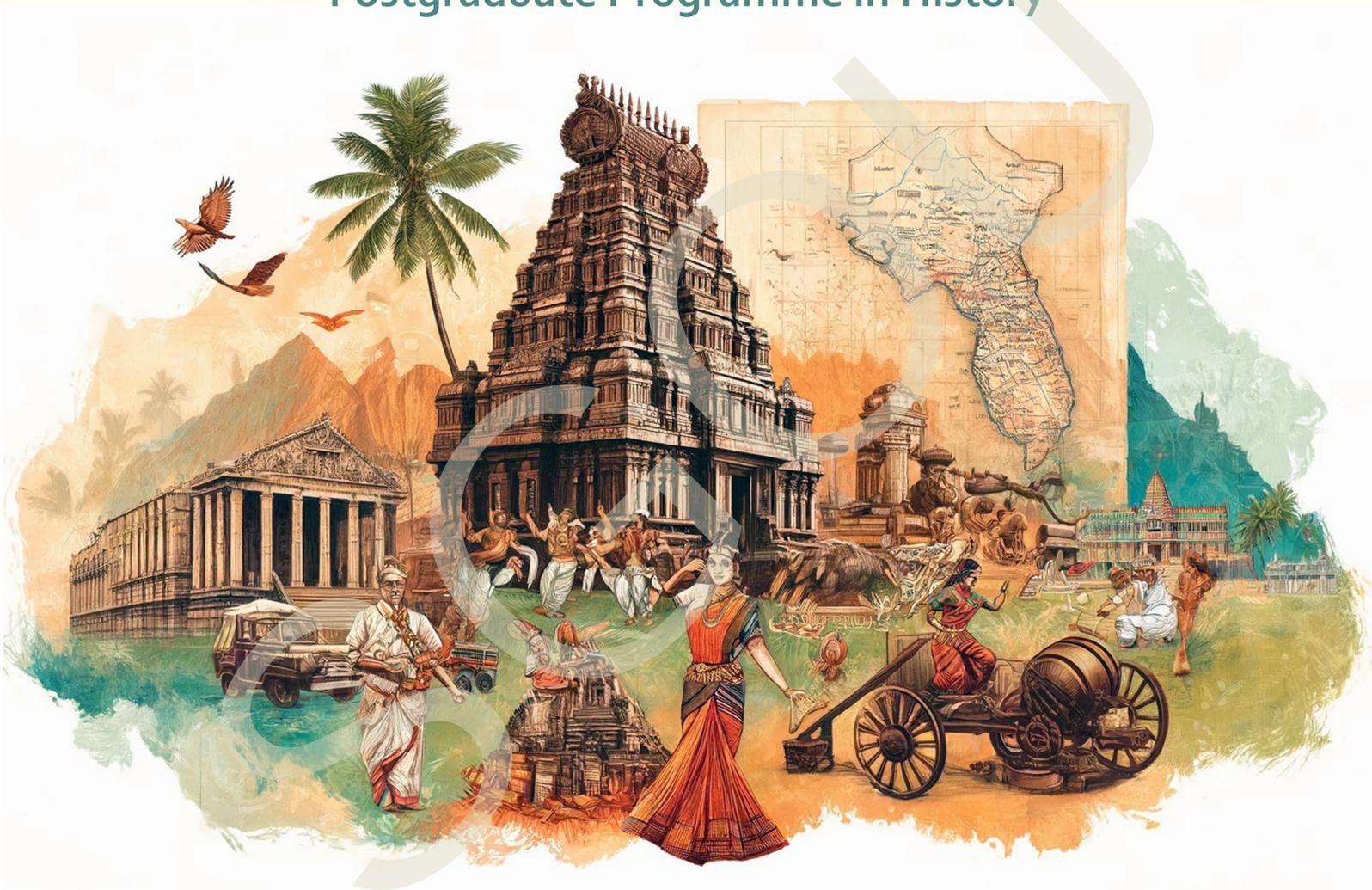


Perspectives on South Indian History

COURSE CODE: M21 HS03DE
Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in History



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

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To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Perspectives on South Indian History

Course Code: M21HS03DE

Semester - III

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Postgraduate Programme in History
Self Learning Material

(With Model Question Paper Sets)



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Semester - III

Discipline Specific Elective Course

MA History



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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The University aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The Master’s program in History aims to familiarise learners with the complexities of historical research and facts through courses on historiography and research methodologies. Learners will develop skills to analyse historical dynamics, allowing them to step deeper into the nuances of historical narratives and reexamine past events with an appropriate outlook. The curriculum’s interdisciplinary nature is evident in its incorporation of concepts from various fields. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Warm regards.
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-09-2024

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Sources and Historiography

BLOCK-01



Archaeological and Epigraphical Sources

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful conclusion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ identify the archaeological sources available throughout South India
- ◆ know the importance of architectural and sculptural sources
- ◆ be familiar with the epigraphical sources of South India

Background

In the broadest sense, we refer to “South India”, the region located south of the Vindhyas or *Dakshina* (the Deccan). One of the world’s oldest inhabited areas, the Deccan plays a significant role in the history of global civilisations due to its prehistoric archaeology. Several attempts were made to record the history of South India. Many scholars have taken up the task of interpreting the data and have produced academic monographs primarily focused on specific dynasties, regions or subjects. They were unable to provide a broad overview of the major political and cultural history of South India.

The closest approach to a general history of South India is found in R. G. Bhandarkar’s *Early History of the Dekkan* (1895); nevertheless, that outstanding work is now outdated and does not cover the history of the ‘Far South’. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar’s work *History of the Tamils* (1929) covered the early history of the ‘Far South’.

As Vincent Smith correctly pointed out, “most historians of ancient India have written as if the South did not exist.” He offered two explanations for this disregard for the South. He states : “he is able to give only a secondary place to the story of the Deccan plateau and the far South and is bound by the nature of things to direct his attention primarily to the North.” Again, compared to the peninsula, the northern record is significantly less inaccurate. There is a tremendous gap in India’s history due to the severe lack of historical documents about the peninsula.



Keywords

Prashasti, Paleography, Inscriptions, Epigraphy, Monuments, Sculptures

Discussion

1.1.1 Archaeological Sources

- ◆ *Historians' Role*
- ◆ *Interpretation of Sources*

Sources serve as the raw materials for historians to reconstruct the past, but they are not history in themselves. A source only gains meaning when a historian engages with it. Thus, the primary role of the historian is not merely to record facts, but to critically evaluate and interpret the past through these sources. Historians continuously shape their interpretations about their sources while refining their understanding of the sources based on their interpretations. In this context, a wide range of archaeological evidence is crucial in reshaping our understanding of South Indian history.

- ◆ *Shift in Archaeological Methods*

Even with a great deal of archaeological study conducted in South India, our knowledge of its protohistoric era is still incomplete. Scholars have only started to abandon conventional cultural historical methods in favour of utilising archaeological material to investigate particular issues about the circumstances and mechanisms that shaped the emergence of social complexity. South Asia's history has been mostly built on epigraphic and textual evidence, as in many other literary rich regions. It can be argued that South Asia's documentary record has mostly affected current conceptions of its early past for the time spanning from prehistory to history.

- ◆ *Archaeology and Tamil Identity*

The introduction of written records to South India allowed researchers to concentrate on smaller regions with different historical trajectories as revealed by their texts, rather than seeing the peninsula as a whole. Across the southern half of the peninsula, roughly coinciding with modern day Kerala and Tamil Nadu, a wealth of foreign and indigenous documentation along with engraved coins and cave inscriptions gave rise to the idea of a separate ethnic and linguistic region called "Tamilakam." Archaeology, on the other hand, has not been central to the study of early Tamil identity.

According to Morrison and Lycett (1997), South Indian historians frequently employ archaeological data to validate or link information obtained from texts. This is essentially the



◆ *Criticism*

process of providing tangible proof to validate “known” historical patterns, events or locations. By commonly designating locations and artefacts in Kerala and Tamil Nadu as “Tamil” without critically evaluating whether the material evidence supports or refutes this idea of cultural difference, archaeologists themselves contribute to this trend.

◆ *Link between History and Archaeology*

As research from various locations sheds light on topics essential to the study of Southern India, archaeologists are becoming increasingly concerned about the link between archaeology and history. There is widespread agreement that evidence from the archaeological record is rarely given the same weight as textual material. Conflicts occur when archaeologists frequently confine their work to single-site evaluations and historians concentrate exclusively on texts, ignoring other evidence. Furthermore, archaeologists may exhibit bias by utilising particular textual records to bolster their conclusions. But it is evident that historically informed archaeology is valuable; combining archaeological and historical data yields more nuanced and thorough understanding of the past.

◆ *Inaccessible Source Material*

The study of the human past through material remains is known as archaeology. There is little definite knowledge of the earlier stages of prehistory in South India. Significant literary and archaeological finds have contributed significantly to our understanding of South India’s history. A significant portion of this new source material may be found in the inaccessible periodicals published by the Archaeological Survey of India as well as by Indian states like Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore. Very little information is known about South India before 600 CE. Despite the scant knowledge we have on the early period of Southern history, things are not as bad as Smith suggests, as “we will see this as we move on.”

◆ *Archaeological Indicators*

Based on the date attributed to the Brahmi script discovered at Anuradhapura, Sri Lankan archaeologists believe that the early historic period in South India began to emerge in the sixth or fifth century BCE. The presence of potsherds such as NBP (Northern Black Polished) rouletted ware, or potsherds with Brahmi inscriptions qualify a culture as Early Historic.

◆ *Findings of Brahmi Script*

The Tamil University conducted experimental excavations at Vallam and Kodumanal between March and May of 1984 and 1985. Black-and-red pottery with graffiti was found at Vallam (Tanjore) and a C-14 dating from the early second century BCE was determined. Although there was no graffiti on the identical pottery in Period-IB, a few sherds did have Brahmi characters on them. Excavations at Kodumanal, Periyar, produced rich, 1.5– 2 m thick strata that were

distinguished by black-and-red ceramics bearing Brahmi script. At this exact location, a potsherd of red pottery inside a cist circle revealed a name written in Brahmi characters.

◆ *Megalithic Burial Structures*

The Iron Age is commonly named as megalithic Age, distinguished by the practice of raising big stone monuments to the dead. The largest single period in the spatiotemporal history of the ancient Tamil region is the Iron Age. It is distinguished by the spread of iron smelting and ironworking technologies, the construction of megalithic structures, and the creation of a wide range of artefacts, including various ceramic traditions such as Red Ware and White Painted Black and Red Ware (Rajan Gurukkal). The primary source material for the early phase, which dates to the turn of the first millennium BCE, is the burial and burial objects. The most prevalent burial styles include cairns, hood stones, transepted cists, passage-port-hole chamber tombs, dolmenoid cists and urns. The items recovered from them include mostly broken bones, beads, ceramics and other metal objects together with a variety of iron artefacts.

◆ *Communal Burial Practices*

We need to review the entire megalithic graves in South India. New people who practised communal burial of the deceased, following burning and exposure in megalithic cists began to arise in South India somewhere in the latter part of the first millennium BCE. Their tools were iron, and they made ceramics on wheels. Most South Indian excavations focused more on burials than on habitation, which produced a completely different image of the culture. Cairn circles are the surface characteristics of most of the tombs found in Kodumanal, Porunthal and Thandikudi. Nonetheless, these excavations revealed that cairn circles had double cists, transepted cists with one or two subsidiary cists, pit burials, urn burials and simple cists. The habitation or grave site Kodumanal was also excavated. There were 61 trenches inside the dwelling and 17 burials in the graveyard were revealed.

◆ *Megalithic Urn-Fields*

Megalithic urn fields, which span an area of perhaps 100 acres or more, are indicative of extensive and well-established communities. One of the most well known megalithic settlements is in Adichanallur in the lower Tamraparni Valley in the Tirunelveli district. Here the deceased were typically interred in big pear shaped urns paired with smaller urns. But in the Madras region, a terracotta sarcophagus on legs is occasionally used instead. Wheeler believes that very little research should reveal them. Various types of ceramics, iron tools and weapons, gold crowns and bronze decorations and cutlery, in addition to beads and stones are among the funeral accessories at Adichanallur.

◆ *Mangudi,
Mangadu,
Perur, Vallam,
Adichanallur*

Black-and-red ceramics, iron and sepulchral monuments are the three main features of iron age culture. These three elements were essential to the identification of this culture, both separately and together. It was believed that these three cultural characteristics came together in most archaeological reports. In certain sites, the identification of Iron Age Culture was deemed possible only based on the existence of black-and-red ceramics. An assortment of excavations that could be highlighted include those at Mangudi (Shetty 2003), Mangadu (Satyamurthy 1992), Perur (Shetty 2003), Vallam (Subbarayalu 1985) and Adichchanallur (Satyamurthy 2007).

◆ *Pandoo Coolies*

Since Marria Graham and Babington first noted the existence of Pandoo Coolies (Pandu kulis) in South India, subsequent reports of graves from Congreve and Newbold came. They produced a substantial amount of information regarding stone, cist or circle graves. Geologist Newbold documented the enigmatic mounds of Bellary and North Karnataka and discovered several artefacts around 1850. Most of the artefacts in these collections either ended up in Indian or British museums or vanished.

◆ *Notes on
Prehistoric Culture*

Bruce Foote arrived in India in 1858 as a geologist. Five years later, he discovered stone tools in laterite deposits close to Madras, which signalled the beginning of a new period in South Indian prehistory. Over thirty-three years, he kept up his fieldwork and made significant findings. Topographical observation, extensive surface collection and typological study were the main components of his methodology, which placed little emphasis on excavation. Based on years of research of his extensive collections, his *Notes on the Ages and Distribution of the Antiquities* presents a magnificent reconstruction of the various periods of India's prehistoric culture.

◆ *Roman
Factory & Textile
Processing*

Next, there is the excavation of a "Roman factory" at Arikamedu in Pondicherry, where textiles were processed for export. This supports the trade links with the Roman Empire, which have already been established by the discovery of several Roman coins, most of which date from the first and second centuries CE. The discovery of pottery inscriptions, which were first discovered between 1941 and 1944 at Arikamedu and thereafter from several other ancient sites spread over the Tamil region, changed all of this. The town of Arikamedu, also called Virampatnam, is four kilometres south of Pondicherry. The site has been excavated four times: in 1941–1944 by a French team, in 1945 by Mortimer Wheeler; in 1947–1950 by another French team and most recently, from 1989 to 1992 by Vimala Begley. Arikamedu is significant for understanding South Indian chronology because it was an "Indo-Roman trading station" and because imported artefacts from the Mediterranean, such as

amphoras, arretine ware (*terra sigillata*), rouletted ware, glass and ceramic items have helped the precise dating of the local culture for the first time.

◆ *Nagarjunakonda Excavations*

Since the Nagarjuna Sagar Project was about to be completed, extensive excavations were conducted throughout the Nagarjunakonda region. The excavations are now complete, and when their detailed report is published, it should provide a wealth of fresh knowledge.

1.1.2 Epigraphical Sources

◆ *Indian Paleography*

The most accurate and reliable historical sources worldwide and especially in India, are epigraphy and numismatics. Indian paleography is a very challenging and intricate subject made up of multiple scripts, each of which has a lengthy evolutionary history. Inscriptions are mainly found in chief materials like stone and copper, although they can also occasionally be found on other materials, such as clay seals, precious stones, silver and gold.

◆ *Rock Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu*

Inscriptional evidence also plays a crucial role in identifying Tamizhakam. Roughly 80–90 rock inscriptions have been discovered in natural caverns in Tamil Nadu alone. Furthermore, the best linguistic evidence for differentiating Tamilakam from the rest of South India comes from fragmented epigraphs found on potsherds from approximately 25 sites in southern India and places outside of South Asia (Mahadevan 1993). From the third century BCE onwards, these inscriptions provide important insights into the distinct identity of the area. However, the emphasis on historically named groups as identified by textual evidence creates further interpretive difficulties.

◆ *Ascetic Buddhist & Jain Caves*

The Brahmi script, which was extensively used throughout the peninsula at the time, is employed to write an early form of Tamil on the inscriptions, which date from the third or second century BCE to the second or third century CE. The Tamil inscriptions are unique from the Sangam writings since they were made for various reasons and come from different sources. The inscriptions, which were discovered in what are thought to be ascetic Buddhist or Jain caves appear to honour the magnanimity of different traders and monarchs who helped to sustain these religious groups. Travellers tend to be reminded of the generosity of various merchants and rulers who supported these religions by these inscriptions, which are said to have been written in ascetic Buddhist or Jain caves. The names of the benefactors who supplied stone beds for Buddhist and Jain monks in the caverns are mostly listed, along with their occupations. The ability of these inscriptions to verify specific



kings and locations given in the oldest Sangam writings makes them extremely valuable.

◆ *Ashoka's Rock Edicts*

Tamilakam is also mentioned in South Asian inscriptions that are not in Tamil. The rock decrees of Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor, which date to the third century BCE, are among the most important. The polities of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka were not a part of the Mauryan Empire, as indicated by one of these edicts, which names five independent states that lie beyond the southern boundary of his empire: the Choda (Chola), Pandya, Satiyaputra, Keralaputras (Chera) and Tamraparni (Sri Lanka). Furthermore, the inscription found in the centre of India, called Hathigumpha, dates to the second half of the second century BCE and speaks of the annihilation of a “confederacy of Tamil powers.”

◆ *Greco-Roman Writings on Tamilakam*

Outside South Asia, Greco-Roman writings offer the most detailed historical information about Tamilakam. India is frequently referenced in Western classical literature. The protohistoric period in South India coincides with a time when South Asia actively participated in the thriving maritime networks of the Indian Ocean. The South Asian subcontinent is renowned for its long-standing, diverse and complex interactions with the external world and South India was no exception to this pattern of engagement.

◆ *Roman Empire and Maritime Trade*

Historical and archaeological reconstructions of South India during the Early Historic period have heavily emphasised its participation in long-distance maritime trade networks, particularly its connections with the Roman Empire. These networks linked various regions along the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea coast, the Arabian coast, East Africa, Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and China. South India functioned as a key node in the interregional exchange of goods during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Of all the historical sources available for Tamilakam, the Greco-Roman references to South India are particularly useful since they are to a large degree datable and help, therefore, to fix the centuries during which overseas trade flourished. However, most of these texts refer not to “Tamilakam,” but to specific trade centres and ports in peninsular India.

◆ *Prakrit, Sanskrit and Dravidian Scripts*

In the north, the inscriptions are typically written in Prakrit or Sanskrit; in the south, they are typically written in Sanskrit or a Dravidian language. The North Indian list of Brahmi inscriptions in North India was compiled by D. R. Bhandarkar and the South Indian list of inscriptions was compiled by Keilhorn, a German Indologist, which is outdated and needs to be updated. The epigraphy of South India is far richer than that of North India.

◆ *Inscriptions as Reliable Sources*

The most reliable and accurate sources of South Indian history are its inscriptions, which steadily increase in quantity and significance. These inscriptions are written in either Sanskrit or one of the regional languages (Kannada, Telugu, Tamil.) During the later periods, these inscriptions are usually bilingual, with popular speech used in the body of the text and Sanskrit at the beginning and the end, especially when explaining in detail the gifts that were given and the boundaries of the territory donated to temples, learned individuals and other institutions.

◆ *Evolution of South Indian Scripts*

The script changed and developed in the Deccan region, where it became the ancestor of the modern Telugu and Kannada scripts. Further south, it first takes on the early Grantha form found in the Pallava inscriptions from the seventh and eighth centuries. Then it changes due to the influence of Tamil, taking on two forms: Tamil properly called so and Vattezhuttu or round hand. Although the origin of these two scripts is unknown, Tamil has a much closer relationship to the Pallava Grantha.

◆ *Pallava Grantha Script*

It is noteworthy to mention that the early Pallava Grantha script, which was not much different from the ancestor of Telugu and Kannada was brought to west Java, Borneo and Indo-China by Hindu colonists. The earliest known stone inscriptions in these regions date to approximately 400 CE. These early colonial inscriptions are written in Sanskrit, which was first used in India in the second century CE by the Saka Satraps of Western India.

◆ *Vattezhuttu as Cursive Script*

According to Buhler, the Vattezhuttu can be considered as a cursive script that is related to Tamil in the same way as the present northern alphabets used by clerks and merchants are related to their native languages. The Vattezhuttu disappeared in the Tamil region about the tenth century CE, although it was still in use on the West Coast until much later.

◆ *Copper-Plate Records as Core Source*

The number of stone inscriptions continued to rise gradually in the sixth century, but for several more decades, copper-plate records remain the historian's backbone and must always be taken into account. Many of these copper plates had seals with the *lanchna* (emblem) of the reigning line, occasionally encircled by a Sanskrit verse (usually in *anustup*) naming the ruler who issued the charter.

The Velvikudi grant and the larger Sinnamannur plates, are largely responsible for our understanding of the history of the early Pandyas from the seventh to the tenth century CE. They are both bilingual and use the Grantha script for the Sanskrit and Vattezhuttu

1.1.2.1 Stone and Copper Plate Inscriptions



◆ *Velvikudi Grant and Sinnamannur Plates*

for the Tamil parts. There are other copper-plate records, including one or two that have recently been discovered, but they are not nearly as important, even though they contribute to the administrative and social history of the Pandyas. Copper plate inscriptions of Pallava ruler Simhavishnu are also the primary source of information about the history of the Pallava line.

◆ *Pandya chronology*

The Pandya chronology is based primarily on a few extremely rare inscriptions that are unquestionably dated. We have the Anamalai inscription (located near the Pandyan capital Madura), which dates to the year 3871 (expired) of the Kaliyuga era. This gives us a precise date during the reign of Parantaka I, Varaguna.

◆ *Chronological framework*

The historian can create a trustworthy frame of chronology for South Indian history by combining these data with known genealogies and probable synchronisms. Another reliable date comes from the Badami Rock Inscription of King Pulakesin I, dated to the Saka year 465 and records that he built a strong fortification on the hill close to Badami during this period. This record was found only in 1941. A copper - plate record provides important insights into the early years of King Dantidurga of the Rashtrakuta line Manyakheta (Malkhed).

◆ *Inscriptions and forgery*

The Pandyan inscriptions frequently list one year opposite to another when referring to a king's regnal year. The exact meaning of this is still unknown. But epigraphists generally agree to add up the two or more figures and treat the total as the year of the reign in which the inscription was recorded. Copper-plates, especially those with small sizes like those of this era are prone to forgery and this technique has been used frequently to conceal various motives. However, an experienced epigraphist frequently has much trouble in identifying the real nature.

◆ *Reevaluation and Kudumiyamalai*

Although some of the records that were previously rejected have had to be reexamined in the light of later discoveries of very early records. There are cases of fake plates occasionally appearing as authentic historical or traditional records. The musical stone inscription of Kudumiyamalai (located in the Pudukkottai area) was distinctive in its own respect. The Kudumiyamalai inscription, which claims to be the composition of a Saiva King who studied under Rudracharya, is a very valuable document that contains musical exercises to be practised on stringed instruments.

◆ *Monastic orders and inscriptions*

The early centuries preceding the beginning of the Common era saw the growth of monastic orders, most likely Jain and Buddhist, as evidenced by these scanty documents, which are still somewhat mysterious. The inscriptions on the pillars and walls of the exquisite cave temples in the western Deccan at Kanheri, Karle, Nasik

and other locations, as well as the relic casket from Bhattiprolu in the Krishna valley, which bears witness to the early Buddhist influence in the area, date to the same period. Most of the time, these documents are written in a regional form of Prakrit, which is the general term for all popular dialects with Sanskrit affiliations. The script used is Brahmi with regional and historical variants and they are all carved on stones.

1.1.2.2 Land Grant Inscriptions

Until the fourth century CE, Prakrit was the primary language used in inscriptions. However, in the following centuries, Sanskrit became the sole language for official documents particularly among the Kadambas, Gangas and Pallavas for a period of two to three centuries. Over time, inscriptions began to adopt a bilingual format, with Sanskrit typically used at the beginning and the end, while the body of the text featured native languages such as Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. This was especially common when detailing land grants to temples, scholars and other entities. While Sanskrit continued to be fully or partially used in many records and maintained its global reputation as a revered language for cultural communication, by the tenth century CE, the use of local languages in inscriptions had become widespread.

◆ *Language shift in inscriptions*

Stone inscriptions comprise several tens of thousands, but copper-plate inscriptions constitute only a few hundred. Most of them are records of modest contributions to temples, such as lamps, sheep, land and others. These records also provide details of taxes paid in favour of donees and privileges bestowed upon them, as well as other information on administrative organisation and policy. These records are particularly interesting when they are made by the ruling monarchs.

◆ *Stone vs copper-plate inscriptions*

1.1.2.3 Prashastis

The Chola ruler Rajaraja I (985-1014) instituted the practice of keeping each official record of his reign with a predetermined *prashasti* and adding to it as new events required recording. His successors continued this strategy, so we have an incredibly accurate chronology of the events of the Chola imperial history. Some of the Chola charters on copper plates reached enormous lengths, with numerous well turned out, large sized plates strung together on enormous rings with a large circular seal attached on them. The most notable example is the Leyden Grant of Rajaraja (21st year), named so because it ended up in the hands of the Dutch and is now held by the Leyden Museum.

◆ *Chola inscriptions and Prashasti*



◆ *The Chola inscriptions*

The Tamil inscriptions of the Chola King Rajaraja I on the walls of the Tanjore Temple are significant due to their exquisite engraving skills of the Temple. The temple was constructed by Chola King Rajaraja I and it is believed to represent the elegance and splendour of the Kingdom he had established. Numerous other lengthy inscriptions provide fascinating details about the structure and operations of village assemblies, the role of trade and craft guilds, economic and artistic life, the curricula of the study and student and teacher ratio in significant educational institutions and other subjects. The Motupalli inscription of Kakatiya ruler Ganapati is one of the very few documents that provides some insight into the conditions of the maritime trade. Another one is the Tirumukkudal inscription of Virarajendra Chola, which is also remarkable in the details it provides of the list of medicines kept at a hospital in the temple of the region.

◆ *Structure and significance of Inscriptions*

Almost all inscriptions on stone or copper are seen to follow a particular sequence, unless they are extremely brief records of a single name. In general, the introduction is an invocation, which might take the shape of a verse, a brief prose phrase or even many verses that invoke different gods consecutively. Subsequently, there is a preface known as the *Prashasti*, which recounts the identities and accomplishments of the king and his ancestors. This part is typically the most relevant to political history students and is sometimes presented in a standard format seen in multiple records of the ruling period. A similar, but usually shorter account of the donee and along with information about the real donor, if he is not the king and his accomplishments as well as those of his ancestors. When the donation is to an organisation or group, it is explained in whole. The document ends with a warning to anyone who may dissolve the charity or otherwise interfere with it and with appreciation for those who will continue to uphold and safeguard it. The many components of a typical inscription are listed to show their value to the historian. The Aihole Inscription of King Pulakesin II and the Talagunda Pillar Inscription of the Kadamba Dynasty are the most notable examples of this kind.

◆ *Vijayanagara inscriptions*

The Vijayanagara rulers frequently used a variant of the Nagari script called Nandi Nagari on their copper plates. A Charter granted to the Dutch in 1658 by Vijayaraghava Nayaka of Tanjore(Thanjavur) and to Ekoji in 1676 in Telugu and Tamil respectively, are engraved on silver plates that are preserved in the Batavia (Jakarta) Museum. Occasionally, but very infrequently and only in recent centuries, the charters were inscribed on more valuable material than copper. However, copper is the metal that is mentioned in the Book of Law and the most powerful rulers in the country used copper as a valuable material for making inscriptions.

◆ *Commemorative and historical inscriptions*

Some of the longer inscriptions are dedicated and commemorative. They frequently include priceless *prashastis* of dynastic lines of rulers. However, few have content as thoroughly historical as the Thiruvendipuram inscription of King Chola Rajaraja III, which provides an unbiased account of his struggles and the way the Hoysalas' assistance brought him relief. Two more inscriptions are also noteworthy. One of the rather lengthy inscriptions is the Kudumiyamalai inscription from the Pudukkottai region. It is exquisitely engraved in the elaborate Pallava Grantha of the seventh or eighth century on a broad rock face, containing groups of musical notes arranged for the benefit of his students by a king who was a disciple of Rudracharya and Mahesvara (worshiper of Vishnu). The second inscription was authored by Nanasambandar to the local deity who comes from Tiruvadaivayil in the Tanjore area.

◆ *Chalukya inscriptions and Saka Era*

A large portion of the history of the Chalukyas of Badami and nearly all of the Eastern Chalukyas are similarly based on copper-plate charters. Early inscriptions are all dated according to the regnal years of the kings. The oldest written reference to the Saka Era is found in the inscription on the Badami rock, attributed to the Chalukya King Pulakesin I and dated to Saka 465 (543 CE). It gives details about the fortification of the Vatapi hill, which was discovered in 1941.

◆ *Paleography*

Paleography is frequently the only source of absolute chronology. Indeed, inscriptions always convey the whole truth. Legends and exaggeration are common in these inscriptions and easily identified as such. It is more challenging to identify the truth behind ideological claims made by the authors of records of various dynasties that were engaged in ongoing conflict. There are many examples where both sides declare victory in a conflict and these claims are frequently supported by evidence. Furthermore, there is still a great deal of work to be done in the analysis and interpretation of the social and economic data included in the inscriptions. It has been put off mostly because the Epigraphical Department has been delayed in publishing the texts.

1.1.2.4 Scripts

◆ *South Indian scripts and cultural influence*

South Indian scripts have played a significant role in the worldwide spread of Indian culture. Grantha Tamil is the source of Ceylon's script. The early writing of South India is quite similar to the script used in Java inscriptions, such as those of Purnavarman. As a result, South India has made a significant contribution to Indian epigraphy, both in terms of language development and the evolution of the script, which has spread over borders abroad to provide characters for writing on the numerous Pacific islands.



The enormous military conquest of Malaya by Rajendra Chola, who led one of the most powerful navies that India has ever had and drew South India and the East Indies closer together is the pinnacle achievement of this cultural bridge between South India and Southeast Asia.

1.1.3 Architectural and Sculptural Sources

◆ *Temples and architectural evolution*

Ancient monuments around the country, dating from various areas and periods, are dominated by temples of one form or another. They make it possible for the learner to obtain a solid understanding of the development of sculpture, architecture and occasionally even painting. To more precisely determine the course of architectural evolution, the Archaeological Department has started a systematic survey of the temples in the north and the south. The survey started to yield new findings and publications that significantly expanded our understanding.

◆ *Paintings, sculptures, and regional studies*

There would still be space for indepth analyses of the paintings and sculptures meant to clarify the social aspects of life including clothing, ornaments, musical instruments, dancing stances and so forth. This is unquestionably a work for the local archaeological societies, which are abundant in other nations but conspicuously absent in India. To add accuracy and a unique local flavour to historical knowledge, Indian universities, which have been expanding quickly in recent years can greatly assist in this regard by gradually devoting themselves to the careful examination of regional landmarks as well as the gathering and sorting of records.

◆ *South Indian Sculpture & Architecture*

The history of South Indian sculpture and architecture throughout this period is rich. Among the most well known locations in the south include Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram, Panamalai and Kalugumalai. These locations are veritable treasure troves of rock architecture and structural temples. In South India, there is an enormous number of religious edifices. There are inscriptions all over these and it is required to translate them. Large granite slabs are placed on monolithic pillars by the Hindu architect to create enormous halls or mandapams. The three principal components of South Indian architecture were the Stupa, Vihara and Chaitya. The earliest known stupas in South India can be found in a few locations, including Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Bhattiprolu, Jaggayapeta and Salihundam. The Buddhist stupas at Amravati Mahachaitya, Vaddamanu and Bhattiprolu indicate their Mauryan connections and cultural importance.

In addition to Buddhist viharas and stupas, cult artefacts such as Buddha padas made of Palnad limestone, metal images of the Buddha for individual worship and *chaitya grihas* similar to those

◆ *Buddhist Artefacts*

found at Nagarjunakonda in Amravati have also been discovered at the Kaveripattinam and Kafichi excavations. Surprisingly, the *Mahasanghika* sects from Dharanikota Amaravathi spread far during this time. In the interior of Karnataka, we find sculptures and cult artefacts made of Palnad stone at places like Hampi, Sannathi, Banavasi, Aihole and several others.

◆ *Satavahana
Chaitya*
◆ *Mahabalipuram
Rathas*

One of the biggest *Chaitya* of the Satavahana in South India is believed to be the 26 x 13.5 m. brick apsidal *Chaitya Griha* revealed in Banavasi. A new form of monolithic temple was discovered at Mahabalipuram called “rathas,” which were actually rock-cut versions of structural temples. There are nine in total, five of which bear the names of the Pandava brothers, while the other four are known as Ganesaratha, Southern Pidari Ratha, Valaiyankuttai Ratha and Northern Pidari Ratha respectively. Although several prominent epigraphists have questioned the authenticity of a freshly discovered single line inscription in the cave shelter at Jambai, Thirukoilur taluk, South Arcot district, it raises hopes for a proper identification of Satyaputas.

◆ *Cultural Influence*

The stupa and the stone sculptures at Dhanyakataka originated in early Mauryan periods and gained stronger roots with the elevating royal touch under Asokan *dharma*, as demonstrated by the recent excavations at the Mahachaitya site at Amaravatharavathi, Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. Students of architecture, sculpture and painting have intermittently studied them because of the insights they provide on the status of religious belief, iconography and the fine arts, including painting, dancing and music.

◆ *Temple Analysis*

Jouveau Dubreuil’s *Archaeologie du sude I’Inde* (2 vols.) provides a detailed introduction to the subject. A chapter of its first volume was translated into English by Dr. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar titled “Dravidian Architecture.” Before an adequate and conclusive analysis of the South Indian temple as a religious and social institution can be attempted, we require a series of meticulously studied monographs on the more significant temples.

1.1.4 Archival Sources

◆ *Archival
Collections*

The Madras Record Office and the National Archives belong among the best organised archival collections in India, but overall, one gets the impression that neither the number of scholars entering the field of study nor the detailed bibliographical aids that guide young scholars to these rich stores are nearly as high as they should be.

Regardless of the importance the Mackenzie Records held when they were first gathered at the beginning of the 20th century,



◆ *Mackenzie Records*

they are now essentially useless. We have only copies, which are defective and loaded with errors, as the majority of the originals have been destroyed by insects. However, there is a plan in place at the University of Madras for the release of summaries of the manuscripts' historical components in English. Taylor's more extensive compilation in three volumes is poorly organised and not entirely 'trustworthy'. Wilson's materials remain the *finest*. The British Museum has a comprehensive list of the manuscript's translations in European languages. Both *Sources of Vijayanagara History* (Dr. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Madras University, 1929) and the more comprehensive *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History* (K. A. N. Sastri and Dr. N. Venkataramanayya, Madras University, 1946), with an introduction by the latter, are collections of a portion from literary sources.

◆ *British Indian Manuscripts*

Manuscript sources pertaining to British Indian history are abundant and can be found in the National Archives and various state offices in India and England. A prime example of rigorous study is seen in Sir William Foster's book on English Factories in India and the East India Company Court Minutes. In addition to Foster's work, Yule and Hunter's historical studies have familiarised us with the actions of the forerunners in trade and industry, allowing us to track the development of Madras and Bombay in the seventeenth century. *Vestiges of Old Madras* by Col. Love (3 volumes.) is a very useful source. Manuscript resources from the India Office Library, the National Archives and other sources are listed for the 17th century in S. A. Khan's 'The Sources for the History of the British in the 17th Century'. Talboys "Wheeler's Madras in the Olden Times" is helpful as well.

◆ *French Influence*

The Deccan and South India were the focal points of French activity in India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A few decades ago, Edmond Gaudart released an exhaustive and useful catalogue consisting of eight volumes from the French Archives located in Pondicherry. With the consolidation of the French territories in India, it appears that all the documents have been moved to Paris.

1.1.4.1 State Papers

◆ *East India Company Records*

The principal sources for the history of the eighteenth century are Marathi and Persian documents in addition to official documents from the time. A great deal of correspondence was exchanged with the servants of the English East India Company in India. For the sake of their English masters, they were required to maintain meticulous records of everything they did daily. Their lengthy debates were documented in the minutes of council meetings

and were referred to as proceedings or consultations. As a result, there are now more documents in circulation, providing plenty of historically significant content.

◆ *Unpublished Materials*

Forrest S. C. Hill and others have listed and calendared some of these data. We also have letters in other collections, such as the two-volume *Cornwallis Correspondence* edited by Deport Ross and the *Fort William Correspondence* (which will eventually be published in 21 volumes). Numerous unpublished materials can be found in the India Office Library, the National Archives of India, the Madras and Bombay record offices, the Admiralty and War Office Records etc. To these can be added printed English records like the letters of Kirkpatrick, the Fort St. George records, the military consultations from 1752 to 1756, the Siege Diary from 1757 to 1759 and other documents.

1.1.4.2 Diary Records

◆ *Ananda Ranga Pillai's Diary*

Another important unique source of information is the monumental Tamil diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai, a dubash in the service of the French East India Company. The diarist has documented anything that came to mind, including commercial dealings, social events, family concerns and state affairs. The result is an odd mixture of unimportant and significant topics, all of which are mixed with pieces of gossip. Even though the language is simple, it has sections that are shocking in both their shrewdness and emotions, as well as descriptions of people and things that are strangely realistic. This unusual modern journal provides much needed information on the turbulent politics of South India during the pivotal years that witnessed the decline of Muhammadan authority in the Carnatic and the expansion and eventual resolution of the struggle for dominance between the English and the French. In the French service, Ananda Ranga Pillai held a highly significant position. He died a few days before Pondicherry was turned over to General Coote in 1761. Compared to the records from other Indians in Pondicherry, his journal has more genuine political details than any other diary. When writing about Dupleix and the flaws in his character and temper, he is at his finest.

Summarised Overview

Despite extensive archaeological research in South India, an understanding of its protohistoric era remains limited. Traditionally, studies have relied heavily on epigraphic and textual evidence to interpret the early history of South India. This documentary focus has shaped prevailing perspectives on the region's transition from prehistory to history.



However, recent shifts in methodology prioritise analysing archaeological materials to explore the processes and conditions that led to social complexity. The advent of written records in South India also encouraged localised studies of distinct historical trajectories, moving away from viewing the region as a unified whole.

Epigraphy and numismatics are among the most reliable historical sources globally, including India. Indian paleography is complex, encompassing numerous scripts with long evolutionary histories. Inscriptions are primarily found on materials like stone and copper but occasionally appear on clay seals, precious stones, silver and gold.

Temples dominate India's ancient monuments, offering insights into the evolution of sculpture, architecture and sometimes painting. The Archaeological Department's systematic surveys of northern and southern temples have enhanced understanding through new discoveries and publications. However, more detailed studies on social aspects, such as clothing, ornaments, musical instruments and dance poses depicted in sculptures and paintings are useful. Local archaeological societies, common in other nations but lacking in India, could address this gap. Indian universities, with their growing resources, can contribute significantly by studying regional landmarks and organising historical records to enrich local historical knowledge.

The Madras Record Office and the National Archives are among the best-organised archival collections in India. However, there is a noticeable lack of scholars pursuing this field and insufficient bibliographical resources to guide young researchers to these valuable archives. Manuscript sources for British Indian history are abundant, housed in the National Archives, state offices in India and archives in England. Notable works include Sir William Foster's studies on English Factories and East India Company records, which, along with Yule and Hunter's research, trace the early development of trade, industry and cities like Madras and Bombay in the 17th century.

Assignments

1. Analyse different techniques for preserving archival sources.
2. Evaluate significant contributions of South Indian epigraphy, both in terms of language development and the evolution of the script.
3. Analyse the role of inscriptions as the most reliable and accurate source of South Indian history.
4. Analyse the peculiarities of Manuscript Sources.
5. Explain the role of Archaeological evidence in reshaping our understanding of South Indian History.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU



Literary and Other Sources

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful conclusion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain different kinds of secondary sources of South Indian history
- ◆ evaluate the significance of numismatical sources
- ◆ identify the sources related to Chola and Vijayanagara states

Background

Literary sources are highly significant among the sources of South Indian history, distinguished by their immense volume. They are divided into several classes with differing values. It is not possible to describe this class in depth here due to its wide variety; therefore, the treatment must be limited and illustrative. It is noted that most of the literature still needs to be thoroughly examined and utilised from a historical perspective by qualified historians. Contributions of linguists and philologists are also important and greatly appreciated but require supplementation from the perspective of the historian in the matter.

Literary sources help the historian to visualise the social and religious setting in which historical figures moved and lived. Then, the prologues, epilogues, and colophons of various works frequently contain insightful information on the backgrounds, successes and royal patrons of the writers of the works and these frequently serve as a supplement to the inscriptions. A few Sanskrit texts and Tamil texts, including the devotional hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars of Tamil Nadu, are some examples of literary sources.

Keywords

Folk tales, Travellers, Geographers, Merchants, Alvars, Nayanars, Numismatics



Discussion

Literary Evidence

- ◆ *Literary Sources*
- ◆ *Temple Chronicle*

One of the significant sources for the study of South Indian history is literary sources. Literary sources can be broadly classified into two. It includes both indigenous and foreign. In all Indian literature, there are not many works that are historical in nature. Indeed, there are certain temple chronicles, such as the Srirangamkoyil-olugu and the Maduraittala-Varalaru. Although they provide useful insights into more contemporary periods, such as those from 1200 onwards, they are essentially a collection of legends and are too full of inaccuracies and distortions. We cannot rely upon them without the support of other more reliable sources. Several *Sthala Puranas*, which are primarily modern redactions of popular legends, and the *Kongu-Desa-Rajakkal Charitram* and *Keralotpatti* in their different recensions have also frequently been exaggerated, though no early examples of such popular quasi-historical material have survived.

- ◆ *Literary Contribution*

Although the direct historical contribution from literary sources is generally regarded as being less significant, the study of Indian pieces of literature can be beneficial to historians. Prologues, epilogues and colophons of different works often contain insightful information about the achievements and royal patronage of the authors of the works as well as their royal patrons. This information not only helps the historian's ability to visualise the social and religious context in which historical figures lived, moved and acted, but these details also frequently supplement the inadequate information obtained from inscriptions. Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada played an important role in the history of South Indian literature and this literature helped to understand the history of South India.

1.2.1 Indigenous Accounts

1.2.1.1 Sangam Literature

- ◆ *Sangam Anthology*

The most important text-based source supporting the identification of Tamilakam as a separate cultural region is the "Sangam Anthology." These native prose poems, which date to the first few centuries, are among the oldest pieces of Tamil literature that have survived. The remaining works consist of 102 poems by anonymous authors, eight anthologies, ten idylls, a grammar book, and eighteen minor works, totaling 2,381 poems by 473 poets. The chronological order of these manuscripts is a matter of debate among scholars, with dates ranging from the first century BCE to the sixth century CE.

◆ *Quality of the Sangam Anthology*

The lyrical and bardic quality of the Sangam corpus must be understood to fully appreciate it as a source of historical data. Even though a large portion of the poetry glorifies the accomplishments of kings, soldiers, and patrons, historians and archaeologists continue to use the writings as sources for the archaeological record. The scriptures describe the “cool land of the Tamils” and frequently extol the valour and military might of the leaders of the Chera, Chola, and Pandya, the three main Tamil polities. In literary works, the term “Tamilakam” is often used to denote a sense of cultural or ethnic identity or at least, a recognition of their independence or uniqueness from neighbouring regions to the north and south.

◆ *Pandya Legacy*

The Pandyas established Sangam in Madurai and had translated the *Mahabharata* into Tamil, according to the larger Sinnamanur plates of the Pandyas, which date to the early tenth century CE. However, this becomes evidently incorrect when we consider that the anthologies contain collections of late poems like the *Tirumurugatrupadai*, *Kalittogai* and *Paripadal*, which are older than the earlier poems.

◆ *Silappadikaram*

Attempts to treat the twin epics of *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, along with some later anthologies and the collection of eighteen didactic works, including the *Kural*, as contemporaneous with the authentic Sangam literature of the early centuries CE have caused significant confusion in the picture of the Sangam period. There are serious questions about the authorship and age of the *Silappadikaram*, though it is an unparalleled work of art. The work is distinct within the entire canon of Tamil literature in several aspects and its fine use of metrical effects and vivid scene portrayal is essentially unmatched in other works. Its premise is an ancient folktale about a merchant named Kovalan who leaves his wife Kannagi and loses everything because he falls in love with Puhar’s famous hetaera Madhavi.

◆ *Kannagi’s Revenge*

Kannagi takes her revenge by burning the city of Madura. She is revered as the Goddess of Chastity by Chera ruler Senguttuvan. A large part of the story is a touching human tale that is masterfully stated, with scenes set in each of the three Tamil kingdoms, despite its magical components. The author, Ilango Adigal, also known as “Prince Ascetic,” is said to be the brother of Chera king Senguttuvan, yet the Sangam poetry has no information about such a brother.

◆ *Manimekalai*

Manimekalai was written by Sattanar, a grain merchant of Madura. This Buddhist poetry describes the life of Manimekalai, daughter of Madhavi and Kovalan, with a focus mostly on issues of religion. The *Manimekalai*, in its current form, is a lengthy exposition of logical fallacies that are based on Dinnaga’s *Nyaya Pravesa*, a book from the fifth century CE.



- ◆ *Prabandha Literature*
- ◆ *Historical Reliability*

Several works of Tamil's *prabandha* class of literature, including the *Kalambakam*, *Ula*, *Parani* and *Kovai* reveal a great deal about history, particularly if they are the works of court poets who made their royal patrons' the subject matter of their poetry. An old commentary on the well-known *Iraiyanar Agapporul* quotes a Pandik-Kovai extensively. Although the verses of the *Kovai* record the names of several battles fought by the Pandya rulers of the Kadungon line, the poem's hero appears to have been a composite figure to whom the poet attributes the dynasty's accomplishments; the use of such literary conventions was fairly common, and one is likely to be easily misled by them if one does not exercise the utmost caution. Pallava Nandivarman III is the hero of the *Nandi-Kalambagam* which is a considerably more reliable source of history. Even though it is a Sanskrit *kavya* with some poetic qualities, Bilhana's *Vikramankadeva Charita* is not nearly as valuable to history as some of the recently mentioned Tamil and Kannada works.

1.2.1.2 Bhakti Literature

- ◆ *Devotional Literature*

There is not much literary evidence except some Sanskrit works and a part of Tamil literature, particularly the devotional hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars. Popular devotional literature grew rapidly during the Hindu religious renaissance, for which many Saiva Nayanars and Vaishnava Alvars contributed together. Both its magnitude and its impact on people's lives made it extremely significant. As they travelled from place to place and shrine to shrine, groups of devotees led by a well-known religious leader, sang the songs they had written during these pilgrimages. A far greater body of writing must have existed during this period of Tamil Hinduism than what has been preserved in the canonical versions of hymns compiled in the tenth century by Nathamuni for the Vaishnavas and Nambi Andar Nambi for the Saivas. For example, a song by Gnanasambandar that is not included in the canonical collection can be discovered carved on a stone at the temple located in the Tanjore district at Tiruvidaiyavayil.

- ◆ *Karaikkal Ammai*

Karaikkal Ammai, a native of Karaikkal, is probably the oldest author in the group whose writings have been included in the Saiva canon. According to tradition, she lived at the same era as Pudam, one of the first alvars; both may be dated to roughly 550. The two additional poems she penned are *Tiru-irattai-mani-malai*, which has twenty pairs of stanzas each with a *venba* and a *Kalitturai* verse and *Tiruvandadi*, which has one hundred *venba* verses. Together, these poems indicate the beginning of *Prabandha* literature in Tamil, a genre that eventually numbered ninety-six types.

- ◆ *Appar Hymns*
- ◆ *Gnanasambandar*

The Saiva canon's volumes 4 - 6 are made up of the 307 hymns of Appar. They are filled with significant anticipation of the Saiva - Siddhanta philosophy. The level of devotion inherent in them is matched only with the *Thiruvagasam* of Manikka - Vasagar. Gnanasambandar, the most celebrated Saiva hymnist, composed of 384 hymns. Sambandar's hymns stand out for their unusually high literary quality, yet at the end of each one, he roundly denounces the Buddhists and Jains, showing how actively he participated in the fight against heretical faiths.

- ◆ *Tirumandiram*
- ◆ *Sundaramurthi*

The 3,000 verse *Tirumandiram* of Tirumular is a manual for Saiva mysticism. Even though no author before Sekkilar appears to have specifically referenced it, it is the tenth book in the canon. The hundred songs that comprise the seventh book of the canon were supplied by Sundaramurthi. He was referred to as the "Friend of God" (Tambiran tolan) because of his close friendship with God.

- ◆ *Periyalvar & Andal*

Together, Periyalvar and his daughter Andal add close to 650 verses to the anthology. She claimed that the Lord of Srirangam was her lover and her songs are influenced by her intense desire for communion with the Lord. Even today, at all Vaishnava Brahmin marriages, the song of Andal, which tells of her dream - marriage with Vishnu, is performed. It begins with the words "Varanam-Ayiram"(one thousand elephants).

- ◆ *Nammalvar*
- ◆ *Tiruvaymoli*

The most recent of the Alvars were the Velala saint Nammalvar, also known as "Sathakopa" and his Brahmin disciple Madhurakavi. The greatest regard is accorded to Nammalvar's writings since they are thought to contain the most profound philosophical lessons imparted by the Upanishads. The *Tiruvaymoli*, which consists of 1,101 stanzas, is considered the most revered and has been extensively discussed by subsequent expositors of the *Visishtadvaita* philosophical school.

- ◆ *Mahendra Varman's Writings*

Mahendra Varman I, the Pallava ruler was the author of the *Mattavilasa*, which is also the name of the king and maybe of another farce *Bhagavadajjukam*, which mock the monastic commands of the Bhikshus and Kapalikas in turn and alludes indirectly to corruption in government departments such as the judiciary and the police. During this time, Kumarila and Sankara's writings are primarily focused on the history of philosophy and general history. With the exception of the *Kural*, we may ascribe the majority of the eighteen *Kilkaanaku* to this era in Tamil.

- ◆ *Alvars and Nayanars*

These works provide insightful views into the social life of the time. But this period also witnessed production of religious hymns of the Alvars and Nayanars. Even hymns by themselves present challenges for the secular historian, who frequently struggles to



piece together the true history behind some of the hymns and the rare miracles they record.

◆ *Nandikkalambakam*

Finally, we have a semi-historical poem by the anonymous *Nandikkalambakam*, which has over eighty stanzas in several metres and numerous interpolations that discuss the events during the reign of Nandivarman III. However, it cannot be said that the poem brings significantly to the knowledge of the reign that is already known from its inscriptions, which include the overseas record at Takua - pa on the Malay Peninsula's west coast.

1.2.1.3 Tamil Literary Sources

◆ *Literary Evolution*

Tamil is undoubtedly the most ancient Dravidian language, having been spoken over the territory in the past than it is now. The earliest Tamil literature from the early centuries has very few Sanskrit loan phrases; those that do are frequently modified to fit the Tamil phonetic system; otherwise, Sanskrit models have no impact on the literary forms themselves. However, Sanskrit influences also became more pronounced in Tamil, leading to extensive borrowings of concepts, vocabulary, literary forms and metres. Sanskrit has a much greater influence on the languages spoken further north, such as Telugu and Canarese. The eleventh century saw the separation of Malayalam, a language that was strikingly similar to Tamil. However, pre - Aryan India has traditionally persisted far more in the languages, kinds of literature and institutions of the South than it has anywhere else.

◆ *Heroic Poems*

Compared to earlier periods, the literary evidence from this era is a little richer in historical value. The *Kalingattuparani* of Jayangondar describes the Chola invasion of Kalinga under the reign of Kulottunga I. Jayangondar also wrote a poem called *Pillaittamil* on Kulottunga II that describes his early years. The poem *Kulottungan Kovai* on Kumara Kulottunga, later known as Kulottunga III makes indirect allusions to some of his early military achievements. The *Thiruthondar Puranam* also known as the *Periyapuranam* of Sekkilar was written during the reign of Kulottunga II (1133–50) and collects all the legends referring to the Nayanars. Corresponding prose hagiologies, known as the *Guruparamparais* are available in various forms and discuss the Alvars and their descendants.

1.2.1.4 Kannada Literary Sources

Kannada is the language spoken in South India with the oldest literature, second only to Tamil. Although its exact origins are unknown, a sizeable body of prose and poetry had been written

◆ *Ranna's works*

prior to Nripatunga's *Kavirajamarga* (850), the oldest known work on rhetoric in Kannada. The Courts of Chalukya ruler Taila II and his successors were enriched by Ranna, who along with Pampa and Ponna completes "the Three Jems" who introduce Kannada literature in its whole. Ranna popularly known as *Kavichakravarthi* (poet-laureate) of the Chalukyan court, receiving honours such as the golden rod, chauri, elephant and umbrella. His *Ajitapurana* (993) is a *Champu* about the life of the second Tirthankara. *Parasurama Charita* and *Chakresvara Charita*, two of Ranna's other works, are no longer in existence.

◆ *Epic Themes*

In Kannada, Pampa's *Bharata*, also known as *Vikramarjuna-Vijaya*, and Ranna's *Gada-Yuddha*, also known as *Sahasbhimavijaya* are primarily devoted to themes from the great epic *Mahabharata*. Both shed light on Rashtrakuta and Chalukya history. This is because the authors of these works chose to identify some of the epic characters as their patrons and include several well-known historical events into their narratives. Occasionally, these poets offer hints that help to coordinate the rich epigraphical evidence of the period.

1.2.1.5 Telugu Literary Sources

◆ *Nannaya and Tikkana*

The origins of Telugu literature can be traced back to Nannaya's translation of the *Mahabharata* during Chalukya ruler Rajaraja Narendra (1019-61). Under Rajaraja's direction, Nannaya completed the enormous task, with the help of Narayana Bhatta, a gifted poet admired by the king. It is unknown whether the political unrest during Rajaraja's reign affected Nannaya's work. Only two parvas (*Adi* and *Sabha*) and a portion of the third (*Vana*) could finish translating. Tikkana (1220-1300), a Telugu poet, continued the translation of the *Mahabharata*.

◆ *Vidyaranya's Kalanjana*

Literary material is abundant in India regarding the history of Vijayanagara. A considerable amount of material is now available in two sets of chosen sources published by the University of Madras. The *Kalajnanas*, a class of works, rests in the necessary correction it provides to the biased narratives of the Muslim historians of the Bahmani kingdom and its successor states. Vidyaranya's *Kalajhana*, written before the end of the 15th century, gives a concise overview of Vijayanagara's history while also shedding light on some of its dark sides.

Krishnadeva Raya's *Amuktamalyada* or *Vishnuchittiya*, is one of the five great Kavyas in Telugu, which also signals the beginning of the influence of Vaishnavism on Telugu literature. The life of Alvar Vishnuchitta (Periyalvar), his explanation of Vaishnava philosophy



◆ *Ashtadiggajas*

and the bond between Goda, his foster daughter and God Ranganatha are all covered. Like the Nine Gems of Vikramaditya's court, the *Ashtadiggajas* also known as the Eight Elephants of the Quarters, are well-known in folklore from Krishnadeva Raya's court. Of the numerous brilliant poets who graced Krishnadeva Raya's court, Allasani Peddana stands out above the others. The ruler bestowed the title 'Andhra Kavita Pitamaha' (Grandfather of Telugu poetry) upon him.

◆ *Quasi-Historical Literature*

Vijayanagara Kingdom also produced quasi-historical literature. One quasi-historical Kavya is the *Kamparaya Charita*, also known as *Madhura Vijaya*, written by Gangadevi, Kumara Kampana's wife. It is described in epic form and it deals with his invasion of Madura and the downfall of the Delhi Sultanate. The military conflicts of Saluva Narasimha were the subject of Rajanatha's *Saluvabhyudayam* (late fifteenth century). The *Varadambikaparinaya* of Tirumalamba, a *Champu*, deals with the marriage of king Achyutaraya with Queen Varadamba. The Rayavacaka's *Krishnaraja Vijaya* describes the reign of King Krishnadevaraya. There were numerous other works of a similar nature produced in the courts of the Nayak kings.

◆ *The identity of Malayalam*

1.2.1.6 Malayalam Literary Sources

The last of the South Indian languages to establish a distinct identity and literary canon was Malayalam. The region that is now Malayalam was once home to Tamil speakers during the Sangam era, although grammarians soon realised that the dialect of the mountain region differed greatly from standard Tamil. The first known literary work in the language is an anonymous poem from the fourteenth century called *Unnuneeli Sandesam*. It was based on Kalidasa's *Meghasandesa*, which describes a message from a lover in Thiruvananthapuram to his lady love in Kodungallur, along with a detailed description of the route to be followed. Another poem from the same period written in Sanskrit is the *Chandrolsavam*. The work *Lilatilakam*, a work on grammar written in *Manipravalam*-style is found in the 15th-century.

◆ *Keralolpatti Origins*

There was no unanimous opinion regarding the origin of the period of *Keralolpatti*. Gundert rejects the claim that these books were composed in the eighteenth century by the Nambudiri Brahmins. He asserts the existence of *Keralolpatti* manuscripts from the sixteenth century CE. *Keralolpatti* is made up of several texts. It depicts various versions in a single and coherent language. People, locations, rituals and practices referenced in the non-legendary sections of *Keralolpattis* are authentic and based on historical accounts supported by epigraphic evidence. Chronicles like *Keralolpatti* and temple chronicles like *Srirangam Koyil Olugu*, *Madurai-Thalavaralaru*, and a comparable work on the

Kalahasti temple believed to be owned by the temple priest fall into the same category. These writings, which have been authored by various peoples and frequently completely rewritten or updated, are typically found in a variety of versions.

◆ Folk Songs

Popular ballads of various kinds, known as *Palaiyapattu*, old songs, had existed before the date of the first *Sandesa* poem, though in their present form, they appear in a highly modernised garb. Many critics hold that some of them must be of very early origin. These folk songs came in many varieties, like *Brahmanippattu* sung in marriages, *Bhadralippattu* and *Sastappattu* in praise of the respective deities, *Yatrakkalippattu* and *Tiruvadiraippattu* which derive their names from the festive occasions when they were sung; they seem to have been generally accompanied by dance.

◆ Niranam Poets

The Niranam poets, in central Travancore, deserve special mention. They developed an autonomous Malayalam style in the fifteenth century, mostly free from the influence of Tamil and Sanskrit. The most well-known of them was Rama Panikkar, the narrator of the accounts of Rama found in the *Ramayanam*, also called *Kannassa Ramayanam*. In addition, he wrote the *Bhagavatam*, *Savitri Mahatmyam*, *Brahmanda Puranam* and *Bhagavatam*. His poetry reflects a strong narrative quality, getting him the title of “the Chaucer of Malayalam.”

1.2.2 Foreign Accounts

◆ External Sources

The descriptions provided by foreigners often offer a vivid picture of numerous issues that local authors might ignore or take for granted. In general, the oldest accounts of India date from the writings of the Greeks and Romans, whose connections to the country became more precise and extensive by the end of the second century CE. Then there are the Chinese annalists and travellers, who are the focus of current studies. The works of Arab historians, cartographers, traders and travellers started to gain significance in the eighth century and Chinese sources became more extensive and reliable than ever before. Occasionally, European travellers like Benjamin of Tudela and Marco Polo have left us writings as well. The number of foreign writers and tourists rose significantly after the fourteenth century; first, the Portuguese and the Italians dominated, but soon Dutch, English and others.

◆ Hellenistic Trade

The earliest references of South India in classical literature is found in Megasthenes’ delightful description of the Pandyan Kingdom, which was controlled by Pandaia, a daughter of Herakles, “to whom he assigned that portion of India which lies southward and extends to the sea.” There were 365 villages in the realm and each village was responsible for bringing the royal tribute to the treasury each day and if needed, helping the queen collect it from



defaulters. During the Hellenistic era, trade flourished between South India and Egypt and it grew more extensive during the Roman Empire.

