

FROM KUDI TO NADU: A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF PRE STATE POLITICAL FORMATIONS IN EARLY IRON AGE SOUTH INDIA¹

Introduction

The emergence of the early state in Peninsular India is commonly discussed within a unilinear evolutionary context which often tends to ignore the significance of the material and the cultural basis sustaining such developments. This formulation also gives low priority to the coalescence of internal and external processes associated with particular geo-physical areas and resident communities, consequently triggering off institutional formation and also uneven development of such formations, distributed both in time and space.

In view of this, an alternative perspective suggested by us² gave greater importance to a synthesis between the external and the internal processes as a crucial factor leading to qualitatively novel transformations more specifically during the Early Historic period. What is identified as the external process consists of metropolitan state hegemony, long distance trade and north Indian social ideologies. These apparently had a significant bearing upon the Late Proto Historic and the Early Historic Iron Age communities residing within particular geo-physical and environmental zones in Peninsular India and Sri Lanka.³

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- ¹. Some of the ideas presented here are drawn from a paper titled "Pre-state to State Societies: Transformations in the Political Ecology of South India with special reference to Tamilnadu", presented at the *Seminar on the State in Pre-Colonial South India*. CHS. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. 28-30 March 1989. This article will be published in the Nagaraja Rao Felicitation Volume.
 - ². S. Seneviratne "Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formation in Early India" in H.J.M. Claessen and P. Skalnik ed *The Study of the State* p. 317-338. (Also in *Indian Historical Review* vol. VII (1981) p. 54-69.
 - ³. Seneviratne *op.cit.*; also "Social Base of Early Buddhism in South East India and Sri Lanka" c. 3rd Cent. B.C. to 3rd Cent. A.D. , Ph.D.diss., Jawaharlal Nehru Univ. New Delhi (1985) and "The Baratas: a Case of Community Integration in Early Historic Sri Lanka" *Festschrift 1985 - James Thevatasan Rutnam* ed. A.R.B. Amarasinghe and S.J. Sumanasekera Banda, Colombo UNESCO (1985) p. 49 - 56.

This study primarily focuses its attention upon the internal process and it attempts to advance a framework for understanding the dynamics that were in motion at the grass roots level. These dynamics seem to have synthesised with the external process ultimately resulting in the structural transformation of pre-state non-complex societies into complex state societies. *Kudi* and *nādu* represent the social and the ecological context of this transformation in south India during the Early Iron Age.

The Frame Work

A study of non complex societies entails the recognition of smaller geo-physical regions situated in the sub continent and micro zones associated with such regions. It is a useful exercise therefore to compare and contrast processes of institutional formation and structural transformations within a series of micro zones organically linked to a macro region, more specifically during the Proto Historic period and its overlapping phase with the Early Historic period. This period i.e. the Early Iron Age, is identified as the *formative period* in our study. For the first time there is a coincidence between the dominant cultural zone and the physical zone and also the formation of recognizable social, economic, political and religio-cultural institutions within such regions.

The institutional superstructure ultimately rests on eco-zones, where the latter had qualitative and quantitative developmental stages in time and space. These do not necessarily indicate a unilinear development. The dominant techno-cultural matrix i.e. the Megalithic - Black and Red Ware culture, had spread over different physical and environmental zones and institutional formation associated with that culture was also unevenly developed in time and space. In addition, there were other parallel techno-cultural groups who either shared the same or had other forms of production techniques.

The earliest phase may be identified with the emergence of micro eco-zones during the formative period. These represent the primary habitat associated with communities thriving on a multi-resource broad spectrum subsistence economy, situated within a series of geo-physical and bio-climatic niches. Each micro geo-physical zone tends to develop an eco-zone having its own distinct character and identity depending upon the nature of community interaction with resource use, technology, subsistence pattern and settlement pattern. It is possible to envisage the emergence of lineage-based chieftaincies within such a context.

The next stage of development is the formation of macro eco-zones. Several interacting micro eco-zones located within a particular geo-physical area apparently went into form a macro eco-zone. Advances in wet agriculture, specialized economies utilizing localized or imported resources, demographic expansion, other socio-economic relationships may have resulted in a series of interacting micro eco-zones. The development of macro eco-zones tends to coincide with the growth of larger chiefdoms. In a sense these chiefdoms represent a definite stage in the integration of resident communities or resources and territorial incorporation (Digram I).

