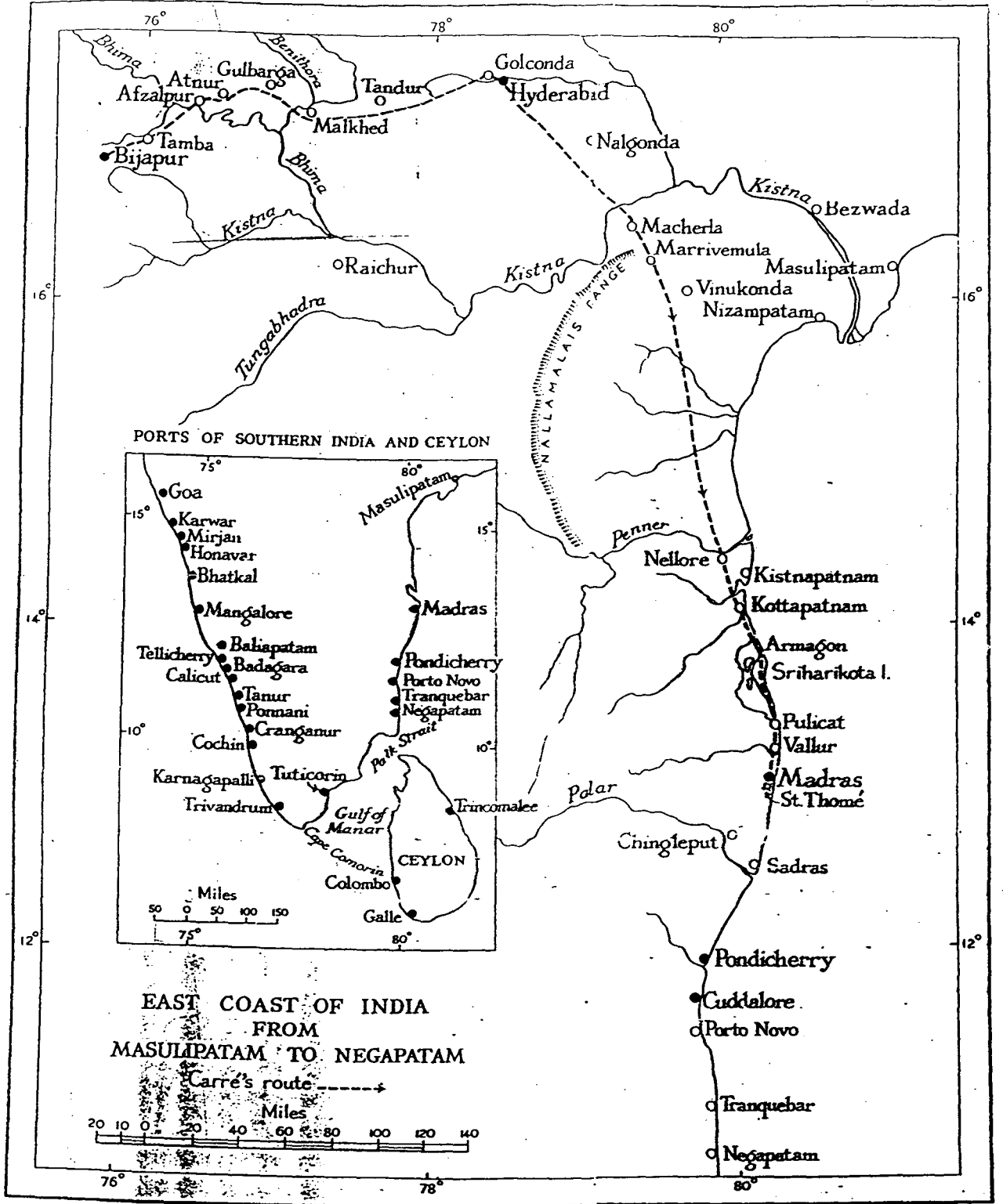
Further, Charles Fawcett edited, *English Factories in India* (I Vol. 1670–1677 & II Vol. 1678–1784), Oxford, 1936 & 1954, and William Foster edited, *English Factories in India, 1618–1669* (13 vols.), Oxford, 1906-1927, are extremely valuable for constructing the history of this period. Especially the record of 1651-54 is very useful for understanding the occupational caste groups and the riots in Madras.

Besides, extensive use has been made of many of the travelogues such as Abbe Carre, Bowrey, Manucci, Tavernier, Martin, Barbosa, Peter Floris, Peter Mundy and Buchanan. The accounts of these travelers are indispensable and extremely useful for understanding the occupational caste groups in Madras. Although they give different numbers of caste groups the fact that these travelers did give extensively of their activities provides good sources understanding about the caste groups. For instance, Bowrey talks about the functions of the various caste groups and pointed that caste occupational were limited to their traditional occupations. He had given that various caste groups had come for the shipping industries. Likewise, Buchanan had also given the numbers of caste inhabiting in the region and talks about at great length on the left and right hand castes with their functions and their positions in the society. He also recorded the conflicts of the various caste groups. Further, Abbe Carre mentioned about Kasi Virona and their flourishing trade in Madras and the Coromandel Coast. Likewise, most of these travelers had the accounts of the caste groups in Madras in one form or the other.

Regarding diaries, *Sir William Hedges Diary* and *Sir Strynsham Master Diary* are very helpful. William Hedges has written about the right and left hand divisions, the riots, and other conflicts in Madras and gave the reasons behind on the conflicts where he attributes religion. Master had also mentioned about his initiative on the Joint-stock company with the merchants of Madras and because of this, the merchants of Madras protest this. On the personal narratives, the work of Elijah Hoole *A mission to those Countries* is used. Hoole give the descriptions of the plankeen and plankeen bearer, thecatamaran caste, etc. The *Census Reports of 1871* is also very informative for the various caste groups in Madras. Apart from these, *Gazetteer of South India* is consulted.

The *Private letter books of Joseph Collet* had inform about the right and left hand riots of 1716-1717, which he found it to be very dangerous.

Besides, the edited works of H.D.Love, *Vestiges of old Madras* and J.T.Wheelers, *Madras in Olden Days* are very informative for many of the original documents which are not available at my disposal. The fact that they cited many of the original records, sometime with the full length, remains a good source for the occupational caste groups and other activities of the town under various Governors.



## Caste in Coromandel Coast

### Castes and Social groupings in Early European Travel Accounts

The word “caste” is derived from ‘chaste’ (Masc. casto), which refers to mean ‘lineage’. Thus, Sayyids were termed by them ‘Mouros da casta de Mafamede’. It could equally be used interchangeably with ‘raca’ (race). With *nacao* (nation: significantly derivative from the verb *nascar*-(to be born), it could even mean religious denomination (*gentio, mouro, etc.*).<sup>1</sup> ‘Casta’ also means ‘not to mix’.<sup>2</sup> The word ‘casta’ is first made known to us by the Portuguese and described by them as signifying ‘breed’ and ‘race’.<sup>3</sup> The Portuguese also used ‘castez,’ which mean the children of the Portuguese.<sup>4</sup> Both boys and girls who were born in India were called ‘castizos’ or ‘castees’.<sup>5</sup> However, the Portuguese accounts used the above terms throughout in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

In English, there was use of the term ‘cast’ in the sense of race in 1555.<sup>7</sup> In early seventeenth century, English writers such as William Methwold used ‘tribes or lineages’ in the sense of caste, and in South Eastern India he divided them into ‘Bramene’ ‘Fangam’ (Jangama?), ‘Commity’ (Komatti), ‘Campo Waro (in Telegu: Kapu Waru, transformed here into the Paortuguese Cammo which mean ‘field’ to underline their agriculturist leanings), ‘Boga Waro (the whoores Tribe), the smiths and ‘all other

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<sup>1</sup> Subrahmanyam, S., *The Political Economy of Commerce in Southern India, 1500-1650*, CUP, Cambridge, 1990, p.328.

<sup>2</sup> Dumont, Louis, *Homo Heirarchicus: the Caste and its Implication*, OUP, 2004, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Yule, Col. Henry and Burnell. A.C., *Hobson-Jobson*, new edition by William Crooke, London, 1903, pp.171-172.

<sup>4</sup> *Fort St. George: Diary and Consultation Book, 1684*, Edited by Arthur T.Pringle, Vol.III, Government Press, Madras, 1895, p.188. (Hereafter *Diary and Consultations*).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.188-189.

<sup>6</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, p.328.

<sup>7</sup> Dumont, *Homo Heirarchicus*, p.21.

and 'all other machanike traders'; all forming one 'tribe' and been 'tribes by themselves'.<sup>8</sup> In English, there was for long no distinction between caste and tribe.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, there was a great confusion about the specific use of the term 'caste'. This is a confusing word. It has been used to convey different meanings, connotations and social categories.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, definition of 'caste' is very problematic and confusing.<sup>11</sup> Yet it is very important to define the caste system and to delineate what its features are. In the following pages, we will look into the various facets of the caste system: first as seen by the Early European travellers, and some modern ethnographical studies of the later period.

In the early sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese traveler, visited South India, stayed in the Malabar Coast (Western Coast). He left innumerable accounts of the caste system in the region. He informed us that he met Brahman caste which is the highest caste among the Hindus.<sup>12</sup> They did not consume flesh or fish. They marry once in life.<sup>13</sup> No man may prepare any food for the King except a Brahman or his own kin.<sup>14</sup> He also mentions that he met a low caste, called '*revoleens*'. He neither touched anyone, nor did anyone touch them under pain of death. They went naked, covering only their private parts with scant and filthy rags, the more part of them indeed with leaves of certain trees.<sup>15</sup> He also informed us that there was another caste who live in the fields and open camping, in secret lurking places and also live in huts very strait and mean.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, p.328.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> Dube, SC., *Indian Society*, NBT, India, p.52.

<sup>11</sup> Habib, Irfan, *Caste and Money in Indian History*, PPH, feb. 1992, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Dames, LM., *The Book fo Duarte Barbosa*, AES, new Delhi, 1989, Vol.II, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.37.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

Barbosa had also reported about another caste group called the *Pariahs*, the members of which were even lower than any other groups and constitute the lowest among all. The Pariahs dwelt in the discrete places away from all other castes. They usually did not have social interaction with persons of other castes. They were held to be worse than devils and were to be damned, and even to see them was considered a sin and one can become 'unclean' and 'outcaste'. They ate yams and other roots. They also ate the flesh of wild beasts.<sup>17</sup> However, Barbosa also made difference among them. He points out that each caste was separate and unable to touch the other or marry them.<sup>18</sup> Further, he listed eighteen caste groups, divided into three sections. First was the higher caste in which Brahmans, Nayars, Vyapari or Ravari, Kusavan, Vannathamar and Chaliyan belonged. The second was the lower caste in which Tiyan, Mannan, Kaniyan or Kanisan, Asari, Mukayar or Mukavar, Mukkuvan, Vettuvan, Panan, Eravallen, Tulayan, and Parayan constituted. The third was immigrant castes or foreign castes in which belonged Chetty, Gujarati Banyan, Mappilla and Pardesi or "foreign Muhammadan".<sup>19</sup>

Duarte Barbosa also visited the kingdom of Vijayanagara and wrote that there were "three classes of heathen, each one of which has a very distinct rule of its own, and also their customs, different much from one another."<sup>20</sup> The three classes in which Barbosa divided the Hindus, however, did not correspond to what is the actual caste division. His understanding of the three classes were: first, the King and Nobility;

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.69-70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>20</sup> Dames, *Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.I, p.212.

secondly, the Brahmans; and third, the members of the Lingayat sect, who occupied very important status in some parts of the territory of the Vijayanagara empire.<sup>21</sup>

Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveller who traveled in India in the middle of seventeenth century also reported on the Hindu beliefs, rituals and customs. He also gives the general description of the caste system in India. He pointed out that an 'idolater'<sup>22</sup> did not eat bread, nor drink water in a house belonging to anyone of a different caste from his own, unless it be more noble and more exalted than his, but they could all eat and drink in the house of the Brahmans.<sup>23</sup> According to him the first caste was the Brahman. This caste was the most noble of all because they were priest and minister of law.<sup>24</sup> The second caste was the Rajpoots or Khetris, i.e., warrior and soldiers. He said that they were the only 'idolater' who were brave, and distinguish themselves in the profession of arms.<sup>25</sup> The third caste was that of the Banians who attached themselves to trade, some being *shroff*, i.e., money changers or bankers and other brokers. They never ate anything which disturb their sentiment.<sup>26</sup> The fourth caste was the Sudras who were like the Rajputs but they were very infamous.<sup>27</sup> There was a special caste, called *Halalkhor*. The *Halalkhors* were engaged only in cleaning houses; they made use of asses, to carry sweepings from the house to the fields. The *Halalkhors* also ate pigs and use them for food.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.212.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier observations of the 'idolaters' is one who worships the god of idol (Murti). His indication was towards the Hindu religion.

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, ed. V. Ball, Orient Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi, 1977, Vol. II, p.142.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.142.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.143.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.143-144.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p144.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.145-146.



Abul Faz'l also mentions the name 'caste' as Tavernier noticed. He noted that there were four varnas such as the Brahmans or Priests, the Ksatriyas or warrior, the Vaisyas or merchant and agriculturists and the Sudras or labourers and servants.<sup>29</sup> With the varna, he also noticed their occupation such as Brahman were priests (*Poojari*), the Ksatriyas were the warrior, the Vaisyas were the merchants, and the Sudras the labourers.

Fraçois Bernier, a traveler in the seventeenth century India, also supported the view of Abul Faz'l, but instead of writing as 'caste', he used the term 'tribe'. He pointed out that Hindus were divided into four 'tribe'. First, was the 'tribes' of Brahmans or interpreters of the law. Second, the 'tribe' of Ksatriyas or warrior. Third, was the 'tribe' of Vaisyas or merchant and trademen, commonly called *Banias*. Fourth, the 'tribe' of Sudras, or artisans and labourers. These different 'tribes' were not permitted to intermarry. For instance, a Brahman was forbidden to marry a Ksatriya.<sup>30</sup>

Niccolao Manucci, a native of Vanice, landed in India in the second half of seventeenth century. He reported extensively about the Hindu religion and its divisions. He divided the Hindus into four classes or kinds. Manucci used the term 'classes or kind' instead of caste. He also gave the origin of class or kind. The first class was Brahmin who descended from the Brahma's face. This class was divided into several branches. The second class was Rajahs who were born from the shoulders of the Brahma. It had also several divisions. The third kind was said to be born from the thigh of the said Brahma and these were the merchants or shopkeepers of whom also there were many varieties. The fourth were the Sudras, who were born from the feet of the Brahma. They have many

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<sup>29</sup> Abu'l Fazl, *A'in-i-Akbari*, Calcutta, 1786, Vol.III, pp.82-84.

<sup>30</sup> *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656-1668*, ed. VA.Smith, MMP, 1983, p.325.

were low and infamous. These people live outside the inhabited places and might be called outcastes.<sup>31</sup>

John Francis Gemelli Careri also supported the views of Manucci, Abul Faz'l, Tavernier, and others. He divided the Hindus in the same manner as the above mentioned authors had divided. However, he used term 'sects' or 'tribes'. He notices that Hindu religion was divided into 84 'sects' or 'tribes,' each of which has its particular rites and ceremonials. Careri mentioned the Brahmans (professors of learning), Rajputs (princes), Banians and lots of other sects.<sup>32</sup>

William Hedges also pointed out that Hindus were divided into 'countless' numbers of 'sects' and 'family' or 'tribes'. He put the Rajputs in the first place, whom he thought were the 'ancient princes and gentlemen soldiers'. Second in the hierarchy was the 'Brahmans', who were the priests to all the other sects of the Indians. The third was the 'Banians,' who were, for the most part of their professions, merchants, tradesmen and brokers. The fourth was the 'Gentoos', who were commonly handicraftsmen such as carpenters, smiths, tailors, shoemakers, and seamen. Finally, the fifth group was the *Coolis*, who were the poor country peasants and who were also appointed to 'watch and oversee every village'.<sup>33</sup>

The South Indian society was explicitly divided into Right Hand castes and the Left Hand castes. It was in prevalence for almost nine centuries, roughly from 1000 to 1900 AD.<sup>34</sup> The Right Hand caste (Idangai) had some difference. The right

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<sup>31</sup> Manucci, Niccolao, *Storia do Mogor, 1653-1708*, ed. William Irvine, OBRC, New Delhi, 1981, Vol.III, p.33-35.

<sup>32</sup> Thevenot, *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, ed. S.Sen, New Delhi, 1949, pp.254-258.

<sup>33</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges (1681-1687)*, ed. H.Yule and R.Barlow, London, 1887-1889, Vol.II, p.cccx, cccxi.

<sup>34</sup> Beck, Brenda EF., "The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.29. no.4 (Aug, 1970), p.779-798.

hand castes claimed the prerogatives of riding on horseback in processions, of appearing with standards bearing certain devices, and of erecting pillars to sustain their marriage booths, while Left hand castes were not allowed more than eleven pillars.<sup>35</sup> The Right hand castes understood that they had the exclusive privilege of using twelve pillars in the *pandal* or shed, under which marriage ceremonies were performed; they had right to ride on horseback and to carry a flag painted with the figure of Hanumanta. The Right Hand groups thought that their adversaries (Left Hand groups) had no right to ride on horseback, or to carry a painted flag. The Left Hand castes, on the other hand, claimed that all these privileges were confirmed to them by the grant of Kali on copper plate. Therefore, they were the highest rank group in south India. Because of this claim from both sides, frequent disputes took place among them especially in Madras.<sup>36</sup> Although these groups excluded Brahman or some included Brahman,<sup>37</sup> the Brahman generally were not assigned a place among both the caste groups. Nonetheless, Brahmans were very active and very much a part of the caste system in South Indian.<sup>38</sup>

At Madras, the Brahmans and Rajpoots were very much a part of the caste system as the foregoing European accounts would tell.<sup>39</sup> They also played very significant role in the city. They were employed in the temples as priests and have the opportunity to 'commit the crime of pilfering the property of the deity especially ornaments'. But, of course, the Kshatriyas had a very limited role in Tamil Nadu.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Subrahmanyam, N., *Tamil Social History*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai, 1998, p.153.

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan, Francis, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, London, 1807, Vol.I, pp.77-80.

<sup>37</sup> Appadurai, Arjun, "Right and Left Hand Castes in South India," IESHR, 14.1, 1974, p.218.

<sup>38</sup> Foster, William, *English Factories in India, 1651-1654*, p.237. (Hereafter refer to as EFI).

<sup>39</sup> *Census Report of the Town of Madras, 1871*, p.10.

<sup>40</sup> Subrahmanyam, *Tamil Social History*, Vol.II, pp.143 &147.

Inter-marriage and inter-dinning was prohibited among them.<sup>41</sup> Palalkeel Banian caste also followed taboos in eating and they were usually occupied in carrying their pots for preparing food and in cooking their meals, which consisted chiefly of rice.<sup>42</sup> Each and every caste did not permit to inter-marry and inter-dine in South India.

### Understanding Caste Divisions

During the 17th and 18<sup>th</sup>, century the caste system had gained much currency in South India as it was practised very rigidly although in a different fashion that was in the Northern India. Even now, members of different castes cannot marry each other, except within their specific caste group. Usually they have caste based occupation or hereditary occupation.<sup>43</sup> Dumont noticed that “the caste, unified from the outside, is divided within. More generally a particular caste is a complex groups, a successive inclusion of groups of diverse order of levels, in which different functions (profession, endogamy, etc.) are attached to different levels.”<sup>44</sup>

While discovering the role of caste in the 17th and 18th century it is pertinent to bear in mind the concept as put forward in recent writings by eminent authorities. Dr.Ambedkar has pointed out that “caste divides labourers; caste dissociates work from interests; caste disconnects intelligence from manual labour; caste devitalizes by denying to him the right to cultivate vital interest and caste prevents mobilization”. Caste system is not merely division of labour; it is also a

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.157.

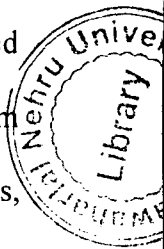
<sup>42</sup> Hoole, Elijah, *Madras, Mysore and the South of India or A Personal Narrative of a Mission to those Countries*, Lonman, London, 1844, pp.47-48.

<sup>43</sup> Habib, *Caste and Money in Indian History*, p.5.

<sup>44</sup> Dumont, Louis, *Homo Heirarchicus, the Caste and its implications*, 1970, OUP, p.34.



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division of labourers”.<sup>45</sup> The 1911 Census gives definition of caste which reads “no member of the caste may intermarry or eat or even share hukka with persons of other caste... the most obvious links are the possession of the same designation and traditional occupation although occupations are often hereditary, they are not always so.”<sup>46</sup> Burton Stein states “caste principles pretend to kinships marriage and occupation....Hierarchy and inequality, a form of segregation and ranking.”<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Dharma Kumar has written that “caste stands in an unchanging relationship to each other; where caste determines its main social and economic roles; where all the rules are interdependent and architectonic whole; where for example, the land provides a livelihood for those playing different parts, the rights and duties of its being strictly defined and none having absolute rights of ownership and possession.”<sup>48</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks says that “when thinking of India it is hard not to think of caste....Caste is in fact neither enchanted survival of ancient India nor a single system that reflects a core cultural value but it is a modern phenomenon.”<sup>49</sup> S. Jaiswal points out that past ideology poses many questions in front of the authorities. Now caste ideology is changing from its *jajmani* type services, endogamy process also changing under the influence of market and further it will modify more.<sup>50</sup> However, such ideas cannot be accepted as such.

Hiroshi Fukazawa reported that all over India there were about 3000 intergamous groups to whom we might call caste. He says that “caste membership is

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<sup>45</sup> Moon Vasant, (ed.), *Dr. Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.67.

<sup>46</sup> *Census of India, 1911*.

<sup>47</sup> Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Delhi, 1994, pp.9-11.

<sup>48</sup> Kumar, Dharma, *Land and Caste in South India*, Manohar, 1992, p.32.

<sup>49</sup> Dirks, B.Nicholas, *Castes of Mind*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> Jaiswal, Suvira, *Caste Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar, 2002, pp.20-21.

fixed by hereditary; each caste is restricted to take certain hereditary occupation the inter-dining and other social contacts between castes are more or less restricted by peculiar ideas of purity and pollution and that there is a hierarchy between the castes in a region with the Brahmin at the top and the untouchables at the bottom”.<sup>51</sup> Ronald Inden has analyzed that ‘Indian civilization was dominated by caste’. Caste affects every area of life. It could be associated with race, occupation, religion, status, land control and psychic security with birth and death, marriage and education. Simultaneously, thought and action are separated from each other. Further, he says that “the Indian people are not the maker of their own history, but a hidden, substantialized agent, caste, is the maker of it.”<sup>52</sup> V.S Naipaul articulated the same view as the “old India has special cruelties; not all the people are people.”<sup>53</sup>

Patrick A. Roche analyzed caste in three different ways. First, caste can be understood in a traditional sense; i.e. as an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of ethnic groups occupying a position superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with such other division. Secondly, caste refers to a categorization peculiar to the Dravidian speaking parts of Southern India except Malabar, namely the growing of caste into two divisions of the Right hand and the Left hand castes. Finally, he refers to the phenomenon of a ‘colour caste’ which was the “white” Europeans and the rest of the local population.<sup>54</sup> For Susan Bayly, caste has been for many centuries real and active in Indian life. It had been most commonly

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<sup>51</sup> Fukazawa, Hiroshi, *The Medieval Deccan, Peasants, Social System and States, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, OUP, 1991, p.91.

<sup>52</sup> Inden, Ronald, “Orientalist Contructions of India,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 20.3 (1986), pp.....

<sup>53</sup> Devnathan (ed.) *From Tribes to Caste*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1997, p.9.

<sup>54</sup> Roche, A. Patrick, “Caste and the British Merchant Government in Madras, 1639-1749,” *IESHR*, Vol.12.4, 1975, p.381n.

understood that caste society is a grading and ranking society. It is divided into four varnas, viz; Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. It had order and hierarchy.<sup>55</sup> Dipankar Gupta defines caste as “a form of differentiation wherein the constituent units of system justify endogamy on the basis of putative biological differences which are semaphored by the ritualization of multiple social practices.”<sup>56</sup> For him caste system is a discrete category. S. Arasaratnam posits that caste was a system of status which could not be de-linked from the question of power.<sup>57</sup>

S.C.Dube examines the features of caste system and points out that:<sup>58</sup>

1. Jatis are endogamous units;
2. they are hierarchically graded;
3. they have a Jati-linked occupation;
4. the purity and pollution ideas determined the interaction between different units;
5. members of Jati generally share a common culture, living condition, life, partner of thought and behaviour. They even share their belief, values, rules of conditions, economic and organization;
6. these values are transmitted from one generation to the next by learning and not by biological inheritance; and

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<sup>55</sup> Bayly, Susan, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. IV:3: *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, CUP, 1999, pp.3-9.

<sup>56</sup> Gupta, Dipankar, “Continuous Hierarchies and Discrete Castes, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 119, 46, 17, Nov, 1984, reprint in idem, *Social Stratification*, (Delhi, 1991), p.137.

<sup>57</sup> Arasaratnam, S., “Social history of Dominant Caste Society: the Vellalar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 18<sup>th</sup> C,” *IESHR*, vol. xviii, no.3.4, 1981, pp.377-391.

<sup>58</sup> Dube, S.C., *Indian Society*, NBT, India, 1990, p.54.

7. in several parts of India, caste have their own mechanism of social control and conflict resolution.

V.N.Misra and Malti Nagar also supported the above views. They point out that “castes are part of complex social system which is primarily, though not entirely, based on occupation. Other distinctive features of the systems are occupational interdependent, hierarchy, endogamy, restriction on sharing of food and drink, concept of purity, pollution, rebirth and karma (social and economic position at present being a consequent of conducting in the previous life) and specific social and religious belief and customs. Each caste in the system has a well defined place in the hierarchical grading, and every member of every caste is aware of his social status within the wide framework of caste society.”<sup>59</sup>

The above definitions of caste give the necessary features of caste system, which points out that caste is necessarily determined by birth and cannot be changed by any means. For instance, a Brahman cannot be a Shudra, and a Shudra cannot be a Kshatriya. However, despite the avowed endogamous nature of the caste system, in reality there were several instances of intermarriage among different caste groups, which were generally through consent. In fact, all caste features of endogamy are not constant but rather dynamic in nature.