◆ *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*

Strabo reports the expansion of Roman knowledge of India during his time. He also mentioned the triumph of Gallus's expedition, which Augustus dispatched in 25 BCE to secure for the empire the command of Aden and the Red Sea route to India, which was gaining acceptance among the merchants of the empire. The anonymous Greek book *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which provides a concise and thorough account of the ports of South India and their trade with the Roman Empire, is a valuable foreign literary source of the Sangam period. These sources give us a good understanding of the social and economic conditions that were in place at the period and also gives details about kings and chieftains that are too fragmentary to allow a unified political history.

◆ *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*

The anonymous writer of the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, Pliny the Elder (75 CE) and Ptolemy (130 CE) symbolise the subsequent phases of the Romans' growing familiarity with the eastern countries, of which Strabo provides us the earliest indications, although Pliny and Ptolemy obtained their sources from other authors. The *Periplus's* author undoubtedly travelled to many of the western Indian ports and he had great knowledge of trading activities that prevailed there. Still, it appears that he knew just barely about the east coast.

◆ *Ptolemy's Geography*

On the other hand, Ptolemy's *Geography* includes much of other parts of India as well as the Indian coast. The name of the grumpy Byzantine monk Cosmas (550 CE), also known as Indikopleustes (the one who sailed to India) is the most famous after Ptolemy. In his early years, he worked as a trader and travelled to numerous locations in the Persian Gulf, the west coast of India and as far east as Ceylon. Not unreasonably, his Christian Topography has been described as "a continent of mud" from which we can, nevertheless, extract "a few geographical fossils of considerable interest."

◆ *South India-China Relations*

Evidence of maritime trade between China and South India dates back to the second century BCE, as documented in the account of a Chinese embassy to "Houang-tche" (Kanchi). Another important source is the finding of a Chinese coin from Chandravalli in Mysore that dates roughly to the same period. The Hindu kingdoms of Indo-China and the archipelago were in regular communication with both China and South India, as evidenced by entries in Chinese annals from the third, fourth and fifth centuries CE. On numerous occasions, they are reported to have sent gifts of South Indian products, such as pearls, sandalwood and *vaidurya* or semi-precious stones to the Chinese court.

◆ *Religious Insights*

Numerous Buddhist monks travelled by sea from South India and Ceylon to China, where they settled and contributed to the spread of Buddhism and translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese. Cosmas wrote about Chinese ships landing in Ceylon with silk. Yuan Chwang, the renowned Master of the Law (of Buddhism), travelled throughout India. He travelled through the Deccan and South India for several months (641-642 CE). He left behind insightful observations about the social and religious context of these regions at the time.

◆ *Hieun Tsang's Record*

The Chinese records mention ambassadors from South India to China, primarily for commercial and sometimes for diplomatic purposes. Fa-hien travelled by sea from Tamluk to Ceylon, not on land and his tale of the Deccan and the "pigeon monastery" is little more than interesting hearsay. During the conflict between the Pallavas under Narasimhavarman I and the Chalukyas of Badami under Pulakesin II in 641-2 CE, Hiuen Tsang travelled to South India and left behind a record of his travels. His records are good and trustworthy overall, but do not fully satisfy the curiosity of modern scholars.

◆ *Chinese Annals*

The Chinese annals contain records of the exchange of emissaries between China and the Chola kingdom in the eleventh century and the Pallava dynasty of Kanchi in the eighth century. Over the following decades, there was a good deal of trade between China and South India and Chinese junks were frequently seen in Indian watercourses.

◆ *Wang Ta-yuan's Travels*

We are unable to evaluate the implications of the numerous embassies that the great Mongol King Kublai Khan dispatched to South India. Some of them even attempted to influence the direction of regional affairs. Between 1330 and 1349, Wang Ta-yuan, a Chinese merchant, travelled to several foreign countries for trading purposes. It was during these journeys that he authored the *Tao-i-chi-lio* (Description of the Barbarians of the Isles). The work is poor in style but exhibits the author's broad knowledge and philosophical bent. It also gives details of a remarkable number of countries, ports, and notable locations. It is valuable as an eyewitness description.

◆ *Expeditions of Ming Dynasty*

Among the locations that Wang Ta- yuan depicted are Calicut, Kayamkulam, the Maldives, Colombo and Eli. Several foreign rulers sent envoys to the Chinese court after the third ruler of the Ming dynasty launched a series of incredible naval expeditions in the first quarter of the fifteenth century CE intending to establish the fame and dominance of the dynasty over many lands. Under Cheng Ho's leadership, no fewer than seven of these expeditions



made it to South India. Fei Hsin and Ma Huan, who have left behind records of the diverse nations they visited, accompanied him on the voyages. The descriptions of Ceylon, Cochin and Calicut in Fei Hsin's *Hsing-cha-sheng-lan*, or *Description of the Star Raft* (1436) and Ma Huan's *Ying-yai-sheng-lan*, or *Description of the Coasts of the Ocean* (1451) are especially valuable because they were written during the period between expedition of Ibn Batuta and the arrival of the Portuguese.

◆ Arab exploration

The records of Arab explorers and geographers became important sources of information of the beginning in the ninth century CE. Arabs controlled a large portion of the Indian Ocean trade from very early on. Islam suddenly gained popularity and its influence extended beyond politics and religion and embraced science and commerce. During this period, Arab traders enjoyed an immense reputation. A colony of Arab traders was organised in Ceylon by the end of the seventh century. The number of Arabs and Persians who had landed in Canton in 758 was large enough for them to cause unrest and profit from the resulting disorder in the city. The first author to be included here is Ibn Khurdadbeh, a Persian Muslim of Magian ancestry, who wrote the *Book of Routes and Kingdoms* written between 844 and 848 and presents content in a dry and frequently incomplete way.

◆ Persian historiography

Under the patronage of Muslim rulers in the Deccan several historical works were written in Persian. Many of them have either perished or are yet to be uncovered. Ferishta mentions a number of works that he used but were no longer available. The only contemporary source still in existence that covers the history of the Bahmani Kingdom is Isami's *Futuh-us-Salatin*. This is the most significant among those that survive and have an impact on the times. Isami started writing his book in 1358 and finished it the next year. The *Futuh-us-Salatin* tells the story of the Delhi Sultanate up to Muhammad bin Tughlaq's reign and it takes inspiration from *Shah Nama* of Firdausi. In addition to providing extensive and precise details on the Delhi Sulthanate's conquest of the Deccan and South India, it also provides a vivid picture of the years of political unrest in the Deccan that preceded the establishment of the Bahmani Kingdom and the life and times of the first Bahmani Sultan.

Additional writings about the Bahmani kingdom were produced much later, long after the Sultanate had collapsed. They were written from the specific perspectives of one or more of the succeeding governments. Among these is the *Burhan-i-Maasir* of Ali bin Aziz-ullah Taba Tabai of Simmin (Persia), who was initially a courtier of

◆ *Historiography of the Post-Bahmani period*

the Nizam Shahi Kingdom of Ahmadnagar and a contemporary of Ferishta. It is an introduction to the history of the Nizam Shahis, preceded by a description of the Bahmani Sultans. Although his story is biased in favour of his patrons, in some ways his claims appear more real than Ferishta and more consistent with the evidence found in the coins.

◆ *Ferishta's historical writing*

Muhammad Kasim Hindu Shah Ferishta, a Persian by birth, arrived in Ahmadnagar in 1582 when he was twelve years old and accompanied by his father. Ferishta is considered the prince among the Persian historians of that period. His history is given a tremendous quality by the breadth and depth of his work, which constitutes a broad history of Dynastic rule in India, the number of experts he examined and the general sense of perspective that permeates the whole narrative. He frequently provides misleading details in his writings. Undoubtedly, this is the most comprehensive and accessible account of the 'Indian Islamic' period, completed in 1606.

◆ *Narratives of Shirazi*

Another work, the *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, was written by a Persian merchant from Shiraz who went by the name Shirazi. It was similarly written from the perspective of Bijapur. He arrived in Sagar on the Krishna in 1560 and in 1574, he started working for Adil Shahi. Between 1608 and 1610, he composed his work, which appears to have less significance for Bahmani political issues while being a firsthand narrative of Bijapur history that provides numerous information not found elsewhere. Because of his Shia beliefs and lack of acquaintances in Ahmednagar, he moved to Bijapur and was given an army position there. We are uncertain of how and when he switched from the sword to the pen. Early in the fourteenth century, a Persian writer named Abd Allah Shirazi Wassaf lived in Persia and had access to knowledge about events that were happening at the time in the Tamil region. He provides insightful information on the Pandyan civil war as well as the trade conditions that prevailed during this period.

◆ *Abu Zaid's accounts*

Despite not being an avid traveller, Abu Zaid Hassan of Siraf on the Persian Gulf had numerous chances to interact with well-travelled academics and merchants, including the renowned Masudi. Abu Zaid states that his goal was to add information from his research and interviews with individuals who had visited the eastern nations to an earlier study on China and India.

Not much is known about South India from the renowned historian and geographer Alberuni (1030). There is not much progress in understanding India from the renowned historian and geographer Abulfeda (1273–1331). His descriptions of South India

◆ *Arab geographers on South India*

are imprecise, hazy and second-hand. He frequently quotes the seasoned traveller and geographer Ibn Said (1214-86). The last and possibly the most significant Arab writer is the Moorish adventurer Ibn Batuta. He was born around 1300 in Tangier, left his native land at the age of 22 and travelled continuously for the following thirty years. He lived for many years in India during the period when Muhammad bin Tughlaq's rule forced all the provincial governors into open revolt and gave rise to autonomous kingdoms throughout the empire. Being a physician specialising in Muhammadan law and customs, he had a sharp eye for people and affairs. A significant portion of his writing is devoted to describing his travels and experiences in South India. It includes a wealth of factual information about the social, political and religious conditions of the region at the time. In 1377, he passed away in Fez.

◆ *European travellers' India connections*

Regarding European travellers in India after Cosmas, it has been questioned if the Jewish traveller Benjamin of Tudela from Spain ever made an expedition there. A fresh phase in the direct transmission of information between Europe and the East begins with Marco Polo. He is known as the "prince of medieval travellers." After a treacherous three-and-a-half-years voyage across Asia, he arrived at Kublai Khan's court. Marco Polo was employed on numerous significant missions during his seventeen years in the Mongol court, where he became the Khan's personal favourite. He set off from China in 1292 and it took him around a year and a half to travel across the Indian Ocean to reach Persia.

◆ *Marco Polo's insights on South India*

In 1295, Marco Polo made his way back to Venice via Constantinople. On his journey to Persia, he was travelling through some regions of South India. But it is astonishing how much information he managed to gather. Long standing doubts about his truthfulness and unbiasedness of observation have been dispelled. He has a lot to say about the customs, beliefs and behaviours of the people of South India as well as about their marine trade. He discovered that India's trade extended like an enormous chain from Kublai Khan's domains to the Red and Persian Sea coasts. He gives a detailed picture of the topaz, amethyst and emerald of the sapphires of Ceylon and the diamonds of Golconda. He discovered the coasts and islands of the Indian Sea lushly covered with nature's finest products.

◆ *Cultural Exchange*

Marco Polo gives a detailed description of the cultural exchanges between the West and the East. After him there were three monks who travelled to South India. First among them was John of Monte Corvino, a Franciscan friar, who travelled to China in 1292–1303 via India to preach the gospel somewhat better known as Nestorianism. The stream of criticism by Christian missionary's of Indian life

and customs may be said to have started with him, who had little sympathy for anything that caught his eye in India.

◆ *Monastic travellers*

The second monk, Friar Odoric of Pordenone arrived in India soon after 1321, over thirty years later. He crossed the west coast, stopped at Ceylon and ascended to the St. Thomas shrine in Mylapore. His description of certain Hindu rituals and customs is undoubtedly that of an eyewitness. Friar Jordanus is the last and he may have arrived in India little earlier than Odoric. He writes two letters, dated 1321 and 1324, from India to his brother friars in Europe, offering the possibility of undertaking major missionary work in the East. Among the first accounts of the Parsi community in India, his reference to the Parsis and their method of exposing the dead is noteworthy. Although it is unknown if he truly assumed leadership of the position, he was named Bishop of Columbum (Quilon) in 1328. John of Marignolli, a Florentian, is another worthy of mention. In 1346, he departed China by sea, arriving in Quilon, where he stayed for a while before sailing to the Coromandel Coast to explore the shrine of St. Thomas. He also spent a few days in Ceylon, where he provided a fascinating overview of the Buddhist monks of the island.

◆ *Foreign visitors*

Foreign evidence on South India has increased significantly in volume, diversity and interest as a result of the emergence of Vijayanagara in the fourteenth century and the Portuguese hegemony in the East. It also attracted many foreigners to India. The Italian Nicolo Conti visited Vijayanagara in 1420 or 1421 and his narrative is the oldest about European visit to the city that we have. He describes the festivals, currency and other aspects of the Vijayanagara Kingdom.

◆ *Persian envoy*

Around the same period, Shah Rukh dispatched Abdur Razzak, the Persian ambassador to Vijayanagara on a crucial mission to the Zamorin of Calicut. He arrived in Calicut by ship in 1442 from Ormuz. Abdur Razzak travelled to Vijayanagara via Mangalore, where he was warmly welcomed and witnessed the Mahanavami celebration. Later, some envious Ormuz merchants questioned his qualifications, leading to the envoy receiving worse treatment than previously. He departed Vijayanagara for Mangalore at the end of 1443 and Mangalore for Persia early in 1444. His records consist of a trained official's statement of the administrative and social conditions of the time.

Athanasius Nikitin, a Russian merchant came through Chaul to reach the kingdom of Bahmani and spent several years in the Deccan around 1470. His findings provide specifics about the army, the court and the state during the Bahmani era. Between 1502 and

◆ *Russian and Italian travellers*

1508, Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna, a soldier and gentleman who was later knighted by the Portuguese, travelled through India and left behind a detailed account of his adventures. His credibility was questioned by many scholars. His descriptions of the city and Kingdom of Vijayanagara, as well as Goa, Calicut and other ports on the west coast, are highly valuable and interesting. Sent by Albuquerque to Vijayanagara in 1510, Friar Luis clarified the martial practices of Krishnadevaraya.

◆ *Portuguese chronicler*

From 1500 until roughly 1516, the Portuguese writer Duarte Barbosa worked in India for his government. He was fluent in Malayalam and “spoke it better than the natives of the country”. He served as a feitor (factor) at Cannanore in 1502 and as an interpreter between Francisco Albuquerque and the Cannanorean king in 1503. He disagreed with the strategy for developing Goa at the expense of Cochin and Cannanore. Historian Gaspar Correa recognised his talent as a writer and hired him. In 1517–1518, Barbosa made the last modifications to his account, which goes far beyond the realm of his official responsibilities and incorporates a thorough account of Vijayanagara.

◆ *Barbosa's insights*

Duarte Barbosa's work has been translated into English in two volumes. *The Book of Duarte Barbosa* by Longworth Dames and *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century by Duarte Barbosa* by Lord Stanley. Dames viewed the valuable contributions of Barbosa and stated that Barbosa's work constituted Geographic and ethnographic value even in the present day. His intention was to describe the people, the region and their history. Some of his historical references are very significant. In these ways, he is virtually unique for his time and his accounts are remarkably accurate and demonstrate keen observational skills. His fluency in Malayalam allowed him to gain a unique understanding of the locals that is uncommon among the writers of the day.

◆ *Portuguese chronicles*

Another significant Portuguese writer, Robert Sewell, was generally highlighted for his work *A Forgotten Empire* (1901). It included translations of the chronicles of horse dealer Fernas Nuniz (1535-37), who spent three years in Vijayanagara and Domingos Paes (1520–1525), in addition to a portion of a letter written from Cochin by Manuel Barradas (12th Dec. 1616). It described the outbreak of the civil war that was then severe in the kingdom of Vijayanagara. Given their familiarity with the political climate and cultural norms of the country, the Portuguese of Goa were an obvious choice to support Vijayanagara against the Deccan Sulthanates. The chronicle authored by Nuniz integrates the data he collected about the Vijayanagara kings dating back to the city's formation,

giving life and colour to the most significant era of Vijayanagara history. Few monarchs have as much historical significance as Krishnadevaraya does because of these two Portuguese explorers and chroniclers. A few years after Talikota, Caesar Frederic visited Vijayanagara and remarked on the royal city's destroyed beauty.

◆ *Philippus Baldaeus' contributions*

The Nauwkeurige Beschrijvinge van Malabar en Choromandel written by the clergyman Philippus Baldaeus in 1672, is a voluminous historical work that exemplifies the best kind of seventeenth and eighteenth-century in Asia. He showed an interest in the history of Indigenous peoples even in the years after the arrival of Europeans, emphasising political history while noting social, religious and economic life for their curiosity.

◆ *European travellers' accounts*

Ralph Fitch, who lived in India from 1583 to 1591, Nicholas Pimenta, a Jesuit visitor to India at the end of the sixteenth century and the Dutch traveller Linschoten (1583) all made unique contributions to our understanding of South India during their respective eras. The writings of the Dutch factor Schorer (1615) and the English factor William Methwold (1618–22) explain the trade and political activity of the kingdom of Golconda and the port of Masulipatam.

◆ *Pietro della Valle's travels*

According to Nilakanta Sastri, Pietro della Valle, who has been hailed as the most distinguished traveller without a commercial or service-related purpose, the 'keenest in judgement and the most precise in the description', may be mentioned to wrap up this overview of our foreign sources. He was born in Rome in 1586 and in January 1623, he sailed from Bandar Abbas to India. He travelled to Calicut, Ahmadabad, Chaul, Goa, Ikkeri, Mangalore and Cambay before sailing back to Muscat in November 1624 from Goa. His writing "brings before the mind's eye a vivid and lifelike representation of men and manners as they existed in the Portuguese settlements on the coast and the native territories in the early seventeenth century."

1.2.3 Numismatic Sources

◆ *Ancient South Indian coins*

Coins are closely linked to the evidence of writings on stone and copper inscriptions. However, the coins of South India offer less reward for the labours and present greater difficulties to the students or researches than that of the North. Very ancient coins are hard to find and usually only include the name or title of the king and no dates or comprehensible legends. The designs on them are also frequently rudimentary and unclear. The Puranas, or edlings of the law books, were rectangular pieces of impure silver with multiple punch marks that were common in both Northern



and Southern India. They undoubtedly date back to the centuries common era. Punch marked copper coins were also known and it is possible that this type of coinage was discontinued around 200 CE.

◆ *Gold coins in South India*

Later on, gold rather than silver were used to mint coins in South India with copper being used for smaller denominations. There were two main types of gold coins: the *Varaha*, which got its name from the Chalukya boar's crest and was also known as *pon*, *hun*, *pagoda* and *pardaos* (Portuguese). It typically weighed 50–60 grains or a *Kalanju* (Molucca bean). The *fanam*, which was a tenth of the *Varaha* and had a weight of 5–6 grains, matching the *manjadi*. The very first gold coins were tiny plain gold spherules with a tiny punch mark. Later, thin cup-shaped pieces known as *padma-tankas* appeared. Initially they were stamped with punches on one side, then on both sides.

◆ *Chola gold coin hoard*

A beautiful collection of Chola gold coins was found in 1946 at Dhavaleswaram, East Godavari. The coins were circular, thin discs made of fine gold with letters around the periphery and a *lanchana* in the centre. One side of the disc has letters punched through, while the other is left blank. Only 127 pieces of the trove were found and among them were 49 coins bearing the regnal years 33, 34, and 35 from East Chalukya ruler Rajaraja I. The remaining coins of Rajendra I and Rajadhiraja I issued with the inscriptions Malanadukonda and Kangai-konda.

◆ *Vijayanagara coinage*

Later die-struck pieces emerged, of which the thick and small Vijayanagara pagodas are the best surviving examples. Small coins were preferred by most of them and the Calicut silver tares, which weigh just one or two grains and they provide some of the smallest known coin specimens. Numerous Vijayanagara rulers are famed for their little, miniature pagodas, which were also issued in half and quarter portions. Initially, their traditions were told in either Nagari or Kannada, but subsequently, the kings only used Nagari.

◆ *Roman influence on South Indian coinage*

Roman imperial coins made of gold and silver were widely imported during the early centuries of the common era through trading activities. Locally created small copper coins with Roman symbols and legends may have been brought in by foreign settlers. Numerous Satavahana coins have names of Satavahana rulers that verify the Puranic lists of these names. The Satavahanas used lead for many of their issues. A two-masted ship on the obverse of one of the more intriguing varieties of these coins is a sign of the Andhras' maritime activity. Copper coins from the further south that date from roughly the same historical period also have a similar design.

It is considered that Kadambas were the ones who struck the first *padma-tankas*. However, a base silver piece with a lion design and

◆ *Kadamba and Chola coinage*

the title “Vishama Siddhi” on the obverse can be most accurately dated to Vishnuvardhana (615–33), the ancestor of the long line of Eastern Chalukya rulers. Punch-marking on gold coins persisted long after it was abandoned for silver and copper coins. A huge collection of coins from the Telugu-Chodas of Nellore in the thirteenth century discovered near Kodur in 1913 demonstrates the *padma-tanka* type depicting their long history and tradition.

◆ *Regional coin legends and symbols*

Nagari legends are discovered on Kakatiya and Vijayanagara coins as well as on the coins of several other dynasties, such as the Cholas and the Kadambas of Goa. Other coins of dynasties had legends in Tamil, Telugu or Kannada depending on the region in which they were made. Designs of Coins frequently serve as symbols for conquests; for example, the Chola coins include a tiger sitting beneath a canopy in the middle of the field, with the Chera bow at the bottom and the Pandya fish on one side, the latter emblem being smaller and less prominent than the tiger.

◆ *Maduran Sultanate and Bahmani coinage*

The coinage of the short lived Maduran Sultanate, which was primarily made of billon and copper, is almost identical to that of modern Delhi issues. It is unique in its distinctive script, unique to the south. The Bahmani Sultans issued gold and silver coins likewise following the Delhi patterns. There is considerable variation in arrangement and design in those from earlier reigns. But subsequently both metals were in use in the same pattern.

Summarised Overview

Literary evidence is an important source for studying South Indian history and can be categorised as indigenous and foreign. Temple chronicles like *Srirangamkoyil-olugu* and *Maduraittala-Varalaru* offer insights into periods after 1200 but are largely compilations of legends and often contain inaccuracies and distortions.

The *Sangam Anthology* is a key text supporting Tamilakam’s identity as a distinct cultural region. Dating to the early centuries CE, it is among the oldest surviving Tamil literature. The collection includes 2,381 poems by 473 poets, encompassing 102 anonymous poems, eight anthologies, ten idylls, a grammar book and eighteen minor works.

Literary evidence of this period is limited, aside from some Sanskrit texts and Tamil devotional hymns by the Alvars and Nayanars. The Hindu religious renaissance spurred the growth of popular devotional literature, significantly influencing society. Saiva Nayanars and Vaishnava Alvars composed hymns that were sung during pilgrimages.

Foreign accounts often provide vivid insights into issues that local authors might overlook. The earliest descriptions of South India come from Greek and Roman writings, which became more detailed by the second century CE. The Chinese annals and travellers’



accounts are also significant. From the eighth century, the writings of Arab historians, cartographers, traders and travellers began to gain importance and Chinese sources became more extensive and reliable.

Assignments

1. Prepare a note on the accounts of embassies to South India sent from different parts of the world.
2. Prepare a note on Buddha and Jain scriptures and discuss their role as a source for the reconstruction of South Indian history.
3. Give a detailed account of the different types of coins found in different parts of South India.
4. Briefly explain the significance of Sangam Literature as a source for the reconstruction of the past.
5. Explain the accounts of Arab travellers, who visited South India and arrange them chronologically.

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3. Karashima, Noboru (ed) *A Concise History of South India*, Oxford University Press, 2014.



4. ----- , *Ancient in Medieval South Indian Society in Transition*, Oxford University Press, 1993.
5. Stein, Burton, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, 1980.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU



Trends in Historiography

Learning Outcomes

Upon the successful completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historiographical trends in South Indian History
- ◆ evaluate historiographical debate on the nature of South Indian States
- ◆ interpret the process of state formation in South India

Background

South India has a rich and distinguished historiographical tradition focused on its early history. Many scholars trained in epigraphy devoted themselves to the canons of modern historical research. Naturally, South Indian historiography is like to other historiographies in India and elsewhere. Once established, historiographical conventions are challenging to alter, even when new partial interpretations of previously accepted historical events revise elements of the original narrative. Historiography tends to become systematic and significant adjustments are difficult to implement without challenging the entire framework. We have discussed in the previous unit, the sources that help to fix the chronology of the history of South India. In this unit, we will discuss the historiographical interpretation of the political organisation of South India during the medieval period.

Keywords

State formation, Kingship, Segmentary State, Feudalism, Monarchy, Sub- Infeudation



Discussion

1.3.1 Nationalist Historiography

◆ South Indian historical literature

Among the major Indian regions, South India stands out due to the extent to which it has developed a strong and outstanding body of historical literature covering its early history. When K. A. Nilakanta Sastri published *The Cholas* and, one would have agreed with his observation that historians had devoted relatively little attention to the southern peninsula compared to the focus on the history of the Gangetic Valley. Historians such as R. G. Bhandarkar and Nilakanta Sastri were trained in epigraphy and dedicated to the canons of contemporary historical study.

◆ Chola history and polity

Nilakanta Sastri, in his work *The Cholas*, provides a coherent and convincing chronological framework. The book is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the political history and the second part gives a detailed picture of the social, cultural and administrative facets of the vast area ruled by the Cholas for around 400 years. His impression of the Cholas state is that of a centralised and bureaucratised monarchy. T. V. Mahalingam's 'South Indian Polity' was reprinted with a glossary and a few footnotes, ostensibly reflecting revisions. However, it displays no evidence of substantial study since it was first published.

◆ Appadorai's economic analysis

For the subject under consideration, Appadorai's work is the most relevant. His chronological approach is implicitly founded on the assumption of the presence of powerful, centralised states from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. He undermines significant analysis of the economy from 1000 CE to 1500 CE. He thus bases the periodisation of his economic analysis on political factors, without questioning their applicability to economic contexts. He accepted Nilakanta Sastri's concept of a centralised bureaucratised state.

◆ Rajan Gurukkal on Tamil state formation

Rajan Gurukkal examines the issue of the formation of the early Tamil state from a fresh angle. The previously proposed notion that the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas of the ancient Tamil poems had ruled over monarchical nations is rejected by him. The Pallavas and their successors were the product of a shift from kin labour to non-kin labour, from individuals performing numerous roles to hereditary occupation groups and from unorganised clan settlements to organised agrarian communities.

R. Champakalakshmi states that although Thanjavur was chosen as the primary royal hub and Kutamukku-Paliyarrai, the residential capital of the Cholas, they maintained their importance

◆ *R.Champakalakshmi on Chola capitals*

throughout the Chola period. This is connected to the emergence of Kutamukku-Paliyarrai as the urban center of the Kaveri delta and its surrounding areas, along with the political and cultural institutions of Chola Kingdom, including the temple, the *nagaram* and the *brahmadeya*.

◆ *Y. Subbarayalu on social stratification*

The stratification of Tamil society during the Chola period is examined by Y. Subbarayalu. By the thirteenth century, the Tamil society had evolved into a fully established caste society. Changes in the ruling class, composed of landed magnates, were a natural outcome of the increasing stratification of Chola society.

◆ *Kesavan Veluthat on temples and polity*

Kesavan Veluthat examines the role of temples in early medieval South Indian polities and their relationship to the state. The dissolution of tribal society and its organisation as a caste society was accelerated by the temple. Those who established the agrarian villages eventually formed organisations to manage the rural population. He demonstrates how the Brihadisvara temple in Thanjavur served as the state's ceremonial centre using this iconic example.

◆ *M.G.S. Narayanan on the Chera kingdom*

The state ruled by Cheraman Perumals of Kerala is typically seen as a 'monarchical state'. M.G.S. Narayanan reevaluated this and contends that the Chera kingdom was "a visible and brahman oligarchy thinly disguised as a monarchy," departing from the stance he had adopted thirty years before. Narayanan argues that the *Keralolpatti's* claim that the Perumals were obedient to the Kerala Brahmins is substantiated by evidence.

◆ *Raghava Varier on Kerala state formation*

Using an existing model, Raghava Varier's work explains the later stages of the state formation in Kerala. The *Swarupam* is portrayed as a powerful state, with a vast bureaucracy, local magnates, subordinate *Sthanams*, a mint, a treasury and an army that could be mobilised on demand, though it was not a permanent military force.

◆ *Venkata Raghatham on Vijayanagara legitimacy*

Venkata Raghatham introduced a new approach in his study of the early Vijayanagara state. He demonstrated how the past was used as a framework of legitimacy to interpret and sanctify the fragile kingship held by the Sangama lineage. By effectively adopting the histories of the regional dynasties and portraying itself as the rightful successor state of the pre-Vijayanagara polities, Vijayanagara attempted to justify its imperial power.

In his analysis of socio-political processes in Venatu, K.N. Ganesh demonstrates that the information provided a painted picture of the agricultural growth of the region, most likely due to the



◆ *K.N. Ganesh on socio-political process in Venatu*

influence of the royal family, wealthy individuals, and brahmanas. The redistributive roles of the temple and the royal family should be taken into consideration while assessing the significance of these events. Tiruvitamkur had patiently waited until the early 1700s for the establishment of a state complete with a judicial, political and ideological apparatus.

◆ *Mysore and South Indian state formation*

Compared to other regions of South India, state formation of Mysore is notably distinct. The process of state formation of Mysore began in 1578, when it seceded from the control of Vijayanagara. Examining this procedure, B. Surendra Rao demonstrates how, to gain legitimacy, Mysore imitated its predecessor state, Vijayanagara. S. Raju examines the common usages of terms like “South India,” “State,” “Society,” etc. in an approach that falls somewhere between the history of ideas and the history of historical literature.

1.3.2 Perspectives on the Kingship in Early Medieval South India

◆ *Early kingdoms and statecraft in South India*

The new kingdoms that fought for control of South India started during the sixth century. They were considerably different in terms of monarchy and statecraft from the Sangam periods. The Satavahana state was founded in Deccan in the first century BCE. The North Indian political culture influenced Deccan and Tamilakam. The kings of these regions offered the *Ashvamedha* and other Vedic sacrifices, such as *Hiranyagarbha*.

◆ *Rajan Gurukkal on agricultural growth and state transition*

As a result, the North Indian influence drastically altered the kingship and states of South India, especially those in the Tamil region. According to Rajan Gurukkal, this is a reflection of the transition brought about by the growth of agriculture as well as the shift from “chiefdom” to “state” that happened in connection with the shift in production. However, we cannot dispute the fact that there was a notable increase in agricultural productivity during this period because this is a significant and controversial topic. Political change was evident in Deccan as a state even before the Common Era during the time of the Satavahanas.

◆ *Nicholas Dirks on Pallava kingship changes*

Over the past forty years, several anthropologists and Indologists have focused on the changes in kingship and statecraft that took place throughout the Pallava period. They have debated on the topic concerning the modifications observed in the rituals of Pallava kings. For example, Nicholas Dirks asserts that the *yajna* or sacrifice was the sole means by which a person could become King, making it of utmost importance for the rulers of the early Pallava period. But with the beginning of the seventh century and especially during the reign of Nandivaraman II, the idea of a sacred



lineage of kingship deriving from Vishnu took on significance.

◆ *Authority Dynamics*

Scholars differ regarding the relative superiority of the king and the Brahmana. However, J. C. Heesterman addressed the topic of authority and stated that the kings with political power and the religiously authoritative Brahmanas existed in distinct and mutually exclusive categories. The establishment of an ordered system of kingship in India was hampered by the fact that their struggle over predominance actually had no solution in sight. According to David Shulman, “the martial or administrative skills of the King and the spiritual powers of the Brahmin are not permanently distinct and opposite forces but internally divided and mutually dependent symbolic clusters.”

◆ *Kingship and Authority*

To study the historical aspects of kingship, including the political-economic relationships a king had with the Brahmanas and other communities, we must look at the king’s political power, especially the power he used to run the local administration of his kingdom. It is also referred to as the relationship between a state’s centre and its periphery. Burton Stein believed that the king had no political power in the state but it was the religious authority that enjoyed power. However, Dirks, who spoke about the significance of *Dana* in the later Pallava period, emphasised the significance of the relationship between the two, that is, religious authority and political power. He says, “There was a clear relationship between ideas and ritual expressions of authority on the one hand and modes of social and political relations on the other.” The connections are essential for understanding this period.

◆ *Legitimacy of Kingship*

Scholars like David Beetham, H. Kulke, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, Rajan Gurukkal and B. P. Sahu have shown a particular interest in the question of the legitimacy of a king’s authority. Sahu notes that “a new legitimization structure was not usually imposed, nor was it easy to do so, but was designed to accommodate, incorporate and utilise what was already available in local societies”.

1.3.3 Historiographical Debates on the Nature of South Indian States

◆ *Historiographical Interpretations*

There were various historiographical interpretations of the political organisations in South India during the medieval period. These interpretations are based on the social and economic research of the period. There were no new facts different from those of the scholars who have done research on the period.

In the 1980s, Stein’s theory of “segmentary state” generated controversy in the debate about state formation in ancient and medieval India, especially in the early medieval period. The



◆ *State Formation Theories*

prominent state formation systems identified can be categorised into two groups: (a) the unitary or imperial state model of earlier nationalist scholars, such as Nilakanta Sastri, which emphasises centralised administration; and (b) the Indian feudalism model of R. S. Sharma and his adherents (D. N. Jha, B. N. S. Yadava, R. N. Nandi, et al.). Their focus is on production relations in the fiefs and the decline of trade in the medieval period, which is consistent with Marxist principles.

◆ *Integrative State Models*

Burton Stein's segmentary state model rejects the idea of a centralised state structure. Various scholars proposed integrative state models, which can be viewed as a single entity with differing points of emphasis on different aspects. For example, Herman Kulke pointed out three key points about state formation. B. P. Sahu talks about the regional and historical variations observed in the relationship between the centre and periphery in state formation. B. Chattopadhyaya focuses on the horizontal integration of *samantas* and the existence of "autonomous spaces" in the state.

◆ *State Models*

S. Blake used the 'patrimonial bureaucratic state' model to analyse the Mughal Empire (borrowing this idea from Max Weber) and the 'Brahman oligarchy' model that M. G. S. Narayanan developed based on his research on the Cherman Perumals. Finally, the concept of "autonomous spaces" as described by Chattopadhyaya bears some resemblance to the "symbiotic state" model put forth by L. B. Alayev for the early medieval south Indian states. Alayev claims that although these states exhibit some "feudal" characteristics, it is difficult to define them using a ready made model because "the Royal court, local magnates and collective organs of communities penetrated one into others, forming a symbiosis and the mutual relations between these actors of socio-political life were not regulated."

◆ *Understanding South Indian states*

Numerous scholars do not adhere to any one of the specific models mentioned here, and as these models were primarily developed via the examination of a state in another region, we should exercise caution while applying them to South India. Nevertheless, these new models have significantly expanded our understanding of Indian states and we should examine the novel concepts they give in order to better understand the south Indian states. Some historians from South India have already started to respond effectively to recent findings.

1.3.3.1 Centralised Empire

The Cholas established their dominance around the middle of the ninth century and vanished by the latter half of the thirteenth century when they had grown to become one of the two most

◆ *Chola Dominance and Transition*

powerful powers in premodern South India, the other being the later Vijayanagar state. Nilakanta Sastri called this period “the balance of two empires” since the Deccan Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas were fighting against the Cholas for control of South India one after the other. We depict a political history marked by the clash of two powers using Sastri’s terminology. The tenth and twelfth centuries brought about a social shift that makes the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries better understood as a time of transition from one social formation to another.

◆ *Centralisation of Chola Kingdom*

Nilakanta Sastri described the Chola state as “the almost Byzantine royalty of Rajaraja and his successors with its numerous palaces, officials and ceremonials and its majestic display of the concentrated resources of an extensive empire as opposed to the simple, personal rule of the earlier time”. The Chola King Rajendra I launched a naval campaign against Srivijaya in the Malacca Straits and he seized control of the northern regions of Sri Lanka. To gain control over the East-West maritime trade in the Indian Ocean, both parties dispatched envoys to the Chinese court. It is evident that the Chola kings took steps to establish a strong, centralised state for themselves and to some extent, they were successful in achieving it. As a result, this perspective contradicts Stein’s segmented state interpretation of the Chola rule and somewhat supports Sastri’s viewpoint.

◆ *Segmentary State Model*

1.3.3.2 Segmentary State

According to Burton Stein, “the state of medieval South India is referred to as a ‘segmentary state’, where political power and influence were local in several significant respects”. The state’s constituent units were restricted to distinct and persistent ethnic territories; its chiefs were typically representatives or leaders of the dominant ethnic groups in the local territory; and possibly most notably in South India, corporate bodies representing the interests of different local folk took part in local public affairs.

◆ *Sovereignty limited to the ruler*

Burton Stein criticised Nilakanta Sastri’s theory of a centralised State in South India. The Chola and Vijayanagara states were considered “segmentary” by Burton Stein. Stein stated that the king ruled the segmentary state, which was made up of numerous comparable segments encircling a centre. Sovereignty was limited to the ruler (ruling the core part), even though each of the other segments had its own ruler as well. Furthermore, the monarch only solemnly exercised his sovereignty over a large portion of the state and he lacked political power over the surrounding areas. Stein attempted to extend this theory to the states in South India that existed from the Pallava to Vijayanagara periods.

◆ *Agrarian Diversity*

Burton Stein makes the point that the peasant areas of medieval South India were not all the same, differing in their structure, wealth and complexity according to the opportunities or limitations given to the agrarian potentialities of the period. The greatest wealth, the most intricate social and cultural structures and the largest human populations were located when and where there was consistent moisture for irrigated agriculture.

◆ *Proto States*

◆ *Segments/cohesive units*

Although segmentary states are viewed by many scholars as “incipient states” or “proto-states,” Southall suggests that they represent a significant form of political organisation not only in Africa, where he conducted his research and where the idea of a segmentary state is most prevalent but also in other cultural contexts, such as European and Asian. The parts or segments that make up the state are considered as existing before the formal state in the segmentary state. These segments are morally and structurally cohesive units in and of themselves. When taken as a whole, these sections or parts represent a state because they acknowledge a sacred king whose supremacy is moral and articulated in a fundamentally ceremonial manner.

◆ *Structural realities*

Most of the scholars on Indian social structure have recognised both the significant influence of peasant institutions and the segmented nature of localised Indian societies. However, some of these same scholars have considered these structural realities—both past and present—as epiphenomena or secondary considerations before the powerful, all-encompassing cultures of Hinduism, caste and large monarchical governments during the pre-modern era.

◆ *Segmentary State Theory and Criticism*

Stein first proposed the theory of “Segmentary State” at the end of the 1970s, drawing on Southall’s research on African societies. When he expanded on it in his magnum opus, numerous scholars offered both support and criticism. Stein’s categorical denial of the king’s political authority over parts other than his own was one of the most significant criticisms raised. Stein gradually modified his interpretation, finally acknowledging that a king’s political authority was combined with his ritual authority in the caste Hindu kingdoms. Nevertheless, he refused to give up his theory of the “segmentary state,” continuing to interpret the states of Chola and Vijayanagara as segmentary.

◆ *Rajaraja I’s Temple and Sovereignty*

In Thanjavur, the Chola King Raja Raja I built a Siva temple and installed a *linga* called Rajarajeswara in honour of himself. Thus, it is clear that King Rajaraja constructed this temple in an attempt to reflect both the unquestioned majesty of the Kingdom and his power. In this regard, it may be interpreted in part in line with Stein’s theory, as an exhibition of the king’s ceremonial sovereignty

over the entire country. But there is also clear evidence of the king exercising his political sovereignty by constructing this temple.

◆ *Political
Autonomy*

Rajaraja gave the state revenue to the temple that came from as many as forty villages in Chola-mandalam, the state's central region and sixteen villages that the state had conquered, which included southern Karnataka and Sri Lanka. There is much information provided about each of the forty villages less precisely than for the villages in Chola-mandalam, the amounts of grain or money to be paid, as well as the dimensions of taxable land are provided for the conquered villages as well. A ruler lacking political autonomy or control of a governmental administrative structure would not have been able to bestow villages across such a vast territory or furnish comprehensive details on every village, encompassing those situated in recently captured lands.

1.3.3.3 Early State

◆ *Heitzman's study
on Chola*

A valuable contribution to the expanding body of research on pre-colonial South Indian kingdoms that crosses disciplinary boundaries, approaches and wide social themes with historical rigour is James Heitzman's study of Chola kingship and politics. Heitzman addresses the organisation of the Chola Kingdom (ninth to thirteenth centuries CE.) in its heartland of the Kaveri River delta in Tamil Nadu, focusing on five study areas chosen to provide a cross-section of ecological and settlement. The book is written in a way that will appeal to both South Asian specialists and non-specialists.

◆ *Patterns of state
organisation and
authority*

Heitzman links land and labour with patterns of state organisation and authority in his work, attempting to reconcile viewpoints that emphasise the Chola state as a ritual polity with an emphasis on "Marx's concept of the mode of production in its most pristine... sense". This goal seems achievable because most of the historical record of Pre-colonial South India consists of donative and memorial inscriptions that document gifts to religious organisations from the elite and other sources. These inscriptions reveal information about the authority systems and material transfers within the region.

◆ *History of south
Asian Urbanisation*

Heitzman examines the inscriptions collected from various Chola temples, each with a different size, location and closeness to the political centre, placing his focus on urban processes and growth within the lengthy history of South Asian urbanisation. His concern for comparison with other regions of the world enhances his careful presentation of the relationship between agricultural development and temples in what might be considered a case of "pristine" urbanisation.



◆ Structuring of extra-royal authority

Heitzman looks at the functions of intermediary authorities as well as the Chola state's organisational structure. Although it is clear that local material bases of control continued to play a significant role in shaping extra-royal authority, he suggests that local authorities became progressively more aligned with Chola kings over time, particularly in terms of their titles and self-defined roles.

◆ Centralised political control

Heitzman claims that the Chola rulers promoted agricultural growth in their core domain by stepping up their tactics of political integration through donations to temples. There was no centralised political control over production; instead, these agricultural systems were mediated through ritual contribution. At the beginning of the eleventh century, kings began to take a more active role in agricultural production, while at the same time, personal property rights became more significant and well-defined.

1.3.3.4 System of Sub-infeudation

◆ Nayankara system

Conventional historiography saw the *nayankara* system, which the Vijayanagara kings instituted, as a military-feudal structure built on a servitude connection with the king, from whom the Nayakas got *amarams* as fiefs. Karashima along with some South Indian and Japanese scholars tend to view them as feudal, possessing traits of personal loyalty and attachment to their master.

◆ Feudal Interpretation

Noboru Karashima rejected the Segmentary State model as an explanation for the Vijayanagara polity. Instead, he applied a feudal interpretation, particularly focusing on the 16th century, incorporating the concept of *sub-infeudation*. Karashima highlighted variations in the status of Nayakas relative to central authority, suggesting the existence of a hierarchical sub-infeudation system. His model emphasised the relationships between the king and local lords, as well as the emergence of complex landholding rights. Expanding on the empirical foundation laid by Nilakanta Sastri, Karashima incorporated newly discovered inscriptions and analysed their content using advanced methodologies, drawing on the expertise of historians such as Subbarayalu.

◆ Epigraphic citations of Karashima

In opposition to Burton Stein's assertion that the Chola polity was better described as segmented state sovereignty, Noboru Karashima uses epigraphic citations to support his theory that the Chola political authority (state) was becoming more and more centralised over most of southeast India. According to Stein, various connected regions of the Chola state had to participate in order for it to maintain its temple - based "ritualised sovereignty." Karashima challenges Stein's theory, arguing that Stein's limited data analysis ultimately confirmed Western perceptions of pre-modern oriental societies as being rooted in stable village groups.

◆ *Village Societies in Chola Period*

By comparison, the research presented in Karashima's book shows that the village societies of the Chola period were by no means unchanging. Based on the epigraphic records of transactions of landholding, the author reports that Chola rulers periodically imposed kingdom-wide land surveys, standardisations of grain and land measures, territorial redefinitions (Cholamandalam, Tondaimandalam and other divisional reorganisations), bureaucratisation (kings' secretariats and revenue departments) and prince-governors. Furthermore, he contends that as evidenced by Chola inscriptions from these areas and Chinese sources, successful Chola foreign efforts in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka were founded on royal hegemony between the late tenth to the twelfth century.

◆ *Imposition of heavy taxes*

Karashima states that the old landed elites became commoners as a result of the imposing of heavy taxes on them during the thirteenth century. According to Karashima, this procedure disproved the previous Vellala community, which was superseded by individual proprietorships. The non-Brahman hill tribesmen or military, artisans and merchants were the newly powerful groups, forcing even the *Brahmadeya* villages to sell or transfer their property to them. The establishment of a new *nayaka* military system by the newly formed Vijayanagara kingdom, in which the state and its warrior class formed a fundamental alliance with South Indian temples and the Brahmins offered a widely accepted alternative.

◆ *South Indian caste-based social order*

According to Karashima, the formation of a South Indian caste-based social order started to take shape in the Vijayanagara era. It was during this period that they found a new sense of social hierarchy, which he believes is fundamental to these apparent shifts in landholding. As these South Indian merchant communities and their international engagements are central to his study, he argues that the emergence of the *jati* system is evidenced by the growing epigraphic legal distinctions between landholders and cultivators during the Chola era as well as the growing social and legal recognition of artisans, particularly weavers and ironsmiths. According to Karashima, the adverse impact of the tribal migration of the late Chola period laid the groundwork for later *jati* distinction between the cultures of semi-nomadic and hunting and gathering and "settled" farming groups.

Summarised Overview

The study of South Indian history, particularly the Chola period, has been greatly enhanced by the contributions of numerous scholars and diverse historiographical perspectives. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's *The Cholas* remains a key work, offering a comprehensive view of Chola political history and their centralised, bureaucratised monarchy. Scholars like Rajan Gurukkal and R. Champakalakshmi have offered fresh perspectives on state formation, rejecting older notions of monarchical rule and highlighting the socio-economic shifts that led to the rise of powerful states. Y. Subbarayalu and Kesavan Veluthat have examined the stratification of Tamil society and the role of temples in shaping early medieval polities.

The role of foreign scholars, particularly from Arab, Greek and Roman traditions has been pivotal in understanding the evolution of political structures in South India. Additionally, debates around kingship, state legitimacy and the relationship between political and religious authorities have been central in scholarly discourses. Burton Stein's *segmentary state* model has sparked significant controversy, with some scholars favouring models of centralised or feudal states, while others, like H. Kulke and B.P. Sahu highlights regional variations.

The concept of the *segmentary state*, as proposed by Burton Stein, explains the political structure of medieval South India, particularly during the Chola and Vijayanagara periods. A 'segmentary state' is a political system in which power is decentralised and exists within distinct, semi-autonomous regions or segments each governed by local rulers or chieftains who are typically part of the dominant ethnic groups. These segments function independently, but they are united under a nominal king or ruler whose authority is more ceremonial than practical. The king's sovereignty is limited to the core area, while peripheral regions retain significant autonomy.

In this framework, the state is not a centralised entity but a loose federation of territories each managing its own affairs with local leaders playing pivotal roles. The segments acknowledge the king's symbolic authority, but local governance is more important for day-to-day functioning. The system is also marked by a deep reliance on agricultural production, with ritualistic ties to the temple economy playing a key role in local governance and administration.

Stein's theory has been subject to debate. Some scholars, like Noboru Karashima argue against it by highlighting the increasing centralisation in the Chola dynasty. Karashima's research points to the Chola kings' efforts to solidify control over vast territories through bureaucratic measures like land surveys, revenue departments and military campaigns. The Chola state, especially during its imperial phase (986-1070), exhibited signs of centralisation, with kings actively managing resources and expanding influence.

James Heitzman's research further complicates this view by linking land and labour dynamics with political authority in the Chola state. He suggests that, while local



authorities remained crucial, the Chola rulers promoted agricultural growth and political integration, often using temples as centres for both religious and political activity.

The *feudal state* model, exemplified in the later Vijayanagara kingdom, contrasts with the *segmentary state*. This system became more formalised, with landholding elites and military leaders (Nayakas) serving the king in exchange for fiefs, reflecting a more hierarchical and feudal organisation of society. The transition from the decentralised to the more centralised structure of the Vijayanagara state marks the end of the segmentary state model and the emergence of a more formalised caste-based social order.

Assignments

1. Briefly explain the recent trends in South Indian Historiography.
2. Analyse the phases of state formation in South India.
3. Explain the political developments in early medieval South India.
4. Prepare a note on the political and cultural institutions of the Chola Kingdom.
5. Describe development of caste based social order in South India.

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Agrarian States of South India

BLOCK-02



Formation of Agrarian States

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner would be able to:

- ◆ get introduced to the concept of early medieval South India
- ◆ explore the nature of agrarian states in South India
- ◆ explain the role of Pallava, Pandya and Chola dynasties in South India
- ◆ assess agrarian settlements of the early medieval period

Background

Most surviving kingdoms on the peninsula adopted a different political structure in the early Middle Ages. The distribution of inscriptions found during the last century of epigraphic collection in India can be used to determine the origin and survival of the kingdoms of the Deccan and the far south. The Satavahana dynasty ruled over the Deccan plateau known as Dakshinapatha, located between the Narmada and Godavari River basins. They made similar claims to universal sovereignty as their northern counterparts, the Kushana and Shaka kings, and they all justified their claims by conquering minor rulers who were required to pay tribute, but very little. Among the minor principalities ruled by the Satavahana were chieftaincies, and among them were the Chola, Pandya and Chera that were recorded in the Ashokan documents. Some of the smaller principalities later gained prominence.

Keywords

Kulu, Ayam, Sabha, Ur, Brahmadeya, Madagu, Olai, Udan Kuttam, Early Medieval, Pallava, Chola, Pandya, Irrigation system

Discussion

2.1.1. Concept of Early Medieval South India

The establishment of numerous regional kingdoms in various regions of the subcontinent is one of the features that characterises



◆ *Establishment of regional kingdoms*

the “early medieval” period in Indian history. Some of these kingdoms were notably established in South India, even though with different historical backgrounds and development paths from their equivalents in other areas of the world. Therefore, during early medieval India, the political systems and procedures in these South Indian kingdoms offer an interesting case study of how they both followed and deviated from the larger subcontinental tendencies. These South Indian kingdoms sprang from essentially comparable backgrounds. During the early historical period (c. third century BCE to third century CE), the southernmost region, where Malayalam and Tamil are spoken now, formed a relatively coherent socio-cultural unit known as “Tamilakam”. This period is sometimes, albeit somewhat incorrectly, referred to as the “Sangam Age.”

◆ *Heroic Societies*

During this time, both the society and the economy experienced unequal development. The degree of social inequality had not yet increased to the point where the creation of an official governmental machinery was required. What is known as chiefdom-level systems, in which multiple chiefdoms, both great and minor, exerted control, characterised the political structure of the era. There was no systematic extraction of surplus in the form of revenue, nor do we find evidence of institutions resembling “officers” or “official offices” during this period. There is no compelling evidence to suggest the existence of a formal “army” of any kind, despite references to battles and warriors. Concepts of territory, sovereignty and statehood had not yet developed in this period. It was a world defined by ideals of heroism, with an emphasis on heroic deeds and poetry. The oral compositions of bards and minstrels, who celebrated the bravery and generosity of various chieftains, alongside the esoteric rituals conducted by Brahmana priests for these leaders, served to legitimise the authority and prestige of their patrons.

◆ *Social Transition*

Following the third century CE, this society underwent a slow transition brought on by several circumstances. The rise of a class of non-cultivating intermediaries who demanded extra-kin labour in production processes, the expansion of plough-based agriculture in the river valleys, the growing influence of Brahmana/Brahmin groups with their institutions and ideas and a host of other related developments were some of these. The nature and dynamics of this process are the subject of a substantial “transition debate” that has arisen throughout this period of change. The historical terrain of South India indicates the rise of monarchical powers by the 7th century CE, especially in the Pandya region (southern Tamil Nadu) and the Pallava region (northern Tamil Nadu). Monarchical governance appeared later in the Kaveri valley under the Cholas

and along the west coast under the Cheras.

The collection of essays Kesavan Veluthat by *The Early Medieval in South India*, spans two decades and explores the concept of “early medieval” in South India. This book is divided into three portions, each with a different length. The sections address issues and trends in the histories of Tamilakam, Kerala and Karnataka throughout the early medieval periods. While much information on early medieval northern India has been defined, there remains some uncertainty regarding South India. Because of this, it is challenging to refer to South India as “medieval” in the same way as North India, where the period is more easily distinguished in terms of larger historical schemes. Thus, this book offers a different perspective on the early medieval period in South India. For example, it examines if there was an “early medieval” formation that was different from the “early historical” formation that came before it and what factors contributed to this change. The prospect of providing a causal explanation for the structures and processes that define early medieval South India is also covered in the book. Veluthat utilises epigraphic and literary sources to support his historical reconstruction, focusing on topics such as the function of temples and the nature of the state, the structure of property rights and the creation of regional identity.

◆ *The early medieval in South India*

The early medieval period is an intelligible period of historical study in South India. Kesavan Veuthat in his work *The Early Medieval in South India*, argues that there are compelling reasons to identify this intelligible early medieval period in South India as we see a broad pattern here. Details of this pattern include:

1. Transformation of an economy characterised by cattle keeping and subsistence agriculture into one of wet rice cultivation and a considerable surplus
2. Replacement of simple exchange with the institution alised process of trade and the subsequent development of urbanism
3. Transmutation of a relatively undifferentiated society into one divided sharply into castes and the consequent casteisation and peasantisation of tribes
4. Acceptance of organised religion with its ideas and institutions suited to the new economic and social order
5. The emergence of the state to suit the newly evolved social order
6. A large number of other attendant developments, including the defining of the regional as, for instance, in the case of Kerala or Karnataka

◆ *Patterns of early medieval period*



2.1.2 Political and Economic Background of the Pallava, Pandya and Chola states

◆ Three Kingdoms

A new kind of state appeared in the Deccan and further south in the sixth century, showing both continuations and discontinuities with states that had appeared in these regions from the third century. Three of them—the Pallavas of Kanchi, the Pandyas of Madurai (both in Tamil Nadu) and the Chalukyas of Badami in the western Deccan—grew to be fairly large states and engaged in conflict with one another over south Indian hegemony from the beginning of the sixth to the end of the ninth centuries (the Rashtrakutas replaced the Badami Chalukyas in the middle of the eighth century).

2.1.2.1 The Pallavas

◆ Origin of the Pallavas

The establishment of the Pallava Kingdom is not identifiable. The Pallava Kingdom established Kanchipuram as their capital. Three copper-plate grants belonging to the period of Pallava ruler Skandavarman give a detailed history of the establishment of the Pallava dynasty. They are all written in Prakrit. His realm stretched to the Arabian Sea in the west and Krishna in the north when he was king, with Kanchipuram serving as the capital. Only the description of Gupta ruler Samudragupta's conquest of the South, found in his Allahabad Pillar inscription from around the middle of the fourth century CE breaks the complete darkness of the Pallava period. Samudragupta engaged in battle with his rival, the Kanchi ruler Vishnugopa. The Jain text, *Lokavibhaga* attests that by the fifth century, Pallava power had spread to at least the south of the Pennar River. It is also documented that the Pallavas were close allies and masters of the Kadambas and Gangas throughout the fifth century. The Pallava inscriptions in the Tamil language date back to approximately 550 CE.

◆ Agricultural expansion of the Pallavas

A favourable climate for the development of agriculture inside their domain may have played a significant role in the establishment of their power. For example, the Pallavas made great efforts to increase the area under cultivation by creating reservoir-style irrigation systems. Out of the three major states, the Pallavas emerged towards the close of the third century, taking over from the Ikshvakus in southern Andhradesa and showing a strong influence from North India. Regarding their origin, some early scholars proposed that they immigrated to India from outside and identified them with the Pahlava, but a number of scholars today believe that they are either native to South India or that they have mixed ancestry of North India and South India. The Pallavas were worshipers of the Brahmanical religion and gifted land to the gods and Brahmins believing that this would ensure their prosperity, good health and military success.

◆ *Expansion of the Pallava Kingdom*

The early history of the Pallavas is recorded from the third century to the beginning of the sixth century. The Pallankoyil copper plates, which date back to the middle of the sixth century and are the oldest Tamil copper plates, document a land donation made by Simhavarman, the Pallava king and father of Simhavishnu, to a Jain temple near Kanchipuram (560 CE-80 CE). Subsequent copper-plate inscriptions claim that the Pallava king Simhavishnu battled against the Kalabhras and subjugated the Chola country up to the Kaveri. He also triumphed over his opponents in the north. He heralded a new era for the Pallavas, and his son Mahendravarman I (580–630CE) is credited by renowned *bhakti* saint Appar with converting him from Jainism to Saivism. A new architectural style — the cave temples seen in several locations, notably Mamallapuram, a major port of the Pallavas, was introduced during Mahendravarman's rule. However, around the same period, conflict erupted in northern Karnataka between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas.

◆ *Chalukya Ascendancy*

In the middle of the sixth century, the Chalukyas became powerful under Pulakesin I of Badami. He built a fort on a hill, shaped like a horseshoe that was accessible to the town and surrounded by a lake. He also performed an *asvamedha* sacrifice to announce his independence from the Kadambas. Pulakesin II (609–42), the grandson of Pulakesin I, expanded his domain to the Konkan and defeated the Harshavardhana army, who attempted to occupy Karnataka on the banks of the Narmada. Pulakesin II received the submission of the rulers of Malwa, Kalinga and the eastern Deccan. The lengthy conflict between the Chalukyas and the Pallavas began when Mahendravarman attempted to attack Kanchipuram.

◆ *Pallava Victory over Chalukyas*

Following periodic conflicts, Badami was invaded and taken over by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I (630 CE–68 CE), who left an inscription on a nearby rock to mark his triumph. Pulakesin II lost his life in the battle. A Chinese monk named Xuanzang (Hsian-tsang or Yuan Chwang), who studied Buddhism at the Nalanda monastery, also travelled in the south at this time, visiting places like Badami and Kanchipuram. His visit to Badami took place just before the city was attacked by the Pallava king Narasimhavarman. According to Xuanzang, Kanchipuram was home to more than 80 Hindu and more than 100 Buddhist temples.

At the end of the sixth century, the Pandyan ruler Kadungon (590 CE–620 CE) revived the Pandya dynasty. In a subsequently discovered copper-plate inscription known as the Velvikudi inscription, he is depicted as the “destroyer” of the Kalabhra rulers, who had been labelled as being destructive to Buddhism. These references in the Pandyan and Pallava inscriptions led to the belief that the Kalabhras were either Buddhists or Jains who targeted the



◆ *Revival of the Pandyas*

Hindus. However, new findings of inscriptions at Pulankurichi reveal that two Kalabhra rulers, Cendan Kugan and Cendan, were responsible for a Jain and two other religious establishments (none of which is Jain or Buddhist). This would suggest that the age-old notion that the Kalabhras were Hindu oppressors should be changed. The third Pandya king Sendan (654 CE–70 CE) expanded his rule to the Chera kingdom. During this period, the Pallavas were engaged in warfare under the fourth king, Arikesari Maravarman (670 CE –700 CE).