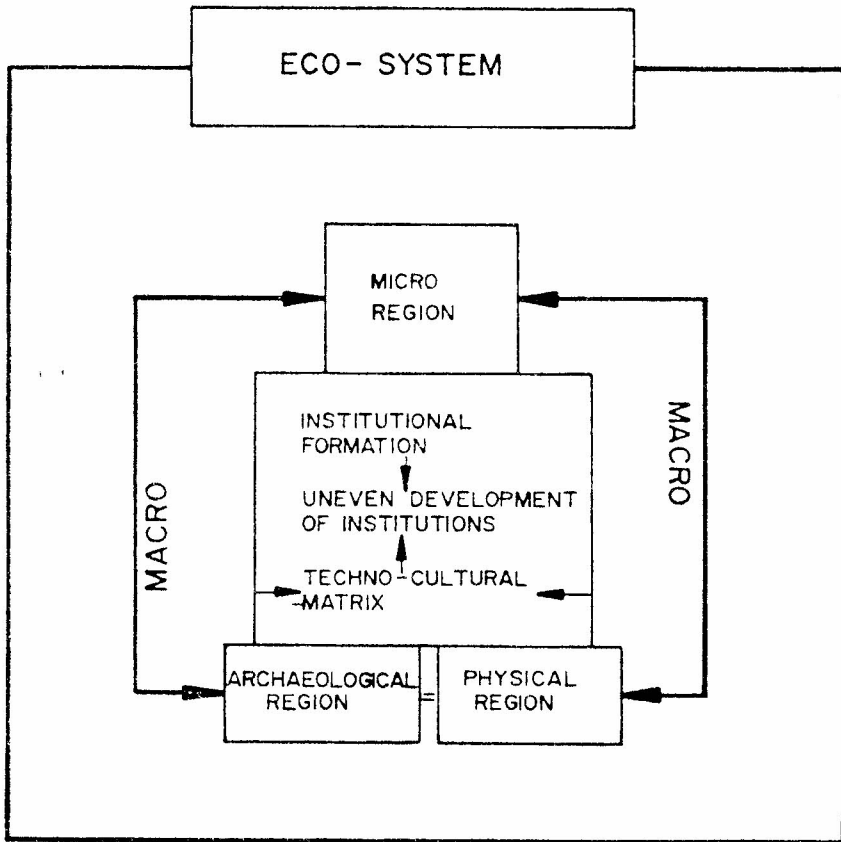
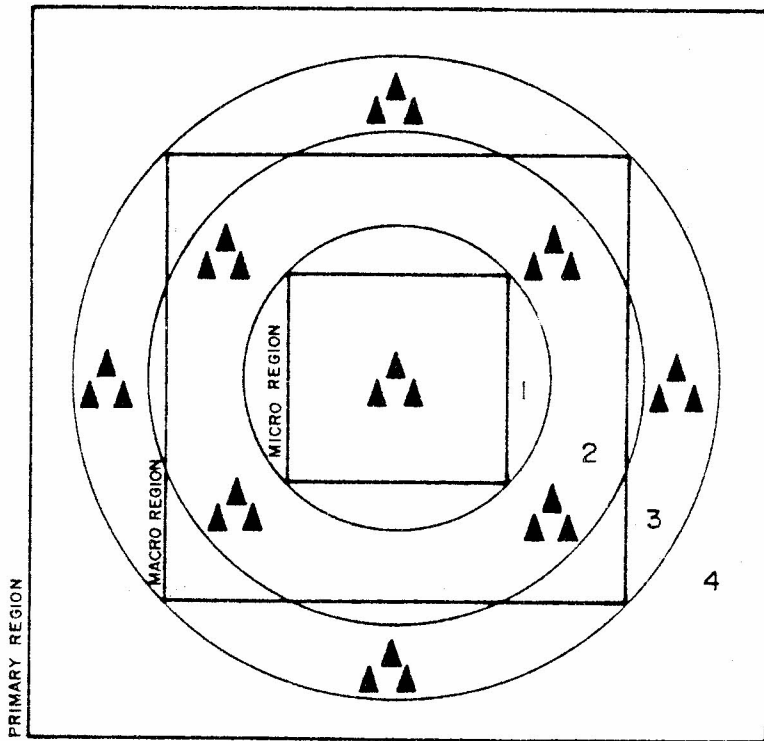


Diagram I

However, all macro eco-zones do not and cannot advance at the same pace. Geo-physical areas having a positive material base in turn sustain more developed forms of institutional structures and complex societies, where technology and production techniques advance at a greater pace. As opposed to this, certain other macro eco-zones display a greater degree of backwardness vis a vis the former. Here changes are relatively slow and communities largely remain within a non-complex institutional structure. Developed macro eco-zones may be identified as Areas of Attraction (housing nuclear/core areas) while less developed eco-zones are graded as Areas of Relative Isolation and Areas of Isolation (after B. Subba Rao).

The final development in this process is the gradual integration of several macro eco-zones forming the larger Primary Region. This development invariably coincides with the Early Historic period and it runs parallel to the formation of the pristine state where the politically integrated territory or the kingdom in our area of study becomes a historical reality. The Primary Region represents the most developed stage in the

growth of eco-zones where it cuts across geo-physical, environmental, resource and settlement zones and institutional development culminates in complex internal formations. It is composed of *insulated* but internally hierarchized eco-zones catering to the priority requirements of decision-making groups in society and those of the state. Areas possessing advanced institutional structures are finally insulated into a cohesive group and identified as the core region. As a consequence, all other zones in the Primary Region become intermediary zones, peripheral zones and marginal zones in relation to the core region. These intermediary, peripheral and marginal zones, in reality are repository zones and auxiliary sectors sustaining the core region. The ultimate development of the Early State represents the successful demarcation of the geo-political zone, the integration of regional eco-systems and the incorporation of resident communities (Diagram II).








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|---|---|
|  CLAN SETTLEMENT |  PERIPHERAL ZONE |
|  CORE REGION |  MARGINAL ZONE |
|  INTERMEDIARY ZONE | |

Diagram II

Subsistence Economy and Territory

Territorial affiliation associated with pre state communities in Peninsular India has an antiquity extending back to the Neolithic period. The mobile cum sedentary groups identified their territory as an area habitually exploited where resources were within convenient reach at a given technological level.⁴ Thus, the "territory was demarcated by the ecological boundaries".⁵

Pastoralism was the dominant feature of the multi-resource broad spectrum subsistence pattern associated with the Neolithic-Chalcolithic communities in the southern Deccan.⁶ In addition to periodic rotations within a specific geographical area necessitated by pastoral and hunting activities, subsistence farming practiced by these groups may have contributed towards the process of semi sedentation. Among the domesticated varieties of plants, habitation sites of this techno-cultural period have yielded remains of *kultī* or horse gram (*Dolichos Biflorus*) and *rāgī* or finger millet (*Eleusine Coracana*).⁷ The agricultural technique may be graded as plot cultivation⁸ and also limited swidden cultivation, where the digging stick and the hoe were used to work the *regur* (Black Cotton) soil of Maharashtra, the terraces on castellated hills and the narrow alluvial tracts of *nullahs* or small water courses. In addition, a good deal of hunting, fishing and forest products supplemented the pastoral cum subsistence economy.

It is also useful to take up the habitat associated with castellated hills. A large number of Neolithic sites in the Southern Deccan are located at the feet, slopes and tops of these hills having natural rock shelters. In addition to the protection it provided, the Neolithic economy thrived on the perennial water cisterns and exploited the trap dykes

4. E.S. Higgs and C. Vita-Finzi "Pre Historic Economics: A Territorial Approach" in *Papers in Economic Pre-History* ed. E.S. Higgs, Cambridge Univ. Press (1972) p. 30.

5. Peter J. Newcomer "The Nuer are Dinka : An Essay on the Origins and Environmental Determinism" *Man* (NS) Vol. VII (1972) p. 5 - 11.

6. Vide F.R. Allchin *Neolithic Cattle-keepers of South India* Cambridge (1963) and K. Paddayya *Investigations into the Neolithic Culture of the Shorapur Doab, South India*. Leiden (1973).

