ON THE UNINTENDED INFLUENCE OF JAINISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASTE IN POST-CLASSICAL TAMIL SOCIETY [1]

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1. Introduction

Like any other human being, the average Tamil also functions at the intersection of many overlapping identities. In spite of the persistence of a linguistic identity over two millennia, and a self-conscious Tamil nationalist political movement of the 20th century which argued against caste differences among Tamils, for many Tamils of today, caste is a significant, if not the primary, identity still. [2] One of the results of this caste identity is that many Tamils who are members of the Scheduled Castes or Dalits feel alienated from the interests of the Tamil Nationalist movement. [3] Many Tamil nationalists like Pāvāṇar (1992: 169) held that the early Tamil society did not have a birth-based hierarchy. [4] But Classical Tamil texts which are the earliest sources for information on the early Tamil society do employ words which are traditionally interpreted as 'low caste person' or 'outcaste'. These words include '*pulaiyaṉ*' (base or low-caste man', 'outcaste'), "*pulaitti*" (the feminine form of '*pulaiyaṉ*'), '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' (outcaste, low or uncivilised person), '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' (person of low birth, outcaste) and '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' (synonym of

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[2] I refer to *jāti* and not *varṇa* by the term 'caste'. Tamil nationalism is very old. Zvelebil 1973: 172 calls the Cilappatikāram (ca. 5th century CE) "the first consciously national work of Tamil literature, the literary evidence of the fact that the Tamils had by that time attained nationhood." The significance of the 20th century movement lies in its emphasis on an ideal caste-free Tamil society.

[3] Rājkautamaṉ 1994: 167

[4] A poem by the Tamil nationalist poet Pāratitācaṉ (also referred to as Bharati Dasan) declares that "Tamil has never accepted caste and religion" according to Ryerson 1988: 83.

'*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'). [5] In these texts, '*pulaiyaṉ*' is used to refer to a bard, a drummer, and a funerary priest; '*pulaitti*' is used to refer to a priestess, a washerwoman, and a basket-maker; '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' is used to refer to a funerary priest; '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' is used to refer to a drummer; and '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' is used to refer to a drummer and a cot-maker. These usages seem to suggest that the above-mentioned professionals were considered to be outcastes in the Classical Tamil society. The Tamil nationalists have not satisfactorily explained how these usages could be reconciled with their idea of a casteless Tamil society. On the other hand, scholars such as K. K. Pillay (1969) and George Hart (1975a, 1975b, 1976, and 1987) have suggested that the concept of untouchability and hence the notion of caste were already present in the Classical Tamil society. [6]

When the Classical Tamil texts are analyzed using information from the fields of philology, linguistics, religion, anthropology, and epigraphy, however, we find that Tamil social history is inextricably linked to Jainism. The notions of untouchability, occupational pollution and caste were not indigenous to the Tamil society and the word '*pulaiyaṉ*' which later came to mean 'a polluted man' originally meant 'a man who causes auspiciousness/prosperity'. It will be argued in this essay that, ironically, the non-violence principle of Jainism was an inadvertent catalyst in the development of violence-ridden untouchability among the speakers of Dravidian languages.

Jains have made fundamental contributions to Tamil literature and grammar. Zvelebil (1973: 137) considers Tolkāppiyaṉ, the author of the core of the oldest extant Tamil grammar, the Tolkāppiyam, to be a Jain who belonged to the pre-Christian era. Jains also authored major post-classical literary works such as the Cilappatikāram, and the Cīvakacintāmaṇi as well as many didactic works. While the contributions of Jains to Tamil literature and grammar are widely recognised, the influence of Jainism on early Tamil society has not been understood well till now because the Classical Tamil texts have not been studied from an inter-disciplinary perspective.

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[5] Classical Tamil texts are dated by Zvelebil 1975: 78 and 107 to be between ca. 150 B.C. - ca. 400 AD. However, we should note that Zvelebil 1992: 105 says, "One is unfortunately forced to admit that, till this very day, the only certainty we have with regard to the earliest chronology of Tamil literature is that the classical Tamil poems are genuine and were composed before Pallava times; more exact dating cannot reasonably be attempted, glottochronology and computers notwithstanding."
In referring to non-English words, they are shown within inverted commas as in '*pulaiyaṉ*' except in linguistic contexts such as in *pulaiyan < pulai* or *pulaiyan* 'outcaste'. When the meaning of the word is intended, the inverted commas are not used, e.g., *pulaitti* was a washerwoman.