### **Caste, the Occupational Caste groups and their Occupation**

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<sup>59</sup> Misra, VN. and Malti Nagar, “From Tribe to Caste: An Ethnoarchaeological Perspective”, in *From Tribe to Caste*, ed. Devnathan, IAS, Shimla, 1997, pp.136-137.



There is a definite relationship of caste with occupation. Ghurye noticed that “caste name are very often names of trade.”<sup>60</sup> Usually, each and every caste have their traditional or hereditary occupation<sup>61</sup> such as, for instance, the Brahmans, who made up the highest rank and monopolized the position of priests and teachers of Vedas. Likewise, the Kshatriyas were a warrior or military class, the Vaisyas were the cultivators, herders, and merchant class and the Sudras were the servant class,<sup>62</sup> while the outcastes or untouchables were associated with some customary or hereditary duties.<sup>63</sup> For instance, the Dhobi, meaning washermen washed clothes of others. This word is said to be derived from *dhoha* in Sanskrit in which *dhav* means to wash.<sup>64</sup> *Chakkans* are oil pressers, *Chakku* means oil-mill. Those who follow this profession are called Chakkan.<sup>65</sup> *Pallicchan*, a sub-division of Nayars, is a group whose hereditary occupation is to carry Palanquin.<sup>66</sup> Paraiyans are drumbeaters. This word is said to be derived from a Tamil word ‘parai’, which means a drum.<sup>67</sup>

There are several occupational caste groups involved in their hereditary occupation such as weavers, cotton carders, barbers, tailors, fishmongers, stoneworker, leather workers, scavengers, blacksmiths, carpenters, gardeners, potters, grass cutters, etc.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, sometime caste occupation changed significantly and therefore it was also hard to recognize the original caste.<sup>69</sup> This

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<sup>60</sup> Ghurye, cited by Dumont in *Homo Heirarchicus*, p.95.

<sup>61</sup> Habib, Irfan, *Caste and Money in Indian History*, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> Kotani, H., (ed.), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar, 1999, p.3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>64</sup> Thurston, Edgar, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, AES, New Delhi, 1993, Vol.II, p.168. (Hereafter Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.vi., p.29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

<sup>68</sup> *Census of 1881*, List V, p.49.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.viii.

view is also supported by V.N. Misra and Malti Nagar that caste occupation is not definite. They argued that one's actual occupation could be different from one's hereditary occupation.<sup>70</sup> For Suvira Jaiswal, occupation is no doubt basic caste system but it is changing under the pressure of the market. Therefore, "caste ideology has gained strength both for political and economic reason, in spite of the fact that there are increasing differentiation of wealth and status of individuals within each caste. Inter-caste relation are now marked by cleavages and conflict replacing the traditional ethos of the community's sense of togetherness in the countryside."<sup>71</sup>

S.C. Dube has argued that notion of noble occupation, clean and unclean, purity and pollution interact into intra and inter-caste behavior and interaction.<sup>72</sup> This argument accepts the changing nature of a dynamic occupation, which gradually is drifting away from tradition. Hocart argued that religion also played a determining role for one's occupation through the intermediary part between caste and profession like barber and washerman. Dumont was not fully convinced with this view, however, supported that there are some religiously natural profession, which are followed by a number of different castes.<sup>73</sup> Francis Buchanan had recorded the contending claims of the Left and Right Hand castes for a superior position in the society. He said that the Left Hand caste groups claimed that they had the sole rights to ride on horseback; right to carry a painted flag, etc. The Left Hand Caste pretended that all these privileges were confirmed to them by the grant

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<sup>70</sup> Devnathan, *From Tribe to Caste*, pp.136-137.

<sup>71</sup> Jaiswal, Suvira, *Caste Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*, Manohar, 2002, p.21.

<sup>72</sup> Dumont, *The Caste and its Implication*, OUP, 1999, p.93.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

India.<sup>74</sup> Rig Vedas legitimized that the top three varnas were the regular members of Aryan society. They were called the *dvijati* or 'twice born' and were allowed to participate in the religious worship presided over by the Brahmanas. Contrarily, the Sudras were segregated from the *dvijati* as *ckajati*.<sup>75</sup> This means that their occupation is also legitimized and this becomes a religious law.

Edgar Thurston gives details of *Kaikolan* caste that were a weaver caste in Tamil Nadu. This *Kaikolans* were a warrior caste as assigned by Lord Shiva. It means that military services was their profession.<sup>76</sup> Mattison Mines support that they were the warrior merchants because of their kingly traditions, which emphasized conquest and human sacrifice and priestly superiority.<sup>77</sup> What he means is that there was a religious rite in order to become a warrior. To Dr.B.R.Ambedkar "religion is a social force. Religion stands for schemes of divine governance."<sup>78</sup> But Hinduism leaves no place and scope for the Sudras to accumulate wealth. One occupation only which is said to have been prescribed by the Lord (God) to the Sudras; i.e. to serve meekly the other three higher castes, gives no scope for change.<sup>79</sup> Ambedkar points out that Hindu religion decides one's occupation or profession.

However, in contrary to the alleged static position of the caste occupation as have been argued by Dumont, Hocart and Ambedkar, the caste occupations in Madras during our period of study shows that caste occupation is dynamic and keeps changing through ages. For instance, in Madras, the various occupational castes took such

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<sup>74</sup> Buchanan, Francis, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, London, 1807, Vol.I, pp. 77-80.

<sup>75</sup> Kotani, *Caste System*, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, pp.31-33.

<sup>77</sup> Mines, Mattison, *The Warrior Merchants: Textiles, trade and territory in South India*, CUP, Cambridge, 1984, 2-10.

<sup>78</sup> Moon Vasant, *Dr.Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, vol.3, p.23.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

professions, which are different from what their religion and tradition had prescribed. For example, peons were laborers,<sup>80</sup> watchmen and even policemen.<sup>81</sup> *Kaikkolans* were weavers and warrior caste at the same time.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, religion is not a deciding factor for one's occupation in Madras.

There is also a great debate on caste mobility in pre-colonial period. M.N. Srinivas noted that “the two potentials of mobility were the fluidity of the political system especially at the lower level, and the availability of marginal land which could be brought under the plough, itself the result of a static demographic situation.”<sup>83</sup> What he means is that people obtained mobility through warfare, to acquire a political power and become a chief or king. Further if a leader of a dominant caste or small chieftain gets the position of Raja or King, then he become sources of mobility for individuals and groups.<sup>84</sup> However, he argued in favors of upward mobility. M.N. Srinivas characterized that mobility in medieval India was based on 'fission'. This view is supported by Burton Stein, as he argues that medieval mobility was of individuals and family, and the “open agrarian system” served “spatial mobility,” which he called social mobility.<sup>85</sup> His argument is that in medieval time, there was upward mobility.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam support the idea by giving example of recent works on Right Hand castes and Left Hand castes where the latter had claimed through apocryphal

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<sup>80</sup> Fort St.George record: *Diary and Consultation Book*, 1683, ed. Arther T. Pringle, Vol.II, Govt. of Madras, p.29. (Hereafter as *Diary and Consultation*).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>82</sup> Mines, *The Warrior Merchants*, p.11.

<sup>83</sup> Srinivas, MN., *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and other Essays*, OUP, Delhi, 1989, p.41.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

apocryphal genealogies, warrior status.<sup>86</sup> Though Vijaya Ramaswamy did not accept the observations of any upward caste mobility, she points out four elements of social mobility:

1. the demand for social and ritual privileges;
2. claiming of Brahmanical status;
3. idangai-valangai (Left and Right Hand) conflicts within their own caste; and
4. social protest and participation in Bhakti movement.

For instance, the Devanga weaver claims descent from Manu and Narada, the Kammala or smiths claim to be the descendants of Visvakarma.<sup>87</sup> However, I disagree with the above views because it is observed that caste remain the same even though occupation changes:

Firstly, caste remains static, stagnant and it is not changing throughout the centuries till this day;

Secondly, occupation is changing throughout the centuries. What Sudras were in ancient time was not so in Medieval period.

Thirdly, occupation consisted of power. It improves the power-relation of one's status.

Occupation changes one's political, social and economic power. For instance, in Madras, several occupational caste groups went on strike to press for their economic demands and English East India Company paid attention towards

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<sup>86</sup> Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, *The Political Economy of Commerce in Southern India, 1500-1650*, CUP, Cambridge, 1990, p.329.

<sup>87</sup> Ramaswamy, Vijaya, "Artisans in Vijayanagar Society," *IESHR*, 22,4, (1985), p.435.

them.<sup>88</sup> They were also in a position to complaint against something that did not go with their wishes.<sup>89</sup> Pariahs, an untouchable and the lowest caste of South India, for instance, gradually improved their status and also power ranking in the society. A.P. Smith writes that “so necessary to the comfort of the public is the Pariya that orthodox Brahman gentleman may be seen employing Paraiya coachmen and syces (footmen). The Christian Paraiya has become ‘native Christian caste,’ and has achieved among other things university honours, the wearing of the surplice, and the rod of the pedagogue.”<sup>90</sup> Weaving communities also improved their status remarkably. Therefore, one can say that there was mobility in occupation but ‘caste’ remains static throughout. Generally, a ‘clean’ and ‘noble’ occupation give jati higher ritual and social status whereas ‘unclean’ or ‘lower’ occupations give lower place in the society.<sup>91</sup> Dumont points out that caste and occupation matters status. Hereditary profession gives inferior place in the society.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the occupational caste groups competed to get the ‘noble’ and ‘clean’ professions. As such, with this process, the occupational caste groups gradually gained new identity in course of time.

But, to define ‘occupational caste groups’ is problematic. Generally, Sudras, untouchables, artisans, and different caste groups (Left and Right Hand), who were engaged in different factories, agriculture fields as a laborers, workers, slaves, servants, etc., on the basis of their accumulated hereditary works or different

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<sup>88</sup> Fawcett, Charles, *The English Factories in India*, Vol.iv (New Series), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1955, p.28.

<sup>89</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1683, p.67.

<sup>90</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. III, p.114.

<sup>91</sup> Dube, *Indian Society*, p.55.

<sup>92</sup> Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p.97.

occupations or as set by the society, may called 'occupational caste group'. All traveler accounts and scholars understood in this manner. For instance, Thomas Bowrey mentioned about the *Halankhore* castes who were very low caste men. They were 'sweepers' and 'scavengers'. Halakhore were employed to clean houses. These castes had no other business but only to clean the houses. They eat the scraps of all other castes.<sup>93</sup> John Fryer had also noticed many 'Gentues' who were 'blacks', such as boatmen, goldsmiths or artisans who were lower than Brahmins or Rajpoots.<sup>94</sup> J.A. Sauter describes that the lower people were called as *Bandar-log* and they were regarded disdainfully as a sort of unclean animal.<sup>95</sup>

The English records also mentioned coolies, Tamil painters, washers, peons who were engaged in Company services and who were regarded subordinate in the society.<sup>96</sup> Fort St.George records also mention Brickmakers,<sup>97</sup> Gentues,<sup>98</sup> Painters,<sup>99</sup> Slaves,<sup>100</sup> Peons<sup>101</sup> Watchmen,<sup>102</sup> Weavers,<sup>103</sup> and Washermen.<sup>104</sup> They are regarded as belonging to the lower orders of the society and are subordinated in positions. Abbe Carre, during his visit to Madras and various places in South India, called these people 'My servants', 'My palanquin bearer', etc.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bowrey, Thomas, *A Geographical accounts of Countries round the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679*, ed. R.Temple, Manohar, 1997, London, p.9, note 11.

<sup>94</sup> Fryer, John, *Travel in India in the Seventeenth Century*, AES, New Delhi, 1993, pp.173-176.

<sup>95</sup> Sauter, J.A., *Among the Brahmins and Pariahs*, (trans. B.Miall), Mittal Publication, 1986, p.186-187.

<sup>96</sup> Fawcett, *EFI*, p.27.

<sup>97</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1683, vol.II, p.32.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.47 &139.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>105</sup> Fawcett, C., *Travels of Abbe Carre in India and the near East, 1672 to 1674*, AES, New Delhi, 1990, pp.543-545.

Francis Buchanan reported about the Left and Right hand groups especially the barbers, washermen, etc. in derogated positions in South India, particularly within the East India Company's factories.<sup>106</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy also points out that the lower positions of the artisans such as blacksmiths, goldsmiths, workers in brass, carpenters masons, the weavers, bleachers, dyers, cobblers, tanners and potters got the place in East India Company.<sup>107</sup> East India Company in Southern Coromandel Coast employed the occupational castes such as "A stewards servant, butlers, caterer, brewer, flagmen, one palenkeen for the chief".<sup>108</sup> However, all traveler accounts and scholars frequently mentioned them in "lower" and "subordinate sense." Thus, it became clear that the low caste people, in whom Sudras, servants, artisans, Left hand castes and Right hand castes come, may be called as the occupational caste groups.

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<sup>106</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, Vol.I, pp.77-80.

<sup>107</sup> Ramaswamy, "Artisans in Vijayanagar Society", IESHR, 1985, p.417.

<sup>108</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1677-80, p.181.





## The Occupational Caste Groups in Madras

The study of the occupational caste groups in Madras has become an important subject as most of the scholars who are working on the subject concentrate their attention on the merchant groups despite the presence of many others caste groups. This chapter intends to study the occupational caste groups in Madras, their numbers, their functions and their economic and social position in the society. Although it is very hard to give the accurate numerical strength and their social and economic position, an attempt is however, made here to understand the various problems pertaining to the various caste groups including the merchant groups. However, the Brahmans are not included among the occupational caste groups, as they are not included in the left and right hand castes. Generally, each caste group occupied different position and exercised different functions in society. However, the caste groups of Madras were seen to be practicing different occupations as per the demand of the time. For instance, *Paraiyans* traditionally were the drummers but they also act as grave-digger, watchmen and scavenger.

### **Caste and their Numerical Strength**

Abbe Carre, a French traveler, who visited Madras in the later half of seventeenth century (1672-1674), reported that there are large number of caste groups inhabiting the 'black town' of the city. They were Talliars, Malabaris (Tamils), Parians, Cheriperes, Patnavars, Tuacouas, Chettys, Comities, Pallis, Gavarais, goldsmiths, carpenters,

blacksmith, etc.<sup>1</sup> The *Diary and Consultation* of Fort St. George had listed twenty-nine caste groups inside Madras for the collection of rents for the construction of the 'Black Town' walls and the outworks.<sup>2</sup> These caste groups and their share of contribution are listed hereunder:

1. Chette caste .....2000 pags.
2. Moormem ..... 300 pags
3. Quomitty caste.....800 pags
4. Vellon Warr caste.....200 pags
5. Bellejee Warr caste.....350 pags
6. Ganlewar caste alias Oylemen.....400 pags
7. Gellawammee Warr caste alias shopkeeper of sugar and limes....100 pags
8. Aggamoodee Warr caste alias brickmakers &c.....400 pags.
9. Comsala Warr caste alias goldsmith.....500 pags.
10. Guzaratts.....500 pags
11. Kiculla Warr caste alias weavers.....20 pags
12. Charnom Warr caste alias coincoplies (kankpillai) accountants...300 pags.
13. Polli Warr caste.....18 pags
14. Sallawarr weaver.....100pags.
15. Zoningeewarr alias Chuliars.....150 pags
16. Saccalawarr alias washermen.....100 pags
17. Gullawarr caste alias shepherd.....70 pags
18. Chomboddee Warr caste alias fishermen.....10 pags

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<sup>1</sup> Fawcett, C., *Travels of Abbe Carre in India*, p.593.

<sup>2</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1706, p.55.

19. Kyawarr caste alias bamboo cooleys.....	10 pags.
20. Mongele Warr caste alias barber.....	20 pags
21. Vellambilla alias tonnapas caste.....	50 pags
22. Connadu alias grass cutters.....	25 pags
23. Jandru alias toddy people.....	180 pags.
24. Wande Warr caste alias sampsons caste.....	100 pags
25. Sattigurree alias andee chittee.....	200 pags.
26. Comra Warr alias pot makers.....	10 pags
27. Correala Warr alias muckquas.....	100 pags
28. Braminys.....	100 pags.
29. Pottanapwarr alias cattamaranmen.....	40pags

Thomas Bowrey also noticed that there were several occupational caste groups in Madras. They were Halankhore castes consisting of 'sweepers' and 'scavengers' and other lowest castes. He also noted that there are Gentues of barber caste,<sup>3</sup> Chetty caste,<sup>4</sup> Palankeen bearer, Coolies,<sup>5</sup> Conicopaly (clerk),<sup>6</sup> Banians,<sup>7</sup> Weavers, Taylors (watchmen), Goldsmith,<sup>8</sup> Bricklayer, Masons, Smiths, and Fishermen.<sup>9</sup>

John Fryer, an English traveler in the 17<sup>th</sup> century visited different parts of the country including Madras, Masulipatnam and other places. He had reported the presence of several caste groups in Masulipatnam, who were also been seen by him in Madras. He also noted several among the 'gentiles' (local people) who lived on the fringes of the

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<sup>3</sup> Bowrey, *A Geographical accounts of Countries round the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.42.

town. Fryer had also mentioned of several 'tribes' inhabiting the town of Masulipatnam who were distinguished by their occupation viz; Engravers, Refiners, Goldsmiths, carpenters, and many other labourers,<sup>10</sup> boatmen,<sup>11</sup> Palankeen bearers,<sup>12</sup> and so on.

Francis Buchanan, who visited Madras in early 19th Century, also reported many castes such as blacksmiths, carpenters, coppersmiths, masons, silversmiths, beri merchants, weavers, oil makers, cultivator caste, tanners or shoemakers, calico printers, tailors, Gujaratis, shepherds, blanket weavers, potters, washermen, palanquin bearers, barbers, brick layers.<sup>13</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveler, had also reported the presence of many castes of 'idolater' people in India. He also noticed the *Halalkhores* (lower caste of India). He also mentioned about '*Pauzecour*' (Panchama) who belongs to Srinegapatnam. *Panchama* is the general name for a class of artisans or menial labourers in Madras but it is possible that he might have confused with *Panchgaur* or *panchaguda*, a term which was applied for the northern Brahman.<sup>14</sup> However, he describes *Halalkhore* as *Panchama* are important caste groups in South India.

H.D. Love has compiled the role of various castes in Madras such as Madjustum, Brahmin, Pattnoolkar, Canakar, Valaler, Reddy, Totier, Mahrasttas, Rakhawar, Tooloowar, Mussulmen, Lubbay, Rajahboots, Pumdauram, etc. They were sixty-nine in number. But they are not the occupational caste groups except the Reddys. However, Love also mentions the presence of 39 occupational caste groups belonging to the Left Hand groups such as County, Vullickar, Mochir, Tellingwar, Purria, Vullawar,

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<sup>10</sup> Fryer, John, *Travel in India in the Seventeenth Century*, pp.175-176.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.173.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>13</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, Vol.I, pp.77-80.

<sup>14</sup> Ball, V., *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, ed. William Crooke, OBRC, 1977, Vol.II, pp.145-146. (Hereafter referred to as Tavernier 's travels in India.).

Gundapodikar, Ahaumar, etc. Correspondingly, he also listed eleven caste groups belonging to the Right Hand groups such as Chitty, Pully, Chuckler, Kykulwar, etc.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, J.Talboys Wheelers study on Madras also talks about several caste groups inhabiting the city of Madras such as painter castes, washermen, merchants, catamaranmen, coolies,<sup>16</sup> boatmen, Laskars and fishermen.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, from the accounts of all sources we come to know of the existence of 149 caste groups in Madras city alone.

The *Census Report of the Town of Madras, 1871* also gives a list of the nineteen 'caste' or 'class' in Madras along with their occupation:<sup>18</sup>

1. Priesthood .....Brahmans.
2. The Warrior caste.....Rajpoots.
3. Merchants.....Chetties
4. The Cultivators of later immigration.....Vallalas.
5. Herdsmen.....Golla.
6. Artisans.....Kammalan.
7. Weavers.....Kaikalan.
8. Accountants .....Kanaccan
9. Temple servants. ....Satani.
10. Potters.....Kusavan.
11. Cultivators of the earlier immigration..... Vunneers
12. Barbers.....Ambattan.

<sup>15</sup> Love, HD., *Vestiges of Old Madras*, AES, New Delhi, 1996, vol.I, pp.124-125.

<sup>16</sup> Wheelers, J.Talboys, *Madras in Olden Time*, 3 vols in one, AES, New Delhi, 1993, p.64-65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.249-250.

<sup>18</sup> *Census Report of the Town of Madras, 1871*, St.Fort George Gazetter Press, 1873, p.10.

13. Washermen.....Sembadevan.
14. Fishermen.....Sembadevan
15. Palm cultivators .....Shanan.
16. Lower races.....Pariah.

On the broader classification of caste in Madras, the Report listed five groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vasiyas, Sudras and Outcastes (or Pariahs).<sup>19</sup> Sudras and Outcastes are the main constituents of the occupational caste groups. The Census recognized fourteen Sudra caste groups in Madras such as: 1). Kavarai, 2). Vallalar, 3). Idayan, 4). Kammalan, 5). Kaikolar, 6). Kusavan, 7). Kanaccan, 8). Satani, 9). Vunhian, 10). Ambattan, 11). Vunnan, 12). Sembadevan, 13). Shanan, 14). Other castes. The Census Report had also mentioned 195 caste groups and 657 occupations, which could not be true.<sup>20</sup> Edgar Thurston had also noted the presence of more than 300 castes and tribes, representing more than 40,000,000 individuals, spreading over an area exceeding 150,000 square miles in South India.<sup>21</sup> However, he fails to point out the exact numbers of the occupational caste groups.

Despite the presence of such large numbers of occupational caste groups, almost all the subsequent writers on the subjects concentrated their works on some merchant groups particularly the Chettis and Comatis. For instance Sanjay Subrahmanyam<sup>22</sup> concentrates his works on the Chetty merchants such as Achyutappa Chetti, Chinna Chetti, etc. Again, Mattison Mines<sup>23</sup> concentrates primarily on the weaving caste and the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>21</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.I, p.xiii.

<sup>22</sup> See Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, Chapter six.

<sup>23</sup> Mines, *The warrior Merchants* and his other work *Public face private Voices* talks especially of the weaver castes.

caste disputes in Madras. Burton Stein<sup>24</sup> concentrated on the broader definition of the Left and Right hand castes and the caste disputes between the two groups. On the same vein, Brenda Beck<sup>25</sup> had also focused on the Right and Left Hand Castes. Arjun Appadurai<sup>26</sup> had worked on the Left and Right Hand castes, and focused on the occupational caste groups as well. Kanakalatha Mukund's work is also on the merchant caste groups<sup>27</sup>. Vijaya Ramaswamy works on the weavers and artisan communities in South India, but did not specifically touch upon other groups<sup>28</sup>.

Patrick Roche<sup>29</sup> works on the caste issues in Madras; but his work is basically on the English Company's role in the shaping of caste institutions in the aftermath of the caste disputes which affected Madras. Susan N. Basu<sup>30</sup> concentrates her works on the Brahman Dubashes of Madras. Therefore, we find that none of the scholars have so far focused on the role of the various occupational caste groups in South India in general and in Madras in particular. As such, our endeavours in this work will be to examine the position of occupational caste groups in Madras, their status, position, functions and various other activities in the shaping of Madras as a premier colonial port city.

### **Positions and Functions of the Occupational caste groups**

Generally, each and every caste occupied different position and exercised different functions in society. However, the caste groups of Madras were seen to be practicing different occupations as per the demand of the time. For instance, *Paraiyans* traditionally

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<sup>24</sup> See Stein, *The Peasant and Society in South India*.

<sup>25</sup> See Beck, "The Right-Left division of South Indian Society".

<sup>26</sup> Appadurai, *Right and Left hand Caste in South India*.

<sup>27</sup> See Mukund, "The Trading World of The Tamil Merchant".

<sup>28</sup> See Ramaswamy, *Testiles and Weavers in Medieval South India*.

<sup>29</sup> See Roche, "Caste and the British Merchant Government in madras, 1639-1749."

<sup>30</sup> Basu, "The Dubahus of Madras".



were the drummers,<sup>31</sup> but they also act as grave-diggers, watchmen and scavengers. They were also employed in the agricultural field as laborers.<sup>32</sup> Again, the *Paravas* were traditionally the fishermen,<sup>33</sup> but they act also as headmen, dealers in cloth, pearl and chunk divers, sailors, packers of cloths, palanquin bearers, peons and who wait about the persons of the chief.<sup>34</sup> We also know that the Paravas gradually became richer as they started to take to trade and other commercial activities. Further, Fort St. George Gazette, 1906, also mentioned that *Mucchis* work as leather-worker, making saddles and trunks, paintings, making toys and pen-making.<sup>35</sup> The above examples clearly show that despite the prevalence of the notion of compartmentalized caste occupation, most of the caste groups, in practice, did not concentrate their activities on one's traditional occupation alone. Therefore, it would be pertinent here to bring into the various functions of the caste groups separately.

### **The Chetti Caste**

The Chetti caste was very numerous in Madras and played a very pivotal role in its history. The Census Report of the town, 1901, recorded that "Chetti means trader, and is one of those titular or occupational term which are often loosely employed as caste name. The weavers, oil pressers and others used it as a title, and many more take it onto their name, to denote that trade is their occupation."<sup>36</sup> Henry Yule wrote that Chetti is a member of the trading caste in South India. Corresponding in every way to the Banian

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<sup>31</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.I, pp.77-78.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.V, p.83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.II, p.92.

caste of Western and Northern India the “Chetti” was generally classified as a shopkeeper. Further, Chettis were a particular kind of merchant in Madras and were generally very rich.<sup>37</sup>

Abbe Carre also noticed that the Chettis were the most important merchants of all the merchants in Madras.<sup>38</sup> Their trade in Madras was 15.7 percent, while that of other lower merchants like shepherd (Idaiyar) was just 8%, and of the Brahmin or Kshatriyas being just 3.2% and 4.9% respectively.<sup>39</sup> The Chettis also contributed very generously towards the development of Madras. For instance, their contribution for the construction of the city walls, which was 2000 pagodas, shows that they were very wealthy and generous. Among the occupational caste groups, their contribution was very large.<sup>40</sup> The Chettis were the Company’s Joint Stock merchants in Fort St. George. Some of the Chetti merchants and their shares with the Company are given below:<sup>41</sup>

1. Eclore Pettee Chittee .....1 share
2. Ande Chittee.....1/2 share
3. Passe Murte Naigue Chittee.....1/2 share
4. Cornapa Chittee .....3 shares
5. Japa Chittee.....3 shares
6. Pupalo Chittee.....3 shares
7. Rujja Chittee.....3 sahes

<sup>37</sup> Yule, Henry, and AC Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, London, 1903, p.190.