7. M.S. Nagaraja Rao and K.C. Malhotra *The Stone Age Hill-dwellers of Tekkalakota*. Poona (1965) p. 91; Vishnu Mittre 'Ancient Plant Economy at Hallu' in M.S. Nagaraja Rao *Proto Historic Cultures of the Tungabhadra Valley*. Dharwar (1971) 129 - 130.

8. R.Allchin *Piklihal Excavations*. Calcutta (1960) p. 132.

for tool production.⁹ The terraces associated with these hills were catchments for collecting rain water and silt for plot cultivation and also for cattle penning.¹⁰

There is also no evidence of a radical alteration of the Neolithic-Chalcolithic subsistence pattern during the early Proto Historic period, even after the introduction of a new technology i.e. iron and a new crop i.e. paddy (*Oriza Sativa*). The coincidence between areas housing the Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites and the Early Iron Age sites in the Southern Deccan (Karnataka and Andhra) is very apparent.¹¹ The pastoral cum subsistence agricultural economy spread beyond the confines of the Southern Deccan only with the movement of the intrusive Iron Age Megalithic - Black and Red Ware culture, which initially seems to have covered the montane regions of South India. Archaeological data in association with literary data clearly indicates that Tamilnadu had a strong pastoral, subsistence farming and hunting - gathering tradition during the Early Iron Age.¹² It is not difficult to categorize these economic activities and associated socio-political dynamics with the Sangam eco-zones known as *Kurin̄ci*, *pālai* and *mullai* regions, where the latter provided the basis for future developments in the *marutam* region.

Society and Territory

In this connection a greater understanding about the structural formation of the kin-based segments i.e. the primary residential group of the Iron Age Proto Historic period, may provide us with a better insight about the primary social segments and the internal dynamics operating within the region that initially linked the family, community, economy and finally the geo-political region, which had far reaching consequences during the Early Historic period.

This socio-economic interaction based on the segmentary lineage seems to have developed earliest within the pastoral cum subsistence agricultural economy where an

⁹. V. Rami Reddy *The Pre Historic and Proto Historic Cultures of Palavoy, South India*. Hyderabad (1976) p. 115 and Paddayya *op.cit.* p. 75.

¹⁰. H.D. Sankalia "Beginning of Civilization in South India" *Proceedings, Second International Conference Seminar, Tamil Studies, Madras, Vol. II* (1968) p. 28 - 37 and Allchin *op.cit.* p. 130.

¹¹. A. Sundara *The Early Chamber Tombs of South India* Delhi (1975); S. Seneviratne *Social Base of Early Buddhism* p. 78 - 80; also see M.D. Kajale "Ancient Grains from Excavations at Hallur (1976 Season), District Dharwar, Karnataka. *Bulletin. Deccan College Research Institute* (1988 - 89) No. 47 - 48 pp. 123 - 128.

¹². Seneviratne *op.cit.* p. 82 - 90.

association between the household or the lineage group (i.e. primary production-consumption unit) and the herd (i.e. the major economic base) become clearer during the Proto Historic period.

Socio-economic interaction between the household or the clan and the herd is to be visualized in association with the primary habitat/territory/ecological niche found in the castellated hills. Remains of wattle and daub houses at Tekkalakota, Sangankallu, Brahmagiri, Palavoy, Paiyyampallai reveal a circular ground plan. It is suggested that circular dwellings often coincide with nomadic and semi nomadic societies.¹³ A circular one roomed house at Sanganakallu has a diameter of 5 mt.¹⁴ where 5 - 6 individuals could reside within that space. In all probability such houses accommodated the nuclear family. It is estimated that a single terrace on the castellated hill at Tekkalakota or at Sanganakallu approximately held ten to twenty such huts.¹⁵ A terrace therefore may have represented clans composed of extended families or the lineage sector. The castellated hill at Tekkalakota has about twenty such terraces. It is suggested that if all the terraces were occupied at one given time, the hill may have held a total population of about 2000 individuals,¹⁶ perhaps the earliest representation of the segmentary lineage groups in this region. The cyclic nature of the ash mounds¹⁷ may indicate periodic gatherings of primary tribal segments for socio-economic and ritualistic purposes at traditionally accepted locations, especially near the castellated hills.

Kudi and its ecology

It is possible to utilize the Dravidian term *kuṭi/kuḍi*, its immediate and extended meanings as a key to understanding not only about socio-economic interactions but also certain elements of the 'primary tribal segments' as well.

At present the Tamil words *kuṭi/kuḍi kuṭumai* and *kuṭumban* carry the meaning house, home, household, householder, family, lineage, town, tenants and even allegiance

¹³. V. Flannery "The Origins of the Village as a Settlement Type in Mesoamerica and the Near East: A Comparative Study" in Friedman, J. and M.J. Rowlands ed. *The Evolution of Social Systems* London (1977) p. 23 - 53.

¹⁴. Z.A. Ansari, M.S. Nagaraya Rao, K.R. Alur *Excavations at Sanganakallu 1964 - 65*, Poona (1969) p. 10.

¹⁵. Sankalia *op.cit.* p. 32.

¹⁶. *ibid.*

¹⁷. Paddayya *op.cit.* p. 72.

of subjects to a sovereign.¹⁸ It is suggested that *kudī* may have derived from the root *kud* "to be together, to join" > *kūd* "To come together".¹⁹ This may reflect a strong bearing on pastoral nomadic kin based family units associated with the Neolithic Age and the Early Iron Age in Peninsular India. Centuries of usage, primarily within an agrarian society, has obviously obliterated certain original meanings of the Tamil word *kudī*. This is very clear if one is to take the Tamil word *kudī* along with the Toda words *kwiṣ*, *kuy*²⁰ and *kwaṣam*,²¹ which have a common origin in the Dravidian term *kudī*. The continued pastoral tradition for centuries among the Toda has a greater chance of retaining certain terms and meanings associated with pastoralism in their original form even at present.²² It is possible, therefore, that the term *kudī* originally used to denote 'herd', later came to mean 'family', the total residential community at one locality and the nuclear family, via its kinship links. The Indo-Aryan term *gotra* seems to suggest a similar transformation and is best demonstrated by examining the term *kwaṣam* of the Toda.