[6] Pillay 1969: 209f.; Hart 1975a: 43, 1975b: 119-33, 1976: 321-7, 1987: 467-91; Hart and Heifetz 1999: xxi-xxii

To illuminate the influence of Jainism on Classical Tamil society, which came to be transformed into a caste society, we shall first discuss the problems in current scholarly understanding of Classical Tamil society and then examine the usages of '*iḷiciṉaṉ*', '*pulaitti*', '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' and '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' in Classical Tamil texts. Later, we shall examine why the person called '*pulaiyaṉ*' was also called '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' based on beliefs related to non-violence and cosmology of Jainism. Having identified how Jainism viewed *pulaiyaṉ*, we shall seek to define the original meaning of '*pulai*' and the earlier role of *pulaiyaṉ* in Tamil society with the help of linguistics, anthropology, and philology. Afterwards a discussion of the transformation of post-Classical Tamil society under the influence of Jainism, Buddhism, and Brahmanism is presented followed by the conclusions of this study.

2. The Source of the Problem

Classical Tamil data reveal an ancient society, in which certainly there were rich and poor, rulers and subjects, and masters and servants.[7] But we do not find any notion of caste hierarchy and especially untouchability. This society was very different from the post-Classical Tamil society as well as the society based on *varṇa* in the north of India. In other words, Tamil cultural history offers a unique insight into how a casteless society gets transformed into a caste society.

Kailasapathy (1968: 259-262), while noting that the early Tamil society was casteless, divided the people in the society into heroes and non-heroes and explained words such as '*pulaiyaṉ*', and '*iḷiciṉaṉ*' as referring to servile people engaged in manual

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[7] Puṟanāṉūṟu 72.11-12, 165.3-4, and 191.4. The Poruḷatikāram, the third book of the Tolkāppiyam, the oldest extant Tamil grammar, shows evidence of borrowing of the notion of *varṇa* hierarchy (Tolkāppiyam 615-629). However, according to Zvelebil 1975: 71, the final redaction of the Poruḷatikāram might be in the 5th century CE and so I consider this book to be post-classical. Zvelebil (ibid.) suggests that the present text of the Tolkāppiyam underwent a final editing sometime in the 5th century CE, but it is based on a much earlier *Urtext* of ca. 100 BCE. Even in the Collatikāram, the second book of the Tolkāppiyam, we find only the notion of economic hierarchy in Tolkāppiyam 445-447. Puṟanāṉūṟu 204.1-4 serves to explain this hierarchy in terms of Tamil attitude towards economic dependency, i.e., those who seek gifts are lowly and those who give gifts are exalted. However, this classification did not seem to apply to the bards. As Kailasapathy 1968: 56-57 noted on the basis of Puṟanāṉūṟu 201.14 and 203.11, giving to the bards was called '*pāṇ kaṭaṉ*', an obligation towards the bards on the part of Tamil kings and chieftains. Indeed the high degree of respect accorded to the bards can be seen in Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai 151-167 which depicts the mighty king Karikālaṉ giving the bards good clothes, food, and precious gifts, and walking seven steps behind the departing bards to see them off as they drive away in the chariot he has given them.

labour. Hart (1975b: 123) rejected Kailasapathy's view saying that if one used Kailasapathy's criterion, many of the bards were low only by their having to go from one king to another to beg for a living. Hart (ibid.) noted that the poets "also had to do that, but rather than being looked down upon, they were praised and admired."