<sup>38</sup> Fawcett, C., *The travels of Abbe Carre in India and the Near East, 1672 to 1674*, Vol.II, AES, Madras, 1990, pp.593-596.

<sup>39</sup> *Census Report of the Town of Madras, 1871*, p.92.

<sup>40</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1706*, p.55.

<sup>41</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1696*, p.143.

In this way, several Chettis had shares in the joint-stock for mercantile investment held in collaborations with the English company. The Chetti merchants were offered contracts for the post of Chief undertakers and managers. They were Cornapa Chettis, Japa Chettis, Ranga Chettis, Pedde Chettis, Parpantum Chettis and Rama Chettis.<sup>42</sup> Among the Chettis in Madras, there were some wealthy merchants such as Beri Chettis, etc. They were wholesalers of varieties of goods.<sup>43</sup> Malays Cheeti or Astrappa Chetti, Cinnanna Chetty,<sup>44</sup> Baliya Chetti,<sup>45</sup> Timann Chetti were all prolific merchants of Madras.<sup>46</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Kanaklatha Mukund<sup>47</sup> have written extensively on the above mentioned merchants.

Socially, the Chettis occupied an honourable position in the local society. Nonetheless, Chettis had many subdivisions within themselves, such as Beri Chettis, Danagarattu Chettis, the Kusukkar Chettis and the Nattukottai Chettis.<sup>48</sup> Apart from these division, they were also divided into 'Left and Right Hand castes', which was very prominent in South India. The Chetti merchants were placed in the Left Hand divisions.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Buchanan and *Hobson-Jobson*,<sup>50</sup> also place them in Left Hand side. It is significant that Beri Chettis and Nakarathu Chettis were the leaders of the Left Hand side,<sup>51</sup> while Buchanan points out that the Panchala group (a group of five working sub-caste: blacksmith, carpenter, coppersmith, goldsmith and silver smith) had commanded

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>43</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchants, Companies and Commerce in the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p.222.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.223.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.228.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.229.

<sup>47</sup> Subrahmanyam deals on the wealthy Chetties in his book "*the Political Economy of Commerce*" pp.300-314; whereas Kanaklatha Mukund also examined the same in her book "*The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*" in chapter V.

<sup>48</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.II, p.92.

<sup>49</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.I. pp.124-125.

<sup>50</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, pp.77-80.

<sup>51</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.253.

the whole party.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that the Chettis were one of the most influential social caste groups in Madras.

Politically, the Chettis were also very influential. For instance, Kelavi Chetti, Venkata Chetti, Sunkuroma Chetti and Karanappa Chetti were politically very powerful through their honorable position in the Company services.<sup>53</sup> Owing to this influential position, they received several presents from others such as New Year gifts. In 1684 Chena Venkatadne, Timmana, Moodu Verona, Allingall Pilla, Taggpa Chetti, Rammapa, Narrand, Pedde Naigue, Vincate Puttee, Gunala Rangapa, the Mulla and Chene Tombe were said to have received gifts from others.<sup>54</sup> The importance of these persons has also been attested by the popular saying of the time. It said:

*He who thinks before he acts is a Chetti,*

*But he who acts without thinking is a fool;*

*When the Chetti dies his affairs will become public;*

*She keeps house like a merchant women, i.e. economically;*

*Though ruined, a Chetti is a Chetti, as though torn silk is still silk;*

*The Chetti reduces the amount of advances to the weavers for the quantity of silk in the border of the cloth;*

*From his birth a Chetti is at enmity with agriculture.<sup>55</sup>*

Therefore, the Chettis were thought to be one of the most influential, generous, and kindly towards the cultivators who did not practice agriculture, and most importantly they were loved by others as their death usually became public affair.

<sup>52</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, pp.77-80.

<sup>53</sup> Mukund, *The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*, p.124.

<sup>54</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1684*, p.1.

<sup>55</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.II. p.95.

### Komati Caste

Komati, a great trading caste of South India, also played a leading role in Madras.<sup>56</sup> This occupational caste group had good contact with the local power magnates. Economically, they were also very powerful and wealthy. Socially, they were also one of the dominant caste groups in Madras. However, the Komatis were known by different names, which had different connotations. To some, Komati means 'fox-minded,'<sup>57</sup> and for others, Komati consists "gomati", meaning the possessor of cows;<sup>58</sup> yet another derivation is "Ku-mati" means "evil-minded."<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the Komatis were big merchants, grocers, and money-lenders. In Madras, they were the principal vendors of all sorts of imported articles. The China Bazar in Madras was almost entirely maintained by them. Many Komatis were cloth merchants and Traivarnikas were almost entirely engaged in the glassware trade. In the Northern Circars, some Komatis earned a living as petty dealers in opium and ganja.<sup>60</sup> There were very wealthy merchants belonging to the Komatis caste such as Tauna Trouvittee, Moodela, Valoore, Aundepau Modela, Pegue Chinniha, Ancilla Deoscitty, Mooraure Ramonsuloo, Maumballum Chinaragga Vengana, Pocalla Rama Kisna, Gannavarum Ramados, Butsoogounda Rosoloo Parane Pooture Marehapa and others.<sup>61</sup> Among the Komatis, Kasi Veeranna was the most influential and wealthiest. He was the chief merchant of the Company. Kasi Veeranna had even surpassed all his senior partners.<sup>62</sup> Apart from this, the richness of the Komatis can also be seen from their

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<sup>56</sup> Yule, Henry, and AC Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.237.

<sup>57</sup> This is in reference to the cunningness of the Komatis in business/trade.

<sup>58</sup> One of the ordained duties of the Vaishyas is the protection of the cows.

<sup>59</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.306.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.343.

<sup>61</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1708*, p.7.

<sup>62</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.229.

contribution of 800 pagodas for the construction of the Black Town walls and outworks, only second to the Chettis.<sup>63</sup>

As far as their occupations are concerned, they had many sub-division within themselves those specializing in the trade of a particular commodity were: Nune (oil); Nethi (ghi: clarified butter); Dudi (cotton); Uppu (salt); Gone (gunny-bag); Gantha (torn cloth).<sup>64</sup> Socially, the Komati merchants were the part of Right hand caste.<sup>65</sup> The Right hand division enjoyed more privileges than the Left hand caste groups. The Komati merchants were the leader of the Right hand caste groups.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, they employed Brahman (top on the varna or caste division) for the performance of their ceremonial rites.<sup>67</sup> This shows how they were so important in the society. However, the Komatis had two big division viz; Gavara and Kalinga. There were further divisions within the Gavara and Kalinga;<sup>68</sup> the traditional concept of 'lower' and 'upper' caste did not permit them to intermarry.

At the political level, they were also very dominant. Francois Martin, director of the French Company in the Coromandel Coast, makes interesting point about Verona. He said that Verona "had influence among the officials of the region, and also at the royal court of Golkonda due to the frequent presents and services he rendered."<sup>69</sup> Major Kisna and Boochee, probably Komati merchant, had also a good relationship with the English

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<sup>63</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1706*, p.55.

<sup>64</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.311.

<sup>65</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.I, pp.124-125.

<sup>66</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.253.

<sup>67</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.310.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.310.

<sup>69</sup> Sharma, Yogesh, "A life of many Parts: Kasi Virana- A Seventeenth Century South Indian Merchant Magnate," *The Medieval History Journal*, 1,2, (1998), p.285, where he cited Francois Martin's accounts.

officials at Madras in about 1706.<sup>70</sup> Thus, their connections with political elements were very significant during our period of study.

Pertaining to their image and importance in the local society, we can also refer to some of the popular folklores of the region, which read:

*A Brahman will learn if he suffers, and a Komati will learn if he is ruined;*

*If I ask whether you have salt, you say that you have dhol (a kind of pulse);*

*Like the burning of Komatis house, which would mean a heavy loss.”<sup>71</sup>*

### **The Weaver Caste**

Weaver community was one of the most important occupational caste groups in Madras, especially for the European Companies. However, weaving is the profession or occupation of several people belonging to different castes. For instance, Fort St. George records prove the involvement of several caste groups, such as the ‘*Kiculla Warr* caste’ (the *Kaikolan* weavers) and the ‘*Sallawar*’ weavers who belong to different castes.<sup>72</sup> Even *Podi* caste is said to have involved in weaving profession.<sup>73</sup> Thurston had also informed us that the ‘*Pano*’ caste also practices weaving.<sup>74</sup> Buchanan had also that the ‘*Devanga*’ caste were also a weaving community.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, there was a great mobility in the weaving occupation. However, traditionally, the *Kaikolan* belonged to the weaver caste, as one can see from the 1871 Census report.<sup>76</sup> The weaver’s functions were to

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<sup>70</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1706*, p.3.

<sup>71</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, pp.347-348.

<sup>72</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1706*, p.55.

<sup>73</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.V, p.454.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.VI, p.72.

<sup>75</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol.I pp.72-80

<sup>76</sup> *Census Report of 1871*,

make cloths, and dye them.<sup>77</sup> It was supplied by weavers to the center.<sup>78</sup> The spinning, weaving and the sale of cloth were the major economic activity and the entire population as geared to these enterprises.<sup>79</sup>

Although, Mattisan Mines disagreed for generalities of weaver communities, he argued that their images was constructed wrongly while “The Kaikkolars have been organized for centuries into supra local organizations and have been both a source of wealth for states and at times, an independent power with which to reckon. They maintained armies not only to protect their warehouses and caravans but also to plunder to agrarian sector”.<sup>80</sup> But, it is true that common weaver's economic condition was not good, as cloths were also imported by Yale (Governor of Madras ) for the promotion of the commercial activities in Madras.<sup>81</sup>

Socially, they were declared as the “Left-hand caste side” because Kaikkolans were unsure at what division they belonged to.<sup>82</sup> Besides weaving, they also worked as agriculture laborers, tools workers, loom workers, cart-drivers and coolies.<sup>83</sup> Kaikolan girls were made *dasis* either by regular dedication to a Temple or by the headman tying the *tali*.<sup>84</sup> Yet, some rich weavers paid them by the piece.<sup>85</sup> Kiakolan is divided into many sub-divisions such as, Shanian, Salin, Sedan, Devangular, Padmasali, Jendravan, Saluppam, Senniyam, Goniga, and Neyigi.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, Vol.I pp.208-209.

<sup>78</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1683, p.24.

<sup>79</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.267.

<sup>80</sup> Mines, *The Warrior Merchants*, p.ix.

<sup>81</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.I, p.547.

<sup>82</sup> Roche, “Caste and the British Government”, *IESHR*, 1975, p.213.

<sup>83</sup> *Census Report of 1871*, p.81.

<sup>84</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.37.

<sup>85</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, Vol.I p.213.

<sup>86</sup> *Census Report of 1871*, p.81



Politically, they were not as strong as the Komatis and the Chettis were. They had no good contact with the political powers of the region including the Europeans. Matisson points out that they were in position to molest the power and were very beneficial to the State.<sup>87</sup> Regarding their position in society, there were many wise saying such as:<sup>88</sup>

1. *Narrate stories in villages where there are no Kaikolans.*
2. *Why should weavers have a Monkey?( This has been suggested, as it implies that a monkey would only damage the work).*
3. *If a dog gets a sore on its head, it never recovers from it and even so a weaver who get a sore on his foot.*<sup>89</sup>
4. *The Chetti lost by partnership while the weaver come to grief by isolation*<sup>90</sup>
5. *The capital of a weavers will not be sufficient to treat even an eye sore*<sup>91</sup>
6. *It is not the loom pit but the grave pit.*
7. *A Weaver who gets a sore on his foot never recovers from it.*<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, it is seen that the weavers were very hard working people who also enjoyed respect in the society as the saying does: “on examining the various occupations, weaving will be found to be the best.”<sup>93</sup> However, their political and economic standings in the society are quite weak as it happened to some occupational caste groups.

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<sup>87</sup> Mines, *The Warrior Merchants*, p.140.

<sup>88</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.41.

<sup>89</sup> This signifies the importance of foot treadles in the loom.

<sup>90</sup> This indicates that weaving involved cooperative efforts since it included process like twisting, winding the threads and preparing the skeins.

<sup>91</sup> It signifies the economic condition of the caste.

<sup>92</sup> Ramaswamy, V., “Weavers folk traditions as a sources of History”, *IESHR*, 1982, p.49.

<sup>93</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol.III, p.41.

### Artisan Caste groups

Leading artisan caste groups were also prominent in Madras, particularly the ‘*Kammalan*’ caste, which consists a group of five. It is also called ‘*Panchala*’ because it is supposed to include only the five castes of ‘workers in gold, copper and brass, iron, wood and stone,’<sup>94</sup> i.e. goldsmiths, coppersmiths, brasssmiths, blacksmiths, carpenters and masons respectively.<sup>95</sup> These castes dominated the metal business in Madras. According to *1871 Census*, they were in all 3588 in numbers. Their percentage to the whole population was 15.7%. The Blacksmiths were 1120 in numbers, brass workers 238, and the coppersmiths 53.<sup>96</sup>

The social composition of blacksmiths constituted a mixture of several caste groups, besides the hereditary blacksmiths. The blacksmiths carried bellows and anvil, hammer and tongs.<sup>97</sup> These people also supplied wares to the numerous shipyards in India in the 16th and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly in the port town of Narasapur.<sup>98</sup> Thomas Bowrey had noticed blacksmiths in the region during his tour in the second half of seventeenth century. He said: “Many English merchants and others have yearly ships and vessels built here, beinge the only commodious port on this or the next adjoining thereto, visit Gingalee...the best iron upon the coast is for the most part vended here and reasonable rates, with the workmanship alsoe; any sort of iron work is here ingenuously performed by the Natives, as speeks, bolts, anchors, & c....very expert master builders, there are several here who have most of their dependencies upon the English, and indeed

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<sup>94</sup> *Census Report of 1871*, p.80.

<sup>95</sup> Ramaswamy, “Weavers folk traditions as a sources of History”, *IESHR*, 1982, p.417.

<sup>96</sup> *Census Report of 1871*, p.93.

<sup>97</sup> Tchicherov, AI, *India Changing Economic Structure in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth centuries: Outline History of Crafts and trade*, Manohar, 1998, p.71.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.76-77.

learnt their art and trade from some of them, by diligently observing the ingenuity of some that built ships and sloops here for the English East India Company and their Agents, so that they build very well...I must not forget their falseheartedness to our English builders.”<sup>99</sup>

Abbe Carre had informed us of the prevalence of a unified social system among the Kammalan artisans. He noted especially among the goldsmith, blacksmiths and carpenters that “if one of them is offended or wronged, all the others shut the shops and abandon all their works.”<sup>100</sup> Regarding their wages, we have no clear accounts from the available sources. However, we are told that in Tamil Nadu during the eighteenth century the blacksmith and carpenters received a special payment for the work they did when houses for the community peasants were built.<sup>101</sup> The blacksmiths belonged to the Left hand caste groups in Madras.

Goldsmiths were also one of the prominent artisan castes in Madras. They made plate or jewels of silver or gold.<sup>102</sup> Goldsmiths worked in the mint house where they made coins and other required gold products. They also received *Tasheif*.<sup>103</sup> Jewelers formed a special group of small community of producers during our period of study.<sup>104</sup> However, among Kammalan groups, goldsmiths were economical and socially better than the others.

Carpenter was also an important caste group in Madras. In carpentry, there were many castes involved. *Tacchan*, a carpenter caste, a sub-division of Kammalans, was

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<sup>99</sup> Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p.102.

<sup>100</sup> Fawcett, *The travels of Abbe Carre*, p.96.

<sup>101</sup> Tchicherov, *India Changing Economic Structure*, p.45.

<sup>102</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1700, p.89.

<sup>103</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1692, p.44.

<sup>104</sup> Tchicherov, *India Changing Economic Structure*, p.80.

very prominent in Madras.<sup>105</sup> *Irchakkollan* caste also acted as carpenter.<sup>106</sup> Thus, carpenter occupation engaged many castes but *Tacchan* was a traditional caste. Socially, carpenter belongs to Left hand caste groups. In 1708 the carpenter caste chiefs were Nina Chief Carpenter, Quallandeeppau, Lingapau and Grua Moortee.<sup>107</sup> The carpenter caste also acted as well-wisher of Company servants, particularly W. Bridge; where they informed Bridges that some seaman could attack on in night; therefore, he should not visit.<sup>108</sup> The Company also depended upon the carpenters for timberwork and for repairing the buildings.<sup>109</sup> Seeing their importance, Company also tried to build a house for carpenters in the Fort.<sup>110</sup> Company also made a carpenter yard for carpenter.<sup>111</sup> Company also paid them in advance.<sup>112</sup> The Company also depended upon the carpenters for boat building. Therefore, they were employed by them.

From these facts, it can be said that carpenters were in good position, economically, socially and politically because they had good connection with the Company servants. *Kal Tacchan* was a sub-division of stone worker caste called the stone-masons.<sup>113</sup> The Kammalan castes were economically prosperous, which enhanced their social mobility among the more prosperous artisan groups.<sup>114</sup>

The Kammalan caste was highly organized, and its organization has its most interesting features. Each of five divisions had its headman and chief executive officer.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VII, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol.II, p.372.

<sup>107</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1708, p.5.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 1700, p.5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1672-78, p.124.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1705, p.110.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1702, p.93.

<sup>113</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. III, p.108.

<sup>114</sup> Ramaswamy, "Artisans in Vijayanagar Society", *IESHR*, 1985, p.435.

<sup>115</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. III, p.108.

Arjun Appadorai and M. Arokiaswami points out that the Kammalans were a humble caste, but they were allowed to live only in certain parts of the village. They were not allowed to take residence in central parts of village, because artisan's occupation was traditionally regarded as being lower than that of farmer.<sup>116</sup> But this argument was not true in the case of Madras, because they were considered important groups by the English East India Company as mentioned before. Burton Stein also mentions that the artisans are very important caste groups in Madras.<sup>117</sup> However, the artisan castes had always maintained an animated fight for precedence in Hindu society.

Further, the Kammalans called themselves *Achari* and *Paththar*, and claimed knowledge of the Vedas. Their own priests officiate at marriage, funerals and on other ceremonial occasions. Pertaining to Kammalans, there were several folktales ascribed to them, which are given below:

1. *The Gold smith knows what ornaments are of fine gold, i.e. knows who are the rich men of a place.*
2. *Goldsmith puts inferior gold into the refining pot.*
3. *The Gold smith will steal a quarter of the gold of even his own mother.*
4. *When the blacksmith sees that the iron is soft, he will raise himself to the stroke.*
5. *A blacksmith shop and the place in which donkeys all themselves are alike.*
6. *What has a dog to do in a blacksmith shop? Said a man who attempts to do work he is not fit for.*

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in Tchicherov, *India Changing Economic Structure*, p.36.

<sup>117</sup> Stein, *Peasant, State and Society*, p.248.

7. *What if the carpenter's wife has become a widow?* (This would seem to refer to the former practice of widow remarriage).
8. *The carpenters want (wood) too long, and the blacksmith wants (Iron) too short,* (that is, a carpenter can easily shorten a piece of wood, and a blacksmith can easily hammer out a piece of iron).<sup>118</sup>

The above mentioned popular sayings show their strong economic, social and political status in local society. Accordingly, Goldsmiths' position was elevated while that of the Carpenter and Blacksmith status were weak.

### **Bricklayers**

Bricklayers were also a part of *kammalans* but their role in Madras was very important. In Madras, 'Aggamoodie' or 'Agamudian' members were the bricklayers.<sup>119</sup> Badaga caste also acted as bricklayers.<sup>120</sup> Bricklayers' function was to construct buildings repair walls of bricks, plaster,<sup>121</sup> buttresses, and pillars,<sup>122</sup> and measuring the land to build the building or wall.<sup>123</sup> Brickmaker's wages were different. Sometimes, Bricklayers were paid 500 pagodas,<sup>124</sup> and at other times 300 pagodas.<sup>125</sup> It is said that wages depend on the number of bricks laid and the volume of the whole work. Nallana was the chief bricklayer in Madras.<sup>126</sup> Bricklayers also contributed 400 pagodas towards the construction of the Black Town walls. This contribution was quite big as compared to

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<sup>118</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. ...., pp.122-125.

<sup>119</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1706, p.55.

<sup>120</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. I, pp.63.

<sup>121</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1672-78, p.124.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 1705, p.110.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 1683, p.32.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 1672-78, p.124.

their status in the society, when many other castes were seen to be higher than them.<sup>127</sup> Seeing their position and contribution, it can be said that they, though belonged to the lower strata, had made considerable economic progress.

### **Palanquin bearers**

Palanquin bearers were another major occupational caste group in Madras. Palanquin means a box-litter for traveling with a pole projecting before and behind which was borne on the shoulders of four and six men.<sup>128</sup> Thevenot described that it was a kind of coach with four feet, having on each side of the ballista, four or five inches high. A backstage was like a child cradle. That machine hang by long poles of bamboo by meant of two frames nailed to the feet of the coach. Suppose if a 'warm' woman (rich woman) was traveling in that it was covered with *velvet*. If afraid of rain, the whole palanquin was covered with waxed cloth. In the bottom of the Palanquin, there was mat for seating which moved easily themselves by means of some straps of silk that were fastened inside the bamboo. Every one decorated Palanquin according to their wealth. Some covered with plates of silver and some had only painted with flowers.<sup>129</sup>

Peter Mundy points out that a Palanquin was a sitting box, which was carried on men's shoulders. Six or eight men required at one time. It was used by wealthy men and women. Palanquin was very comfortable to lie.<sup>130</sup> Mundy says that Palanquin was carried by low castes, called *Kahar*.<sup>131</sup> They traveled 25 or 30 miles in a day with ½ quintals on

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 1706, p.55.

<sup>128</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.659.

<sup>129</sup> Sen, Surendarnath (ed.), *Indian Travels of Thevenots and Careri*, 1949, p.76.

<sup>130</sup> Temple, RC., *Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia*, 1608-1607, Second Series, Vol.II, p.189.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp.114-115.

their shoulder.<sup>132</sup> Thevenot also noted that four men were required to carry a Palanquin because each of the ends of the bamboo rested upon the shoulder of the two men and when the journey was long, then some colleagues to take their turn.<sup>133</sup>

Elijah Hoole, a missionary, who landed in India in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, described extensively about Palanquin bearers. He points out that four men were required for the carrying of Palanquin. The four men were relieved about every ten minutes by four others. Those who were not actually carrying were running before or behind. The whole party talked, laughed and sings while carrying the Palanquin. They usually move around five miles an hour. The Europeans often dislike this method of traveling but was often indispensable as India was extensive and there was no good road to travel by other means. There were vast jungles and very few bridges. For the local people such occupation was regarded another avenue for employment. The Palanquin bearers were, in fact, very cheerful in the performance during the journey as Hoole observed. He also said that though they run tired and thirsty through the forty miles stretch during the night they were fully prepared to proceed their journey on the succeeding evening. Six men took his palanquin at the Mission door in Madras, with the intension of performing a journey of six hundred miles. Hoole said that they are ready to travel with him even to Kasi or Benaras.<sup>134</sup>

About their nature and social status, Hoole noted that the Palanquin bearer quarreled rarely with the people of the villages through which they passed. Unfortunately, in the end of a stage, they often disputed violently among themselves about various trifles

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.xxx.

<sup>133</sup> Sen, *Indian Travels of Thevenots and Careri*, p.76.

<sup>134</sup> Hoale, E., *Madras, Mysore and the South of India or a personal Narrative of a mission to those countries*, Longman, 1844, London, pp.46-47.



and when they were excited, their language and gestures were most ill. For instance, he narrated the story about a Danish missionary, who was traveling in Palanquin. At the end they quarrel led violently. The Danish missionary understood that they were struggling for money and wanted to kill him. By thinking this, he offered money and his gold watch so that they would spare his life and conduct him safely on his journey. At this gesture they greet at him with astonishment and led him safely to his destination.<sup>135</sup>

Elijah Hoole also noted their caste division within. He reported that their caste did not allow them to eat with each other. During the voyages, one person entrusted with carrying their pots for preparing their meals, which consisted chiefly of rice.<sup>136</sup> The Palanquin bearers were classified into three categories, which were 'gentoos', 'Malabars' and 'Pariahs'.<sup>137</sup> The 'Gentoo' boys were employed in most of the families. They did any sort of jobs. There was nothing, which had subjected Europeans to more imposition than their religion. The 'Gentoo' Palanquin boys were mostly employed in the northern settlements. The same work was done by the Malabars and Pariahs in Madras.<sup>138</sup>

Concerning their wages, the Company paid five pagodas a month.<sup>139</sup> The master of the Palanquin bearers was paid one fanam monthly.<sup>140</sup> Love said that Gentoos worked in set of eight, Malabar in set of seven and Pariah in set of six. Their wages were ranging from 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  pagodas per month for each man.<sup>141</sup> English East India Company did provide houses during difficult times to their inhabitants including Palanquin boys.<sup>142</sup> On

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>137</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.III, p.328.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.328.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., Vol.II, p.330.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., Vol.III, p.15.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.328.

<sup>142</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1696, p.144.

the whole Palanquin bearers were not in good conditions socially, economically and politically.

### Watchmen

Watchmen were also an occupational caste group, whose real role was very important in Madras. The *Taliar* caste people functioned as watchman traditionally in the region. The word 'Taliar' was derived from 'talai', which means 'head', a chief watchmen.<sup>143</sup> The Talajari or Chief watchman was a kind of policeman who was generally known as the 'talari'. Watchmen had other duties also, that is, to follow on the track of stolen cattle, to act as a guard over persons, and to serve process and detain goods.<sup>144</sup> H.D. Love also points out that 'Taliar' means watchmen and they act as watch and guard.<sup>145</sup>

Watchmen were appointed in the city of Madras for preventing robberies and other disorders in the city,<sup>146</sup> from the time of the first settlement.<sup>147</sup> Abbe Carre noted that Talliar are a caste of bandits who lurked in the mountains and woods during the day and ravaged the countryside at night.<sup>148</sup> The Talliar were living like savages, cut off from all connection with the towns.<sup>149</sup> Not only in Madras, but also, all over India, these watchmen were not generally respected and did not have good reputation.<sup>150</sup> The English East India Company employed them and gave them importance but politically, socially and economically they were weak.