At present the term *kwaṣam* conveys the meaning 'the buffaloes / the herd of the clan'.²³ Linguistic evidence suggests that *kwaṣam* originally meant only 'herd', which was later extended to the family, caste, genus and still later (the present meaning) 'the herd of the clan'.²⁴ The Toda word *kwiṣ*, a derivation from the Dravidian *kudī*, means 'the shed for calves'. And extension of this term is *kuy*, which means 'a room in the dairy / house'.²⁵ The significance of these terms is the equation between 'the

¹⁸. *DED* 1379.

¹⁹. R. Caldwell *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian*, Madras (1856); see 1976 ed.

²⁰. *DED*. 1379.

²¹. M.B.Emeneau and T. Burrow *Dravidian Borrowings from Indo-Aryan*, Berkeley (1962) (University of California Publications in Linguistics No. 26) p. 110.

²². Emeneau *Ritual Structure and Language Structure of the Todas*, Philadelphia (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society (NS) Vol. 64 (vi) (1974); Allchin, *Neolithic Cattle-keepers* p. 102.

²³. Emeneau *op.cit.* p. 23.

²⁴. *ibid.*

²⁵. *DED* 1379. To this day cattle are herded in the courtyard and in the house itself at Piklihal (Allchin *Piklihal Excavations* Pl. 60b). The Lambadi village in the southern Deccan consisting of wattle and daub one-roomed huts with the

herd and the house / room, family / clan', where there is an obvious link between the economic base and the family unit.²⁶ The original meaning of the herd (economic base) has been extended to the house (place of residence), family (the immediate subsistence group) and lineage (the extended kin group) forming the total socio-economic complex.²⁷

It is interesting to note that *kuḍi* is the term used for the lineage group as well as the place of residence during the Sangam period. Maravar are known as *Vātkuḍi* i.e. the sword bearing clan.²⁸ According to our evidence noted above, the hamlets/villages housing the clan also came to be known as *kuḍi*. For instance, the tiny hamlet of the hunters is called *Cirukuḍi*.²⁹ Similarly, the small cowherd colony was the *āy kuḍi*.³⁰

Another major aspect related to the structural formation of the pre-state residential community or the primary segments may be seen in the existing kinship system, which provided a self-perpetuating basis for the segmentary lineage system. The Dravidian cross cousin marriage system goes back to a very early period in antiquity;³¹

cattle tied up in any available spot within the village gives the whole settlement an appearance of a cattle-pen (Allchin *Neolithic Cattle-keepers* p. 109, Pl. IIa). The average house of the iron smelting Asur tribals of Chota Nagpur consists of a sleeping apartment, kitchen and cattle-shed (K.K. Leuva *The Asur* New Delhi (1963) p. 27). It is significant that the Tamil word *patti* implies "a fold for cattle, a pound, a small village" (Caldwell *op.cit.* p. 574).

²⁶. The word *tāy* i.e. 'mother' has been analysed in the following manner by Caldwell. *Tā* > *tam*, used honorifically to *āy* i.e. 'mistress of the cows'. He also draws an interesting parallelism with the Indo-Aryan word *duhitri* i.e. daughter, but literally 'milkmaid' (*op.cit.* 400 - 401).

²⁷. There is strong evidence for clan or family ownership of cattle among the Toda in the past. Pastures are still held commonly by the clan (W.H.R. Rivers *The Todas*, Oosterhout Anthropological Publications 1906, (1967 reprint) p. 541 and 557). We may also note that the term *mad* is used by the Toda for the clan village, the dairy, the sacred pen where buffaloes are kept and also for the funeral place (*ibid.* p. 24).

²⁸. *Perumbān*. 157.

²⁹. *Murugu*. 196.

³⁰. *Maṇi*. xxvii. 45.

³¹. T.R. Trautmann ed. *Kinship and History in South Asia* Univ. of Michigan (1974); T.R. Trautmann *Dravidian Kinship*, Cambridge Univ. Press (1981).

for which textual evidence is available in the Sangam sources,³² and may have been extremely crucial in the structural formation of the segmentary lineage. It is suggested that this form of marriage is a reciprocal exchange of daughters between families and lineages to perpetuate alliances between them.³³

However, as Hart suggests, there is a second aspect related to the cross cousin marriage system, which in turn affects the lineage system. As against the parallel cousin marriage (where the kin nuclei is not an interwoven continuity), the cross cousin marriage makes the kin nuclei a tightly integrated whole.³⁴ Judging by the Sangam texts the Tamil 'kin nucleus' seems to consist of a woman's relatives i.e. a woman, her father / mother / brother / husband / son.³⁵ Considering her role in the subsistence economy as well as a crucial cementing factor in perpetuating the lineage system, the female was assigned a central role in the early societies, the symbolic form of which extended even to the ritual structure of South India.³⁶

³². G.L. Hart "Some Aspects of Kinship in Ancient Tamil Literature" in Trautmann ed. *Kinship and History in South Asia* p. 20 f. According to the South Indian cross cousin marriage system, either one marries the mother's brother's daughter or the father's sister's daughter (Hart *op.cit.* p. 41).

³³. C. Levi-Strauss *The Elementary Structure of Kinship* London (1969) ch.9.

³⁴. *op.cit.* p. 41-44. This tightly integrated whole is seen in the kinship terminology itself. The Tamil word *māmaṅ* which means mother's brother, also means/includes father's sister's husband, and spouse's father. Similarly the reciprocal term *marumakaṅ* includes sister's son (man speaking), brother's son (woman speaking), wife's brother's son, husband's sister's son, and daughter's husband (Trautmann *op.cit.* p. 88-89). *Mun* is the term used by the Toda for father in law as well as mother's brothers (Rivers *op.cit.* p. 482).

³⁵. B.E.F. Beck "The Kin Nucleus in Tamil Folklore" in Trautmann ed. *Kinship and History* p. 1 - 28; Hart *op.cit.* p. 31 - 39.

³⁶. For instance, Korṟavai was a prominent indigenous goddess who was associated with war and victory during the Sangam age (Hart *op.cit.* p. 23 - 24). The central position of Pārvati in the structure of the south Indian Hindu pantheon is a prominent feature in determining her position *vis a vis* the male deities (Beck *op.cit.* p. 10 - 12). It is also interesting to note the personal name Eurmai taken by certain chieftains of the Sangam age. The etymological meaning of Erumai is female buffalo (*DED* p. 699). The association of matrilineal traits with the Toda in the remote past has not been ruled out by Rivers who bases his arguments on certain rituals associated with the cattle and the pens (*op.cit.* 548).

