



SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE SANGAM AGE IN MADURAI

M. Shanmuga Jothi

M.Phil, History, Sadakathullah Appa College, Tirunelveli.

Introduction

Madurai, well known as a pilgrim centre today, is one of the oldest cities in South India. For the last two thousand years it has been a great centre of South Indian culture and civilization¹. A connected history of the great temple city dealing with various aspects of its life and culture such as political, religious, social and economic is a hard-felt need. A careful examination of the available descriptions of Madurai in the various Tamil works of the Sangam Period shows that the city of Madurai was well planned and built according to the principles of town planning laid down in the Silpa Sastras. During the Sangam age the social condition is very well. Many caste people were lived in Madurai society. Madurai was surrounded by a deep moat and a high rampart. The strong and ancient city gateways had high towers and doorways with guardian deities. There were different types of houses for different classes of people as prescribed in the Sastras. Their houses were well built with many different parts such as mandapa, hall, kitchen, manai and so on. Different localities were assigned to different professions and craftsmen who crowded the streets with their wares. In this presentation I will convey caste system, dress and ornaments; arts and crafts condition prevailed in the Sangam Age – Madurai.

Social Life

Caste and Community

Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas, was from early times a well-organized city. The Sangam literature gives a fairly complete and true picture of the social and economic life of the age. Most of the people were organized into occupational groups. Mangudi Marudananar says that there were only four castes, viz, Thudiyar, Panan, Parayan and Kadamban and only one God worthy of being worshipped by having paddy strewn before him, viz, the hero-stone erected in memory of the brave warrior who fell in battle². His statement shows the great antiquity of these castes. The standard of living had reached a high degree of refinement in great cities like Madurai. Many classes of artisans and craftsmen lived therein. There were the workers on shells, pearls, goldsmiths, bullion merchants, clothiers, dealers in perfumes and flowers, painters and artists³. The Malavas and Maravas from whom the warriors were recruited, also resided in the city. Nakkirar refers to the presence of Mleccas and Yavanas also. Being the capital city of the Pandyas, members of the infantry, cavalry, and the elephant corps were frequently in the city and their constant movements added to the bustle of the city life⁴.

Dress and Ornaments

The Tamils, men and women were fond of bedecking themselves with flowers and ornaments of various kinds and the extent sangam works give details about the mode of dress and the kinds of ornaments worn by the ancient Tamils of the Madurai country. The good taste and refinement of the period are reflected in the dress of the richer classes. The noblemen of the city, says that they were clad in embroidered red silk dresses with flowing upper garments. Their swords decorated with gold work, hung by their sides⁵. They wore flower garlands and on their legs, the warrior's anklets. The king's generals wore pearl and flower garlands and sandal pastes on their chests, gem set gold rings, the *todi*, and well – starched fine dresses over which they wore the appropriate ornaments also.

Fine cotton dresses, well starched were greatly used. The men wore a *vastra* and flowing upper garments. Some sort of turban or head-dress seems to have been in vogue.

Flower circlets for the head were commonly used by men. The hair was often worn in five plaits by women. *Todi* in the shape of a ring or circle was worn on the shoulder. The *vandigaioir kaivandi* was worn on the arm above the elbow. Chank bangles and especially of the *valampuri* chank were used⁶. The chest and shoulders were ornamented with decorative designs made of perfumed paste and sandalwood paste. The red cotton paste was also used for decorating the body. Pearl and flower garments as well as gold chains were worn. The legs were adorned with many kinds of anklets such as gold *silambus* with pearls inside them. The men wore the *kalal*⁷.

Arts and Crafts

Arts and crafts had reached a high degree of perfection and there are references to different classes of artisans and skilled workers living in the Madurai city. Skilled craftsmen in gold produced fine gold ornaments. As chank bangles were popular the chank-cutting industry was an important one. Along the Gulf of Mannar diving for chanks and pearls was carried on a large scale. The artisans made articles of a highly decorative and artistic kind of the lotus ornaments of the driver's seat on chariots. Statues and images of gold and other metals were of fine workmanship. The blacksmiths turned out the



requirements of the army such as armour, weapons of offence and defense, as well as articles for domestic use such as lamps⁸.

There was a healthy rivalry among craftsmen and each one tried to do one better than his companions. The instance of this is given in *Nedunalvadai* which refers to the making of a cot for the bed chamber of the Pandya queen. The cot was finely wrought in ivory, well ornamented, curtained with painted cloth and cushioned. Doorways of palaces and houses which were decorated with Gajalakshmi panels gave further scope to display the artistry of craftsmen⁹. Painting also reached a high degree of perfection. Walls were covered with decorative floral and abstract designs in various colors. Poets speak highly of the skill of painters. It is stated that the two big bazaars of the Madurai city looked as picturesque as a painting. The artists understood their subjects so well that they were able to give expression in their paintings even to subtle and hidden characteristics. Stucco work and stucco images and statues were erected on walls.

Conclusion

Madurai city is the most important city for the social condition held at the time of the Sangam Age. In this search I know the social life of the sangam people in Madurai. Many caste people were lived in Madurai society during the sangam age. They were wear gold, pearl, chank and other ornaments. During this time the art and crafts also well developed. Painting also developed this period. By this presentation I will expressed the social condition in the sangam age- Madurai.

References

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