◆ *Pallava - Chalukya Conflict*

The Pallava king, Narasimhavarman sacked Badami and declared that he had defeated the Cholas, Cheras, Kalabhras and Pandyas. As a Saivite, he built numerous rock-cut Shiva temples throughout his kingdom. The Chalukyan king Vikramaditya invaded the Pallava territories during the reign of Narasimhavarman's grandson, Paramesvarman I (670 CE–700 CE). These deadly battles were fought on the banks of the River Kaveri. In these battles, the Gangas and the Pandyas became the allies of the Chalukya kingdom. However, the next fifty years were comparatively peaceful, especially the period of the Chalukyan rulers Vinayaditya (681CE –96 CE) and Vijayaditya (696 CE -734 CE) and their contemporary Pallava king Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha (700 CE–28 CE). The Shore Temple in Mamallapuram and the Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram were built during this period. Other new temples were built in Pattadakal and Aihole, including the well-known Durga Temple in Aihole. Renowned rhetorician Dandin, who wrote *Dasakumaracharita*, appears to have spent a few years at the Pallava court.

◆ *Succession Crisis*

The son of Narasimhavarman, Paramesvaravarman II succeeded him. Paramesvaravarman II died without leaving a successor and it created a problem for the line of succession. But the people (*Mula Prakriti*), the college (*ghatika*) of erudite Brahmanas, and the officials (*matras*) selected a young king from a collateral line, Nandivarman (II) Pallavamalla (731–96), the twelve-year-old son of Hiranyavarman. This narrative is told in several copper-plate inscriptions as well as the sculptured panels of the Vaikuntha Perumal Temple at Kanchipuram, which was constructed by Nandivarman II. Scholars assume that this Pallavan collateral line originated in Southeast Asia in Cambodia based on the name of his father, Hiranyavarman. Though the Pallavas and other south Indian kingdoms of this period had close connections with Southeast Asian countries, there is not much proof to support this claim.

Vikramaditya II came to the throne in the Chalukya kingdom in 733 CE-734 CE, and he invaded Kanchipuram shortly thereafter. The Chalukyas, the Gangas, the Pandyas and even a Pallava king



◆ *Chalukya -
Pallava Struggles*

who claimed the Pallava throne with the support of the Chalukyas and others appear to have caused great hardship for the young Pallava king, Nandivarman II, during the course of roughly twenty years. It appears that Dantidurga, a former feudatory of the Chalukyas of the Rashtrakuta line, assisted Nandivarman during that time. After defeating the Gangas in 760 CE, Nandivarman was unable to prevent the Pandyas from becoming more powerful under the rule of Maravarman Rajasimha (730 CE–65 CE) and Nedunjadaiyan, also known as Varagunavarman I (765 CE-815 CE).

◆ *Expansion of
Rashtrakuta*

Kirtivarman II, Vikramaditya's son, succeeded him in the Deccan (744/5-55). Due to his struggle with the Pandyas, he lost his southern states and became the last Chalukyan king. The Rashtrakuta ruler Dantidurga (752-6) strengthened his dominance by defeating the rulers of Kosala and Kalinga, as well as the Gurjaras in Malwa. On the other hand, he kept cordial ties with the Pallavas and married his daughter to Nandivarman II. His uncle Krishna I (756-75) succeeded him and he is credited with building the Kailasa Temple at Ellora. He defeated the Gangas and the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi. His grandson, Govinda III (792–814) and his son, Dhruva (780–92), strengthened the Rashtrakutas' position of power by vanquishing the ruler of Kanauj and his guardian, Dharmapala of Bengal. Govinda III conquered Kanchipuram and conquered Dantivarman (796 CE–847 CE), the successor to Nandivarman II.

◆ *Decline of
Pallava rule*

The hostility of the Pandyas from the South and the Rashtrakutas from the North reduced the Pallava territory throughout Dantivarman's rule. Tondaimandalam was under the Telugu-Chodas' rule (belonging to the southern Andhra region) during this period. The Cholas were becoming more powerful in the Kaveri delta. The Rashtrakutas, Cholas and Gangas helped the Pallava king Nandivarman III (846 CE–689 CE), son of Dantivarman in the battle against the Pandyas and the Telugu-Chodas. However, Aditya I of the Cholas, who invaded Tondaimandalam, assassinated Aparajita, the grandson of Nandivarman III. This marked the end of the Pallava rule in South India.

◆ *Expansion of
Pandyan rule*

Going back to the history of the Pandyans, Varagunavarman I conquered the Pallava kingdom and seized the Kongu area. Additionally, he expanded his power over Kerala's southern region, Venad. During the reign of Sena I, his son Srimara Srivallabha (815 CE –62 CE) invaded Sri Lanka and destroyed Anuradhapura, the capital. But in the conflict with Nripatunga (859 CE–99), the Pallava ruler who succeeded Nandivarman III, Srimara was defeated. Sena II of Sri Lanka, the successor of Sena I, took over Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas and the army of Sri Lanka placed Varagunavarman II as the new successor of Srimara, who passed away shortly after.



2.1.2.2 The Pandyas

◆ *Inscriptions of the Pandyas*

In recent years, a vast amount of newly unearthed material has become available for the study of South Indian history in general and the Pandyan kings in particular. However, there has been no attempt so far to narrate the Pandyas' past systematically and scientifically. Most ancient inscriptions use the script known as "Grantha" in Sanskrit and "Vatteluttu" in Tamil. "Vatteluttu" was replaced by the present Tamil script during the Chola conquest of Pandya, which is considered to have occurred around the end of the tenth or middle of the eleventh century CE. Although the early Pandyas' records are prose writings with great literary excellence, it should be noted that a handful of the later inscriptions are written in magnificent verse. The early Tamil works have been passed down to us in the form of collections known as the Sangam works which gives the list of the earliest known historical kings of the Pandya kingdom.

◆ *Shifting Boundaries*

The early Pandya chronicles do not contain the exact boundaries of the kingdom. There is no indication of a Pandya region in the records from that period. It does not imply that there was no state formation at all. During that time, the state was a central region with changing peripheries. Therefore, the kingdom in those days was a region whose boundaries were constantly shifting. One could interpret the early Pandya records of territorial distribution as a sign of the shifting boundaries of the Pandyan territory. The Parantaka Nedunjadayan records states that the Pandyan territory spread from the Periyakulam taluk in the west to the Paramakudi taluk in the east, and from Aramboli near the Travancore border, in the south-west, to Tirukkodikkaval, near the Kumbakonam taluk, in the north-east.

◆ *Pandya Kingship*

Pandyas of the Sangam Age (Early Pandyas)

Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi was the first known ruler of the Pandyan dynasty. Ayyappudai Kadantha Nedunchelivan, also known as Nedunchelivan I was the fourth ruler of this kingdom. His royal title is "Ayyappudai Kadantha", which means "The one who defeated the Aryans". His name appears in the *Silappadikaram*, a notable work of Tamil literature penned by Ilango Adigal. This work claims that when Nedunchelivan, in a state of anger and without conducting a complete legal inquiry, ordered the execution of an innocent man named Kovalan who had been falsely accused of stealing a queen's anklet, he failed in his kingly duty to administer fair justice. The greatest of the early Pandyan kings was Nedunchelivan II. The combined forces of the Cholas and Cheras were defeated by him in the battle of Talaiyalanganam. Because of this, he was able to increase the Pandya domain and seize a large portion of the Tamil region.

◆ *Pandya Governance*

Monarchy was the mode of government in the Pandya kingdom. The “five great Kulus” and “eight great Ayams,” are frequently mentioned as pieces of the king’s attire at ceremonial events. An earlier annotation defines the five Kulus as including the people, priests, doctors, astrologers and ministers. A later interpretation expands this list to include commanders, messengers and spies in addition to the ministers and priests. Literary sources of the period revealed that social life had reached a high level of refinement, particularly in cities like Madurai.

The First Pandyan Kingdom

◆ *Establishment of the first Pandyan Kingdom*

Following the Sangam period, the dominance of the Pandyas declined and the Kalabhras became the predominant political force in the area. We do not have any exact reasons which led to the establishment of the first Pandyan Kingdom. This period spans approximately three centuries, from the beginning of the seventh century to the beginning of the tenth century. Kadungon victory over the Kalabhras in the sixth century, he established the first Pandyan Kingdom. The ruler of the first Pandyan dynasty adopted titles like *Maravarman*, *Sadayavarman* (honouring Lord Shiva) or *Sadaiyan* (the person with dreadlocks) after him. An influential leader of this Kingdom was Arikesari Maravarman. We discover from the Pandyan inscriptions that he repeatedly conquered the Cheras and imprisoned the ruling Chera king. The Chalukya-Pandya battles began under the reign of his son and successor Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran.

◆ *Administrative System of the Pandyas*

There is no evidence that the Pandya state has a highly structured bureaucracy. But a few famous people who served the royal family can be identified from some records. The *Uttaramantri* appears to have had the highest prestige among the personages listed in the records, although we know nothing about the order of the rank of the royal servants. The title attests to his handling of chief ministerial duties.

◆ *Decline of first Pandyan Kingdom*

While battling the Cholas, the Pandya king Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran died. As the next king, his son Maravarman Rajasimha I came to the throne and defeated Nandivarman II in numerous battles. He took control of the Pallava territory. He defeated the Gangas and the Chalukyas as well. The son of the Pandyan ruler married his daughter to the Chalukyan ruler Kirtivarman II. Maravarman Rajasimha III was the last ruler of the Kingdom. The Chola king Parantaka I defeated him. After seizing the Pandyan capital, he assumed the title “Madurai konda”. The Pandyans’ dominance gradually diminished when the Cholas reappeared in the tenth century. Aditya Karikala, the son of Parantaka Chola II, defeated Vira Padya, the Pandya king.



The Second Pandyan Kingdom

◆ Revival of Pandyas

The Pandyans grew in power once more in the latter part of the 13th century. The establishment of the second Pandyan Kingdom was initiated by Maravarman Sundara Pandyan, who compelled Kulothunga Chola III, the Chola king, to submit to the Pandyan power. Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan, also known as Sendan, was the most well-known ruler. It may be said that he succeeded his father Maravarman who ruled during 645-70 CE. He is recognised for both his military skill and the fairness of his reign. In addition, his name, Vanavan, seems to suggest that he has achieved some success over his Chera counterpart. Throughout this period, the Pandyan territory expanded significantly. In addition to successfully capturing Kalinga (in modern-day Odisha), the Telugu kingdom, he launched invasions into Ceylon.

◆ Decline of the Pandya Kingdom

The Pandyans' increasing influence was not effectively checked by the Chola kings who followed Kulothunga Chola III. The Cholas continued to lose their lands, image and power even if the Hoysalas helped them to restrain the Pandyan power. In South India, the Pandyans rose to prominence in the political scene. Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandyan I ultimately overcame the united forces of the ruling Hoysala ruler and Rajendra Chola III. The Chola Kingdom came to an end. But the Pandyans did not last long after the Cholas declined. The civil war that resulted from the succession dispute between Vira and Sundara Pandya, the two sons of Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandyan I, accelerated the decline of the Pandya kingdom.

Agrarian Settlement of the Pandyas

◆ Agricultural Foundation

The agriculture system of the Pandyan kingdom served as the foundation for its governmental structure. Essentially, the polity consisted of an institutional framework derived from the structure of the production organisation and associated social interactions. The land rights were organised and the distribution of produce among the holders of those rights was in different shares. The evolution of superior land right holders into power groups and their individual or corporate management of agricultural settlements were the basic developmental stages that support the institutional expression of state power.

In those days, managing agriculture meant essentially controlling a community through mobilisation of the labour force and disciplined division into specialised trades and crafts. In this sense, the government of an agrarian settlement was made up of a corporation of land proprietors (*sabha or Ur*) or a chief among them. In the case of a *brahmadeya*, the *Sabha*, and in the case of a non-brahmana village, the *Ur*, served as the fundamental units of

◆ Agrarian system

government. The *nadu* was above it. Among the hierarchy of chiefs, the majority of them were in charge of an agricultural region, there were numerous, including *kilavan*, *konaraiyan* or *alvan*, *peraraiyan* and other high-ranking officials of the king. During this period, *brahmadeyas*, Brahmanical temples and *Devadanas* gradually proliferated, reflecting the spread and progress of the new agrarian system. The first significant category of land grants, known as the *Brahmadeya*, is essential to understanding the nature of agrarian expansion. The earliest epigraphical document mentioning *brahmadeyas* is the Cendan rock inscription from Pulankuricci.

Irrigation System of the Pandyas

◆ Irrigation techniques

Attempts at the utilisation of the groundwater sources for irrigation continued from early times and were extensive during the period. When we say that irrigation techniques were known to the agrarian societies of early times, we do not mean that advanced farming had any remarkable range of expansion then. Knowledge of irrigation techniques alone does not imply agrarian expansion. There were numerous records of the technological development available and from them, we get information about the sluice (*madagu*, *tumbu* or *kalingu*) attached to tanks and water channels.

◆ Irrigation Development

Both perennial and inundation techniques of irrigation were extensively used in the areas suitable for such methods. Canals were cut from rivers and streams for direct irrigation. The earliest epigraphical evidence known so far attesting irrigation works in the Pandya region is the Vaigai bed inscription of Centan Arikesari. It registers the construction of a *madagu* (sluice) and the excavation of a *kal* (channel) from the Vaigai River by the Pandya king Centan Arikesari. The record mentions that the *madaqu* was named “Arikesariyan”, obviously after the name of its founder. After Arikesari’s project, we have no inscriptional reference to irrigation works in the Pandya region till the time of Srimara Srivallabha.

◆ Renovation works

An inscription from Cinnakkollappatti dated in the 8th year of Srimara Srivallabha registers the renovation of certain bunds and sluices built under the auspices of the king Etti Cattan the *kilavan* of Iruppai Kuti was the renovator. He rebuilt the collapsed *matai* (bund) on Perumkulam in Cattanur, in granite. In the same place two more *matais*, Pönnan-*matai* and Pankhuri-*matai*, besides the one called Connor-*matai* on Puthukulam, were rebuilt by him in bricks. Two inscriptions of Erukkankuti allude to the various projects of this *Kilavan*. One record says that in the 16th year of Srimara Sri-Vallabha’s reign, the *Kilavan* dismantled an old bund at Karumkulam, strengthened it with a stone base and constructed a new one raising the shore west of the mud-bund and east of the tank. He renamed the tank *kilavan-eri*.

◆ *Royal Patronage*

It is significant to note that the major irrigation projects were carried out by the kings and chieftains. The local chieftains who enriched their localities with such projects were granted higher political status by the kings. The Erukkankuti inscription enumerating the projects of Etti Cattan says that Srimara Srivallabha honoured the former by conferring the status of the *kilavan* of Iruppaikkutti.

◆ *Water Distribution System*

Each agrarian unit had a network of channels (*Vaykkal*) to supply water in each field, leading from the village tank (*Ur-kulam*) or the big channel of the locality (*nattu-permakal*) connected to certain huge tanks either rain-fed or river-fed. The Tirukkurunkutti inscription of Parantaka Nedunjadaiyan shows that the huge tank called *Vasudeva-eri* and certain minor tanks like *Arakkulam* and *Nakkan--eri-kulam* belonged to Vaikunt-valanadu. The Velvikudi plates show that the granted village Velvikudi was on the bank of the tank called *Kalantai-kulam*.

◆ *Irrigation Engineering*

The remains of the bunds and sluices of the period are indicative of the technical skill involved in the irrigation systems. The position and depth of the sluice demonstrate the adequate knowledge of the people in choosing the most suitable points and ascertaining the correct skill level. They knew the place where the bunds were to be raised for storing the maximum quantity of water. The quantity of water stored depends primarily on the quantity of precipitation which flows freely on the surface of the ground. The extent of the area which drains into the water source is also very important. Any of the surviving tanks of the period shows that its architects had a thorough understanding of these factors.

◆ *Sluice Mechanism*

The *tumpu* (sluice) was a single-valve system operated without any devices for mechanical advantage. The sluices consisted of two granite pillars installed in the tank on either side of the sluice mouth. The pillars are of varied heights as required by the depth of the tanks. The distance between the two pillars is about one to one and a half metres. The pillars are connected by cross-slabs through the centre of which a rod was inserted from above to the sluice mouth. The edge of the rod was flat covering the whole of the sluice mouth and could act as a shutter of the sluice mouth. One could swim across to the pillars and rest on the cross-slabs to operate the shutter by lifting the rod. As the edge of the rod is the shutter plank the sluice mouth becomes open when the rod is lifted.

In the case of a *Kumili* (sluice-pit system) the edge of the shutter rod, which was more or less global, closed the opening into a stone pit. So, when the rod is lifted the mouth of the sluice pit remains open and water from the tank flows forcefully into the pit. Here

◆ *Sluice-pit system*

the difference is in the nature of the valve of the sluice. In the case of the sluice single valve system (*Tumpu*) water from the tank flows into the sluice from the side and in the case of the sluice-pit system(*kumili*) the flow is from above. In both cases, the sluice mouth opens to an underground channel which leads water to a well called *etirakkinaru* built up outside the tank. Unlike ordinary wells, this is constructed upwards from the ground level. It has openings at the base level to different channels running in various directions. The flow of water through the channels required no contrivance since it is worked on gravitational force. For lifting water from the wells attached to fields they must have depended on the various types of *picootah* systems based on the power of men and animals. In certain types, simple contrivances like adding weight at the effort of water lifts were used for mechanical advantage.

◆ *Decentralised Irrigation system*

Royal projects were very few and the irrigation system involved only small-scale work which could be carried out locally. It is obvious that there was no centralisation in the management and administration of the irrigation system. It appears that the local chiefs and other prominent landholders who were the patrons of the various irrigation projects had some control over the irrigation sources. Generally, there was no royal interference in the administration of local irrigation systems unless there occurred some disputes between the agrarian villages on irrigation rights. Usually, the corporate bodies of landholders, the *sabhas* and *urs* managed the irrigation systems in their areas. The larger irrigation networks common to two or more villages must have necessitated their collective administration by the *nadu*.

2.1.2.3 The Cholas

◆ *Chola Dominance*

From the middle of the ninth century until the latter part of the thirteenth century, the Cholas, who became one of the two dominant powers in premodern South India (the other being the later Vijayanagara state), ruled over the region. This was a period that Nilakanta Sastri called “the balance of two Kingdoms” since the Deccan Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas were fighting with the Cholas for control of South India side by side.

◆ *The Chola's rise*

The Pallavas in the north and the *Pandyas* in the South, along with the Rashtrakutas in the Deccan, were the two modern major powers of the Tamil region at the time, while the Cholas, who controlled the Kaveri delta, gained power during this period. Even though the origins of the Cholas' are ambiguous, they asserted that they were descended from the Cholas who flourished in the same region during the Sangam period. Vijayalaya, the first king of this later Chola dynasty, appears to have been a Pallava feudatory. He

had taken Thanjavur from the Muttaraiyas. The second Chola king, Aditya Chola, killed the Pallava king Aparajita in war at the end of the ninth century. He seized Tondai-mandalam, the territory of the Pallavas.

◆ *Rashtrakuta conflict with the Chola state*

The Rashtrakutas had matrimonial alliances with the Pallavas and extended their control up to Tondai-mandalam. They attempted to conquer the Andhra region by defeating the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, which led to conflict between the Cholas and them. The Rashtrakuta kings frequently invaded the Chola territory, when Krishna III came to power in the middle of the tenth century. Parantaka I (also known as the “Conqueror of Madurai”) was defeated in the battle of Takkolam in 949 and the northern half of the Chola country was taken. Following this loss, the Cholas’ influence decreased for a few decades. But in 973 CE, the Rashtrakutas were crushed by Taila II of the Chalukyas and following that, the Cholas progressively regained their lost power.

◆ *Expansion of the Chola Kingdom*

Rajaraja I (985–1044) and his son and successor, Rajendra I (1012–44), were the two significant Chola rulers who expanded their kingdom in the south. First, Rajaraja fought with a confederation of Pandyan, Chera and Sri Lankan kings in the south. He destroyed Kandalur to defeat the Cheras and took Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas, from them. He then attacked Sri Lanka, by conquering Anuradhapura to establish Chola dominion in the northern portion of the island. He subsequently destroyed other minor powers, such as the Gangas in southern Mysore and defeated the Chalukyas in the north. After capturing Manyakheta, the Cholas moved their army into the eastern and western Deccan at the beginning of the eleventh century, bringing a sizeable region south of the Tungabhadra River under their control.

◆ *Maritime Dominance*

Rajaraja later attacked the Maldives Islands as well to dominate the east-west maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. He dispatched envoys to the Chinese court to get profit from the trade. He constructed a magnificent Shiva temple in his capital city of Thanjavur and Sri Lanka, which houses a *linga* bearing his name. The inscriptions on the walls of this temple attest to his donation of grants to numerous villages, some of which are located in southern Karnataka and Sri Lanka. Following in the footsteps of his predecessor Rajaraja I, Rajendra I retained control over Kerala, the Pandyan country, and the northern region of Sri Lanka. He appointed viceroys to Pandya country and Sri Lanka and named them Chola-Lankesvara and Chola-Pandya. The Chola station of Sri Lanka was Ponnaruwa.

The territories of Jayasimha II in the Deccan region were



◆ *Northern Campaigns*

attacked by Paramara Bhoja of Malwa and Gujarat was seized from him. Once it was recovered, Jayasimha II attempted to use the succession dispute in Vengi as an excuse to assault that city. After defeating and conquering Vengi, Rajendra I moved his troops even further north having conquered the northern Eastern Gangas. His expeditionary troops reached the banks of the river Ganga. Following his trip to North India, Rajendra launched an attack on Srivijaya, marking the culmination of the territorial expansion of the Chola country. But conflicts with the Chalukyas resumed in his later years.

◆ *Chalukyan Conflict*

Following his accession to the Chalukyan throne in 1042, Somesvara I moved his capital from Manyakheta to Kalyani, launched an invasion of Kalinga in the east, and fought with the Paramaras and Pratiharas in the North. He continued his authority over Vengi. The war against the Cholas went on without a clear winner. Following his death in 1068 CE, his elder son Somesvara II ascended the throne. However, his second son Vikramaditya (VI) rebelled, dividing the kingdom into two, with Somesvara ruling the northern part and Vikramaditya ruling the southern part. The Vengi issue caused great tension in ties between the Chalukyas and the Cholas over the following two years.

◆ *Internal consolidation*

Kulottunga I, an Eastern Chalukyan king from Vengi, came to the Chola throne in 1070 CE. Two years prior, in response to a Kadaram king's appeal for assistance, the Cholas (led by Virarajendra) had sent a second naval expedition to the Malay Peninsula, whereupon they duly restored the king to his position. But at the outset of Kulottunga's reign, Sri Lanka was lost. Vijayabahu, who gained prominence in the Rohana region (in the southeast of the island), was able to regain Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura region. Kulottunga I maintained Chola's power by focusing more on internal administration than on expanding Chola territory, even if the Pandyan country uprising also put Chola rule in southern Tamil Nadu in danger.

◆ *Chalukyan Challenges*

The Chalukyan king Vikramaditya conquered Somesvara in the Deccan in 1076 CE. His court was adorned by poet Bilhana, who praised the king Vikramaditya in his *Vikramankadevacharita*. But as Vikramaditya ruled, his feudatories — the Hoysalas and Kakatiyas consolidated and began to pose a danger to the Kingdom.

◆ *Decline of Power*

Towards the end of Kulottunga's reign, Chola's power in the North and South began to decline. The Chola family temple, Chidambaram, was expanded by Vikramachola (1118 CE–1335 CE), Kulottunga's successor. But state finances began to strain at the beginning of the twelfth century and several inscriptions from

this period record tax arrears and the ensuing land sales. In such circumstances, the Chola army's local chiefs, primarily descended from ex-hill tribes, became more powerful and the core parts of the kingdom were essentially under their control.

◆ *Pandyan Conflict*

Due to an issue about succession in the royal family, a major conflict emerged in the Pandyan country in the latter part of the twelfth century, involving the powers of Kerala (Kulasekhara), Sri Lanka (Parakramabahu) and the Cholas (Rajadhiraja/Kulottunga III). Three powers continued to struggle even after Jatavarman Kulasekhara took the Pandyan throne in 1190 CE. The Chola dominion in South India came to an end with the reign of Kulottunga III (1178 CE–1218 CE), who preserved the Chola suzerainty in the South and erected a magnificent Siva temple with sculpture-covered walls in Tribhuvanam, the centre of the Chola Kingdom.

◆ *Downfall of the Chalukyas*

The Chalukyan power was threatened in the Deccan during the twelfth century by the Hoysalas in the South, the Kakatiyas in the east and the Saunas (Yadavas) in the North. In the latter part of the century, the Kalachuris even briefly usurped the throne at the center. Ultimately, in 1190, the forces of the Hoysalas from the South and the Saunas from the north advanced and destroyed the Chalukyas. The last ruler of the Chalukya kingdom was Somesvara IV.

Revenue Administration of the Cholas

◆ *Sources of Revenue Collection*

Since there are no reliable sources that shed light on the Cholas' complete revenue structure, it is difficult to obtain accurate information on their revenue system. To comprehend it, we must compile every tax term found in inscriptions. In the two basic *mar'ef, alams*, 422 phrases appear to point to a tax or due and that have been gathered from published Chola inscriptions documenting a land transfer and or tax imposition or exemption. Given the size of the amount, it appears that the Chola revenue administration was highly arbitrary and lacked a logical justification. However, there is a certain logic that becomes apparent when we statistically analyse the inscriptions that contain these tax terms.

◆ *Organised Bureaucracy*

The Chola Kingdom possessed a highly organised bureaucracy for revenue collection. The revenue department, known as *puravuvvari*, was made up of several offices and functions, including *puravuvvari-tinaikkala-kankani* or *puravu vari-tinaikkala-nayagam* (the revenue department's accountant supervisor), *varippottagam* (the tax register), *mugavetti* (the royal stamp), *varipottaga-kanakku* (the tax register's accounts), *variyilidu* (a tax register entry) and *pattolai* (the palm-leaf record writer). The Karandai copper-plate inscription of Rajendra I documents his transfer of almost 50 villages to 1,080 Brahmanas. The names of



the additional executors from the local administration office and secretariat, including *nadu-vagai* (the tax settlement), are also listed. There are more than 40 officers in total who are described in this copper-plate inscription. This alone demonstrates that the Chola state has a reasonably developed governing body.

◆ *Other Officials*

Aside from the revenue department, other notable officials who served the king as secretaries were the *tirumandira-olai*, also better known as *olai*, who served as the royal scribe or personal secretary of the King. *Naduvirukkai* were learned Brahmanas who were likely engaged in legal matters. *Udan Kuttam* were court officials and *vidaiyil*, who executed royal orders on tour. These officers held high positions and were frequently referred to as *Adhikari*. They enjoyed impressive titles, such as *Rajaraja-muvendavelan* (bestowed upon the Vellalas), *Rajendrachola-brahmarayan* (bestowed upon the Brahmanas), *Kulottungachola-pallavarayan* (bestowed upon the Vellalas or other non-Brahmanas) and so forth. Similar titles belonged to military chiefs known as *Senapati* and *dandanayakam*. The official who managed the temple affairs of the Chola kingdom was *Srikaryam*. They officially were graded hierarchically in order.

Summarised Overview

Kesavan Veluthat's *The Early Medieval in South India* is a comprehensive collection of essays that spans two decades, exploring the concept of the "early medieval" period in South India. The book is divided into three sections that analyse the historical developments in Tamilakam, Kerala and Karnataka. Unlike northern India, where the medieval period is more clearly defined, the early medieval phase in South India remains ambiguous. Veluthat investigates whether there was an "early medieval" formation distinct from the preceding "early historical" formation and discusses the factors contributing to this transformation. He utilises epigraphic and literary sources to reconstruct historical narratives focusing on themes like the role of temples, state formation, property rights and regional identity. Veluthat's work and the historical accounts provide insights into the complexities of early medieval South India, characterised by dynamic shifts in economy, society and governance.

The Pallavas, who established their capital at Kanchipuram, played a significant role in South Indian history from the third to the eighth centuries CE. The early period of their rule is documented through copper-plate grants and inscriptions, notably the three grants from Skandavarman, written in Prakrit. Their Kingdom reached from the Arabian Sea to the Krishna River, with Kanchipuram as the centre of administration. The Pallavas emerged as a powerful force towards the close of the third century, succeeding the Ikshvakus in southern Andhradesa. Their rise can be linked to agricultural advancements, particularly the development of reservoir - based irrigation systems, which increased cultivable land. While some early scholars speculated that the Pallavas had foreign origins, modern



historians suggest a mixed ancestry of North and South Indian roots.

The earliest known ruler of the Pandyan dynasty was Palyagasalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi, followed by Ayyappudai Kadantha Neduncheliyan I, renowned for his victory over the Aryans and his unjust execution of Kovalan, as mentioned in the *Silappadikaram*. The Pandyas' prominence waned after the Sangam period, giving way to the Kalabhras. The establishment of the First Pandyan Kingdom occurred in the 7th century under Kadungon, who defeated the Kalabhras. The Pandyas regained power in the late 13th century with Maravarman Sundara Pandyan and his son Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan, known for his military expeditions. However, the Pandyan resurgence faced challenges from the Cholas and internal succession disputes, ultimately leading to their decline.

The ability of the Chola Kingdom to expand its territory and influence across southern India and into Southeast Asia is a testament to its military and naval prowess. A detailed examination of the revenue system indicates a well-structured economic framework that supported the Kingdom's expansive governance. The mention of temple construction and patronage suggests that the Chola rulers played a significant role in promoting art, culture and religion within their realm, which has had lasting impacts on South Indian culture. The decline of the Chola Kingdom illustrates the challenges of maintaining power over a vast territory, especially with competing regional powers and internal succession disputes.

Assignments

1. Discuss how the Pallavas, Cholas and Pandya rulers contributed to the development of agrarian economies in South India.
2. Discuss the role of temples in the agrarian economy of South Indian states. How did large landholdings by temples influence local production and trade?
3. How did the construction of large irrigation systems, such as tanks and canals, influence agricultural productivity and state revenue in South Indian agrarian states?
4. Discuss the taxation system in South Indian agrarian states. What impact did this have on farmers and rural society?
5. Compare the agrarian systems of the Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagara states. How did regional variations in land ownership, taxation and agricultural practices reflect the differences between these kingdoms?



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Suggested Reading

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4. Veluthat, Kesavan, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 1993.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU



Vijayanagara Kingdom

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner would be able to:

- ◆ examine the administrative history of the Vijayanagara Kingdom
- ◆ evaluate and examine the various theories of the origin of the kingdom
- ◆ get introduced to the *Nayankara* system

Background

Beginning in the middle of the fourteenth century, the Vijayanagara Kingdom ruled over a significant part of the southern peninsula of India for three centuries, during which time Indian culture underwent a transformation from its medieval past toward its modern, colonial future. When its rulers, known as the “Rayas,” ruled over the peninsula and Vijayanagara, their capital, stood for immense riches and power, lordships of all kinds grew with greater power than they had ever had. The Vijayanagara rulers were among India’s greatest historical rulers when they reached the height of their power and influence in the early sixteenth century. They had degraded the Sultanate regimes of the Deccan and forced them to subjugate several royal and main dynasties that they did not destroy.

The capital of the Vijayanagara monarchy, or “Kingdom,” was located close to the subcontinent’s heart on the Tungabhadra River, thus the name “City of Victory.” Over three centuries, its kings professed to have global authority, with the purpose of “ruling the vast world under a single umbrella.” They also addressed themselves more modestly as the rulers of Karnata or contemporary Karnataka. It is somewhat misleading to say that their suzerainty has been limited to a small portion of the Indian subcontinent, rather than a great portion of South Asia.

Although the Chalukyan capitals of Vatapi and Aihole from the sixth to eighth centuries were much smaller than Vijayanagara in 1500 CE, the latter was still a massive fortified city spanning 10 square miles. The Vijayanagara kings also took the boar or *Varaha*, as their emblem. However, the initial temples constructed in the city were essentially larger copies of the temples at the Chalukyan capitals. Like the Chalukyas, the Vijayanagara dynasty consisted of multiple separate lineages. The first of them was referred to as Yadavas at times, but was most commonly called Sangamas after the chief’s sons founded the kingdom in or about 1340 CE.



Keywords

Rajyam, Adikari, Valagai, Idangai, Tari, Ayam, Pattadai, Patta, Patta Swamikal, Maha Pradani, Vijayanagara, Nayankara

Discussion

2.2.1 Theories of Origin

◆ *Foundation of the Vijayanagara empire*

Robert Sewell's book 'A Forgotten Empire' published in 1900 served as the foundation for the study of Vijayanagara. Following him, the study of Vijayanagara advanced significantly as a result of the early work of several scholars, including Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Nilakanta Sastri, B. A. Saletore, N. Venkataramanayya and T. V. Mahalingam. Vijayanagara was the model and forerunner of the seventeenth century Maratha state. Nevertheless, from the period of the Chalukyas of Badami, Vijayanagara was also a medieval south Indian state. The establishment of the fortified city on the Tungabhadra around 1340 serves as a starting point for the ordering of the history of Vijayanagara. However, the beginning of the incursions by soldiers serving the Khalji Sultans of Delhi may have occurred earlier and is thought to have created the conditions and incentives for the subsequent dynasty and the city of Vijayanagara.

◆ *Founders of the Vijayanagara*

According to some historians, the Bukka - Harihara brothers then joined the court of the Hoysala ruler Vira Ballala III. In 1327, Vira Ballala transferred his court to Tiruvannamalai, located in northern Tamil Nadu, following the sacking of Dvarasamudram, the capital of the latter. Ballala founded the fortified city that would eventually become Vijayanagara across from Anegundi as it was situated on the Tungabhadra River. Virupaksha Pattana, which means "the town under the protection of Siva as the god Virupaksha whose shrine was there," was one of the many names of the city at the time. This was done to prevent Sulthanate incursions into southern Karnataka. Some historians argue that the new city was governed by Bukka and Harihara.

N. Venkataramanayya proposed an alternative theory based on seventeenth century records that claimed that Harihara and Bukka had held significant positions under Kakatiya ruler Prataparudra rather than Hoysala king Vira Ballala. He compiled traditions that state that the five sons of Sangama (Bukka, Harihara, Kampana, Mudappa and Marappa) were taken as prisoners when the

◆ *Theory of Origin of the Kingdom*

Tughlaq army eventually reduced the massive fort at Warangal. Afterwards, they became Muslims, and the Sultan hired them to run the recently taken Kampili territories. The main legendary element of Vijayanagara's origins consists of these enduring stories as well as others that speak of their later separation from Islam, guided by the renowned religious figure Madhvacharya, also known as Vidyaranya, and their founding of a 'Hindu state.' Many inscriptions refer to Vidyaranya's support to the Sangama brothers for the foundation of Vijayanagara kingdom in 1336.

◆ *Role of Vidyaranya*

Hermann Kulke writes specifically about Vidyaranya's involvement in the foundation of Vijayanagara Kingdom. Thus, Kulke gives the story that Harihara and Bukka established the new state with Vidyaranya's guidance and assistance as a "myth" that was only developed in the sixteenth century, when the Sringeri Matha was forced to fight a serious setback brought about by the royal patronage shifting from the Saiva Matha of Sringeri to the Vaishnava temple at Tirupati during the reign of the devoted Vaishnavas, Krishnadevaraya and Achyuta Devaraya.

2.2.2 The Early Period of Vijayanagara Rule

◆ *Establishment of the Kingdom*

Vijayanagara developed into an Kingdom under its early rulers, ruling over several linguistically and culturally diverse regions and populations on the peninsula. They mostly achieved this by conquering smaller Hindu lordships, such as kingdoms and chiefdoms and by defending their conquests against the Sultanate that Ala-ud-din Gangu Bahmani had formed not far to the north, roughly ten years after Vijayanagara was founded. Sometime before 1340 CE, Harihara and Bukka established their rule in the Hampi or Hosapattana area, across from the old town of Anegundi, on the southern banks of the Tungabhadra. The Hoysala ruler Ballala III fought against the Madurai Sultan and died in the south at Tiruchirappalli in 1342 CE. His son Ballala IV governed the northern portion of the kingdom in alliance with Harihara and Bukka. Their most probable headquarters was located in the Hampi or Hosapattana area. Following the death of Ballala IV, Harihara I ascended the throne and with the support of his brothers, started to reign on his own.

◆ *Bukka's reign*

Harihara I, passed away in 1357 CE and Bukka succeeded him. The capital, Vijayanagara, first appears in an inscription dated 1356 CE. This likely indicates Bukka's restoration of the city of Hampi or Hosapattana or the building of a new royal centre. He is first invested with the entire imperial title "maharajadhiraja paramesvara" in an inscription written by his minister in 1368 CE. During his rule, Kampana, his son, launched southern campaigns to conquer the Madurai Sultanate and the Sambuvarayar in the



Kanchipuram region. It appears that the Sultanate was overthrown by approximately 1370 CE. However, the capture of the Raichur doab in the north and Goa in the west led to the outbreak of war in the north against the recently formed Bahmani state.

◆ *Expansion under Harihara II*

After conquering Goa, Harihara II (1377–1404) conquered the Reddis in Kondavidu and expanded his hegemony to the Coromandel Coast. He also dispatched an expedition to Sri Lanka, but the Bahmani state from the North posed a threat to his capital. During this period, the kingdom was split into four large regional entities, or *rajyas*, that surrounded the core area. These included the *rajyas* of Udayagiri in the east, Penugonda in the mid-east, Mulavay in the south and Araga in the west. Every *rajya* was governed by rulers or people of power.

◆ *Conquest of Devaraya II*

Devaraya II attacked Kerala in the south and Orissa in the east. He kept the peace through marriage alliances with the Bahmanis. During Devaraya's reign, Abdur Razak, the Persian ambassador, visited Vijayanagara and stated that the latter's power extended from Bengal (Orissa) to Malabar and from Ceylon to Gulbarga. Later, Kapilesvara Gajapati of Orissa invaded the Tamil region, extending beyond Tiruchirappalli and the Bahmanis recaptured Goa under the rule of his two feeble successors, Mallikarjuna and Virupaksha II. There emerged a rebellion in the Tamil region.

◆ *Tuluva Dynasty*

With the aid of Narasa Nayaka of the Tuluva dynasty, Saluva Narasimha, who had governed the Chandragirirajya in the northern Tamil country reclaimed Udayagiri from Kapilesvara, put down the revolt in the Tamil country and expanded the territory of Vijayanagara to the river Godavari. As the first ruler of the Saluva dynasty, Narasimha took the throne in 1486. Nonetheless, the conflicts with the Gajapatis and the Bahmanis persisted and following his passing in 1491 CE, Narasa Nayaka assumed the role of *de facto* ruler and reclaimed a portion of the lost lands. His son Vira Narasimha established the third Tuluva dynasty in the Vijayanagara kingdom in 1505 CE, usurping the throne of the Saluva Dynasty.

◆ *Reign of Krishnadevaraya*

Bijapur, one of the successor states of the Bahmani kingdoms, was invaded from the north under Vira Narasimha's reign (1505 CE–1509 CE) and a rebellion broke out in Ummathur, near Mysore. After Vira Narasimha died in 1509 CE, Krishnadevaraya (1509 CE–1529 CE) put an end to the Ummathur rebellion and pursued the Gajapatis to Simhachalam. As he needed quality imported horses from Arabia, he had good relations with the Portuguese, who took Goa in 1510 CE and conquered the Raichur doab by fighting Bijapur in the north. Ten years after his coronation, the state of

Vijayanagara acquired its largest area ever. Krishnadevaraya is renowned for being a patron of the arts, and poets such as Allasani Peddana. The *Amukta-malyada* is a Telugu poem that explores the life of Perialvar and Vaishnava philosophy. The Telugu historical prose book *Rayavacakamu*, written later at the Madurai Nayaka's court, claims to record events during Krishnadevaraya's reign as though its author had lived at the same time.

◆ *Establishment of Bahmani Kingdom*

The Bahmani kingdom was founded in 1347 CE at Gulbarga by Zafar Khan (Hasan Gangu), who had been ruling the northern Deccan for Muhammad bin Tughluq. The state was named after him because he claimed ancestry from the semi mythical Persian hero Bahman. The Bahmani state engaged in conflict with Vijayanagara in the South and Malwa and Gujarat in the North. The capital was relocated to Bidar in the first part of the fifteenth century. West and Central Asian foreigners were heavily employed by the Bahmani Kingdom, giving them noticeable gifts in the courts. During this period there were numerous conflicts between mostly Shias and the Sunni native Muslims known as Deccanis.

◆ *Fragmentation of Bahmani kingdom*

Mahmud Gawan, a Persian, was appointed *Peshwa* (prime minister) in the second half of the fifteenth century. Under his strong leadership, the Bahmani kingdom expanded its dominance by capturing Goa in the west and Kanchipuram in the Tamil country, taking advantage of the decline in Vijayanagara rule following Devaraya II. But in 1481 CE, the Sultan put Gawan to death for his part in the continuing war at his court between the foreigners and the Deccanis. After that, the state ultimately collapsed, leaving the local chiefs to stand up for themselves. As a result, autonomous states like Golkonda in the former Kakatiya region, Ahmadnagar in the western Deccan, Bijapur in the south near Vijayanagara and Berar in the Vidarbha region emerged. Additionally, a Bidari family claimed the Sultanate in the drastically diminished Bahmani and the state became known as Bidar. As a result, the Bahmani state had split apart into five distinct states by the beginning of the sixteenth century.

◆ *Battle of Talikota*

Following Krishnadevaraya's death in 1529 CE, there were succession issues in Vijayanagara. With the support of Saluva Viranarasingaraya-nayaka (Saluva Nayaka), Achutadevaraya ascended the throne. However, Rama Raja (Son-in-law of Krishnadevaraya), had supported the infant son of Krishnadevaraya against Achutadeva and Saluva Nayaka for the throne. But Saluva Nayaka was soon captured and brought under control. Raichur was taken back by Achutadevaraya from Bijapur, but Rama Raja soon gained more influence in the court. When Achutadevaraya died in 1542 CE, there was yet another succession issue, and Sadasiva,



his nephew, assumed the throne. However, the actual power was enjoyed by Rama Raja, his brother who rose to become the Chief Minister. To keep the five northern states engaged in conflict, Rama Raja used cunning and a “divide and rule” strategy in his diplomacy with them. But over time, this had the reverse effect and made the five Sultanates more unified, which finally resulted in the pivotal battle of Rakshasa-Tangadi(Talikota) in 1565 CE, in which the Vijayanagara state was defeated by the federation of these Sultanates.

◆ *Establishment of Aravidu Dynasty*

The victorious army of five Sultanates destroyed the capital city under its hooves, capturing and killing Rama Raja. Along with Sadasiva, Tirumala fled the capital and withdrew to Penugonda in the Southeast. But in 1569 CE, Tirumala overthrew Sadasiva and usurped the throne, establishing the fourth dynasty, the Aravidu dynasty. He established his three sons as rulers of the Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil provinces, at Penugonda, Srirangapatna, and Chandragiri respectively. However, the major nayakas of Thanjavur, Madurai and Senji in the Tamil area grew more powerful and almost became independent.

◆ *Decline of Vijayanagara*

It is believed that Venkata II, who began his reign at the close of the sixteenth century, was the final Vijayanagara ruler who could effectively manage internal disturbances and deal with external issues. He reclaimed the lost territory up to the Krishna River and put an end to the invasions by Golconda and Bijapur; however, he eventually relocated the capital to Chandragiri, which is located closer to Tirupati and farther south. Along with suppressing the uprisings of the southern Nayakas, he also had cordial ties with the Dutch, who came as far as the Coromandel Coast, where they established factories in Masulipatam and Pulicat. But when Venkata II passed away in 1614 without leaving a successor, a major conflict about succession emerged and it lasted for more than ten years. When the Thanjavur Nayaka, with whom Sriranga III had sought refuge, was defeated by Bijapur in 1649 CE, the last curtain fell on Vijayanagara. This involved the three larger southern nayakas and was responsible for an invasion by Bijapur and Golconda that accelerated the disintegration of the state.

◆ *Advent of Europeans*

This is when the English, who had followed the Dutch to the Coromandel Coast, established Fort St. George in Madras. The fort was built in 1639 CE using materials acquired from the native nayakas. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Ahmadnagar acquired Berar, one of the five Deccan states and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Bidar was merged into Bijapur. The remaining three states were invaded by the northern Mughals, who first defeated Ahmadnagar in 1636 CE. Although Golconda and

Bijapur ended Vijayanagara's rule in the middle of the seventeenth century, they were also defeated by the Mughals in 1686 and 1687, respectively. Then the Mughals went on to dominate the Tamil and the Telugu, placing their representatives in Hyderabad and Arkadu.

2.2.3 Administration

◆ Administrative Division

The Vijayanagara state was administratively divided into large territories called *rajyams*, which were typically governed by high ranking officials, many of whom were members of the royal family. These officers, known as *adikaris*, were responsible for overseeing the *rajyams* and assisting in the state's administration. Senior officials, including *Mahamandalesvara*, *Pradani*, *Mantri*, or *Rajyakarta*, usually spent little time at the headquarters of these *rajyams* (called *chavadi* or *uchavadi*), leaving the *adikaris* to handle the daily activities. Many inscriptions from Tamil Nadu reveal that the *adikaris* often exploited the people through arbitrary taxes due to their relatively unchecked authority. This led to a public uprising in 1429, with people organising into *valangai* or *idangai* groups to revolt against the oppressive landlords and corrupt officials.

◆ Village administration

Administrative positions such as village and locality headmen, typically occupied by members of dominant landholding groups, village and locality accountants (often Brahmins) and various lesser roles were compensated through grants of tax exempt land, often from scarce irrigated land. These grants, referred to by the Sanskrit term *manya*, signified both honour and income. This system of land based remuneration for local administration was continued by the British in the interior districts of the Madras Presidency. The landholdings, known by the Arabic term *inam*, replaced money payments for village and locality officials, and this practice persisted well into the nineteenth century, with such privileged landholdings sometimes accounting for up to half of all land in certain areas.

◆ Revenue Administration

It is widely acknowledged by scholars that more land revenue was collected in money during the Vijayanagara period than in earlier times. One reason for, or consequence of, this increased monetisation is described by Nuniz, a witness to events in the 1530s. He detailed the system of powerful commanders introduced by Krishnadevaraya to control the major chiefs of his realm. Nuniz listed the leading Vijayanagara captains during Achyutadevaraya's reign, along with the territories they controlled and the money they collected and shared with the king. Nuniz emphasised that he was not describing officers of the king but rather the lords of the kingdom's greatest territories. Even the most powerful Vijayanagara rulers of the sixteenth century, Krishnadevaraya, Achyutadevaraya and Rama Raja, received only a portion of the revenues collected



from the richest provinces of the realm, which were mostly located outside the kingdom's core.

2.2.3.1 Society and Religion

◆ Royal Patronage

Comprehensive studies on the temples of the Vijayanagara kingdom, such as their number, distribution and sectarian affiliations are scarce. Similarly, there is a notable lack of understanding and in some cases profound ignorance, about the religious networks centered around sectarian organisations (*matha* or monasteries) of the period. The leader of such a sectarian center, *Mat adipati*, was one of the most influential figures during the Vijayanagara era. Many of these leaders enjoyed royal patronage and trust, often serving as spiritual advisers (*rajaguru*) to kings and powerful chiefs. For instance, Kandadai Ramanuja Ayyangar, the preceptor of Saluva Narasimha, was the head of the Tengalai Srivaishnava Matha at Tirupati. With Narasimha's support, this Brahmin gained control over the affairs of the Tirupati Temple in the late fifteenth century. Similarly Krishnadevaraya's preceptor was the head of the Madhva Matha at Tirupati.

◆ Role of Temples

Temples and *mathas* played a central role in the political history of the Vijayanagara kingdom, serving as key instruments for political influence. Each temple represented or embodied the diverse communities that gathered to worship there. During the sixteenth century major Hindu institutions began to concentrate in urban areas. Villages and localities often had shrines dedicated to guardian deities, typically goddesses, worshipped by the entire community. Additionally, there were lineage shrines dedicated to the tutelary deities of powerful landowning families, as well as larger territorial guardian temples.

2.2.3.2 Agriculture, Trade and Industry

◆ Development of Agriculture

Through a combination of interconnected political and religious investments, many areas in the arid peninsula of Vijayanagara evolved into microzones of intensive agriculture, primarily supported by tank irrigation and often focused on cash crops like cotton and indigo. These microzones emerged as a result of similar investment practices being implemented in both smaller and larger temples, as well as by chiefs of varying stature. Collectively, these efforts transformed the dry upland interior from a region of marginal agriculture and animal husbandry into one characterised by robust, mixed farming capable of sustaining a growing population and more complex social and political structures. Like frontier societies elsewhere, the upland communities were led by warrior chiefs and populated by people accustomed to fighting for their new territories. This long-term development significantly benefitted the

Vijayanagara kingdom of the 14th century, whose rulers, in turn, actively supported and furthered these transformative processes.

◆ *Expansion of Trade*

The west coast of India was an integral part of a vast emporia trade network, which K.N. Chaudhuri described it as “the zone of Islamic influence”, in his work ‘Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean’. This trade system extended from the Atlantic shores of Iberia and West Africa to the Indonesian archipelago and China, functioning through two primary routes: an overland caravan route and a maritime route. The sea route originated in the Mediterranean, connecting trade hubs from the Arabian Peninsula to India’s western coast, Malacca, and southern China. This oceanic network, established around 1000 CE, replaced the earlier, more perilous direct voyages between the Arabian heartland of the Islamic world and China that prevailed from the 8th to the 11th centuries. Chaudhuri credits its emergence to political developments, particularly the rise of two major political powers at opposite ends of Eurasia. He links this shift to the early 7th century, marked by the establishment of the T’ang dynasty in China and the Prophet Muhammad’s migration from Mecca to Medina, seeing these events as heralding “a fresh beginning, a new order.”

◆ *Expansion of Trade*

When we study the Vijayanagara inscriptions, one thing that specifically strikes us is the expansion of trade and manufacturing across various regions. This phenomenon appears to have begun in the fourteenth century as evidenced by the frequent references to terms like *pattadai* (artisan’s workshop), *tari* (tax on looms), *pettai* (market), *kasaya-kudi* (people who pay *ayam* tax in cash), *Kaikkolas* (weavers), *Vaniyas* (merchants), *Kanmalas* (smiths, carpenters, and masons) and so forth.

◆ *Merchant Associations*

The *nagarams* or merchant associations were also quite significant. The decision to contribute to a festival at the Kariyamanickam Perumal temple at Harivasapuram (Nagalapuram) was made by corporate bodies of merchants made up of *pattana swamigal* (leading merchants of port towns) and *nagarattar* (*nagaram* members). This decision is documented in an inscription from Nagalapuram. A wide region that included Chandragiri-rajyam, Padaividu-rajyam, Cholamandalam and other areas was represented by the merchants gathered there. Palaverkadu (Pulicat) was the home of *Pattana Swamigal*, a prominent trading organisation.

The Chinese navy under the commandship of Zheng He arrived in the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the fifteenth century and this event deserves special mention. The Chinese record of this expedition offers details about the inhabitants and commodities of Kollam, Kochi and Kozhikode on the Malabar Coast. It appears

◆ *Trade and Ceramics*

that the most significant trading item for them was pepper. On the beaches of Coromandel and Malabar, several Chinese pottery sherds dating to the Vijayanagara period have been found in a variety of medieval port sites. The towns of Machilipatnam (Masulipatnam), Kothapatnam, Pulicat, Sadras and Nagapattinam in the north and Kallam, Kodungallur and Pandalayini Kollam in the South are among the Coromandel towns that provide Chinese ceramic sherds. Among some of them are Kothapatnam and Kodungallur. Sherds of earthenware from Thailand and Vietnam have also been found.

2.2.4 *Nayankara System*

◆ *Research on Vijayanagara*

A focused sequence of historical works on Vijayanagara began with Robert Sewell's 1900 publication of his book 'A Forgotten Empire'. Following that, several academics, including Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Nilakanta Sastri, N. Venkataramanayya, T. V. Mahalingam, B. A. Saletore and others worked hard to further the research. Very recently, a great number of significant works have also been produced. The significance of the nayakas, who are military chiefs with specific territories, in the Vijayanagara administration and their personalities, is one of the most important subjects covered by these historians.

◆ *Role of Nayakas*

There were numerous sources from the Vijayanagara period mentioning the nayakas. Fernao Nuniz, a Portuguese horse merchant who lived in Vijayanagara city during the reign of Achutadevaraya writes about the nayakas after listing the amount of revenue that the eleven big nayakas had to pay to the state treasury as revenue for their allotted territory. Thus, the kingdom of Bisnaga (Vijayanagara) is divided among over two hundred captains (nayakas). Based on their lands and revenue, the King determines for them the forces they must maintain and the amount of revenue they must give him each month or year. This is done during the first nine days of September.

◆ *Feudal System debate*

It is believed that a sizeable portion of the Vijayanagara kingdom was included in the area so allotted to the nayakas. Though there are some disagreements among scholars, many have suggested that this system of giving the nayakas state land is like the feudalism of medieval Western Europe. However, Burton Stein offered a completely different view on this subject. Firstly, Stein refers to only big nayakas like those of Senji, Thanjavur and Madurai as nayaka in most of his works. Regarding the other *nayakas*, he either denies their existence or refers to them as chiefs, magnates or poligars, assuming that their power came from caste relations and kinship-based communal organisations in the area.

Stein treats the nayakas strangely because he intended to apply

◆ Theory of Segmentary state

the theory of the “segmentary state” to the Vijayanagara state as well, viewing the local powers as segments that refused to recognise the political authority of the king. However, it is evident from the inscriptions that many nayakas were either intimately associated with the Vijayanagara rulers or served as subordinates for some of the more powerful Nayakas. Approximately 500 Nayakas are known to have appeared as such in the Vijayanagara inscriptions in Tamil Nadu alone, although Stein calculates that number to be only approximately 58, based on an inadequate survey conducted by A. Krishnaswami. The number will nearly double if we include the nayakas in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

◆ Nayakkattanam

Regarding the land of the nayakas, Nuniz mentions that we often see references in inscriptions of the region (*sima*, *sime*, or *sirmai*) known as *nayakatana* (*nayakkattanam*). According to an inscription found at Manalurpet records, Surappa Nayaka donated two villages in Magada-mandalam, also known as *lrakuttanallur-sirmai*, to the Manalur temple. The king Sadasivadeva had awarded him the villages as *nayakkattanam*. This and other inscriptions make it clear that the king gave the *nayakkattana* to the nayakas. Nuniz’s statement and inscriptions make it abundantly evident that the nayakas were responsible for maintaining an armed contingent of a specific size for the king in addition to performing general administration duties in the territories through his agents. They also had to collect revenue in their territories and send a specific amount to the state. It is now clear from recent studies that the nayakas were moved from one region to another under the reign of powerful rulers like Krishnadeva Raya and Achyutadevaraya. However, the nayakas appear to have tried to assert their dominance in the area as the power of the king weakened. The king’s designation of the *nayakkattana* persisted even after his defeat at the battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi in 1565.

◆ Administrative responsibilities of Nayakas

We know from inscriptions and claims made by Nuniz and another Portuguese merchant, Domingos Paes, that the nayakas performed various kinds of duties for the king in both the palace and the government. *Mahamandalesvarara* (ruler of a large area), *Mahapradani* (chief minister or governor of a specific area), *rajya-Kartar* (provincial governor), *Dalavay* (military general), *Vasal* (palace guard), *Adaippam* (king’s page bearing betelnuts), *Bokkisham* (state accountant) or *Kaariyattu-kadava* (executor of a particular duty for the king) are a few examples of the nayakas known to have existed. It is very clear that the nayakas were not local authorities, but rather they actively participated in state administration under the king’s supervision while also holding military leadership positions. This is further supported by the numerous inscriptions that indicate

the nayaka's desire to be recognised by the king or to have direct access to him through.

◆ *Role of Nayakas in Tax remission*

The nayakas undoubtedly contributed significantly to the state's revenue collection. The remission of *pattadai-nulayam* (tax on artisan's workshop), *kanikkai* (present or contribution) and other taxes by nayakas in favour of craftsmen, merchants and cultivators are documented in a significant number of sixteenth- and seventeenth century inscriptions. According to Karashima, we can deduce 631 tax terms from the Tamil Nadu inscriptions, and 556 and 260 tax terms from the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh inscriptions, respectively. Numerous nayakas in Vijayanagara state were allotted territory and served as administrators for the state. Based on the number of nayakas found in inscriptions, this system was in use from the latter part of the fifteenth century until the early seventeenth century. Regarding the origin of the system, research indicates that Prataparudra II Kakatiya state employed a system similar to the Nayaka system.

◆ *Tiers of tax-levying*

Based on their topographical and historical distribution, we can conclude that the three most significant taxes imposed by the Vijayanagara kingdom were *kanikkai* and *sunkalsungam*. These taxes are evident in all three regions and span all the sub periods of Vijayanagara rule. However, we can identify three distinct tiers of tax-levying authority in Vijayanagara: the king, the *nayakas* and the *nattavars*. However, it is not an easy effort to categorise all individual taxes into groups according to various levels of authority. *Jodi* and *sulavari* can be categorised as the taxes at the king's level, for it was the king who primarily remitted them. The nayakas appear to have managed or been involved at all levels of tax levying. Numerous inscriptions reveal that the king gave nayakas orders to cease imposing *jodi* and *sulavari* on temples. However, in the South Arcot district, there exist multiple inscriptions (sixteenth-century) in which the *nattavar* removed the tax that the previous *nattavars* had imposed on the Kanmala community and vowed to uphold their decision to the king, the *nayaka* and his local agent.

◆ *Conflict between king and nayakas*

There emerged conflict between the king and the nayakas during the Vijayanagara period because the kings constantly moved the nayakas from one region to another to prevent them from becoming local authorities. On the other hand, the nayakas substantially expanded their strength after the battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi. Big nayakas, such as Thanjavur, Senji and Madurai Nayakas in Tamil Nadu and Ikkeri Nayaka on the western coast of the Deccan, emerged in some peripheral areas. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Vijayanagara was finally destroyed by the uprising of some of these nayakas and the northern invasion of Bijapur and Golconda.

Summarised Overview

The Vijayanagara Kingdom, established around 1340 along the Tungabhadra River, emerged as a significant medieval South Indian state primarily in response to incursions from the Khalji Sultans of Delhi. The founders, Bukka and Harihara, are often linked to the Hoysala ruler Vira Ballala III; after the sacking of Dvarasamudram, they founded Vijayanagara to protect southern Karnataka. Alternative theories, such as those proposed by N. Venkataramanayya, suggest that Bukka and Harihara held positions under Kakatiya Prataparudra and were captured during the Tughlaq army's conquest of Warangal. Their eventual return to Hinduism, guided by the influential religious leader Madhavacharya (Vidyaranya), marked a significant shift towards establishing a Hindu state. Hermann Kulke critiques the narrative of Vidyaranya's early involvement, arguing that his influence only became prominent later, around 1374-75, when he was appointed head of the Sringeri Matha. This narrative may have been shaped in response to changing royal patronage from Saivism to Vaishnavism during the reign of Krishnadevaraya.

The study of the Vijayanagara Kingdom gained momentum with Robert Sewell's publication, *A Forgotten Empire* (1900), followed by significant contributions from historians such as Krishnaswami Aiyangar, Nilakanta Sastri, N. Venkataramanayya, and T. V. Mahalingam. Sources from the period, including accounts by Fernao Nuniz, a Portuguese merchant, highlight the nayakas' roles in administration and military obligations. They managed territories, collected taxes and were responsible for maintaining a military presence. This system of governance has been likened to medieval Western European feudalism, though historian Burton Stein argued that most nayakas operated as local chiefs rather than direct representatives of royal authority, emphasising kinship and caste dynamics.

The relationship between the king and nayakas was characterised by mutual loyalty and obligation, often documented in inscriptions that highlight their contributions to the kingdom's revenue collection. Taxation was an essential duty of the nayakas and various inscriptions detail the taxes levied, indicating that the kings and nayakas worked together in tax management.