While Pillay (1969) did not offer an explanation for the basis of the low status of *pulaiyaṉ* and *iḻiciṉaṉ*, Hart (1975b: 122-125) and Hart and Heifetz (1999: 310) explained that the bard, the washerwoman, the priestess of god Murukaṉ, the drummer, and the funerary priest of indigenous Tamil culture were considered to be low castes because of their association with polluting dangerous powers with which they came into contact in their occupations.[8] But there are many linguistic, philological and epigraphic data that seem to contradict the view of Hart. For example, a Classical Tamil text, Paripāṭal 3.86, praises Tirumāl (Viṣṇu) as "*nalliyāḻp pāṇa*", 'the bard of good lute'. Also, contrary to Hart, Zvelebil (1992: 29) includes the bards and minstrels in the elite strata of the Tamil society.

We also find a hero-stone inscription (ca. 7th century CE) mentioning a warrior named Cākkaip Paṟaiyaṉār.[9] In the 13th century CE, an inscription of Cōḻa king Kulōttuṅkaṉ III states that he defeated the Pāṇṭiya king Caṭaiyavarmaṉ Kulacēkaraṉ of Madurai and "ordered that the Pāṇṭiyaṉ should thereafter cease to be called by the name Pāṇṭiyaṉ, and conferred the title of Pāṇṭiyaṉ on the Pāṇaṉ who sang in praise of the prowess of the arms that conquered Madurai."[10] A few years later, Kulacēkaran's successor Māṟavarmaṉ Cuntarapāṇṭiyaṉ avenged this by defeating Kulōttuṅkaṉ III, "seized the Cōḻa crown of pure gold wrought with jewels, and was pleased to give his crown to the Pāṇaṉ."[11] An inscription of 1141 CE in the Tiruviṭaimarutūr temple in the reign of Kulōttuṅkaṉ II indicates that a *pāṇaṉ* by the name Irumuṭiccōḻaṉpirāṉāṉa

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[8] Hart 1975b: 122-125, Hart and Heifetz 1999: 310

[9] *Ceṅkam Naṭukaṟkaḷ* (1972), inscription no. 1971/96. Ta. Paṟaiyaṉ (singular of 'Paṟaiyar') refers to a member of the caste from whose name is derived the English word 'pariah' meaning 'outcaste'. Interestingly, Cākkaip Paṟaiyaṉār commanded some subordinate warriors. Also, note the use of honorific marker *-ār* which was unheard of in common usage until very recently when some leaders of the Paṟaiyar community renewed its usage as part of their names.

[10] '*Pāṇaṉ*' means 'bard'. See *Inscriptions in the Pudukkottai State Translated into English Part II* (2002: 151f.). The names of Tamil kings have been transliterated based on their Tamil forms even though they might be Sanskritic in origin and are rendered differently in different sources.

[11] See *Inscriptions in the Pudukkottai State Translated into English Part II* (2002: 228).

Acañcalappērayaṉ was authorised to engage the services of some *pāṇaṉ*s to sing to the deity in the temple and to teach music to the *tēvaraṭiyār* (temple women) of the temple.[12] During the time of Cōḻa king Irācēntiraṉ I, a *pāṇaṉ* with the title Arumoḻitēvac Cākkai, evidently a performer of Sanskrit drama, donated seven goats and some clarified butter to a Brahminic temple in Koṭumpāḷūr.[13] The *pāṇaṉ*s in these post-classical inscriptions do not seem to be polluted outcastes.

Further, inscription no. 1974/66 in Tarumapuri Kalveṭṭukaḷ (1975) is an interesting memorial stone inscription of 8th-9th century CE, which mentions a person called Pulaiyamaṉṉār who ruled a territory called Puṟamalai Nāṭu near present day Dharmapuri in northern Tamilnadu. While '*pulaiyaṉ*' is traditionally interpreted as an untouchable, here Pulaiyamaṉṉār can be translated as 'the honourable *pulaiya* king'.[14]

The above data suggest that there seems to be a misunderstanding regarding the presence of the notion of untouchability in the Classical Tamil period with ritual pollution as its basis. The reason for this misunderstanding is that scholars of Classical Tamil seem to extrapolate into the distant Classical Tamil past cultural features and semantic developments that appeared much later in the Tamil society. They do not seem to be cognizant of the possibility of a semantic change which could result in drastically different and possibly even opposite understanding now of what some words meant centuries ago. A good example of such a phenomenon is the Tamil word traditionally used to refer to Vaiṣṇava saints of Tamil Nadu. Palaniappan 2004: 63-84 has shown that for more than 800 years Tamil scholars and scholars and followers of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism have been calling the Tamil Vaiṣṇava saints as '*Āḻvār*', interpreting the saint's nature as 'being immersed in devotion to Viṣṇu.' But the original and correct[15] form of the word was '*Āḷvār*', meaning 'lord'. It is highly significant that this change occurred almost a