<sup>143</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, pp.718-719.

<sup>144</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. II, p2.

<sup>145</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.I, p.126; see also *Diary and Consultation*, 1672-78, p.14.

<sup>146</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol.III, p.465.

<sup>147</sup> Fawcett, *The Travels of the Abbe Carre*, Vol. II, p.583.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.II, p.583.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.589.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.583.

### Washermen

Washermen were also another leading occupational caste group in Madras. They were known as 'dhobi', a term derived from 'dhoba,' which in Sanskrit, 'dhav', means to wash.<sup>151</sup> They followed no other profession but of washing.<sup>152</sup> According to *Census Report of 1871*, washermen were called as *Sembadivan* and also *Vunnan*.<sup>153</sup> Buchanan says that 'Agasa' were washermen,<sup>154</sup> while Fort St. George records referred to them as 'Saccala warr'.<sup>155</sup> However, washerman was extremely important for the Company. The English Company's decided that between 'gentu town' or the 'black town' and the 'potters town,' there was a river which was extremely useful for the Company's washermen who daily wash, dry their calicos. Not only this, the Company also ordered that "Justice of the Choultry should clear as much as possible of the ground or sand on the North side of river on either side of Mr.Edward Henry's house and garden, from the houses and gardens that might be useful for the washers."<sup>156</sup> In a sort of protest, the washermen opposed to make contract with the East India Company and forced the latter to provide a proper space for washing.

The washermen also were given money in advance for curing the Company's cloth.<sup>157</sup> But the washermen complained for being paid low prices while they washed lots of cloths. They also complained to the Company to increase the number of washermen as they are not able to wash them all. The Company brought washermen from other parts of

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<sup>151</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. II, p.168.

<sup>152</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol.I, pp.337-338.

<sup>153</sup> *Census of 1871*.p.82.

<sup>154</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol.I, pp.337-338.

<sup>155</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1706, p.55.

<sup>156</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1672-78, p.76.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 1706, p.3.

the country. The Company noted: “we shall extremely want washers to cure the cloth, for their encouragement we have settled the following prices viz:<sup>158</sup>

1. Long cloth.....Pags :1:Fan corge.
2. Long cloth Midling .....Pags:1:4 Fan,corge.
3. Long cloth Fine.....Pags,1:10 Fan corge.
4. Salampares fine.....Pags :21 Fan corge.
5. Salampares Midling .....pags : 16 Fan corge.
- 6.Moorees fine .....Pags : 12 Fan corge.
7. Moorees Ordinary .....Pags :10 Fan corge.
8. succatnums .....Pags :23 Fan corge.
- 9.Betteelas Original.....Pags : 25 Fan corge.
- 10.Betteelas d 40 coveds .....Pags : 21 fan corge.
- 12.Ditto ...50 .....Pags : 25 fan corge.

The above facts show that washermen were in a position to bargain with the Company. Despite this good relationship, the washermen made serious complaints against their chief washerman Narso. The allegation was that, he was a cheat who did not give their wages, and abused them. Therefore, the Company ordered that Roggiah, Saugie and Coopah would be three chief washermen and that head in the General Book be changed from Narso to Roggiah, Saugie and Coopah as chief washermen.<sup>159</sup>

The following folktales can be attributable to the Washermen in South India:<sup>160</sup>

1. *Get a new washerman, and old barber.*

<sup>158</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1700, pp.85-86.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 1693, p.15.

<sup>160</sup> Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, vol.II, p.169.

2. *The washerman knows the defects of the village* (i.e. he learns a good deal about the private affairs of the various families when receiving and delivering the cloths).
3. *When a washerman gets sick, his sickness must leave him at the stone.* (The stone referred to here is a large stone, on which the washerman cleans cloths, and the proverb denotes that, whatsoever sick a washerman may be, his work must be done).

Seeing the above facts, it could be said that they were in bargaining position at least with the English East India Company. Their social position was not good; as Buchanan says, they were not allowed to sit and eat with the other persons from the higher castes. They were highly divided within and not permitted to inter-marry. The washermen were not respected and belonged to the most ignorant caste.<sup>161</sup> Thus, they were socially ignored caste. Economically, they were not so dominant, but during the East India Company's time, they improved their status.

### **Painters**

Another important occupational caste group was that of the Painter, who drew patterns and painted them on calicoes. In the English factory were dyed mostly blue cloths, having above 300 jars set in the ground for that work. Also, the painters made many of their best painting here in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese applied the term "*Pintado*" to any cloth with a spotted or other designs.<sup>162</sup> Paintings, chintz, on which the coloured design was

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<sup>161</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, vol. I, pp.337-338.

<sup>162</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.139.

imprinted by wood blocks or traced by hand<sup>163</sup> and painters were chintz designers and stampers.<sup>164</sup>

The caste composition of the Painter was disputed. Abbe Carre referred to them as the Palli caste.<sup>165</sup> The English Factory records speak of a dispute between the painters and Pallis.<sup>166</sup> The Records of Fort St. George also indicated that “Painter castes” and “Palli Caste” were different, because they had different signs and symbols.<sup>167</sup> For Thurston Pallis were mainly agriculturist castes,<sup>168</sup> but they were not confined to this occupation. They were merchants, cultivators, painters (printers), lascars, sweetmeat vendors, flower vendors, fitters, sawyers, oil-pressers, gardeners, polishers, bricklayers and masons.<sup>169</sup> Hence, Abbe ‘Carre’ did not understand them wrongly, as Pallis were also involved in paintings. However, painters also painted ships, clay goods,<sup>170</sup> and their wages depended on the nature of work done by them (fine or rough).<sup>171</sup>

The Painter castes played a significant role in developing Madras as they tried to collect capital for Fort St. George.<sup>172</sup> Socially, the painter caste (Pallis) belonged to the left hand section.<sup>173</sup> Among the Pallis, there was also one section who were the beggars,

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<sup>163</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol. I, p.63

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129n.

<sup>165</sup> Fawcett, *The Travels of the Abbe Carre*, Vol. II, p.595.

<sup>166</sup> Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol. I, p.140.

<sup>167</sup> Records mentioned several Castes including Pallis and Painter cast as. 1) Churliar Cast. 2) Painter Cast. 3) Taylor Cast. 4) Husband man Cast. 5) Cooley Cast. 6) Washers Cast. 7) Barber Cast. 8) Parrian Cast. 9) Comity Cast. 10) Olyimake Cast. 11) Furniture Cast. 12) Pot maker Cast. 13) Moocha cast. 14) Shepherds Cast. 15) Patanara Cast. 16) Tigga Cast. 17) Cavaree Cast. 18) Hugabamds Cast. 19) Pally Cast. 20) Goldsmiths Cast. 21) Chitty Cast. 22) Weaver caste. Source *Diary and Consultation*, 1686, p.5.

<sup>168</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VI, p.6.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>170</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1703, p.14.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 1686, p.5.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

called *nokkan*.<sup>174</sup> Thus, Pallis (painters) were economically, socially and politically one of the most servile groups in Madras.

### Coolies and Peons

The caste of Coolies was also an occupational caste group in Madras. Coolly means hired labourers, or burden carrier. In upper India, the term had been frequently used for the lower class of labourers who carried earth brick as distinguished from the digger. The word appeared to have been same as gentle. The name *kuli* of a race or castes in western India meant savagery. The application of the word would mean a slave, captured and made a bonded servant in South India. There was a word 'kuli' in Tamil and Canara in common used, signifying 'hire' or wages.<sup>175</sup> The term 'Cooly' also denoted the kahar who were Palanquin bearers in North India. They traveled 25 or 30 miles a day. During carrying, they run.<sup>176</sup> Coolies were the most subjected caste group in India. They were servile labourers who earned their living by a meager wages. They might be called Hindu because they were of ancient inhabitants of country and had a reverence for the cow. They did not make distinction of meats and drinks. They did not eat meat at all.<sup>177</sup> Collies were also hired by other countries.<sup>178</sup> Company also fixed their wages to hire laborers and chief coolly.<sup>179</sup>

The Rates for coolly hire and the fanams and pagodas<sup>180</sup> out of the same are given below:

To MetchelePatan each coolly 1: Pags: Dustoor 2: Fans

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>175</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.250.

<sup>176</sup> Temple, RC., *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.II, pp.114-115.

<sup>177</sup> Yule, Col. Henry, *The Diary of Sir William Hedges, 1681-1687*, Vol.III, p.cccxiii, ccxiv, cccxv.

<sup>178</sup> *EFI, 1665-1667*, p.91.

<sup>179</sup> *Diary and Consultation, 1680*, p.42

<sup>180</sup> 36 fanams (gold coin)=1pagodas (a gold coin with 9 shillings).

To Golcondah each colly 1 ½ Pags : Dustoory 3; Fans.  
 To Soundy each colly ¾ Pags; Dustoory 1 ½ Fans.  
 To Neloor each colly; 14:Fans : Dustoory ¾Fans.  
 To Carrenda each colly 19: Fans Dustoory 1 Fans.  
 To Ramapatam each colly 18: Fans: Dustoory1: Fans.  
 To Oudcore each coolly 13: Fans: Dustoory ¾; Fans.  
 To Armagon each coolly 8:Fans: Dustoory¾;Fans.  
 To Policat each coolly 3: Fans : Dustoorry ¼ ;Fans.  
 To Trevilore Battee and 3: Fans; Dustoorry ¼ : Fans.  
 To Congee Voraum each colly 5:Fans: Dustoory ¾ fans  
 To Veloor each coolly 18: Fans: Dustoory 1; Fans  
 To Chengy each coolly 16: Fans: Dustoory 1Fans  
 To Tripitee each coolly 18: Fans: Dustoory 1; Fans  
 To Trincumber each coolly 18: Fans: Dustoory1; Fans.  
 To Porto Novo each coolly 12: Fans: Dustoory ⅔ Fans.  
 To puddicherree each coolly 12: Fans: Dustoory ⅔ Fans.  
 To Sadrasspatam each coolly 4 Fans: Dustoory ¼ Fans.

The chief coolies were Pundula Grua and Woundda Nasso and their wages were 20 pags per month.<sup>181</sup> Emaun coolly was also a chief Cooley. He had a good relation with Nawab Zulfikar.<sup>182</sup> Emaun coolly is also said to have good relation with the chief Dubashes of Madras.<sup>183</sup> He had certain privileges in Madras.<sup>184</sup> Despite his relation with Nabob and

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<sup>181</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1680, p.42.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 1696, p.28.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 1694, p.11.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.



Dubash, there were several complaints against him that he used several people unkindly. He could not proceed his business according to peons.<sup>185</sup> However, Emaun Cooly was granted freedom from rent in Madras. This grant was given by the Prince.<sup>186</sup> There were also important coolies such as, Issa cooly<sup>187</sup> and Rasasa cooly whose role was also important.<sup>188</sup> The chief coolies were trying to develop the Madras city, when Fort St. George was in developing stage.<sup>189</sup> Except some Coolies, like the Emaun colly, the condition of the coolies were deplorable politically, socially and economically.

The role of Peon was also certainly important in Madras at least for English East India Company as an occupational caste group. Peon means “a footman, an armed messenger and orderly<sup>190</sup> a foot soldier,<sup>191</sup> labourer<sup>192</sup> and act as watchman.<sup>193</sup> The English Company appointed Talliars and peons to watch persons, arrest them if found guilty and carried them to the next guard where the officer of the guard shall examine and if he did not provide satisfactory answers he was finally carries to Justice of peace. If any person shall oppose, abuse or fight even at night, he shall be arrested and should undrgo the same process.<sup>194</sup>

The appointment of peons as watchmen to the city was important as there were many reports of robberies and burglaries committed both within the walls and in the black towns and of other social disorders.<sup>195</sup> Peon’s employment was based on the city’s

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.117.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 1692, p.5.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 1694, p.18.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 1686, p.5.

<sup>190</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.528.

<sup>191</sup> Love, *Vestiges*, Vol. I, p.74.

<sup>192</sup> *Diary and Consultation*, 1683, p.74.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 1701, p.109.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 1693, p.147.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.146.

extension and security. Formerly, peons were only 20, but later on they were increased to 50 peons,<sup>196</sup> but for the delivering of paddy or rice, peons were employed largely, and sometime could be 150 or 120 peons.<sup>197</sup> Peons also received prizes as a soldier and guard.<sup>198</sup> They were categorized as servants and on the basis of occupation for which they were employed. Streyntsham Master employed 12 peons as servants.<sup>199</sup> Peons were also employed as Pattamars (a foot messenger). Despite their hard work, peon's wages were only 1 pagoda per day.<sup>200</sup> Conclusively, they were not powerful caste socially, politically and economically.

### **Pariah caste**

Another important occupational caste group in Madras was a Pariah caste. They played a very significant role. Pariah means a hereditary drum beater. It is derived from 'tam'. Pariah means 'drum'. The term 'Pariah' had been extended to include all the lowest caste members who in the city of Madras numbered one-fifth of the population.<sup>201</sup> A Pariah who was servant and whose office was hereditary, inherited their profession from father to son.

The contemporary writings are full of derogatory and contemporaneous language against the Pariahs. For instance Bowrey puts that: "The Pariahs are the vilest caste of all." "Buy me...as slave boy...let him not be of Parryar, but a good caste."<sup>202</sup> H.Kotani, a great scholar of inscription in South India, pointed out that above Paraiyas are, in

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 1686, p.97.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 1692, p.8.

<sup>199</sup> Love, *Vestiges*, Vol. I, p.448.

<sup>200</sup> Love, *Vestiges*, III, p.15.

<sup>201</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.680.

<sup>202</sup> Bowrey, *A Geographical Accounts*, p.41.

ascending order, watchman, washerman, barber, potter, goldsmith, carpenter, blacksmith, oilmerchant, weaver, merchant and others. While below Pariahs, in descending order, are soldiers (sarvakkarar) and toddy tapper (Ilampunjai) only.<sup>203</sup> Apart from these, pariahs were not admitted in the temple.<sup>204</sup> Even they were not allowed to take water from public well.<sup>205</sup> This confirmed what Yule said that “low caste Hindoos in their own land, to all ordinary apprehension, slovenly, dirty, ungraceful, generally unacceptable in person and surrounding. Yet offensive as is the low caste Indians, were I estate-owner or colonial governor, I had rather see the lowest Pariah of the low, than a single trim, smooth-faced, smooth-wayed, clever. High caste Hindoo on my land or in my colony.”<sup>206</sup>

Generally Pariahs were the lowest categories in society. Despite that, Pariahs were the parts of the Right Hand categories.<sup>207</sup> Generally, Right hand caste according to norms had more privileges than the Left hand caste. However, the Pariah castes were much below even to Left Hand castes, as H.Kotani points out.<sup>208</sup> Then how did Pariahs secure a place in Right Hand Caste? However, all the primary sources support that Pariahs were in Right Hand caste.

Though Pariahs were traditionally the drum beaters, they were servants, the grave diggers, watchmen, scavengers,<sup>209</sup> and palanquin bearers,<sup>210</sup> who were largely employed by the Europeans.<sup>211</sup> Palanquin Pariahs' wages were ranging from 1 ¾ to 1 ¼ pagodas.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Kotani, H., (ed.), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Manohar, 1999, pp.23-24.

<sup>204</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.680.

<sup>205</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VI, p.78.

<sup>206</sup> Yule, *Hobson-Jobson*, p.171.

<sup>207</sup> Appadurai, “Right and Left Hand Caste”, *IESHR*, p.217.

<sup>208</sup> Kotani, *Caste System*, pp.23-24.

<sup>209</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VI, p.115.

<sup>210</sup> Love, *Vestiges*, III, p.115.

<sup>211</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VI, p.114.

<sup>212</sup> Love, *Vestiges*, III, p.328.

Economically, Pariahs were not in a good position to feed their family. Some folktales pertaining to Pariahs are given below:<sup>213</sup>

1. *Though 70 years of age, a Pariah will only do what he is compelled.*
2. *Pariah talks in half-talk, (a reference to Paariah vulgarism of speech).*
3. *If a Pariah boils rice, will it not reach gods?( That is gods will notice all pity, even that of Pariah).*
4. *The drum is beaten at wedding, and also at funeral. (Say according to the Reverend H. Jensen, of a double dealing unreliable person, who is a ready for good as well as evil).*
5. *You may believe a Pariah, even in ten ways; you cannot believe Brahman. (The only saying in favour of the Pariah).*

These sayings also confirm their social, political, economical and cultural position which also played a big role in construction of consciousness.

### **Other Occupational castes**

Several other castes who played also an important role in Madras, are: cooks, purchasers, a servant who went to market and keep the accounts; horse keeper boy,<sup>214</sup> grass cutters, shaving barber, hair dresser, water women and totties (sweepers).<sup>215</sup> Oil makers who used two oxen in their mills for producing oils,<sup>216</sup> boatmen or catamaranmen, who usually

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<sup>213</sup> Thurston, *Caste and Tribes*, vol. VI, pp.117-118.

<sup>214</sup> Boys mean slave, a servant as Henry Yule understands them. See *Hobson-Jobson*.

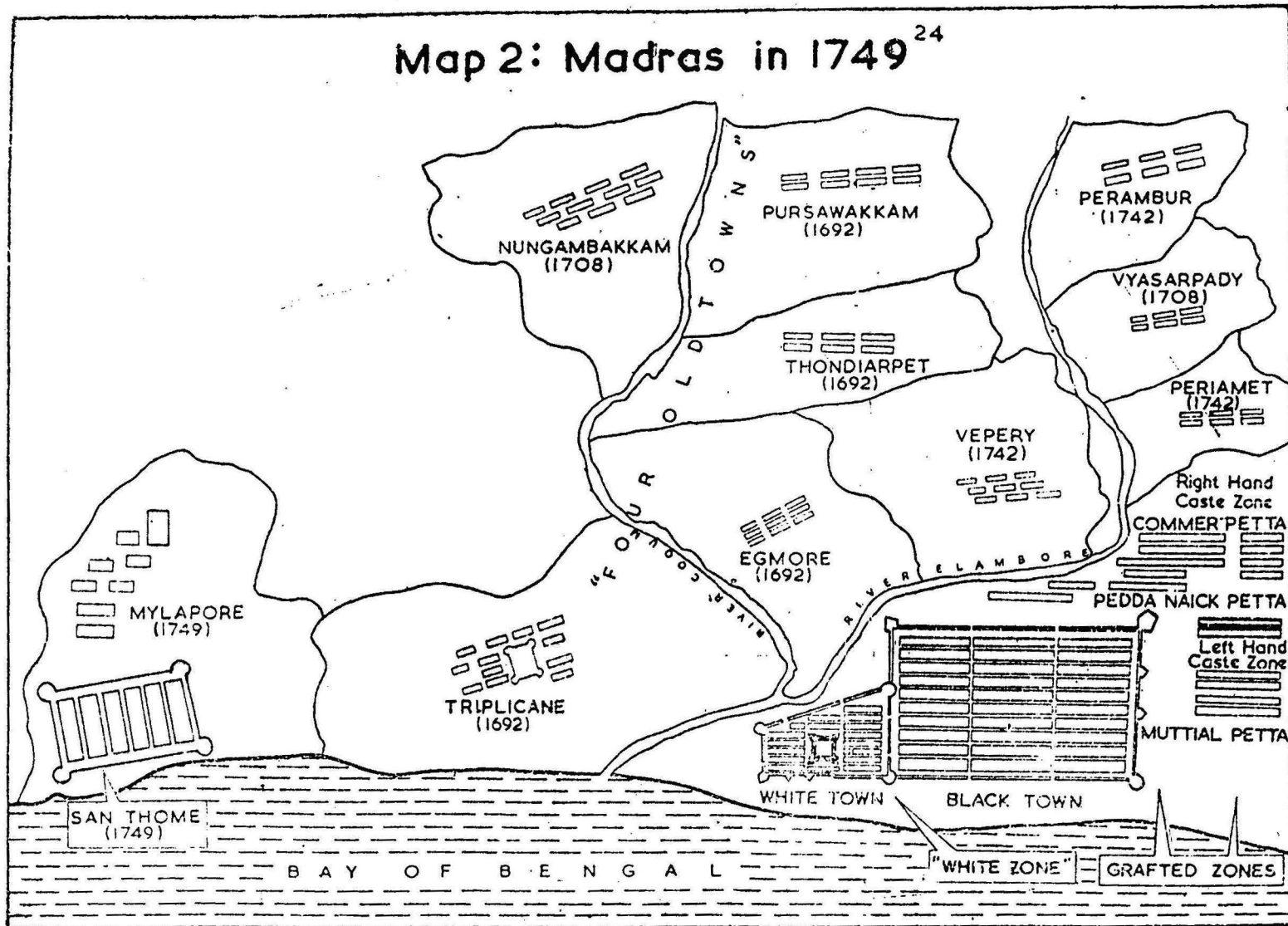
<sup>215</sup> HD Love understands. See *Vestiges*, III, p.15.

<sup>216</sup> Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras*, I, p.80.

appear in coastal areas for fishing or employed by European for business,<sup>217</sup> fishermen, scavengers, potters, flagmen (bearer of European flag), kite sellers, chupdar,( bearer of silver staff ) rundelleers (umberalla bearers), dutymen (lamp-cleaners), arramen (pike men ), sukymen (water-carrier), grasscutters, gardeners and other occupational castes.

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<sup>217</sup> Hoole, *Madras, Mysore and the South India*, p.30.



Sources: Pitt's map, 1708, and official map, 1733.

<sup>24</sup> See Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, pp. 125 and 150.

## Occupational Caste Groups and the English Company

Madras was one of the prolific commercial towns under the English East India Company in the Coromandel Coast in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> It was the largest city in the Coromandel Coast,<sup>2</sup> and its trade was considerable, especially in cottons.<sup>3</sup> Very eminent merchants were permitted to dwell and were admitted free trade under the English flags<sup>4</sup> who were the lords and master of Madras town.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the founding of Madras in 1640 was largely of the British commercial interests.<sup>6</sup> East India Company created the 'Black Town' for the local inhabitants such as the Moors, Hindus, Foreign traders, artisans, sailors and workmen.<sup>7</sup> It was also primarily a commercial center and the majority of its inhabitants directly or indirectly depended upon trade.<sup>8</sup> The Black town was the commercial centre of the city and many mercantile offices were situated here and it was more thickly populated part of the city.<sup>9</sup> Joseph J. Brenning analyzed that European

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<sup>1</sup> Sharma, Yogesh, 'A life of many parts: Kasi Viranna a seventeenth century South India Merchant Magnate', *The Medieval History Journal*, 1, 2, (1998), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Manucci, Niccolao, *Storia Do Mogor (1653-1708)*, (ed.) William Irvin, Oriental Books reprint corporation, 1981, New Delhi, vol. iii, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Ball, V (ed) *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, Oriental Books reprint corporation, New Delhi, 1977, p. 381.

<sup>4</sup> Temple C R., (ed), *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679* by Thomas Bowrey, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *The Travels of the Abbe' Carre' in India and the near East, 1672-1674*, Asian Educational Service, Madras, New Delhi, 1990, vol. ii, p. 554.

<sup>6</sup> Roche, A Patrick, 'Caste and the British Merchant Government in Madras, 1639-1749', *IESHR*, 1988, P.

<sup>7</sup> Abbe' Carre', vol. ii, p. 549.

<sup>8</sup> Neild M. Susan, 'Colonial Urbanism, the development of Madras city in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 1979, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> *Gazetteer of South India*, vol. I, (ed) S. W. Francis and other Mittal Publication, 1988, Delhi, p. 498.

enclaves served as trading centers in seventeenth century and Madras was one of the major center of trade in the coast of the Coromandel Coast.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Madras was a major entrepot and redistributive centre<sup>11</sup> and growing commercial centre in the Coromandel Coast.<sup>12</sup> The English East India Company thought that she will achieve her ambition of developing Madras as a commercial centre in her dominions and this proved enormously successful.<sup>13</sup> Generally, Madras became as a strong commercial power centre in India during seventeenth century and early eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

No doubt, by nature, the English East India Company was an organization founded to engage in the commercial enterprise. Basically, they were merchants inspired by the Portuguese and the Dutch. The English also wanted to have a share in the riches of the Indian trade. This trading nature brought them in the Indian Ocean for cottons particularly and spices, jewels, perfumed rice and other commodities generally.<sup>15</sup> Getting a grant from Venkatappa, the Naik of Chingleput who controlled the Coromandel Coast from Pulicat to San Thome, Mr. Francis Day and Mr. Cogan (both of whom became Governor of Madras in later times) got an offer to erect a Fort at Madras.<sup>16</sup> The English Company settled near the old village of Chennapatam in 1639 and constructed the Fort St. George in 1640. Fort St. George became the residence of their President and Council

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<sup>10</sup> Brenning, J. Joseph, 'Chief Merchant and the European Enclaves of Seventeenth Century Coromandel', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1977, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, *The Political Economy of Commerce Southern India 1500- 1650*, CUP, Cambridge, 1990, p.52.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.62.

<sup>13</sup> Arasaratnam, S, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650 1740*, OUP, Delhi, 1986, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> Newell, H.A., *Madras the birth place of the British India*, Madras times printing 1919, Madras, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Wheeler, J.Talboys, *Madras in the olden time*, 3 volumes complete in one, Asian Educational Service, New Delhi, Madras 1993, pp.1-4.

<sup>16</sup> Newall, H.A., *Madras, the birth place of British India*, p. 10.



and controlled all the trade of Bay of Bengal and other Eastward trades.<sup>17</sup> The English got complete freedom from customs duties on their imports and exports along with the grant. They were allowed to exercise extra territorial power within the grant as well.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the English East India Company was a trading company which played a significant role in Madras.

### **EIC and the Occupational caste groups**

Commercially, the role of occupational caste groups in Madras was very significant. These groups were directly or indirectly dependent upon trade.<sup>19</sup> In other words, these castes were important for the commercial functioning of the English East India Company too. Therefore, the relationship between them was that of mutual interdependence. Both were necessary for the smooth functioning of commercial activities in Madras. For instance, In 1680, three or four thousands of the inhabitants including a large number of the Company's employees, headed by Pedda and Chinna Venkatadri, left the town on strike. This strike disturbed the business of the Company very badly.<sup>20</sup> In this strike, not only the adult men but also the women and children participated and they left the town. In fact, soldiers and peons were sent out to bring back the Mutineers and dispersed them so that they might not make such strike and harm the town's people. In this strike the Dubashes, chief peons, merchants, washers and others left their daily jobs, which caused tremendous difficulties to town people as well as for the Company business. Even the

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<sup>17</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Merchants, Company and commerce*, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> Love H.D. *Vestiges of old Madras*, 4 volumes, Asian Educational Service, Madras, New Delhi, 1996 vol. I, pp.17-18.