The *nayaka* system, believed to have been influenced by earlier Kakatiya practices, became increasingly contentious as the kings attempted to prevent them from gaining local power by regularly relocating them. Following the Battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi in 1565, the nayakas expanded their influence, leading to conflicts that ultimately contributed to the decline of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, due to their uprisings and external pressures from the Bijapur and Golconda Sultanates in the seventeenth century.

Assignments

1. Discuss the economic responsibilities of the Nayakas in terms of tax collection and revenue management. How did they sustain their regions economically?
2. Discuss the role of Harihara I and Bukka Raya in establishing the Vijayanagara Kingdom.
3. Explain the political relationship between the Nayakas and the central authority of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. How did this relationship evolve over time?
4. Analyse the relations of Vijayanagara with neighbouring kingdoms, such as the Bahmani Sultanate.
5. How have the cultural contributions of the empire, such as in literature, architecture and arts influenced present-day South India?

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Suggested Reading

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Post -Vijayanagara States

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner would be able to:

- ◆ gain insight into the nature of Post Vijayanagara States
- ◆ understand the role of Nayakas in South India
- ◆ analyse the significance of the *Nayaka* family in Madurai, Thanjavur, Senji, and Ikkeri

Background

In this unit, we will discuss the phase of the post Vijayanagara period. The Nayakas were significant regional military leaders and administrators in South India, particularly during the late medieval and early modern periods, especially in the context of the Vijayanagara Kingdom. Emerging as local chieftains, the Nayakas played a crucial role in the governance and military organisation of their territories, often holding power in regions such as Tamil Nadu and parts of Karnataka.

Initially, the Nayakas were originally given power over particular territories and were tasked with upholding law and order, collecting taxes and protecting the king's interests there. They were initially chosen by the Vijayanagara ruler. They established a government like a feudal society, commanding their armed forces and serving as the king's delegates. Particularly with the fall of the Vijayanagara Kingdom after the Battle of Rakshasi Tangadi in 1565, this arrangement allowed them to solidify control and autonomy. Many *Nayaka* families became independent rulers and formed their dynasties when the central authority collapsed. Examples of these families are the *Nayaka* family in Madurai, Thanjavur, Senji and Ikkeri. During their reigns, South India's cultural landscape was greatly influenced by their support of literature, art and architecture. The Nayakas left an extensive mark in the areas they ruled, influencing social structures, cultural practices and political dynamics that formed South Indian history, even though their eventual decline was brought about by internal disputes and external invasions.

Keywords

Rakshasi Tangadi, *Nayaka*, *Palaiyakaran*, *Poligars*, Ottoman Retreat, Portuguese Trade



Discussion

2.3.1 Nayaka States

◆ *Nayaka Dominance*

This unit will focus on the powerful nayaka dominance in the seventeenth century in Madurai, Thanjavur and Senji in the Tamil country, as well as in Ikkeri in the Kannada country. Although there have been groundbreaking studies on each of these nayaka lineages, general histories of India in the past rarely acknowledged the nayakas, seeing the period from 1565 (the Battle of Rakshasi Tangadi) to 1761 (the rise of Hyder Ali) as something like to a black hole in south Indian history. However, two recent publications that recognise the significance of the nayakas discuss the spirit of their rule and the period. ‘Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamilnadu’, by V. Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1992), and ‘Tidings of the King: A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Rayavacakamu’, by Phillip B. Wagoner (1993). It should be mentioned that Richard Eaton had recently spoken about a related topic.

◆ *Legitimacy of Madurai Nayaka*

Rayavacakamu (‘Tidings of the King’) is a work of historical prose fiction written in Telugu during the 17th century, that narrates the political affairs of Vijayanagara state through the eyes of an agent of a Madurai Nayaka who claims to have visited Krishnadevaraya’s court and even quotes some of his “utterances.” Historians have even used this work for years, believing it to be an authentic account of past events. However, according to Wagoner, the true intention of this composition was to establish the legitimacy of the Madurai Nayaka, whose court it is believed to have been written, by connecting the nayaka with Krishnadevaraya. According to Wagoner, the Aravidu dynasty of Vijayanagara had already lost its fame because it had lost its sacred city, Vijayanagara, in 1565, even though the legitimacy of the rule was recognised (at the time *Rayavacakamu* was authored) as being granted by a higher authority. As a result, to establish Madurai as a genuinely legitimate successor state, the Madurai Nayakas had to cede their rule to Krishnadeva, who was regarded as the greatest Vijayanagara ruler.

◆ *Legitimacy through political authority*

The manner a dynasty attempted to gain legitimacy for its rule is the crucial element to consider in this situation. Divine lineage and *dana* (gifts) assumed greater importance during the Pallava period and after and the states before the Pallavas relied on Brahmanas for legitimacy through Vedic rituals. According to Wagoner, during the nayaka period, on the other hand, it was the authority of a great political power that gave legitimacy to lesser political powers. It is



believed that Vijayanagara sought legitimacy from a Delhi Sultan to establish its authority by connecting Harihara and Bukka with the Sultan who sent them back to rule Karnataka.

◆ *Nayaka Succession Conflict*

The authors of 'Symbols of Substance' discussed the "ethos" that may be found in the three nayaka powers of the Tamil country. Let us take a quick look at the political histories of the Ikkeri Nayakas and the three powers. When Vijayanagara's Aravidu king Venkata II passed away in 1614 CE without leaving a successor, it sparked a severe succession debate that lasted for a long time. Sriranga, Venkata's nephew, was not considered deserving of the throne by the people, but Velugoti Yachama, a powerful vassal with his estate (*amaram*) in the Chengalpattu region, supported him. Gobburu Jagga Raya, another powerful vassal who owned an estate in the southwest of the Nellore area and was the brother of Venkata's favourite queen. Jagga slaughtered Sriranga and his family except one son (Rama), who managed to escape from prison. Many of Jagga's rival vassals sided with Yachama and supported Rama, the slaughter survivor, following this incident. All three of the major nayakas in the south were involved when the inevitable battle broke out between Jagga and Yachama.

◆ *Nayaka alliances and Toppur conflict*

Yachama was supported by Raghunatha Nayaka of Thanjavur, whereas Jagga was backed by Muttu Virappa Nayaka of Madurai and Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka of Senji. At the end of 1616, a major conflict occurred at Toppur, a village close to the Grand Anicut on the southern bank of the Kaveri River. After defeating Jagga and his supporters, presumably Venkata's son was taken as a prisoner. Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka lost all of his forts except Senji, his headquarters. Even though Etiraja, Jagga's younger brother, continued the conflict with Rama and Yachama, by 1620 a strange reconciliation had occurred between Rama and Etiraja. The threat from Golconda and Bijapur in the east had intensified as a result of this civil war, but the Vijayanagara king's rule was partially restored by 1630.

◆ *Sources of Nayaka History*

There are numerous materials available that discuss this period in history. We can assume from the literary works produced in the nayaka courts that the nayakas in the south or at least the three Nayaka families of Madurai, Thanjavur and Senji, were completely independent of the Vijayanagara kings' rule, having established their kingdoms beginning in the latter part of the sixteenth century. According to the Portuguese and Dutch accounts at the beginning of the seventeenth century, even these powerful nayakas paid tribute to the Vijayanagara rulers. In 1608, during the rule of Venkata II, a Jesuit account states that the Thanjavur and Madurai Nayakas paid their tributes in his court, however, the Senji Nayaka did not.

Venkata II, therefore, sent an armed contingent to Senji to obtain the payment and the Senji Nayaka also submitted. The Jesuit report mentions arrears paid after the war, but even after the civil war, the nayakas seem to have paid tributes, which in some cases accounted for a quarter of their revenues.

◆ *Nayaka Genealogies*

Genealogies of the Ikkeri Nayaka family in Karnataka and the three nayaka families in Tamilnadu are available to us from historical inscriptions and literary sources. The Nayakas of Madurai originate from Nagama, the Nayakas of Thanjavur from Chevvappa, the Nayakas of Senji from Vaiyappa and the Nayakas of Ikkeri from Chaudappa. These four nayakas, who established their respective dynasties in the first half of the sixteenth century, were designated as nayakas by either Krishnadevaraya or Achutadevaraya. The nayakas of these four families stood in their separate regions without being moved even though nayakas were frequently moved throughout the reigns of the two strong kings, Krishnadevaraya and Achyuta Devaraya. They consolidated their power in the second half of the sixteenth century, particularly following the battle of 1565, but they appear to have stayed obedient to the king as nayakas in charge of governing their domains up to the time of the civil war.

◆ *Sriranga III's exile and return*

According to a Srimushnam inscription from 1584 CE, Bhuvanagiri sirmai was Senji Kondama Nayaka's (son of Krishnappa) *nayakattanam*. But after being overthrown by the rebel nayakas of Madurai and Senji, Sriranga III, who succeeded to the Vijayanagara throne in 1642 CE, lived at Thanjavur for a while. Following Thanjavur's defeat by Bijapur in 1649 CE, he fled to Mysore, which was ruled by the Wodeyars. But a few years later, because of the conflict between Golkonda and Bijapur and the Mughal attacks on both the Sultanates, he returned to the Carnatic (Coromandel) and briefly recovered Chandragiri. After living in the Carnatic for a while, he fled to Karnataka, as deceived once more by his vassals, the Nayakas of Thanjavur, Madurai and Senji. This time, he turned into an ally of Sivappa Nayaka of Ikkeri, who recognised Sriranga as his nominal master. He was the last ruler of Vijayanagara, even though by the middle of the seventeenth century, it had ceased to exist as a *de facto* kingdom. The nayaka period in Senji was essentially ended by Golconda and Bijapur, while Thanjavur, Madurai, Mysore and Ikkeri continued to be independent for a brief period.

◆ *Integration of Ikkeri into Mysore*

In 1676, Maratha rule was eventually established in Thanjavur with the help of Bijapur's invasion, led by Venkoji (Ekoji), a Maratha general. The Madurai Nayaka polity reached its pinnacle of glory under Tirumalai Nayaka's tenure (c. 1623–1599), which ended in 1732 with an attack by the Nawab of Arcot. In 1763, Hyder Ali



integrated the Ikkeri into Mysore. In the seventeenth century, petty chieftains were employed by nayakas and other political forces in Tamil Nadu and the Deccan for local administration and highway or forest security.

◆ *Role of Palaiyakaran*

The chieftains went by the name *palaiyakaran* in Tamil (*palegara* in Kannada, *palegadu* in Telugu, and *poligar* in English). They established authority in their domain, known as *palayam* (*polam* in English). For instance, the Marava chieftains known as the *Sethupathis* created a strong *palayam* in Ramanathapuram to serve the Madurai Nayaka Poligars in Tamil Nadu. The Poligars were primarily devoted to their master, one of the three Nayakas and fought alongside him against the northern invaders.

◆ *Decline of Nayakas*

The Mughals ruled over the southern region in the eighteenth century, through the hands of Nawab of Arcot and Nizam of Hyderabad. Even though the nayakas that the poligars had served in Tamil Nadu virtually vanished after being overthrown and replaced by the Nawab, Marathas and Mysore. Later the poligars became virtually independent local authorities in the Carnatic and Mysore Wars. Some of them turned against the English, who fought against them and wanted a portion of their revenue.

◆ *Significance of money*

The three writers of 'Symbols of Substance' claim that around this period, a new ethos defined by "money," a liquid kind of property distinct from "land," emerged in society, especially in the courts of the nayakas. The Nayakas and their subjects were very interested in money. This obsession with money may have contributed to the rebellion of Nagama Nayaka of Madurai against Krishnadevaraya, which caused a crisis at the very beginning of the Madurai Nayaka polity. The writers use a variety of accounts to highlight the significance of money in the seventeenth century.

◆ *Reversal of the Caste system*

During this period, people's inherent qualities were highly valued in addition to their imposed values, such as caste, ancestry and status. Vishvanatha Nayaka's cunning, determination and bravery, which kept his father Nagama Nayaka out of threat and allowed him to seize control of Madurai, are excellent examples of this. By highlighting the nayakas' Sudra ancestry, this point pertains to the reversal of the caste system. The three writers support this claim with numerous quotations from published works, pointing out that other recently considered virtues included the enjoyment of life's more sensual pleasures like sex and food.

It is more likely that this new ethos spontaneously spread throughout southern India due to its involvement with the global economy and the cultural influences that followed, even though it is possible that it originated from the original culture of the nayaka

◆ *Advent of Europeans*

immigrants and developed further because of their interaction with the Tamil society. In the seventeenth century, Europeans also established bases on the south Indian coast and got involved in local politics. The Portuguese made their economic hold into India. In any event, more research is encouraged, given the significant shifts in south Indian culture that took place throughout the nayaka period.

◆ *Portuguese arrival and European control*

2.3.2 Intervention of European Naval Powers

In 1498, Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut with two ships, guided by Gujarati pilots from the African coast. This event is often considered a turning point, marking the beginning of European control over the Indian Ocean. As a result, Indian traders faced setbacks and over time, the Europeans established their dominance in India and nearby regions. However, this view has been questioned by both Indian and Western historians, especially after World War II, when European colonial rule ended in many parts of the world.

◆ *European growth and trade expansion*

Before diving into the impact of the Portuguese on India, it is important to understand why they came here in the first place. During this time, Europe was experiencing rapid growth. More land was being used for farming, forests were being cleared and new agricultural tools, like improved ploughs and better crop rotation were helping to increase food production. This led to the growth of towns and a rise in both local and international trade.

◆ *Spices needed*

Since the days of the Roman Empire, Europeans had been eager to get their hands on goods from the East, like silk from China and spices from India and Southeast Asia. As Europe's economy recovered, the demand for these goods, especially pepper and other spices, increased. Spices were crucial for preserving and flavouring meat, especially during the winter when cattle were slaughtered due to a lack of fodder.

◆ *Turkish monopoly and European challenge*

Pepper from India and Southeast Asia made its way to Europe via the Levant, Egypt and the Black Sea ports, using a mix of overland and sea routes. However, the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century brought these regions under Turkish control. When the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 and later took over Syria and Egypt, they established a monopoly on the spice trade. Although the Turks allowed trade, their control over major trade routes posed a challenge for European merchants.

The growing power of the Turkish navy, which dominated the eastern Mediterranean, also worried the Europeans. Cities like Venice and Genoa, which had been important players in the spice trade, were too small to stand up to the Turks and Venice quickly



◆ *European response to trade threat*

sought a deal with them. This left Spain and Portugal, supported by northern European countries and aided by Genoese knowledge and expertise, to take on the challenge. They began searching for a direct sea route to India, which kickstarted the era of naval exploration.

◆ *Columbus's discovery of America*

This period also saw the “discovery” of America by Christopher Columbus, a Genoese sailor. However, this was not the first time someone had reached America – the Norsemen and Indigenous peoples had already been there long before. In this context, Prince Henry of Portugal, known as Henry the Navigator, played a major role in pushing forward these explorations and opening new sea routes to the East.

◆ *Trade dominance and religious expansion*

◆ *Exploration of Africa*

From 1418, Prince Henry of Portugal began sending ships annually to explore Africa's western coast, aiming to find a sea route to India. His two main goals were: first, to displace the Arabs and his European rivals, especially the Venetians, from the lucrative eastern trade; and second, to counter the expanding power of the Turks and Arabs by converting the non Christians of Africa and Asia to Christianity. These goals were mutually reinforcing, with religious motives backing economic ambitions. In 1453, the Pope endorsed Portugal's actions, granting them perpetual rights to any land they discovered beyond Cape Nor in Africa, provided they converted the local people.

◆ *Technological innovations*

◆ *New trade links*

In 1488, Bartholomew Diaz successfully navigated around the Cape of Good Hope, laying the groundwork for direct trade between Europe and India. This was made possible by important technological advances like the mariner's compass and the astrolabe, the latter widely used by Arabs, Indians and others for navigation. While European ships were not necessarily superior to vessels like Chinese junks, their spirit of enterprise was unmatched. This adventurous attitude grew out of the Renaissance, which promoted independent thinking and encouraged advances in technology, such as gunpowder, printing and metallurgy, resulting in better quality firearms.

◆ *Vasco da Gama's arrival*

◆ *Slow trade growth due to the Portuguese monopoly*

◆ *Portuguese naval supremacy*

Vasco da Gama's arrival in Calicut in 1498 marked a new era. He was aided by Gujarati pilots but faced hostility from the Arab merchants in the region. However, the Zamorin, the local ruler, welcomed the Portuguese and permitted them to trade in spices. The profits from Gama's expedition were enormous—sixty times the cost of the trip. Yet, the growth of direct trade between India and Europe was slow, mainly because the Portuguese government maintained a strict monopoly, restricting trade to royal interests and excluding both European and Asian competitors, as well as private Portuguese merchants.

- ◆ *Defeat of Egypt-Gujarat fleet*
- ◆ *Indian Ocean control*

Meanwhile, the Sultan of Egypt, who was alarmed by Portuguese dominance, sent a fleet towards India, with support from Gujarat. Although initially successful, the Portuguese eventually defeated this combined fleet in 1509. All these factors culminated in the establishment of Portugal's naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean. This victory allowed the Portuguese to expand their operations into the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, securing their control over major maritime routes.

- ◆ *Albuquerque's strategy*

Albuquerque, who succeeded as governor of Portuguese territories in the east, pursued a policy of dominating eastern commerce by building forts at strategic locations across Asia and Africa. He believed that a strong navy alone was insufficient to secure lasting power. His strategy combined naval strength with fortified positions, ensuring control over both trade and diplomatic relations in the region.

- ◆ *Growth of Portuguese domination*
- ◆ *Goa becomes base*

Albuquerque initiated a significant shift in Portuguese policy by capturing Goa from Bijapur in 1510. Goa's location was ideal due to its natural harbour and fort, giving the Portuguese control over the Malabar trade and the ability to monitor Deccan rulers' movements. Its proximity to Gujarat's seaports also enhanced its influence. Goa soon became the main hub of Portuguese political and commercial activities in the East. Furthermore, the Portuguese expanded their hold on the mainland near Goa and disrupted Bijapur's Sea trade by attacking the ports of Danda-Rajouri and Dabhol.

- ◆ *Expansion beyond Goa*

From their stronghold in Goa, the Portuguese fortified their position further by setting up forts in Colombo (Sri Lanka), Achin (Sumatra) and Malacca, which controlled access between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra. They also established a station on Socotra Island, at the mouth of the Red Sea. Although they could not capture Aden, keeping the Red Sea out of their reach, they secured a fort at Ormuz, which commanded the entrance to the Persian Gulf.

- ◆ *Turkish rivalry emerges*

However, Portuguese success was not without its challenges. Externally, they faced threats from the Turks, who sometimes allied with Arab and Indian forces. After taking control of Syria, Egypt and Arabia, the Turks extended their influence into Eastern Europe, even threatening Vienna in 1529. As the Turkish power grew along the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, a conflict with the Portuguese over dominance in the western Indian Ocean seemed inevitable. The Turkish leadership, recognising their naval disadvantage, sought to reinforce their strength at sea to rival the Portuguese.

Concerned about the Portuguese impact on Gujarat's trade and coastal security, the Sultan of Gujarat sought an alliance with the Ottoman Empire. This led to a continuous diplomatic exchange



- ◆ *Turkish-Gujarat alliance*
- ◆ *Repulsion of the Portuguese attack*

between the two. The Turks pushed the Portuguese out of the Red Sea, and in 1529, a fleet led by Sulaiman Rais was sent to assist Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. Turkish officials, who were given Indian names, were appointed as governors of Surat and Diu. One of them, Rumi Khan, became renowned for his expertise in artillery. In 1531, the Portuguese, after conspiring with local officials, launched an attack on Daman and Diu. Rumi Khan, the Ottoman commander, successfully repelled them. Despite this setback, the Portuguese managed to construct a fort at Chaul, further down the coast.

- ◆ *Mughal threat response*
- ◆ *Failed negotiations*

After the Gujarat - Turkish alliance started to take form, Gujarat faced a larger threat from the Mughals. Humayun launched an attack and to counter this, Bahadur Shah ceded the island of Bassein to the Portuguese. A defensive and offensive pact against the Mughals was formed. It allowed the Portuguese to build a fort at Diu, thus securing a foothold in Gujarat. However, Bahadur Shah quickly regretted his concessions to the Portuguese. After driving the Mughals out of Gujarat, he sought aid from the Ottoman Sultan and attempted to curb Portuguese advances at Diu. However, during tense negotiations, a scuffle broke out. It resulted in the death of the Portuguese governor and Bahadur Shah's drowning in 1536.

- ◆ *Ottoman reluctance*
- ◆ *Turkish siege fails*

Even though the Ottomans opposed the Portuguese on religious grounds, they did not challenge their dominance in the Persian Gulf or beyond. The Turkish navy, while formidable in the Mediterranean, never seriously contested Portuguese control of Indian waters, despite their military advancements in artillery and naval tactics. The Turks made their largest naval push against the Portuguese in 1536 with a fleet of 45 galleons and 20,000 men, including elite janissaries. Led by the elderly Sulaiman Pasha, the fleet besieged Diu in 1538. However, due to arrogance and the withdrawal of Gujarati support, the Turks retreated after a two-month siege when news of a powerful Portuguese fleet arrived.

- ◆ *Final Ottoman retreat*

Turkish opposition to the Portuguese lasted for two more decades. In 1551, Peri Rais, with help from the Zamorin of Calicut, attacked Portuguese forts at Muscat and Ormuz. The Portuguese, in turn, fortified their hold by acquiring Daman. A final Ottoman attempt under Ali Rais in 1554 failed, and by 1566, the Ottomans and Portuguese agreed to divide the spice trade. Thus, they ended their rivalry in the Indian waters.

2.3.2.1 Influence of Portuguese on Indian Society, Economy and Polity

The Portuguese, though dominant in naval power, struggled to maintain control over the vast Indian Ocean. They aimed

◆ *Portuguese trade monopoly*

to monopolise the trade of specific items, such as pepper, arms, ammunition and war horses, declaring them royal monopolies. All other trade required permits from Portuguese officials. Furthermore, ships trading in these areas were forced to pass by Goa to pay customs duties. However, the Portuguese faced difficulty enforcing these restrictions, as their efforts clashed with long-standing traditions of open trade in Asian waters.

◆ *Trade enforcement conflict*

The Portuguese enforced their rules through aggressive actions, such as searching ships and seizing those who did not comply. This often led to conflict, and the rigid enforcement of these rules strained relations with local traders. While some ships started carrying cannons for protection, these measures were more defensive against pirates rather than the Portuguese. Ultimately, the Portuguese lost more on land than they gained at sea, as their practices were incompatible with the established Asian trading networks.

◆ *Failed trade monopoly*

Despite their efforts, the Portuguese were unable to disrupt the well-established trading systems in Asia. Arab and Gujarati traders continued to dominate key markets, especially in textiles, spices and other valuable goods. The Portuguese only managed to monopolise the spice trade to Europe for a short period and by the end of the sixteenth century, trade routes through the Levant and the Red Sea were still functioning. Mughal and Safavid empires supported overland trade, while Gujaratis found alternative sea routes that bypassed Portuguese control.

◆ *Opened new trade routes*

Goa, although a major Portuguese base, never surpassed Indian ports like Cambay or Surat in importance. However, the Portuguese disrupted trade along the Malabar coast and preyed on Bengal's Sea routes. On the positive side, the Portuguese opened new trade routes to Japan, bringing copper and silver to India. They also established a trade connection with the Philippines, exchanging Indian textiles for South American silver. These ventures showed how naval power could be used to both hinder existing trade and open new opportunities.

◆ *Limited cultural exchange*

According to Satish Chandra, the medieval historian, the Portuguese failed to introduce significant European scientific or technological advancements to India. He argues that it was partly due to their limited exposure to the Renaissance and the later dominance of conservative Catholic views led by the Jesuits. However, they did facilitate the introduction of new agricultural products like potatoes, tobacco, maize and peanuts from Central America, though these crops took time to become widespread in India.



◆ *Failure of
Deccan coalition*

Following the defeat of Vijayanagara in 1565 at Banihatti, the Deccan states saw an opportunity to challenge Portuguese dominance on the coast. In 1570, the Sultan of Bijapur, Ali Adil Shah, allied with the Sultan of Ahmadnagar and the Zamorin of Calicut attempted to attack Portuguese strongholds. Despite their combined efforts, the Portuguese, strengthened by their navy, successfully defended their positions, maintaining control over the Deccan coast and the seas.

Summarised Overview

This unit examines the rise of powerful nayakas in the seventeenth century across regions like Madurai, Thanjavur, Senji and Ikkeri. *Rayavacakamu*, a Telugu historical fiction from the 17th century, narrates political events in Vijayanagara through the perspective of a Madurai Nayaka.

The genealogies of these nayakas indicate their origins and status as significant dynasties within the region, all of which trace their titles back to the Vijayanagara rulers Krishnadevaraya or Achyuta Devaraya in the early sixteenth century. The nayakas of four prominent families maintained their distinct territories and power during the reigns of Krishnadevaraya and Achyuta Devaraya, particularly consolidating their influence in the second half of the sixteenth century after the Battle of 1565. They remained subordinate to the Vijayanagara rulers while governing their domains until the civil wars emerged.

An inscription from 1584 highlights the role of Senji Kondama Nayaka. However, after being overthrown by rebels from Madurai and Senji, Sriranga III, who ascended to the Vijayanagara throne in 1642, briefly resided in Thanjavur before fleeing to Mysore after its defeat by Bijapur in 1649. His return to the Carnatic was prompted by conflicts among Golconda, Bijapur and Mughal incursions. Ultimately, Sriranga became allied with Sivappa Nayaka of Ikkeri, despite the decline of Vijayanagara as a political entity. The nayaka period ended in Senji due to the rise of Golconda and Bijapur, while Thanjavur, Madurai, Mysore and Ikkeri maintained brief independence. In the eighteenth century, the Mughals asserted dominance over the South through the Nawab of Arcot and Nizam of Hyderabad. The previous nayaka rulers faded away and the Poligars evolved into independent local authorities amid the Carnatic and Mysore Wars. Some even opposed the British, resisting their efforts to collect revenues.

Assignments

1. Analyse the rise of successor states like the Nayakas of Tanjore and Madurai and the Wodeyars of Mysore.
2. Discuss the Portuguese, British and Dutch influence in South Indian culture.
3. Discuss the role of the Nayaka system during the Vijayanagara Kingdom. How did it contribute to the administration of the Kingdom?
4. Describe the changes in caste relations, urbanisation and the role of local chieftains or Nayakas.
5. Investigate the military and diplomatic strategies of Nayakas in dealing with neighbouring powers and European traders.

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1. Karashima, Noboru, *A Concise History of South India, Issues and Interpretations*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.
2. Veluthat, Kesavan, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Suggested Reading

1. Karashima, Noboru (ed.), *A Concise History of South India*, Oxford University Press, 2014.
2. Sastri, K.A. Nilakanta, *A History of South India*, Oxford University Press, London, 1968.
3. Stein, Burton, *The New Cambridge History of India- Vijayanagara*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

Structure of Society and Economy

BLOCK-03



Brahmadeyams and Devadanams

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ examine the land grants to the temples and brahmins; *devadanam* and *brahmadeyam*
- ◆ evaluate the role of temples in South India
- ◆ understand the *Vellanvagai* villages and *Tankuru* settlements

Background

A complex interplay of agricultural practices, social hierarchies and regional variations shaped the economy's structure and land relations in pre-modern South India. Land ownership and control were significant determinants of power and status within society, often divided among a hierarchy of landlords, peasants and labourers. This relationship was further complicated by caste dynamics, where social stratification influenced access to resources and land. Central to this were the concepts of *Brahmadeyam* and *Devadanam*, two land tenure systems that shaped agrarian practices and land ownership. *Brahmadeyam* referred to lands granted to brahmins/ brahmanas, often for religious or educational purposes, fostering a system where agricultural production was intertwined with religious patronage. In contrast, *Devadanam* involved lands dedicated to temples, thereby establishing a symbiotic relationship between agrarian productivity and spiritual offerings. These land relations not only influenced economic activities but also determined social hierarchies, as land ownership was a critical factor in the power dynamics of pre-modern South Indian society. The study of *Vellanvagai* villages and *Tankuru* settlements reveals the intricate interplay of religion, governance and economy in shaping pre-modern South India's landscape, with local chieftains playing a crucial role in land distribution and agricultural practices. Understanding these structures provides insight into the region's historical economic landscape and its enduring legacy on contemporary land relations.



Keywords

Brahmadeyams, Devadanams, Land Grants, Vellanvagai Villages, Tankuru Settlements, Temples, Sabha

Discussion

◆ Tradition of land donation

The Indian tradition of land donation, which was popular between 700 and 1200 CE, increased the rulers' resources and political influence. The system originated in the Ganga valley, spread to northern Deccan and Andhra and then to eastern and western India. South India also experienced land grants between the 8th and 9th centuries. By the 13th century, the land-grant system had become a common feature throughout the Indian subcontinent. Land grants covered not only land rights but also human resources such as peasants and artisans.

◆ Land grants: religious and secular awards

◆ Gifts consolidated power and agrarian base

Land grants in ancient India were divided into religious and secular awards, with ruling dynasties initiating spiritual gifts such as *Brahmadeya*, *Devadana*, and *Agrahara* or *Mangalam*, which were then followed by chiefs, officials and feudatories. *Brahmadeya* grants land to brahmins, whereas *Agrahara* or *Mangalam* provides tax-free villages for Brahmin resettlement in north and south India. *Devadana* donates land to temples, monasteries and other religious institutions. These institutions were critical to the development of the agricultural base, the consolidation of state power, the peasantisation of Shudras and social differentiation.

◆ Brahmanical settlements enhanced caste stratification

◆ Devadanas integrated peasants and tribals

Brahmanical settlements, such as *brahmadeya*, *agrahara* and *mangalam*, were primarily owned by brahmins. These settlements were stratified and marked by private ownership, with some villages grouped to form a *brahmadeya* or *agrahara*. These settlements contributed significantly to the growing peasantisation of Shudras and other lower castes, with some small brahmana donees working as peasant cultivators in the absence of tenants. In most regions, Brahmanical settlements constituted only a portion of the total population. *Devadanas*, or land grants to religious institutions, served as agricultural settlements that integrated peasant and tribal communities. Temples leased land to tenants in exchange for crop shares, which were overseen by both brahmana and non-brahmana elites. Non-brahmana settlements' lands were administered by temple executive committees.



3.1.1 Brahmadeyams

◆ *Burton Stein: alliance between brahmin settlers and local peasantry*

The *brahmadeyams* were groups of brahmin settlers in peasant localities who were granted property and formed land-owning corporations. Historical literature in early medieval South India is abundantly devoted to the *brahmadeyams* and their *sabhas*, leading to a significant exaggeration of their importance. This has resulted in the neglect of other groups like the *ur*, *nadu* and *nagaram*, which are often overlooked in the discourse. Burton Stein introduces the concept of an alliance between brahmin settlers and the local peasantry, but this idea is not entirely valid. He also introduces the individual brahmin living in ordinary peasant settlements, who had minimal political role except in military or civil functions. Instead, sources focus on corporate bodies like the *sabha* and its ancillaries, such as the *gana* and *parishad*, which are more connected to social and political organisations in the localities.

◆ *Temple-centred settlements*

The corporate bodies of *brahmadeyams*, landowning groups in temple-centred settlements, established themselves in the fertile Palar, Pennar, Kaveri and Vaigai basins by the seventh century during the Pallava and early Pandya periods. But there were differences of opinion among the scholars regarding the factors responsible for this growth. According to some, this phenomenon is caused by a higher level of civilisation such as organisational ability, new technology, and so on.

◆ *Brahmin settlements filled power void*

◆ *Peasant pockets lacked cohesive force*

Before the establishment of Pallava, Pandya, Chera and Chola states, peasant settlements were common in fertile river valleys. The organisation of these pockets of agrarian settlements surrounded by non-agrarian land and people remains unknown. Contemporary sources suggested that these pockets were vulnerable to marauding tribes from less settled and underdeveloped regions, as there was no cohesive force to integrate peasant communities. This context is responsible for the emergence of Brahmin settlements in agrarian tracts, which were endowed with superior land rights and command over peasant cultivation.

◆ *Pulankurichi marks early brahmin landholding*

The Pulankurichi inscription, discovered around the fifth century CE, is the earliest evidence of a Brahmin settlement or *brahmadeyam*. It describes the creation of a new settlement of brahmin landholders and their *kutis*, mentioning various types of land, the superior right (*miyata*) of the *brahmadeyakkilavar* over it, and the subordinate rights (*karankilamai*) of the settler-tenants.

Though copper plate records granting land to brahmins in the Pandyan kingdom date only from the eighth century CE, it has been demonstrated that *brahmadeyams* existed in that region in a much earlier period with the help of place names figuring in inscriptions.

◆ *Velvikudi copper plate of Nedunjadaiyan*

The Velvikudi copper plate of Nedunjadaiyan (767-811 CE) is the earliest known record of the Pandyas. It renews an earlier grant of the same village given to an ancestor of the donee. The practice of granting land to brahmins and establishing *brahmadeyams* predates Nedunjadaiyan, regardless of the accuracy of the record.

◆ *Early land grants show cultural shifts*

The Pallava kingdom in the north received similar land grants in the south. The earliest records of such grants are found in the Mayidavolu and Hirehadagalli plates, both in Prakrit and dating to the third or fourth century CE. Sanskrit charters from Pallava rulers in the Andhra region serve the same purpose as later records. During Simhavarman's reign, bilingual charters in Sanskrit and Tamil began recording land grants to brahmins, except for the Pallankoil plates, which granted land to a Jain teacher. The transition from Prakrit-Sanskrit charters to bilingual Sanskrit-Tamil records marks a significant shift in the dynasty's geographical location and economic base, possibly indicating the beginning of state formation in the Tondaimandalam region.

◆ *Brahmadeya villages became key settlements*

◆ *Land grants fostered large brahmin communities*

According to the Kuram plates of Paramesvaravarman (669-690 CE), a Shiva temple was consecrated in a pre-existing *brahmadeya* village with 108 Chaturvedi Brahmins. The Unne Guravayapalaiyam plates contain a record from the same ruler who granted a village to a certain Devasharman to improve their longevity and health. Later records, such as the Udayendiram, Pullor, Tandantotam and Pattattajmangalam plates, describe the creation of large settlements with 108 brahmins settled in both Udayacandramangalam and Nayadharamangalam, 214 listed in the surviving parts of the Tandantottam plates settled in Dayamukhamangalam and 16 *brahmins* in Pattattalmangalam.

◆ *Pallavas invited brahmins to settle*

Tandantottam plates mentioned the pre-existing *Brahmadeya*. In the seventh and eighth centuries CE, the Pallava kingdom began inviting outside brahmins to settle in large numbers. By the seventh and eighth centuries CE, the Pallava kingdom had already begun the practice of inviting brahmins from outside and settling them in large settlements. The existence of a larger number of *Brahmadeya* villages is supported by place names in contemporary records, despite the absence of original charters.

By the ninth century, the Chera kingdom on the west coast had established numerous brahmin settlements, preserving the Parasurama tradition alongside those of the Konkan and Kanarese (Canara) coasts. This migration represents a southward migration along the west coast, with the southernmost major settlement in Kerala being the latest. According to the Kannada and Malayalam chronicles *Gramapaddhati* and *Keralotpathi*, the brahmins



◆ *Cheras established brahmin settlements widely*

◆ *Migration linked to Parasurama tradition*

settled in 64 villages between Gokarna and Kanyakumari in the Parasuramakshetra region. The thirty-two settlements on the Kerala coast south of the Chandragiri river can also be identified using epigraphic and literary evidence. The settlements were established by the ninth century, when the later Chera kingdom of Mahodayapuram emerged. The Vazhapalli copper plate of Rajasekhara (circa 812 CE) mentions two *upagramas*, subsidiary settlements of Tiruvalla, a southern *brahmin* settlement in Kerala.

◆ *Brahmins transformed tribal areas into farms*

Kesavan Veluthat stated that immigrant brahmin groups along the west coast most likely settled in undeveloped river valleys in Kerala, establishing their authority and opening up the land for cultivation by converting the local population, which was still tribal, into peasant communities. By the time the Chera state of Mahodayapuram was established, the entire landscape had been covered by a closely knit network of brahmin villages.

◆ *Pallavas inspired Cholas' Brahmin settlements*

◆ *Kaveri valley thrived with Brahmadeyas*

Prior to the emergence of the Vijayalaya line in the mid-nineteenth century, the Chola country had similar experiences. The Tandantottam plates and Pattattalmangalam plates of Nandivarman II Pallavamalla demonstrate the Pallava initiative in establishing large Brahmin settlements in Chola country. Place names such as Simhavishnu Chaturvedimangalam and Videlvidugu Chaturvedimangalam also reflect this. By the time the Cholas settled near Tanjavur, the Kaveri valley was home to numerous prosperous brahmin communities. The later Chola rulers, as evidenced by the Karantai plates of Rajendra I, continued a tradition of land grants, settling up to 1080 brahmins in Tribhuvanamahadevi Chaturvedimangalam, which had already been prevalent in Pallava and Pandya territories.

◆ *Brahmin settlements mastered land control*

These regions' settlements were distinguished by effective land management, control over the peasant population, organisational ability and superior ideological force. Their corporate bodies, known as *sabha* or *mahasabha*, were effective in sustaining and promoting themselves in the new situation, making them the most dynamic and progressive force in contemporary society. As agrarian settlements expanded and tribal populations were transformed into settled peasant communities, brahmanical settlements in agrarian villages emerged as the most active force in contemporary society. Their historical role was reflected in their ability to provide a rational explanation of social organisation.

Jati, a well-known social paradigm in northern India, served as a rationalising principle in the newly formed agrarian society. It represented various shades of land rights and was hierarchically stratified, a concept familiar to the brahmin settlers from

- ◆ *Jati system rationalised land rights*
- ◆ *Brahmins shaped hierarchical society*

Dharamasastra texts. The semi-tribal population, which had been transformed into peasants and occupational groups, was incorporated into a hierarchically organised society as *jatis*. Once the upper classes accepted this rationalising principle, the brahmins, at the top of this hierarchy, were able to dictate the pattern of society.

- ◆ *Temples reinforced stratification ideology*
- ◆ *Bhakti strengthened monarchies' legitimacy*

The rationalised stratification of society received ideological support from religious institutions and movements. Most *brahmadeyams* centred around a temple, which serves as a centre for various social activities. The temple promoted a new ideology through Purana and Ithihasa exposition, art forms, and *bhakti* philosophy. The *varnashrama-dharma* exemplified the principle of social stratification and contributed to its legitimacy. According to Kesavan Veluthat, the brahmin priest and 'kshatriyised' ruler occupied the highest positions in society, strengthening and validating newly established monarchies. This enabled the state, established by the upper classes in a stratified society, to gain legitimacy from these new ideologues. This role may have prompted chieftains and kings to invite more brahmins to settle in their territories.

- ◆ *Ideology outweighed revenue loss*

The fact that this necessitated the loss of a significant portion of the state's revenue should not have been a major deterrent: for one thing, it is unclear in many cases whether the land granted to the brahmins had previously yielded any revenue to the state. Additionally, the ideological legitimacy provided by the settlers to the stratified social order and the state was more significant than the minimal revenue.

3.1.1.1 Taniyur or Tankuru settlements

- ◆ *Taniyurs are independent villages in nadus*

The major *brahmadeyams* in the Chola country are referred to as *taniyurs*, meaning separate villages. Many *taniyurs* are located within a *nadu*, such as Tiruvellarai in Vadavalinadu, Tribhuvanamahadevi Chaturvedimangalam in Vilupparaiyanadu, Rajadhirajachaturvedimangalam, Vīranarayanacaturvedimangalam, and Perumbarrappuliyur in Cuttamali-valanadu. Despite being situated in *nadus*, these villages were completely independent of the *nadus'* jurisdiction. They independently managed revenue and justice without mentioning the *Nadus*, and many agrarian villages were connected to a *Taniyur*. According to Y. Subbarayalu, the powers of the *nadu* have been replaced by the *taniyur's* representative. Perumbarrappuliyur (modern Chidambaram) was not a *brahmadeyam* but controlled by a temple. However, this made no qualitative difference in terms of the *taniyur's* status: instead of the *sabha*, the *mulaparusai* was in charge of administration.



Sabha

◆ *Sabha maintained social control*

Brahmin settlers gained significant social status especially through their control on land and they maintained it through the well-knit organisations like *sabha* or *mahasabha*. The Manur inscription of Maranchadaiyan records a *mahasabha* resolution setting membership qualifications. For instance, it is stated that only children of those who own shares in the village's property, as well as those who are proficient in the *mantrabrahmana* encompassing one *dharma* and have good antecedents, will be eligible for membership in the *sabha*. For each share, only one membership was allowed. The obstruction of *sabha* proceedings was discouraged by imposing a fine on those who obstructed them. However, this record does not reveal the nature of the *sabha's* business or jurisdiction.

◆ *Sabhas managed land and temple assets*

◆ *Kept detailed records of income and expenses*

Two Parantaka inscriptions from Uttaramerur, similar to the Manur record, outline eligibility for various *Sabha* committees (*variya*m), with minor differences in detail. Records from both places emphasise property ownership, educational qualifications, and good conduct. Similar specifications were obtained in an inscription of Rajaraja I from Uttamachola Chaturvedimangalam and Kulottunga III, Talainayar recorded a royal order requiring similar qualifications for the executive committee of the Kulottunga Cholanandinayaka Chaturvedimangalam. The *sabha* was responsible for managing landed property, funds and temple livestock. They collected rent on a regular basis, leased land methodically and kept detailed records of income and expenses. The *sabha* occasionally supervised day-to-day temple operations, including jurisdiction over temple servants ranging from priest to sweeper. Numerous inscriptions from the medieval period in south India refer to the day-to-day operations of these bodies.

◆ *Violating sabha decisions led to social ostracism*

The *sabha's* decisions were followed in a systematic manner, with those who violated them losing their membership, property and suffering societal consequences. Many records compare abrogators of *sabha* decisions to those who have killed cows, fathers, teachers, or engaged in incest with their mothers. Earlier historians regarded the association of violating *sabha* decisions with one of the *mahapatakas*, which were condemned by the *sastra* texts, as a mere moral stricture. According to M. G. S. Narayanan, *mahapatakas* refer to social ostracism, where individuals lose their property and status. The *sabha's* actions demonstrate its determination to prioritise corporate interests over individual interests and idiosyncrasies. The emphasis on full attendance and unanimity can be seen in phrases like *kuzaiyu-tirttukuti* and *avirotattal*. The Dalavaipuram plates acknowledge an earlier *mahasabha* in the area, but no records indicate that the corporate body of brahmins was established through a royal charter.

- ◆ Kerala's rural settlements were dispersed
- ◆ Brahmin settlements followed Dharmasastra rules

The authority behind the constitution of managerial bodies of brahmanical agrarian corporations is clearly evident in the numerous inscriptions of South India. These documents provide information about the organisation, procedure, functioning and follow-up action of managerial bodies such as *sabhas* and their organs such as the *variyaam*, *parishad*, and *gana*, which are responsible for managing temple properties. Kerala, a region in South India, has a distinct pattern of organisation compared to other southern states. The rural settlements in Kerala are dispersed, unlike the nucleated villages found in the rest of the Tamil country. This variation in organisation is attributed to two main factors: the unique ecology of Kerala, which differs from the rest of the Tamil country, and the absence of a strict definition of 'village' in Kerala. The Brahmin settlements in Kerala strictly adhered to *Dharmasastra* rules, including qualifications for membership, attendance in meetings and unanimity in decisions. They were the final links of a long migration chain from the north along the west coast, with a Prakrit-Kannada-Tulu predominance in their traditions. This led to differences in the organisation of the settlements and their influence on society. The Brahmin settlements' character and influence on society are expected to be broad.

- ◆ Brahmin *gramas* were temple-centred in Kerala

The Brahmin *gramas* of Kerala are distinct from the *brahmadeyas* in south India due to their temple-centred nature, the absence of *agraharas*, and the existence of several *upagramas* or subsidiary settlements affiliated with larger, prosperous original settlements. Additionally, parts of royal family estates or local chiefs' estates were granted to major Brahmin settlements like Tiruvalla, Cengannur Airanikkalam, and Avittattur. The tradition in Kerala suggests that the entire brahmin community was represented by four major *gramas* near the capital of the Cheras in Mahodayapuram, namely, Paravur, Mulikkalam, Airanikkalam and Irinjalakkuda. These *gramas* were represented in the capital city by two celibate brahmins, with their seats in the temples of Netiya Tali, Melttali, Kilttali, and Chingapuram Tali. These brahmins were members of the Chera court in the *Nalu Tali*. The traditional account of the foundation of the Chera monarchy in Mahodayapuram suggests that these councilors or *taliyatiris* established Perumal on the throne. This is not supported by records from other parts of south India.

- ◆ Mulikkalam served as a model settlement
- ◆ *Vyavastha* protected temple tenants' rights

Mulikkalam, a major settlement in Kerala, serves as a model for South temple-centred Brahmin settlements throughout Kerala. It was one of the four major Brahmin *gramas* and located near the capital, Mahodayapuram. A *vyavastha*, also known as *Mulikkalakkaccam*, *Mulikkalavyavastai*, *Mulikkalaccavattai*, and *Mulikkalattolukkam*, was mentioned from the end of the ninth century until the last Ceraman Perumal's reign, and is mentioned in records from Pullur to Tirunandikkara. The original text of the *Mulikkalam*



Vyavastha is unknown, but historians believe it was intended to protect temple tenants from the whims of temple trustees. However, a study by M. G. S. Narayanan reveals that these rules and precedents, which were similar to the *sastra* prescriptions, were intended to protect the primary interests of corporate groups of brahmin landlords.

◆ *Brahmins influenced chieftains and kings*

The brahmin community in Kerala, with a will to protect class interests as property owners, had a significant influence on local chieftains and the king. There were more local chieftains claiming kshatriya status, temple establishment was more important, and there were no powerful *nadu* or *nattar* groups as in other parts of south India. Before the Brahmin settlements, peasant agriculture was less developed, which may have contributed to these phenomena.

◆ *Brahmadeyas varied in influence and control*

◆ *Temples were hubs of education and various social groups*

Not all *brahmadeya* settlements in south India were the same. Some settlements, such as Uttaramerur, Manur, Ennayiram, Tribhuvani, Tiruvaduturai, and Tiruvalla, were less populous and prosperous and had less control over the surrounding rural population. The complex nature of these settlements frequently revolved around temples, which were historically significant and served as primary centres of religious and secular education. These temples were also hubs in a complex network of relationships between various social groups, such as traders, artisans and pastoralists. However, this diverse and complex role should not be assumed for all Brahmin settlements in south India, as some were small pockets within their natural surroundings. The complexity of these settlements should not be applied to all Brahmin settlements in south India.

◆ *Brahmadeyams decreased, temples expanded*

◆ *Temples took central position in society*

Temple-centred Brahmin settlements may not have maintained the same influential position as early Chola rule. A record from Uttaramerur shows that when a nearby temple demanded repayment of a loan, the *Mahasabha* of Uttaramerur transferred its share of income from a neighbouring village, Vennakkuttanallur, to the temple. The royal order converted *brahmadeyams* into *vellanvagai* villages and donated them to temples as *devadana*, *tirunamattukkani*, or *tiruvidaiyattam*. The Tiruvalangadu plates and Pandya and Chola records indicate that by this time, the *brahmadeya* settlements had fulfilled their historical mission and began to bow out in favour of the temple, which occupied the centre stage. After the middle of the eleventh century, there was a decrease in the number of *brahmadeyams*, while more temples were built and existing ones expanded.

Brahmin settlements, which were originally exotic pockets, merged society through resource manipulation and social

◆ Temples contributed to social stratification

stratification. The temple's institutionalised religion contributed to the spread of an ideology that rationalised and maintained this social stratification, allowing them to integrate into society while maintaining their interests. The brahmanical settlement played an important role in establishing the *varnashramadharma* and incorporating peasants and artisans into the *jati* formula, which was sanctified by *dharma* and *bhakti* beliefs. They maintained their position by organising corporate bodies in *sabha* and *parishad*. However, there were regional variations, with more brahmanical influence on chiefly and royal families in the Chera kingdom and competing non-brahmin landholders and cultivators in the Chola and Pandya kingdoms. The *brahmadeyas* played a significant role in sanctifying the social stratification that was the foundation of early medieval south Indian states.

◆ Vellanvagai: Land of non-brahmin peasant owners

3.1.2 Vellanvagai Villages

The land of non-brahmin peasant owners was called *Vellanvagai*. Y. Subbarayalu examined 240 inscriptions from the Tamil region, concentrating on the activities of *vellanvagai* villages and their corporate bodies. Although this is only a small sample of the epigraphical records available, he can provide broad overviews of the structure and functioning of these corporate bodies, even though only about 80 of them contain useful information.

◆ Vellanvagai ur: a non literate society

Historians explain the scarcity of records about *Vellanvagai* settlements as natural, as they were not as remarkable as other types of villages such as Brahmin settlements or trading corporations. Activities in these villages were routine enough to not require recording. The *Vellanvagai ur* may have represented a non-literate society that did not record its proceedings, as records of the *ur* are found in temples with a literate tradition. The *ur* represents a distinct group with a literary tradition.

◆ Chola inscriptions detail Vellanvagai structure

◆ Study of Noboru Karashima

Noboru Karashima a well-known Japanese historian's study of village settlements in the Chola country, which used Tanjavur and Gangaikkondacholapuram inscriptions, suggests that *vellanvagai* villages included habitation sites, cremation grounds, drinking water sources, irrigation channels, cultivated lands, and pasture lands. Residential areas included quarters for landowners (*ur-nattam/ur-irukkai*), artisans (*kammanacceri*), and agricultural workers (*paraicceri*). According to Karashima's study of *brahmadeya* vs. non-*brahmadeya* villages, non-*brahmadeya* villages did not exhibit clear stratification. However, evidence from later Tanjavur and Gangaikkondacholapuram inscriptions contradicts this. The society was divided into three groups: landowners, artisans, and agricultural labourers. Landowners in non-brahmin villages had economic parity with brahmins due to their control over land. They



were known as *kaniyudaiyar* and tenant-cultivators as *ulukudi*. These top-level positions were regarded as commanding due to their economic control. Subbarayalu noticed that both owner-cultivators and tenant-cultivators were referred to as *kudimakkal*, implying a lack of distinction between the two groups. Both were considered Vellalas.

◆ *Ur: Corporate body*

The corporate body of the *Ur*, also known as *urar* (those of the *ur*) or *urom*, consisted of landholders living in habitation sites called *ur-nattam* or *ur-irukkai*. Around seventy inscriptions dealing with the *ur* provide evidence of the strength of the corporate body, which consisted of those who lived in such quarters. Inscriptions refer to a single or two members of the body, but these are usually from collective gatherings of many villages, with one or two members serving as representatives rather than the entire village. Nineteen cases of *ur* bodies have been identified, with a variety of memberships. Most villages had *ur* bodies of less than ten members, implying that effective landowners may have been equally numerous. Subbarayalu calculated those landholders held land in extents ranging from two to ten *velis*. According to Tanjavur inscriptions of Rajaraja I, villages in more fertile areas varied in extent from five to hundred *velis*. This supports the view that the *ur* body's strength was generally less than ten.

◆ *Ur: Managing landed property*

The *ur*, a corporate body responsible for managing landed property, differed from the brahman *sabhas* that represented *brahmadeya* villages. Its main function was property ownership, which included land sales, gifts, and exemptions from taxes. Only landholders had a place in the *ur*, as explicit statements indicate that only members of the *ur* paid land tax, implying that all landholders in a village were the members of the *ur* body.

◆ *Landowners in Cholamandalam increased significantly*

Chola inscriptions frequently include names with a regular pattern of segments, usually preceded by a village name. This implies that the holder of the village name and 'udaiyan' title owns or possesses the village. However, multiple 'udaiyans' may be associated with the same village, so this meaning is unclear. As a result, whenever a title with the village name and 'udaiyan' pattern appears, it is assumed that the reference is to someone who owned or possessed land in the village. Records from Tanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, and parts of south Arcot districts in the Cholamandalam area show a consistent increase in the occurrence of names with the title 'udaiyan' from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. This suggests an increase in landowners in the Cholamandalam area. Tondaimandalam or Jayangondacholamandalam, which includes north Arcot, Chingleput, Chittur, and Nellur districts, do not show such regularity. This could be due to the presence of a well-

established peasant community under the Pallavas prior to the region becoming part of the Chola state, leaving little room for further expansion. Subbarayalu's states that there was an increase in individual land ownership among non-brahmin landholders between the 10th and 12th centuries CE.

◆ *Pandyan records reflect agrarian settlements*

Rajan Gurukkal claims that the Pandyan kingdom's records reveal a clear picture of agrarian settlement, with the *ur* being the smallest unit. There are regional differences, with the generic place name *irukkai* in the Chola country referring to habitation sites and a village in the Pandyan country. The pattern appears to be consistent for settlement and assembly of representatives. However, there is less evidence of non-brahmin groups in the Chera kingdom, with Brahmin settlements and assemblies denoted by expressions such as *ur* and *urar*.

◆ *Villages formed basic administrative units*

M. G. S. Narayanan's study of the Chera kingdom reveals a less developed non-brahmin peasant agricultural organisation, which was later supported by Rajan Gurukkal and Kesavan Veluthat. This could be due to the region's less fertile soil and varying settlement patterns. This, however, had an impact on the region's social evolution, with a greater degree of Brahmanical influence in all aspects of social life and political structure. According to the conventional view of the *nadu*, which is the aggregate of elements, villages were the basic units of administration, and several villages comprised a *nadu*. However, the above view presents Tamil Nadu as an administrative division, with villages serving as subdivisions. There may be differences in detail, such as whether the *nadu* consisted only of *vellanvagai* villages or other types of villages like *brahmadeya* and *devadana*.

◆ *Meaning of the word 'Devadana'*

3.1.3 Devadana

Devadana land grants played a significant part in south Indian agrarian society and economy during the ancient and medieval periods. These grants to temples and religious institutions had an important effect on the region's socio-economic and cultural development. Originating from the Sanskrit words 'deva' (god) and 'dana' (gift), they rose to prominence during the reigns of the Pallavas, Cholas, Chalukyas and, later, the Vijayanagara.

The temple received *Devadana* grants, which included tax exemptions or revenue from the village. These land grants were classified into two types: *kudineekki* and *kudineekka*. The village's cultivators were evicted from their land in order to make a grant to the temple, but the cultivator or *kudi* was later not evicted because they were either divested of their land possession or continued as cultivating tenants or labourers. Chola kings made *devadana* grants

◆ *Classification of Devadana land*

with *kudineekka devadana*, and temples received revenue or tax, which would otherwise be paid to the government. The *Parudai*, a brahmin *sabha*, governed the land donated by villages to the temple, which was managed by the temple or those in charge. The temple or those in control controlled the majority of a village's land and water resources, necessitating the presence of a brahmin or a vellala. Irrigation allocation was strictly based on caste.

◆ *Temples gained extensive land rights*

During the seventh-eighth centuries, the region experienced significant changes, including the development of fertile river valleys for agriculture, the expansion of Brahmin settlements, the establishment of temples with extensive land rights and the rise of monarchy, foreshadowing the future Chola state. These interconnected elements contributed to the region's complicated and changing landscape.

◆ *Brahmins transformed early social formations*

By the seventh or eighth century of the Common era, when a monarchical state was established, the *Agamaic* variety of Brahmanical religion had established significant roots in south India. This penetration was aided by brahmin groups that infiltrated the region in the early historical period. Although they began by practising Vedic religion, they later spread *Agamaic* and *Puranic* beliefs. The brahmanical factor played an important role in breaking up early social formations, resulting in the formation of a state society in south India. Brahmins gained chiefs' trust and received land grants as *brahmadeyas* and *devadanas*, making them a significant force in society and economy. The increasing number of Brahmin settlements and the rise of temples led to a revolution in South India during the Pallavas and Pandyas era, which was fulfilled in the Cheras and Cholas eras.

◆ *Temples integrated caste-based society*

◆ *Temples amassed wealth and power*

M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat discuss the socio-economic significance of temples in south India. The temples played an important role in the agrarian economy by facilitating the extraction of surplus from peasants, resulting in the expansion of agriculture in tribal areas and the consolidation of landlord dominance. This accelerated tribal society's disintegration and reorganisation into a caste society. The temple also served as an integrating factor, bringing together the rich and the poor through its services, attracting clients from various castes and subcastes. This integrated role paved the way for state power inspired by and supported by brahmins in south India's regional monarchies.

The temple's legitimacy led to state patronage, supporting the brahmanical *varnasrama* ideology and serving as an institution for

◆ *Bhakti movement upheld caste hierarchy*

the *Bhakti* Movement. Over time, the temple became a storehouse for gold, silver and precious jewels, as well as a regular meeting place for the rural elite. This resulted in the temple growing into a fortress-like structure with multiple streets, *bazaars*, and armed forces. Finally, the temple contributed to the development, consolidation, transmission and preservation of cultural heritage.

◆ *Upper classes accepted varnasrama ideology*

The temple, through its *Bhakti* Movement, secured victory for the Hindu Brahmanical religion as well as the agrarian order in South India. This created a caste hierarchy based on textual prescriptions or *varnasramadharmā*. This ideology was accepted by the upper classes, who were primarily the owners of groups, but it needed to be spread to other segments of society.

◆ *Temples legitimised monarchic power*
◆ *Temple patronage strengthened social ties*

The *Bhakti* Movement in South India, which was essentially a temple movement, coincided with the rise and fulfilment of the temple, reflecting the emerging social order and legitimising it comprehensively. The potential of the temple was realised by the monarchs of south India, as early as the Pallava kingdom's monarchical state origin. Temples in medieval South India were patronised by a variety of groups, including royalty, political leaders, landlords and trading organisations. Patronage included resource donations, resource protection and service provision. These organisations benefitted significantly from the patronage. The reciprocity involved in patronage was not calculated; rather, the temple reciprocated by ensuring the ruler's legitimacy and support from important sections of society.

◆ *Temples integrated agrarian order peacefully*
◆ *Brahmanical groups managed temple resources*

The landlord class supported the temple, ensuring the peaceful integration of the agrarian order. The peasants and lower classes accepted the temple's ideological hegemony, while traders and artisans benefitted from their association with the temple. The temple served as both an occasion and a focal point for their activities, making it an important consumer and centre for their activities. The temple was linked to brahmanical groups in Kerala who owned vast land known as *devadanam* (a gift to the god) and *brahmadeyam* (a gift to brahmanas). They promoted wealth by efficiently managing this resource, such as clearing land and irrigation, and weaned royalty, social groups, and the market away from an earlier tribal background. Patronage of the temple implied patronage of powerful brahmanical organisations.

The use of religious symbols by ruling classes for ideological dominance and ruler legitimacy is investigated in relation to the opening of river valleys for agriculture. This resulted in significant social changes, creating clear societal divisions. This process continued south to the Pandya territories and west to



◆ *Agrarian expansion drove social changes*

the Chera territories. By the ninth century, the Kaveri Valley had become the central region of a new monarchical state. The social changes brought about by agrarian expansion were reflected in the emerging political institutions, which gradually spread southward, culminating in Chola country. This process of state formation in Tamil Nadu serves an important role in the region's development.

◆ *Bhakti linked to agrarian expansion*

◆ *Temples central to bhakti movement*

The *Bhakti* Movement spread in a similar way, with early Alvars and Nayanars connecting with Tondaimandalam and singing about temples there. The last group of them, mentions temples in the Pandyan and Chera countries, with the majority mentioned in Chola country on either side of the Kaveri. This suggests that the *bhakti* movement was directly linked to the expansion of agriculture and the establishment of a state based on it.

◆ *Royal patronage boosted bhakti movement*

Early *bhakti* movement patrons included rulers from newly established dynasties, such as Mahendravarman Pallava, Nedumaran, Koccenganan, Cheraman Perumal, and Kulasekhara Alvar. These rulers most likely found the support of these movements useful and beneficial in their early stages. Royal patronage benefitted the movement significantly, particularly in terms of using state power to physically defeat rival creeds. The mutual support between the *Bhakti* Movement and the newly established monarchies is significant because it enabled the movement to use state power to defeat rival creeds. The *bhakti* movement and newly established monarchies have shown strong mutual support.