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[12] *South Indian Inscriptions* 5, (1925/1986) 295

[13] Rājāmukamatu and Irācēntiran 2004: 39 show the reading "*arumoḻitēvac cā*". Dr. C. Santhalingam of Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology and I visited the site, Mucukuntēcuvarar temple, in 2007 and were able to read also '*k*' and the symbol for '*ai*' in '*kai*' with the letter '*k*' in '*kai*' covered by recent repair work.

[14] Pulaiyamaṉṉār < *pulaiya + maṉ + ār*
where, *pulaiya* = adjectival form of *pulaiyaṉ*
        maṉ = king (DEDR 4774)
        ār = 3rd person honorific plural suffix

[15] The use of 'correct form' as in the earlier paper is based on the fact that the form '*Āḷvār*' was arrived at not only on the basis of the oldest available form but also a detailed philological analysis.

millennium ago among the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, a religious sect with a claim of unbroken teacher-student line from the 10th century CE. However, until it was established by Palaniappan (2004) what the original form was and how and when it changed, Tamil scholars of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism held on to an incorrect form of the word, i.e., '*Āḻvār*', which led to misinterpretations of the nature of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava saints.

Usually, one would expect that major socio-cultural changes in a society might lead to changes in its literary tradition, lexical usage, and semantic understanding of words. Yet. in the case of the words '*Āḻvār*'/'*Āḷvār*' there was no real Tamil socio-cultural discontinuity in the 10th century CE, when the sound variation and semantic change occurred. Tamil country continued to be ruled by kings who could be called Hindu kings. On the other hand, there was a major discontinuity in Tamil socio-cultural life beginning ca. 3rd century CE. It is called the Kalabhra Interregnum, when the Tamil country was overrun by a people called the Kalabhras from the region immediately to the north. This was the time when the so-called bardic age of the Classical Tamil period ceased to exist. If semantic change could occur when there was no cultural discontinuity, clearly such a change would be even more likely when there was a major cultural discontinuity as during the Kalabhra Interregnum. Non-realization of this possibility has led to anachronistic interpretations of the early Tamil society.

2.1 Anachronistic Interpretations

Till now, scholarly understanding of ancient Tamil society is primarily based on interpreting key Classical Tamil usages as equivalent to medieval or even modern usages. Consider, for example, the following statement of Hart (1987: 469) regarding the status of the people living in a *cēri* (street) in the ancient Tamil country.[16]

> "Evidently, low-born people lived largely in separate places in ancient times. Thus *Paṭṭiṇappālai* 75 mentions a *cēri* outside a city—then, as now, evidently a place where low castes live—where there are pigs and

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[16] Hart 1987: 469. Since Hart has written more extensively than other scholars on this issue and provided the latest theoretical rationale for the presence of caste in the early Tamil society, the discussion in this section will focus on his work. Hart's theories have not been seriously challenged by scholars till now.

chickens and where fishermen live. *Paripāṭal* 7.31-2 speaks of the *cēri* of the dancers (*āṭavar*) [sic!][17]—who, as will be seen, were of low caste."

But the ancient and medieval usages of '*cēri*' were very different. In the Classical Tamil text, Kuṟuntokai 231, we find the hero's residential street being called '*cēri*'. As for inscriptions, we find Vāmanaccēri and Nāraṇaccēri as places where Brahmins lived during the 9th century.[18] Another inscription of the 10th century mentions a *pāppanaccēri* (Brahmin street).[19] Clearly the anachronistic interpretation of the use of the word '*cēri*' in Paṭṭiṉappālai leads to a serious misunderstanding of the social status of the residents of such *cēri*s in ancient times. The association of *cēri* with low castes is a modern phenomenon where '*cēri*' refers to a slum in an urban area such as Chennai.