<sup>19</sup> Neild M. Susan, *Colonial Urbanism, the development of Madras*, p.239.

<sup>20</sup> Fawcett Charles, *The English Factories in India*, vol.iv (New Series) Clarendon press, Oxford, 1955, p.viii.

Pariah caste did not beat drum, and carpenters did not bring wood to town,<sup>21</sup> so much so that, Streysham Master, then Governor of Madras, realized the usefulness of painters and washermen, especially to the washers whom he writes that “Washers, who does as yet strike, close to their business and are the more to be encouraged by reasons of their usefulness in whitening the cloth at this time being in the height of that business.”<sup>22</sup>

The above facts shows how the occupational caste groups were so important for the English in Madras. It also confirms that power-relation was changing particularly for washermen, Pariah Caste, Weavers, Coolies, and Peons, whose positions were very weak in Ancient India.<sup>23</sup> But in the late medieval period, especially after the coming of the European companies, their conditions improved financially, politically and socially.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the English East India Company and the occupational caste groups were dependent upon each other. Yet, the English Company was in superior position and merchants who accepted company’s subordination derived some benefits and made closer relationship to the English,<sup>25</sup> such as Sesadra, Konara Chitti, Beri Timanna, Kasi Virana, and Sunaca. All were the chief merchants of Madras in the English Company and they were very influential and leaders of their respective caste groups, i.e., Right and Left Hand Castes.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fort St. George, *Dairy and Consultation book*, 1680-81. Madras Govt. Press, Madras, p.76. (Hereafter *Dairy and Consultation*.)

<sup>22</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p.75.

<sup>23</sup> H. Kotanis (ed.) ‘*Caste system, Untouchability*’ discussed extensively the untouchability in history where depressed class positions were very low. Suvira Jaiswal, Louis Dumont, M.N. Srinivasan, all primary documents referred their very low position in Ancient India.

<sup>24</sup> In *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, Washer men were in bargaining position with the company. Not to speak a single word in Ancient India, how, they were in position to complain regarding their salary and discrimination. They even contracted with the Company for the purpose. The company had also compulsion to take their services. (p.27). In the same fashion, all castes bargained the Company and Company also take their service for commercial purpose.

<sup>25</sup> Arasaratnam S. *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.251.

<sup>26</sup> Brennig, J.J. ‘The Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves,’ pp. 328-40.

### Madras: The Occupational Caste Groups

Within the occupational caste groups, there were many sub-castes and divisions within the caste groups. Each and every caste has their own specific functions and duties. Even their social, political cultural, and economic powers, were different. Some of the castes were very highly respected in the society and belonged to affluent background such as Chitties and Komaties. Some of the castes were badly treated as outcastes who were at the bottom of the caste ladder. For instance, the Pariahs were outcastes in the society and very weak financially.<sup>27</sup> Merchants of Madras who played a very significant role were the Komati and Chitti merchants.<sup>28</sup> Some of the castes were weavers, palanquin bearers, peons, coolies, laborers, slaves and other castes who were not merchants in true sense but they were equally worthy for the Company.<sup>29</sup> Some castes extended their activities in the Sea such as the boatmen or *cattamaran* castes who were also not merchants but important for the English Company.<sup>30</sup>

Arasaratnam is of the view that Indian merchants were of diverse groups in seventeenth century, divided into many categories on the basis of ethnic and caste origins, followed their traditional commercial duties, and engaged for generations in specific trading profession. Then, there were other social groups that moved from other occupations into commerce, like some of the weaver castes took commercial occupations, and boatman took small-scale commerce. He divided them into four categories broadly:

1. Sea-borne traders who were ship owners and traders whose primary activities was long-distance and coast trade.

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<sup>27</sup> *Census reported of the town of Madras, 1871*, p, 80.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>30</sup> Hoole, Elijah, *Madras, Mysore and the South of Indian or A Personal Narrative of Mission to those countries*, Longman, London, 1844, p.28.

2. Overseas merchants whose activities were larger than the first.
3. Kings, princes, other members of the royal family, administrative and military officers who took these professions.
4. Nakodas who were specialist sailors, and served as sea captains and navigators.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from these categories there were other merchants who worked in ports and hinterland as wholesalers of many commodities. They were bulk buyers of spices, copper, tin, broadcloth, lead, zinc and other minerals imported by Europeans. They were also vital for export trade in textile, pepper, indigo, saltpetre and opium.<sup>32</sup> Separate from these categories, there were other merchants who functioned as middlemen and brokers whose major area of operation was the textile trade, and they had close link with weaving villages. Another important category of merchants were financiers, schroffs, dealers in exchange and the minting of specie.<sup>33</sup> Documents suggest that Madras merchants actively participated in all categories, particularly, Chetti and Komati merchants.

Kasi Virana, for instance, a Komati by caste, a chief merchant of Madras, engaged actively in commercial activities as he was admitted to take European goods, landed from Company's ship in 1674.<sup>34</sup> About his activity in trade and importance in Madras, Abbe Carre, a French Traveller in Madras during 1672-73, reported that Virana was "The Principal Merchant who governs everything at Madras" which confirms there role in trade and importance.<sup>35</sup> Lawrence Sawcer, a company servant arrived at Madras, wrote in a letter that Kasi Virana was undoubtedly influential, as the Natives said that Sir

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<sup>31</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Maritime India in the seventeenth century*, OUP, pp.179-181.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p, 182.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.183.

<sup>34</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1672—78, p.34.

<sup>35</sup> Fwacett, Charles, *The Travel of Abbe' Carre'* vol. ii, p. 605.

William “Governs within the Fort and Verona (Viranna) without.”<sup>36</sup> Further, Abbe Carre reported that Virana was “richest and most powerful in the country who was now living at Madras. He had in his hand all the English trade on the coast and neighboring countries.”<sup>37</sup> Virana was in a position to recruit his own servants to look after his growing trades, which spread widely.

Fort St. George records puts that “Cassa Verona, apart by himself acquainting us how that he having private notice that the said merchants abroad in the country did not look after ye weavers as they should, but minded their own case too much, he was faine to send out five of his own servants unto each head place being eighteen in numbers, having each their circuit and several others subdivided, with orders to look after the business better and remedy what amiss, at which the said Merchants took great offence.”<sup>38</sup> The Chetti merchants were very mobile and went to Ceylon for trade and even they had their own people settled in Ceylon who gave them significant assistance.<sup>39</sup> It shows that caste like Chettis played a very significant role in all kinds of trade, when every caste had played some kind of commercial roles in Madras.

In the context of commerce, the occupational castes groups may be classified into five categories:

1. *Merchant class*: The Komaties and the Chetties castes activities make them as merchant groups who were traditionally associated with that business.
2. *Artisans*: The group of five or *Kammalan* castes were the artisans castes. They were balcksmiths, goldsmiths, coppersmiths, carpenters and masons and also

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, vol. ii, p.605n.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, vol. ii, p.361.

<sup>38</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1672—78, p.74.

<sup>39</sup> Arasaratnam, S. Dutch, *Commercial policy in Ceylon and its effects on the Indo-Ceylon Trade (1690-1750)*, p.120.

those involved in the handloom industry, the weavers, bleachers and dyers. Some of the other artisan groups were the Cobblers, Tanners, Potters, Brickmakers and other castes. Susan M. Neild termed them as “Skilled Indian artisans.”<sup>40</sup>

3. *Labourers*: In this group came the Palanquin bearer, cooley, peons, grass-cutter, gardener, umbrella bearer, kahar, flag men, kite salesmen, cooks, barbers and others. Susan M. Neild called them “Unskilled labourers”.<sup>41</sup>
4. *Groups of Sea-labourers*: K.N. Chaudhari recognized them as the “group instantly recognizable in every society, the one that lived off the sea.”<sup>42</sup> They were Fishermen, Coral-divers, boat builders, rope-makers, net menders and so on.
5. *Slaves*: Slaves were employed as domestic laborers and were very useful for the Company.<sup>43</sup>

### **Chief Merchants**

The merchant class played a leading role for the English East India Company in Madras. Their functions were diverse and some of the merchants being powerful became the chief merchants of the East India Company. The chief merchants of the English Company enjoyed certain privileges. First, the chief merchants directly participate in the Company trade which far exceeds the trade of other brokers of the Company in Madras. Secondly,

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<sup>40</sup> Neild, M. Susan, ‘Colonial Urbanism: The development of Madras city in the Eighteenth century and Nineteenth Century,’ *MAS*, 1979, p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.227.

<sup>42</sup> Chaudhuri, K.N. *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean, An Economic History from the rise of Islam to 1750*, CUP, 1985, p.121.

<sup>43</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1683, p.67.

the chief merchants mediated between these brokers and the Company. The lesser brokers did not negotiate contracts with the Company directly but only through the chief merchants as sub-contractors. For most case, the Company in Madras dealt with only one local chief merchant. The chief merchant through this arrangement gained a monopoly over the English investment.<sup>44</sup>

Seshadri or Sesadra Nayak and Konari or Konara Chitties were the chief merchant of the Company during the early days of Madras (in 1650). The English Company conducted their trade through them. But unfortunately, both merchants got into financial difficulties and were unable to run their business. Therefore, a Brahmin merchant called Venkata was appointed as the chief merchant of Madras.<sup>45</sup> Sesadra and Konara were removed due to several reasons. One was the financial crisis and second was due to the Right hand caste and Left hand caste dispute where the roles of two Brahmin brothers, Venkata and Kanappa and the English government failed to resolve the situation.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1650s, Beri Tamanna, who belonged to the Perika Baliya caste (who was weavers of gunnies as well as traders in salt), emerged as Chief Merchants of Madras.<sup>47</sup> Brenning points out that it brought a “new generation of merchants into prominence in Madras.” He found that new generation was worthily different from its predecessors, the Malaya family, and occupied humble positions in the Company.”<sup>48</sup> Kasi Virana, who was a long time partner of his predecessor, Beri Timanna, was appointed as chief merchants

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<sup>44</sup> Brenning, J. Joseph, ‘Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves,’ p.334.

<sup>45</sup> Mukund, Kanakalatha, *The Trading world of the Tamil Merchant, evaluation of merchant capitalism in the Coromandal*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1999, p.67.

<sup>46</sup> Foster, William,(ed), *The English Factories in Indian*, 1651-54, pp.236-286.

<sup>47</sup> Arasaratnam, S.Merchant, *Mercxhants, Companies and Commerce*, p.229.

<sup>48</sup> Brenning, J. Joseph, ‘The Chief Merchants and the European Enclaves,’ p.334-35.

of Madras and surpassed his senior partner in some respects.<sup>49</sup> Kasi Virana accumulated great respect as Abbe Carre reported that he as the richest and most powerful in the country and controlled all the English trade on the coast of Coromandel.<sup>50</sup> He accumulated enormous wealth and spread his business in eighteen circles (district),<sup>51</sup> and appointed five headmen to look after the business.<sup>52</sup> Kasi Viranna died in 1680 and was succeeded by Timanna's younger brother, Pedda Vencatadry.<sup>53</sup>

At this time the Madras government was controlled by Streynsham Master who was a vigorous and able administrator but a man of little patience.<sup>54</sup> Inspired by the Dutch's "Joint-Stock Company" system in Pulicat, Streynsham Master also decided to make a 'Joint stock company' for the English East India Company for investment and accordingly there was seven or more than seven principal men appointed to manage the trade and adjust their accounts. Every year, they had to ensure about the 'joint-stock-company'.<sup>55</sup> The Joint-Stock agreement was signed by nine chief merchants initially. They are: 1) Berri Pedda Venkatadry; 2) Cassa Muddoo Verana; 3) Calleany Chitti; 4) Mutty Chitti; 5) Sura Yengana; 6) Conde Malla Madavaya; 7) Rango Chitty; 8) Comarapa Moodaliar; and 9) Aiapa Chitty.<sup>56</sup> Pedda Vencatadry later on withdraws from it due to the decline of his income. As a result, Vencata left the city with 5000 persons. But the efforts of the Right hand caste (Vencata belonged to Right hand caste) were not

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<sup>49</sup> Arasaratnam, S, Merchant, *Companies and Commerce*, p.229.

<sup>50</sup> Fawcett, Charles, *The Travels of Abbe Curre*, vol.ii. p.605. Cercles was understood districts by Yogesh Sharma in his article "Kasi Virana".

<sup>51</sup> Circles were understood to be districts by Yogesh Sharma in his article "Kasi Virana". F.St. G. D&CB. 1672-78.p, 44.

<sup>52</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1672-78, p.44.

<sup>53</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchant, Companies and Commerce*, p.232.

<sup>54</sup> Brenning, J. Joseph, 'The Chief Merchants', p. 338. F. St. G. D&CB, 1680-81, p, 43.

<sup>55</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p.43.

<sup>56</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p.51.



so strong to force Master to change the Company's position.<sup>57</sup>

After his death, his younger brother, Chinna Venkatadri became Chief Merchant and headed the joint-stock trading with the English. Chinna Venkatadri imposed on the inhabitants of the 'black town', such as tobacco tax, betel tax, paddy tax, market tax and fisherman's taxes<sup>58</sup> but he misused his power. Knowing this the Company discharged him from the position of Chief Merchant.<sup>59</sup> Chinna Venkatadri died in 1689 and Alangatha Pillai succeeded him as Chief Merchants. He jointly held charge of the joint-stock company with two others, Beri Timmappa (Pedda Venkatadri's son) and Kasi Mudda Viranna, for six years.<sup>60</sup> English East India Company found many faults and decided not to purchase any cloth from them.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, Chikka Serappa became the Chief Merchant of the Company.

According to Kanakalatha Mukund, Chikka Serappa dominated Madras from 1696 to 1703.<sup>62</sup> He made several contracts with the Company and became very important for the English. Fort St. George records mentioned that "It is resolved that it be propounded to Serappa that he produce to us a Company of Merchants who are inclined to join with him, and will bring in their share of a stocke in money with whom if we approve of them and their stocke we will contract for so much as they will undertake to provide, upon such terms as we can agree."<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, Serappa became bankrupt and could not give the Company's debts. As a result, the Company confined him in a godown as records says, "Tis agreed they be confined to the Brown Godown and there to

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<sup>57</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p.75

<sup>58</sup> Loves, *Vestiges*, vol.I, pp.522-4.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.414.

<sup>60</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*, p.115.

<sup>61</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1696, p.50.

<sup>62</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*, p.119.

<sup>63</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1696, p.132.

remain till they have paid the Company's debt, or given satisfaction for the same."<sup>64</sup> Consequently, according to wish of the English East India Company "Seraupau himself mortgaged all his houses and gardens for security of his debt to the Company, upon which Seraupau, Naira Verona and Ponagattee Narso were discharged from their confinement..."<sup>65</sup>

Another major merchant in Madras was Sunku Rama Chetti. He was the leader of a prominent Komatty merchant family of Madras whose grandfather had worked with the English.<sup>66</sup> Sunku Rama Chetti was the towering figure in the trade for the first twenty-five years of the eighteenth century<sup>67</sup> and was appointed as a Chief Merchant of Madras.<sup>68</sup> The English government told of him that, "Sunca Ramma, offering a bill of exchange for four thousand pagodas, payable to the Deputy Governor and Council of Fort St.David: Agreed the same be accepted of and so much paid out of cash here."<sup>69</sup> Sunca Rama played significant role in Madras. During his time, being a Chief Merchant, he accumulated enormous wealth. The Company used to borrow money from him and other joint-stock merchants.<sup>70</sup> Given below are records of some dealings:

1. One to Sunca Narrayan  
dated 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1716.....Pags.10,000.
2. One to Sunca Ramah (Rama)  
and Colloway (Kelavi) Chetti  
dated 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1716/17.....Pags. 20,000.
3. One to Sunca Ramah and

<sup>64</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1703, p.59.

<sup>65</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1702-3, p.86.

<sup>66</sup> Arasaratnam, S.Merchant, *Mercxhants, Companies and Commerce*, p.249.

<sup>67</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*, p.126.

<sup>68</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Mercxhants, Companies and Commerce*, p.249.

<sup>69</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1705, p.100.

<sup>70</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1717, p.113.

- New Fort St. David Merchant, 20<sup>th</sup> May.....Pags. 13,000.
4. one to Sunca Ramah (Rama) and  
Joint-Stock Merchants, the 27<sup>th</sup> June.....Pags18,000.

The above facts show his importance for the English East India Company.

Other important merchants were Kalavi Chetti,<sup>71</sup> Vankata Chetti, Karanappa Chetti, Kitti Venkatapati (the brother of Kitti Narayan who was the Dubash of Madras), Sunku Muddu Rama (the brother of Sunku Rama Chetti); Sunku Narayan, Sunku Venkatachalam and Kelavi Chettis brother Muttamar Chetti. However, most of the Chief Merchants belonged to the weaver community like Masi Muddu Varanna, Chinna Venkatadri and most important was Beri Timanna, also from the weaving communities. This view is supported by Kanakalatha Mukund who puts that "Class differentiation had emerged within the artisan groups as well."<sup>72</sup>

S.N. Basu also posited that "a Dubash with the caste title of Chetti or Naik which would indicate a mercantile or martial caste affiliation. It is possible that more Chettis and Naiks quietly performed the functions of dubashes than is apparent from the records. Certainly by early 1800s there were a number of Chettis and naiks holding government positions as writers, accountants, managers and even translators --all jobs which might have carried the title of dubash in late 1700s."<sup>73</sup> The extension of the above view is held by S.Arasaratnam. He points out that within the mercantile communities who performed non-mercantile functions appeared in the European ports and other enclaves. They occupied varieties of minor roles such as interpreters or dubashes, ambassadors and

<sup>71</sup> Kelavi is known in th records as Calloway Chetti.

<sup>72</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading world of the Tamil Merchant*, p.117.

<sup>73</sup> Basu, S.N., 'The Dubashes of Madras', *MAS*, 1984, p.10.

agents or vakils at the territorial governors.<sup>74</sup>

### **Commercial Activities of the Chief Merchants**

Merchants performed varieties of activities in Madras. The Chief Merchants were most important and their roles pertaining to their commercial practices were tremendous. In the words of Brennig, “The Chief Merchants had thus stood near the center of Coromandel’s most important market places, interacting in varying ways with the leading commercial, political and social institution of the region.”<sup>75</sup> Subsequently, “the merchants were the most powerful and wealthy of the regional groups to come into contact with the Companies in substantial numbers.”<sup>76</sup> Simultaneously, the English East India Company also provided the opportunities to Indian merchants, as Brennig understood that “In Madras the English permitted a new generation of Chief Merchants to gain power. They owed their status and wealth solely to their association with the Company and the Enclave.”<sup>77</sup>

Records of Fort St. George recognized that some of the Chief Merchants came from middle or even very low caste families.<sup>78</sup> Yet they were allowed to ride on Palanquins, right to receive the presents or gifts by the governor on festive occasions and on the signing of contracts; right to purchase houses and property in favourable location in the Town, even in white Town where only the English men other Europeans were allowed; and the right to carry their own export and import trade from their own

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<sup>74</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Mercxhants, Companies and Commerce*, p.256.

<sup>75</sup> Brennig J. Joseph, *The Chief Merchant*, p.340.

<sup>76</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Merchants, Companies*, p.256.

<sup>77</sup> Brennig, p. 340.

<sup>78</sup> Dispatches from England, 1683, p.32.

settlements at half duty.<sup>79</sup> In the words of Arasaratnam, “It is significant that these signs of social prominence were treasured more and more as the tendency of these prominent merchants to strike roots in European port increased.”<sup>80</sup> It is therefore a very significant trend, which was set by English East India Company for providing the opportunities for not only the upper caste but also lower caste.

### **Artisans, crafts and the commercial centre of Madras**

The artisans were not traditionally a business community but an important caste group to promote business by contributing their skills. In this context, they were, therefore, “promoting business communities” in Madras. From this instances, we can understand their importance. However, these groups played a vital role and contributed greatly to the English Company. The Records of Fort St. George reported the day to day affairs of the Company and there is very little information on these groups. Yet, one can gather enough information about the artisan groups. Here is a list of some artisans and their contribution to the English Company.

The Company great expenses:<sup>81</sup>

#### *Charges in Garrisons:*

For making tools<sup>82</sup> &c., delivered the Engineer

for trying the shells and mortars.....54 pagodas.

Charges of extraordinary:

For erecting Gallows &c.,

<sup>79</sup> Love, H.D. *Vistiges of old Madras*, vol. p.414.

<sup>80</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Merchant, Company*, p.238.

<sup>81</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1719, p.173.

<sup>82</sup> Tools were made by Blacksmith.

for hangs Roger Bullmore pirate.....26 31 40 pagodas.

Mussoola hire<sup>83</sup> ..... 18 pagodas.

Repairs of Fortifications:<sup>84</sup>

For sundry Repair at Ye, Garden House.....113 15 50 pagodas

Charles point: pad labourers & c.....385 25 60 pagodas.

New Warehouse: paid for material & labours .....398 13 30 pagodas.

In another place, Record mentioned charges of Dyet & allowances as 289: 6 pagodas, and for Dyet and stores lay as 258: 29 pagodas.<sup>85</sup>

There are cross sections of references about the activities of these occupational groups regarding painting. Records reported that “The painters have finished and brought in ten corge of chints and they wanting money into carry [on] the rest of their work, agreed that three hundred pagodas be advanced them.”<sup>86</sup> From making gold or relating to goldworks, the English Company employed Goldsmiths.<sup>87</sup> Goldsmiths worked in mint generally.<sup>88</sup> Carpenters were employed to make wood related work including ships.<sup>89</sup> For instance, one English accounts puts that “We asked the carpenters what water the ship made, he said 6 inches in 12 hours we asked him if he coul’d not stop that leak which let in the 6 inches water in 12 hours; he said he could do it very well but it must be in smoother water than there is here, at present, here being now too great a swell and he said he did not take it to be a leak but that the ship wanted caulking near the water’s Edye but

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<sup>83</sup> *Mussoola* were Boat men or *Cattamaran*.

<sup>84</sup> Repairs of fortifications were done by Bricklayers generally.

<sup>85</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1710-11, p.4.

<sup>86</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1710-11, p.5.

<sup>87</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1692, p.45.

<sup>88</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1692, p.44.

<sup>89</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1700, p.53.

her bottom is tight.”<sup>90</sup> It shows the carpenter’s ability to know the sea-ship situations. About the oilmen Records mentions, “The all oylemen shall allow you every time they fill their Mill 1/6 part of a small measure of oyle.”<sup>91</sup>

Weaver community’s role in Madras was also very significant. From the weaving communities, a few people became the Chief Merchant of the English in Madras like Beri Timanna who was the big merchant of the Company. He had friendship and partnership with Kasi Virana, who was the towering figure in Madras.<sup>92</sup> Seeing the importance of Madras, the English Company too wanted weavers to come in Madras. Records showed that “Serapa acquainting us that there are 50 weavers who offer to come with their families and settle here on condition they have the same encouragement as others have had.”<sup>93</sup> Weavers were granted to build houses and exempted from taxes, as records says “Here being some Betteelae weavers who have petitioned for leave to build houses and conveniency’s in order to carry on their trade but desire to be exempted from all manner of taxes for three years, which is agreed to be granted them, and they have bought Mrs. Health Fields Garden for that purpose.”<sup>94</sup> The weavers became part and parcel of English East India Company and ‘*kumbini*’, which mean that they were not to be ignored.<sup>95</sup> Thus, these groups were contributing largely to the Company.

With this, it was also reported by the Fort St. George Records that these groups were also in a bargaining positions as balancing the power by assigning the contract of the Company and forcing them for increasing of wages. One major example was 1680s

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<sup>90</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1720, p.87.

<sup>91</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1701, p.109.

<sup>92</sup> Arasaratnam, S. *Merchant, state and companies*, p.229.

<sup>93</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1698, p. 121.

<sup>94</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1706-07, P.2.

<sup>95</sup> Ramaswamy, Vijaya, *Textiles and Weavers in Medieval South India*, OUP, Delhi, 1985, p.150.

when strike was resorted to by the Right Hand Castes where 5000 people left the town. Painter and other castes threatened their own people of the town. English East India Company tried to mobilize washermen, painter castes, boatmen, catamaran and others. This strikes by the artisan castes disturbed the Company's business.<sup>96</sup> It is a very significant development in the history of Madras and in the life of occupational caste groups. It is important for both the artisans, merchants and the English because they allowed each other to make such space where each could play a vital role for the development of Madras trade.

### **Unskilled labour in Madras**

The category of unskilled labourers had played a tremendous role in the growth of Madras as a the premier colonial port town. They were traditionally not merchants, but they acquired skilled kind of jobs as fishermen. We also found that the landless labourers of untouchable castes were gaining the skills of weaving.<sup>97</sup> However, the labourers were confirming their role by showing their talents to the English Company. They also made the Company realized that without them no kind of trade can be run smoothly. Though not a commercial category, they were necessary entities too. Fort St. George Records mentioned their roles and works. Streynsham Master write a letter to Captain John North (Ballasore) where he focused the importance of these persons. He writes: "You are to receive on board your ship the Golden fleece all the persons hereunder mentioned with their number and necessary who are to take their passage upon you to Fort with

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<sup>96</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1680, pp.76,75,78, 80.

<sup>97</sup> Arasratnam, S. Arasaratnam, S. *Merchants, Companies*, p.267.



myself.”<sup>98</sup> The servants’ lists are as follows:

<u>Servants</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
1. Dubasses.....	12 nos.
2. Palankeen boys .....	9 nos.
3. Peons .....	2 nos.
4. Flag men .....	2nos.
5. Kitti sale men .....	2 nos.
6. Cookes .....	2 nos.
7. Chupdar .....	1nos.
8. Rundeleers .....	3 nos.
9. Duty men .....	4 nos.
10. Barbar .....	1 nos.
11. Arra Men .....	2 nos.
12. Sucky .....	1 nos.
13. Pattamars .....	4 nos.
14. Slave Boyes .....	6 nos.