The Sangam texts also show strong traits of parallel male domination. This is seen in the form of father / husband / brother playing a strong protective role over the woman as a means to avoid the intrusion of strangers, which may have in turn jeopardized their own control and domination within the lineage group.³⁷ Thus, in reality, the position held by the woman as a central figure was a superficial one. As Hart sums it up, the cross cousin marriage in South India is motivated 'to some extent by beliefs regarding the power of woman and the need to keep that power under control'.³⁸ Unless this is so, we cannot reconcile the dual or the parallel situation, where on the one hand the lineage system is perpetuated through the cross cousin marriage system and by a central role played by the woman in the kin nucleus, and on the other hand the concentration authority, amongst segmentary groups, in the hands of a male i.e. *perumakan* (viz. *makan* : son, husband, exalted person, warrior,³⁹) who as the head of the local lineage group identified himself with the lineage ancestor.

The internal dynamics of pre-state political formations in south India, may be seen in two overlapping sectors. The first is the pre-conditions for the emergence of leadership viz. the structure of the existing society and economy located in association with a particular physiographic and environmental context. The second is the mechanism of control, viz. personal or individual qualities (of valour, prowess, strength and persuasive powers), the acquisition of social wealth and prestige items, traditions and cult beliefs associated with the clan or the tribe.

The earliest recognizable political institutions capable of taking more advanced forms in their evolution seem to have appeared in the peripheral hills. It is indeed not a coincidence that there is a correlation between eco-zones represented by the physiography, economy, habitat in the peripheral areas and the epithets / titles and personal names of chieftains mentioned in the Sangam texts. For instance *kō*, *kōmān*, *malaiyamān*, *neḍumān*, *kōḍan* (from *kōḍu*), *Porai*, *Perunkal* are epithets associated with the physiographic region or the habitat indicating the montane regions. Similarly, terms such as *Āy*, *Āvi*, *Āviyar*, *Erumayūran*, *Ērai*, *Kaṇḍirakkō*, *Kōmān* indicate a strong pastoral connection of these lineage chieftains. The greatest fillip to the emergence of leadership and authority perhaps came from the socio-economic interaction of the Proto Historic society. It is possible to suggest that the beginnings of a purposeful and planned exploitation of localized resources may have given a stronger basis for the development of more sedentary settlement units. Conversely, the process of gradual sedentation necessitated a more intensive exploitation of localized resources than under mobile economies. There are several aspects associated with this development that are relevant to our study.

³⁷ Hart *op.cit.* p. 31 - 34, 43 - 45.

³⁸ *op.cit.* p. 44.

³⁹ *DED.* 3768.

Firstly, kinship relations not only result in social homogeneity but go on to provide a corresponding concentration of households and exploitation of resources. The opposite dynamic occurs when the integration of the household cannot be contained within its demographic expansion. With the consequent pressure on resources, it may directly lead to a process of segmentation. The predatory expansions of segmentary lineage groups have been called a social means of intrusion and competition in an already occupied ecological niche⁴⁰ and 'a means by which the tribe can avoid population pressure on available resources'.⁴¹ In fact habitation and burial sites located along the banks of rivers leading from the peripheral areas to the fertile lower plains were probably a result of a linear movement in the process of segmentation. An echo of this resource requirement may be seen in the Sangam term *vañji (tinai)*, or expeditions led by land-hungry pastoral chieftains into the forest tracts.

The second is the operation of the subsistence economy through "simple technology". Pre-state societies of the Proto Historic period developed the ability of the family / extended family as the unit of production, to control labour and the means of production, including property rights. This is primarily due to the absence of a controlling authority that allots specific tasks of production. In this context the resident kin group associated with a particular economy and physiographic region in the peripheral areas becomes significant. The lineage group which was perpetuated largely by the cross cousin marriage system may have provided a convenient social context for the emergence of leadership in association with the resident kin groups. The alliance between families and lineages perpetuated by the cross cousin marriage system made the kin nuclei a 'tightly integrated whole', where the intrusion of strangers was avoided and thereby ensured the hegemony or the domination over the tribe exercised by the lineage group. This situation may have had its political implications in relation to the emergence of leadership.

The Sangam texts introduce us to a series of chieftains in the peripheral areas known by the epithet *perumakan* or *perumān*.⁴² For instance chieftains such as Ōri (*Puram*. 152), Korran (*Nar*. 265 - 268), Ēraī (*Puram* 157), Pēkan (*Sirupān* 86 - 87), Erumai (*Aham*, 115.5) had the epithet *perumakan* preceding their personal names. Some

⁴⁰. M.D. Sahlins "The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion" *American Anthropologist* vol. LXIII (1961) p. 323.

⁴¹. A.P. Vayda "Expansion and Warfare among Swidden Agriculturists" *American Anthropologist* vol. LXIII (1961) p. 353.

⁴². The disappearance of the intervocalic-k and the assimilation of the two vowels, *perumakan* becomes *perumān*. A. Veluppillai "Tamil Influences in Ancient Sri Lanka with Special Reference to Early Brahmi Inscriptions" *Journal of Tamil Studies* vol. XVII (1980) p. 10.

of the etymological derivations of *makan* are son as well as husband.⁴³ The etymological meanings for *perumān*, we find also include elder and elder brother. Among certain resident kin groups, if the leadership was associated with the head of the local descent group, the term *makan* (son) may have well implied the 'descendent' of the clan / lineage ancestor. The clan graves and ancestor worship probably associated with the megalithic burials may be recalled at this juncture. Apparently where leadership was claimed through descent, the term *perumakan* (*peru* + *makan*) may have carried the meaning 'great descendant / scion / son'. Similarly, *Kōmān* (*Kō* + *makan*) in certain instances may have conveyed the meaning 'descendent / scion / son of the cowherd'. The tribal, clan, pastoral and peripheral hilly territorial affiliations of a chieftain is best demonstrated by the epithets attributed to Pēkan of Palani hills, viz. *Āvīyar perumakan peruṅkal nātan Pēkan*.⁴⁴