◆ *Bhakti equated deities with royalty*

◆ *Devotee-deity mirrored feudal relations*

The *bhakti* movement had a significant impact on society at deeper levels, as temples gained popularity. The services in temples and the *bhakti* jargon reflected a social organisation, with deities granted full royal status. The terms *udaiyar* or *perumal* referred to both the king and the deity, whereas *koil* denoted both the temple and the palace. The temple's daily routine coincided with the palaces. The deity was often equated with the lord, and the devotee with the vassal. The devotee addressed the deity as *udaiyar* or *tambiran* (lord), while describing their status as *adiyar* (servant).

◆ *Bhakti created caste equality illusion*

◆ *Temples validated caste structures*

The *bhakti* movement legitimised the established polity by creating the illusion of cross-caste equality and ensuring acceptance of caste and its ideology. The stories of Nantanar, a Paraiya, and Tiruppana Alvar, a Pana, showed that even lowly castes could reach the highest rung in the *bhakti* hierarchy. The movement's true purpose was to demonstrate where ordinary Paraiya or Pana belonged. The temple-based religion of *Agamaic/Puranic* Hinduism, as spread by the *bhakti* movement, provided the necessary sanction and validation for the existing social and power structures.

The temple institution was politically significant, especially in rural temples. These temples, which began as humble shrines, grew

◆ *Temples centralised power and land control*

◆ *Tribes assimilated into caste society*

spontaneously into the nucleus around which Brahmin settlements emerged, contributing to the area's political use. Temples were managed by settlement founders' or their representatives' corporations, which controlled landed wealth for both the temple and themselves. These corporations, along with the agrarian settlements, controlled vast tracts of land and a large portion of the population. This position was critical during a period when tribal populations were being converted into peasants and assimilated into caste society.

◆ *Temple centralised power in Chera polity*

◆ *Veluthat highlighted temple-driven expansion*

The temple's position gave it significant political power in its locality, particularly in the Chera kingdom of Kerala, where the monarchical state was weakest in south India. Local groups, such as the brahmanical corporation of non-cultivating intermediaries, wielded significant political influence. These bodies, organised around the temple, wielded immense power in fiscal, judicial and political administration, all of which were considered state functions. This power structure dates back to the Chera kingdom. A lengthy copper plate record known as the Tiruvalla Copper Plates or the Huzur Office Plates, elaborately documents the process of development. Kesavan Veluthat conducted a detailed study of the Tiruvalla settlement, highlighting the expansion of a temple-centred Brahmin settlement in terms of size and activities.

◆ *Temple collected taxes and land dues*

The Tiruvalla Copper Plates reveal that the temple was assigned or acquired to various state-related functions, including revenue collection, which would typically be attributed to state power nodes. Iravi Chirikantan, the chief of Venpolinatu, granted a village Kutavur to the Tiruvalla temple. The temple received the village, along with all eighteen taxes and market duties. The temple committee's representative was authorised to collect 360 *parais* of paddy, equivalent to eighteen *kalanju* of gold, and the village's *rakshabhoga* (land tax) from the chief. If payment was not made, the chief was obligated to pay the original amount in gold. The Tiruvalla Copper Plate states that the temple committee must take the *rakshabhoga* to protect the settlement from the king's and *Samanta*'s (feudatory) wrath. Opponents of this arrangement give up their rights, including *sabha* membership.

◆ *Temple handled tax and judicial roles*

The temple committee was in charge of collecting all village taxes and resolving complaints from the king and *samantas*. As a result, the temple committee presented itself as the state, allegedly taking over the state's revenue and judicial administration functions. The expense was met through the tax (*vari*) due to Otanatu, as seen in several other cases where taxes were assigned from *natu* units and lesser ones like *ur* and *valkkai*. In revenue administration and judicial administration, temples exercise state power.



- ◆ *Temple superseded local chiefs' authority*
- ◆ *Temples: multifaceted societal institutions*

The temple trustees were given the authority to seize village property if dues were not paid on time. This agreement, in which the chief is helpless as the temple attaches his property, should be attested by the Six Hundred, the chief's honorary companions, and his other representatives. The temple in the Chera kingdom was in charge of judicial administration and political power, specifically the local chief. Failure to supply the temple with a specified amount of oil resulted in a fine of 50 *kalanju* of gold for the Perumal or king, 25 for the temple's *sabha*, and 10 for the local chief. This shows the relative positions of power nodes in the hierarchy. The temple was above local chiefs and represented the state in its most visible form, rather than a theocracy or 'temple states'. It was co-opted as the state's agent for administrative purposes in the Chera kingdom.

- ◆ *Patronage reflected reciprocal significance*

Kesavan Veluthat observes that in medieval South India, temples served as social, economic, political and cultural institutions in addition to religious ones. Its complexities were interconnected and the rush to patronise it was motivated by more than just religion. The patronage was reciprocated, emphasising the importance of understanding the temple's role in society and its complexity by appreciating its entirety.

Summarised Overview

Between 700 and 1200 CE, land donations became a key strategy for rulers across India to increase political power and resources. Originating in the Ganga valley, this system spread throughout northern and southern India. Land grants were given to both religious and secular institutions, notably through *Brahmadeya* (land to brahmins) and *Devadana* (land to temples). These grants played a central role in developing agriculture, solidifying state power, and transforming tribal communities into settled peasant societies. Brahmin settlements (*brahmadeyams*) emerged as influential land-owning corporations, especially in South India, significantly shaping the social and political landscape. These grants fostered social stratification, legitimising the authority of both rulers and religious institutions.

Brahmin settlements, organised into corporate bodies like *sabha* or *mahasabha*, were prominent in fertile river valleys, particularly in southern India. These landowning groups held significant social and political power, supported by temples, which served as centres of ideology, legitimising the social hierarchy and state power. The Brahminisation of society, through hierarchical stratification and temple-centred activities, helped integrate tribal populations into peasant communities, shaping the agrarian landscape of medieval India. The brahmadeyams in the Chola country, also known as *taniyurs*, were independent villages that managed their own revenue and justice, separate from the *nadus* they were

located within. These settlements, often centred around temples, played a crucial role in local governance. The brahmin settlers maintained their influence through well-organised bodies like the *sabha*, which required members to meet strict property, educational, and conduct standards. These *sabhas* managed land, temple properties and social affairs, imposing moral and social consequences for violating decisions.

In Kerala, the organisation of Brahmin settlements was slightly different due to its unique geography and the absence of *agraharas* (Brahmin villages). These settlements were temple-centred and played a significant role in influencing local chieftains and kings. Unlike Tamil Nadu, Kerala lacked the presence of strong non-brahmin landholder groups, giving brahmin communities more control.

The *vellanvagai* villages (non-brahmin villages) were also an important part of the Chola country. These settlements, although less well-documented, functioned with a corporate body known as the *ur*, which represented landholders and managed property. While Brahmin settlements held more influence initially, the shift towards temple-based administration and land control marked a change in the agrarian landscape, particularly after the 11th century. The *brahmadeyams* and *vellanvagai* villages were integral in shaping the socio-political and religious landscape of medieval south India, especially in relation to land ownership, caste and temple administration.

During the 7th and 8th centuries, south India underwent significant socio-political changes. The expansion of Brahmin settlements, supported by land grants (*brahmadeyas* and *devadanas*), and the establishment of temples as key economic and social hubs marked this period. Temples not only facilitated agricultural growth by integrating tribal areas into a caste-based society but also became centres of wealth, power and cultural preservation. The rise of monarchical states, like the Chola and Pallava dynasties, was closely tied to the Brahmanical religion, which legitimised the ruling class. The *bhakti* movement, intertwined with temple culture, reinforced the caste hierarchy and state power, integrating diverse social groups under Brahmanical ideology. Temples gained immense political influence, particularly in Kerala, where they took on functions like tax collection and local governance, acting as extensions of state authority. The mutual support between temples and the ruling elite ensured the integration of agrarian society and bolstered the emerging regional Kingdoms.

Assignments

1. Examine how temples function as economic hubs in south Indian society.
2. Analyse the significance of *brahmadeyam* land grants in South India.

What economic impacts did *brahmadeyam* grants have on agrarian practices?



3. Explain the concept of *devadanam* land grants. How did *devadanam* land grants impact the socio-economic structure of south Indian society?
4. Compare and contrast *vellanvagai* villages and *tankuru* settlement.
5. Make a list of inscriptions and Plates which shed light on the *brahmadeya* land grants.
6. Examine the role of *sabha* in contributing to the authority and influence of brahmins in society.
7. Discuss the socio-political and economic structure of *Ur* as a Corporate body in early medieval South India.

Reference

1. Karashima, Noboru, ed., *A Concise History of South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.
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Suggested Reading

1. Karashima, Noboru, *Ancient to Medieval: South Indian Society in Transition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993.
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5. Stein, Burton, *All the Kings' Mana: Papers on Medieval South Indian History*, New Era, 1984.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU





Maritime Trade and Trade Corporations

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historical significance of *Anjuvannam*, *Manigramam*, *Ainnurruvar*, and *Ayyavole* in the socio-economic context of south India
- ◆ analyse the roles and contributions of merchant guilds to the agrarian economy, trade practices and social organisation in south India
- ◆ compare and contrast the organisational structures, functions, and governance of *Anjuvannam*, *Manigramam*, *Ainnurruvar*, and *Ayyavole*
- ◆ evaluate how merchant guilds influence local cultures, social norms, and religious practices in their regions
- ◆ explain the socio-economic and political significance of *nagaram* or urban centres in south India, highlighting their role in trade, administration and social integration

Background

This unit explores the rich and dynamic commercial networks that flourished along the southern coastline from ancient times through the medieval period. This era saw South India emerge as a vital hub in the Indian Ocean trade, connecting it with various regions, including Southeast Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. The maritime trade was characterised by the exchange of a diverse array of goods such as spices, textiles, gems and agricultural products, facilitating cultural interactions and economic prosperity. Trade corporations, including groups like the *Anjuvannam*, *Manigramam*, and *Ainnurruvar*, played a crucial role in organising and regulating trade activities. These corporations not only managed commerce but also established networks of trust, standardised practices, and community governance, contributing to the socio-economic fabric of pre-modern south India. This unit will delve into the significance of maritime trade routes, the role of trade corporations and their impact on regional economies, societies, and cultural exchanges, providing insight into a vital aspect of south India's historical legacy. It also delved into the urban centres which served as vital hubs of trade, culture, and administration.



Keywords

Ainnurruvar, Anjuvannam, Manigramam, Ayyavole, Urban Centres, Nagarattar, Nagaram

Discussion

- ◆ *Nagarams housed merchants and artisans*
- ◆ *Travelling guilds led trade activities*

Many *nadus* had one or two *nagarams*, along with *brahmadeya* and *ur*-type villages. *Nagarams* were commercial towns inhabited by merchants like *Chettis* (general merchants) and *Sankarapadiyars* (oil merchants), and artisans like *Saliyas* (weavers) and *Tattars* (goldsmiths). Representatives of leading communities formed a town assembly called *nagaram*, but their commercial activities were less active in the early Chola period. *Nagaram* members likely held and earned income from land. Initially, traveling merchants organised in guilds such as *manigramam* and *ainurruvar* carried out commercial activities.

3.2.1 *Ainurruvar*

- ◆ *Ainnurruvar originated in eighth-century Aihole*

Noboru Karashima suggests that the *ainnurruvar* organisation originated in eighth-century inscriptions in Ayyavole (Aihole), Karnataka, and early Chola inscriptions. Many merchants came from Pudukottai and Tiruchirappalli districts, with Kodumbalur being a hub for *manigramam* merchants. Subbarayalu mentions another guild, *anjuvannam*, in Kerala, organised by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic merchants from West Asia. The *manigramam* and *anjuvannam* were later integrated into the *ainnurruvar* organisation, which served as an umbrella organisation for smaller merchant guilds.

- ◆ *Ainnurruvar operated across 18 countries*

Merchant guild inscriptions in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Sri Lanka document donations to temples by individual members or large assemblies, sometimes with *chitrameli-periyanadu* members. Similar inscriptions are found in Andhra Pradesh and Southeast Asian countries. Inscriptions from large assemblies often include a eulogy of the *ainnurruvar*, who conducted commercial activities in *pattanams* (towns) and *velapuram* (ports) across eighteen countries (*Padinen-vishayam/bhumi*). They were proud of their lineage from the gods -Vasudeva, Kandali, and Mulabhadra, had a close relationship with Aihole through its deity Paramesvari, and considered honesty and bravery as their professional *dharma*, as enjoined by their charter. Merchant groups like Chetti, Kavarai, and Katriban, along with soldier groups like ‘virar’ and ‘munai’,



were mentioned in inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. These merchants praised the bravery of the soldiers, naming the town where they lived Erivirapattinam, meaning ‘town of brave soldiers’.

◆ Overseas trade boosted *ainurruvar* growth

◆ *Nagarams* thrived post-eleventh century

The rise in *ainurruvar* inscriptions and the incorporation of other merchant organisations in the eleventh century is linked to the growth of overseas trade, as evidenced by recent discoveries of Chinese ceramic sherds dating back to the eleventh century and beyond in south India. Contemporary accounts from Arabic, Chinese and European sources describe merchant activities in the Indian Ocean, which led to changes in the characteristics of the *nagaram*. Commercial activities in the *nagarams* were not prolific in the early period but became very vibrant after the eleventh century, associated with the *ainurruvar* network.

◆ Overseas inscriptions show *ainurruvar* presence

An inscription from Kovilpatti, dating back to 1305, details a charity deed in an *ainurruvar* assembly, where contributions to a temple were made by four specific *nagarams*. Sarkar Periyapalaiyam inscription of 1289 in Malaimandalam, Kerala, indicates that numerous *nagarams* joined *ainurruvar* in making charitable donations, indicating that the *ainurruvar* consolidated their activities by including *nagarams* from various locations within their ambit. A Barus inscription (1088) in northwestern Sumatra mentions the establishment of a town (*pattanam*) in Barus, a port known for the camphor trade. A Pagan Inscription of the thirteenth century in Myanmar also mentions the establishment of a *mandapam* in a Vishnu temple by *nanadesi*, another name for *ainurruvar*.

◆ Horse trade was significant in *ainurruvar*

◆ *Ainurruvar* inscriptions spanned southern India

Inscriptions from the 12th century and after, mention horse merchants in Kerala and Karnataka. In Kerala, there were numerous centres for horse import, with Arab ships carrying horses from the Persian Gulf and Arabia. In Karnataka, the activities of the *ainurruvar* were vigorous under Chalukyan rule, especially in the 12th century. However, it is unclear whether Aihole is their place of origin. There are also *ainurruvar* inscriptions in Andhra Pradesh, though not as many as in other areas. Important inscriptions, such as two in Visakhapatnam, date back to 1090 and the beginning of the 13th century, referring to *anjuvannam*, associated with *ainurruvar*, and their relations with Sri Lanka and Sumatra.

◆ Trade boosted south Indian industries

The brisk trade of merchants towards the end of this period was closely linked to the development of industries in south India, such as weaving, smithing, and oil-pressing, and the increasing importance of temple rituals requiring camphor and coconuts, becoming more noticeable after the fourteenth century.

3.2.2. Anjuvannam and Manigramam

3.2.2.1 Anjuvannam

The term *anjuvannam*, or *anchuvannam*, was first identified in the Chera copper-plate grants edited by Gundert. It was believed to refer to the Jewish and Christian principalities or corporate bodies of these communities. However, V. Venkayya and T.A. Gopinatha Rao disagreed, viewing the two bodies as semi-independent trading corporations. Hultsch later translated the term as ‘five castes’ by splitting it into *anju* (five) and *vannam* (caste). The grant aimed to establish *Anjuvannam*, which may refer to the quarter of Cranganore where the five artisans, *ainkammalar*, reside, as seen in the Kottayam grant. Kesavan Veluthat argues that Hultsch’s claim is incorrect, as in the Kottayam grant, *ainkammalar* are given as servants to a merchant leader, while the *Anjuvannam* and *Manigramam* are found in the Chera copper plates as independent bodies with trading rights and employing servile people.

- ◆ *Anjuvannam* linked to trading bodies
- ◆ *Kesavan Veluthat* disputes *Hultsch’s* claim

The Syrian Christian church at Kottayam received two earlier grants in 849 CE. The first grant, dated in the fifth regnal year of Sthanu Ravi, was given by Venadu chief Ayyanadikal Tiruvadikal to assign certain *ilavar* and *vannar* tenants or cultivators to Tarisapalli and a Christian church built at Kurakkeni-Kollam by Maruvan Sapir Iso, the leader of the merchant guild. These tenants were relieved of tax encumbrances and allowed to enter the fort and market area for their duties. The church was granted the right to enjoy all taxes and keep measuring instruments.

- ◆ Church gained tax-free tenant services
- ◆ Church permitted market and fort access

The second grant suggests an additional grant to Tarisapalli, assigning carpenters and cultivators to the church and gifting demarcated land for oil supply. The church was allowed to punish its tenants, and the officials were warned not to interfere. The military bodies *aiunurruvar*, *anjuvannam*, and *manigramam* were asked to protect the *palli* (Church) and its landed property, as per the charter.

- ◆ Church was allowed to punish tenants

The *anjuvannam* and *manigramam* became the rightful occupants of the *nagaram*, acting together and collecting customs duty. Sapir Iso, who established the township, allowed the church to use measuring instruments and pay fees to the *nagaram*. *Anjuvannam* and *manigramam* were important trading bodies responsible for determining the sale prices of merchandise in Kollam. They were granted customary rights and privileges by the ruler of the area. The relationship between Sapir Iso and the two bodies was close, as the former is considered the founder of the *nagaram* and the latter the occupants.

- ◆ Trading bodies collected customs duty



◆ *Copper plates listed extensive privileges*

The Jewish copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi (1000 CE) mentions 'seventy-two' rights and privileges, including the title of *anjuvannam*, free use of boats and vehicles, torch use, decorative cloth and palanquin. Joseph Rabban, a Jewish merchant, was exempt from duties and weighing fees. Maruvan Sapir Iso and Rabban were considered the chief merchants of their respective towns, similar to the pattanavami mentioned in Ayyavole-500 inscriptions in Karnataka.

◆ *Kollam hosted diverse West Asian traders*

◆ *Manigramam linked to indigenous merchants*

The identification of *anjuvannam* and *manigramam* as Jewish and Christian bodies is not supported by direct evidence. The possession of the copper plates by the present owners, a Jewish synagogue in Cochin and a Syrian Christian church in Kottayam, prompts the identification. The signatures in Arabic, Hebrew and Pahlavi scripts at the end of the second Syrian Christian grant suggest a mixed population of West Asian traders, including Jews, Arab Muslims, Christians and Persians, at Kollam in the ninth century. The fact that a Jewish copper-plate grant was specifically honoured to a Jew, further supports the *anjuvannam* body as a West Asian trader. In contrast, *manigramam* could only be a body of indigenous merchants, as it is found in interior places like Ramantali, Talakkadu, Kodumbalur, Uraiyr, Srinivasanallur and others.

◆ *Hanjamana linked to Arab Muslim traders*

◆ *Kannada inscriptions highlight their trade roles*

D.C. Sircar observed the term *hamyamana* and its variant *hanjamana* in inscriptions of northern Konkan, possibly denoting Parsee settlements. The term appears in a passage addressing the local community addressed by the king, including the elders of *hamyamana*, *paura*, and district officer *Verthalaiya*. The names *Alliya* and *Madhumati* are Indianised forms of Arabic names 'Ali and Muhammad', suggesting some *hamyamana* (*Hanjamana*) elders were Arab Muslims. In the case of *paura* elders, they appear to be local merchants, with prefixing segments like *sreshthi*, *suvarnna*, and *vanija* denoting their specialised trades. The name *hanjamana* is mentioned in Kannada inscriptions of North and South Kannada Districts in coastal places like Basrur and Barakul, even during Vijayanagara times.

◆ *Hanjamana represented diverse West Asians*

Ummara-marakala, a *hanjamana* leader mentioned in an inscription from Devaraya I, is considered a Parsee by K. V. Ramesh, derived from the Kannada name *Ummara* (Umar), *marakala*, meaning sailor in Kannada language. However, D.C. Sircar argued that *hanjamana* could not denote a Parsee settlement due to the lack of evidence for such settlements far south. He suggested that it may be related to Tamil *anju-panchalattar*, the 'five artisans', through Kannada *pancha-vanna* and Tamil *anjuvannam*. This argument is based on assumptions without valid evidence and has

been criticised by K.V. Ramesh. *Hanjamana* could have denoted West Asian traders, Arabs, Jews, Christians and Parsis collectively, with Arab Muslims possibly playing a more prominent role from the eleventh century onwards.

◆ *Anjuvannam's origins debated*

Anjuvannam, or *anchuvannam*, is a term found only in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Its derivation from *hanjamana* is easily accepted, but it is unlikely to be empirically verified. The term is often equated with *Anju-panchalattar* ('the five artisans'), as suggested by T.V. Mahalingam and D.C. Sircar. However, this equation cannot be sustained due to the artisans' poor social position in the early medieval centuries, being treated as servicing communities to merchants and landholders. They gained better recognition during the Vijayanagara times and later when commodity production increased.

◆ *Anjuvannam as Muslim community*

A twelfth-century literary work, *Palchandamalai*, supports the *anjuvannam* group as a Muslim community, referring to members of the group living in Nagapattinam as Yavana and Sonaka, followers of Kalupati, and worshippers of Allah, a Tamil variant of 'Khalifa'.

◆ *Anjuvannam prominent in coastal towns*

Anjuvannam is primarily located in coastal towns, with its presence spanning various port towns along both the west and east coasts. It is most prominent in the Konkan coast, with presence in the Kerala coast in Pantalayini-Kollam and Kurakkeni-Kollam. The southern Kollam is the most important town known to medieval Chinese and Arab sources. Pantalayini-Kollam is known only in a fragmentary Chera inscription, dating back to 1000 CE, found in the mosque called Jamat-palli. The inscription refers to the *Valanjiyar* and other merchants in the assembly of *Ayyavole*-500 trade guild, and a high royal official. The inscription may be related to an important occasion when the *anjuvannam* people were present alongside the *Ayyavole* merchants. The inscription's connection to the mosque cannot be ascertained from the available portion.

◆ *Anjuvannam merchants influential in trade*

In Tittandatanapuram (1269), *Anjuvannam* held a prominent position among a large assembly of merchant groups, including *Manigramam*, *Valanjiyar* of Sri Lanka, and *Anjuvannam* weavers. In Mayilappur, a 13th-century fragmentary inscription mentions *Anjuvannam* alongside *Vaniga-gramam* (*Manigramam*). At Krishnapatnam (1279), merchants from Kerala, along with local and itinerant merchants of *18-bhumi*, decided on contributions to the temple based on imported and exported goods at the port.

Vishakhapatanam contains three inscriptions, two in Telugu and one in Tamil, which are a duplicate of a Telugu record. The first inscription, dated in *Saka* 1012, remits taxes on house-sites within the demarcated precincts of the Ainuttuva-perumballi in

◆ Inscriptions found in Visakhapatanam

Vishakhapattanam *alias* Kulottungachola-pattanam by the ‘Twelve Members’ of the *nagaram* of the town. The grant was entrusted to a merchant (*vyapari*) of the *Anjuvannam* of Matottam *alias* [Ra] makulavalli-pattanam. The merchant’s name, Pattanaditya nana-rajavidyadhara samangattu-ghanti Asavu *alias* 18-bhumi-nagara-senapati *alias* Malaimandala-mata, may be his personal name and possibly derived from the Arab name ‘Asaf’.

◆ Inscription hints at mosque identity

Subbarayalu mentioned that the title *vidyadhara* is associated with a *sonaka* official found living in a *bazaar* street called Rajavidyadhara at Tanjavur, suggesting he was a Muslim merchant. The Tamil version of the inscription is damaged, but it is easy to recognise its exact identity with the Telugu version from the surviving lines. Both inscriptions are written on different sides of the same stone, and the Telugu inscription has some Tamil features. Though there is no explicit evidence to identify the religious affiliation of the Ainuttuva-perumballi, it is likely a mosque.

◆ Pasai-linked merchant received grant

The second Telugu inscription records a grant to Ainnuttuva-perumballi by Mahamandalesvara Kulottunga-Prithvisvara, with a date of *Saka* 1120+ with three probable equivalent dates, 1200, 1204 or 1207. The boundaries of *Palli* and tax wording are identical in both cases. The receiver was another merchant from the *Anjuvannam* of Pasay, whose name is similar to the port town Pasai or Samudera-Pasai in Indonesia. The merchant’s name is Savasandi[ba]lla, son of Boyarandi[ba]lla, and his title is Ma[va]ngari-vallabha-samaya-chakravartti. The attribute ma[va]ngari-vallabha is similar to the *Madangari-vallabha* found in the Barus guild inscription, which means ‘a favourite of Madangari (the deity Durga). The title, *samaya-chakravartti*, is usually given to an active representative of the *samaya* or assembly. The *Anjuvannam* people were patronised by the *Ayyavole-500* guild and treated as members of that guild. The inscriptions suggest that the *Anjuvannam* people were treated as members of that guild.

◆ Anjuvannam trade reached Indonesia

Indonesian royal inscriptions from the ninth and early tenth centuries in central and eastern Java mention the terms *hunjeman*, *hunjaman*, and *hinjaman*. These inscriptions describe *hunjaman* and its variants as a group or body, with restrictions on entering newly created *sima* villages (villages whose royal revenue had been transferred to a religious institution). These bodies were trading groups from foreign countries, including south India. The term *hunjeman* (or *hunjaman/hinjaman*) is a variant of *hanjamana*, likely due to Arabic orthography’s context-specific vowel sounds. *Hanjamana/Anjuvannam* group’s trade activities extended to Indonesia in the ninth century and after. The presence of *Manigramam* in Takua Pa in Thailand is a well-known fact. If the

name *Hunjaman* and its variants are ignored in Javanese records, it is surprising that Arab and other West Asian traders are not mentioned in Southeast Asian records, despite their role in maritime activities in the Indian Ocean.

◆ *Anjuvannam* included diverse merchants

The *Anjuvannam*, a trading body composed of West Asian seafaring merchants, was first mentioned in Tamil inscriptions in Kerala and Tamilnadu coasts. It initially included Arabs, Persians, Jews, Syrian Christians Muslims, and Parsis. The *Anjuvannam* spanned the Indian Ocean from Arabia to Java and initially interacted with the *Manigramam*, a south Indian merchant guild. The *Ayyavole-500* emerged in the tenth century and became a major overarching merchant guild in southern India, involving most existing indigenous and local trade guilds.

◆ *Muslim* dominance in later *Anjuvannam*

Anjuvannam also interacted with the *Ayyavole* guild and participated in large gatherings. In the eleventh century and after, *Anjuvannam* was mostly composed of Muslim traders. *Anjuvannam* was primarily a maritime guild found on coastal sites and became a permanent part of the local community in coastal villages. Its presence as a trading guild was visible until the end of the thirteenth century, and the *Ayyavole-500* and other guilds almost disappeared from the scene in the fourteenth century and after.

3.2.2.2 *Manigramam*

◆ *Manigramam* active in South India

The *Manigramam* was a significant merchant guild in early medieval South India, referred to in several inscriptions. It was a corporation of merchants, with the name *Manigramam* being a corruption of *Vanik-gramam*, meaning association of merchants. The inscriptions indicate that its activities extended across south India, including the interior. The corporation also functioned in South East Asia, as seen in an inscription at Takua Pa in Thailand. The *Manigramam*'s origins suggest its activities extended across South India and South East Asia.

◆ *Originated from* Kaverippumpattinam traders

◆ *Developed* inter-regional trade networks

The *Manigramam*, a group of traders from Kaverippumpattinam established long-distance trade links early in their history and improved them through interaction with the Five Hundred. They were a descendant of traders from *Vanika-grama* in Kaverippumpattinam, who moved into interior places like Uraiyur and Kodumbalur after the decline of external trade. By the 9th century CE, they re-emerged as an organised group of traders. The *Manigramam* retained its unified composition and character, as it was part of local agricultural communities that branched out into the trading profession. In early medieval Rajasthan, merchant families, either insurgent local merchant lineages or new ones, established wide intra-regional and inter-regional networks. Their

names were derived from their origins, such as Uesavala jnatiya and later Oswals, merchant communities in India, particularly in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

◆ *Guild activities traced via inscriptions*

Manigramam inscriptions are found in various parts of Tamil Country, South East Asia and Sri Lanka, attesting the trading activities of the guild. The state of Tambralinga in South East Asia is likely the Madamahalingam of the Tanjore inscription of Rajendra Chola I. The inscriptions at Ramantali, Courtallam, Srinivasa Nallur, and Tiruvellarai are from the early tenth century, while others are later and attest to religious enrollment activities. At Talakkad in Mukundapuram Taluk, a long inscription mentions the *Manigramam*, describing the founding of a market and the boundary defined by the *urar* or responsible citizens of the village. The inscriptions suggest an eighth-century date for the guild's activities.

3.2.2.3 *Ayyavole*

◆ *Ayyavole founded in 8th century*
◆ *Expanded across south India*

The *Ayyavole* (The Five Hundred) was founded in the 8th century CE by the 500 Mahajanas of the *Mahagrahara* of Aihole to provide an institutional base for the region's commerce. The organisation later expanded its activities to other parts of South India. Its origins in Karnataka may be a survival of the early historical tradition of merchant guilds dominating the commerce of the Deccan. The organisation did not remain a single unified body or its permanent headquarters and the number Five Hundred became conventional. The terms *Ubhaya Nanadesi* (*svadesi* and *pardesi* merchants) have been used almost interchangeably in their records. The *Valanjiyar* (*Banajigas*=traders) and *Vira Valanjiyar* also denote the same organisation, but the emphasis is on their militant character. The *Velaikkara* group associated with the *Valanjiyar*, especially in Sri Lanka, forms another militant component in this organisation. The heterogeneous composition of the organisation is attested in guild inscriptions, which refer to the different castes of its members, as well as regional and religious associations. Thus, the *Ayyavole* was a group of people of "disparate origins associating together for a common purpose" i.e., trade.

3.2.3 Urban Centres

The *nagarattar*, or 'men of the *nagaram*', is a significant group in the copper plate records of early medieval south India. Unlike the *brahmadeyams*, there is limited evidence about their composition, organisation and administration. Conventional historical literature fails to provide a framework for studying these institutions, although inscriptional details are provided in the work of Nilakanta Sastri and Appadorai. However, recent publications have sparked interest in studying the *nagaram* organisations in medieval south

- ◆ Limited evidence on nagaram structure
- ◆ Debate over political roles of nagaram

India. Kenneth R. Hall presents data on *nagaram* organisations, but his approach is misguided. Hall identifies two domains of trade: localities and long-distance maritime exchanges. He argues that the state used the *nagaram* in Chola polity to integrate the political system of medieval south India. However, B. D. Chattopadhyaya and R. Vanaja question the empirical validity and theoretical soundness of the politico-economic relationships. R. Champakalakshmi's work on urban processes in early medieval Tamil Nadu stresses the empirical data and challenges Hall's equation of one *nadu*-one *nagaram*. B. D. Chattopadhyaya also provides insights into urbanisation in early medieval south India. The role of the *nagaram* in the socio-political organisation of medieval south India is also explored in various documents.

- ◆ Nagaram managed by a committee

The *nagaram*, a corporate body in ancient India, was primarily inhabited by trading community members and those earning a living through commercial and artisanal activities. The *nagaram* was a separate designated area, with the corporate body of *nagarattar* being constituted only by local merchants. The *nagaram* was managed by a committee formula, with the *nagaravariyam* being the most important. A *Managaramalvan* (chief) in Kanchipuram was associated with the annual supervision committee, *attaivariyam*, which reminded us of the *samvatsaravariyam* of Uttaramerur and other places. Other officers concerned with the *nagaram*, such as the *nagarakkaranattan* and *nagarakkanakku*, were also mentioned in the records. It is unclear whether all these settlers formed the *nagarattar*. The records also reveal that the *nagaram* was a separate designated area inhabited primarily by trading community members.

- ◆ Nagaram responsible for land revenue
- ◆ Administrative rights of nagaram

The *nagaram*, a rural corporation, was responsible for communally owned land called *nagarakkani* and was established through various means such as assignment, purchase, union of hamlets, lease and payment of levies or goods and services to the local community. The *nagaram* was collectively responsible for collecting land revenues from its domain and handling internal assessments and collections in a manner that it saw fit. This demonstrated the *nagaram*'s comprehensive administrative rights over its own affairs.

- ◆ Nagaram assigned dues to temples

The *nagaram* was also responsible for assigning dues to local temples, including royal levies, *kadamai*, *kudimai*, *koyimamapperu*, and *nagaraviniyogam*. They were expected to pay the king's revenue agents, 23,000 *kalam* of paddy on cultivated lands and 1000 *kasu* of gold on dry lands. This situation contrasts with the situation in other local bodies like the *nadu*, which was recognised by the state as an agent for the assessment and collection of revenue and settlement of other administrative matters.

The *nadu*, a feudal principle, carried out state functions in medieval south India, while local groups held the power. The *nagaram*, a



- ◆ Nagaram's jurisdiction over land
- ◆ Land as a symbol of prestige

body of locals, also held state powers and functions in regions where it existed. The *nagaram*'s role in political organisation was evident in Mammudicholapuram, where it collected fees for *padi kavul*. The *nagaram*'s proprietary and jurisdictional rights over neighbouring agricultural land were evident in records, similar to the *sabha*, whose members did not participate in primary agricultural operations. In some cases, the *nagaram* assigned land on service tenure, and profits of individual merchants were invested in land. Land was considered a permanent investment, symbolising prestige and pointing to the largely land-based nature of the economy and society.

- ◆ Nagaram as a marketing centre

The *nagaram*, a pre-capitalist socio-economic structure, was primarily seen as a marketing centre, coordinating the exchange of agricultural surplus and locally produced commodities. It played a crucial role in coordinating artisanal production and facilitating exchange, as illustrated by Rathakara inscriptions. The *nagaram* brought together weavers, oil mongers, potters and smiths, as well as merchants of articles produced far and near. However, in the localised economy of the age, these activities must be seen as recycling local resources within the locality. The industrial aspect never freed itself from agrarian entanglements, and thus failed to take off in any other form. The *nagaram*'s focus on land and agrarian relations does not minimise its non-agrarian aspect.

- ◆ Nagarams granted local autonomy in nadu

The *nagaram*, a group of *nagars*, was a significant part of the feudal structure in south India during the early medieval period. They were assigned *taniyur* status, granting them independence within the territorial limits of a *nadu*. This status was also given to major *brahmadeyams*, such as Rajadhirajachaturvedimangalam and Uttaramerur. This indicates that *nagarams* were granted local autonomy within the *nadu*. The creation of new *nagarams* under royal patronage, such as Kollam, Muyirikkodu, Uraiyur, Nagapattanam, Kanchipuram, Narttamalai (Nagarattarmalai), and Piranmalai, demonstrates that *nagarams* played a role similar to *brahmadeyams* in integrating society in the new form of polity. The recognition of these *nagarams* as representing a significant section of society and their use by the state as agents reflects their role in a feudal power structure.

- ◆ Nagarams integrated society with autonomy

The discussion of the *nagaram* in early medieval south India highlights a significant aspect of the social structure. The *nagaram* being more of a trader-like character and having local autonomy in *taniyūr* settlements, shared the role of integrating society, which was identified by rulers and liberally encouraged and patronised. It enjoyed comparable places in the political structure of early medieval south India.

Summarised Overview

In early medieval south India, the structure of commercial and social organisation was centred around towns called *nagarams*, which housed merchants and artisans such as *Chettis* (general merchants), *Sankarapadiyars* (oil merchants), *Saliyas* (weavers), and *Tattars* (goldsmiths). Each *nagaram* had an assembly composed of representatives from the leading merchant communities. While the commercial activity of these towns was initially modest during the early Chola period, merchant guilds such as *Manigramam* and *Ainurruvar* played a critical role in carrying out trade, particularly long-distance trade. Guilds like *Anjuvannam*, composed of West Asian traders (Jewish, Christian and Islamic communities), also became prominent. The rise of these organisations coincided with the growth of overseas trade, especially by the eleventh century.

The *Ainurruvar* and *Anjuvannam* guilds significantly influenced south Indian trade, with inscriptions from the eleventh century revealing their activities, temple donations and community decisions. Reputed for their bravery and honesty, these guilds managed trade across 18 countries and engaged in vigorous overseas trade with regions like Southeast Asia, China, and the Persian Gulf. The decline of *Ainurruvar* merchant guilds in south India is linked to the transformation of the economy, with industries like weaving and oil-pressing becoming more significant, and temple rituals demanding specific goods like camphor and coconuts.

The *Anjuvannam* guild, mentioned in Tamil inscriptions and associated with West Asian traders, was vital in the coastal trading communities of south India. They operated in prominent port towns like Kollam and Krishnapatanam and were closely connected to local merchant assemblies. In the ninth century, *Anjuvannam* played a pivotal role in facilitating trade between India and West Asia. However, the organisation evolved over time, becoming primarily associated with Muslim traders by the eleventh century. Inscriptions from Java and Sumatra suggest that Indian merchant guilds like *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam* extended their influence far into Southeast Asia.

The *Manigramam* guild, a significant player in both South Indian and Southeast Asian trade, had deep roots in Tamil Nadu and was closely associated with the town of Kaverippattinam. By the ninth century, *Manigramam* re-emerged as an organised group of traders engaged in long-distance trade. Their reach extended into interior south India as well as foreign regions like Thailand and Sri Lanka. The *Ayyavole* guild, also known as the Five Hundred, formed a crucial institutional base for the commerce of southern India from the eighth century onward, expanding across South India and Southeast Asia. Their records highlight the inclusion of various regional and religious communities, reflecting the diversity and militant nature of the organisation.

The merchant guilds of medieval South India played an indispensable role in the region's economic history, facilitating domestic and international trade through complex networks that spanned across continents. Their decline, however, remains a topic of debate, but their legacy persists through inscriptions and historical records.



The *nagaram*, or trading communities, played a significant socio-political and economic role in early medieval south India, as highlighted in copper plate records. Unlike the more well-documented *brahmadeyams*, evidence regarding their organisation and administration is sparse. Scholars such as Nilakanta Sastri and Appadorai have explored inscriptional data, while more recent studies, like Kenneth R. Hall's, have attempted to link the *nagaram* to political integration within the Chola polity. However, Hall's interpretation has been critiqued by scholars like B.D. Chattopadhyaya and R. Champakalakshmi for its theoretical limitations. The *nagaram* primarily functioned as a corporate body of local merchants, controlling land and revenue collection, and assigning dues to local temples. It also played a role in local governance, possessing administrative rights over land management and internal affairs. Additionally, it maintained control over non-agrarian artisanal production and trade but remained deeply intertwined with agrarian relations. The *nagaram* enjoyed local autonomy within the *nadu* system, often resembling feudal structures, and was occasionally granted special status, similar to *brahmadeyams*. This integration into the larger polity reflects its importance in the socio-economic system of the period.

Assignments

1. Examine the role of the *Ainnurruvar* in the development of trade and commerce in South India. How did this organisation integrate with other merchant guilds like the *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam*?
2. Discuss the significance of inscriptions related to merchant guilds like the *Ainnurruvar*, *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam* in understanding medieval South Indian trade networks.
3. Compare and contrast the roles of the *Manigramam* and *Anjuvannam* merchant guilds in the maritime trade of South India and Southeast Asia.
4. Discuss the role of the *Ayyavole* (Five Hundred) merchant guild in shaping the commercial and socio-political landscape of medieval South India. How did the guild's military associations, such as the *Vira Valanjiyar* and *Velaikkara*, contribute to its power?
5. Discuss the role of the *nagaram* in the socio-political and economic structure of early medieval South India. How did it differ from other local bodies like the *nadu* and *brahmadeyams*?



6. Critically analyse Kenneth R. Hall's argument regarding the *nagaram* as an integrative force in the Chola polity. How do scholars like R. Champakalakshmi and B. D. Chattopadhyaya challenged his interpretation?
7. How did the *nagaram* function as a rural corporate body, and what were its responsibilities in terms of land management, revenue collection and religious obligations in early medieval south India?
8. How does the evidence from inscriptions about the *nagaram* in early medieval South India contribute to our understanding of urbanisation and political organisation during this period?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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Caste Hierarchy

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ identify and describe the major caste groups in South India and their roles in society
- ◆ analyse the social, economic and political roles of Vellalas within the caste hierarchy, including their influence on land ownership, agriculture, and local governance
- ◆ explain how *Valangi* and *Idangai* (Left Hand) and (Right Hand) divisions influence community identity and social interactions
- ◆ differentiate between the left-hand and right-hand caste groups, explaining their social dynamics, rituals and historical significance

Background

Caste, a system deeply rooted in Indian society, emerged from various historical, cultural and religious influences. In pre-modern south India, caste was not merely a social stratification based on occupation; it encompassed a broad spectrum of identities, practices, and interrelationships that shaped societal dynamics. The examination of caste hierarchy in pre-modern south India offers a complex lens through which to understand social organisation, cultural practices and power dynamics in the region. Central to this analysis are the Vellalas, an agrarian caste group traditionally associated with landholding and agricultural production and the Left Hand and Right Hand factions, which reflect significant social and political distinctions within the broader caste system.

The caste hierarchy in pre-modern south India was not only a system of social stratification but also deeply intertwined with land ownership, agricultural practices and economic power. The Vellalas, being a prominent landowning group, played a crucial role in the agrarian economy and maintained significant influence in local governance and administration. The interactions between Left and Right Hand factions highlight the complexities of caste relations, including competition for resources, status, and political influence.



This unit will explore the socio-economic roles of the Vellalas, Left and Right Hand faction and the implications of their hierarchical divisions. It will also examine how these dynamics shaped social interactions, community identities, and the broader cultural landscape of pre-modern South India, providing insight into the enduring legacy of caste in contemporary society. By analysing inscriptions, literature, and archaeological evidence, we aim to uncover the complexities and nuances of caste in shaping identity, power dynamics, and social cohesion in pre-modern south Indian society. Examining these caste groups, along with their historical contexts and socio-political implications, is crucial for understanding the complexities of south India's social structure, the persistence of caste-based identities, and the transformative forces that shape contemporary society.

Keywords

Idangai, Valangai, Vellalas, Surutiman, Palli, Non- Brahmin, Caste, Nattar, Malaiyaman

Discussion

3.3.1 Caste groups

◆ *Wealth from plunder led to landholding*

The Chola's military expansion in the early eleventh century tapped into the martial-natured tribes of fringe areas, drawing recruits for their army. Many regiments of bowmen were formed in these areas, and as members of the imperial Cholas, they were introduced to the plains' culture and the opulence of the Chola government. The wealth obtained through plunder and tribute was shared among all fighting people. Noboru Karashima argues that this new wealth was a significant factor in the emergence of private landholding and the incorporation of tribal folk into settled communities.

◆ *Varnasrama system restructured caste hierarchy*

The Imperial Chola period in South Indian history marked a transition from the ancient caste system based on profession and merit to the *Varnasrama* system, a four-fold class system based on birth in a particular order. The brahmins, who were patronised by Chola rulers, spread the ideals of *Varnasrama* among the people and established their superiority. They concede the kshatriyas as the warrior class, and assigned the roles of vaishyas and shudras to the trading and agricultural castes of Tamil Nadu, thereby gaining the favour of the kings and securing the support of the influential landed aristocracy. This led to the relegation of artisan caste and labourers to *avarnas* or untouchables.

The Pandya inscription from Aduturai, dating around 1318 CE, refers to an earlier Chola inscription dated 1122, which mentions the



◆ Palli people gained land holding rights

palli people as the holders of *kani* (hereditary property rights in land) in many villages in the northern part of the dry zone. It refers to them collectively as *palli - riattar* or *pan-nattar*. The *palli* were a martial community, like the marava and kalla. The inscription also emphasises that anyone opposing the decision of the *pallinatar* would not be considered a warrior of their group.

◆ *Surutiman* community became landholders

The term *nattar* suffixed to *palli* indicates that the *palli* people settled as peasants. This inscription addresses the *palli* people of a vast territory (about 10,000 square kilometers) bounded by the Viranarayanan tank on the east, the Pachchai hills on the west, the Kaveri river on the south, and the Pennai river on the north. This information reveals the concentration of the *palli* people in the south Arcot District and the adjoining Tiruchirappalli District to the north of the Kaveri, as well as the social integration over a wide area at this time. Another martial group turned peasants in this area is the *surutiman* community, with the earliest *surutiman* referred to as a vanguard soldier who gave up his life at the battlefield of Kadakkam. A reference in 1141 CE, mentioned a *surutiman* as a member of the *nattar* of Urrattur-nadu and another reference in 1150 CE, mentioned *surutiman* as a landholder and *nadalvan*, a watchman or ruler of the *nadu*. These big *surutiman* landholders are mentioned in early 13th century inscriptions.

◆ Pastoralists gained landholder status

The *surutiman* and two other contiguous groups, the *nattaman* and *malaiyaman*, also claimed the status of *nattar*. An inscription from 1227 CE from Valikandapuram mentions the *nattaman* as leaders of the Yadava-kula, a pastoral community. The *malaiyaman* is mentioned immediately after. Evidence suggests that pastoralists became landholders, as seen in a Srirangam inscription of 1184 CE. The inscription assigns the taxes of a village in Valluvappadi-nadu to the Srirangam temple by the sri-gopals holding *kani* rights in the *nadu*.

◆ *Idangai* used as caste designation

The *sri-gopala*, a herding group, was identified by its signatories and designation *sri-gopala*. The nature of Right-hand and Left-hand classification over time changed, initially used for military classification, but later became a social designation. In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the term *idangai* was used as an attribute of certain caste groups. These were landholding castes that emerged from former military and pastoral groups. An inscription in 1218 CE at Uttattur relates to the solidarity pact of the *idangai* group, mentioning the mythical origin of the *surutimans*, their settlements in five *nadus*, and their association with the Left-hand group. Only some *surutiman* members with the title *nadalvan* signed the solidarity pact.

◆ *Nattaman, malaiyaman led Left-hand group*

The Valikandapuram inscription of 1227 CE is a solidarity pact among the ninety-eight Left-hand communities, including *brahmin, ariya, nattaman, malaiyaman, andanar, pannattar, vaniya-nagara* and *kaikkola*. The *nattaman* and *malaiyaman* occupy the top positions next to the brahmana caste. An allied inscription at Varanjuram in the same year also mentions the entry of the *malaiyaman* and *nattaman* into the Left-hand group and their oath to be the ‘eyes and hands’ of the group. These two inscriptions highlight the leading role of the *nattaman* and *malaiyaman* in the Left-hand group as new landholding communities.

◆ *Formation of solidarity pacts in the Left-hand group*

The emergence of new landholding castes in the peripheral areas of the Chola kingdom during the twelfth-thirteenth centuries was evident due to the military activities of the imperial Cholas and the maturity of the caste system. The newer castes were resented by the older landholding castes, leading to the formation of solidarity pacts in the Left-hand group. These pacts challenged the privileged position of the traditional landholding castes, with the new castes playing a dominant role. The elite character of the dual division, consisting of only landholders and their associates, did not continue during the Vijayanagara period, as evidenced by the evidence.

◆ *Revolt opposing tax burdens*

In the early fifteenth century, the Vijayanagara period saw a joint revolt between the Right and Left groups, primarily due to opposing tax burdens. These inscriptions, dated 1429 CE, describe a revolt against Vijayanagara governors, local military leaders, and brahmana and vellala landlords for oppressing them with heavy tax burdens and exploitation. The evidence suggests that the Right and Left groups included all direct producers, including cultivators, artisans, commercial castes, and other servicing castes.

◆ *Valangai-idangai evolved over time*

The *valangai-idangai* classification, initially a military classification, evolved into a general nomenclature for direct producers in Tamil Nadu during the 14th and 15th centuries. It was flexible and evolved with medieval society changes. The post-Vijayanagara and British evidence of the 18th and 19th centuries often originated from urban contexts unfamiliar with the Chola age, making it crucial to consider this when interpreting post-Vijayanagara and British evidence.

◆ *Vellalas' regional divisions and customs*

◆ *Vellalas as landowners and cultivators*

3.3.2 Vellalas

The Vellalas, a non-brahmin community, were influential in the Chola period. They were divided into several categories, including Tondaimandalam, Karkarta Vellalas, Nanchinad Vellalas, and Kongu Vellalas, based on their region and vegetarianism. They were landowners and cultivators. The Vellalas have varying customs and manners, with some sections employing brahmin priests for



sacred ceremonies, while others use caste men, barbers, and *dhobi* for their own ceremonies, highlighting the unique traditions and customs of each Vellala.

◆ *Kongu Vellalas' regional connections*

Early writers believed the Kongu Vellalas, along with other Tamils, originated from the Ganga country in Mysore. However, the Kongus are among the earliest Tamils, as evidenced by references in Sangam works like *Purananuru* and *Akaananuru*. They had frequent contacts with neighbouring Chera, Chola, Pandya, Hoysalas, Vijayanagar, and Mysore powers, as well as the Hoysalas.

◆ *Vellalas' agricultural roles and divisions*

The Vellalas, primarily associated with agriculture, emerged in the 9th century. They were divided into '*Uluvittunbar*' and '*Ulutunbar*', with certain sections like Kondaikkatti Vellalar and Karkarta Vellalar being '*Uluvittunbar*' or landlords. The Kondaikkatti Vellalas' stronghold was Tondaimandalam, and they later spread throughout Tamil Nadu, some working in the King's court and others as military leaders during expansionist times.

◆ *Vellalar-Brahmin 'alliance' theory*

Burton Stein's theory suggests that the 'Vellalar-Brahmin' relations were an 'alliance', with peasants holding the balance of secular power in south India. This alliance may have contributed to the failure of the Kshatriya tradition in medieval south India, but this is an exaggeration, as some Vellalas were ministers and generals, and the Kshatriya tradition's failure did not only occur in Tamil Nadu. Steve Barnett argues that economic and social conditions created caste, culture and local hierarchy in the Kondaikkatti Vellala organisation, which persisted until British imperialism, and still maintains a sense of superiority.

◆ *Saiva Vellalars and bhakti movement*

The Kondaikkatti Vellalar, even within the same village, do not intermarry and are divided into vegetarian and non-vegetarian groups. Famous Saiva Vellalars include Sekkilar from the 12th century and Meykandar from the 13th century, both of whom were famous for their roles in the Kalappalar group, with Sekkilar being a Kondaikkatti Vellala and Meykandar being a Saiva Vellala. The distinction between Saiva and other Vellalas emerged during the Bhakti movement in the 7th century CE, with a significant emphasis on vegetarianism, as many hymnists at temples were vegetarian Vellalas, despite the early influence of Jainism and Buddhism.

3.3.3 Left and Right Hand groups

South Indian society was divided into 'right' and 'left' halves for nearly nine centuries, from 1000 to 1900 CE, to categorise localised and occupationally specific kin groupings into two overarching and ritually opposed social categories. The literature on South India



◆ *Left-hand artisans specialised in trades*

mainly focuses on the right-left division of castes, with the ‘right hand’ dominated by rural landlords and economically dependent on land. Castes could claim a share of the harvest in return for ritual services to local peasant communities. The ‘left hand’ was led by artisans, who lived mainly by marketing their skills and were paid by individual jobs. These specialists learned and practiced specific inherited occupations, rather than generalists whose fortunes were linked to agricultural production.

◆ *Stein rejected rigid occupational links*

The social divisions *valangai* (Right-hand) and *idangai* (Left-hand) in Tamil inscriptions and British records from the eleventh century onwards are often seen as opposing. Burton Stein, the most recent significant scholar on the subject, argues that these divisions were not fixed social groups but potential formations that polarised local social groups and castes. He challenges the common belief that the *valangai* division comprised only land and agriculture castes, while the *idangai* division included commercial and artisan groups. Stein’s analysis challenges the prevailing notion that these divisions were fixed social groups.

◆ *Stein’s Valangai-Idangai designations*

The notion that the Colonial administration popularised the idea of the Left and Right division in Tamil Nadu is contradicted by Stein’s evidence. Stein’s *Valangai-Idangai* designations show the affiliations of sixty-eight prominent castes in northern Tamil Nadu and the neighbouring districts. Only ten out of these castes are designated as Left, while many merchant and artisan castes are bracketed with the Right group. Stein acknowledged the weakness of his argument and glossed over it, stating that some weavers were also of the Left division, but most were of the Right division. The association with the Left division for weavers seems to be based on scale of operation and production for the market, similar to oil producers.

◆ *Vanniyars shifted from martial to peasant*

The agrarian versus mercantile and craft occupations explanation for the Right and Left designation in inscriptional evidence is not appropriate. The *palli* or *vanniyar* caste, which was never a commercial or artisan caste, plays a leading role in Left-hand inscriptions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This caste was first noticed as a martial group in the eleventh century and later transformed into a peasant caste within a couple of centuries. Additionally, in several *Ayyavole* merchant-guild inscriptions from the eleventh-thirteenth centuries in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, the leading merchant groups consider themselves as Right-hand members.

Merchant-guild inscriptions from the 11th and 12th centuries in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu mention the term *valangai* as part of the



◆ *Valangai titles linked to merchant guilds*

titles of some merchant groups. In Nattam Koyilpatti, Tamil Nadu, a similar inscription mentions various *mandalas* and *virakodiyar* of the 18th century, including the *nattu-chettis* and *danma-chettis* of several *mandalas*. The *valangai* attribute is prominently displayed in the title segment of *virakodiyar* names, which are found in merchant-guild inscriptions of Sri Lanka and a few inscriptions in Karnataka.

◆ *Valangai-idangai rooted in Chola military*

The *virakodiya* were militia and guards of the merchant guild, with most inscriptions referring to special towns called Erivirapattinam. The origin of the *valangai-idangai* nomenclature can only be traced to the Chola-period military classification. The term *valangai* was first used in the late tenth century by Rajaraja I, the first ruler to organise a large army for his imperial expeditions. In the latter half of the eleventh century, a poll tax called *valangai-idangai magamai* was introduced, which was part of the category of *antarayam*, which included *ayam* and *pattam* taxes collected from non-cultivating people.

◆ *Valangai-idangai designations became functional*

The inscriptions referring to the tax of *valangai* and *idangai* suggest that by the late eleventh century, the *idangai* designation had become functional. Only the Right-hand army units are mentioned conspicuously in a few known inscriptions. For example, a 1073 CE inscription in Kolar District of southern Karnataka mentions the Right-hand army (*valangai-mahasenai*) in a gathering of agriculturalists from Chola-mandalam and Jayangondachola-mandalam. The famous velaikkara inscription of Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka enumerates different sections of the velaikkara army as *valangai*, *idangai*, *chirudanam*, *pillaikaldanam*, *vadugar*, *malaiyalar*, *parivarakkondam*, and *palakalanai*. Nilakanta Sastri suggested that these names did not denote actual classes of the army but only the sources of their recruitment, such as social classes from which soldiers were drawn. Ascribing caste status to these groups as early as the beginning of the twelfth century is not convincing, as it would project backwards later developments in society.

Summarised Overview

The Chola's military expansion in the early 11th century significantly influenced the region's socio-economic structures, particularly through the recruitment of martial tribes from fringe areas. This military strategy resulted in the formation of various regiments, including bowmen, who, as they integrated into the imperial structure, experienced exposure to the culture and wealth of the Chola government. This newfound wealth, derived from plunder and tribute, played a critical role in fostering private landholding and integrating tribal communities into settled agricultural societies. As these martial communities transitioned, they contributed to shifting social dynamics in south India, where the ancient caste system began evolving into a more rigid *varnasrama* system, marking a move towards birth-based class stratification.

During the Imperial Chola period, the role of brahmins became paramount as they propagated the ideals of the *varnasrama* system, elevating their status while accommodating the kshatriyas and vaishyas from the martial, trading and agrarian backgrounds of Tamil Nadu. This restructuring led to the marginalisation of artisan castes and labourers, relegating them to lower social strata as *avarnas* and untouchables. The competition for status resulted in factional conflicts and violence among various groups, with the Chola kings and the brahmins occasionally mediating disputes. The interactions between these emerging social classes revealed the complexities of power dynamics, as new landholding castes challenged the existing elite, leading to the formation of solidarity pacts among different groups in response to shared grievances.

The inscriptions from the 13th century, particularly those referencing the *palli* people and the Right and Left-hand divisions, illustrate the evolving nature of caste and community identities in south India. The *palli*, originally a martial community, became recognised as landholders, while the *surutiman* and other groups claimed a similar status. This period also witnessed the blurring of traditional caste boundaries, as the *valangai* (Right-hand) and *idangai* (Left-hand) classifications transitioned from military designations to broader social categorisations. Despite the initial distinctions based on occupational roles, the classifications adapted to the socio-political landscape, reflecting the increasing complexities of caste relations in medieval Tamil society. The alliances and rivalries that developed during this time laid the groundwork for later revolts and social movements, culminating in significant changes during the Vijayanagara period, where both Right and Left groups united against oppressive tax burdens.



Assignments

1. Analyse the significance of inscriptions, such as the Pandya inscription from Aduturai and those from Valikandapuram, in understanding the socio-political context of the Chola's. What insights do they provide about landholding and caste dynamics?
2. Discuss the emergence and influence of the Vellalas during the Chola period. How did their social status and economic activities shape the agricultural landscape of Tamil Nadu?
3. Explore how the classification of Right-hand and Left-hand groups evolved from military designations to broader social categories.
4. Examine how economic and social conditions contributed to the formation of caste, culture and local hierarchies among the Kondaikkatti Vellalas.
5. Discuss the significance of the right and left-hand divisions in South Indian society. How did these divisions shape social hierarchies and occupational roles?
6. Critically assess Burton Stein's argument that the right and left-hand divisions were not fixed but rather fluid social formations. How does this perspective challenge traditional understandings of caste structure?
7. Examine the role of inscriptions in understanding the socio-political landscape of medieval South India. How do these inscriptions inform us about the relationships between different castes and their occupations?

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SGOU



Women in Pre-modern South India

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ evaluate the role of women *bhakti* saints in South India's spiritual and devotional practices, highlighting their teachings and poetry's ability to challenge gender norms and social hierarchies
- ◆ assess how *bhakti* movement provided a platform for women's voices and expressions of devotion
- ◆ examine the cultural significance of temple dancers (Devadasis) in pre-modern South Indian society
- ◆ analyse the role of women as donors in Pre-modern South India

Background

Patriarchy is an ideology that promotes structural inequality between men and women, with men controlling women's labour and reproductive capabilities. Premodern South Indian society provides insights into patriarchal society and women's condition through rich literary, inscriptional and iconographic evidence. Understanding gender relations in society, particularly within India, is crucial. The rich tradition of *bhakti* is particularly significant for women due to its social and religious implications. It challenges the dominant Brahmanical ritual world, allowing for a break from rigid social boundaries and providing breathing space for some men and women. Historical investigation into India's past is essential to better understand its past and its impact on gender relations.

The exploration of women's roles in pre-modern South India reveals a complex tapestry of social, cultural and religious dynamics that shaped their identities and contributions to society. The *bhakti* movement, which gained prominence between the 7th and 17th centuries, witnessed the emergence of women as influential saints who articulated personal devotion to God through poetry, song and public discourse. These women, such as Andal and Akka Mahadevi, challenged existing norms and offered a unique lens through which the intersection of gender and spirituality could be examined. Their contributions not only enriched the spiritual landscape but also paved the way for a more inclusive understanding of divine love and devotion.