Labourers wages were different at Hugly.<sup>99</sup>

Rupees

Servant wages for the chief -----12: Y: Mensem.

For the second -----8:

For the minister -----6:

For Y: 3<sup>rd</sup>: of council -----5:

<sup>98</sup> *Dairy and consultation*, 1679-80, p.80-81.

<sup>99</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1679-80, p.164.

For Y: 4<sup>th</sup>: of council -----5:

For the Chyrurgeon -----4:

For the Secretary -----2:

For the Steward -----2:

2 : Palankeens, one for the chief, the other for the second. 7 Horses, 2 Camels (only for the chief), Gurrialls, Cooks, Mussalls, washing, dogkeeper, Barber etc. servant as usual.

*At the subordinate factories* : Servant wages for the chief -----6 rupees per Mensem.

For the second -----4 rupees per Mensem.

For the third -----3 rupees per Mensem.

Generall keeper -----2 rupees per Mensem.

There were 1: Palanquin for the chief; 3: horses for chief only; 3:Gurrialls; 1:cooke; 1:mate; 2:Mussallches. Barber was given 2 rupees a month for washing what it coast for the entire factory.

*At Medapollam*: The wages were different.<sup>100</sup>

Servants wages to attend the chief was---- 2 pags. per mensem.

For the second----- 1 1/2 pags. per mensem.

For the third----- 1 pags. per mensem.

A steward, butler, caterer and brewer. Six men for duties, randell and Kittesale. 1 Pallenkeen for the chief, 3 horse (only for the chief), 1 cooke, 1 Mate, Washing what it costs for all the factory, Barber ½ : Pags; a month. Flag men: as usual.

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<sup>100</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1679-80, p.181.

*At Metchlepatam:*<sup>101</sup> Servant wages for chief -----2: pags per mensem.

For the second -----2 ½ pags per mensem.

For the third-----1 pags per mensem.

For the chyrurgeon-- 1 pags per mensem.

A stewards, servants, buttlar, caterer, buttermen and brewer. 6 men for duties, rundell and kittle sale. 1 Palankeen for the chief; 3 Horse (for the chief); 1 cooke; 1 Mate; Washing what it cost for all the factory. Barber ½ pags a month, a flag man, arranman, pipers etc. as usual.

The above record shows that substantial labourforce was engaged by the Company. By getting the opportunity to be employed in the English East India Company services, they all increased their powers and consciousness and therefore they started posing questions in front of the English. For instance, it was recorded that “Many of the chief washers having made their complaint to the Governor of great wrong done them in detaining their money for their labour and upon demand for offering to whiten, wash more moderate rates than it hath been done.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, we can say that the labourers contributed greatly towards the English trade and life in Madras. Subsequently, they gained importance in the society gradually.

The **sea-labourers** or coastal workers include fishermen, coral-divers, boat builders, rope-maker and net menders. These groups also played an important role for the company. Elijah Hoole focused their importance by analyzing that the communication between the shipping and shore was carried on exclusively by Masoola boatmen and

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<sup>101</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1679-80, p. 189.

<sup>102</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p. 27.

*catamarans*.<sup>103</sup> These groups resided near the sea largely.<sup>104</sup> The English Company also got interested in the fishing business. It was said that “the fishermen shall pay you (Koonu Goree Angerapa Naigui) 325 fanams per annum...That those that boy fish and carry out of town, shall pay out of every fanams worth 4 cash ...that out of every draught of fish, you shall be allowed ten fish...that for fishing in the river, shall be allowed you ten fanams per annum.”<sup>105</sup> The, sea-labourer or Coastal trader also played significant role in the English Company’ trade.

The **slaves** were also important group in Madras. They are not the traditional trading communities but form the bottom ladder of the society. Slaves were largely employed as labourers, domestic workers and other menial works.

### **Madras trade and occupational Caste Groups**

The Trade in Madras mainly constituted textiles and it was a major center during seventeenth century. Besides that, shipping, rice, elephants, mining especially Gold and slave trades were also important but less important than the textiles. Most of these articles were basically for export. Major items of imports were pepper, spices, metals, articles for making ropes and vital to the boat-building industry.

The English East India Company participated on a large scale in the above mentioned trade especially in textiles. They invested enormous amount of money for it. The English Company participated in long-distance trade such as to South-East Asia, China and Japan. Not only that they also participated in the trades with Malabar Coast or

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<sup>103</sup> Hoole, Elijah, *Madras, Mysore and of the South India or a Personal Narrative of as mission to those countries*, Longman,(1844), p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p.30.

<sup>105</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1701, p. 109.

Kerala especially of the papper.

The English East India Company employed some local merchants, non-mercantile groups, slaves and the untouchable caste groups for their trade. When the Chief Merchants and the Company formed the pivot of trades, artisans, labourers, and slaves also greatly contributed for the growth of trade in Madras. In fact, no trade could run smoothly without their assistances.

### **Textile Industry**

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveller, visited the Coromandel Coast during second half of seventeenth century and reported that, "Its [Madras] trade was considerable, especially in cottons."<sup>106</sup> John Fryer, a British traveller points out that; Indian peoples were lovers of cotton.<sup>107</sup> Thomas Bowrey, a sailing master and captain of Royal Navy, describes that Madras was a great producer of Calicoes<sup>108</sup> (cotton cloth) and largely transported to England.<sup>109</sup> The Southern Coromandel (in which Madras was a major textile port) was great producer of blue, red and stripped guinea cloth.<sup>110</sup> Irfan Habib emphasized that the textile industry was well developed in India since the ancient period but after the coming of Europeans it become more prominent. During the seventeenth century, Masulipatam and Madras emerged as large manufacturing centres.<sup>111</sup> The textile was the largest export components of the trades from Coromandel Coast during second

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<sup>106</sup> *Travel in India by Jean- Baptiste Taverner* (ed) V. Ball., in vol. ii, 1977, vol. I, p. 117.

<sup>107</sup> Fryer, John, *Travels in India in the Seventeenth Century*, A.E.S. New Delhi. Madras, 1993, pp.437-39.

<sup>108</sup> Calico included Muslin, Long cloth and chintz.

<sup>109</sup> Temple Carnac Richard,(ed), *A Geographical account of Countries round the Bay of Bengal, 1609-1619*, M.M.P. 1997, p.5.

<sup>110</sup> *Memoirs of Francois Martin, India in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*,(tr. And annotated by) Lotika Varadarajan, Manohar, 1983, New Delhi.

<sup>111</sup> Habib, Irfan and Tapan Rai Chaudhari, *Cambridge Economic history of India*, vol. I , p. 317.

half of the seventeenth century.

Textiles were initially exported to Asian countries but through the Portuguese it was first exported to West Africa and Brazil for the slave trade. Again, during the seventeenth century there was a growing demand for Indian cottons in Europe.<sup>112</sup> In fact, “Coromandel textiles became a link in a trade cycle which embraced the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, Western India, Malabar and Coromandel, Malacca, Java and the Spice islands”<sup>113</sup> and it was “the opening of new markets and the rise of new production methods based on African slave labour, which created the famous triangular trade between Europe, West Africa and America, provided the Indian cotton textiles with a sustained outlet for nearly two centuries (17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>)”.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Indian textiles covered every important port of the Indian Ocean and Indian cloth formed an important part of the economic network of the ocean.<sup>115</sup>

In return, India received precious metals and copper. From the beginning cottons were initially used for purchase of spices and drugs,<sup>116</sup> such as gold, mostly from the Malay world, precious stone from Sri Lanka, Galconda and Borneo, and spices<sup>117</sup> mostly from spice Islands i.e. Eastern Indonesia.<sup>118</sup> Further, textiles and indigo were exported to Persia mainly for silver of Persia.<sup>119</sup> We also got American silver through textile trades.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Varadarjan, Lotika (ed) *Francois Martin*, p.783.

<sup>113</sup> Arasartanam, S., *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p. 97.

<sup>114</sup> Chaudhuri, K.N. *The Trading world of Asia and the East India Company, 1660-1760*, S. Chand & Co. (New Delhi), CUP, Cambridge, London, 1978, p. 277.

<sup>115</sup> Gupta, Ashin Das & M.N. Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean, 1500-1800*, OUP, Calcutta, 1987, p.25.

<sup>116</sup> Varadarjan, L., *Francois Martin*, p. 783.

<sup>117</sup> In spice, Mace, Nutmeg and Cloves come from Indonesia, Pepper from Malaya, Sumatra and Malabar (India) and Cinnamon from Sri Lanka.

<sup>118</sup> Gupta, Ashin Das (ed) *India and Indian Ocean*, p.17.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98.

<sup>120</sup> Chaudhuri, K.N. *The Trading world*, p.277. *Ibid.*, p.98.

The importance of cotton was that it served as cheap household linen, used as dress and decorative material, expensive linen from Scotland and France.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, cotton was easily washable, colors were fast, easy to-clean inner clothing, comfortable to wear and for the riches it was more fashionable, especially for women's clothing that was difficult to achieve with material made from wool. The utility of cotton goods was mentioned by Jamaican traders in a petition dated 1704, "the said Island being situated in a hot climate, much of the clothing of the inhabitants is stained calicoes, which being light and cheap and capable of often washing contributes very much to keep them clean and in good health."<sup>122</sup>

There were many kinds of cottons produced in the region. However, Francois Martin had mentioned that there were two kinds of broad category of cotton produced in Madras, *Calicos* and *Muslin*.<sup>123</sup> *Calicos* again are of many varieties but three important varieties are such as long cloth, salem pores and *Moris*.<sup>124</sup> *Betillas* came under the category of Muslin. However, long cloth or guinea cloth was usually a low grade cloth and was graded into six varieties according to counts. The North Coromandel and Coastal Orissa produced white guinea cloth which was popular in Red Sea and the Levants. The Southern Coromandel produced blue, red and striped guinea cloth. The English termed for guinea cloth was "long cloth". The term 'guinea' cloth was first coined by the Dutch. The next category of Calicos was *Salempore*. Salempores or bedspreads were popular in the European market. *Mooris*, was a superior yellowish white cloth with a red stripe

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<sup>121</sup> Vardarajan, Lotika, *Memoirs of Francois Martin*, p. 783.

<sup>122</sup> Chaudhari, K.N. *The Trading world*, p.277.

<sup>123</sup> Vardarajan, Lotika, *Memoirs of Francois Martin*, p. 783.

<sup>124</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.98.

down the middle. The best kind was, however, the most sought after *Chintz*.<sup>125</sup>

Muslin was a more finely woven cloth made from superior cotton than the Calicos. *Betilla* was produced in the Coromandel Coast. The Portuguese termed “*beatilha*”. There were three main categories. Among them *Organdi* was the best among Muslins. *Betillas* were greatly demanded in South-East Asia, Persia and the Red Sea countries where they used as turbans. During seventeenth century, they began to find new markets in Europe.<sup>126</sup>

In Madras, the Company made “contract” with the local merchants that the textiles industry in Madras was gradually depended on the “contract system”. In the contract system, the merchants had made promise to supply the goods by a certain date and organized their purchase and transport from the weaving towns and districts. The Company had also made promises to pay certain amount of money once the goods reach their factories. For this the Company appointed the Chief Merchant among the local people and he was given all the responsibility for all the required goods to be produce in time.

The Company heavily depended upon these Chief Merchants. For instance, the Company made a contract with Kasi Verana, one Chief Merchant, in 1676. It was said that “The Agent and Council having have several treaties with Cassa Verona & c.: Merchants about the selling unto them the several quantities of Europe goods here under mentioned, and also the contracting with them for the assortment of Callicoes for this years ships, in like manner here under mentioned.”<sup>127</sup> Kasi Verona also accepted the contract: “We underwritten in the name and in the behalf of ourselves our partners, heires

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<sup>125</sup> Vardarajan, Lotika, *Memoirs of Francois Martin*, p. 783.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 784.

<sup>127</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1676, p.96.



and executors and administrators, jointly and severally doe hereby accept of the broad cloth and cloth rashis at the prices and termes aforesaid....We doe also as aforesaid oblige to provide the aforementioned quantitys of Callicos to be all ready for these ships by the 5<sup>th</sup> January next at the prices and goodness settled on the 29 September.”<sup>128</sup>

In 1680, Streyntsham Master, then Governor of Madras, formed a joint-stock corporation of Merchants, where each member of the Company’s merchants assigned a certain number of shares. It was said that “A Joynt Stock of the Merchants to provide the whole investment to pay the Company’s monys thereupon as the goods came in, and to appoint seven or more of the principall men amongst them to manage the trade and to adjust their accounts. Every year to which they answered that it was well, they would consider there of and give an answer.”<sup>129</sup> Till 1720, this was the policy of the English Company for textile industry.

Statistically, the Company’s textiles trade reached its zenith during the first half of the seventeenth century. But in the early Eighteenth century or even in last parts of the seventeenth century; textiles trade began to decline gradually. In second half of the Seventeenth century, in 1664, Madras shared 41% of the total quantities and 48% of the total value of the textiles exported by the Company. In the same year, the total sales revenue from Indian cotton goods was 216836 pounds. Out of this the share of Madras textiles was 58.7% followed by Gujarat at 31.1 % and Bengal at 10.2 percent.<sup>130</sup> Despite that the cotton scarcity was a big problem for the Company and it badly affected the cotton trade.<sup>131</sup> In 1710, the share of Madras in the total quantities of exported textiles

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<sup>128</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1676, p.97.

<sup>129</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1680-81, p. 43.

<sup>130</sup> Chaudhari, K.N. *The Trading world at Asia*, p.290.

<sup>131</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1711-12, p. 9.

was 28% while Bengal held a much higher share at 47%. Fort St. George Council also reported that Madras textiles were becoming unprofitable as compared to Bengal.<sup>132</sup> We can also see that ups and downs of the Company's textile trade in the table given below:

*English Textile Trade in Madras:*<sup>133</sup>

Prices at Madras Pagodas per score					Total quantity contracted					
Long Cloth			Sailemport		Pagodas			Number prices		
Year	Con-tract	Actual	Con-tract	Actual	Madras	Fort St. David	Total	Madras	Fort St. David	Total
1674	27.50	27.50	12.00	12.00	80,000		80,000			
1676	27.50	27.50	12.00	12.00				99,300		99,300
1677	27.50	26.12	12.00	11.40	74,000		74,000			
1678	27.50	25.50	12.00	11.12				119,000		119,000
1679	27.50	25.85	12.00	11.28						
1680	27.50	25.85	12.00	11.28				118,000		118,000
1681	27.50	25.85	12.00	11.28				134,000		134,000
1684								72,400		74,400
1685					60,000		60,000	47,400		47,400
1686					12,00	80,000	92,000			
1688	25.55	27.59	11.14	11.14	40,000		40,000			
1692	25.55	27.59	11.14	12.03	40,000	10,000	50,000			
1693	27.50	27.50	12.00	12.00	27,000	20,000	47,000			
1694	25.55	28.10	11.14	12.25	20,000		20,000			
1695	25.55	28.10	11.14	12.25	15,000		15,000			
1696	27.50	30.80	12.00	13.44	20,000	20,000	40,000			
1697	27.50	30.80	12.00	13.44	52,560		52,560			
1698	27.50	34.37	12.00	15.00	60,000	27,000	87,000			
1699	34.00	34.00	16.50	16.50	151,125		151125	89500		87500
1700	31.00	36.00	15.00	16.50	150000	30,000	180000	85500		85500
1705	31.50	31.00	14.50	15.00				51800		112300
1708	31.50	31.50	14.50	14.50		40,000		10120	31250	91970
1712	31.50	29.92	14.50	14.50				57000	54510	111510
1715	31.50	33.07	14.50	15.22				58000	64600	1226000
1720	31.50	31.50	14.50	14.50	117119			98680	115900	214580
1740	40.00	40.00			86920		86920	36477		36477

The above table shows the ups and downs of textile trade in the Coromandel region.

In the context of the cotton spinning and weaving mills in the Presidency of

<sup>132</sup> Chaudhari, K.N. *The Trading world*, p. 296.

<sup>133</sup> Statistics collected by K. Mukund by records of Fort St. George and Fort St. David in 'the trading world of Tamil Merchant,' p.81.

Madras we also have the following table.<sup>134</sup>

Numbers	1881	1891	1901	1903
Mills	3	8	11	12
Looms		555	1,735	1,747
Spindles	48,000	173,000	288,000	288,000
Hands employed daily	1,400	5,900	12,600	12,000

### Caste and the Textile Industry

The role of caste in the textile industries were also very important. The majority of the chief merchants were the Chettis or Komattis, but some of them had also come from the weaving communities.<sup>135</sup> In fact they controlled the textiles trade. The Chief Merchants made several contracts with the Company for providing finished cotton goods. Indeed, these merchants were the backbones of the textile industry. Of course, the weavers did definitely form the most important elements in the textiles industries. Among the weavers, *Kaikollar* caste played a very significant role. This caste was called the warrior merchants. Their roles in dispute between the Right and Left Hand castes were also very significant.<sup>136</sup> J.J.Brennig, says that the weavers held a central position in the textile industry but the Europeans had very little direct contact with them.<sup>137</sup> However, such assumption is only partially true for the English Records puts that "It is ordered that Pags. 20,000 be paid to the honourable Company merchants to be delivered out ye weavers to keep them employed and to prevent their being concerned with the interlopers to hinder

<sup>134</sup> *Gazetter of South India* (ed.) W.Francis, Vol. I, Mittal, Delhi, 1988, p.68.

<sup>135</sup> Brennig, JJ., *Chief Mercahnts*, pp.320-340..

<sup>136</sup> Mines, M., *The Warrior Merchants*, pp.1-10.

<sup>137</sup> Brennig, JJ., 'Textile producers and production', in S,Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Merchants amnd Markets in Medieval India*, OUP, 1990, Bombay, p.79.

their pricing of cloths.”<sup>138</sup> Further, it was said that the “Weavers and Washers [were] in employment for 3 or 4 months.”<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the Company also encouraged to settled weavers and painters in their territory so that they could be used for weaving.<sup>140</sup>

A list of the houses of some castes and the numbers of persons who inhabit are given in the records as:

Castes	No. of Houses	No. of persons.
1. Painters D. Qt.....	35.....	Men.....100.
		..... <u>Women.....81.</u>
		..... Total : ...181
2. Weavers D.Qt.....	20.....	Men.....39.
		..... <u>Women.....36.</u>
		.....Total : ...95
2. Painters D. (Left Hand caste).....	18.....	Men.....44.
		..... <u>Women.....49.</u>
		.....Total : ...93
3 Chittys D.Qt. ....	14 .....	Men.....33
		..... <u>Women.....30</u>
		.....Total : ...63

The above lists show the usefulness of the weavers and painters for the Company. However, weavers had to pay customs at the Choultry while painters were free from customs.<sup>141</sup>

Washerman were also important for cotton trade. The washermen’s duties were “washing, whitening, congeeing, beating and curing all the hanourable Company’s

<sup>138</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1683, p.70.

<sup>139</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1695, pp.68-69.

<sup>140</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1719, p.224.

<sup>141</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1719, p.225.

cloths'.<sup>142</sup> Peter Floris pointed out that weaving, bleaching, dyeing and paintings were practiced at all the centers.<sup>143</sup> The subsequent table also shows the structures of wages caste (bleachers and collies role) in textile industries.<sup>144</sup>

	Pagodas	Fanam	Cash
Beating		3	
Cooly hire for carrying		1	30
Brown Cloth to washing place, do for carrying			
It back after it is washed		1	30
Conipolys wages		1	
Goats dung to rub the brown cloth for washing		1	
Chinam, soap and choud		8	
Fuel for bailing the cloth three times before well wash		9	
Do. For boiling rice		1	
Indigo to prevent the red and brown spots in congee and cloth		10	40
		26	20
For every corge of long cloths washing rice allowed to the conge is measure 16, whereas the merchants accounts half thereof on their part and for the other half, 8 measures they receive in your positions account the value of it .		10	40
		1	60
Bleachers paid by the Company for washing 20 pieces bleachers profit		1	5
		4	20
the price of rice during the time the above price was fixed	5-6 pagodas		for a grace.
The price now of rice	22-3 Pagodas		for a grace

<sup>142</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1681, p.22.

<sup>143</sup> Floris, peter, *His Voyage to the East Indsies*, 1611-1615, p.xx.

<sup>144</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1736, p.78.

Thus, textile trade during the seventeenth century was the largest industry in the coromandel region and the role of the various caste groups were also very great.

### **Shipping**

As Madras was not a natural harbor it was not a major centre of shipping industry as was Masulipatnam. Yet, in the early eighteenth century it began to attract some Indian shipping which was based in that port because the Chief Merchants who dealt with the English Company had begun to pursue their overseas shipping interests. In the eighteenth century some of the prominent merchants were known to have owned and operated ships. Some of them were jointly operated with the English Company servants. The Portuguese, Armenians and some free merchants also involved in shipping. Some of the Madras ships participated in long-distance coastal trade, to destinations like Pegu, Tenasserim, Bengal, South East Asia, Japan, China, Africa, Brazil, London and within the Indian Ocean countries. There were also small boats whose role was very significant. These small boats brought printed textiles from Madras to China, to South East Asia and so on.<sup>145</sup>

The role of the caste groups in this trade was also very significant. The rich communities like Komattis and Chettis, possessed many ships and participated in long distance trade. Some of the big ships were named through their owners such as Venkatesh, Venkatalatchumi, Jailatchumi, Chindagiri, Terupathy and Arunachalan. There were also others ships which were identified by castes name such as 'Chetty', 'Komatties', 'Balija Chettis', 'Beri chetis', or 'Vyapari Chettis'. Some other ships were also identifiable by their links to the English Company as 'Dubashes' 'Kanakapillas' and

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<sup>145</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.196.

‘Polygars’.<sup>146</sup>

K.N.Chaudhari has also pointed out that fishermen, coral-divers, boat-builders, rope-maker, and net-menders always settled near the sea. Their childhood starts with the connection of the sea and it continued through the hard toils of an entire lifetime. Such people were found everywhere and at every port. They were the original boatmen who found, in the sea, their daily sustenance. In the social hierarchy, the position of the fishermen was very low. Thomas Bowrey noticed that the caste of fishermen in the Coromandel Coast called the “*Machuas*” were regarded as the lowest among the Hindu untouchable and lived separately from other people.<sup>147</sup>

The role of Boatmen was also very important. Especially the *Catamarran*’s boatmen were naturally very significant. *Catamarans* or *Mussoalars* were very big boat, used by the *machus*. They were widely employed in transporting passengers and bulky goods.<sup>148</sup> Elijah Hoole, a Missionary of the region in 18<sup>th</sup> C. reported that the communication between the shipping and the shore was carried on exclusively by the *Musoala* boats and *Catamarans*. He said “the boats which were from twenty to thirty feet in length, six feet depth breadth were constructed of strong planks, bent by means of fire; stitched together through hole drilled all round the edges with threads or chord of coir, the outer fibrous covering of the coconut; inside the boat, the stitched enclose a sort of caulking or wadding of straw, rendering the seams water tight... *Mussoala* boat was generally manned by ten hands; eight men at the oars, one at the helm and one boy to the water...During strike the boat they sing a song together”.<sup>149</sup> However, carpenters,

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., pp.198-199.

<sup>147</sup> Chaudhari, KN., *Trade and Civilization*, p.121.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>149</sup> Elijah, Hoole, *Maadras, Mysore*, p.28.

caulkers, sailors (lascars), general labourers (coolies) and blacksmiths were employed heavily at shipping industry. From fifty to a hundred persons were employed at each yard.<sup>150</sup>

The *Kammalan* caste was immensely important for the Company. For instance, carpenters knew that ship should be 6 inches in water for 12 hours. The carpenters were very knowledgeable about the sea-worthiness of the shipping they constructed. For instances one English record mentioned that, “we asked him how this ship came to want so much caulking he said he lay a long time on the west coast and rode out several great storms that she being a new ship it was usual for a new ship to want more caulking than a ship at a second voyage. The carpenter desired us to note it is not usual to fit ships here for a voyage home and that his place is not convenient for it because he must reap off the carts of the lower whales to come to the seam under them and to search the butts and scarf of both the whales and that in all new ships it is necessary so to do else the goods will damaged... We asked him in how long time the ship could be fit to take in goods and have all that work done, he spoke of and what other work should be necessary he said in 20 days more but if the weath were favorable than in 17 or 18 days for he said that work must be done upon a stage, we asked him if he could not work on a stage now, he desired us to go about the ship in a boat and see it we coul’d then stand upon a stage. Whence upon Mr. Pyke desired the carpenter to go in the Yawl with Mr.Catwright and Mr. Murray who went and looked at the ship whales afore and abaft and when they came in were asked if they thought any man could work on a stage in such weather, they said that after the change of the moon fairer weather and smoother water might be expected but

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<sup>150</sup> Habib, I., *Cambridg Economic History*, vil.I, p.322.



that the ship must be lighted more and heeled.”<sup>151</sup>

Thus we have seen that in shipping trade various castes were involved. Some of them were merchants in true sense, some as sort of merchants who actively participated in trade.

### Slave Trade

Although, English Company literally denounced the practice of slave trade unlike the Portuguese and other Companies, such practices were prevalent in the town of Madras during our period of study. In 1792, British rule forbid slave trades in any forms in their colonial empire. Those who dealt with slaves will be considered as thief and be punished according to the law. The purchasers were to be similarly treated. Despite such stringent rules slave trade was clandestinely practiced in Madras. Many instances of stealing and transportation of persons for slave were noticed by the English records.<sup>152</sup> Edgar Thurston recognized fifteen kinds of slavery:<sup>153</sup>

1. Those born of female slaves.
2. Those purchase for a price.
3. Those found by chance.
4. Slaves by descend.
5. Those fed and kept alive in famine time.
6. Those given up as a pledge for money borrowed.
7. Those binding themselves for money borrowed.
8. Those captured in the battle fields.

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<sup>151</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1720, p.87.

<sup>152</sup> Thurston, E., *Ethnographic note in Southern India*, p.443.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.441-442.

9. Those unable to pay gambling debts.
10. Those becoming slaves of their own wish.
11. Apostates from a religious life.
12. Slaves for a limited period.
13. Slaves for subsistence.
14. Those who for love of slave women become slaves.
15. By voluntary sale of liberty.