2.2 Philological Problems

A secondary but serious problem in understanding the early Tamil society is the lack of philological rigor in the interpretation of Classical Tamil texts. Discussing the use of the word *pulai* and its derivatives, Hart (1987: 468) writes:

> "In early Tamil literature, *pulai* or a derivative is sometimes used as a term of abuse (as *paṟaiyaṉ* is used even today); in Maṇi. 13, for example, it is used in scolding a Brahmin, who stole a cow from a sacrifice, while in Kali.72.14, a women [sic!] uses the term (in the feminine) in abuse to her husband's courtesan."

That the feminine derivative of '*pulai*', i.e., '*pulaitti*', is used as an abusive term is a misinterpretation of its usage in Kalittokai 72.14. Indeed, what we have in Kalittokai 72.14 is a matter-of-fact reference to a washerwoman and not an abusive term to refer to a courtesan.

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[17] The word should be '*āṭuvār*'.

[18] *South Indian Inscriptions* 6 (1928/1986) 145.

[19] Sastri 1931-32/1984: 169.

In addition to people referred to by the term '*pulaiyaṉ*', Hart (1987: 469) also considers the fishermen in the ancient Tamil society to be low caste and fish to be 'low' food. Hart says:

> "In Akam 110.16, a girl from a fishing village says to an evidently high-born man that he would not like to eat fish, which is a 'low' food, while in Kali. 121.20, the fish in a harbor are said to be 'low.' This suggests that in ancient times, as now, fishermen were of quite low caste."

An examination of Kalittokai 121.20, however, indicates that the fish was being described as beached fish and not as 'low'.[20]

In light of the technical meaning of '*iḷinta mīṉ*' as 'beached fish', Akanāṉūṟu 110.16-17 has the heroine saying:

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[20] In Kalittokai 121.20, the relevant text reads:
>   *eṟi tirai tantu iṭa iḷinta mīṉ* …

It is interesting that Rajam 1992: 440 n. 9 translates *iḷinta mīṉ* as "fish which came down (the shore)". She adds [Rajam's emphasis]:

> "The context is: eṟi tirai tantu iṭa **iḷinta** mīṉ 'the fish that came **down** the shore as the tossing waves brought and dropped them. In most contexts, **iḷinta** signifies movement in a lower direction."

The text *eṟi tirai tantu iṭa iḷinta mīṉ*, can be glossed as shown below:
eṟi - 'tossing' (verb stem 'to toss')
tirai - 'wave/waves' (noun)
tantu - 'having brought' (adverbial participle)
iṭa - '(because of) being dropped' (infinitive)
iḷinta - '(which) came down' (adjectival participle)
mīṉ - 'fish' (noun)

We should note that *iṭa* functions as an infinitive whose action requires to be completed by *iḷinta,* an adjectival participle, or a finite verb as in '*iḷintatu*' 'came down'. '*iḷinta*' cannot be interpreted as a pure adjective meaning 'lowly'. The commentator of Kalittokai, Naccinārkkiṉiyar interprets '*iḷinta mīṉ*' as '*ekkarilē kiṭanta mīṉ*' meaning 'fish lying on the sand'. That '*iḷinta mīṉ*' is a technical term for beached fish as opposed to fish caught in the sea by the fishermen is also made clear by the old commentary for Akanāṉūṟu 10.

ivai numakku uriya alla iḻinta

koḻumīṉ valci eṉṟaṉam...

> We said, "These are not right for you. These are food made of beached salt-water fish…"[21]

So all that the heroine says is that a food made of beached fish is not right for a potential 'guest' and not that all fish are 'low' and unfit for a high-born person.[22]

In the case of Patiṟṟuppattu 30, involving a drummer beating the royal war drum, Hart (1987: 475f.) adds a qualification to the word '*uyarntōṉ*', meaning 'high one', which used to refer to the drummer.[23] According to Hart, drummers in early Tamil society were

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[21] Unless acknowledged otherwise, translations of Tamil texts in this paper are mine.