Devadasis, women temple dancers, played a significant role in South India's religious and cultural life. They were sacred custodians of rituals and traditions, embodying the divine feminine. They contributed to the spiritual atmosphere of temples, influencing local culture. Women were also key patrons and donors, supporting the construction and maintenance of religious institutions. This unit explores the multifaceted experiences of women, focusing on their contributions and roles as *bhakti* saints, temple dancers, and donors within the socio-religious fabric of South Indian society. By examining the roles of women as *bhakti* saints, temple dancers and donors, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of their significance in shaping the cultural and religious landscape of the region.

Keywords

Bhakti, *Devadasi*, Avvaiyar, Karaikalammnaiyar, Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Donors, Temple Women

Discussion

- ◆ *Shift in gender relations*
- ◆ *Institutionalisation of Patriarchal structures*

The early medieval period in South India marked a significant shift in gender relations and the institutionalisation of patriarchal structures. The Sangam sources of early historic Tamilakam reveal a tribal society with varying stages of development and the limitations of the emerging state system. However, the poetry of the time marginalised women as lovers, mothers and wives, focusing more on male pursuits of war and heroism. Despite these limitations, there are indications of matrifocal and matripotestal traditions, indicating different cultural practices within the Tamil macro region. Post-Sangam literature, marked by the didactic works and epics, incorporated influences from outside the region, such as Jainism and Buddhism. Women were portrayed as complementary figures to the heroic male, but characters from the *Silappadikaram*, such as Kannagi and Kavunti Adigal, gave precedence to women who upheld the moral order of Buddhism and Jainism. However, the new ideas presented by the *Sramanic* traditions were eclipsed by the growth of Brahmanical religion in the region.

3.4.1 Women Bhakti Saints

Bhakti literature, dating back to the sixth to ninth centuries CE, provides insight into the cultural transformation influenced by brahmanical religion, ideas, and practices. Feminist scholars

◆ *Bhakti linked to caste and gender*

have argued that women's subordination in social life was linked to the evolution of caste-based society, with class, caste, and gender regulated and legitimised by religion. However, the corpus of *bhakti* hymns, such as the Nayanars and Alvars, presents a more complex picture, with women being prominent devotees, men speaking femininely to their objects of devotion, and reinforcing patriarchal values that affirmed family, kin relationships, and social structures, even as they stood outside these.

◆ *Avvaiyar was a Sangam-era Tamil poet*

3.4.1.1 Avvaiyar

Avvaiyar, the earliest of the four women saints in South India, lived during the Sangam period. In the late Sangam age, seven warrior chiefs provided sustained patronage to poverty-stricken Tamil poets, expressing gratitude in their compositions. In her article "The World of the Bhaktin in South Indian Traditions—The Body and Beyond," Uma Chakravarthi discusses the political hierarchy in the Tamil region, which includes hill chieftains and the three great Tamil kings. Tamil poets of the Sangam age are associated with the hill chieftains, who were hostile to the kings. Some poets, like Avvaiyar, sided with the smaller chieftains.

◆ *Legend links Avvaiyar's parents to caste conflict*

Avvaiyars, a term used in Tamil literature, are elderly wise women. The earliest Avvaiyars lived in the Sangam age and were the daughters of an outcast woman named Athy and a brahmin named Pagavau. A popular legend states that Pagavan's father discovered his future marriage to a low caste girl through his child's horoscope, leading him to leave home on a pilgrimage. The mother then devoted her child's education, and the boy grew up to be a learned brahmin. Pagavan discovered his father's departure and, horrified, left home on a pilgrimage.

◆ *Seven children, including Avvaiyar, were abandoned*

Pagavan encountered a low caste girl who he threw a stone at, causing her to flee to her adopted father, a brahmin, in a neighbouring village. When Pagavan returned, the girl had grown into a beautiful, unrecognisable woman. Pagavan accepted the brahmin father's proposal, but as the marriage ritual was being completed, he realised the girl he was tying himself to was the low caste girl he had encountered earlier. He tried to escape from the marriage but was persuaded to accept her, with him insisting on a condition requiring her to abandon each child born to them wherever they were. The woman was forced to abandon seven children, including Avvaiyar, three boys, and three girls. The mother wailed for care, asking who would take care of her baby. Each child provided wise and encouraging answers, which are believed to have survived as the "Songs of the Seven."

The story revolves around seven abandoned children, each with



◆ *Abandoned children were raised by various families*

◆ *Tiruvalluvar and Avvaiyar gained renown*

a different family background. Avvaiyar was adopted by a Panar family, who were known for their singing. Athiyaman, the eldest of the boys, was associated with Avvaiyar's life and patronised Tamil poets. Uruvay, a dancer and poetess, was raised by a toddy dealer family. Kapilar, a brahmin boy, was invested with the sacred thread but refused by the brahmins due to his caste. Vally, a basketmaker, was raised by a basketmaker family. The last child, Tiruvalluvar, composed the famous *Thirukural*.

◆ *Avvaiyar became a wandering teacher and poet*

Avvaiyar, a young girl, surprised her parents by completing half-finished compositions, demonstrating wisdom beyond her years. As she grew up, a marriage proposal came, causing dismay to her as she faced the dilemma of serving her god and a husband simultaneously. Avvaiyar resolved this dilemma by seeking a drastic solution to avoid marriage, focusing on her youth and beauty. Avvaiyar is said to have prayed to Lord Ganesh, and transformed herself into an old woman. Thus she was released from the requirements of marriage and adopted the life of a wandering teacher. She told the assembled people that she was not meant for family life and that she must care for her people like her adopted mother. She travelled alone, even at night and scattered wisdom and earned the title 'curlyuccupadi', meaning "she who sang for a meal." Her specialty was education, especially for the young.

◆ *Critiqued caste, praised alms-givers*

Avvaiyar/Avvai, a woman of wisdom, composed 13 books, including a panegyric on a wealthy merchant and metaphysics. The remaining 10 are ethical sayings, with the *Atti-Choodi* containing 108 maxims teaching the Tamil alphabet. Avvai prioritised learning and sought proficiency in the threefold classical Tamil, requesting Vinayaka's blessings. She was critical of rigid social divisions and believed that only two castes exist on earth: those who give alms are noble and those who do not give are low.

◆ *Good wives are central to household ethics*

Avvaiyar was known for her criticism of greed and her criticism of women. She criticised the idea that a woman's life is one of misery till death, and believed that a woman's loyalty to her husband is a powerful force that can bring about change. She also emphasised the importance of moderation in food and the blessings of a home where a wife obeys her duty. Avvaiyar believed that good wives, who are loyal to their husbands, have great powers and can cause the rains to fall. The ethics of a household are centred on the good wife as its focal point.

Avvaiyar's life was marked by her association with kings, chieftains and secular power. She was appointed by her patron, the chieftain Athiyaman, as an emissary to the Tondaiman court. According to tradition, she advised the three crowned heads of the

◆ Associated with kings and chieftains

Tamil country to do good. After the death of her patron Athiyaman, Avvaiyar wandered the Tamil region, receiving immortality from the nelli fruit. Chieftains tried to hold her down, but she refused, stating she hated youth and accepted old age, questioning the rightness of binding her in one place. She met her brother Tiruvalluvar and helped him access the Sangam, a poet gathering in Madurai.

◆ Avvaiyar transforms gender roles

◆ Combines moral authority and politics

Avvaiyar, gains a moral authority that is typically reserved for men. She can create beautiful songs, record her devotion to god and teach, formulate a code of ethics and assume a position of authority over men. Her world is not limited by religious ends, but also includes the lay world, everyday relations and political power. She transcends the conventional limitation on *bhikshu*, which was central to Buddhism. This is evident in the Chola king's rebuke when she intervenes on behalf of her patron, a chieftain of the Tamil region. The king dismisses her, but Avvaiyar responds by ensuring justice and righteousness in the land. Avvaiyar is like the Buddha, who realised that the moral order could only be sustained through the transformation of politics. In Avvaiyar's view, a withdrawal from the State implies a withdrawal from righteousness. Her concerns with the secular political world may have been influenced by her Panar background, where she transforms the conventional role of a bard into a moral authority. She successfully wrests a moral space in the secular world, becoming a prototype and establishing the tradition of a series of Avvaiyars in the Tamil region.

◆ Karaikalammaiyar poem reflects deep devotion

3.4.1.2 Karaikalammaiyar

Karaikalammaiyar, a devotee of God Shiva, made a significant contribution to Tamil literature around 600 CE. Despite not being known outside the Tamil region, her enduring impact is evident in her 100-verse poem, *Arputha Thiru Anthati*, which expresses her devotion to Shiva and is considered capable of moving people to tears. The *Periapuranam* describes her birth in Karaikal, a seaport town inhabited by wealthy merchants. One merchant named Danadattan performed austerities and was blessed with a daughter named Punitavati, meaning the immaculate one. Punitavati was deeply devoted to Shiva, religious literature and *bhaktas*. At marriageable age, she married a Nagapattinam man, but her parents refused to leave her, leading him to reside in Karaikal.

◆ Story regarding the life of Punitavati

There was a story regarding the life of Punitavati. Punitavati, a housewife, was tested when she gave away one of two mangoes meant for her husband's consumption to an aged *bhakta*. The husband, after eating one mango, asked for the second one. Punitavati couldn't reveal what had happened. Shiva intervened, and she found a ripe mango. The husband noticed its unique sweetness and asked for an explanation. Punitavati revealed the



truth, and the husband mocked her. He tried to test her powers and she produced another mango. The husband believed that a mere housewife couldn't possess such powers.

◆ *Punitavati transforms into Karikalammaiyar*

The husband was disturbed by his wife's supernatural powers and decided to leave home to seek an ordinary existence. He remarried and named his daughter Punitavati after his former wife. Punitavati's family discovered her whereabouts and took her to him. Her husband revealed she was not an ordinary woman. Punitavati prayed to Shiva, asking him to transform her into a demoness and "stand by God in prayer." Shiva fulfilled her wish, and Punitavati became the emaciated figure known as Karikalammaiyar.

◆ *Witnesses tandava; composes devotional verses*

In her new form, Karikalammaiyar, a goddess, walked to Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva and Uma. She walked on her hands into the presence of the lord, a scene depicted on stone reliefs. Shiva welcomed her with love and understanding, and she addressed him as Appa (father). She begged for an end to rebirth and requested to sing his praises in her present birth. The lord directed her to visit Tiruvalankadu, the sacred banyan forest, where she could see his *tandava* (dance of Shiva). After making her for some days, the lord appeared to her and danced the *tandava* with her under his feet, while her songs resounded in the forest. A selection of her verses in the 'Arputha Thiru Anthati' provides insight into her devotion and emotional range.

◆ *Devotion conflicts with societal marital role*
◆ *Symbolises creative energy through bhakti*

Karikalammaiyar's *Alankadu* poems, which are not chanted in temples or set to music, have a profound impact on the average devotee. They inspired them to reject the beauty of the female body and the external environment, as they are unnecessary for feeling the presence of the Lord. Once released from her bond with her husband, Karikalammaiyar, expressed her devotion to Shiva, viewing him as "father" and seeing herself as his slave, but not as a "husband" or lover like some other *bhaktins*. Karikalammaiyar, the only woman saint composer in the Saiva tradition, wrote about Shiva's dance in forests and cremation grounds at Tiruvalankadu. She emphasised her position as a *bhakta* and her terrifying form, resembling bloodthirsty spirits and ghouls.

3.4.1.3 Andal

◆ *Two works express her devotional love*

Andal, a mysterious woman, appeared in tulsi bushes and was raised by a priest named Periyalvar. She refused to marry anyone but Vishnu, expressing her love in an unconventional manner. At 16, her father took her to the Srirangam temple, where she was married to Vishnu. Andal was then mysteriously absorbed into a stone replica of her beloved. She composed two poetic works, one, *Tiruppavai*, which represents her girlhood sentiments for Krishna

and is incorporated into Vaishnav temple rituals. The other, *Nachiyar Tirumozhi*, expresses her feelings for the lord in more explicit terms. This work has been marginalised, except for a section about her marriage which has been incorporated into marriage rituals of Vashnavites. Andal is now considered Bhudevi, consort of Vishnu.

◆ *Andal merges into Vishnu idol*

Andal, a woman saint among the twelve Alvars, was an orphan raised by a temple priest in Srivilliputtur. She composed two major poems, expressing her desire to be the bride of Vishnu. Her life story is narrated in later hagiographies of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, marked by her devotion to Vishnu and her ultimate desire for the forbidden union with God. At sixteen, she merged into the idol of Ranganatha in Srirangam. Andal resolves the issue of marriage by refusing to marry a mortal and insisting on marrying the lord himself. This leads to no conflict and she renounces beauty and wifehood. Her father travels with her to Srirangam, where she marries Ranganath. Andal chooses marriage directly, unlike the other three women who negotiate it. This direct resolution resolves the issue of marriage.

◆ *Women saints defy patriarchal norms*

◆ *Devotion redefines societal roles for women*

Twelfth-century hagiography reveals the celebration of women who were outside the normative patriarchal structure, such as Andal and Karaikkal Ammaiyar. Andal's explicit expressions of desire led to the end of her mortal life, while Karaikkal Ammaiyar had to shrink her form to be recognised as a ghoul. In Karnataka, Akkamadevi, a woman saint, cast away her clothes and all illusory bonds, including marriage, when she realised her devotion was all-seeing and all-pervasive. These examples highlight the importance of breaking patriarchal norms and embracing women's unique roles in society.

◆ *Bhakti literature linked goddesses to Siva*

During the early medieval period, *bhakti* saints used literary motifs to associate the regional goddess Korravai with the male deity Siva, often associating her with Parvati or Kali. This continuity with Sangam traditions often overshadowed Puranic influences, highlighting the importance of Sangam in Hinduism. The Tamil Puranas, composed from the 12th century, represent both Tamil and Sanskrit traditions, particularly in relation to the goddess. They often resolve myths through marriage, displacing the local goddess with a transcendental god if marriage was not possible. If the goddess was seen as an adversary, the myth was resolved through dance performances, either individually by Shiva or the goddess, or in some cases, as a competition between them.

The visions of the independent goddess at the margins in Hindu mythology reflect personal perceptions and religious and cultural beliefs. Mahalekshmi argued that these narratives based social



◆ *Shiva's dances symbolised masculine triumph*

order on marriage and chaotic spaces occupied by women outside normative institutions. Shiva's victory is not only due to his dance expertise but also a phallic triumph, where he performs the *urdhvataṇḍava*, a dance where one leg is planted to the ground and the other lifted upwards. The goddess loses due to her womanly nature. Shiva's victory at Chidambaram, where he defeated Kali, is also the site where he banishes her to the sacred site's northern margins.

◆ *Sacred myths reflect kinship patterns*

Shiva is often urged to reside in specific sites, and the Puranic goddess Uma-Parvati takes on a local form and name, rooting the deity there. In Kanchipuram, Parvati protects the sand *linga* she worships from cosmic flood by clutching it to her breasts. *Bhakti* saints mention the imprint of her breasts on Shiva's body. These myths are embedded in the kinship patterns of south Indian society, where women are not completely displaced from their natal home through cross-cousin marriages. Thomas R. Trautmann suggests a variant form of this 'Dravidian kinship' is the matrilineal tradition, which is still prevalent among communities like the Nairs in Kerala.

◆ *Indigenous traditions persisted in rituals*

The early medieval period in South India significantly transformed the cultural landscape, affecting gender relationships. However, myths and ritual practices reveal continuities with older indigenous social traditions. Local goddesses in classical tradition were transformed into divine spouses, while in local cultic worship, they remained independent and fiery, subservient to none.

3.4.1.4 Akka Mahadevi

◆ *A Shiva devotee*

Akka Mahadevi, a passionate Shiva devotee, was initiated into worship at an early age by an unknown guru. As a beautiful young woman, she came to notice Kaushika, the chieftain of the land. He managed to become her husband through force. Akka Mahadevi sets conditions on Kaushika's relations with her, while he attempts to subjugate her will. The marriage was unsatisfactory, as Akka Mahadevi threatened Kaushika to leave him if he forced himself on her and even walked out on him when he continued to violate her.

◆ *She embraced religious devotion and wanderings*

Akka Mahadevi rejected existing marital relationships and began her religious wanderings. She found kindred spirits among saints who helped her consummate her love for Shiva. They arranged her real marriage to him, and she died in her early 20s, becoming one with Shiva at Srisaṭṭa.

The south Indian *bhaktins'* lives and poetry reveal a difference in their experience of *bhakti* compared to the *bhakta* in the realm of marriage. The *bhakti* movement broke down the householder

◆ *Bhakti bridged householder-renouncer*

and renouncer divide, which had been present in the earlier dissent movement against Brahmanism. In the *bhakti* movement, there was no contradiction between the pursuit of *bhakti* and the life of the *grahastha*. However, this boundary collapsed only in men, and the tension between marriage and devotion to a personal god persisted for women. All *bhaktins* negotiated the institution of marriage, but there is no equivalent to the typical male *bhakta*, such as Tiruvalluvar.

◆ *Mortal marriage seen as unfulfilling*

Akka Mahadevi, a woman with acute problems, left her husband and devoted herself to Shiva. She explains the tension between being a wife and a devotee, describing her love for God as “adulterous.” She gives up on her husband and in-laws, and later makes the lord herself her husband. Her relationship with mortal husbands is unsatisfactory, and she dismisses mortal husbands with contempt. After dissolving with her earthly husband, she is free to roam and seek the real husband, ignoring hunger and thirst. The lord’s presence makes hunger and thirst irrelevant, allowing her to find her true husband.

◆ *Devadasi system associated with temples*

3.4.2 Devadasis/ Temple Dancers

Temple women, known as *devadasi*, have been a topic of debate and controversy in India. The *devadasi* system, which involved women servants associated with temples, was prevalent until made illegal early twentieth century. The tradition’s origins are unclear, but it has been traced back to the Indus valley civilisation, Vedic literature, Sangam literature, and some scholars attribute it to a pure Tamil origin.

◆ *Sangam texts and inscriptions document devadasis*

The *Agam* (love poem) texts of the Sangam age provide evidence of the devadasis and their services in south India. Inscriptions from South India also provide information about the *devadasi* tradition. In medieval Tamil India, the *devadasi* was a dominant socio-religious institution, becoming an institution towards the end of the fifth and sixth centuries CE under the patronage of the Pallavas and Pandyas. The Chola period (ninth to thirteenth century CE) saw the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural influence of the Chola dynasty reach its pinnacle in South India, with the Chola kings and royal family constructing magnificent temples that served as potent religious institutions and centres of socio-economic activities.

Devadasis were female servants of gods attached to temples in India, known by various names in different parts of the country. In Andhra Pradesh, they were called *joginis*, while in Maharashtra, they were called *muralis*. In Chola inscriptions, the term *tevaratiyal* or *devaradiyal* was most frequently used to signify

- ◆ *Devadasis had varied names regionally*
- ◆ *Terms linked to godly servitude*

temple women. This compound term consists of the words *tevar* (god, lord) and *atiyal* (female slave, servant, devotee). Over half of the references to temple women use this term or synonymous terms like *emperumanatiyal* or *alvanatiyal*. *Tevaratiyal* and related terms are found in inscriptions from all regions of Tamilnadu. They were also known by other names in Tamilnadu, such as *devakannis*, *padaliyar*, *talichecherippendugal*, *Koilpendugal*, *tiruppadiyar*, and *devanar magal* (the daughter of devanar, lord Shiva). Their name suggests they were drawn from the Shiva temple.

- ◆ *Devadasis served deities in temples*
- ◆ *Inscriptions show donations for temple service*

The origin and existence of the *devadasi* institution in Hindu civilization can be attributed to various factors. One reason is that deities require full-time service, both ritual and secular. As temples of Hindu gods were built, people began to believe in having singing girls attached to shrines to play music during various services and worship. Rajaraja I built the Tanjore temple in the 10th century CE, providing for temple service of at least 400 dancing girls. Engaging a *devadasi* in the temple was considered a divine act. Some devotees offered themselves to temple service, while others were donated by others or elder family members. Inscriptions from Kulottunga Chola I and Adipurisvara temples mention that bowman Achchapaideran Ganabaty assigned women of his family to the service of a temple in Tiruvallam. Another inscription from Adipurisvara temple mentions Vayalur Kilavan Tiruveganban who donated five women and their descendants for husking paddy in the temple. Some believe captured and helpless women during wars were made to serve as devadasis. In the third year of King Rajaraja III, five men and five women sold themselves to enter the service of the Vedapurisvara temple.

- ◆ *Devadasis undergo dedication ritual*

The young *devadasi* undergoes a ritual ceremony of dedication to the local temple deity, similar to an upper-caste Tamil marriage ceremony. After this, they are set apart from non-dedicated sisters, allowing them to live a normal life involving economic activity, sex, and child-bearing. The rituals also commit them to rigorous emotional and physical training in classical dance, their hereditary profession.

- ◆ *Devadasis had a sacred life devotion*
- ◆ *Devadasis marked with temple symbols*

Devadasi women had unique lifestyles and *samaskaras*, which transformed them into ‘ever-auspicious women’, a *nityasumangali*. They sacrificed their lives in service of god. It’s unclear whether they could leave their profession, but inscriptions suggest that if a female servant dies, her daughter can take up the duty. *Devadasi* were also not known if they entered into married life, although inscriptions from Achuda mangalam village and Somnatesvara temple mention marriages. Temple service was initiated through a ritual marriage ceremony called *pottu-kattuthal*, a spiritual

marriage allowing participation in divine life. Girls were branded with symbols to show their bond to temples. Inscriptions show that devadasis of Siva temples were branded with trident marks, while Vishnu temples had *sankh* or *chakra* marks. Mislabeled ladies were removed from palace emblems and struck with temple stampages. Devadāsī debut was held on auspicious days.

◆ *Talaccheri inscriptions confirm their privileges*

The *devadasi* temple ladies lived in separate hamlets called *Tali cheri*, adjacent to the temples. They were typically provided with residences by the temple. The Talaccheri inscriptions of King Rajaraja I show 400 devadasis being allotted one house per head in the northern and southern parts of the Taliccheri, as part of their rights and privileges in exchange for their ritual services.

◆ *Devadasis were both prestigious and menial*

Devadasi were prestigious and menial servants in temples, performing various duties and showing devotion to their rituals. They were paid rewards for their services, which varied from temple to temple and from time to time. During the Chola period, official supervision was strictly imposed on devadāsīs, who were attached to the royal temple. Rajaraja I drafted rules for temple services, naming temple women as *paniceyyapendukal*, who performed singing and dancing in front of deities.

◆ *Devadasis performed ritualistic singing and dance*

Thirteen female hymns, known as Tamil vedas, were sung in temples, preceded or followed by dance. *Devdasis* were also entrusted with other duties, such as preparing garland for lords, providing flowers for the temple, gardening, and weaving garlands. Menial services included husking paddy, carrying lights, food preparations and cleaning temple floors. An inscription from the 13th century CE mentions assigning various duties to the ten temple women, including applying protective ornaments (*kappu*) to deities, making decorations in the *mahamandapa*, and cleaning and applying *kappu* to the deities of the inner and outer *prahara*.

◆ *Devadasis were highly respected by society*

◆ *They were associated with divine titles*

Devadasis, or women of the temple, were respected in society and religious institutions. In the Chola period, they were referred to as ‘devaradiyar’ (devotee of god), ‘devanarmakal’ (daughter of God), ‘taliyilar’, and ‘patiyilar’ (women of the temple). These terms were functional and showed respect. *Devadasis* were sometimes referred to by place names or titles of Alvars and Nayanars, who were devotees of god Vishnu and Shiva respectively. Rulers like Eduttapadam, Paravai, Narayani, Samundi, Tirunelakendi, and Umai also denoted both Saivaite and Vaishnavaites titles.

Adevadasis was considered a *Nityasumangali*, eternally free from widowhood, and performed their ritual duties in the temple. They were considered more auspicious than *sumangali* (married women whose husband is alive) because their individual female powers



◆ *Social status*

were ritually merged with the goddesses and they were dedicated to a divine husband, a husband who could never die. Therefore, temple women were considered to be employed and protected by the temple, as they brought luck, protected the king and the country, provided protection against danger, and supported prosperity, health, fertility, and happiness. In 1019, Thillaivanamudaiyal Madavalli was mentioned as the sacred servant of the Siva temple of Tirumananjeri. Nanakai Paravai was a famous *devadasi* from Rajendra I's region, and her image was kept within the temple premises alongside the Chola king's. These images received ritual sanction and continue to be performed by temple priests today.

◆ *Misconduct against devadasis was forbidden*

The sectarian texts mention touching dancing women, speaking to them, or looking at them as a ritual offence when visiting temples. This misconduct is considered equivalent to other forms of desecration, such as spitting in the temple, turning back to the shrine, and looking covetously at consecrated property. Life honours are granted to the *devadasi* at her death, with flowers, sandal paste, and a garland sent. In some temples, the kitchen fire is used to light her pyre, and the deity observes 'pollution' for a day without *puja*. The bier is placed on the floor near the entrance to the temple during the funeral procession.

◆ *Economic status*

During their time, *devadasis* were highly respected and paid for their services by temple authorities and royal family members. They also provided housing and participated in donations. Under the Chola rule, devadasis were often seen as donors, such as Caniorrialvi of Tiruorriyur Utaiyar temple who donated 32 cows for a perpetual lamp, Kovanarkula, a dancing girl who offered Tirukamakottai Nacciyar's icon to Annamalaiyarkoyil, Tiruvannamalai for her mother's health, and Kovanarkula, a dancing girl, who gifted 10 *kālanju* of gold for padaiyal and ornaments for the icon. Temple women were sometimes referred to as holder of *Kani*, a right not due to tax.

3.4.3 Women as Donors

◆ *Women had access to economic resources*

◆ *Temple women had independent economic status*

Gender relations in society can be analysed by examining the access of men and women to economic resources. Inscriptions reveal that many women had the economic resources to build temples and make donations for various services. They were mostly daughters, wives, and mothers of important men in the state structure or locality. Royal women were prominent in the early Chola period, particularly in the core Tamil regions of Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli. Other categories of women with control over land and resources included Brahmana families, palace women, and temple women. Temple women were considered devadāsis or

god's slaves and were the only section of women who were paid and had an independent economic standing.

◆ *Women's roles as donors were limited*

Women were notably less likely to donate than men, and there are no explicit references to their roles as cultivators, traders, or menial groups, despite their potential contributions to the production process. According to Kesavan Veluthat, Chakravarthi's famous question about the invisibility of certain sections of women in the Vedic period, 'What happened to the Vedic Dasi?', is relevant in our region as well, and the absences indicate biases in our sources for early medieval south India.

◆ *Myths reflect gender stereotypes*

Myths provide insight into society's worldview and gender identities in a cultural context. They are often related to sacred deities, such as Shiva and goddesses in Tamil culture. These myths highlight stereotypes about men and women, reflecting early medieval society's attitudes and expectations. The Saiva Nayanar hymns highlight these attitudes, highlighting the importance of understanding gender identities within a cultural context.

◆ *Temple women made significant donations*

In the fourth year of Ko Virajakecaripanmar's reign, Centan Ceyyavaymani, a temple woman, gave 10 *kalanju* of gold to the Mahadevar of Tenkailayam in Srikanta-chaturvetimankalam for a twilight lamp and a pot of river water for daily offerings. The worshipers at the temple were responsible for this grant. In the ninth year of Tiripuvanaccakuravartikal Sri Rajadhirajadevar's reign, records of perpetual lamp gifts were inscribed in the temple accountant's registry. Cani Orrialvi gave 32 cows to Lord Tiru Orriyir Utaiyar for one perpetual lamp, and Patampakiin Vallamutaiyan supplied 114 *nazhi* of ghee.

◆ *Temple women's roles were frequently recorded*

Temple women play a crucial role in Chola period inscriptions, with 37% of 304 inscriptions describing them as donors to the temple. Of these, 44% record gifts made by temple women. This role is most prominent in all four subperiods, with 56% of all inscriptions in the third subperiod describing them as making gifts. In the fourth subperiod, 41% of inscriptions mention them as making deals, while another 21% refer to them as relatives of donors. Temple servants are the second most commonly mentioned role for temple women, but only half as frequently as the role of donor. Overall, temple women's roles in inscriptions are significant.

◆ *Temple women's gifts supported services*

Temple women's gifts during the early Chola period were similar to other donors, with most donations supporting perpetual lamps for temples. Later, endowments continued to support lamps, daily or festival services, temple personnel, building temples, and installing images. There were no differences in the object of donation or apparent value among different types of donors. The relative value



of gifts such as land, livestock, gold, jewellery, and currency was not very great, and there were not many donors whose generosity was particularly conspicuous. The range of gifts is not very great, and there are not many donors whose generosity is particularly conspicuous.

Temple women's role as donors is frequently mentioned in Chola period inscriptions, which are primarily records of gifts to the temple. Temple women often acted as temple patrons and their gifts resembled those of other donors, but these facts distinguish them from other groups with whom they would be most similar, such as other women and temple men. The establishment of hierarchies of temple authorities and new political complexities by Chola kings may have discouraged patronage, especially for female donors. However, a readjustment was made, and various individuals were motivated to make gifts to temples. However, the previous level of donations by women, except for temple women, was never restored. Relations between donors and temples resumed, but women's participation in public affairs was more restricted. Temple women, however, showed increasing engagement with the temple during the Chola period. Temple women were able to participate in the network of linkages in a way that other women were not.

◆ *Temple women's donations were consistent*

◆ *Women's public roles became restricted*

◆ *Royal women's patronage was concentrated*

◆ *Temple women's patronage was more diffuse*

◆ *Temple women's patronage was unique*

◆ *Donations strengthened familial relationships*

Royal women's patronage was primarily concentrated in the core Chola region, with most gifts made to temples in Tanjavur and Tiruchirappalli districts. Temple women's gifts were distributed throughout the Tamil country, with Chingleput district being the focus of concentration. Queens and palace women followed each other's examples in choosing temples to endow, with queens modeling themselves after other queens and palace women. Temple women's donations were more diffuse, with no group strategy based on consistent or cumulative patronage of a single temple. Chola royal women may have acquired considerable local influence through their gifts, but their influence did not continue into the later Chola period.

Temple women, on the other hand, did not act in concert with each other in their patronage of temples. Temple women's gift giving is unique in that it is not only absent from temple men but also exhibits unique characteristics. Inscriptions of their donations mention the privileges and honours they received in exchange, unlike other donors. These donations are more common in areas peripheral to Chola political dominance. The pattern of temple women's patronage is more diffuse, focusing on medium-sized temples, particularly their own home temples. The greater number of references to temple authorities and mentions of their mothers,

sisters, and daughters as recipients of their gifts indicate the unique relationships they established and strengthened through their donations.

Summarised Overview

Bhakti literature, which emerged between the sixth and ninth centuries CE, serves as a significant lens through which to understand the cultural shifts influenced by Brahmanical religion and societal changes in pre-modern South India. While feminist scholars have pointed out that the evolution of caste-based society often subordinated women, the corpus of *bhakti* hymns—including works by the Nayanars and Alvārs—depicts women not only as devoted participants but also as complex figures who navigate and often subvert patriarchal norms. Notably, women saints such as Avvaiyar, Karaikalammaiyar, and Andal made profound contributions to this literary tradition, each embodying unique narratives that reflect their struggles against societal constraints. Avvaiyar, celebrated for her wisdom, criticised rigid social divisions and emphasised the transformative power of devotion. Karaikalammaiyar's profound love for Shiva transcended conventional gender roles, allowing her to find liberation in her spiritual journey. Similarly, Andal's unwavering devotion to Vishnu led her to reject traditional marital expectations, ultimately merging with her divine beloved.

These narratives illuminate the intricate interplay between gender, spirituality, and social dynamics, showcasing how women in pre-modern South India carved out spaces of agency within religious and cultural contexts. The lives and poetry of these *bhakti* saints challenge the patriarchal structures of their time while offering alternative expressions of devotion that resonate with broader themes of love, sacrifice, and moral authority. Together, they illustrate how *bhakti* not only facilitated spiritual connection but also acted as a vehicle for challenging the existing social order, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of women's roles in religious and cultural life.

The *devadasi* system in India, involving women who served in temples, has been a topic of debate since its legal abolition in the early 20th century. Originating from the Indus Valley civilization, it flourished during the Chola period (9th to 13th centuries CE) under royal patronage. *Devadasis* performed essential ritual and secular duties, including dancing, singing hymns, and preparing garlands and cleaning. They were considered *nityasumangali*, or eternally auspicious women, merging their individual powers with the divine. Despite their unique status, their contributions to temple culture and society remained profound, as reflected in inscriptions and historical accounts.

The study of gender relations in society reveals that women, primarily daughters, wives, and mothers of influential men, had significant economic access and contributions to temples and inscriptions during the Chola period. Royal women were prominent in core Tamil regions, while temple women, or *devadasis*, held an independent economic status



and were the only women paid for their services. Despite their contributions, women were less likely to donate compared to men, highlighting an inherent bias in historical records. Temple women's contributions were significant, supporting perpetual lamps and various temple services. Their roles exemplified their economic engagement and reflected broader societal dynamics. Over time, temple women's contributions became more diffuse and personal, strengthening familial ties through their donations. However, the overall trend indicates a decline in women's public participation and patronage as political complexities evolved, emphasising their unique position within this historical context.

Assignments

1. Analyse how the lives and compositions of women *bhakti* saints, such as Avvaiyar and Karaikalammaiyar, challenge traditional notions of femininity and authority within a patriarchal framework.
2. Compare and contrast the literary works of Avvaiyar, Karaikalammaiyar, Andal and Akka Mahadevi. How do their respective themes and messages contribute to our understanding of women's experiences in the *bhakti* tradition?
3. Examine how temple women's donations reflect or challenge existing hierarchies within temple governance.
4. Discuss the role of Devadasis in temple rituals and religious ceremonies in medieval south India. How did their position contribute to the functioning of temples, both religiously and culturally?
5. Critically assess the significance of inscriptions in understanding the lives and roles of *devadasis*. What do these inscriptions reveal about their rights, privileges, and social status?

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

Cultural Formation in South India

BLOCK-04



Development of Art and Architecture

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner would be able to:

- ◆ understand the development of art and architecture in South India
- ◆ evaluate the features of Dravida, Vesara, and Amaravathi or Andhra School of Architecture
- ◆ examine the nature of architecture in South India

Background

We notice various architectural styles around the world, which differ in fundamental principles and styles. Indian architecture is unique due to its spiritual content, which aims to represent the people's prevailing religious consciousness through the objectification of the mind in stone, brick, mortar, or wood. The development of Hindu architecture has been primarily regional, shaped by varying local conditions and the availability of building materials, resulting in a unique architectural style that reflects the people's religious consciousness. Religious ideas have had a significant impact on Indian architecture, with Buddhist, Hindu, and Jaina styles all influencing one another. Hindu architecture is both religious and secular, influenced by societal values. Materials and climate also influence construction, with secular structures often distinguished by utilitarian considerations and religious structures by religious symbolism. Even secular structures are thought to possess aesthetic qualities. This unit examines the evolution of art forms in South India and the mutual influences of various schools in different places and ages. This unit provides a detailed analysis of the Dravida, Vesara, and Andhra school of architecture.

Keywords

Temple Architecture, Dravida, Vesara, Andhra, Amaravathi, *Mandapa*, *Ardhamandapa*, Chola, Hoysala, Deccan, Chalukya, Pandya



Discussion

◆ *Regional architectural styles flourished in South India*

Architecture is the matrix of civilization, viewed historically as the principal visible material record through man's intellectual evolution. During the early medieval period, art and architecture underwent significant developments. Regional architectural styles emerged in south India, with major edifices built in peninsular India under the patronage of early Chalukyas, Pallavas, Hoysalas, Pandyas and Cholas. Indian architecture is mainly classified into three different styles. They are Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara. The Nagara style is popularly known as North Indian, it is associated with the land between the Himalayas and the Vindhya, the Dravida style is generally known as South India with the land between the Krishna and Kaveri rivers; Vesara style is called Central India, occasionally associated with the area between the Vindhyas and the Krishna river. According to architectural historian Adan Hardy, Nagara and Dravida should be viewed as architectural languages, each with its vocabulary, elements, and forms that can be combined in a variety of ways. Hardy suggests that the Chalukya temples in the Deccan should be referred to as 'Karnata-Dravida' rather than 'Vesara'.

4.1.1 Dravida Style

◆ *Features of Dravidian temple*

The Dravidian temple is surrounded by a compound wall and features a central entrance gateway known as a *gopuram*. The main temple tower, or *vimana*, is a geometrically stepped pyramid. In South Indian temples, the term *shikhara* refers to the crowning element at the top, which is typically shaped like a small stupika or octagonal cupola, similar to the *amlak* and *kalasha* in North Indian temples. South Indian temple entrances frequently feature sculptures of fierce *dvarapalas* or the door keepers who guard them, as well as a large water reservoir attached within the complex. Subsidiary shrines may be found within the main tower or as separate small shrines outside the main temple. The North Indian concept of multiple *shikharas* as a cluster was not well received in South India.

◆ *Garbhagriha has the smallest tower*

South Indian temples frequently include a *garbhagriha* in the main temple, which usually has one of the smallest towers because it is the temple's oldest section. As the town's population and size grew, a new boundary wall was required, one that was taller than the previous one. The Srirangam temple in Tiruchirapally, for example, has seven 'concentric' rectangular enclosure walls with *gopurams* on each. The outermost tower is the most recent, while the central tower containing the *garbhagriha* is the oldest.



- ◆ Temples were administrative urban centres
- ◆ Iconography shapes vimana designs

Temples in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Kanchipuram, Tanjaur, Madurai, and Kumbakonam, became the centre of urban architecture during the eighth to twelfth centuries, serving as administrative centres and controlling vast land areas. Dravidian temples have five shapes: square, rectangular, elliptical, circular, and octagonal. The style and *vimana* shape are influenced by the consecrated deity's iconography, allowing for temples dedicated to specific types of icons. However, this is a simplistic differentiation of the subdivisions, as different shapes can be combined in specific periods and locations to create distinct styles. The deity's iconography influences the temple and vimana plans.

- ◆ Vimana wall has high-relief deities

The Dravida moulding sequence in the *adhithana* is replaced by a series of sculptures featuring rows of elephants, lions, *hamsas*, makaras, cavalry, and scrolling vegetation. The *vimana* wall above these bands features high-relief images of deities, each around two feet high, all around.

4.1.1.1 The Chola Temples

- ◆ Chola temples are centered in Tanjore

Chola temples are concentrated in the south, around Tanjore. The Chola period's temple architecture is divided into two phases based on dynastic symbols: the early phase, i.e. mid 9th to early 11th centuries, and the late phase, early 11th to early 13th centuries. Art historians classified art history into three phases: early (850 CE-985 CE), middle (985 CE-1070 CE), and late (1070 CE-1270 CE), each with its own sub-phase.

- ◆ Chola architecture evolved from Pallava style declined by late 10th century

The Cholas, descendants of Pallava traditions, constructed numerous stone temples throughout their kingdom. However, by the end of the tenth century, these structures had diminished due to limited resources and local developments. The Pudukkottai district is home to numerous early Chola monuments that depict the stages of later Pallava architecture transforming into the Chola style.

- ◆ Vijayalaya-Cholesvara temple shows early Chola style

The Vijayalaya-Cholesvara in Narttamalai is a prime example of early Chola style, likely built during the reign of Vijayalaya in the mid 9th century, comprising a *vimana* and an *ardhamandapa*, a hall with two rows of three pillars. The main shrine, surrounded by six parivaralayas, has a circular sanctum with a *linga* and *yoni*. The outer walls have minimal sculptural ornamentation, but two *dvarapala* flank the western entrance. The walls have pilasters but lack niches with deity images, unlike later Chola temples.

- ◆ Minimal wall ornamentation; simple design



Fig.Narttamalai
Source: Pudukottai District

The Chola temple has ornamental pilasters with Chola ‘order’-specific characteristics. The external walls feature a carved frieze of *bhutas* below the curved cornice and a frieze of lions (*vyalas/ Yali*) above it. The *vimana* features miniature shrines (*panjarams*) on the ceiling and in the lower storeys. The mandapa’s pillars are Pallava-style, with a slightly raised, plain, medium band. An elegantly carved floral design hangs over the main entrance, flanked by two *dwarapalas* with half-turned bodies. There are seven tiny, inward-facing stone sub-shrines surrounding the main temple. The Balasubrahmanya temple in Kannanur (Pudukkottai) is another temple in the same style, with elephants replacing *nandis* at the four corners of the roof and beneath the *Sikhara* in the *vimana*.

◆ *Chola temple features distinctive pilasters*

The Nagesvara Temple in Kumbakonam features unique sculptures on its outer walls. The central niches enshrine deities such as *Ardhanari*, *Brahma*, and *Dakshinamurti*, while others feature life-size sculptures of men and women in high relief, possibly portraits of donors or contemporary princes and princesses. The sculptures depicting puranic scenes in low relief on the plinth below the cella resemble goldsmith or woodcarver art.

◆ *Nagesvara Temple features unique sculptures*

The temple of Koranganatha, built during the reign of Parantaka I, represents the next stage of evolution in Srinivasanallur. The temple is 50 feet long, with a 25-foot cella and a *mandapa* in front of a rectangle measuring 25 feet by 20 feet. The interior includes a small hall with four pillars, a vestibule, and a passage that leads to the cella, a 12-foot-square chamber. The temple’s interior pillars are typical of the Chola ‘order’, with two differences from the Pallava type of order: a neck moulding in the capital and an expanded palagai or ‘plank’ in the abacus. Outside the cella, central niches enshrine traditional deities such as *Dakshinamurti*, *Vishnu*, and *Brahma*. Every sculpture is in high relief and of fine workmanship.

◆ *Koranganatha temple shows Chola evolution*

◆ *Distinct Chola pillars and high relief sculptures*

◆ *Shembiyan Mahadevi influenced 3rd phase of Chola temple architecture*

Shembiyan Mahadevi, a queen who was a significant patron of temple building during her husband Gandaraditya's (949-57 CE), son Uttama I's (969-85 CE), and early Rajaraja I's reigns, influenced the third phase of Chola temple architecture. During this period, many older brick temples were replaced with stone structures. Sculpted figures appear stiff and lifeless, indicating a significant change. The Agastyeshvara temple in Anangapur is one such temple dedicated to Shembiyan Mahadevi.

◆ *Muvarkoil complex showcases Chola grandeur*

The **Muvarkoil**, an early Chola temple complex in Kodumbalur, is renowned for its stunning architecture and sculptures. Bhuti Vikramakesari built the central shrines in the second half of the tenth century. They were 21 feet square and separated by about 10 feet. They were connected to a large monastery led by Mallikarjuna. Each shrine featured an *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, nandi shrine, and plinth. A covered cloister surrounded the group, with fifteen sub-shrines distributed as follows: two on each side of the main entrance, four on the insides of the northern and southern walls, and three on the eastern wall behind the main shrines. The outer enclosure consisted of a massive stone wall with an entrance *gopura* on the western side and a four feet wide entrance on the northeast corner. The frieze of *ganas* below the cornice is particularly interesting due to the variety of craftsman interpretations of the members' attitudes, actions, and countenances. Sculptures on the *vimana* walls depict various forms of Shiva, such as Ardhanari, Vinadhara Dakshinamurti, Gajari, Andhakasura Samharamurti, Kiratamurti, Gangadhara, Harihara, Umapasadana, Chandrasekhara, Kalari, Chandra, Surya, Uma, Jyeshtha, Saptamatrikas, and Mohini.



Fig. Muvar Kovil
Source: Wikipedia

◆ Temple construction inspired by conquests

◆ Intricate sculptures adorn the temple

The early years of Rajaraja's reign saw temple construction influenced by the conquests and genius of Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra. Many temples, although of moderate size, emerged throughout his Kingdom. The Tiruvalisvaram temple in Brahmadesham is renowned for its intricate and detailed sculptures. The *garbhagriha* is square, with a *yali* frieze depicting animal figures. The *gana* frieze beneath the cornice is well-designed, with figures in various dance poses and merriment. The entire cornice is embellished with foliage and creeper designs, as well as ornate arches topped with *simhamukhas*. The *vimana's* first floor has several fine sculptures of historical significance. The southern side includes Nataraja, Vrishabharudha, Gangadhara, Virabhadra, and Devi, while the western side includes Lingodbhava, Vishnu, and Brahma.

◆ Mature Chola architecture

The *vimana* style temples in Tanjore and Ceylon have an octagonal plinth with a grid and an eight-ribbed *sikhara* on top. The *vimana's* second storey replicates the *garbhagriha* exterior's ornamental features, such as *gana* and *yali* friezes and a cornice. The second storey is topped by four recumbent bulls, one in each corner and facing outward. The *ardhamandapa* in front of the temple is original, but the *mahamandapa* was added later, possibly during Rajendra I's reign. The goddess' shrine was built later, most likely in the thirteenth century. Rajaraja's small temples include the Uttara Kailasa shrine at Tiruvadi, the Vaidyanatha temple at Tirumalavadi, the twin temples to Shiva and Vishnu at Dadapuram, and Shivadevale No. 2 in Polonnaruva, Ceylon. Two magnificent temples in Tanjore and Gangaikondacholapuram showcase the maturity of Chola architecture.

◆ Brihadeeswarar Temple: Chola masterpiece

Tanjore's Shiva temple (Brihadeeswarar Temple), built around 1009, exemplifies Rajaraja's material achievements during his reign. It is India's largest and tallest temple, and a masterpiece of South Indian architecture. The *vimana*, *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, and large Nandi pavilion are all aligned in a spacious walled enclosure. The *gopura* gateway connects subshrines raised at cardinal points and along the four sides. A second *gopura* serves as the gateway to a larger enclosure. The grand *vimana* towers nearly 200 feet above the *garbhagriha*, dominating everything in its vicinity. Its dignity stems from its simple design, which features a square vertical base, a tall tapering body, and a graceful domical finial. A massive cornice divides the *vimana* into two storeys, with pilasters and ornamental devices on the walls. The cupola with winged niches on all four sides relieves the severity of the outline.





Fig: Brihadeeswarar Temple
Source: reddit.com

◆ *Blend of solidity and graceful form*

The cella of a Tanjore temple is 45 feet square and has a narrow nine foot passage. It has an enormous *lingam*, originally named Rajarajesvara, now known as Brihadisvara. The cella has two stories and is surrounded by a transept, *garbhagriha*, and *ardhamandapa*. The shrine chamber's entrance is guarded by two large *dvarapalas* in niches. The transept is supported by two rows of four pillars each. The *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, and *nandi-mandapa* are all two-storied structures with similar pilasters and niches. The *ardhamandapa*'s outer walls feature sculptures of gods and goddesses of great iconographic and artistic value. The temple is an outstanding example of solidity combined with proportion and grace of form.

◆ *Constructed to surpass the Tanjore temple*

◆ *Temple's architectural style*

The **Gangaikondacholapuram temple**, built by Rajaraja's son Rajendra, aimed to surpass the predecessor. It is set in the wilderness, surrounded by a town and a large lake. Erected around 1030, it is larger in plan but not as tall, forming a large rectangle. It was built in a massive walled enclosure, which was partially designed for defensive purposes. The main entrance is to the east, and the *mahamandapa*, a low building with over 150 pillars, is adjacent to it. The *mahamandapa* is organised in colonnades on a solid platform, separated by a wide passage or aisle down the centre and a narrower passage around the hall. Between the *mahamandapa* and the sanctuary is a transept with north and south doorways, as well as two rows of massive square piers, eight in total.



Fig. Gangaikondacholapuram temple

Source: thanjavuronline.in

◆ *Vimana inspired by Tanjore style*

The *Vimana* is constructed similarly to the Tanjore *Vimana*, but with eight tiers and a slightly concave outline. The introduction of curves enhances the *vimana's* beauty, but detracts from its stateliness and power. The Chandesvara shrine, located north of the *vimana*, is a small structure of the same style and period as the main temple. The goddess' separate temple, a medium-sized structure with a *vimana* that closely resembles the Tanjore model, appears to have been built shortly after the main shrine.

◆ *Chola temples and sculptures thrived*

◆ *Masterpieces like Nataraja statues*

For a century, the Chola architectural and sculpture style thrived, manifesting itself in a plethora of temples. Two major temples, Airavatosvara in Darasuram and Kampaharesvara in Tribhuvanam near Kumbakonam, are considered masterpieces. The Chola period is also distinguished by its sculptures and bronzes, many of which are masterpieces. Tanjore inscriptions mention bronzes depicting Saivism's sacred legends, but they have vanished. Fine sculptures of Shiva, Brahma, the seven mothers, Vishnu, Rama, Sita, Saiva saints, and the infant Krishna dancing on the serpent 'Kaliya' can be found in museums and temples throughout South India. These statues frequently compare favourably to the finest stone sculptures from various schools. The sculptor worked with great freedom in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, displaying classic grace, grandeur, and excellent taste. The art is best represented by numerous images of Nataraja, the 'Divine Dancer', who displays rhythm and exaltation. The Nataraja is shown in a rhythmic motion with a tambourine, attracting all creatures to him. The statue's steadiness and majesty represent the stability and immutability of substance, while the gyration of the legs in dizzying speed represents the vortex of phenomenon.

◆ *Tanjavur- centre for artistic and technical excellence in metal sculpture*

◆ *Nataraja sculptures differ in ornamentation and pose*

Metal Sculpture

Tanjavur was a significant centre during the Chola period, which is known for its artistic and technical excellence in metal sculpture. South Indian metal sculptures are solid and made from an alloy of five. Metal images in Chola metal sculptures were similar to stone images, with dressed and ornamented designs that were used in temple rituals and ceremonies. Southern images were frequently carried in processions. Shiva as Nataraja, appears frequently, along with Krishna, Alvar, and Nayanmar saints, as well as a few Buddhist images.

Shiva temples in south India frequently feature a separate *natana-sabha* with Nataraja's image, as seen in Chidambaram. The cosmic dance, which is characterised by angry and pacific movements, represents the universe's creation and destruction. Shiva's 'dance of bliss' (*ananda tandava*) has four arms, a snake as an ornament, and a front left arm in a pose known as *danda-hasta* (staff hand) or *gaja-hasta* (elephant hand). The Natarajas of south India depict Shiva with a flame in his rear left hand, a drum in his rear right hand, and a release-granting *abhaya* pose. The drum symbolises creation, while the fire symbolises destruction. Shiva's left leg is thrust across his body, and he usually dances on the 'Apasmara', a dwarf also known as 'Muyalaka', symbolising ignorance or evil. His locks of hair cradle the goddess Ganga, radiating out into the flames. The Natarajas' attributes differ from similar images found in other parts of the subcontinent, such as Ellora or Badami, in expression, ornamentation, arms, and attendant figures.



Fig. Nataraja Statue
Source: Nine Cottage

4.1.1.2 Pandyas

Under the Pandya dynasty, temple builders shifted their focus from the central shrine to the temple's outer walls, creating towering gateways to emphasise its sanctity. *Gopuras*, made

◆ *Pandya temples featured towering gateways*

◆ *Sculptures enhanced temple aesthetics*

◆ *Sravana Belgola hosts major Jaina monuments*

◆ *Manastambhas and free-standing pillars are iconic*

◆ *Sikhara design with vertical bands*

◆ *Sanctum with diagonal layout and projections*

of solid stone masonry, formed massive piles that served as a foundation for sculptural embellishments. Under the Pandyas, the pillar evolved further: the idol gained a scalloped edge, the corbel was shaped into a pendant or drop, and the *palagai* widened. Pandya architecture emphasised enhancing existing temples with outer *mandapas*, sub-shrines, and *gopuras* rather than constructing new ones. Early examples include the second enclosure wall of the temple of Jambukesvara in Srirangam, which still retains Chola style features. The Sundara Pandya *gopura* at Jambukesvara and the eastern *gopura* of the Chidambaram temple are examples of typical Pandya *gopuras* from later periods. Pandya art aimed for an elegant effect with more decorative detail, indicating the shift from Chola architecture to Vijayanagar's extravagant productions.

Sravana Belgola has two significant Jaina monuments, one created by Chamundaraya, the minister of Ganga king Racamalla IV. The Chamundaraya *basadi*, the largest and finest of the Jaina temples, is 70 feet long and 36 feet wide. The other monument is a monolithic image of Gommata, the first Tirthankara's son, standing 56 feet tall on Indrabetta Hill. Similar statues were created in Kanara, one standing over 40 feet tall at Karkala in 1432 and another at Yenur in 1604. The temples have a manastamba standing in front of a wide square base with several moulded steps. The capital typically consists of a fluted vase with an elaborate superstructure supported by an abacus and figures of rams and gryphons. Some of these free-standing pillars are over 50 feet tall and stand out as works of art.

4.1.2 Vesara

4.1.2.1 Deccan

Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, a variation of the Northern style emerged in the northwestern part of the Deccan. The *Sikhara* design is the temple's most distinguishing feature, with a vertical band running from the lower cornice to the finial at each angle. The space between these bands is filled with rows of small replicas of the *sikhara* mounted on appropriate pedestals. This principle is applied to other areas of the temple, yielding positive results. The sanctum is laid out diagonally, and the walls are shaped with projections and recesses, which are sometimes exaggerated. Horizontal mouldings, often with a knife-edged section known as *kani*, counteract the vertical effect of the wall-surface treatment.

Karnataka has a rich history of temple architecture, with various styles influenced by North and south Indian temples. Some scholars consider these buildings as Nagara or Dravida, while others refer to a hybrid style called Vesara. The Deccan in Karnataka

◆ Karnataka has Nagara, Dravida, Vesara styles

◆ Architecture blends northern and southern features

◆ Architectural features of Ladh Khan Temple

◆ Roof structure uses flat slabs and grooves

features early medieval rock-cut and structural shrines, with the early architectural phase, 6th-8th centuries at Badami and Aihole, followed by later 8th century temples at Pattadakal. The temple architecture combines northern and southern features, gaining a distinctive identity during these centuries.

The temple complex in Aihole, a town of temples, dates back to around 600 CE and includes over 70 structures. The temple, known as **Ladh Khan**, is a 50 foot square, low flat-roofed building with a small square cella and a porch that serves as an independent Sun shrine. The main temple is surrounded by three walls, two of which have stone windows perforated with various designs. The fourth side features an open porch with river-goddess figures on the pillars. The interior includes a pillared hall with two square groups of columns, a large Nandi in the central bay, and a cella built against the back wall. The temple's layout is insufficient for its purpose, and Percy Brown, a British historian and archaeologist, believes it was converted from a moot hall into a temple. The exterior pilasters demonstrate the beginnings of the Dravidian order, with a tapering column and cushion capital adorned with an expanded floral abacus. The roof structure is unusual, consisting of large flat slabs held together by long narrow stones that fit into grooves cut in the slabs.



Fig. Ladh Khan

Source: www.theworldarchitecture.com

◆ Sixth-century adaptation of Buddhist chaitya

The **Durga temple**, a sixth-century experiment in adapting the Buddhist chaitya to a brahmanical structure, is built on a high plinth with intricate mouldings. It is an apsidal structure measuring 60 feet by 36 feet, with a large portico 24 feet deep on the eastern side. The flat roof reaches 30 feet above the ground, and a sikhara rises above the garbhagriha in the apse. The *verandah* is covered with sloping slabs and massive square columns.

- ◆ Northern-style *sikhara* added later
- ◆ Entrance hall connects sanctum and hall

The *sikhara*, a pyramidal tower over the sanctum, is curvilinear in Northern India and rises in the far South on square terraces. In the Deccan, both styles were used, with some features being combined. The Durga temple's *sikhara*, which may have been added later, is of the Northern variety. The Durga temple, like Huccimalli-gudi, Aihole has an entrance hall that connects the cella and main hall.



Fig. Durga Temple
Source: Karnataka Tourism

- ◆ Jaina temple of Meguti unfinished
- ◆ Ravanaphadi cave has Nataraja sculptures

The **Jaina temple of Meguti** (634 BCE) in Aihole show progress in structural temple construction but remains unfinished. The Malagitti Shivalaya at Badami is a small, finely proportioned, and magnificently located temple from the same period. Aihole has two cave shrines, one Shaiva and one Jaina, each with ornate interiors. The **Shaiva cave or Ravanaphadi cave**, consists of a central hall, side shrine sections, and a *garbhagriha* with a *linga*. The cave has sculptures of Shiva as Nataraja and the Sapta-Matrikas, both with slender figures and tall crowns. The figures are graceful, slim, and have long, oval faces with tall cylindrical crowns. They wear short dhotis with fine incised striations, which distinguishes them from modern western Deccan or Vakataka styles in Maharashtra's Paunar and Ramtek. Outside the entrance, there are carvings of dwarfs and doorkeepers dressed in Scythian attire.



Fig. Nataraja inside Ravana Phadi
Source: Map Academy

- ◆ *Badami caves: Vaishnava, Shaiva, Jaina*
- ◆ *Meticulous carvings, technical brilliance*

Badami has four pillared rock-cut caves, carved into a red sandstone hillside, including three major caves: Vaishnava, Shaiva, and Jaina. The caves have a simple structure that includes a *verandah*, pillared hall, and sanctum. The walls and ceilings are adorned with carvings. The third cave, a Vaishnava cave, dates back to 578 and contains detailed reliefs of Vishnu, Narasimha and Vamana. The boar was an emblem of the Western Chalukyas. The bracket figures in Cave 3, mostly *mithuna* figures, are remarkable for their variety and elegance. The caves are known for their technical brilliance, with a running frieze of *ganas* in various postures carved in relief on each plinth. Every detail of the interior has been meticulously crafted.

- ◆ *Sculptural ornamentation in temples*

The structural temples of the periods were constructed of large stone blocks without mortar and had sculptural ornamentation on the inner walls and ceilings. Mahakuta has 20 early Western Chalukya period temples with northern-style curvilinear *shikharas*, the majority of which have a pillared porch.

- ◆ *Pattadakal temples: Northern, Southern styles*
- ◆ *Papanatha temple: Combined architectural features*

The Pattadakal temples, located near to Badami, represented the next stage in Chalukyan art development and the evolution of Deccan traditions in temple architecture and sculpture. There are ten temples: four in the Northern style and six in the Southern style. The most noteworthy are the Papanatha temple (c. 680), Sangamesvar (c. 725), and Virupaksha (c. 740). The Papanatha temple has flaws due to uncertainty about the proper relationship of different parts of the structure. It is 90 feet long, too short for its size, and features a small Northern-style tower and a large antarala (a small antechamber or foyer between the *garbhagriha* (shrine) and the *mandapa*) . The temple was one of the first attempts to combine Northern and Southern features in a single structure, but it did not succeed.

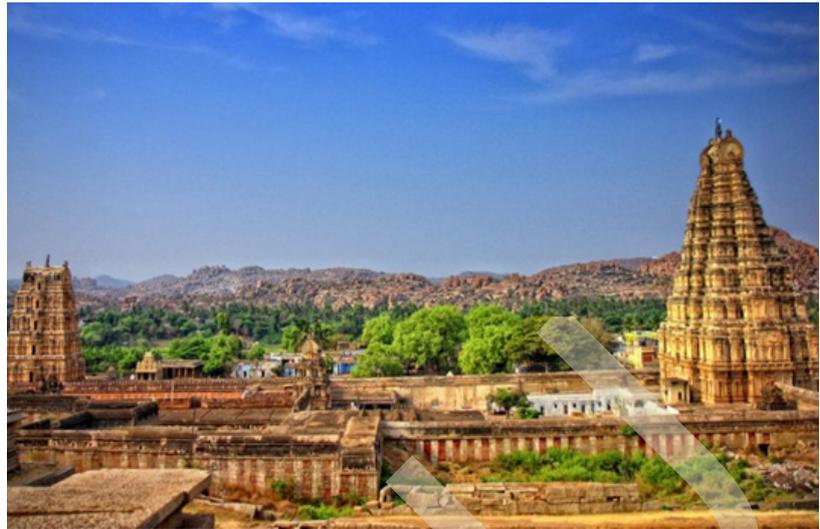


Fig. Virupaksha Temple
Source: vijayanagara.nic.in

Lokamahadevi, the chief queen of Chalukya king Vikramaditya II, built the Virupaksha temple to honour Shiva. It is similar to Dravida temples in that it contains a complex of shrines, including a Nandi shrine, within a rectangular enclosure. The temple is 120 feet long from the porch to the back, and its arrangement of components creates a pleasing overall effect. The temple's exterior is a comprehensive design that highlights the beauty of the Pallava capital. The main temple includes a pillared mandapa or hall, porch extensions, thick walls, perforated stone windows, antechamber, and a sanctum with a Pradakshina path or circumambulatory passage. The Dravida style *shikhara* has deep carvings of Shiva in niche shrines, and the interior is decorated with sculptures of *nagas*, *naganis*, and scenes from Ramayana. An exceptional Durga carving can be found in a niche shrine. The doorway leading into the sanctum, that enshrines a *linga*, is intricately carved with *dvarapalas* and other figures. The sculpture flows into the architecture in a continuous but disciplined stream, making it one of the few buildings that retains the spirit of its creators. The nearby Sangamesvara temple, built earlier, is similar but with an open *mandapa*.