Edgar Thurston emphasized that the first four could never obtain their liberty without the consent of their owners.<sup>154</sup>

The English Company employed slaves not for purpose of trade but for routine functions and for palanquin bearer, coolies and so on. Every Governor and subordinate officers of the English had slaves.<sup>155</sup> These slaves came from Brazil, Africa exchange of textiles. Within Madras, slaves were largely employed. For instance, Fort St. George records mentioned that every year large numbers of slaves were export by the traders who were mostly stolen in the villages in which children constitutes majority of them. It was done by professional traders. Therefore, the Company ordered that no more slaves should be sent off the shore again.<sup>156</sup> Records of 1687 for the month of September revealed a striking instances of torture and the magnitude of slave trade carried in Madras. In September 1687 alone 665 slaves were exported from Madras.<sup>157</sup> These period was basically the famine years when many people sold themselves to the Europeans in order to avoid death. All Diary and Consultations book of Fort St. George records maintained

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.442.

<sup>155</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1679-80, p.164.

<sup>156</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1682, p.70.

<sup>157</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1687, p.63.

the slave registers in the warehouse. Therefore, slaves were treated as commodities and employed for their daily uses. Hence, it could be said that slave trade was practiced in one form or the other.

### **Other trades**

Madras imported many things such as rice, pepper, elephants, and varieties of spices, bullion, varieties of wine, paddy, betel and tobacco. For instance records says that “we yearly lay up stores of paddy and pork for fear of troubles from the country, and buy in plank and timbers and several other stores, which when we find have no occasion for we dispose of them as opportunity presents.”<sup>158</sup> English Company might involved in growing paddy in Madras like, “Suncah Ramah & c. renters of the Paddy fields pay into cash pagodas seven hundred and ten in full of a years rent of that cowle ends. The 16<sup>th</sup> January last.”<sup>159</sup>

The imported grains in Madras during 1712-13 are given below:<sup>160</sup>

1. Rice and other food grains imported by sea 3,603 garce @35 pagodas per grace.....126,105 pagodas.
2. Paddy imported by sea 1,331 Garce @25 pagodas per Garce.....33,280 pagodas.
3. Paddy brought in by renters by land and sold in city 2,003 Garce @20 pagodas per Garce.....40,000 pagodas.
4. Paddy brought in renters by land and consumed 1,500 garce @ 20 pagodas per grace.....30,000 pagodas.

<sup>158</sup> *Despatches to England*, 1707-8, p.82.

<sup>159</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1719, p.63.

<sup>160</sup> *Despatches to England*, 1714-1718, p.63.

Total Value: 209,445 pagodas. [219,385].

However, rent of the paddy fields per annum was 710 pagodas.<sup>161</sup> Moreover, according to Company's record all grounds were cultivated for paddy. It indicates that paddy became very important crops in Madras.

Pepper was also an important spices which was sent by voyages:<sup>162</sup> Pepper was purchased from Sumatra and on account of this they send good quantities of cloth and other goods.<sup>163</sup> Candy Pepper was also imported from the West Coast, that is Malabar Coast.<sup>164</sup> Thus, pepper was very important spice imported by Madras regularly.

About betel and tobacco fort St. George records mentioned that "The farms of betel, tobacco, ganjee and expired 15<sup>th</sup> December the farmers much in arrears having encouraged the planting beetle gardens, 5 or 6 being in perfection which the leaves being small pay but half custome the farmers complain of the gardens and desire abatements; shall adjust all when the ships one gone: it will be difficult to keep up the farms as formerly lett and fear must take them into company's hands."<sup>165</sup> Company probably took heavy rents as betel, tobacco and arrack farms were not agreed to pay more than 6,000 pagodas.<sup>166</sup> Betel and tobaccos farmer's conditions were not good as records says "They having houses goods nor chattels to make any satisfaction."<sup>167</sup>

Apart from that many metals were imported from Europe.<sup>168</sup> Elephants were also imported as records says "The imported for this two years last past were not of half the

<sup>161</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1717, p.126.

<sup>162</sup> *Despatches from England*, 1706-1710, p.6.

<sup>163</sup> *Despatches from England*, 1719, p.46.

<sup>164</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1702, p.70.

<sup>165</sup> *Despatches to England*, 1703-04, p.10.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>168</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1718, p.79.

value they used to be by reason the owners would gladly have sold them at almost any rate rather than at so great an expense (for rice is their chief diet).”<sup>169</sup> The Company also imported wine although it was only for their uses. The wines names were Gallicia wine, clamet, canary, palm, white Lisbon, Rhcnish, Sherry, Syder, Burton Ale, Bottle beer, Ditto Small, Cask beer, Ditto, Cheese, Pipes and Tobacco.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1719, p.129.

<sup>170</sup> *Dairy and Consultation*, 1718, p.99.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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# Caste Dispute, Riots and the English Company

In South India, society was divided vertically into two caste groups, more commonly referred to as the “left hand caste” and the “right hand caste” (*Valangai* and *Idangai* in Tamil) for almost nine centuries, roughly from 1000 to 1900 A.D. Each of the broad caste divisions consisted of many sub-castes which were bounded together. Right Hand and Left Hand caste were not actually caste but they were groups of castes which constituted a broad category of political, social or cultural groups. For instance, in 15 January 1707, Fort St. George Records pointed out that it was deliberated to which of these caste divisions the weaver caste and oilmen caste belonged. The Company assigned the weavers to the Left hand and Oilmen to the Right hand caste which they were ordered to keep or be severely punished. In right hand caste groups the Chetti and Komati were on the top while Paraiyar were at the bottom. In the same way Beri Chetti secured the top and Pallan and Palli were the last among the left Hand caste. In other words, the trading communities, on both sides, were on the top while the untouchable groups of both side were at the bottom.

By and large each of the caste groups claimed a superior position. For instance, the artisan groups and untouchables castes claimed ritually higher status and tried to be place themselves along with the upper caste groups. However, this social relation caused bloody dispute and produced riots. By the seventeenth century caste conflicts and riots were almost continuous between the two sides in order to defend their relative social

positions and status. Symbol, social space, physical space of human settlements and more importantly, dignity, pride and superiority was the main reason for these disputes and riots.

The English Company played very significant roles in quelling the riots as they were primarily concerned about their trade and commerce. They were not worried much about the disputes but for the smooth functioning of commerce they did intervene during the riots. They separated the streets of the different caste groups and enunciated rules and regulations of the Company to control the riots or conflict. The Company's trade used to be greatly affected because of the disputes, particularly during riots, conflicts and strikes. The company was not able to understand the situation and nature of conflicts. But it shows that the power relation was changing. The whole communities particularly artisans and untouchable groups were getting importance as compared to the earlier period.

Madras was the chief place where riots occurred largely and more frequently. Although the whole South India was affected in general, it was more rampant in the Tamil and Telegu speaking country in particular in which Madras experienced the most frequently during seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries.

### **Right and Left Hand castes: Origin**

The origin of this division remains unknown, unexplained and a mystery. Scholars of South India history like Brenda Beck,<sup>1</sup> Nilakanta Sastri,<sup>2</sup> N.Subrahmanian,<sup>3</sup> Arjun

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<sup>1</sup> Beck, EF Brenda, "The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society," *JAS*, 1970, p.779.

<sup>2</sup> Sastri, KA Nilakanta, *The Cholas*, University of Madras, 1975, pp.550-552.

<sup>3</sup> Subrahmanian, N., *Tamil Social History*, vol.II, A.D.600-1800, Institutes of Asian Studies, Chennai, 1998, p.153.

Appadurai<sup>4</sup> and Burton Stein,<sup>5</sup> have agreed that the first known mention of right-left hand caste division appeared in an inscriptions dating from the first half of the eleventh century A.D. Burton Stein mentioned the inscriptions which says: "...in the second regnal year of the king (Kulottunga I) there was a clash between the Right –Left hand and left hand communities in which the village was burnt down, the sacred places destroyed, and the images of deities and the treasure of the temple (Mummudi-Chola-Vinnagar-Alvar temple) looted." This division appeared also to have existed in Southern Karnataka, "*balagey and edagey*" terms were used for right and left hand divisions. Other terms were used in later period among the Kannada speakers as *desa* for right hand division.

In Telegu speaking area the terms *Kampulu* was used for the Right hand and *Panchanamvaru and Pnachanulu* were for the left hand divisions. Panchanamvaru and Panchanulu means five artisan-trader groups usually consisting of goldsmiths, blacksmiths, braziers, stone and carpenters. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, these groups were known to us through affiliations of religion. Those who worshiped Vishnu (Srivaisnavas) came to be known as the right hand divisions, and Siva worshipers allegedly corresponds to the left divisions.<sup>6</sup>

The origin of the Right hand and Left hand caste groups is also traced to the various armies or military classifications of the Cholas. During the eleventh century, Rajaraja Chola invaded Vengi Nadu, Rettaipadi, Gangaipadi, Kollam, Kalingam, Ilam (Ceylon), Madurai and other countries. These armies were classified into two divisions. Rajaraja constituted his own regiments from Cholamandalam (the heartland of the Chola

<sup>4</sup> Appadurai, Ajun, "Right and Left Hand castes in South India," *IESHR*, 1974, p.223.

<sup>5</sup> Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Delhi, 1994, p.174.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.174-175.



state, in the basin of the Kaveri river) and the second armies made up from the Pandya, Telugu and Canarese countries. The former regiments were made from the Vedan, Nattam, malayanman and Paraiyar castes to be called right hand army, while the other was made up of the Pallans, Pallis, Madigas and Bedars who were called the left hand army.<sup>7</sup>

There were other sources which give some explanations of the origin and meaning of right and left hand castes. Arjun Appadurai gave eleven explanations of the origin of the castes. He collected sources from some of the inscriptions and some from secondary sources.<sup>8</sup> Srinivasa Aiyangar posited that right hand and left hand castes origin was a religious phenomenon. Arjun Appadurai narrated that “The right hand and left hand castes took its origin from the command of the goddess Kali at Kanchipuram (the seat of so many religious and political changes) where it is said, exist to this day special halls for the two parties called Valankamantapam and Idankaimantapam.”<sup>9</sup>

In the context of the origin of the left hand and right hand castes, Edgar Thurston has three explanations which refer to the conflict between the Kammalan (Artisans) and Vellalas (non-Brahman dominant Tamil agricultural caste): “The Kammalans belong to the left hand, as opposed to the right hand faction. The origin of this distinction of castes is lost in obscurity, but according to one version, it arose out of a dispute between the Kammalans and Vellala. The latter claimed them as their jatipillaigal or caste dependents, while the former claimed the latter as their own dependents. The fight grew so fierce that Chola king of Conjeeveram ranged these two castes and their followers on opposite sides,

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<sup>7</sup> Appadurai, “Right and Left Hand castes in South India,” *IESHR*, 1974, pp.223-224.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.233-241.

<sup>9</sup> Aiyangar, M.S., *Tamil studies*, Madras, 1914, p.99, as cited in Appadurai, “Right and Left Hand castes in South India,” *IESHR*, 1974, p.237.

and enquired into their claims. The Kammalans and those who sided with them, stood on the left for the king, and the Vellalas and their allies on the right. The king is said to have decided the case against the kammallans, who then dispersed in different directions.”<sup>10</sup>

Edgar Thurston’s second explanation refers to the conflict between Balijas and Kamallans. He said “according to another legend, a Kammalan who had two sons, one by a Balija woman, and the other by his Kammalan wife, was unjustly slain by a king of Conjeeveram, and was avenged by his two sons, who killed the king and divided his body. The Kammalan son took his head and used it as a weighing pan, while the Balija son made a Peddler’s carpet out of his skin, and threads out of the sinews from stringing bangles. A quarrel arose, because each thought the other had got the best of the division, and all the other castes joined in, and took the side of either the Kammalan or Balija.”<sup>11</sup>

Edgar Thurston also recorded the *Mysore Census Report 1891*, which refers to the origin of right-left castes pertaining to the untouchables groups (Holayas and Madigas): “At a remote period, Jambava Rishi, a sage, was one day questioned by Isvara (Siva) why the former was habitually late at the Divine Court. The Rishi replied that he had personally to attend to the wants of his children everyday, which consequently made his attendance late: whereupon Isvara, pitying the children, gave the rishi cow (Kammadhenu) which instantaneously supplied their every want. Once when Jambava was absent from Isvara’s Court, another rishi, named Sankya visited Jambava’s hermitage, where he was hospitably entertained by his son Yugamuni. While taking his meals, the cream that had been served was so savoury that the guest tried to induce

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<sup>10</sup> Thurston, E., *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, AES, New Delhi, 1993, vol.III, p.117.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp.117-118.

Jambava's son Yugamuni, to kill the cow and eat her flesh; and, in spite of the latter's refusal, Sankya killed the animal, and prevailed upon the others to partake of meat.

On his return from Isavara's Court, Jambava found the inmates of his hermitage eating the sacred cow's beef; and took both Samkya and Yugamuni over to Isavara's Court for judgment. Instead of entering the two offenders remained outside while Sankya rishi stood in the doorway. Isavara seems to have cursed them to become Chandellas or outcasts. Hence, Sankya's descendants, by having stood on the right side were designated right-hand caste or Holayas; whilst those who sprang from Yugamuni and his wife Matangi are called left hand caste or Madigas."<sup>12</sup>

N. Subrahmanian also refers to the origin of Right hand and left hand castes. He posits that according to an *Itanlai-Valamkai Puranam* (of A.D. 1692-93) Siva (the non-Brahmin Vedic deity) and Indra (the Brahmin deity) and Bhrigu (the Brahmin sage) created the right hand division.<sup>13</sup> In another context this divisions were seen as the result of disagreement between Sivas and Pravati. The *Idangai-Valangai puranam* assigned to each division different somatic makers. Blood, skin, and eyeball were assigned to Left Hand while bones, nerves and brain to the right hand caste.<sup>14</sup>

Thus we can see the various explanation of the origin of the right hand and left hand castes. Each explanation has been related to religion which might be true or wrong but it is a fact the right hand left hand caste groups existed from eleventh century onwards. Perhaps, it is also true that almost all divisions were created through a great conflict and probably winner party was designated as Right hand caste and the loser party as left hand caste, particularly in case of Kammalans caste.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., vol.IV, pp.315-316.

<sup>13</sup> Subrahmanian, *Tamil Social History*, p.153.

<sup>14</sup> Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and society*, p.184.

### **Terms used for Right and Left Hand caste.**

In generic terms, *Velangai* word was used for right had caste while *Idangai* was used for Left hand caste. Brenda Beck pointed out that the English term “hand” was misleading. In the Dravidian languages the crucial distinction between arm and hand or between leg and foot was not clearly made. In this sense Right Hand can equally mean Right arm likewise Left Hand as Left Arm. Furthermore, using ‘hand’ as a term caused great problem in Indian society. According to the ritual term, throughout India, the left hand was considered polluted and inferior to the right.<sup>15</sup> In other words, to orthodox Hindus, ‘left’ was inauspicious. The left represented an inferior status while ‘right’ represents a superior status.<sup>16</sup>

Arjun Appadurai understand the dual classification in the context of the Indian cultural system as a ‘root paradigm’. He points out that the Tamil terms Valangai and Idangai which refer to the left and right hand or arms of the human body was best understood to refer to the right and left sides of the body metaphorically. Appadurai referred to *Manu Dharma Sastra*<sup>17</sup> according to which, *Purusa*, an original man, as symbol of society, was divided by the gods into four varnas. The Brahmana, born from Purusa’s mouth, was the highest varna. His duty was to teach the Vedas, performed sacrifices for the Kshatriya and Vaisya, and to accept gifts from them in exchange. The Kshatriya, born from the arms of Purusa, possessed royal power and was to fight enemies, gave food and gifts to the Brahman; in return, he received a share in the leavings of the sacrifices from the Brahmana and wealth from the vaisya. The Vaisya, born from the thighs of Purusa, possessed productive power. His duty was to produce

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<sup>15</sup> Beck, EF Brenda, “The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society,” p.783.

<sup>16</sup> Subrahmanian, *Tamil Social History*, p.153.

<sup>17</sup> Manu Dharma Sahatra was written by Manu in later vedic period (200 B.C. to 200 A.D)

wealth and gave taxes to kshatriya, for protection. The Sudras, born from the lowliest part of Purusa (his feet), had to perform service for the three higher varnas. The Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas were the “twice-born” men divinized through a second ritual birth. The sudra was “once-born”. This was a horizontal division, which was rooted in ranking.

The Varna scheme in South India caste system had two characteristics. Firstly, according to Appadurai, South India had great regard for female bodily substance, which resulted in the endogamous castes division into numerous smaller circles who often marked their distinctions with visible attributes. Secondly, the Kshatriya and the Vaisya were not clearly specified which resulted as the core of the classification of South Indian society into right and left hand castes.<sup>18</sup>

Brenda Beck also interpreted the “sides of a social body.” She points out that according to the Indian tradition, the human body was clearly identified with the two sexes. The left hand caste was considered female while the right caste was considered male. Siva God was an icon as Siva was called *Ardhanarisvara* who represents male and female joined in one body. The bronze images of Siva portrayed male-female body. The right side of the figure had the hip, shoulder and chest of a man, while the left side was fashioned with the thighs, waist and breast of a woman.<sup>19</sup> There was a local saying pertaining to the effect that “if the breath be taken in through the right nostril at conception the child will be male; if through the left a female.” The popular perception was that moles and muscular trickles were auspicious when they occurred on the right side of man’s body or on the left side of a women’s body. Ritually, a woman was asked

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<sup>18</sup> Appadurai, “Right and Left Hand castes in South India,” pp.219-220.

<sup>19</sup> Beck, EF Brenda, “The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society,” p.783.

to use her left foot or hand to contrast with the male right in rituals where both sexes participate.<sup>20</sup>

To understand the two relations of the categories male and female to the four caste categories or varna, it is important to the theory of society as she pointed out, “According to this all pervasive theory of society, Brahmans are ranked first and Kshatriyas second. Furthermore, Brahmans are male in relation to Kshatriyas (implicitly female). Metaphorically, these two varnas are husband and wife. When Kshatriyas are described vis-à-vis the lower varna, however, then the Kshatriyas is spoken of as male.”<sup>21</sup> Speaking from the above facts, therefore, Kshatriyas may be female or male, inferior or superior, depending in which groups Kshatriyas belong. Thus, the terms used for the divisions were general and it was also very controversial particularly for the left hand caste who were regarded as polluted.

Burton Stein wondered about the stigma of pollution. He cited the idangai-mangamani inscriptions. According to this record, the idangai groups received good position with respect to the dominant peasant. Despite that, they were using idangai title. Therefore, Stein pointed out that “idangai title as a well established symbol of identity.”<sup>22</sup> This title was used by left hand caste substantially in South India even after the twelfth century. A part from that, according to the records, left hand caste was labeled inauspicious or inferior which actually have no base. Probably low occupations, but in

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 783n.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 784.

<sup>22</sup> Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and society*, pp.203-204.

left hand caste, Berri Chettis were but traders and big merchants of Madras and they were also mobile and active than Right hand caste traders as Arasaratnam understood.<sup>23</sup>

**The Right hand and Left hand castes: Numerical strength and differences.**

It is hard to give the true figures about the castes and how many castes belong to left castes and right castes. For example, Chetti caste belonged to both right and left hand castes. English records also said that Cootee Chette was from left hand caste while Nairaa Veropa Chetti belongs to the Right hand caste.<sup>24</sup> Pertaining to another example of confusing the groups, the Company received complaints against the oilmen and kaikolan weavers, that these caste groups did not fix either they belong to left or right hand castes. The Company ordered that: "Both castes complain against the kicullar [kaikolan] weavers and the Oylemen that they were very fickle in their cast, that they were sometimes of one cast, and sometimes of another, which give trouble to both casts, so desired the heads may be sent for, which accordingly was done when the weavers declared for the right Hand, which they were ordered to keep too, or be severely punished."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the Paraiyar caste who belonged to right hand caste,<sup>26</sup> according to N.Subrahmanian, in recent centuries, probably in nineteenth century, were treated as left hand caste.<sup>27</sup>

Brenda Beck's inclusion of the Komati Chettis in Left hand caste is also confusing. Generally, Komati Chetti caste correspond to right hand caste.<sup>28</sup> M. Srinivasa

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<sup>23</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchant, Company and Commerce on the Ccormandel Coast, 1650-1740*, OUP, New Delhi, 1986, p.253.

<sup>24</sup> *Diary and Consultations, 1707-1708*, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> *Diary and Consultations, 1707-1708*, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> *Diary and Consultations, 1716*, p.155.

<sup>27</sup> Subrahmanian, *Tamil Social History*, p.154.

<sup>28</sup> Beck, EF Brenda, *Peasant society in Konku*, as cited in K.Mukund, "Caste Conflicts in South India", p.7.

Aiyangar dual classification of weaver communities also caused confusion. Usually, the weavers communities belonged to the left hand castes while he divided them into both groups as Devanga and Kaikolan were the left hand castes groups and Jandra, Saliyan and Seniyan were the Right hand castes.<sup>29</sup>

Apart from that, in each groups, castes had many sub-divisions<sup>30</sup> as we have noticed in the weaver castes. Weaver castes sub-divisions were Devanga, Kaikolan, Jandra, Saliyan and Seniyan.<sup>31</sup> Among the weaver community, Kaikolan caste was a warrior caste and dominant caste in South India. Kaikolan caste holds the leading position among the weavers.<sup>32</sup> Another instance of Chetti caste, which had several sub-divisions differ very greatly in their ways but the best known of them were the Beri Chettis, the Nagaratta Chettis, the Kasukkar Chettis and the Nattukottai Chettis.<sup>33</sup> However, each and every caste had many sub-divisions and differs very greatly within the same sub-castes, which might create problem to identify the caste groups as we have noted in the above paragraph.

Despite that, Fort St. George recorded certain castes, which belonged to Right Hand castes and the Left Hand castes. Firstly, the right hand caste includes Chetti,<sup>34</sup> Pariyar,<sup>35</sup> oilmen,<sup>36</sup> and other castes while the left hand castes also includes Chettis,<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ayangar, M.S., *Tamil studies*, Madras, as cited in Appadurai, "Right and Left Hand castes in South India," *IESHR*, 1974, p.217.

<sup>30</sup> Dodwell, H. *The Madras Weavers under the Company*, Indian historical Records Commission, Delhi, 1992, pp.2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Appadurai, "Right and Left Hand castes in South India," p.217.

<sup>32</sup> Mines, M., *The Warrior Merchants: Textiles trade and territory in South India*, CUP, Cambridge, 1984, pp.1-11.

<sup>33</sup> Thurston, E., *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol.II, p.92.

<sup>34</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1708, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1716, p.155.

<sup>36</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1708, p.7.

<sup>37</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1708, p.36.



bricklayers, carpenters, weavers,<sup>38</sup> boatmen, watermen, fishermen, barbers,<sup>39</sup> and other come to the left hand castes.<sup>40</sup>

M. Srinivasa Aiyangar also classified the right-left hand divisions according to their occupation:<sup>41</sup>

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Right Hand</u>	<u>Left Hand</u>
1. Traders	Baliya	Beri Chetti
	Banajiga	Vaniyans
	Komati	(who yoke two bullocks)
	Vellan Chetti	
2. Weavers	Jandra	Devanga
	Saliyan	Kaikolan
	Seniyan	
3. Artisans	Nil	Kammalan
		Kamsali
		Panchalas
4. Leather workers	Maidga or chakkilyan	Ditto (males)
	(females)	
	Malaiman	Bedar
	Nattaman	
5. Field labourers and soldiers.	Palli (females)	Pallis (males)
	Vedan or Vettuvan	Pallan
	Paraiyan, Mala and Haleya	

The above table shows that there was no clear-cut division. Apart from artisan castes many castes or sub castes were divided on both sides. Interestingly, Chakkelyan

<sup>38</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1708, p.5.

<sup>39</sup> *Dispatches to England*, 1707-8, p.76..

<sup>40</sup> Fort St. George records do not mention clearly about Chettis in which group they belong.

<sup>41</sup> Aiyangar cited by Appadurai, "Right and Left Hand castes in South India," p.217.

females were Right hand castes and males were left hand castes. In this way, palli female belongs to right hand and palli males to the left hand castes. Moreover, the list includes fifteen castes in right hand side but Arjun Appadurai signified that Komattis, Kaikolans, Saliyans and Gollas have been partitioned and the numbers of the castes of either side may be very large.<sup>42</sup>

H.D.Love quoted Captain Colin Makenzie, which according to him; there were 39 castes in 'Buljewar'<sup>43</sup> caste (right hand caste). They were Komati, Moochi, Vullickar, Tellanwar, Paniayar, Vullawar, Gundapodikar and Shaunar castes while in the left hand castes (Naggaret)<sup>44</sup> he gave eleven castes. They were Chitti, Pully, Chekkilyan, Panchalas and Kaikolan.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, his reporting also makes very great confusion. Makenzie excluded Chitti caste from the Right hand caste while Aiyangar included in both sides. Aiyangar includes Chakkilyan females in Right hand and male in Left hand caste. Makenzie also gave very less lists of left hand castes while Aiyangar gave almost equal numbers.

Francis Buchanan, a traveler, who visited Madras, Mysore, Canara and Malabar, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century has also reported on the right-left hand divisions. He recognized nine castes in left hand side (Idangai).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.218.

<sup>43</sup> Mackenzie write "Buljewar" for right hand caste and it is also in terms of Merchants. He says that these groups exported and imported commodities. Although, he included Pariyar caste who were not merchants.

<sup>44</sup> Captain colin Mackenzie uses term "Naggaret" fro left hand caste. These castes were not a trading communities. The term is not a trading communities. The term Naggaret implied "living in a habitation".

<sup>45</sup> Captain Makenzie as cited in H.D.Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800*, AES, New Delhi, Madras, 1996, vol.I, p.124.

<sup>46</sup> Buchanan, Francis, *A Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, London, 1807, vol.I, pp.77-80

1. Panchalas: in Panchalas, there were five castes: I) Cubbinadava or blacksmiths; ii) Badiga (carpenters); iii) Cunsugaru (coppersmiths); iv) culbadiga (Masons); v) Akala, (gold and silver smiths).
2. Beri Chette, a merchant who pretended to be of the Vaisya caste.
3. Devanga, a class of weavers.
4. Heganigaru, oilmakers, who used two oxen in their mills.
5. Gollur or Golawanlu, who transported money.
6. Paliwanlu and Palawanlu, the two tribes of cultivators.
7. Baydaru, a hunter.
8. Madiga, tanners or shoemakers.