The kinship network was one method by which social wealth concentrated in the hands of certain lineage groups, who may have emerged as dominant political groups in the subsequent Early Historic period e.g. the Vēlir. Especially, cross cousin marriage system may have perpetuated a system of the horizontal transmission of social wealth (i.e. as bride price) and the subsequent vertical transmission of wealth (i.e. to the lineage group). If the chieftain took a bride from an affiliated kin village within the tribal sector, his sphere of influence over the extended kin group and an extended geo-physical area may have increased. In addition, predatory expansion and cattle raids offered greater opportunities for the chieftain to secure material wealth by virtue of his 'big man' status within the lineage sector. In fact the collection and division of booty at a feast and its distribution were integral parts of *veṭchi-t-turai*.⁴⁵ Thus there was a concentration of prestige items such as gold, gems, elephants, cattle, paddy, etc., in the hands of the chieftains.⁴⁶ By redistributing this wealth among warriors and travelling bards, the chieftain enhanced his authority over individuals and established a rudimentary element of inequality *vis a vis* the resident group in a donor-recipient status. Within the segmentary groups therefore 'was a circulation of goods flowing towards the top of the

⁴³ DED 3768; The Adiyān or the Adigal of Kerala have a headman in all their settlements who is known as the *perumān*. The Adiyān apply the same term to the senior member of the family as well (A.A.D. Luiz *Tribes of Kerala* New Delhi (1962) p. 27 - 28).

⁴⁴ *Śirupān* 86 - 87.

⁴⁵ *Tol. Prul. Pura*. 58, 61.

⁴⁶ Vide Seneviratne *Social Base of Early Buddhism* p. 223 - 227 for a complete list.

social pyramid and down again'.⁴⁷

As the chieftain had a direct role to play in the acquisition of resources, this situation provided the most conducive pre-condition for the emergence of leadership and authority precisely because resource requirement and community movement had to be given direction and organization. It is here that personal qualities of heroism, prowess, the ability to wield arms went in to consolidate an already existing leadership leading to the emergence of the 'big man'. The element of heroism had a fundamental role to play here. *Ērrai*, *Porunan*, *perumakan*, *palavēl*, *valvēl*, *vayvēl* indicate personal names of chieftains who are associated with heroism, strength and valour. It may be noted that iron weapons were useful not only in harnessing the environment and gaining an edge over more backward technological groups, but also as a source of internal domination *vis a vis* other lineage groups. The association of the horse with chieftains gave greater mobility (in community movement and warfare) and also prestige.

The unequal distribution of social wealth was another crucial mechanism of control. The megalithic burials and (slightly later) the Sangam texts amply indicate that there was already an "accumulation" of prestige items and other objects of social wealth in the hands of the chieftains, and a mechanism of 'redistribution' that consequently enhanced this unequal distribution of social wealth.

In this context it is quite significant to note that the megalithic burials often entombed some of these prestige items as grave goods. Our studies also indicate that burial sites often had 'special burials' where the method of construction was more elaborate or grave goods were of a special kind. In fact the very cult belief and practice of venerating the dead or ancestor worship and the belief in a life after death, saw the usage of the ritual and cult symbols perpetuating socio-political domination. If the cult group and descent group became one, then this legitimating ritual provided a convenient psychological basis for the chieftain and his lineage group in enhancing their hegemony over the resident community. It is not surprising therefore that pre-state societies of Tamīlaham saw the titles / epithets taken up by chieftains were used for deities and religious symbols / personages on the one hand and also to identify males who wielded authority with the family / household unit on the other e.g. *Āi*, *Aiyan*, *Attan*, *Irai*, *Kō* / *Kōn* / *Kōmān*, *Makan*, *Talaivan*, *Vēl*, *Vedan*, etc.

Dialectics of continuity and change

It is said that the initial impetus for advanced institutional development in the alluvial tracts had its origins in the peripheral pastoral zones. If that were so, why did the resident communities in the peripheral areas fail to carry out this historic task to its logical conclusion within that ecological context? And again, what was the reason for

⁴⁷. M.D. Sahlins *Tribesmen* New Jersey (1968) p. 87; M.J. Fried *The Evolution of Political Society* New York (1967) p. 117.

the non-emergence of the 'early state' and its allied socio-economic hierarchy based on a class society in the peripheral areas?

Certain contradictions inherent in the economic infrastructure of the peripheral areas apparently had a crucial role to play in limiting the ability to evolve towards advanced institutional development. The emergence of the nuclear areas in the alluvial plains, initiating advanced institutional development, may be viewed as a consequence of the dialectics of socio-economic change. On the one hand the structural weakness in the functioning of the mobile and mobile-cum-sedentary economies resulted in peripheral areas remaining institutionally backward throughout history. On the other hand, the process of socio-economic interaction did not permit even peripheral societies to be devoid of change. The early Proto Historic society, for instance, was by no means static. It is precisely such socio-economic interaction within the pastoral cum subsistence agricultural economy that released gradual but perceptible forces of change which became much more apparent and had far reaching consequences in a different ecological context.

A major weakness of the Proto Historic mobile economies in the Primary Region was their non-sedentized character with periodic shifts in the 'ecological boundaries'. This gave no potential for achieving a surplus economy associated with sedentized societies. Though migratory grazing practiced by the pastoralists in India represents a most efficient pattern of resource use,⁴⁸ these economies could never evolve integrated territorial units associated with communities. Besides, their limited economic self-regulation and instability are shown as one of the predominant negative aspects of nomadism.⁴⁹ In a mobile economy territorialism based on land does not develop. 'What is appropriated and reproduced here is only the herd and not the soil'.⁵⁰ Property relations associated with immovable resources could develop only with proper sedentation, which is also one method of overcoming the economic onesidedness of the nomads.⁵¹

Thus semi sedentation nor the combination of subsistence farming and pastoralism could overcome the structural weaknesses of a non-agrarian economy. To

⁴⁸. N.S. Jodha "Agricultural Development and Problems of Nomadic Tribals in Rajasthan Desert" in M.L. Patil ed. *Agro-Economic Problems in Tribal India*. Bhopal (1972) p. 25 f.

⁴⁹. A.M. Khazanov "The Early State among Eurasian Nomads" in Claessen and Skalnik ed. *The Study of The State* p. 156.

⁵⁰. Karl Marx "Introduction, Economic Manuscripts of 1857 - 1859" *Marx - Engels : Pre-Capitalist Socio-Economic Formations*, Moscow 1979 p. 105.

