

THE ILAVAS IN TAMIL NADU AN ETYMOLOGICAL STUDY

Dr. S. Palani Kumar

*Head & Assistant Professor, Department of History
Athoor Cooperative Arts & Science College, Seevalsaragu, Athoor, Dindigul*

Introduction

Community studies in India are highly impactful factors to derive informations on social divisions. Since India is called as ethnological Museum, various races spread their features in the society. Each race or community has its own feature in respect of economic thriving and social status. At the same time various communities moved to different parts of India and settled. It is important to mention that the migrated communities did not forsake their identities where they settled for example the Sourashtras migrated to south India particularly in Tamil Nadu found major settlement at Madurai. Before their settlement to Madurai they found settled at Tirupathi Arai, Vellore, Thiruchirappalli and Thanjavur. Though they were migrated from Gujarat region they carried on their traditional profession silk weaving. During Madurai Nayakdom they were engaged in weaving the kings patronised them, so that they were called as Pattunulkarars. Similarly, people from various communities home migrated to Tamil Nadu from the northern part of India as well as from neighboring states and have established their livelihoods.

Communal Migrations

The migration of a community from one place to another is not a simple event. It is an event that has various historical and social consequences and impact. These social migrations, whether they originate from one state to another or within a state, have profound impact on the social life of the migrate and place. The Vellalas of Tenkasi and Kumbakonam had migrated to Kerala for want of livelihood they found settled and Thodupuzha, where they later called as Thodupuzha Vellalas. There is a strong belief that the Veerasaiva Vellalar of Chidambaram have been found settled at Kuthanoor, Pallassana, Kalloor, Mamppad and Kodumpu areas of Palakkad district of Kerala. The above migrations brought solidarity in new places on the regional identity i.e. Hinduism. At the same time some of them were ready to renounce their affiliation on nature religion and to ready to embrace on new faith and its culture. The new immigrants both in Tamil Nadu and Kerala sought reinterpretation and a new identity within Hinduism linking the superior Brahmanical gods. Similarly the Ilavas the migrated community of south Travancore too claimed their superiority through Brahmanical gods and legends.

Varnashra Dharma

In India many unprivileged sections followed certain myths of Hindu religion as a tool for their social mobility, for example the gollas of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The waddar a nomadic group of Karnataka mostly engaged in stone work claimed higher status in Varnashra Dharma. The leaders of this community claimed Kshatriya Varna system.

Similarly in Tamil Nadu many lower caste like the Konar (Idayar) Vanniyar, Shanars claimed Kshatriya status. Even today many association belonged to Nadar community claimed that they were belonged to Kshatriya status. These Communities systematically reinterpreted their lineage from Puranas and Ithikasa. It is important to mention that a group of Shanars of the Madurai district with an intention of social elevation within the fold of Hinduism. They strived hard to come up in the high social order. They gave many representations to the governments for the social recognition. The group of shanars from Tirunelveli submitted a petition to the census commissioner the petition could be read as “we humbly beg to say that we are the decendants of the Pandya or Dravida race”. During 1921 their claim of higher Varna status was conceded by the governments as a result the name shanar was replaced by Nadar. Similarly the Ilavas in Tamil Nadu did not seek conversion for their social elevation, instead they claimed higher Varna status as usual other communities did through various myths and puranic stories. The Ilavas found settled at Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari region claim higher status of origin through hindu divine.