Francis Buchanan also indicated nineteen right hand caste groups:

1. Banijiguru, who were traders and divided many religions. The two were most important as; i) Panchum Banijiguru, who were traders and weaned linga; ii) Taliga Banijigaru.
2. Wocligaru, cultivators of the Sudra caste.
3. Joti Phana, oilmakers, who used one bullock in the mill.
4. rungaru, Calico printer and tailors.
5. Ladaru, a kind of Muslim traders who were followed by all artificers of the same religion.
6. Gujarati, merchants of Gujarat.
7. Komati, persons who were really of Vaisya caste.
8. Jain, worshippers of Jain.
9. Curubaru, shepherds, blanket weavers and cultivators.

10. cumbaru, potters.
11. Agasa, washermen.
12. Besta, palanquin bearers.
13. Padma Shalayvaru, a kind of weavers.
14. naindaru, barbers.
15. Uparu, person who dug tanks and builds rough walls.
16. Chitragaru, painters.
17. Goallaru, keepers of cow and buffalos.
18. Whalliaru, the paraiyar caste who formed the active part of the right side.

Francis Buchanan's classifications of the dual division produce much confusion. Generally, washermen, barbers and painter caste belonged to the left hand caste while Buchanan included them in the Right hand castes. Even weavers and boat makers were in both sides. Buchanan accepted that the divisions was often controversial.

In the context of castes belonging to both sides such as weavers, Chetti, painters and others, it is important to note that "the Left hand caste" and the "right hand caste" were not as such castes but groups and therefore mobility was possible. Burton Stein also said that, "The divisions were not absolute, corporate or continuous but potential groupings."<sup>47</sup> Perhaps, there might be another reasons but group nature was one of the important reasons.

It is, however, very difficult to point out the exact numbers of castes because of these great variations. Despite that, numerically, the left hand castes were lesser than the right hand caste. S. Arasaratnam signified that right hand castes were numerically superior in Madras. He further stated that in Madras and other coastal towns, there was a

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<sup>47</sup> Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and society*, p.205.

mix of trading castes, artisans' castes and service castes on both side.<sup>48</sup> It is also evident from the dual classification that the trading communities of both sides were dominating. Chetti communities were leading figures and artisans of both sides were in between. The lowest groups of both sides were untouchables.

In the context of the differences of castes, in spite of the mixing of trading castes, artisan castes and service castes on both sides, there were great differences between them. William Hedges mentioned that the left hand castes were primarily trading communities and manufacturing castes. These castes were carrying their professions from the ancient time and were primarily the agricultural castes that also maintained their ancient caste legacy.<sup>49</sup> Captain Mackenzie supported the views.

The right hand caste claimed certain privileges, which they jealously denied to the left hand castes. They claimed that they had the right to ride on horseback in processions or marriage occasions, to carry standards beaming certain devices, using for their marriage pandals or pavilions, and the twelve pillars. Francis Buchanan adds that the right hand caste had the right to carry the painted flag with the figure of hanuman. The left side pretended that all those privileges were confirmed to them by the grant of Kali on the copper plate<sup>50</sup> and therefore they were of the highest rank having been placed by that goddess on her left hand, which in South India was the place of honours.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Arasaratnam, S., *Merchant, Company and Commerce*, p.253.

<sup>49</sup> Yule, C.H., *Diary of William Hedges, 1681-1687*, vol.III, London, p.cx notes.

<sup>50</sup> Buchanan referred a copper plate at Conjeveran in which according to fable goddess Kali has granted the privileges to the left hand caste than the right hand caste. The conflict reason was that both castes groups were standed the same time and each side equally. This plate wa diametrically opposite. However, each castes were understanding that the privileges which were for them. In this way they denied privileges to each othe r and fought regularly to take this claim. It is also sid that the copper plate was preserved ata the temple of that place. Although Buchanan himself doubted the existence of such copper plate.

<sup>51</sup> Buchanan, Francis, *A Journey from Madras*, pp.77-80.

Irfan Habib pointed out that the Right hand castes were of basically Vaishnavas and were associated primarily with agricultural production and local trade in agricultural commodities, while the left hand castes were mostly Saivites. The left hand castes were mostly associated with mobile artisans' production and relatively extensive trade in non-agricultural commodities.<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Dirks pointed out that right hand caste were land owning castes groups such as Vellalars, Mudaliyars, kavuntars, Maravars and untouchables Pariyar caste. The right hand castes usually made up the higher Sudra castes. The left hand groups were made up of traders, merchants, artisans and some lower 'sudras' caste groups as well as leather workers.<sup>53</sup>

### **Caste Conflict and Riots in Madras**

Various English records incorporated the evidences of caste conflicts and riots of the two vertically differentiated groups more commonly known as the right and left hand castes or *valangai and idangai* respectively in Tamil during the seventeenth and eighteenth century Madras. Most agreed that in the two mentioned periods, caste conflicts between the two sides were continuous which caused great problems to Madras people generally and the English authority particularly, especially when it erupted into a major riots. Honorary distinction, pride, exclusive privileges and religious superiority were the main factors behind all the disputes.<sup>54</sup> In other words social status, physical space of human settlements, various symbolic locations and areas were the main causes of the riots.<sup>55</sup> It is

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<sup>52</sup> Habib, Irfan, (ed.) *Cambridge Economic History of India*, CUP, p.27.

<sup>53</sup> Dirks, B.N, *Castes of Mind, Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p.76.

<sup>54</sup> Yule, C.H., *Diary of William Hedges, 1681-1687*, vol.III, London, p.cx notes.

<sup>55</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading World of the Tamil Merchants*, Orient Longman, 1999, Hyderabad, p. 145.

also very significant that merchants were the leaders of both divisions. Balijas and Komatis were leaders of the right hand castes and Beri Chettis leads the left hand castes.

In the ensuing riots the English Company had an important role to play as the ruler of the port town. For the English authority such disputes was regarded as the “factious madness”<sup>56</sup> which needs to be taken seriously as they destabilized the smooth functioning of trade and commerce.

During our period of study there were four major riots apart from many skirmishes between the two major caste groupings. There were riots in 1652-53, 1707-08, 1716-17 and in 1720.

During the riots in 1652-53, we found that the leaders were the Balija Chettis (Right Hand Caste) and the Beri Chettis (Left Hand Caste). Seshadri Nayak and Koneri Chettis (right hand merchants) held prominent position in Madras. The immediate reasons were the uses of the routes, wedding, and burial places. President Baker of Madras allotted some portion of the town to each caste for their exclusive residence and rules were laid down as to the streets through which marriage and funeral processions may pass.<sup>57</sup> In a series of disputes, the right hand merchants told the left hand merchants that they did not worth ‘a cash’. In response, the Berewar (left hand caste) replied that the right hand castes have not worth ‘two cash’. Upon this the right hand caste attacked the left hand caste, and the whole right hand caste ran with sword and clubs in the left hand castes’ streets, plundered their houses and murdered two left hand caste men. Hearing all these the left hand caste groups organized themselves to avenge the wrongs done to them

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<sup>56</sup> *English Factories in India*, 1651-54, p.155.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.135-136.

by the right hand side.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, during the ensuing riots the two Brahmin brothers, who held very influential positions as ‘dubash’ to the Agent and the Choultry judge, sided with the Beri Chettis and the Left Hand factions.<sup>59</sup> In the context of the caste riots, President Baker said that “We know not what spirit of factious madness hath of late possessed our townes people in generall, but the like, we assure you, in all lives, we never knew.”<sup>60</sup>

The second major caste riots began in the year 1707 and it went till 1708. During this disputes, Thomas Pitt was the Governor of Madras. The leaders of the conflicts were the merchants from the right hand, Sunku Muthu Rama, the rising merchant of Madras on the one hand and the Kelavi Chetti and Venkata Chetti on the left hand side on the other. The reasons for the riots were again the demarcation of streets, wedding and some commercial interests.

There was a continuous dispute between the right hand and the left hand castes for passing through some streets on occasion of their weddings. The Company tried very actively to prevent future dispute.<sup>61</sup> The heads of the castes of both sides surveyed the two areas of the town and decided that those who were living in houses in streets belonging to the other side had to sell them and move to their own area. The area was demarcated by four stones (pillars) at the cost of left hand caste. The Company ordered both castes that they should not cross their limits and not ignore the rule.<sup>62</sup>

However, the right hand castes were not satisfied with the decisions and consequently they pasted a notice on the pillars on the streets and the same notice was

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp.155-156.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-241.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>61</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1707, p.36.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.40.



also given to the left hand caste. The notice was to urge the left hand caste to break the pillars as it was built by the English authority and at the expenses of the left hand castes.<sup>63</sup> The government also noted that a Paraiyar (right hand caste) wedding procession went through the left hand caste streets, which was against the rule.<sup>64</sup> As a result the right hand caste left Madras in large numbers for San Thome and the neighbouring villages. These belonged to the boatmen, washermen, fishermen and barber.<sup>65</sup> The right hand castes tried to take support from the neighbouring countries.<sup>66</sup>

The left hand chief merchants Kelavi Chetti and Venkata Chetti felt that the disputes was because of commercial reasons. This relate to the investment in the Company and right hand castes merchants were not interested in it and they continued to make little progress till the matter was resolved.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Pitt summoned the right hand caste but they refused to come.<sup>68</sup> Finally, an arbitrary division of streets solved the matter and it was done through the Governor of San Thome. Lastly, both the head caste signed on the agreement.<sup>69</sup>

Another riot broke out in Madras in the year 1716 which lasted till 1717. Edward Harrison was the Governor of Madras at this time. Again, the contending leaders were the merchants of both sides. The Kalavi Chetti and Kalatti were from the left hand side and Komati and Chetti castes from the right hand side. It all began when a young boy of the left hand caste hurt a Paraiyar woman of the right hand caste. After hearing such news the whole right hand caste grouped together and came violently in the streets and demanded

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>64</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1707, p.52

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>69</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1708, pp.5-7.

justice from the Government. Although the right hand group dispersed during the day they gathered together at night. Knowing the grave situation, the head asked the left hand castes people such as cooks, water bearers, coolly, palanquin bearers, flagmen and umbrella bearers to desert the place. The Company ordered to the head of the right hand castes to return to the services otherwise severe consequent may come to their fortunes.<sup>70</sup>

Another disputes arose between the right hand Komati caste and left hand Chetti caste for some ceremonies.<sup>71</sup> In the same fashion, a dispute broke out between both the castes to take the Nagaram temple because the Komatis caste sang in the Nagaram temple.<sup>72</sup> However, the solution came by act of pardon of Chetti and Company ordered that both divisions should not disturb the public ceremonies.<sup>73</sup>

Again, a minor dispute broke out in the year 1720 between both the castes to take streets for the procession and other ceremonies. The Madras governor Hastings was informed by the right hand castes that the left hand castes had carried an image in procession through their streets. Therefore, Governor talked sixteen left hand caste merchants for inquiring purpose but they refused anything regarding the procession. However, the Company decided to hold an inquiry.<sup>74</sup>

### **Causes for the Riots**

Various records and writings on the subject agreed that pride, honours, symbols, physical and social space were the most important causes for the conflicts and disputes in Madras.

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<sup>70</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1716, p.155.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.198-200.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.

<sup>74</sup> *Diary and Consultations*, 1720, pp.190-191.

However, the new urban economies, which provide new avenues for occupational<sup>75</sup> upward social mobility to the merchants were one of the main causes for the various disputes including the riots.<sup>76</sup> Numerically, the right hand caste merchants were dominant than the left hand caste groups. However, because of their influential position and economic status the left hand caste groups started to claim an equitable status on par with the right hand caste. This had brought about constant conflicts between the two groups, which sometimes broke out into open riots. Apparently, the left and right hands were fighting for physical and social space. However, if one goes deeper, the booming economic conditions provided the base for the continuing conflicts between the two. The fact that Madras witnessed most frequently of those caste riots in comparison to the hinterland and other port towns suggest that the flourishing trades and the booming economy of Madras was the main cause of the conflicts.

Another chief cause was urbanization. Since the Chola period, urbanization started to gain importance as the state practiced both domestic and foreign trades. It contributed to the weakening of the state and brought about dramatic social change. It especially became importance during the Vijayanagar period and later during the British time.<sup>77</sup> Most of the scholars who are working on the caste riots like Burton Stein, Ajun Appadurai and S. Arasaratnam, etc. agreed that urbanisation was the chief factor for the riots. Arasaratnam says that urbanization factors brought many differences into caste, productions and performance of many caste related ceremonies, weddings and funerals.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> 'Occupation' is my word. I use the upward occupational mobility because mobility in caste was not possible.

<sup>76</sup> Mukund, K., *The trading World of the Tamil Merchants*, p.148.

<sup>77</sup> Stein, *Peasant State and society*, p.204.

<sup>78</sup> Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, p.256.

## **Conclusion**

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An attempt was made to understand the caste occupation, the occupational caste groups their relations with the English East India Company, the right-left hand divisions and caste conflicts and riots in Madras in the preceding pages. It has not been possible to quantify and conclusively prove the exactness of caste nature and definition of occupational caste groups. Nor has it been possible to evaluate the company participation in the caste riots in complete forms. It is equally difficult to give the exact causes of caste conflicts. However, every possible effort was made to understand the aforesaid subject matters through the records available at our disposal.

In the context of caste occupations and mobility, it has been tried to evaluate that there was definite relations between caste and occupation. It has been argued that occupations or professions improve the power relation of ones status. It is also stated that caste has been static, stagnant and therefore there was no caste mobility. It is not possible to see the mobility in the caste system as noted above. However, the mobility was possible only in the occupation or profession, as we have seen in Madras with several caste groups. For instance, the washermen, the barbers, the weaver communities, the carpenters, etc. were practicing different kinds of professions, which are traditionally not their occupations. Therefore, the term "caste occupational mobility" instead of 'caste mobility' is use. For example, the sudras in which artisan caste, the carpenters, weavers,

goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and untouchable in which paraiyar caste and leather workers were all becoming dependent because of financial status.

The English East India Company gave this opportunity from its new economic policy. The Company employed them extensively and various castes were adopting new professions such as in shipping, carpentry, weaving and joining many industries like textile industries. In this context, we can see the caste occupational upward mobility. This profession was, in fact, not practices only by the sudras or untouchables groups. The other upper castes were also adopting different professions. For instance, one Brahman was the chief dubashes of the Company in Madras.

Another example of upward occupational mobility was in term of merchants. Generally, merchants organized their business independently or in private with the Company or with other groups. But in Madras the famous merchants were appointed as a chief merchants of the Company. Becoming chief merchants of the Company means they have official status and power apart from their business. The company provided them all facilities including the estate ownership, palankeen and other honorary symbols which were not available for the ordinary merchants. It shows that they had extra honours as chief merchants of the Company. Therefore, it can be argued that the occupational upward mobility was occurring in all castes from top to bottom.

In the context of occupational caste groups' numbers in Madras it is again very problematic issue. The Fort St. George Records reported that there were twenty-nine caste groups in madras.<sup>1</sup> The Census Report of the Town of Madras, 1871 however gives only nineteenth list of castes.<sup>2</sup> While Edgar Thurston noted in 19th C. that there were

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary and Consultation Book*, 1706, p.55.

<sup>2</sup> *Census Reports of the Town of Madras, 1871*, p.10.

three hundred castes and tribes representing more than forty lakhs individuals.<sup>3</sup> The above facts show that the numbers of castes were always increasing throughout the centuries. In early medieval time it increase and during 17th century, it become 29 caste groups at least in Madras, which increase to 300 in 19th century.

Pertaining to caste positions and functions again, it is confusing. As by convention, the lower castes were always in disadvantage position to ask for better living and to fight for their own benefits. However, in 17th century Madras under English Company we have several instances of the untouchable groups fighting for their wages, claimed for a respectable positions and importance of their caste in the society. They were also in position to threat the English Government in case their demands were not fulfill. For instance, the washermen, who belongs to untouchable groups, had told the English Government to increase the wages and provide all facilities to wash the calicoes and the company's cloths. They also demanded that the company should also provide securities from any dangers from the seaside particularly. The Company has agreed to provide the demands to prevent the washermen from leaving the town. There was also an instance of strike, which was called by the chief merchants of Madras in which both the left and right hand castes untouchable participated in 1680-81. We also see that in 1707-08 the right hand caste groups in which the pariah castes protest against the English government and migrated en mass to San Thome.

These untouchable groups were also in a position to take the support from the people of their respective caste divisions. For instance, the pariah caste belonging to the right hand caste had immense support of the whole right hand groups including the

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<sup>3</sup> E.Thurston, *Castes and Tribes in Southern India*, vol. I, p.xiii.

Komattis and Chettis merchants. In 1716, a left hand boy insulted a pariah caste woman, which resulted into riots between the left and right hand castes.

Pertaining to occupational caste functions, they were not tied by their traditional functions. Rather they were adopting new jobs and through these opportunities, they gained new form of identity and consciousness through their struggle, strikes, and demanding wages. In fact, they were in a bargaining position and changing the traditional social relations. Although it was also a fact that the untouchable groups were treated badly and were not even allowed to eat together. Despite that in urban centre untouchability was receding slowly and gradually. They were also interacting with the English officers including the Governor. They also interacted with the chief dubahes and other European merchants. This was the economic compulsions of all the Company officers, the Chettis, Komattis, weavers, artisans groups, bricklayers, palankeen bearers, washermen, painters, coolies, peons, pariahs, horse-keepers, grasscutters, barbers, hardressers, water bearer and other occupational cast groups were becoming economically independent.

In the contexts of social and physical space, merchant groups were at the top position while the untouchable groups were at the bottom. In the physical space, the whole occupational caste groups were settled in the Black Town. However, the chief merchants were in position to settle outside the Black Town. The whole Black Town was divided into different streets named on the basis of occupational caste groups such as weavers streets, washermen streets, chettis streets, and so on. It also symbolizes the social space of the occupational caste groups.

In the context of commercial relations between the Company and the caste groups many scholars have shown that, the occupational caste groups and the English Company had interdependent relationships. The Company knew their importance and therefore the Company employed them largely and contracted them for commercial purpose. In Madras the Company used the methods of contract with the occupational castes.

In terms of commercial aspects, the occupational caste groups may be classified into five categories such as merchants, artisans, labourers, groups of sea labourers and slaves. These five categories contributed immensely to the Company's trade and commerce. They were engaged in textile trades, shipping, rice, pepper, spices, and other trades of the Company. These groups also worked in the sea as catamaran persons, boatmen, and sea-farers. They also participated in the in the oceanic trade particularly in the South East Asia, South Asia, East Africa and through out the world in general. With this the other occupational caste groups like artisans and untouchables went to these areas with the merchants and governors as skilled labourers and also unskilled labourers. However, these commercial opportunities produced avenues for interaction of the caste groups with different cultures and different peoples, which improve their life drastically.

Coming on divisions between the left and right castes in South India, the whole South India was divided into two vertically differentiated caste groups. The first time we got the evidence of the divisions was in the eleventh century through an inscription. We get the existence of these divisions from the 11th to 19th century. In terms of their origin, there was controversy among the scholars. However, an inscription was the main sources of the origin.



In terms of superiority of the right and left hand caste, it is again controversial matter. Both groups claimed superior positions. Socially, of course, the right hand castes were on the higher positions than the left hand caste. However, economically both the caste groups are in the same positions. As Arasaratnam pointed out that in comparison to the caste, the left hand merchants are very affluent. From the left hand side many big merchants become the chief merchants. For example, many Balija merchants become the chief merchant.

Numerically, the right hand caste merchants were dominant compared to the left hand caste groups. However, because of their influential position and economic status the left hand caste groups started to claim an equitable status on par with the right hand caste. This had brought about constant conflicts between the two groups, which sometimes broke out into open riots. In the contexts of caste conflicts, both right and left hand castes and the English Company were very involved. Apparently, the left and right hands were fighting for physical and social space. However, if we go deeper, we will get the booming economic conditions, which are the roots of the conflicts. Cultural and religious factors cannot be avoided, which was certainly the main components of the conflicts. But economic conditions formed the base for the caste riots and dispute especially in Madras. The fact that Madras witness most frequently of those caste riots vis-à-vis the complete absences of such instances of riots in other parts especially in the countryside have shown that the flourishing trades and the booming economy of Madras was the main cause of the conflicts. Interestingly enough the left hand merchants accepted this fact that the caste riots were because of the economic reasons which is recorded in 1707-1708.

The English Company also became involved in the issue of caste riots as the rulers of Madras. The Company made rules for them so that the peaceful environment could be maintain in the town. It is equally important to note that the Company was not interested in intervening in the caste structure. They did get involved in the situations because of the commercial reasons. Although the Company assumed that, they were protector for the poor their main motive behind it was for their profitable commerce.

The other reasons behind the riots were problems pertaining to urbanization. Generally, in urban setting the professional and economic work was very important. The urban centre also provides as centre of interaction between all caste groups irrespective of caste, creed or races and religion. Madras represents one of the best examples for this. Therefore, behind all caste riots, the economic conditions and the pressures of rapid urbanization formed the basis. This is not to disagree with other factors such as caste prides, honours, caste symbols, religion cultures, etc. however, it appears that these factors were only the outward representations of the inherent economic conflicts between the left hand and the right hand caste.

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**APPENDIX-I**

Occupational caste groups of Madras who offered assistance to the Government of Fort St. George in Madras for expanding the town.

1. Chuliar caste
2. Painter caste.
3. Husbandman caste
4. Cooly caste
5. Washers caste
6. Tailor caste
7. Barber caste
8. Pariyar caste
9. Komati caste
10. Oilmaker caste
11. Furniter caste
12. Shepheyard caste
13. Potmaker caste
14. Moochi caste
15. Patamava caste
16. Telgu caste
17. Cavaree caste
18. Hugabumds caste
19. Palli caste
20. Goldsmith caste
21. Chitte caste
22. Weaver caste.

*Source:* Record of Fort St. George, *Diary and Consultations Book*, 1686, p.5.

## APPENDEX-II

List of thirty-one Merchants who have subscribed to 83 ½ shares at 100 per annum each towards the new 'joint-stock company' of ten thousand Pagodas:

1. Checca Serapa Shares-----	25
2. Rayasum Ramapa-----	10
3. Nayro Verona-----	10
4. Coperte cash-----	3
5. Cornapa Chitte-----	3
6. Japa Chitte-----	3
7. Vincate Chette-----	3
8. Ragga Chitte-----	3
9. Purpaude Chitte-----	3
10. Berra Ramana-----	3
11. Namosheway Mudiliar-----	3
12. Pedde Tombe Chitte-----	1 ½
13. Conche Bolla Chitte-----	1
14. Coperte Paipia-----	1
15. Punumbola Tondo-----	1
16. Cowalathe Goupala-----	1
17. Venia Yembia-----	1
18. ballaw qwanda Chitte-----	1
19. Ande Chitte-----	1/2
20. Rawshapa Citte-----	1/2
21. Venna Tetta Chitte-----	1/2
22. Cheathe Puttoo Chitte-----	1/2
23. Coyaraw Therowvenglum-----	1/2
24. Vena Yaca Chitte-----	1/2
25. Woothe Wacum Vellapaw-----	1/2
26. Condapa Chitte-----	1/2

27. Shankara Muttamar-----1/2  
28. Shevaraya Chitte-----1/2  
29. Conavarum Rmania-----1/2  
30. Mangathe Linga Chitte-----1/2  
31. Yeocolora Chitte-----1/2

*Source:* Record of Fort St. George, *Diary and Consultations Book*, 1688, p.86.

## APPENDIX-III

Accounts of the hire of the skilled and unskilled labourer by the English Company at  
Madras:

1. 600 collies out of which 200 were hire at 3 ½ pagodas each-----	700
2. 50 peons ou of which 30 hired at 1 ½ pags.-----	45
3. 2 smiths-----	6 ½
4. 2 cerpenters-----	6 ½
5. 10 horsekeepers-----	25
6. 10 grasscutters-----	24
7. 3 coincoplys-----	10 ½
8. 1 moochi-----	3
9. 2 coblers-----	6
10. 10 servants for Mr.Lweis & Mr.Berlu-----	25
11. 6 ditto for the Mulla and Paupia-----	15
12. 1 ditto for Mr. Way-----	2 ½
ditto for the Doctor-----	5
13. 10 frosses-----	30
14. 1 servant clock maker -----	2 ½
15. 2 sakers-----	6
16. 4 cookes-----	12
17. 1 compradore -----	3
18. 1 butler-----	3
19. 4 pariyar-----	10
20. 4 packers-----	10
21. 1 flagman-----	2 ½
22. 1 barber-----	2 ½
23. 2 armorers-----	6 ½
24. 10 dutys-----	
25. 3 washemen-----	7 ½
26. 4 oxen men-----	12

Source: Record of Fort St. George, *Diary and Consultations Book*, 1708-09, p.26

## APPENDIX-IV

The chief of washermen of the English East India Company contracted and agreed to wash the following clothes with Narso:

Long cloth fine.....	at 2 ½ : fans.per piece.
Long cloth ordinary.....	at 2 ¼ : fans.per piece.
Long cloth blew.....	at 1 1/8 : fans.per piece.
Salampores fine.....	at 1 ¼ : fans.per piece.
Salampore ordinary.....	at 1 : fans.per piece.
Percolloes.....	at 5/8 : fans.per piece.
Moorees ordinary.....	at 5/8 : fans.per piece.fans.
Moorees fine.....	at 3/4 : fans.per piece.fans.
Beteelacs of 50: coveds.....	at 1 ½ : fans.per piece.
Beteelacs of 40: coveds.....	at 3/4 : fans.per piece.
Nechcloths of 50: coveds.....	at 3/4 : fans.per piece.
Neckcloths red strip.....	at 4/3 : fans.per piece.
Dyapers.....	at 1 : fans.per piece.
Ginghams.....	at 2 : fans.per piece.
Dungarees.....	at 3/8 : fans.per piece.

The *fanams* are to be reckoned at 36:... to the pagodas.

**APPENDIX-V**

List of important washermen along with the Chief Washermen of Madras in 1680-81 under the English Company:

1. Chinna Purrupu Narso (Chief washerman)
2. Peaduree Jangum
3. Paulipoo Mootealo
4. Chenge Coradiah
5. Razapunde Acuiah
6. Damara Muddugu Ianah
7. Cundavete Paupiah
8. Cherncure Guriah
9. Gumerepunde Ianah
10. Colacula Yengana
11. Shanumpunde Yengana

Source: *Diary and Consultation*, 1680-81, p.28.