- ◆ *Virupaksha temple honours Shiva*
- ◆ *Exterior highlights Pallava capital's beauty*

- ◆ *Granite statue of Lord Bahubali*

Karnataka has a rich Jain shrine heritage, including the world's tallest monolithic free-standing structure at Sravanabelagola, the granite statue of Lord Bahubali commissioned by Chamundaraya, the General-in-Chief and Prime Minister of the Ganga Kings of Mysore.

4.1.2.2 Hoysala

The Hoysala dynasty, ruled from Dwarasamudra (modern Halebid), significantly influenced the architectural style of temples

◆ *Hoysala temples feature intricate carvings*

in southern Karnataka. The relics of temples from this period can be found in Halebid, Belur, and Somanathapur, which are known for their intricate carvings on smooth chlorite schist walls and ceiling. Hoysala temples have two main types of elevation: one with a sharply-moulded adhisthana and staggered walls with niches containing sculptures, like Arasikere, Amrutapura, and Belavadi, and another larger, more ornate type raised on a wide platform following the staggered or rotated elevation of the *vimana*, such as Belur, Halebid, Javagal, Somnathpur.

◆ *Chalukya influence on Hoysala temples*
◆ *Pillars with fine details and finishes*

The western Deccan temples built by the Chalukyas of Kalyani evolved characteristics that were most maturely expressed in the Hoysala temples of Mysore. These temples featured side entrances, gracefully decorated external walls, and *vimanas* that were a cross between the plain, stepped storeys of the early Chalukyas and the closely moulded tiers of the Hoysala style. The pillars were turned on lathes (circular or bell-shaped) and had a prominent knife-edge projecting beneath the capital. The doorways were intricately carved, with fine details and finishes. The Navalinga and Kalleśvara temples in Kukkanur are the earliest examples of this style, possibly dating from the late 10th century.

◆ *Temples often built in multiple forms*

◆ *Intricate carvings and sculptural friezes*

The Hoysala temple in Mysore was a complex structure composed of a central structure surrounded by walls and cells. The main structure included a cella with *sukhanasi*, a vestibule in front that led to a pillared hall (*navaranga*). The temples were frequently built in triplicate, quadruplicate, and quintuplicate, with key components duplicated. The main shrine's external walls were built on a high platform, with lines and angles that ran parallel to the structure it supports. The walls were decorated with horizontal friezes, with the *vimana* having three horizontal divisions and the pillared hall with two. Both temples had a high, almost vertical basement with sculptured animal friezes that wrapped around the structure. The pillared hall's basement was terminated by a 'sloping seat-back' (*asana*), above which rose the external pillars with formed shafts at regular intervals, filled by perforated stone screens among the columns.

◆ *Vimana features ornate divisions and niches*
◆ *Pillars with fine carvings and details*

The *vimana*'s three horizontal divisions are more ornate than the hall. The basement connects to the hall, and the large space above it is adorned with ornate niches containing God images under foliated canopies. The structure's star shape creates vertical planes that resemble facets, resulting in an abundance of light and shade. The *sikhara*, separated by a wide projecting cornice, retains the stellate formation while being balanced by horizontal mouldings, resulting in an orderly succession of diminishing tiers culminating in a low finial with a parasol at its apex. Each tier contains miniature shrines

and niches. This style's pillar and capital stand out, with a monolith shaft and sloping bracket-stones carved with fine images and leafy aureoles known as Madanakai figures.



Fig. Hoysaleswara temple
Source: Times of India

◆ *Hybrid Vesara style with star-like plans*

◆ *Extensive Sculptures express religious thought*

The Hoysaleswara temple in Halebid, Karnataka, was built in 1150 during the reign of Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana in dark schist stone. Known as hybrid or vesara, these medieval temples have unique star-like ground-plans and a variety of decorative carvings, distinguishing them from other medieval structures. The Halebid temple, dedicated to Shiva as Nataraja, is a double structure with a large hall for music and dance, preceded by a Nandi pavilion. The temples' appearance can be seen through detailed miniature versions flanking entrances. The central square plan features cut-out angular projections creating a star effect decorated with intricate carvings of animals and deities. The carving is so intricate that no two elephants are in the same pose in the bottom-most frieze which depicts a continuous procession of hundreds of elephants. The temple's extensive sculpture collection makes it one of the world's most remarkable monuments and a unique repository of religious thought expressed in plastic form.

The **Cenna Keshava temple** in Belur, was dedicated in 1117 by Visnuvārdhana after defeating the Chola viceroy of Talakkad. It is one of the largest and finest Hoysala temples, focusing on its main east-facing shrine with a stellate *vimana* and attached cruciform *mandapa*. The cruciform *mandapa* is built on a plinth, and the intricate carvings on the walls, pillars, screens, and bracket figures are magnificent. The temple features three entrances, a

- ◆ *Intricate carvings and unique star-shaped design*
- ◆ *Exterior sculpture with sculptor inscriptions*

pillared hall, and a recessed ceiling. The main pillars and ceiling are of various designs, with the star shape creating vertical planes resembling facets and providing ample light and shade. The *sikhara*, separated by a wide projecting cornice, retains the stellate shape, but its vertical lines are balanced by horizontal mouldings, resulting in an orderly succession of diminishing tiers that culminate in a low finial with miniature shrines and niches. This style pillar and capital were remarkable, with a lathe-turned monolith shaft, a sloping bracket-stone above the capital, and carvings of fine images and leafy aureoles known as madanakai figures. Their high finish matched those found in *vimana* niches. The exterior narrative and iconic sculpture are outstanding; many accounts highlight the presence of the elegant bracket figures beneath the parapet, many with inscriptions bearing the sculptors' names.



Fig. Cenna Kesava Temple
Source: Incredible Malnad

- ◆ *Hoysala temples used intricate stone techniques.*
- ◆ *Kesava temple showcases balanced architecture*

The **Hoysala temples** are examples of an art form that used stone techniques to work with ivory or gold. The 13th century Kesava temple in Somanāthapur is a typical example of this style, with a triple shrine in the shape of a cross measuring 87 feet by 83 feet and a single entrance on the east. The enclosure, which measures 215 feet by 177 feet, is well balanced and proportioned. The temple features a triple shrine with star-shaped projections on three sides and a plinth following the intricate outline of the shrine. The *shikhara* is moderate in height and stands stylistically between the Nagara and Dravida temple towers. The temple's walls and ceilings are richly carved in the style of other Hoysala temples, with several erotic themes. The shrine consists of three images: Keshava (the main image), Krishna as Venugopala (playing the flute), and Janardhana Vishnu.

4.1.2.3 Pallava

◆ *Pallavas crucial in South Indian art evolution*

◆ *Distinct Pallava sculpture style developed*

◆ *Pallava caves simpler than Ajanta and Ellora*

◆ *Some relief carvings are exceptional*

◆ *Mahendravarman I founded rock architecture in Pallava country*

◆ *Mahendra's cave temples hold historical significance*

◆ *Vallam Cave temple*

The Pallavas of South India played an important role in the evolution of South Indian art, from rock architecture to structural stone temples. The history of stone architecture in south India can be traced back to the seventh century, when *bhakti* cults gained popularity. Pallava kings such as Mahendravarman I (600–625 CE), Narasimhavarman I (625–670 CE), and Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha (700–728 CE) were significant patrons of the arts. The Pallava period architecture, found mainly in Mamallapuram and Kanchipuram, includes cave, monolithic, and structural temples. Pallava sculptures have a unique style, distinct from Gupta period sculptures in north India. Human figures have oval faces with high cheekbones and slender bodies with tapering limbs.

Pallava cave shrines are smaller and less complex than those at Ajanta and Ellora, with relatively plain caves like Lakshitayatana temple at Mandagappattu, Lalitankura's cave at Tiruchirapalli, and some at Mamallapuram. The massive pillars are square at the bottom and top, chamfered into an octagonal shape. The cave facade is plain with *dvarapalas* marking the ends. Larger caves have columns leading into a sanctum guarded by *dvarapalas* and *dvarapalikas*. The sanctum contains images of Shiva, Vishnu, or Brahma, and deity representations are carved on the walls. Some relief carvings, like the scene of Shiva receiving Ganga in the Tiruchirapalli cave, are especially fine.

Mahendravarman I, a royal artist, is credited with establishing rock architecture in Pallava country. Many of his cave temples bear his inscriptions, which include titles. King Vicitra Chitta built one such temple, Mandagappattu, without the use of bricks, mortar, timber, or metal. He also built a five-celled cave temple in Pallavaram, near Madras, known as Mahendravikrama, Mattavilāsa, Chettakari, Vicitra Chitta etc. Mamandur in North Arcot District has four cave temples, two of which are finished and the others are unfinished. The Chola inscriptions in Mamandur show that the two completed caves were dedicated to Shiva.

Mahendra's cave temples, such as the Shiva temple at Avanibhajana Pallavesvaram in Siyamangalam and the upper rock-cut cave at Tiruchchirappalli, hold historical significance for Hinduism. The Shiva temple, named after one of Mahendra's titles, bears an inscription from him stating its foundation. The cave temple also houses a magnificent depiction of Gangadhara, a *linga*, and a poem by Mahendra. Mahendra also claimed to have built a statue of Sthanu and a portrait of himself worshipping the Lord. Another cave temple, Vallam, was discovered by Kandasena, Mahendra's feudatory. Mahendra also excavated several Vishnu cave temples, including the Mahendravishnugraha

at Mahendravadi and the Ranganatha temple in Srivavaram. The Ekambaresvara temple in Kanchi has pillars bearing his titles, and the Gunadharesvara temple in Thiruvadigai contains sculptures that are likely from his time.

◆ *Monuments and caves remain in Mamallapuram*

Post-Mahendra period art and architecture can be found in Mamallapuram, a seaport town 32 miles south of Madras. The town was a thriving port with royal residences, bazaars, warehouses, and a harbour. Although all secular structures have vanished, halls and sculptures made of natural rock with religious significance have survived. Mamallapuram was a major entrepot in South India, influencing the art of Hindu colonies in Indonesia and IndoChina. The monuments at Mamallapuram are classified into cut-in cave temples, cut-out monolithic temples known as *rathas*, bas-relief sculptures in open-air rocks, and structural temples.

◆ *Pancha Pandava Cave's large sanctum*
◆ *Unique sanctum and hall designs*

Saluvankuppam, a village two miles north of Mamallapuram, is home to cave temples known as *mandapas*. These modest temples are in various stages of completion, with only a few almost finished. Each temple has a unique design, with sanctums cut into the back wall, projected into the hall from the rear wall, pillared pavilions in front, or sanctums cut directly into the outer wall of the rock face. Pancha Pandava Cave is India's largest cave, featuring a sanctum and a circumambulatory path. Many caves feature beautiful sculptures, including Mahishamardini, Adivaraha, Varaha, and Trimurti. The sculptures in Ramanuja cave are damaged. The most outstanding piece of Mamallapuram art is the Goddess Durga riding a prancing lion and attacking the buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura. The powerful monster retreats, symbolising the triumph of divine nature over evil. The sculptures were chipped off at a later time.

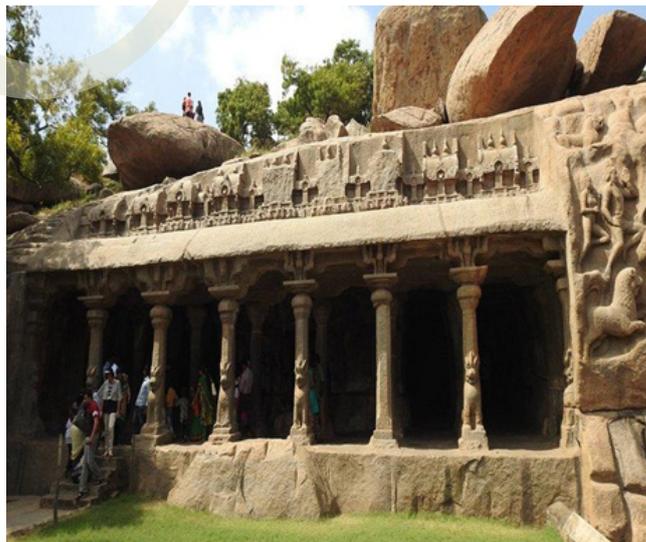


Fig. Pancha -Pandava Cave Temple
Source: www.tripadvisor.in

◆ *Various sculptures found in Pallava caves*

◆ *Mamallapuram features iconic monolithic temples*

◆ *Pallava caves have delicate relief carvings*

◆ *Mythological scenes adorn the rock-cut caves*

The Pallava caves in India have various sculptures, such as Mahishamardini, Vishnu, Lakshmi, and Durga. The Adivaraha cave depicts Lakshmi and Durga, as well as two royal portraits of Simhavishnu and Mahendravarman I. The Varaha cave contains four panels depicting Varaha, Trivikrama, Sridevi, and Durga. The Tiger Cave, a cave temple in Saluvankuppam, contains a row of vyala heads arranged as an aureole. Mamallapuram has ten monolithic temples, with the most famous being the Pancha Pandava *rathas* group. Three more monoliths, *Pidari rathas* and *Valayankuttai rathas*, are located at the western end of the village. *Ganesha ratha*, near the great bas-relief, is another monolith. An attempt to cut a monolith can also be seen in the rock before the Mahishamardini cave.

The Pallava period caves in the port city of Mamallapuram, named after Pallava king Narasimha I, are characterised by slender columns, multi-faceted shafts, cushion-shaped capitals, and seated lions. Some caves, like *Adi-Varaha*, are preceded by a tank. The rock-cut caves at Mamallapuram contain numerous mythological scenes carved in relief, such as Vishnu rescuing the earth, taking three strides, *Gaja-Lakshmi* and *Durga*, *Mahishasuramardini*, and *Krishna* lifting *Govardhana* mountain. The relief carvings in Pallava cave shrines are shallower than those in the Deccan, with slender, delicate, and elegant figures wearing plain headdresses and crowns and minimal jewellery.



Fig. Arjuna's Penance
Source: The Heritage Lab

The most significant open-air relief of this period is the massive carving at Mamallapuram, which spans two boulders 15 metres high and 30 metres long. The rock face is covered in life-size figures of people, animals, and elephants. On rare occasions, water may have poured from a cistern on the summit into the natural cleft

- ◆ *The Descent of the Ganga is a monumental relief*
- ◆ *Arjuna's Penance and Krishna's panel are masterpieces*

- ◆ *Five rathas named after Pandavas*
- ◆ *Temples have unique architectural features*

- ◆ *Each ratha has distinct structural features*

between the rocks. The relief depicts Ganga's descent or Arjuna's penance, a story from the Mahabharata that serves as the theme for the Kiratarjuniya. The Descent of the Ganga, also known as Arjuna's Penance, depicts a waterfall in a natural fissure, symbolising sacred water. The relief is a masterpiece of classical art, with a genuine impulse that brings all creatures together around the beneficent waters. The Krishna Govardhanadhari panel is of equal quality, and a feeble attempt to replicate the masterpiece is made further south.

Mamallapuram contains nine rock-cut temples, five of which are clustered together. The name of the great Pallava Mamalla was later misinterpreted as referring to the five Pandavas, and the temples are now known as the five *rathas*, named after the Pandavas and their wife Draupadi, and are usually referred to as the five *rathas*. *Rathas*, which means "chariots," were temple *rathas* believed to represent celestial chariots used by deities for travelling. The *rathas* are named Dharmaraja, Bhima, Draupadi, Arjuna, and Sahadeva. Despite their proximity, these shrines have distinct architectural features like varying plans and elevations, reflecting their individual significance.

The Dharmaraja *ratha* is the most impressive, three-story *vimana* with *garbhagriha* on each level. The second and third *talas* are functional and have impressive sculptures. It is a square structure with open porches and a terraced pyramidal tower supported by seated lions. The Bhima *ratha* is long and has a barrel-vaulted roof, whereas the Draupadi *ratha* is short and has a curvilinear roof. Arjuna is a two-storied temple with elegant figure sculptures. The Sahadeva *ratha* is an apsidal temple with a portico, whereas the Pidari *ratha* group has an octagonal *sikhara* and a square *sikhara*. The Mamallapuram temples are adorned with Hindu mythology scenes, and the south face of the Dharmaraja *ratha* bears a portrait of King Narasimhavarman Mamalla I. The Ganesa *Ratha*, a rectangular *vimana* with an *ardhamandapa*, is thought to be a *īśvaragr̥ha* designed by King Atyantakama. A few verses about its origins can be found in Rajasimha's Saluvankuppam cave.



Fig: Pancha Pandava Ratha
Source: Wikipedia

◆ *Structural temples replaced rock-cut ones*

During the reign of Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha, structural temples replaced rock-cut ones. The Shore temple in Mamallapuram has three shrine areas and features a stone Shiva linga, Somaskanda, Shiva with Uma and Skanda, a popular theme during the Pallava period, and Vishnu resting on the serpent Ananta. The two terraced *shikharas* are slender, and the relief sculptures were destroyed due to sea breeze and sand.

◆ *Kailasanatha temple has over 50 shrines*

The Rajasimheshvara or Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram, dedicated to Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha, has a large rectangular enclosure that includes a main shrine and over 50 subsidiary shrines. The main shrine has a square sanctum with a *linga* and an enclosed passage, surrounded by nine smaller shrines. The *shikhara* is in the traditional Southern style. The Kailasanatha temple, a significant Pallava period structure, has a pillared hall and *verandah*, *gopuras* on its enclosure walls, and is heavily ornamented with sculptures. It frequently includes depictions of Somaskanda and lions on its enclosure wall, indicating a significant stage in the evolution of the South Indian temple.

◆ *Somaskanda and lions are depicted*

◆ *Two views on authorship of monuments*

There are two perspectives on the authorship of Mamallapuram's monuments: one assigns them to successive Pallava dynasty rulers, beginning with Mamalla Narasimha I and ending with Rajasimha, and another based on inscriptions, indicating a single ruler, Rajasimha. The foundation inscriptions on the Dharmaraja mandapam and Ganesha ratha are identical to Rajasimha, and the title *Atyantakama* is important to Narasimha II.

◆ *Shore temple example of Rajasimha group*

South India's structural temples are divided into two groups: the Rajasimha group (c. 700-800) and the Nandivarman group (800-900). The Shore temple in Mamallapuram is an example of the former group, with its fine craftsmanship and ability to withstand the effects of wind, sea, and shifting sands. The temple's layout is unusual, with the cella facing the sea and the usual adjuncts in the back. A massive enclosing wall surrounds the central building, and access to the open courtyard is gained from the west. Two shrines were later added to the western end of the main shrine, one with a smaller *vimana* and serving as the main entrance. The Shore temple's buildings are a natural progression from the Dharmaraja *ratha*, allowing for the transition from rock-cut to structural techniques. The treatment of the *vimanas*, particularly the lion motif, leads to a lighter and more rhythmic tower. The outer enclosure houses a network of shallow cisterns that collect water via conduits, with any overflow draining into the sea. The parapet of the surrounding wall is topped with couchant bull figures, and the exterior has boldly carved lion pilasters.

◆ *Features include cisterns and lion motifs*





Fig. Kailasanatha Temple

Source: Wikipedia

◆ *Kailasanatha temple shares Pallava features*

The Pallava-style Kailasanatha temple consists of a *mandapa* and sanctuary connected by an intermediate *ardhamandapa* over centuries. The sanctum and *vimana* are Dharmaraja *ratha* in design, with the exception of the subsidiary shrines, which add to the temple's beauty. The main features of the Pallava style are assembled in an intriguing manner, with traces of painting in the surrounding wall, cupola-shaped walls, sturdy pillars, and a lion pilaster. The *vimana* is a larger and more proportionate version of the Shore temple. The courtyard is accessed through small openings on the sides of a large subsidiary temple, Mahendravarmesvara, built to represent the beginnings of the *gopuram*. The Kailasanātha temple was built with granite foundations and a sculpted sandstone superstructure. Many repairs have been required over the years, and they have not always been carried out with discrimination.

◆ *Vaikuntha Perumal: matured Pallava architecture structure*

The Vaikuntha Perumal is a mature Pallava architecture structure that integrates cloisters, porticos, and sanctums into a well-articulated whole. The sanctum is a square with 90-foot sides and a 28-foot front, surrounded by a tall outer wall adorned with ornamental motifs. Inside, there is an open ambulatory and cloisters with lion pillars and sculptures depicting Pallava history. The portico is a square with twenty one and half feet sides and eight pillars supporting the ceiling. A vestibule leads to a rectangular cella that rises to a square *vimana* with 47-foot sides and a height of 60 feet. The *vimana* has four storeys, each with a passage around the exterior, a cella in the centre, and a corridor that encircles two for circumambulation.

The Nandivarman group of Pallava structural temples includes small, modest structures like Muktesvara and Matangeśvara in Kanchipuram, Vadamalleesvara in Oragadam, Virattanesvara in Tiruttani, and Parasuramesvara in Gudimallam. These apsidal

- ◆ *Nandivarman temples: Small, modest structures*
- ◆ *Pallavas preserved Amaravati traditions*

structures reflect the decline in Pallava power. However, the Pallavas are credited with preserving and developing Amaravati traditions, which were later transmitted to lands beyond the seas, resulting in the construction of massive monuments.

4.1.3 Vijayanagara

- ◆ *Vijayanagara temples: Kalyana-mandapa & thousand-pillared mandapa*
- ◆ *Pillars featured ornamental brackets and statuary*

Under Vijayanagara, South Indian art experienced a fullness and freedom of rich expression, with a focus on preserving and developing Hinduism. Temples grew in size and organisation, with the addition of pillared halls, pavilions, and other subordinate structures. The most notable addition was the *kalyana-mandapa*, an ornate pillared pavilion with a raised platform in the centre for the reception of the deity and his consort during their annual marriage ceremony. The goddesses also had separate shrines, which dates back to the late Chola period. Another feature was the ‘thousand-pillared *mandapa*, a massive hall with numerous rows of pillars. The Vijayanagar style’s most notable feature was the varied and complicated treatment of the pillar. The shaft became a focal point, surrounded by large statuary and sculptures, frequently depicting a ferociously rearing horse, a rampant hippogryph, or an upraised supernatural animal. Other types featured miniature pillars encircling the central column, which could sometimes produce seven distinct notes of Indian music when struck. All pillars’ capitals included ornamental brackets, as well as a pendant shaped like an inverted lotus-bud below the bracket. Under the Pandyas, tall entrance towers, known as *gopuras*, evolved further.

- ◆ *Fortifications ensured city’s survival*

The Vijayanagara’s architecture is primarily found in its capital Hampi, where activity centres abounded until the early to mid-16th century. Before the city was founded in the 1330s, there was a fortress at Anegundi. The fortifications, which consisted of three rings, followed the terrain and were critical to the city’s survival on the northern war frontier with the Deccan Sultanates. The city’s architectural legacy reflects the success of the fortifications.

- ◆ *Oldest temples on Hemakuta Hill*
- ◆ *Deccan tradition: Multi-shrined temples*

The oldest temples in Vijayanagara are found on Hemakuta Hill and around the tank, near the large Virupaksa temple. The ninth-century Durgadevi temple on the west side of the tank is the oldest standing structure in Vijayanagara. The typical Deccan tradition includes several multi-shrined temples, some of which date back to the ninth and tenth centuries, as well as smaller ones dating back to the fourteenth century.

- ◆ *Ramachandra temple: Tamil Dravida style*

The **Ramachandra temple**, built in the early 15th century, marked a significant architectural development in Vijayanagara. The complex was a walled structure with shrines, halls, and gateways inspired by the Tamil Dravida tradition. The kings of Vijayanagara connected themselves with Rama and the city with



Ayodhya. The temple was strategically placed between the royal residence and performance zones, creating a harmonious and sacred environment.

◆ *Early 16th century saw temple expansion*

The temple, built between 1406 and 1417 under Devaraya I's patronage, was designed in Tamil Dravida style to reflect the political power of the Cholas. The choice of Tamil Dravida over local Deccani architecture indicates that the artists and patrons intended viewers to see the temple as Tamil, prompting the political power of the Cholas. The small Saumya Somesvara temple in Nimbapuram was built in the Tamil tradition and dedicated around 1450.

◆ *Tuluvas influenced early 16th-century temples*

◆ *Vijayanagara temples mark architectural shift*

The Tuluvas dynasty had a significant influence on imperial temple construction in the early sixteenth century. The Virupaksa and Vitthala temples were expanded, and new temples such as Vaisnava Krishna, Anantasayana, Tiruvengalnatha, Pattabhirama, and Ranganatha were built, as well as numerous smaller undated ones. Vijayanagara's temples, particularly Tamil Dravida, break with past architectural traditions and create a new imperial language of temple architecture in the early 16th century. Vijayanagara's temple architecture began with small-scale foundations in the local Deccan tradition until the early 15th century, when new temples like the Rāmachandra were built using the Tamil tradition. However, the first half of the 16th century saw the most activity in temple size, scale, and elaboration.



Fig. Vitthala Temple

Source: templeinkarnataka.com

◆ *Vitthala temple is India's most ornate*

◆ *Temple structure includes distinct sections*

The **Vitthala temple**, constructed between Devaraya II and Achyuta Raya, is the most ornate temple in India. It has a rectangular courtyard with cloisters and a triple row of pillars, along with three entrances and five other structures. The main temple, dedicated to Vishnu, is 230 feet long and 25 feet tall, divided into three sections: the *mahamandapa*, an open pillared hall in front, the *ardhamandapa*, a closed hall in the middle, and the 436 garbhagriha in the back. The *mahamandapa* has 100 feet of recessed sides and is built on a

moulded plinth with elephant-guarded steps. The *ardhamandapa* features two side entrances, each with steps and a pillared porch. The interior is a square with 55-foot-long sides and a square dais in the centre. The *vimana* measures 75 feet long and 72 feet wide, and a *pradakshina* path connects the *garbhagriha* to the *ardhamandapa*.

◆ *Kalyana mandapa smaller than mahamandapa*

The *kalyana mandapa*, the largest structure, is less than half as large as the *mahamandapa*. Near the *kalyanamandapa*, there is a *ratha* or chariot of the god, carved out of a single block of granite with moving wheels. Similar stone cars can be found in other temples from the time period, including Tadpatri and Tiruvalur.



Fig. Hazara Rama Temple
Source: Nanchi.blog

◆ *Modestly finished Hazara Rama temple*

◆ *Relief scenes from Ramayana decorate walls*

The **Hazara Rama temple**, most likely built by Virupaksha II, is a modest but well-finished example of this style. The shrine for the goddess, *kalyanamandapa*, and other temples are enclosed in a courtyard by a 24-foot-high wall. The enclosure is entered through a well-proportioned porch that leads to the assembly hall, which has four large blackstone pillars. The *vimana*, with its stone lower storey and pyramidal brick superstructure, is impressive, but it stands less than 50 feet tall. The temple's inner walls are decorated in relief with scenes from the *Ramayana*.

◆ *New temples built around tanks*

The Vijayanagara period is notable for its activity patterns, which include few new foundations and additions to existing temples. Temples built between the sixth and eighth centuries in Early Western Chalukya sites were not expanded later, even if they existed in the later period. During Later Chalukyan rule, new temples were constructed around tanks, such as the Mallikarjuna and Yellamā temples, and the Bhutanātha group, rather than adding to existing ones.

- ◆ Melukote: key Vaishnava centre
- ◆ Ramanuja's influence in Melukote

Melukote is a significant Vaishnava pilgrimage site and one of the four most significant Srivaisnava centres, along with Srirangam, Kanchipuram, and Tirupati. The Narayana temple, known by its processional image of Celuvaraya or Selvapillai, was founded during the Chola occupation of southern Karnataka between 1004 and 1116. Melukote gained fame after Ramanuja's flight from Srirangam and his twelve-year residence in Melukote in the twelfth century. The *vimana* and *ardhamandapa* were built in the Tamil Drāvida tradition, similar to contemporary temples in Chola Tamilnadu. In the early twelfth century, the *mahamandapa* was built and a *prakara* wall with a small colonnade added.



Fig. Celuva Temple
Source: Kerala Tourism

The *Celuva temple* in Melukote, India, is an important Vijayanagara-period architectural addition, with a *rangamandapa* before the goddess shrine and infilling columns. According to a Sanskrit inscription on one of the columns, it was built under the patronage of Sriranganayaki, the wife of Timmanna Dandanayaka, the regional governor of Vijayanagara raya Mallikarjuna. In December 1458, Timmanna's wife Rangambika reportedly made donations, according to another Kannada inscription. The *mandapa* and colonnade are excellent examples of Vijayanagara period sculpture, with miniature colonettes and high-relief scenes from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavata Purāna*. The *mahāmandapa* was renovated in the mid-15th century and features a small *gopura*.

- ◆ Rich sculpture, featuring Hindu epic

- ◆ Detached gopura marks fortifications entrance

- ◆ Royal patronage seen through inscriptions

During the Vijayanagara period, an unfinished detached *gopura* to the south of the Celuva temple may have marked the entrance to the town's fortifications. The *gopura* is aligned with the town's main north-south street, rather than with the temple's entrance. It is larger than any of Vijayanagara's remaining *gopuras*. This *gopura* dates back to the early 16th century, as evidenced by sculptures of

women standing on *makaras*, *dvarapalas*, and deity reliefs. The epigraphic record at this temple demonstrates that royal figures maintained patronage throughout the Vijayanagara period, with a peak of activity in the early sixteenth century and during Wodeyar rule from nearby Mysore in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Vellore, Kumbakonam, Kanchipuram, Tadipatri, and Srirangam are known for their Madura-style temples, a revival of the Pandya building methods. The *kalyanamandapa* in Vellore is the most beautiful structure, while the temple of Margasakheśvara in Virinchipuram is known for its extravagant treatment. The *Ekamranatha* and *Varadaraja* temples in Kanchipuram have large pavilions with imaginative statuary. *Rameśvara's temple* in Tadipatri features two *gopuras* with intricate carvings. Srirangam's horse court features a colonnade of furiously fighting steeds executed with such force that it is hardened steel. The Madura style is distinguished by the addition of *prakaras* (a compound of walls around a Hindu temple's sanctum) via concentric outer enclosure walls, each of which has four *gopuras* at the cardinal points.

- ◆ *Madurai-style temples revive Pandya methods*
- ◆ *Features concentric prakaras with gopuras*

The temples of this period include Madurai, Srirangam, Jambukeśvara, Tiruvalur, Ramesvaram, Chidambaram, Tinnevely, Tiruvannamalai, and Srivilliputtur. Madurai is the most common, with a double temple dedicated to Sundareśvara and his consort Minakshi. The main enclosure measures 850 feet by 725 feet and features four large *gopuras* in the centre of each side. The main entrance opens into a beautiful pillared avenue that leads to a smaller *gopura* and the eastern entrance to the second *prakara*. The second enclosure is roofed in, with a smaller covered court and an elaborate pillar arrangement outside. The main temple is divided into three sections, each with a long colonnade of pillars that provide panoramic views.

- ◆ *Madurai features double temple complex*
- ◆ *Main temple with panoramic pillar views*

The Minakshi sanctuary is a smaller replica of the main temple, measuring 225 feet by 150 feet and entered through two *gōpuras*. The Tank of Golden Lilies is a reservoir measuring 165 feet by 120 feet that is surrounded by steps and a pillared portico. The Hall of a Thousand Pillars measures 240 feet by 250 feet and features a symmetrical arrangement of pillars as well as a central aisle leading up to a small shrine dedicated to Sabhapati. Outside the main enclosure, the *Pudumandapam*, also known as Tirumalai's poultry, is a large open hall 350 feet by 105 feet, divided longitudinally into a nave and two aisles by four rows of pillars. The pillars in the centre bear life-size statues of Madura's Nayak kings, including Tirumalai.

- ◆ *Minakshi sanctuary a smaller replica*
- ◆ *Hall of Thousand Pillars with symmetrical design*

The Ranganatha temple in Srirangam, built by the Nayaks of Madurai. The shrine is surrounded by seven concentric enclosures,



◆ *Ranganatha temple surrounded by seven enclosures*

◆ *Golden vimana marks temple's sanctuary*

including an outermost rectangle measuring 2,880 feet by 2,475. The temple's fourth court, measuring 1,235 feet by 849 feet, features *gopuras* facing north, south, and east. This enclosure also houses the Hall of a Thousand Pillars, which measures 500 feet by 160 feet, as well as the famous 'horse-court'. The second enclosure consists of a covered court with pillared halls and a long processional passage on the western side. The innermost enclosure has a south-facing entrance and a circular chamber that is surrounded by a larger rectangular chamber. The sanctuary is indicated by its golden domical *vimana* projecting above the flat roof.



Fig. Ranganatha temple in Srirangam
Source: Wikipedia

◆ *Ramesvaram temple with pillared corridors*

◆ *Bronze casting and portrait art flourished*

The **Ramesvaram temple**, built on a unitary plan, has approximately 3,000 feet of pillared corridors and avenues. The art of bronze casting flourished under the Chola and Vijayanagara rulers, with life-size portraits of Krishnadeva Raya and his wives, Venkata I, and others of uncertain identity. The Tirupati temple houses these portraits, while a small stone statue of Krishnadeva Raya in a niche in the doorway below the northern *gopura* of the temple in Chidambaram, built in 1520, is also notable.

◆ *Vijayanagara's secular architecture praised*

◆ *Audience Hall and Throne Platform details*

The citadel of Vijayanagara boasts impressive secular buildings, such as the King's Audience Hall and the Throne Platform, which were built to commemorate Krishnadeva Raya's conquest of Orissa. These structures demonstrate that the city's architecture was justified by foreign visitors. The Audience Hall featured a hundred pillars with square bases, cylindrical shafts, and bracket capitals. The basement was decorated in three stages with bold mouldings and courses that emphasised the structure's monumental character. The Throne Platform, which was also divided into three stages, was square in design, with the highest stage featuring stone mouldings and the lower stages featuring plain masonry plinths with entertaining figures and animals.

- ◆ *Bahmani architecture blended Delhi, local styles*
- ◆ *Persian influences in Deccan architecture*

The Bahmani kingdom and its successors' architecture was influenced by the Delhi architecture model as well as indigenous styles from the surrounding area. The Bahmani rulers generously supported art, science, and education, making their court appealing to poets, scholars, and artists. Influences from European military architecture and Persia's civil architecture became more visible in the fifteenth century. Examples of Persian architecture include Gulbarga's Jami Masjid, Daulatabad's Chand Minar, and Bidar's Mahmud Gawan College. However, by the end of the fifteenth century, the Deccan had reestablished itself, and pre-Muslim styles were prominent in the architecture of Bijapur, where Indian artists were employed in large numbers.

4.1.4 Amaravathi/ Andhra Style

- ◆ *Krishna and Godavari host Buddhist sanctuaries*
- ◆ *Sankaram and Guntupalli display early architecture*

The lower reaches of the Krishna and Godavari rivers are home to numerous rock-cut and structural Buddhist sanctuaries dating from around 200 BCE to 400 CE. These sites connect the ancient schools of Bharhut and Sanchi with medieval Hindu art. Guntupalli and Sankaram hills in Andhra Pradesh are well-known for their rock-cut architecture. Guntupalli's small circular *chaitya*, 18 feet in diameter, resembles a primitive hut and may represent the beginnings of a more elaborate chaitya hall. The Sankaram hills have a later period, around 350 CE, with numerous monolithic stupas and rock-cut chambers scattered irregularly. Some stupas are the largest of their kind, with one measuring 65 feet in diameter at its base. The work at these locations is crude and unskilled, highlighting the region's rich history and cultural heritage.

- ◆ *Monuments exhibit technical skill and artistry*
- ◆ *Stupas featured large bricks and sculptures*

The Andhra craftsmen's technical skill and artistic excellence are evident in their structural monuments, particularly the stupas, which were distributed across 75 miles around Ellore. These monuments were notable for their Buddhist architecture and sculpture, which featured white marble exteriors and low relief carvings. The stupas were built solidly, but later reinforced with cross-walls and other walls to ensure strength and material economy. The bricks were enormously large, measuring 24" x 18" x 4". The stupa began as a low hemispherical mound, but was later raised on a tall plinth. The marble casing was only applied to the lower portion of the brick core; the rest was plastered and painted white. At the four significant points, rectangular projections from the plinth housed steps leading to the procession path above the plinth. Above each projection were five slender pillars, possibly representing the five Dhyani Buddhas, known as *aryaha kambhas* (worshipful columns).





Fig. Amaravathi Stupa
Source: travelsetu.com

- ◆ *Amaravati stupa featured large dome*
- ◆ *Sculptural remnants preserved in museums*

The Amaravati stupa, the largest of the southern type of stupas, was rebuilt between 150 and 200 CE. It had a 162-foot-wide dome and a concentric railing that surrounded a 15-foot-wide *pradakshina* pathway. The dome's height varied from 90 to 100 feet. A higher processional path with offsets and *Ayaka* pillars rose 20 feet above ground. The inner sides were carved with an 8-foot-high balustrade. The only remnants are sculptural slabs and parts of the railings, which are housed in museums

- ◆ *Amaravati sculptures reflect idealism and beauty*
- ◆ *Realistic depictions of animals and figures*

Amaravati's sculptures depict Buddha's life and worship scenes, with intricate ornamental motifs. The figures of women and animals exhibit the vigorous and supple realism that distinguishes Indian sculpture, particularly of animals. The scenes depicting life in women's quarters show innocent delight in nude and refined sensuality with a distinct freshness. The Bodhisattvas and Buddha are directly represented, with Roman influence visible in Amaravati art, which indicates that of Aihole and Mamallapuram. Amaravati art emphasises idealism and beauty in order to create a new aesthetic ideal of India. The school displays flawless stone compositions by unknown artists, such as the medallion depicting the taming of an elephant. The art depicts walled cities, palace-buildings, *toranas*, stupas, and even the stupa of Amaravati in its full glory. The school's art frequently reflects the aesthetic ideal of India, highlighting the beauty and tranquility of its landscape.

- ◆ *Buddhist chaitya halls from fifth century*
- ◆ *Amaravati sculptures depict dance and joy*

Buddhist *chaitya* halls, possibly from the fifth century CE, can be found in the Ter and Chezarla districts. Trivikrama temple at Ter and Kapotesvara temple at Chezarla are the only examples of these structures, which measure 30 feet long. Because Buddhist structural temples have no exteriors beyond their facades, these small buildings are now the only way to assess their external appearance.

The Satavahana period in Andhra Pradesh saw a significant aesthetic movement, with stupas featuring exquisite sculptures.

◆ Major Buddhist monasteries in eastern Deccan

◆ Excavations reveal remnants of Amaravati stupa

◆ Hindu temple architecture from Ikshvakus

◆ Stupa designs with wheel and chakra plans

◆ Nagarjunakonda stupas had wheel-shaped bases

◆ Some stupas included ayaka pillars

◆ Wheel-shaped or svastika bases

◆ Five ayaka pillars symbolised Buddha's life

The sculptures from the Amaravati school can be found in the Krishna valley, Jaggayyapetta, Amaravati, and Nagarjunakonda, while stupa plaques can be found at the British Museum and the Government Museum in Chennai. The Amaravati style is elegant and sophisticated, with sculptured panels that are delicately formed and have linear grace. These reliefs depict scenes of dance and music, expressing joy in life. The sculptural remains, known as “marbles”, are made of white limestone, giving the illusion of marble. Artists from the Amaravati School freely express their artistic abilities, following Buddha's new path of liberation.

Amaravati, Jaggayyapeta, and Nagarjunakonda were among the major Buddhist monasteries in the eastern Deccan. Although two are ruined and the third is submerged, the surviving remains provide information about their basic structure and features. Amaravati, near Dhanyakataka, could have been founded during the Maurya period, possibly through an Ashokan inscription. In ancient inscriptions, the Amaravati stupa, Andhra's largest, was referred to as a *Mahachaitya*. After extensive excavation and removal of sculpted stones, only the brick stupa's drum, circumambulatory path, and a few railing uprights remained.

The origins of Hindu temple architecture in South India can be traced back to the Ikshvakus' early brick temples, which were excavated in 1959 at Nagarjunakonda. The temple complexes featured shrines with *ardha-* and *maha-mandapas*, *prakara*, *gopura*, and *dhvaja-stambha*. One temple had *parivaralayas*, subsidiary shrines with square, octagonal, and circular plans, indicating that temple forms were common across all creeds. Nagarjunakonda had over 30 Buddhist establishments between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, with inscriptions mentioning four sects: Mahaviharavasin, Mahishasaka, Bahushrutiya, and Aparamahavinaseliya. The architecture varied, with some consisting of a stupa and monastery, as well as a few isolated stupas and small votive stupa. Stupas in the Andhra region were built of brick or stone, or on a spoked-wheel plan with mud spaces. This design included the Buddhist symbol of the *chakra*, which increased the structure's strength. The Amaravati stupa had a solid brick core, whereas the Bhattiprolu stupa had a solid core with a wheel design. The wheel-shaped plan was also observed in other Andhra regions.

The stupas at Nagarjunakonda were primarily made of brick, with a few made of stone rubble. They had wheel-shaped bases with 4 to 10 spokes, the number of which varied according to the size of the stupa. Some stupas had a *svastika* instead of a wheel in their base. Some Andhra stupas included five *ayaka* pillars, which were thought to represent Buddha's birth, renunciation, enlightenment, first sermon, and death. Some other stupas do not

have *ayaka* platforms or pillars.



Fig. Nagarjunakonda
Source: wikipedia

- ◆ *Amaravati stupa had sculpted slabs*
- ◆ *Early Buddhist sites in coastal Andhra*

Some of the region's great stupas were adorned with sculpted limestone slabs in the early centuries CE, including the dome, railings, and gateways of the Amaravati stupa. However, despite relief sculptures depicting railings at Nagarjunakonda, few actual railing fragments have been discovered, all of which are plain and uninscribed. Recent excavations have revealed early historical Buddhist sites in north coastal Andhra Pradesh, such as Thotlakonda, Bavikonda, Pavuralakonda, Sankaram, and Dharapalem. Thotlakonda, which was occupied between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE and the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, contains *vihara*, *chaitya*, and *stupa* ruins.

- ◆ *Amaravati carvings are woodcarver-inspired*
- ◆ *Reliefs show progressive development*

The intricate surface decoration and shallowness of Amaravati's relief carvings indicate that they were a translation of woodcarver's art into stone. The artists excelled at depicting the human body from a frontal perspective but struggled with side views. The reliefs of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda exhibit progressive development, with less crowded scenes and less pronounced frontality when compared to central Indian sites. The carving at Andhra sites is more developed and detailed, with more natural and graceful human figures than earlier sculptures. Stella Kramrisch, American art historian and a specialist in Indian arts, observes that early Buddhist relief art incorporates the landscape as part of the action itself.

Summarised Overview

During the early medieval period, South India developed regional architectural styles, including Dravida, Vesara Andhra. These styles were associated with different regions and were influenced by early Chalukyas, Pallavas, Hoysalas, Pandyas, and Cholas. Dravida style with the Krishna and Kaveri rivers, and Vesara style occasionally with the Vindhya and Krishna rivers. The Vesara style is a hybrid of northern and southern styles.

Chola temples are divided into early and late phases, each with its own sub-phase. Early Chola temples, built during Vijayalaya's reign, feature ornamental pilasters and sculptures. The vimana temple in Tanjore and Ceylon, showcases the maturity of Chola architecture. The Chola architectural style thrived for a century, featuring images of Nataraja, the Divine Dancer. Under the Pandya dynasty, temple builders emphasised outer walls and gateways, contrasting Chola architecture with Vijayanagar's extravagant productions.

The Deccan in Karnataka has a rich history of temple architecture, influenced by North and South Indian temples. Early medieval rock-cut and structural shrines emerged in the 6th-8th centuries, with the world's tallest monolithic free-standing structure at Sravanabelagola showcasing the region's Jain shrine heritage. The Hoysala dynasty significantly influenced southern Karnataka temple architecture, known for intricate carvings and two types of elevations. Western Deccan temples by the Chalukyas of Kalyani evolved characteristics, with Mysore's Hoysala temples being the finest.

The Pallavas of South India significantly influenced South Indian art, influencing rock architecture and structural stone temples. They established cave temples with inscriptions from King Mahendravarman I. Post-Mahendra period art is found in Mamallapuram, a religiously significant seaport town. Under Vijayanagara, South Indian art flourished, focusing on preserving and developing Hinduism. Temples expanded in size and organisation, with notable additions like *kalyana-mandapa* and thousand-pillared *mandapa*. The Vijayanagar style's most notable feature was the varied and complicated treatment of pillars, often depicting ferocious or supernatural animals. The oldest temples in Vijayanagara are found on Hemakuta Hill, while the Madurai-style temples in Vellore, Kumbakonam, Kanchipuram, Tadipatri, and Srirangam are known for their extravagant treatment.

The lower reaches of the Krishna and Godavari rivers in Andhra Pradesh are home to numerous rock-cut Buddhist sanctuaries dating from 200 BCE to 400 CE, connecting ancient schools of Bharhut and Sanchi with medieval Hindu art. The Andhra craftsmen's technical skill and artistic excellence are evident in their structural monuments, such as the Amaravati stupa and Nagarjunakonda, which emphasises idealism and beauty. The Satavahana period in Andhra Pradesh saw a significant aesthetic movement, with stupas featuring exquisite sculptures.



Assignments

1. Compare and contrast Dravida, Vesara and Andhra school of architecture.
2. List important temples which were constructed in Vijayanagara period.
3. Bring out the features of Deccan school of architecture.
4. What are the peculiarities of Andhra school of art?
5. Bring out the stylistic differences of Pallava and Hoysala architecture.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU



Bhakti Movement

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ understand the development of *Bhakti* movement in South India
- ◆ evaluate the Nayanars and Alvar *Bhakti* streams
- ◆ analyse the impact of *Bhakti* movement in South India
- ◆ understand the influence of Jainism and Buddhism in South India

Background

Religion in South India was influenced by two forces: a resurgence of the Jaina and Buddha movements as a result of the imperial Guptas' Hindu renaissance in North India, and a revival of Hindu classicism, which resulted in the spread of brahmanical Sanskrit literature. South India initially tolerated other faiths, but by the fifth or sixth century, the attitude toward religion had become more complex. In these eras, the *bhakti* movement in South India began. Historically, Buddhism and Jainism were popular, with Kanchi and Madurai serving as religious scholarship centres. However, socio-religious tensions did not develop until after the fifth century CE, when sharp differences appeared among these religious groups.

Hindu religious leaders were concerned about the growing popularity of Jainism and Buddhism, which led to the use of immoderate language and propagandist tactics by *bhakti* movement leaders, particularly the Saiva Nayanars in Tamilnadu. From the seventh century onward, both the Saiva Nayanars and the Vaishnava Alvars were vehemently opposed to Jainism and Buddhism. This unit delves into the evolution of the *Bhakti* movement in South India, specifically through the Alvar and Nayanar *Bhakti* streams.

Keywords

Bhakti, Alvars, Nayanars, Jainism, Buddhism, Vaishavism, Saivism



Discussion

◆ *South India shaped religious philosophy*

South India made significant contributions to religion and philosophical thought over time. Its saints and seers created a new type of *bhakti*, a passionate emotional surrender to God, which found literary expression in the *Bhagavatapurana*. Two schools of Vedic exegesis emerged in South India: Kumarilabhatta and Prabhakara. The founders of the three major Vedanta systems, Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva, were also from the southern country. Another well-known philosophical system, Saiva-siddhanta, had adherents in the Tamil country. The Vedas were frequently discussed in south India, and the study of ritual manuals from various Vedic schools was continued. The literature on these developments is reviewed in outline form, illustrating the major stages in their history.

◆ *Bhakti poetry evolved from Sangam roots*

South Indian *bhakti* has its roots in late Sangam poetry and incorporates elements of *Paripatal* and *Pattuppattu*. The poem *Tirumurukarruppatai* uses epithets to describe the god Murugan and encourages devotees to visit shrines there. According to Zvelebil, the formal structure of *bhakti* poetry is derived from *Tanippatal*, which are single bardic stanzas found in *akam* and *puram* poems. *Patan*, a setting of heroic poems, focuses on praising the patron and soliciting gifts. Both *patan* poems and *bhakti* songs have an intense, personal tone, but in *bhakti*, the focus shifts from the king to the god, who is praised and requested to deliver his devotees.

◆ *Alvars and Nayanars revered from Chola times*

◆ *Poetic devotion depicted intense godly love*

The tradition identifies 12 Alvars and 63 Nayanars. The saints themselves are worshipped from the Chola period onwards, which was evident from the images or paintings of saints found in the hall surrounding the sanctum. Vishnu temples typically have a separate shrine for Alvar images. However, the historicity of some saints is uncertain, and it is difficult to distinguish between fact and myth in their hagiographies. Male saints were nomadic or ascetics, whereas female saints differed. Alvar and Nayanar poetry reflects an intimate, intense, and ecstatic devotion to their god. The poets visualised their god in various ways, such as friend, mother, father, master, teacher, and bridegroom. Many male saints interpreted the feminine voice of a lover or bride to express their longing for union with god. The female voice was considered appropriate for expressing complete love and surrender, as the objects of devotion were male. Some instances of women saints assuming a male voice exist.

Religious sects in India coexisted peacefully and with tolerance until the fifth century CE. They worshipped primitive godlings (a minor god, or local god) with blood and toddy offerings, performed



- ◆ Religious harmony existed until fifth century
- ◆ Hostility towards Jainism and Buddhism

elaborate Vedic sacrifices, and had a popular pantheon of deities including Muruga, Shiva, Vishnu, Indra, and Krishna. Buddhists and Jains practised their religions freely. The *Manimekhalai* story mentioned philosophical systems of Veda, Jiva, Vishnu, Ajivika, Jaina, Stokhya, Vaiseshika, and Lokayata. In the early seventh century, a significant shift occurred in Tamil India, with people concerned about the spread of Jainism and Buddhism. Worshipers of Shiva and Vishnu sought to prevent the spread of heresy, which resulted in a growing emotional devotion to Shiva and open hostility toward Buddhists and Jains. This new era saw public debate, competition in miracle performance, and ordeal-based doctrine testing. Devotee groups led by saints travelled the country singing, dancing, and debating. This wave of religious enthusiasm peaked in the early seventh century and lasted until the middle of the ninth century.

4.2.1 Alvars and Nayanars

- ◆ Emphasised Vaishnava and Saiva devotionism
- ◆ Devotion rooted in Tamil ethos

In the early medieval period, the south Indian Alvar and Nayanar saints emphasised Vaishnava and Saiva devotionism, which was deeply rooted in Tamil language and ethos. The Sanskrit word *bhakti*, which means to share or participate, was used to describe a devotee who shares or participates in something divine. Their devotion was referred to as *anbu* in Tamil, which means 'love'. The term *bhakti*, or its Tamil equivalent *patti*, was coined relatively recently, and the relationship between devotee and god was regarded as reciprocal. The term *arul* referred to the god's love for his devotees.

4.2.1.1. Nayanars

- ◆ Nayanar: Shiva's devoted servants
- ◆ Key figures: Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar

Saiva saints use the honorific 'Nayanar' to refer to themselves as Shiva's servants or slaves. Three of the 63 Nayanars, Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar, are important and have their own shrines in temples. They are occasionally accompanied by a picture of Manikkavachakar. Sundarar's poem *Tiruttondar Tokai* (Assembly of Sacred Slaves) in the 8th century introduced the concept of Saiva poet-saints, which included 62 Nayanars. Andar Nambi wrote the *Tiruttondar Tiruvantai*, a hagiography of the 62, in the early 10th century, and included Sundarar's name on the list. He also collected saintly songs. The *Periyapuram*, the 12th and final book of the Tirumurai canon, was written in the mid-12th century and included saints' life stories as well as the Tevaram hymn collection. Saiva bhakti portrays the god's relationship with his devotee as similar to that of a master and a slave.

The Saiva revival was led by 63 Nayanars, including a woman from Karaikal (Karaikal Ammaiyar), a pariah (Outcast) from Adanur (Nandanar) and a general of the Pallava forces, Siruttandar.



◆ *Saiva revival led by 63 Nayanars*

The most prominent were the three men whose hymns are collected in the Devaram: Tirunavukkarasu, a Vellala from Tiruvamur, and Mahendravarman I, a Pallava ruler. The story of Dharmasena seemed to be interesting in this context. Dharmasena, a monk from an orthodox Saiva family, became interested in Jainism and joined the Jaina monastery in Pataliputra. His elder sister, who had witnessed his conversion, sought Shiva's assistance. Dharmasena came to her for help with an abdominal disorder. She obtained his healing through the grace of the God of Tiruvadigai. The news of his defection alarmed the Jaina monks of Pataliputra, who falsely accused him of poisoning Mahendravarman's mind. Dharmasena faced numerous trials and tortures, but with the grace of Shiva, he easily overcame them.

◆ *Manikkavachakar: known for miracles, hymns*

Manikkavachakar is known for performing miracles and debating with Ceylon Buddhists in Chidambaram. He is believed to have defeated them. His Pandyan contemporary is most likely Yaraguna II. His hymns, *Tiruvagasam* and *Tirucarrambalakkovai*, are attributed to him. Manikkavachakar's poems frequently describe the experience of 'melting' before the Lord, with a deprecation of the body and its state. The poet frequently criticises himself for his flaws and speaks to the god in familiar tones.

◆ *Appar: Pilgrimage and spreading Saivism*

The king, Tirunavukkarasu or Appar, was convinced of Saivism's superiority and accepted it. A verse in Mahendravarman's Trichinopoly inscription demonstrates that the king converted to Saivism from another religion. However, the tradition of Mahendravarman's persecution of Appar clashes with the spirit of the Mattavilasa. Appar spent his 81 year life on pilgrimage, meeting many contemporary Nayanars, including Nanasambandar, the most famous and greatest of them all.

◆ *Gnanasambandar: Divine wisdom at young age*

Gnanasambandar, a Brahmin from Shiyali in the Tanjore district, was a revered figure in Tamil society. He was a poet and engaged in disputes with Buddhists, visited numerous shrines, and sang numerous hymns. His contemporary was either Maravarman Avanisulamani or his grandson Arikesari Maravarman. According to legend, he received divine knowledge from goddess Parvathi at the age of three and passed it on to his father. The father recognised his divinity and took him to various Saiva shrines, eventually receiving a pearl palanquin for his son to use. The Pandya country was nearly overrun by Jainism, and the Pandyan queen and minister Kulaccirai, both Saivas, invited Sambandar to assist in freeing the Pandya and his country from Jainism's grip.

Gnanasambandar went to Madurai, foiled all the Jains' conspiracies against him, defeated them in debate, and converted

◆ *Madurai: Triumph over Jainism*

the king and his subjects to Saivism. The story revolves around 8,000 Jains who were impaled, and a festival is held in the Madurai temple to commemorate the event. According to Nilakanta Sastri, this is only an unpleasant legend and cannot be considered history. Despite religious differences, intolerance led to such cruel atrocities.

◆ *Sundaramurti earned title 'Tambiran-Tolan'*

Sundaramurti, born to poor Brahmin parents, was admired for his beauty in his childhood and was brought up by local chieftain Narasinga Munaiyadaraiyan and brought up by him. His marriage to a girl of his own caste was stopped by Shiva, who claimed him as his slave. Sundara fell in love with two women, a dancing-girl of Tiruvallur and a sudra girl of Tiruvottiyur. Their jealousies were resolved by Shiva acting as a messenger to one of them. Sundara, like other Nayanar credited with numerous miracles, had a close relationship with Cheraman Perumal, a contemporary Chera ruler. Sundara and Perumal visited each other on a regular basis and travelled to Shiva's abode in Mount Kailasa on a white elephant and a horse, respectively. Sundara's devotion to Shiva earned him the title 'Tambiran-Tolan', meaning 'Friend of God'.

◆ *Nandanar: Devotion of an untouchable*

The Shaiva saint Nandanar, who was considered as an untouchable made a living by slaughtering animals for drum leather and gut for musical instruments. According to his hagiography, Shiva directed the priest to light a fire at the Chidambaram temple, allowing Nandanar to pass unharmed. His desire to see his lord was fulfilled, and he is said to have disappeared under the foot of the dancing Shiva.

◆ *Hymns: Raptures to moments of darkness*

◆ *Targeting Buddhists, Jains*

Sambandar, Appar, and Sundara's hymns describe a wide variety of religious experiences, including mystical raptures, light moments, and dark periods. Manikkavacakar hymns are more exuberant, with open confessions and passionate devotion. Some of these hymns were controversial, with no kind words for Buddhists or Jains. The hymns offer a diverse range of religious experiences, from mystical raptures to dark periods of fear.

4.2.1.2 Alvars

◆ *Alvars deeply absorbed in divinity*

◆ *Alvar bhakti prioritises devotion with Krishna*

Alvar, which means 'those who dive deep', is a term used to describe those who become absorbed in the divine. Nathamuni collected the 12 Alvars' hymns in the 10th century for the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* (Four Thousand Holy Hymns), which became the Vaishnava canon. The first major hagiography of Alvar saints was Garudavahana's *Divyasuricharitam*, written in the 12th century. Alvar *bhakti* emphasises the lover-beloved relationship with Mayon or Mal (Krishna), with a focus on devotion to the god rather than traditional practices of religion.

In 1983, Friedhelm Hardy, scholar of south Indian religion,



◆ *Krishna worship central to Alvar devotion*

◆ *Geographic shift of Alvar activity*

analysed the Tiruvantatis, the earliest stage of Alvar religiosity, emphasised the importance of the Krishna *avatara* in god worship. Devotees are described as serving, worshipping, praising, and adorning the god, with the deity residing within the devotee. Hardy observes a systematic shift in the geographical distribution of Alvar activity from Venkatam-Kanchi to south Tamil Nadu and south Kerala, eventually culminating in a concentration in Srirangam, with 95 temples serving as the external structure for this *bhakti*.

◆ *First three Alvars non-sectarian bhakti*

The Vaishnava movement has twelve Alvars, with three believed to have arrived at the beginning. Poygai, Pudam, and Pey, born in Kanchi, Mallai, and Mylapore respectively, are thought to have been the first. According to legend, they were sheltered from the rain in a narrow room when Vishnu sought their company. Their *bhakti* was gentle, simple, and free of sectarian sentiments. Their use of ‘venba metre’ in their songs indicates an early date, possibly in the fifth or sixth century CE.

◆ *Tirumalisai raised in diverse traditions*

Tirumalisai, a senior contemporary of Pallava Mahendravarman I, was born in Chingleput District. He was raised by a sudra after his parents abandoned him. Before converting to Vaishnava yoga, he practiced Jainism, Buddhism, and Saivism. His poems had a more controversial tone than the first three Alvars, which was natural for his age.