Ilava's origin and Etymology

As stated earlier every communities have derived their origin from divinity. The story of origin of Ilavas also derived from divine force i.e. Buddhism. They were Buddhists of Srilanka. The historians have opinion that they were original an immigrants of Ceylon. Long centuries ago they travelled alongside. Buddhist monasteries to the Malabar coast. During 8th century a group of Namboothiri Brahmins established a rigid vedic caste system Kerala. The Ilavas refused to accept the vedic system and continued their Buddhist traditions, it pushed them to out caste the main stream society. The term Ilava derives from the words Iravan or Ilavar which denotes Villava an ancient warrior tribe or Eezham a native Tamils land in Srilanka. Tamil lexicon mentions Ilavan as a warrior, guard, watchman, soldier. The above Etymological theories are suffice to note about the origin of Ilavas. It is concrete to mention that the Ilavas settled at Malabar coast in first moved towards Travancore and later to southern parts of Tamil Nadu. The latest theory that the Ilavas are belonged to Dravidian stock or south India enabled them to migrate towards Tamil Nadu. The first phase of migration of Ilavas into Tamil Nadu would have been occurred during the 16th century, when Travancore rulers held sway over the southern Tamilnadu (Tirunelveli region). After their migration the Ilavas adopted the titles of caste hindus to gain social status in the new soil, they were popularly known Illathupillai or Pillai. After their settlement in Tamilnadu they followed their own customs and ceremonies, which had distinguished features in Tamilnadu. They practiced “Illam” as lineage to be highly prestigious and unique from other community of Tamilnadu. This particular custom helped Ilavas to identify their clans who found scattered different parts of Tamilnadu.

Apart from that there are many ceremonial customs of Ilavas stand as testimony of their origin tradition and historicity. Come of the ancient customs like Talikalyanam (Marriage) Thirandukuli (Puberty ceremony) pulikudi (a pregnancy ceremony) are vital to denote about the Ilavas. Unfortunately certain customs including the above mentioned ceremonies were disappeared because of the preaching of Sri Narayanaguru. At the same time the Ilavas

celebrate ceremonies like ear boring festival puberty and marriage engagement etc. Though Ilavas are hailed from Kerala region they used to follow certain customs of Tamilians. They wear pampadam (9 big size ear ornament), now it became unpopular among them. Now the Ilavas wear dress as Tamilians. With a view to cohabit with Tamilians the forsake some of their customs and embraced the customs and ceremonies of Tamils for cordial living of Tamil land.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier the Ilavas are not the native of Tamil soil. They originated in ceylone as a Buddhist sect. Due to suppressed conditions they moved to Malabar coast of Kerala and then to south Travancore region. Later they moved to present Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari regions with the assistance of south Travancore rulers. The census of 1921 has enumerated the total strength of Ilavas as 30000 in Tamil Nadu. During the later of 1950s district statistical reports mention that Ilavas lived concentrating on kanyakumari, Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram regions. During 1970s the Ilavas were widely spreaded in southern Tamil Nadu and their population was recorded as 69.5.77. It is important to mention that “IllathuPillaimar” community is reconned as one of the important community in the Tamil Nadu. Hence the history of Ilavas of Tamilnadu did not invite the attention of social science researchers, which alarmed the Ilavas mass migration and their struggle for solidarity and social equality in Tamil Nadu.

References

1. Illathupillaimars' Tiruchirapalli Srirangam Srinivasa Perumal Temple Copper Plate acquired during theperiod of Nayak Queen Mangammal, dated 1706 A.D.,
2. The Travancore Land Revenue Manual, Vol. IV and Vol. V (Trivandrum: Government Press, 1916).
3. Travancore Archaeological Series, 9 Vols.(Trivandrum: 1910-1939).
4. Report of the Backward Classes Commission, Tamilnadu,1971, Vol. II.
5. G.O.M.S.No.81 Social Welfare Department, dated 5th February 1974.
6. Census of India, 1921, Vol.XIII: Madras, Imperial Provincial Tables.
7. Census of India, 1921, Vol.XXV: Travancore, Report.
8. Ramaswami, A., Ramanathapuram District Gazetteer, Madras: Government Press, 1972.
9. Aiyappan, A. Social Revolution in a Kerala Village. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965.
10. Caldwell, R. A History of Tinnevely. (Reprint), New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982.
11. The Tinnevely Shanars. Madras: 1849.