⁵¹. Khazonov *op. cit.*

resolve this drawback, the Proto Historic communities had the choice of either remaining in the peripheral areas and intensifying agricultural production or adjusting themselves to new ecological adaptations that entailed institutional transformations within the mobile cum sedentary economies. New ecological adaptations became imperative due to the dialectics of socio-economic change. On the one hand, the subsistence economies of the Proto Historic period were self-limiting by nature and on the other hand, the Proto Historic society itself was expanding and consequently becoming more complex in its interactions in the post 6th/5th Century B.C. A greater proliferation of Megalithic-BRW sites in the lower alluvial plains points to the growing emphasis of the significance associated with 'areas of attraction' during the latter half of the Proto Historic period.

It is difficult to point out one primary factor that gave rise to the elements of civilization in the lower alluvial plains. It may be suggested that a combination of factors may have been responsible for the actual material basis that provided the impetus to the subsequent demographic expansion and the consequent development of an agrarian economy, its allied socio-economic and political institutions in the post 5th-4th Century B.C.

The evidence given below indicates that, at least by the beginning of the Early Historic period, there was an essential synthesis of the following structural developments viz. the natural selection of the lower plains as 'areas of attraction'; greater sedentation, demographic expansion, an emphasis on intensive agriculture and surplus production, the harnessing of organic and inorganic sources of energy, i.e. draught animals and water for agriculture, technological innovations associated with iron and hydraulic control, the evolution of 'chiefdoms' and social ranking, the beginnings of new forms of specialization and organization of labour, the development of new forms of exchange patterns - all, hitherto unknown during the Early Proto Historic period.

The choice of a new environmental zone, a switch over from dry to wet crops, the utilization of iron and hydraulic technology with greater efficiency and the potential for demographic expansion, provided the essentials to the late Proto Historic communities to single out the lower alluvial plains as 'areas of attraction'. The lower alluvial plains possessed certain physical advantages over the peripheral zones. Amongst these we may note: the composition of the river valleys with fertile soil and flat land and also the existence of an uninterrupted supply of water from the rivers which in turn provided a convenient avenue of transportation. Similarly, important raw material (considered as prestige items during the Proto and Early Historic periods) were associated with the lower valleys and the delta areas e.g. diamonds, garnets, chank, pearls, salt along the Coromandel coast. The delta areas also formed convenient 'points of contact' for a coastal-hinterland exchange mechanism as well as for (traders/intermediaries linked to) the long distance trade network (touching the east coast of India) that became prominent points of commercial and cultural interaction linking the south with the northern regions of the sub continent in the post 5th Century B.C.

In the above context what is significant is the establishment of relatively larger geo-political units based on pre-existing nuclear units. The survival of *kuḍi* as family, clan, implies that a group of extended *kuḍi*, as a collective, also came to be known as the *kuḍi*, the larger geo-political unit e.g. Āy *kuḍi* of Āy Antiraṇ. Implicit in this development is the breakdown of the internal autonomy of the smaller (socio-economic) unit of the clan and their integration to a larger political and economic unit, that of the territory, which also coincided with the new subsistence pattern i.e. the agrarian economy that began to evolve by the Early Historic period. This geo-political unit with its productive capacity of the natural and human resources, was the economic base of the ruling elite and political authority.

Interestingly, the coming together of several families in the process of sedentation is reflected in another term found in the Sangam texts. This term is *cēri*, which means 'a village' or literally 'a cluster of houses'.⁵² It is suggested that the term *cēri* may have derived from *cēr/cēra* 'to join'⁵³ 'altogether, wholly, along with, in company with',⁵⁴ a process that can be associated with household units and the clan or the lineage group.⁵⁵

Nāḍu and its ecology

In this connection the term *nāḍu/nāṭu* may prove to be useful indicating movement, settling down and the evolution of the 'territory'. In the Sangam context, the evolved meaning of *nāḍu* specifically implied country, territory and kingdom.⁵⁶ The etymology of *nāḍu*, however, indicates at least three groups of meanings. The first carries meanings such as 'district, province, country, kingdom, state'. The second group conveys 'rural tract, agricultural tract, cultivated, planted, opposite of *kāḍu* i.e. jungle tract'. The third has a group of meanings such as 'situation, earth, land, world, open place'.⁵⁷ In fact a fourth can be suggested on the basis of the Toda term *no-r* (from

⁵². PPTI 396.

⁵³. Caldwell *op.cit.* p. 550.

⁵⁴. DED 2312.

⁵⁵. The term *ūr* generally conveys the meaning 'town and city' and also a pre-existing situation associated with the meaning 'village' and 'residential place' (PPTI 152-53; DED 643: TL I-ii 1924 : 498).

⁵⁶. PPTI 488 - 489.

⁵⁷. DED 3012.

the Dravidian *nādu*) which means the 'sacred place, dairy complex'⁵⁸ probably indicating a very authentic situation in antiquity associated with the pastoral nomadic household economy and ritual complex.

It may be suggested that *nādu* may have derived from the root *naḍ / naḍa* 'to walk, go, pass, proceed, happen'⁵⁹ or *naḍu* 'to walk, to enter' or 'probably to plant (the foot)'.⁶⁰ These root words are extremely important in the light of community movement - in the process of settling down consequently leading to the evolution of the territory. In fact the very association of the adjectives *perunkal* and *malai* with the hill chieftain i.e. *nāṭan* and also the association of Proto Historic sites in peripheral hilly entry-points may give credence to the above assumption. The process of settling down represented by the meaning 'to plant the foot' i.e. *nādu* has an interesting parallel in the Indo-Aryan *jana + pada* 'foothold of the folk / clan'.

The very fact that there are *nādu* units mentioned in the Sangam texts in association with the physiography, the resident community and economy i.e. the ecological context, gives further weight to our argument about the origins of *nādu* before the emergence of a full fledged agrarian economy in Tamilnadu. For instance, we come across regions such as *Erumainādu*. i.e. land of buffaloes, which has a dominantly pastoral economy. We also hear of the physiographic representation in *pūli nādu* (land of sands), *kuddam nādu* (land of lakes), *karkā nādu* (land of rocks), *malai nādu* (hill country), *punāl nādu* (land of waters) etc. There are instances when a particular region is identified after the resident community. For instance *Vēnādu* (land of the Vēḷir), *Oyma nādu* and *Koṅkar nādu*.