◆ *Tirumangai critiqued Jainism and Buddhism*

◆ *Periyalvar won Pandya court dispute*

Tirumangai, a celebrated Alvar, was a petty chieftain from Alinadu in the Tanjore district. His hymns mention Vairamegha, implying he lived around the eighth century. His hymns include poetry and criticisms of Jainism and Buddhism. Tirumangai had a more friendly attitude towards Saivism, and there are many similarities in literary form and religious sentiments between Gnanasambandar and Tirumangai. In the eighth and ninth centuries, several Alvars emerged, including Periyalvar, a Brahmin from Srivilliputtur, who won a religious dispute at the court of Pandya king Srimara Sri Vallabha.

◆ *Andal expressed intense devotion to Krishna*

◆ *Poems reflect longing and separation*

Andal, Periyaivar’s adopted daughter, was a woman who adored Vishnu and dreamed of marrying him. Her devotion was similar to that of Manikkavacagar, and her hymns frequently mentioned Krishna stories. Krishna’s mythology and his relationship with gopis, including Pinnai, emphasised emotional and erotic aspects. The erotic element was most noticeable in the poems of the female saint Kodai, also known as Andal, who expressed feelings of separation and longing for union with her lord.

◆ *Tiruppan was a low-caste devotee*

Tiruppan, a low-caste minstrel, was Nandanar’s Vaishnava counterpart, and he was not permitted to enter Srirangam Temple. He desired to see Lord Vishnu in Srirangam. According to his hagiography, the god appeared to one of the Brahmin temple

priests in a dream and told him to carry Thiruppan on his shoulder, allowing him to enter the temple. This is how the Alvar saint Tiruppan entered the temple and met his master. After singing a hymn, he merged into the image of Vishnu.

◆ *Vipranarayana opposed other religions*

Vipranarayana, a Brahmin from Tanjore district, was known as Tondar-adip-podi, which means ‘the dust of the feet of the devotees’. He had a strong dislike for Buddhism and Jainism. Their devotion to Vishnu was a significant part of their culture.

◆ *Nammalvar blended akam style with bhakti*

Kulashekhara, a ruler of Kerala, sang at Vishnu shrines in Chidambaram and Tiruvali, which is considered the foundation of Tirumangai. Nammalvar and his pupil Madhurakavi, born in Alvarthirunagari, were celebrated for their yoga practice. Nammalvar, known as Sathakopa, renounced the world in his thirty-fifth year and wrote the largest number of hymns, which are considered to embody the deepest religious experience and philosophic thought of one of the greatest seers of the world. Nammalvar’s poems combined traditional *akam* style with new symbolism, describing the relationship between devotee and deity as similar to that of lover and beloved.

◆ *Yuan Chwang missed Hindu revival*

◆ *Revival led to kings’ conversions*

Yuan Chwang, who visited south India in 642, did not notice the Hindu revival movement, despite Shiva worshippers covering themselves with ashes in Maharashtra. He mentioned the decline of Buddhism and notes that it had yielded to Digambara Jainism. The revivalist movement’s triumph came in the following centuries through public debates that caused kings and rulers to switch creeds. The Nayanars and Alvars used popular speech in soulful compositions and simple tunes, which was more significant.

4.2.1.3 Social Backgrounds of Bhakti Saints

◆ *Saints came from all social classes*

Bhakti saints came from a variety of social backgrounds. Around two-thirds of the saints were Brahmins, including notable saints. However, there were people from other social classes present, including kings, minor chieftains, civil and military officials, merchants, and landowners. The saints were also a cowherd, washerman, weaver, potter, toddy fermenter, hunter, fisherman, and bandit. The Saiva saint Nandanar and the Vaishnava saint Tiruppan Alvar are considered ‘untouchables’. Nandanar and Tiruppan Alvar’s stories imply that the path to bhakta was open to individuals regarded untouchable by society. However, their admittance inside their god’s sanctum proved difficult and necessitated supernatural intervention. This demonstrates the significance of societal acceptance of bhakta.

The *bhakti* movement had a significant impact on south Indian social organisation, particularly temples. *Bhakti*’s services and jargon reflected a social organisation, with temple deities granted



◆ Temple language reflected royal power

◆ Deities symbolised hierarchical structures

◆ Devotee-lord relationships resembled feudalism

◆ Temples had Brahmanical institutional roots

◆ Bhakti mirrored caste-based structures

◆ Temple religion reinforced social hierarchies

◆ Few women leaders in bhakti

◆ Women gained roles in later eras

◆ Bhakti emphasised spiritual equality

◆ Hymns acknowledged inclusive communities

full royal status. The terms *udaiyar* or *perumal* referred to both the king and the deity, whereas *koil* denoted both the temple and the palace. The temple's daily routine coincided with the palace's. However, this terminology applied to any major landed magnate or local chief, as each chief or landlord was regarded as a 'king' in their own way. The plurality and coexistence of deities reflected a political structure with a large number of lords and magnates organised in a hierarchical manner, with orders of precedence and substantial ties of deities.

The deity was frequently equated with the lord, and the devotee with the vassal. The devotee addressed the deity as 'udaiyar' or 'tambiran' (lord), while describing their status as 'adiyar' (servant). This corresponds to the traditional feudal pyramid, in which each point was a lord for their immediate vassal and a vassal for their immediate suzerain, with ties of allegiance and dependence. Sundaramurthi, the last of the Nayanars, emphasised the brahmanical nature of the movement and its institutional foundation, the temple, in his *Tiruttondattogai*.

The *bhakti* movement legitimised the established polity by reflecting the existing social order and creating the illusion of a divide across caste lines. This facilitated the acceptance of caste and its ideology by all segments of society. The stories of Nandanar, a paraiya, and Tiruppana, a pana, showed that even lowly castes could rise to the highest rung of the *bhakti* hierarchy. However, they also emphasised the ordinary paraiya's or pana's position in the existing social and power structures. This was supported by the temple-based religion of Agamaic or Puranic Hinduism, which was popularised by the *bhakti* movement.

Bhakti's implications for women are complex, with works like Saiva Periyapuram frequently portraying them negatively. The only women listed among the Nayanars are Karikkal Ammaiyar, Mangaiyarkkarasiyar, and Isainaniyar. Alvar had only one woman, Andal. There were a few women among bhakti saints, but the majority of the leadership is male. Mathas did not allow women, and it was not until Ramanuja's reign in the 11th century and the Virashaiva movement's impact in the 12th century that women began to play a more active role in Saiva bhakti.

The social significance and impact of the *bhakti* tradition can be assessed by evaluating the ideals stated in bhakti songs as well as the increase in social access to sacred spaces. Despite being dominated by elite groups, *bhakti* established a religious society in which traditional class distinctions could be overcome, notably in the interaction between a *bhakta* and their god. This idea is visible in certain saints' hymns that acknowledge the *bhakta* community, such as 'bhaktakulam' or 'tondaikulam'.

- ◆ Royalty supported *bhakti* for benefits
- ◆ *Bhakti* gained from royal patronage

The early patrons of the *Bhakti* movement were rulers from newly established dynasties. Mahendravarman Pallava, a great Appar, was a patron who played a significant role in the conversion of the Appar king to Saivism from Jainism. Nedumaran, a Pandya king, was also converted to Saivism under Kulaicirai Nayanar's influence. A Chola, Koccenganan, and Ceraman Perumal were also Saiva Nayanars. The rulers likely found the support of these movements useful, and the movement itself benefited from royal patronage. This mutual support between the *Bhakti* movement and newly established monarchies is significant, as it allowed the movement to use state power to win conflicts with rival creeds.

- ◆ *Bhakti* linked with feudalism debates
- ◆ Movement challenged social hierarchies

D. D. Kosambi proposed that *bhakti*, an ideology based on devotion and loyalty, was ideal for feudal regimes. Historians later contended that temples, as landed magnates, were part of the feudal system, and that the *bhakti* movement, which was temple-based, legitimised feudal social connections. This resulted in the extending of the feudal label to the *bhakti* movement. D.N.Jha, Kesavan Veluthat and M.G.S Narayanan also shared the same perspectives as that of D.D. Kosambi. The characterisation of early medieval India and temples as 'feudal' is problematic, as it obscures the fact that *bhakti*, a religious ideology, challenged social hierarchies and expanded the social boundaries of sacred spaces, despite the labelling of it as a feudal ideology.

4.2.2 Jainism and Buddhism

4.2.2.1 Buddhism

- ◆ Buddhism waned as Hinduism revived
- ◆ Buddhist influences were depicted in Chola art

Yuan Chwang observed the decline of Buddhism in Andhradesa, where it flourished in the early centuries CE. This decline persisted after his death, as the revival of Hinduism resulted in the worshipping of Buddha at Amaravati as an incarnation of Vishnu and the conversion of many Buddhist sites into Hindu shrines. Buddhism declined rapidly in Tamil Nadu as a result of Hindu saints and reformers, but it persisted in other parts of India. Buddhist settlements were discovered in Negapatam and Srimulavasam during the Chola period, and decorative panels in Tanjore's great temple depicted scenes from Buddha's life.

- ◆ Buddhist legacies persisted in Ceylon
- ◆ Hindu and Buddhist cultures coexisted

The Velgam Vehera in Ceylon, near Trincomalee, was renovated and renamed Rajaraja Perumballi in the eleventh century. It features a large Buddha image and a bronze lampstand, indicating the Chola ruler's concern for his subjects' spiritual well-being. A Buddhist scholar wrote the *Virasoliyam*, a work on Tamil grammar. Kanchipuram, a section of Kanchipuram, is known as Buddhakanchi, and a Buddhist monk from one monastery sang praises to a Hindu ruler in the 14th century.



- ◆ *New viharas emerged in Deccan*
- ◆ *Endowments supported Buddhist worship*

In the ninth century, new viharas were established in the north-west Deccan, including a Bengali monk who built a Mahavihara, a large monastery in Krishnagiri (Kanheri) in 853, endowing it with 100 gold drammas. In 877, a minister of the Silaharas of Konkan constructed a meditation hall for monks in the same area, and other endowments for regular Buddha worship were recorded.

4.2.2.2 Jainism

- ◆ *Jaina influence in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu*
- ◆ *Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas supported Jainism*

Jainism had a greater impact on people's lives than Buddhism, particularly in Karnataka and Tamil India, where Jaina authors made significant contributions to Kannada and Tamil literature. The Jaina temple at Aihole, built by Ravikirti during Pulakesin II's reign, is regarded as the pinnacle of excellence. Jaina temples and monasteries were built throughout the Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas' provinces. Rashtrakuta Amoghavarsha I sought solace by visiting a Jaina monastery several times during his reign. The Eastern Chalukyas patronised Jainism, which was followed by early Western Ganga monarchs. Amma II built two Jinalayas and established *satras* to feed *sramanas* (Jaina monks) from all castes.

- ◆ *Jains faced Vaishnava persecution.*
- ◆ *Jainism's decline but persistence in Gujarat*

Jainism shares similarities with Hinduism, with common beliefs and practices. Many Jaina grants require donees to use the proceeds for daily rites and observances similar to Hindu donations. Influential merchant guilds often had a strong Jaina wing in their membership. Following Vijayanagar's establishment, Jains complained about Vaishnava persecution, leading to King Bukkaraya's intervention in 1368. He decreed equal freedom for both religions, and while Jainism has steadily lost ground in the country, it has not completely disappeared, particularly in Gujarat.

Summarised Overview

South India significantly contributed to religion and philosophical thought through its saints and seers, creating a new type of *bhakti*, a passionate emotional surrender to God. The region also saw the emergence of two schools of Vedic exegesis, Kumarilabhatta and Prabhakara, and the founders of major Vedanta systems. The tradition identifies 12 Alvars and 63 Nayanars, expressing love and surrender. Religious sects coexisted peacefully until the fifth century CE, with a popular pantheon of deities. The term *bhakti*, derived from Sanskrit, signifies a devotee sharing or participating in divine activities. The term *arul*, referring to the god's love for his devotees, was coined in the early medieval period, reflecting the reciprocal relationship between devotee and god.

Saiva saints, known as Nayanars, refer to themselves as Shiva's servants or slaves. Three of the 63 Nayanars, Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar, are important figures in the Saiva revival. Sundarar's poem *Tiruttondar Tokai* introduced the concept of Saiva poet-saints, including 62 Nayanars. The *Periyapuranam*, the 12th and final book of the Tirumurai canon, includes saintly songs and life stories. The god's relationship with his devotee is similar to that of a master and a slave. The Saiva revival was led by 63 Nayanars, including Dharmasena, Manikkavachakar, Appar, Nanasambandar, Sundara, and Nandanar. Their hymns describe a wide range of religious experiences, from mystical raptures to dark periods of fear. The hymns are attributed to various figures, including Dharmasena, Manikkavachakar, Appar, Sundara, and Cheraman Perumal.

Alvar refers to those who become absorbed in the divine. The Vaishnava canon, which included the 12 Alvars' hymns, was collected in the 10th century. Alvar *bhakti* emphasises the lover-beloved relationship with Krishna, with devotion to the god rather than traditional practices. The Alvar movement has twelve Alvars, with three believed to have arrived at the beginning. Tirumalisai, Tirumangai, Periyalvar, Andal, Tiruppan, Vipranarayana, and Nammalvar emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries. The revivalist movement's triumph came through public debates, leading to kings and rulers switching creeds. The Nayanars and Alvars used popular speech in soulful compositions and simple tunes, which was more significant.

Bhakti saints, a religious movement in south India, were diverse in social backgrounds, including Brahmanas, kings, and other social classes. The movement had a significant impact on social organisation, particularly temples, where deities were granted full royal status. The movement legitimised the established polity by reflecting the existing social order and creating an illusion of a divide across caste lines. The movement also facilitated the acceptance of caste and its ideology by all segments of society. The social significance of the *Bhakti* tradition can be assessed by evaluating ideals stated in *bhakti* songs and the increase in social access to sacred spaces. Early patrons were rulers from newly established dynasties, and the movement benefited from royal patronage.

Buddhism in India experienced a decline in the early centuries CE due to Hinduism worshipping Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. However, it persisted in other parts of India, with Buddhist settlements and Buddhist works in Ceylon. Jainism, a religion with similarities to Hinduism, had a greater impact on people's lives in Karnataka and Tamil India, with significant contributions to Kannada and Tamil literature.



Assignments

1. Examine the impact of *Bhakti* movement in South India.
2. Bring out the features of Alvar and Nayanar *bhakti* movement.
3. Explain the social background of the *Bhakti* movement.
4. List the important Alvar and Nayanar *bhakti* saints.
5. Write a short note on Jainism and Buddhism in south India.
6. Explain how the *Bhakti* movement led to the decline of Jainism and Buddhism in south India.

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU



Philosophical Schools

Learning Outcomes

After the successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ comprehend the fundamental teachings of Advaita philosophy
- ◆ understand the philosophy of Ramanuja
- ◆ explain the development of Dvaita philosophy and its important tenets
- ◆ describe Saiva Siddhanta
- ◆ analyse the establishment of *mathas*

Background

Commentators on the *Brahmasutra*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavat Gita* influenced the *Upanishadic* seers' search for ultimate reality. The interpretation of the *Upanishads*' mahavakyas, which discuss the relationship between the individual and the supreme self, resulted in the formation of various *Vedantic* schools. These schools are Advaita, Visistadvaita, and Dvaita. Advaita Vedanta advocates non-dualism, Visistadvaita emphasises qualified monism, and Dvaita emphasises dualistic viewpoints. The Saiva Siddhanta, a pluralistic realist school of Saivism, maintains the three realities of God, Soul, and World. These schools contributed to the evolution of *Vedantic* philosophy. This unit examines the growth and development of philosophies like Advaita Siddhanta, Dvaita Siddhanta, Vishista Advaita, and Saiva Siddhanta and also explores the impact of these philosophies. It also discusses the establishment of the institution of *Mathas*.

Keywords

Advaita Siddhanta, Dvaita Siddhanta, *Mathas*, Vishista Advaita, Saiva Siddhanta, Philosophy



Discussion

4.3.1 Advaita Siddhanta

The Advaita School of thought emphasises the three pillars of epistemology, axiology, and metaphysics, with the philosophical conclusion of ‘Absolute Truth’ derived primarily from scriptural statements. Adi Sankara, born in 788 CE in Kalady, Kerala, was a well-known and distinguished teacher known for his exceptional intellect, compassion, and visionary outlook. Sankaracharya was born to Shivaguru and Aryamba, a devout couple, and demonstrated extraordinary brilliance at a young age, composing *Balabodha sangraha* at the age of six years. He is remembered not as a founder, but as someone who spread the Advaita philosophy. Sankara’s life and teachings have had a profound impact on generations of minds, and they continue to inspire and inform contemporary thought.

◆ *Advaita’s epistemology and metaphysics*

◆ *Sankara’s intellectual brilliance and impact*

At eight, Sankara was determined to live a reclusive life but couldn’t persuade his mother. It is said that while bathing, he was dragged by a crocodile, leaving his mother helpless. Sankara yelled that if she allowed him to renounce, the crocodile would do no harm. Her mother agreed, and the crocodile left safely. This incident is an allegory for Sankara’s search for a guru. Lord Vishnu sent him a dream directing him to the great ascetic Govindapadacharya at Omkarnath. Sankara embarked on an expedition to find Govindapadacharya and waited for the ascetic to awaken from deep meditation. The ascetic asked Sankara, “Who are you?” Sankara responded with ten verses known as the Dashashloki, which describe the ultimate nature of the self.

◆ *Meeting with Govindapadacharya*

◆ *Vedantic knowledge spread at sixteen*

◆ *Combined Advaitic teachings*

Govindapada, an ascetic, accepted Sankara as a disciple and taught him all the scriptures in three years. Sankara concluded his studies by writing commentaries on the scriptures. He travelled to Kashi to spread the teachings, and by the age of sixteen, he had established the superiority of *Vedantic* knowledge. Sankara is regarded as a ‘gem’ in the lineage of teachers because he combined Advaitic teachings and paved the way for future teachers.

◆ *Founded four mutts*

◆ *He influence through simple stotras*

By the age of 32, he had thousands of followers and founded four mutts under his disciples: Padmapada, Sureshvara, Totaka, and Hastamalaka. Sankara not only wrote for intellectuals, but he also provided the essence of profound teachings in simple stotras to appeal to a wide range of truth seekers. His most famous philosophical works are *Vivekachoodamani*, *Upadesha Sahasri*, *Vakyavrtti*, and *Mohamudgara*. His devotional hymns include *Ganesha Pancharatnam*, *Soundaryalahari*, and *Shivanandalahari*.



Sankara wrote over 100 works in his short life, and at the end of his mission in 820 CE, he instructed his disciples to carry out his vision for humanity's well-being.

◆ Gaudapada's non-dualistic Vedanta

His hagiographies, written after the 14th century, frequently combined historical detail and legend. The *Sankara-digvijaya* of Madhava is a popular example, as it describes Sankara's journey, debating, and defeating philosophical adversaries. He was a major proponent of Vedanta, also known as Advaita Vedanta, and his writings continue to influence philosophical thought today. Gaudapada, a well-known figure in the 7th or 8th century, introduced Advaita, or non-dualistic Vedanta, in his *Mandukyakarika*, a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Gaudapada, influenced by Madhyamika and Vijnanavada Buddhism, believed that reality is one and that plurality is the result of *maya*, an illusion caused by ignorance.

◆ Sankara's commentary on Brahma Sutra
◆ Two levels of reality in Advaita

Sankara expanded the ideas of Gaudapada claiming that the *Upanishads* and *Brahmasutras* contained a systematic, unified philosophy. Sankara's most important work is his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, which emphasised the value of Vedic sacrifices for material gain and the *Upanishads* for ultimate knowledge. He believed that 'brahman', or ultimate reality, is pure consciousness that is eternal and unchanging, with only apparent change and plurality. He distinguished between two levels of reality: 'conventional reality' and 'absolute reality', using a metaphor of a coiled rope resembling a snake. Ignorance (*avidya*) arises from mistaking conventional reality for absolute reality, and Advaita Vedanta seeks liberation from rebirth by recognising the oneness of *atman* and *brahman*.

◆ Six types of knowledge in Advaita

Sankara's famous line, "Brahma satyam jaganmithya jivobrahmaiva napanah," exemplifies Advaita philosophy, which holds that *Brahman* is real, the world is unreal, and the individual self is not distinct from *Brahman*. Advaita focuses on the mechanism of knowing, which consists of a knower, a means of knowing, and an object of knowledge. The six types of knowledge are perception, inference, comparison, postulation, non apprehension, and testimony.

◆ Brahman is infinite and impersonal
◆ Turiya state: one's soul into harmony with all

Advaita philosophy, rooted in the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutra*, asserts that *Brahman* is the only reality, encompassing all beings and material objects. It posits that *Brahman* is infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, and impersonal, and that there is no distinction between *Brahman* and others in the Universe. Achieving the *turiya* or *chaturtha* state (the true self (*atman*) beyond the three common states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, and dreamless deep sleep) brings one's soul into harmony with all.



◆ *Atman as eternal and core of personality*

Atman, a concept in Indian philosophy, is frequently linked to breath, soul, the principle of life, and sensation. It is regarded as the eternal core of the personality, which survives death and transmigrates to new life. Advaita Vedanta regards *Atman* as the entirety of Brahman, not just a component that dissolves into it. It is the silent witness to all life's events, free of sin and merit. *Atman* can transform into *jiva*, a living being with a body and senses, each experiencing their own *Atman*.

◆ *Higher Brahman through Vidya*

◆ *Overcoming ignorance via Vidya*

Sankara distinguishes between Higher Brahman (*Vidya*) and Lower Brahman (*Avidya*), claiming that the Higher Brahman is understood through knowledge and liberation, whereas the Lower Brahman is perceived through ignorance. The Advaita philosophy focuses on understanding Brahman, overcoming obstacles like ignorance (*avidya*) and incorrect interpretation (*vikalpa*). Sankara explains that the only way to overcome ignorance is to thrive through *Vidya* (knowledge), which is the most important characteristic for understanding Brahman. Gaudapada describes ignorance as *vikalpa* (wrong interpretation) and *adhyasa* (superimposition). Sankara also discusses the natural tendency to superimpose the qualities of objects on their subjects, arguing that the only way to overcome ignorance is to thrive through *Vidya* (knowledge).

◆ *Knowledge through perseverance and clarity*

Gaudapada, influenced by Buddhism, uses *Maya* to refer to both the power of creation and the creations themselves. Sankara uses *avidya* to describe the creation of the *Maya* world, not the world itself. Scholars challenge the use of *avidya* and *Maya*, claiming that ignorance belongs to Brahman. Both are temporary and can be eliminated by *Vidya* (knowledge). Knowledge is gained through personal perseverance and self-examination, which entails questioning one's understanding of the world and its circumstances. Clarity in understanding leads to truth, which is knowledge.

◆ *Cause and effect relationship explained*

◆ *Effect exists in the cause*

Sankara's cause-and-effect argument holds that understanding one thing is dependent on the persistence of another, and that a cause (*karana*) and effect (*karya*) require an agent. He contends that the effect is identical in substance to its cause, and that the cause has a pre-existing effect before manifesting it. He also discusses the distinction between cause and effect, claiming that the effect exists in the cause but not vice versa. This principle is difficult to understand, but it can be separated using imagination.

◆ *Four characteristics of a person seeking liberation*

◆ *Liberation through cognising Brahman*

Indian philosophical systems, such as Advaita Vedanta, emphasise the importance of liberation as being, knowing, and experiencing one's true self. Sankara identifies four characteristics of a person seeking liberation: distinguishing between eternal and non-eternal, remaining detached from present and future actions, and developing moral virtues. He rejects the notion that liberation is



the result of action, arguing that the only entity capable of liberation is cognising *Brahman*, which exists in the present, past, and future without regard for time.

- ◆ *Dashanami sect and Amanaya mutts*

Sankara is thought to have founded the Dashanami sect and four or five Amanaya *mutts*, which were later attributed to him for prestige. The *mutts*, including those in Shringeri and Kanchi, were built several centuries later, with the Sringeri *mutt* most likely founded in the 14th century during the Vijayanagara period. Historians believe that these *mathas* were established to preserve and spread Sankara's teachings.

4.3.2 Vishishta Advaita

- ◆ *Ramanuja emphasised bhakti for liberation*
- ◆ *Ramanuja succeeded Yamuna in leadership*

Sri Ramanujacharya, a Vishistadvaita pioneer, emphasised *bhakti* as the only means of liberation, establishing monotheism on the *Prasthan Traya*. He was born in Sriperumbudur in the eleventh century. He received his early philosophical training from Yadavaprakasa of Kanchipuram, belonging to the school of Sankara. Yamunacharya is said to have met Ramanuja in Kanchi but, not wanting to disrupt the youth's studies, he prayed for the growth of Sri Vaishnavas and returned to Srirangam. Ramanuja later disagreed with his guru's teachings and moved toward the Srirangam school. Yamunacharya tried to contact him but died before reaching him. Ramanuja succeeded Yamuna as the head of the *Matha* in Srirangam, gaining control of the temple and school. His teaching abilities and organisational skills grew, as did his influence.

- ◆ *Ramanuja reformed temple rituals*
- ◆ *He spread bhakti across castes*

Ramanuja who challenged Sankara's *Mayavada* argued that the *Upanishads* did not teach strict monism. He put forward the Visishtadvaita philosophy, which combined devotion to a personal God with Vedanta. He attempted to unify the sect by reforming temple rituals, despite the fact that only the twiceborn could read the Veda. He also spread the *bhakti* doctrine among the Sudras and outcastes, allowing them to enter temples on one day each year. He travelled extensively throughout India to spread his ideas, which may have helped the sect gain widespread influence in Northern India.

- ◆ *Ramanuja faced persecution under Cholas*
- ◆ *He founded a mutt in Melkote*

The Cholas, followers of Shiva, did not support Ramanuja's growing influence. Ramanuja was subjected to persecution and had to withdraw into Mysore in 1098. He couldn't return to Srirangam until 1122. During this time, he won over Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana from Jainism and established a well-organised *mutt* at Melkote. After returning to Srirangam, Ramanuja continued his work until his death in 1137, and is worshipped as an avatar in all Vaishnava temples.



◆ Ramanuja's philosophy combined bhakti and monism

◆ Brahman and atman are inseparable

◆ Nimbarka focused on Krishna and Radha

◆ He held the bheda-bheda position

◆ Visishtadvaita integrates cit, acit, and Ishvara

◆ Perception is central to Visishtadvaita knowledge

◆ Theory of erroneous perception

◆ Visishtadvaita embraces syllogistic reasoning

Ramanuja wrote several works, including *Vedantasara*, *Vedarthasamgraha*, and *Vedantadipa*, as well as commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Brahmasutra*. His philosophy, *Vishishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism), combined Vaishnava *bhakti* and *Upanishadic* monism. The doctrine posits that *Brahman*, a *sa-guna*, possesses qualities and can be summoned by devotees through *bhakti*. The relationship between *Brahman* and individual selves (*atman*) is compared to the relationship between a rose and redness. *Brahman* and *atman* are distinct but inseparable, as they cannot exist without each other, resembling the red rose without redness.

Nimbarka, a Bhagavata Telugu Brahmin from Nimbapura, was Ramanuja's younger contemporary. He accepted the doctrine of surrender and turned it into devotion to Krishna and Radha. Nimbarka believed Radha was Krishna's eternal consort and lived with him in Goloka. He also held the 'bheda-bheda' position, which regarded God, the soul, and the world as identical but distinct. Nimbarka established a new sect loyal to Ramanuja, expressing his ideas in *Vedantasutras* and *Siddhantaratna* or *Dasaslōki*.

4.3.2.1 Philosophy

Visishtadvaita, also known as panentheism, holds that the ultimate reality consists of cit and acit. It acknowledges three fundamental realities: matter (*cit*), individuals (*acit*), and God (*Ishvara*). Visishtadvaita's metaphysical conclusion requires perception as a means of knowledge. Perception entails sensory contact with objects, whereas knowledge reveals an object, knower, object of knowledge, and mode of knowledge. Visishtadvaitin rejects transcendental absolute reality and instead focuses on the real.

The theory of erroneous perception, also known as *yathartha khyati* or *satkhyati*, explains illusory perceptions like seeing silver in a shell. This error is caused by *jiva's* attributive consciousness, which does not understand the distinguishing characteristics of an object and how it differs from others. Errors can be corrected using pragmatic verification.

Inferential cognition is defined as valid knowledge of a specific pervader, such as fire, gained through the observation of smoke being pervaded by fire. *Visishtadvaitin* accepts the five-part syllogism: proposition (*pratijna*), reason (*hetu*), instance (*udaharana*), application (*upanaya*), and conclusion (*nigamana*). All mediate knowledge is obtained through inference.

Visishtadvaitins believe that scriptural statements are an independent source of knowledge, and that the *prasthanatraya* is the primary scripture. They also accept the *Puranas* and

◆ *Visishtadvaitins value scriptural knowledge*

Pancharatra Agamas as reliable sources, with the Puranas being the most authentic. The *Pancharatra Agamas* are believed to have been revealed by *Ishvara*. According to Visishtadvaita's theory of verbal knowledge, words can represent their meanings, qualities, and differences, which are known as *aparyavasana vritti*. Words denote *Brahman*, and *cit* and *acit* are inseparable attributes. This concept, known as *sarva shabda vachya*, is explained by Ramanuja using grammatical coordination.

◆ *Ramanuja reconciled bhakti and Absolutism*

Ramanuja's approach to Visistadvaita, developed in the 11th century, sought to reconcile personal theism and Absolute philosophy. This system arose as a reaction to Absolutism in the Advaita School, which emphasised the role of *bhakti* in liberation. Ramanuja emphasised the return of *bhakti*, incorporating Realism while maintaining a theistic perspective. His 'Qualified Monism' theory combined the non-dual system and the difference-cum-non-difference school of thought. Visistadvaita's epistemological theory presents a unique theory of error, with metaphysical concepts and categories at its core. Liberation in Visistadvaita necessitates a disciplined lifestyle and complete commitment.

◆ *Schism arose over prapatti interpretations.*

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a schism arose among Ramanuja followers due to differing interpretations of *prapatti*. Some believed that a devotee had to exert themselves to win the Lord's grace, whereas others believed that the Lord's grace alone was sufficient for salvation. The first school, *Vadagalai*, emphasised the rule of a young monkey clinging to its mother with effort, whereas the second school, *Tengalai*, emphasised the rule of a kitten being carried in the mother's mouth.

◆ *Northern and Southern School of Buddhism*

The two schools of Buddhism differ in their preference for Tamil over Sanskrit. The southern school, led by Pillai Lokacharya, was founded by him and authored eighteen esoteric treatises. He left Srirangam with the sacred image. Manavaja Mahamuni, a great teacher and writer in the southern school, was an influential expositor. The northern school's leader was Vedanta Desika, a poet, philosopher, and man of affairs.

◆ *Vaishnavism influenced Maharashtra through saints*

From the thirteenth century onwards, Vaishnavism based on the Bhagavata saw the rise of poet-saints who influenced Maharashtra's life in the same way that Nayanars and Alvars influenced Tamil countries. Jhanesvara, also known as Dnyandev Dnanoba, was a dualist and the sect's founder. He wrote a lot of Marathi verse about the *Bhagavadgita*, with a focus on *Advaita* philosophy and *yoga*. Jhanesvara's movement was carried on by a succession of saints, including Shivaji's contemporary, Tukaram.



◆ *Vallabhacharya developed Shuddhadvaita*

Vaishnavism remained a dominant force in people's lives, with no significant changes to doctrine or practice. However, the cult, particularly Radha's followers, has occasionally degenerated into erotic excesses. Vallabhacharya, a Telugu Brahmin, was a prominent figure in the sect, writing Sanskrit works and establishing Shuddhadvaita. He defeated Smarta scholars in a public debate held at Krishnadeva Raya's court. The sect's followers, known as Maharajas, lived opulent lives and aspired to become *gopis* and compete with Krishna in his Heaven. This ideal frequently devolved into gross eroticism. Rival sect disputes have occasionally escalated into violence. The Rayas of Vijayanagara, great patrons of Vaishnavism, gave Sadashiva thirty-one villages in 1556 to help him maintain the Ramanuja temple and its associated institutions in Sriperumbudur.

◆ *Dvaita contrasts Advaita's idealism*
◆ *Jayatirtha and Vyasa-tirtha excelled in dialectics*

4.3.3 Dvaita Siddhanta

Dvaita is a Vedantic thought system in India, with a well-defined community, religious institutions, and extensive philosophical literature in Sanskrit and Kannada languages. It has been Advaita's main rival in Indian philosophy history, arguing for realism over idealism and acosmism. Dvaita adherents, particularly Jayatirtha and Vyasa-tirtha, demonstrate logical skill and depth of acute dialectic thinking, making them unrivalled in the Indian thought range.

◆ *Madhvacharya founded Dvaita Vedanta*
◆ *He installed Krishna's idol in Udupi*

Madhvacharya, also known as Anandatirtha and Purnaprajna, founded Dvaita Vedanta in the 12th century CE. He was born in Pajaka, near Udupi, Karnataka, and is considered Vayu's third incarnation after Hanuman and Bhima. Madhva was a multifaceted personality with excellent memory and debate skills. He rejected Sanyasa's monistic interpretations, believing that sacred texts promoted realistic theism. Madhvacharya installed Lord Krishna's idol in Udupi, which has since become a Dvaita Vedanta centre with his eight disciples. Madhva was a prolific Sanskrit writer who quoted from various Indian philosophical and religious systems. His works include thirty-seven commentaries on *Prasthanas Traya*, *Vedas*, *Epics*, *Puranas*, and the Ten *Prakarnas*. Jayatirtha and Vyasa-tirtha have also contributed commentaries to his tradition.

◆ *Madhva's system emphasised world's reality*

Madhvacharya wrote commentaries on the *Brahma Sutra*, *Upanishads*, and *Bharata Tatparya Nirnaya* based on *Puranas* and epics. The philosophical debate against Sankara emphasised the reality of the world and the soul, resulting in a pluralist Madhva system. However, he deviated from this system and created his own, primarily based on the *Bhagavata Purana* tradition, which credited him with exceptional physical endurance.

- ◆ *Madhva was a prolific preacher and writer*
- ◆ *He believed in eternal separation from Vishnu*

Madhvacharya built a Krishna temple in Udupi and spent nearly 80 years preaching, converting, and defeating illusionists. At the age of 96, he went missing while teaching. He claimed to be an incarnation of *Vayu*, the Wind God. He was a prolific writer who disliked fine arguments and based his teachings on the *Puranas* and subsequent literature. He believed that the Universe was ruled by two individuals, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and that souls were eternally separate from 'Him'.

4.3.3.1 Philosophy of Dvaita

- ◆ *Dvaita asserts dualism in philosophy*

Dvaita, or dualism, is a metaphysical principle that asserts several fundamental distinctions between human souls and the Supreme Being. Dualism is a theory that recognises two independent and mutually irreducible substances, resulting in a fundamental twofold distinction. In the classical Indian tradition, *Samkhya* promotes dualism through its two fundamental eternal categories, *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, or spirit and matter.

- ◆ *Madhva rejected Sankara's mayavada*
- ◆ *Jiva is distinct from Brahman in Dvaita*

Madhva, along with Sankara and Ramanuja, is a well-known systematiser of Vedantic thought, particularly for his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*. His unique dualistic Vedanta system, Dvaita Vedanta, examines the relationship between *Brahman*, the individual soul (*Jiva*), and the world (*jagat*). Madhva refuted Sankara's *mayavada* theory, arguing that the world is real but dependent on *Brahman*. In Dvaita Vedanta, Madhva argued that *Jiva* (soul) is distinct from and not identical to *Brahman*. He also rejected qualified monism, which asserted that *cit* (spirit) and *acit* (matter) are distinct realities from *Brahman* and do not constitute His body (*sharira*).

- ◆ *Bheda central to Madhva's philosophy*
- ◆ *Dvaita is a theistic, pluralistic system.*

Madhva's philosophy is unique in its emphasis on various distinctions, such as soul and God, soul and soul, soul and matter, God and matter, and one material thing versus another. The concept of difference (*bheda*) is central to Madhva's philosophy, which makes it pluralistic. Dvaita Vedanta, with its emphasis on the external world and souls, is regarded as realistic. Madhva's philosophy acknowledges a personal God as the sole independent reality, with all other real beings completely dependent on Him. Overall, Madhva's philosophy is theistic, with a personal God as the sole independent reality and all other beings subservient to Him.

- ◆ *Liberation through devotion to Vishnu*

Madhva's philosophy is founded on the three authoritative prasthanas (*Upanishads*, *Bhagavadgita*, and *Brahma Sutras*), *puranas*, and the *Mahabharata*. It claims that Vishnu (*Hari*) is the supreme God, that the world exists, and that there is a distinction between God and soul. All living beings rely on Vishnu, and liberation entails experiencing inherent bliss and pure devotion as a means of achieving it.



- ◆ Madhva classified reality into two categories
- ◆ He unified eternal substances with Brahman

Madhva had a significant impact on Indian philosophical tradition by classifying reality as “Svatantra” and “Paratantra,” rationalising the concept of substance and attributes with the doctrine of “Visesas” and the principle of “sakshi” in Indian epistemology. He reconciled the existence of “eternal substances” such as *Jivas*, *Akasa*, and *Prakrti* with the universal causation of Brahman through his creation doctrine, Paradhina-Visesapti. Madhva’s metaphysics and ethics are supported by his defense of means of knowledge, implying that they are the result of well-developed epistemological theories.

- ◆ Dvaita prioritises bhakti and self-surrender
- ◆ Mukti and damnation are central to Dvaita

Dvaita Vedanta is a theistic, dualistic, and realistic system of thought that holds that knowledge of other realities exists and that truth can be attained through *bhakti*. It differs from other Indian systems in that it focuses on self-surrender and God’s grace. Madhva believed in a personal God and recognised the fundamental difference between God and man. He also believed in the *Saguna Brahman*, who can be reached through *bhakti*, which emphasises self-surrender and God’s mercy. Dvaita Vedanta’s doctrines of soul liberation (*mukti*) and eternal damnation (*bhavya*) are similar to Jaina religious thought, which differentiates between redeemed and unredeemed souls.

- ◆ Madhva’s religion emphasised bhakti to Krishna
- ◆ He rejected God as the world’s creator

Madhva’s religion recognised various soul orders and some were condemned to eternal damnation. The core of his religion is *bhakti* to Krishna, as taught in the Bhagavata. Other avatars are revered, Shiva is worshipped, and the five gods (*Panchayatama*) are recognised. Modern critics argue that this teaching reflects Christian influence. He rejected the notion that God was the material cause of the world’s creation, believing that serving and worshipping God could lead to near-perfection for the individual soul. His relationship with God was similar to that of a master and servant.

- ◆ His Bhasyas harmonised Vedanta doctrines

Madhva, along with Sankara and Ramanuja, influenced the *Brahma Sutra* by introducing a unique philosophy system. He wrote many commentaries on Vedanta’s foundational texts, such as the *Vedanta sutras*, *Upanishads*, and *Bhagavad Gita*. Madhva’s *Bhasyas* sought to establish harmony between terms and doctrines found in the *Upanishads*, whereas other Acharyas sought harmony with the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*.

4.3.4 Saiva Siddhanta

- ◆ Development of Tamil Saiva-siddhanta

In the 12th and 13th centuries, two significant developments in Saivism occurred in Tamil country and the Deccan. The first was the development of Tamil Saiva-siddhanta philosophy based on the *Agamas*, as first mentioned by Sundaramurti. Tirumular’s

Thirumandiram is the earliest work to reflect *Agamas'* theology. Manikka-vasagar's writings also contain agamic terminology, as he expresses dislike for *Vedanta*, referring to Sankara's monism.

◆ *Saiva Siddhanta's focus on philosophy*

Saiva Siddhanta, a popular Shiva school in South India, focused on the philosophical and metaphysical aspects of Shaiva bhakti. Southern exponents included Meykandadeva, Arulnandi Shivacharya, Marai Jnanasambandhar, and Umapati Shivacharya. Meykanda's 13th-century *Shivajnanabodham* summarises the school's fundamental doctrine.

◆ *Meykandadeva's contribution to Saiva-siddhanta*

Meykandadeva, a pious Vellala in the thirteenth century who lived on the banks of the Pennar River south of Madras, developed the first definite formulation of Tamil Saiva-siddhanta philosophy. He received instruction from Paranjatimuni, and his translation of twelve Sanskrit Sutras from the *Raurava-agama*, known as Shiva-Nana-Bodam, is regarded as the system's dogmatic foundation.

◆ *Saiva-siddhanta views on God and soul*

The Saiva-siddhanta, a philosophic system, aims to determine the relations between God, matter, and the soul. It asserts that matter and souls are eternal, like God, and that the 'Absolute', through its grace-form, is always engaged in rescuing souls from the bondage of matter and the three stains (*malas*) that defile their purity. This system has led to the growth of various schools within the Saiva-siddhanta.

◆ *Emphasis on inner devotion and wisdom*

Advaita is a philosophy that emphasises the unity of body and mind, with God representing the soul whose body is the Universe of nature and humanity. Advaita means inseparability rather than oneness, and achieving this union is the soul's highest calling. The guru or teacher enlightens the soul, whereas Shiva is the source of enlightenment and wisdom. The system transcends caste and ritual, emphasising inner devotion and contentment. Contentment, justice, and wisdom are regarded as the flowers of worship.

◆ *Lingayat cult's anti-caste stance*

The Lingayat cult, also known as Vira-saivism, which began in northwestern Karnataka in the 12th century, was founded on the twenty-eight Saiva Agamas, was an anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical sect that rejected Vedic tradition, sacrifices, rituals, social customs, and superstitions. Despite espousing *ahimsa*, it criticised Jainism, a powerful sect in Karnataka whose main social base consisted of artisans, traders, and farmers.

In 12th century Karnataka, Bijjala, the Kalachuri king, and Basava, his prime minister, led the rise of Virasaivism, a religion that worshipped Shiva and was known as Lingayats because of its small *linga*. Virasaivism's origins can be traced back to ancient times, and Basava, as an elder of the order, passed on its dogma



- ◆ *Basava's role in Virasaivism*
- ◆ *The spread of Virashaiva movement*

and ideas to the people. He emphasised equality, abolished caste distinctions, and treated widows with dignity. The *matha* and its presiding guru played an important role in Lingayats' daily lives. According to Nilakanta Satri, the Virashaiva sect, which originated in Karnataka, has five legendary teachers: Renuka, Daruka, Gantakarna, Dhenukarna, and Vishvakarna. Akka-Mahadevi, a female saint, was part of this tradition. The Virashaiva movement spread to South India, where both male and female members wore *ishta-lingas* and focused on Shiva worship. While the Virashaivas accepted many Shaiva doctrines, their core ideas are expressed in free verse lyrics known as *vachanas*.

- ◆ *Influence of Jainism and Islam*
- ◆ *Lingayats' devotion to Shiva*

Vira-saivism, a sect influenced by Jainism and Islam, is believed to have its early history uncertain. The five ascetics mentioned were all contemporaries of Basava, with the prominent role of monasteries and social and religious equality among the sectarians attributed to the influence of Jainism and Islam. Lingayats believe that Shiva is supreme and that they must worship only Him, hence the name Vira-saivas, or stalwart Saivas, and their chosen guru.

- ◆ *Virasaivism's challenge to Brahmanical values*
- ◆ *Women's role in the Virasaivism movement*

The new Saiva sect in Karnataka paralleled the reform movement in Tamil society that began in the 12th century. Vijaya Ramaswamy, who studied Virasaivite suchanas, contends that Virasaivism in Karnataka in the 12th century sought to undermine Brahmanical superiority and patriarchal values. Women were equally visible and possibly more vocal in the 12th-century Virasaivism movement.

- ◆ *Virasaivism's resurgence in Karnataka*

According to a Virasaiva legend, Basava plotted the assassination of Bijjala, who had planned to remove the eyes of two Virasaiva devotees. Basava sent a poisoned fruit to Bijjala and threw himself into a well, causing friction between him and his overlord over their beliefs. Bijjala was either a Jain or an orthodox Saivite. Following Bijjala's murder, there was a large-scale massacre of Virasaivites in Kalyana, which reduced their activity. However, Virasaivism resurfaced in the following century and spread throughout southern Karnataka.

4.3.5 *Mathas/ Mutts*

Mathas, or monasteries, played an important role in the development and spread of new religious ideas, as evidenced by inscriptions from the ninth century onward, providing valuable information on religious movements in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The first half of the twelfth century saw a significant increase in *matha* inscriptions, peaking during the thirteenth century. The influx of Brahmana/Brahmin ascetics from the north is thought to have contributed to the concentration of inscriptions

in the first half of the 11th century. Rajaraja I and his son, Rajendra I, had royal preceptors from the Saiva Siddhanta order, leading to the establishment of numerous *mathas* throughout the Chola country. The Vijayanagar period saw an increase in *matha* inscriptions due to the Saluva kings' royal grant to the feeding house-cum-matha, known as ramanuja-kudam.

◆ *Tiruvorriyur inscription*

Aside from the inscriptions that record the establishment of a *matha* by individuals such as kings and chiefs, there are numerous inscriptions that reveal the *matha's* various activities. According to a Tiruvorriyur inscription, Kulottungachola I offered tax-free land to feed 50 worshippers daily at the Kulottungacholan-matha in Tiruvorriyur temple. *Mathas* were known for regular activities such as feeding (*unnum*), worship (*pūjikkum*), recitation (*odum*), and learning (*padippar, vachittu*).

◆ *Mathas' regular activities documented*

◆ *Kulottungachola's support for mathas*

The inscriptions reveal that *Devaram (Tevaram)* hymns (*Tiruppatiyam*) and *Tirumurai* were recited in *mathas*, primarily in the thirteenth century, implying a close relationship between mathas and the *bhakti* movement in Tamil Nadu from the seventh to tenth centuries. Many *mathas* in the thirteenth century were named after famous *bhakti* saints like Appar, Sundarar, and Sambandar. The publication of the Periyapuram and the compilation of Tirumurai in the twelfth century may have reflected an increase in people's devotion to *bhakti* saints, as reflected in Saiva hymns and *bhakti* hagiography.

◆ *Mathas and bhakti movement connection*

◆ *Influence of Periyapuram on devotion*

Between the 11th and 12th centuries, *mathas* experienced a shift in community or class. Brahmins were the primary founders and supporters of mathas, but communities such as Vellalas, merchants, and artisans gained prominence. The 14th century saw a decline in royal support for *mathas* as Chola and Pandyan states declined. A 13th century inscription mentions *Chittiramēli-matha*, founded and supported by chitrameli-periyannadu members. The increase in *matha* inscriptions and participation by non-Brahmin communities in *matha* activities suggests a religious movement in the 12th and 13th centuries, which was closely related to the rise in power of lower social strata.

◆ *Mathas emerged from Saiva ascetics*

◆ *Bhakti hymns influenced Golaki mathas*

Mathas emerged from the arrival of Saiva ascetics from the north, including the Pasupata and Kalamukha sects. Beginning in the 11th century, the Golaki order, representing the Saivasiddhanta sect, took over and led *matha* activities. The Golaki order originated in the Vindhya and spread to the north and south. They initially emphasised orthodox Brahmanism, but by the 12th century, they had been influenced by south Indian religious traditions, particularly *bhakti* worship, which resulted in *bhakti* hymns being recited in their mathas.



- ◆ *Ramanuja's works localised Vaishnavism*
- ◆ *Mathas linked to social change*

Vaishnavism experienced localisation or Tamilisation in Ramanuja's works, which combined popular *bhakti* worship with orthodox Vedanta philosophy, and in the division of Srivaishnavas into radagalai (northern) and tengalai (southern) sects, each employing Sanskrit and Tamil in their text and worship. The distribution of *matha* inscriptions indicates that religion changed during the 12th and 13th centuries, with *mathas* serving as an important channel. This movement was closely linked to social change, as lower-class groups such as cultivators, merchants, artisans, and former hill tribes gained power. The religious movement through *mathas* in the 12th and 13th centuries resulted in the emergence of Tamil Saiva siddhanta, an ideological manifestation of social change in the 13th century.

- ◆ *Sankaracharya consolidated matha organisation*
- ◆ *Mathas supported social mobility and unity*

Sankaracharya is credited with consolidating and organising matha, resulting in *Mahanusasanam* (great discipline), which hastens societal unity around abstinence and strengthens spiritual experiences. *Matha* serves an important purpose in providing hope, courage, and strength to overcome obstacles and continue with social life. *Mathas* involvement in society is closely related to the field of Vedanta, as it stems from sanskritisation by low-caste Hindus, tribe members, and people of various ideologies and ways of life. All four *mathas* represented the spread and redefinition of Vedanta, emphasising that anyone, even a sudra, can become a brahmin with hard work.

- ◆ *Sankaracharya founded four Mathas*
- ◆ *Disciples served as Matha presidents*

Sankaracharya established four Hindu *Mutts* or *Mathas* in India: Jyotir *Mutt* in the north, Govardhari in the east, Sardda *Mutt* in the west, and Sringeri in the south. In Kerala, he established four *Mutts* at Trichur: Vadakke Matham, Natuvil Matham, Edayil Matham, and Tekke Matham. Trotaka, Sureswara, Hastamalaka, and Padmapada, his principal disciples, served as the *Mathan's* first presidents.

Summarised Overview

Adi Sankara is remembered for his exceptional intellect, compassion, and visionary outlook. He was a major proponent of Vedanta, or Advaita Vedanta, and his writings continue to influence philosophical thought today. Sankara's life and teachings have had a profound impact on generations of minds, inspiring and informing contemporary thought. He combined *Advaitic* teachings with *Vedantic* knowledge, establishing the superiority of *Vedantic* knowledge. Sankara's most famous works include *Vivekachoodamani*, *Upadesha Sahasri*, *Vakyavrtti*, and *Mohamudgara*. Advaita philosophy asserts that Brahman is the only reality, encompassing all beings and material objects.

Ramanujacharya, a Visistadvaita pioneer, emphasised bhakti as the sole means of liberation and established monotheism on the Prasthanas Traya. Ramanuja challenged Sankara's Mayavada and presented the Visishtadvaita philosophy, which combined devotion to a personal God with Vedanta. He spread the bhakti doctrine among the Sudras and outcastes, gaining widespread influence in Northern India. His philosophy, Vishtadvaita, combined Vaishnava bhakti and Upanishadic monism. Visishtadvaita rejects transcendental absolute reality and focuses on the real. It accepts scriptural statements as independent sources of knowledge and emphasises the return of bhakti while maintaining a theistic perspective.

Madhvacharya came up with Dvaita Vedanta, an Indian Vedantic thought system, in the 12th century CE. It is a dualistic system that emphasises the interaction of Brahman, the individual soul (*Jiva*), and the world. Madhva, like Sankara and Ramanuja, was a well-known systematiser of Vedantic thought, particularly his commentary on the Brahma Sutra. His philosophy is founded on the three authoritative *prasthanas* (*Upanishads*, *Bhagavadgita*, and *Brahma Sutras*), the Puranas, and the Mahabharata. It asserts a personal God as the only independent reality, with all other beings subservient to Him. Dvaita Vedanta emphasises self-surrender and God's grace, along with doctrines of soul liberation and eternal damnation. It is influenced by Jaina religious thought while also reflecting Christian influence.

Saivism underwent three significant developments in Tamil India and the Deccan during the 12th and 13th centuries. The first was the evolution of Tamil Saiva-siddhanta philosophy, which was based on the *Agamas* and sought to establish the relationship between God, matter, and the soul. The second was the Lingayat cult, also known as Virasaivism, which was anti-caste and anti-Brahmanical in nature, rejecting Vedic tradition and social customs. The third was the rise of Virasaivism, a religion that worshiped Shiva and emphasised equality, including social and religious equality. The new Saiva sect in Karnataka coincided with the reform movement in Tamil society.

Mathas, or monasteries, played an important role in the development and spread of new religious ideas in India, as evidenced by inscriptions dating back to the ninth century. *Matha* inscriptions increased significantly in the first half of the twelfth century, reaching a peak in the thirteenth century. *Mathas* were known for their regular activities, which included feeding, worship, recitation, and learning. *Mathas* were closely associated with the *bhakti* movement in Tamil Nadu between the seventh and tenth centuries. The distribution of *matha* inscriptions suggests that religion evolved between the 12th and 13th centuries, with *mathas* serving as an important conduit. Sankara is credited with consolidating and organising *matha*, resulting in *Mahanusasanam*, which promotes societal unity around abstinence while strengthening spiritual experiences.



Assignments

1. Give an account of the life and works of Madhvacharya.
2. Critically analyse the fundamental principles of Advaita philosophy.
3. Examine the development of *mathas*.
4. Bring out the important features of Saiva- Siddhantha.
5. Explain Visistadvaita and how it is different from Advaita siddhanta.

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Suggested Reading

1. Bannanje Govindacarya (Ed.), *Madhvacarya, Sarva-Mula-Granthah; Collection of the Complete Works of Sri Madhvacarya*. Vols. 1-5. Bangalore: Akila Bharata Madhva Maha Mandala, 1974.
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 6. Rao, K.B. Ramakrishna, *Advaita Vedanta: Problems and Perspectives*, University of Mysore, Mysore, 1980.
 7. Rao, Srinivasa, *Advaita - A Critical Investigation*, Jnana Bharati, Bangalore, 1985.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS





SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No :

Name :

THIRD SEMESTER M.A. HISTORY EXAMINATION

Model Question Paper (Set A)

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE

M21HS03DE: PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY

(CBCS - PG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries one mark.

(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. Who first identified stone tools near Madras in 1863?
2. Which ancient trade site was known as Virampatanam?
3. Which term is commonly used to describe the Iron Age in South India?
4. Which Persian ambassador visited Vijayanagara in 1442?
5. Which Jain text attests to Pallava power in the fifth century CE?
6. Who wrote the book 'A Forgotten Empire'?
7. Which Chinese monk visited Kanchipuram and Badami during Pallava rule?
8. Which battle marked a turning point in the decline of Vijayanagara's central power?
9. Which term describes tax-free villages for Brahmin resettlement?
10. Who introduced the idea of an alliance between Brahmins and local peasants?
11. Who proposed the theory of Vellalar-Brahmin relations being an alliance?



12. Who is considered the main proponent of Advaita philosophy?
13. Who founded Dvaita Vedanta?
14. Which temple in Kanchipuram is dedicated to Narasimhavarman II?
15. What type of structure is the Durga temple in Aihole?

SECTION B

Answer any five questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.
(5X2 =10 Marks)

16. Arikamedu
17. Silappadikaram
18. Niranam Poets
19. Battle of Talikota
20. Palaiyakaran
21. Rayavacakamu
22. Agrahara
23. Vazhapalli copper plate
24. Brihadeeshwara Temple
25. Alvars and Nayanars

SECTION C

Answer any five questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

26. Explain the significance of the Sangam literature in understanding Tamilakam as a distinct cultural region.
27. Discuss the theories regarding the origin of the Vijayanagara kingdom, with particular reference to the contributions of historians like Robert Sewell, N. Venkataramanayya, and Hermann Kulke.
28. Explain the early expansion of the Vijayanagara kingdom under Harihara I and Bukka. How did they consolidate power in the region?
29. Discuss Burton Stein's concept of the alliance between Brahmin settlers and local peasantry.
30. Examine the origin and significance of the Ainnurruvar merchant organisation.
31. Analyse the role of women in temple donations during the Chola period. How did temple women's patronage differ from that of royal women and other social groups?



32. Examine the role of temples as political and economic institutions in South India.
33. Discuss the role of mathas in the development and spread of religious ideas in medieval South India.

SECTION D

Answer any three questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

34. Critically examine Nilakanta Sastri's view of the Chola state as a centralised and bureaucratised monarchy. How does this compare to Burton Stein's segmentary state model in the context of medieval South India?
35. To what extent does the idea of 'segmentary states' proposed by Burton Stein help explain the political organisation of the Cholas?
36. Analyse the significance of the nayakas in the administration of the Vijayanagara kingdom. How did their role contribute to both the military and revenue systems of the state?
37. Critically analyse the significance of land grants (Brahmadeyams and Devadanams) in shaping the socio-economic and political context of South India during the early medieval period.
38. Compare and contrast the Amaravathi/Andhra style, Dravida style and Vesara style of architecture, highlighting their unique features.
39. Evaluate Adi Sankara's contributions to the development and spread of Advaita Vedanta.





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THIRD SEMESTER M.A. HISTORY EXAMINATION

Model Question Paper (Set B)

DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE

M21HS03DE: PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY

(CBCS - PG)

2022-23 - Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any ten questions in a word or a sentence. Each question carries one mark.

(10X1 = 10 Marks)

1. Which script was widely used in Tamil inscriptions during the Early Historic period?
2. Which script influenced the development of Tamil and Vattezhuttu?
3. Which literary work records the achievements of Pallava Nandivarman III?
4. Which traveler is known as the “prince of medieval travelers”?
5. Who were the local administrators under Nayakas in Tamil Nadu?
6. Who was the author of the work ‘The Early Medieval in South India’?
7. Which merchant guilds are mentioned in the 1269 Tittandatanapuram inscription?
8. Who was the Jewish merchant exempted from duties in the Jewish copper plate of Bhaskara Ravi?



9. What term was used in Chola inscriptions to refer to temple women?
10. What was the name of the ritual ceremony for dedicating devadasis to temples?
11. Which concept did Ramanuja reject in favour of his own philosophy?
12. Which Alvar is known for expressing intense devotion to Krishna?
13. Which temple is known for its unique Nataraja sculpture in the Pandya period?
14. What is the main distinguishing feature of the Vesara style in Deccan architecture?
15. Which temple was built by King Vishnuvardhana of the Hoysala dynasty?

SECTION B

Answer any five questions in two or three sentences. Each question carries two marks.

(5X2 =10 Marks)

16. Pandoo Coolies
17. Vattezhuttu
18. The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea
19. Nayakkattanam
20. Kulottunga I
21. Nagarattar
22. Devadana
23. Shravanabelagola
24. Hoysala temple
25. Tiruppan

SECTION C

Answer any five questions in one paragraph. Each question carries four marks.

(5X4 = 20 Marks)

26. Explain the role of prashastis in inscriptions, particularly in the Chola dynasty. How do prashastis contribute to the understanding of political history?
27. Discuss the contributions of Chinese travelers, such as Fa-hien and Hieun Tsang, in shaping the historical narratives of South India.
28. Examine the political and military conflicts between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas during the 6th and 7th centuries. How did these conflicts impact the trajectory of both kingdoms?



29. How did the rise of temples in South India during the Chola period contribute to the consolidation of agrarian power and the creation of caste-based society?
30. Evaluate the transformation of Avvaiyar's gender role in society. How did she assert moral authority, and in what ways did her life and works challenge traditional gender norms?
31. Explain the socio-religious and cultural roles of devadasis in medieval Tamil India, with reference to their training, rituals, and services in temples.
32. How did Noboru Karashima's study of Vellanvagai villages challenge earlier perceptions of non-Brahmin peasant societies in the Chola region?
33. Examine the philosophical differences between Advaita Vedanta and Vishishtadvaita, focusing on the key contributions of Ramanuja and Sankara.

SECTION D

Answer any three questions in two pages. Each question carries ten marks.

34. Explain the significance of archeological and epigraphical sources of medieval south India.
35. Critically analyse the historiographical debate on the nature of South Indian States.
36. Discuss the collapse of the Vijayanagara kingdom after 1565 and the subsequent rise of the Nayaka states. How did the political vacuum left by the fall of Vijayanagara influence the rise of independent Nayaka rulers in the Tamil and Deccan regions?
37. Examine the historical significance of Anjuvannam and Manigramam in the context of medieval South Indian trade and commerce. How did it influence the socio-economic structure of the region?
38. Analyse the role of women saints in Bhakti movements, considering their contributions and challenges to patriarchal social norms.
39. Explore how the bhakti movement both reflected and reinforced the existing caste-based social structure in South India, with a focus on the role of temples in perpetuating social hierarchies.



സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

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സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
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Perspectives on South Indian History

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