The *nādu* seems to have developed as a larger habitation zone when greater sedentation and an agrarian economy gradually developed in the nuclear areas. The structure of the *nādu* which evolved during the Early Historic period, may be located mainly within the nuclear areas sustaining relatively advanced forms of institutions.

The geo-political area known as *Parambunādu*, which was the 'territory' of *vēḷ Pāri*, is described as a region having fertile agricultural tracts, reservoirs, hill tracts and forest products.⁶¹ Thus the 'territory' of *Pāri* is identified as a *nādu* and it also covered different physiographic zones i.e. fertile plains and hilly forest tracts. The reference to

⁵⁸. *DED* 3012.

⁵⁹. *DED* 2957.

⁶⁰. Caldwell *op.cit.* p. 587; *DED* 2957. In Sanskrit *naḍ* means 'dance' 'play' (Witney p. 37). Caldwell believes that Dravidian *naḍ* and Sanskrit *naḍ/nṛit* have a common source of origin (*op.cit.* p. 587).

⁶¹. *Puram* 105, 117-18.

irrigated agriculture and forest products (i.e. 'those not produced by the ploughman'⁶²) indicates the co-existence of different production techniques within the *nādu*. A second example may be quoted from the former Travancore area. The Sangam texts mention a particular region named Nāñjilnādu, which was under the control of a section of the Vēlir known as the Āy.⁶³ We have already pointed out to the strong pastoral tradition associated with Āy groups in a pre-existing situation. Nāñjilnādu literally means 'plough-land'. Notices on the accumulation of the surplus rice in the hands of Āy chieftains⁶⁴ clearly shows that in addition to pastoral wealth, these 'territories' possessed agricultural production and thus the existence of different production techniques. In another sense this co-existence also implies, the integration under the leadership of a chieftain, various groups specializing in different production processes within a particular territorial entity.

Another important aspect emerging from the above is the integration of smaller settlement zones of various residential groups, more specifically of the clan, within its geo-physical region. For instance, a 2nd-1st Century B.C. Tamil Brahmi inscription from Cittanavasal (District Pudukottai) mentions '*erumainātu kumulūr piranta kavuṭi iten...*'⁶⁵ or Kavuti Ite_n from/born at Kumulūr in Erumainādu. In the same manner, the texts refer to three hundred villages that comprised Parambunādu of Pāri.⁶⁶ This clearly means that the chieftains were capable of integrating resident groups housed within the *kudi*, *ūr* and *cēri* and the geophysical area along with its natural resources. It is such a geophysical area capable of constantly sustaining the resident community and providing its chieftains with resources that came to be called a 'worthy' *nādu*.⁶⁷

A marked feature during the post 3rd and 2nd Century B.C. is a move towards integrating communities and territorial zones, which in the process evolved the necessary bureaucratic and military apparatus to extend control over labour, production and distribution. This may also be called a transitory period where the pre-existing social relationships, economic systems and political structures were being uprooted, at least in the nuclear areas, for the establishment of new production relations. However, this does

⁶². vide *Puram* 109, 3-8.

⁶³. *Puram* 137 - 140.

⁶⁴. *Aham* 152.20.

⁶⁵. I. Mahadevan *Corpus of the Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions*, Madras (Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology, 1966, No. 27).

⁶⁶. *Puram* 109-110.

⁶⁷. S. Singaravelu *The Social Life of the Tamils: The Classical Period*, Kuala Lumpur (1966) p. 171-173.

not imply an immediate disintegration of the clan-based units of settlements. Such clan-units apparently continued well into the early Christian period, though an equation between the settlement/habitation and its composite identity with a particular clan or lineage was becoming less conspicuous in the post 1st Century B.C.

By the beginning of the Early Historic period, the *nādu* came to represent the chieftaincies that had a wider meaning than the clan or physiographic or economic unit. It had by this period evolved into a physically larger area that had integrated different physiographic regions - economic-settlement units. The *nādu* thus became an integral component of the state denoting a specific meaning of a populated-agricultural region juxtaposed to the peripheral hilly (*malai*) and jungle (*kādu*) tracts. For instance, the Cēraland is described as a geo-political area covering the *malai*, *kādu* and *nādu*.⁶⁸ On another occasion, the texts specifically mention that Karikala Cola cleared jungle tracts to create *nādu* units.⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that the *nādu* in this contexts stands parallel to the *janapada*. Thus by the Early Historic period the *nādu* had its final evolution establishing its character as an agrarian eco-zone.⁷⁰

It is precisely this political and the material basis provided by the *nādu* chieftaincies that rendered the territorial infrastructure for the greater political entities represented by the *mandalam* or the state to evolve out of this situation, under the hegemony of the Mū Vēntar or the 'three crowned kings', Cēra, Cōla and Pāṇḍya.

⁶⁸. *Puram* 17.

⁶⁹. *Puram* 283. Traditions in the Cuddappa and Kurnool districts (ancient Rēnādu) have it that Karikāla Cōla invaded this region and had the forests in the southern slopes of Karigiri cleared to establish a main village called Pottapi. Subsequently he established other villages around Pottāpi and called this conglomeration Pottāpinādu P.T. Srinivas Iyengar *History of the Tamils: from the Earliest Times to 600 A.D.*, Madras (1929) p. 347.

⁷⁰. vide Y. Subbarayalu *Political Geography of the Chola Country*, Madras (1973) p. 32.

Abbreviations

Aham	<i>Akanānūru</i>
DED	<i>Dravidian Etymological Dictionary</i> : ed. Burrow T. and M.B. Emeneau, Oxford, (1961)
Kurun	<i>Kuruntogai</i>
Maduraik	<i>Maduraikkāñci</i>
Maṇi	<i>Maṇimekalai</i>
Murugu	<i>Tirumurugārruppadaḥ</i>
Nar	<i>Narrinai</i>
Pattinap	<i>Pattinappālai</i>
Perumbāṇ	<i>Perumbāṇārruppadaḥ</i>
PPTI	<i>Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index</i> ; ed. Subrahmanian N. Madras (1966).
Puram	<i>Puranānūru</i>
Śirupāṇ	<i>Śirupāṇārruppadaḥ</i>
TL	Tamil Lexicon. University of Madras.
Tol.	Tolkāppiyam