[22] Indeed, in Akanāṉūṟu 300 the heroine's friend invites the hero and his servants to stay overnight at the home of the heroine as honoured guests of her relatives. Another poem, Akanāṉūṟu 280, describes the hero who has fallen in love with a fisherman's daughter and wonders, since the father who does pearl-fishing does not care for even a large amount of wealth as bride price, whether the hero should work under him making salt, going to the sea in the boat and fishing, being submissive, and staying with him so that the father will do the right thing and give the daughter in marriage to the hero. This poem clearly contradicts Hart's view that in ancient times, as now, fishermen were of quite low caste. There are also other Tamil literary and epigraphic data underscoring the non-low caste nature of the fishermen. Matti, a chief of the fishermen, is praised in Classical Tamil poems (Akanāṉūṟu 226.7-8, 211.11-15). According to Sastri 1923-24/1983: 306, Vēḷvikkuṭi copper plates of the eighth century CE, while mentioning the victory of the Pāṇṭiyan king over the fishermen, describe the fishermen as not being submissive to the Pāṇṭiyan king.

[23] Hart says:

"The most intriguing—and mysterious—reference to this drum is *Patiṟ*. 30.32 ff.:

'Your drum, king, beats with a roaring voice for dividing the fine rice (*peruñcōṟu*) together with other music, and the voices of warriors yearning for war after destroying in the great battle shake the earth like thunder...as kites with black-eyed crows eat the sacrifice [*pali*—Sanskrit *bali*], while, amazingly, ants do not—the great sacrifice with clear liquor and blood, as black-eyed demon girls clasp their hands and tremble [and, according to Swaminathaier, refuse to eat the sacrifice] at that *piṇṭam* [ball of sacrificial food] hard to get raised by the high one [*uyarntōṉ*] to supplicate the god [in the drum, according to the old commentary] wont to be hard in his might with mantras [*mantiram*] roaring [i.e. shouted] out.'

This intriguing passage shows graphically how important the drum was and how and why it was supposed to be efficacious. Clearly, the most important element connected with the drum was the god—or spirit—who was supposed to inhabit it, and who had to be kept in the drum and made happy with blood and liquor sacrifice. The ball of food offered to the god was so

of low status. So, Hart qualifies the 'high one' as "the one who is high in respect to other [low caste] Paṟaiyaṉs." But, he fails to notice the use of *mantiram* (< Sanskrit *mantra*) by the priest. Interestingly, the only other reference to *mantiram* in the Classical Tamil texts is to *antaṇar* (Brahmins) performing a sacrifice without deviating from the mantras.[24] This suggests that the drummer was most probably a Brahmin which would imply that there was no correlation between drumming and low social status.[25]

Thus, the view that there were people of low social status or untouchables in the Classical Tamil society seems to be based on erroneous interpretations of Classical Tamil

> terrible that—if Swaminathaier is right—even demon girls, who were wont to eat the flesh of the dead, would refuse it. The identity of the "high one" is a mystery. The old commentator says nothing, but Swaminathaier suggests that it means "he who worships the god that lives in the drum." One of the modern subdivisions of the Paṟaiyaṉ caste is named "Muracu" (Thurston and Rangachari 1909; VI, 80) and it seems possible that this is a very ancient division. If so, the "high one" may mean "the one who is high in respect to other Paṟaiyaṉs and has the office of beating and taking care of the *muracu*."

Swaminathaier is the famous U. V. Swaminathaier (also written as U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar) who collected the anthology and published it.

[24] Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai 95f. I have not considered the additional text which a version of his article found on the web contains. (See http://www.tamilnation.org/caste/hart.pdf visited 5/22/07) I consider the web version to be a draft version since the web version says:

> "Alternatively, it could mean a Brahmin—something that appears plausible when one considers that Brahmins are found in the poems presiding at the war sacrifice, in which the blood and intestines of dead enemies were symbolically cooked up (Puṟam 126), and at a rite in which a king who died in bed was cut with a sword to make it appear that he had been killed in battle so that he could go to the Tamil Valhalla (Puṟam 93). The problem with this is that Brahmins are generally called Antaṇaṉs and Pārppāṉs, not "high ones." It seems most likely, then, that the "high one" means a drummer whose status is high relative to the other drummers."

Most probably, Hart had intended to refer to Puṟanāṉūṟu 26 where a war sacrifice is mentioned. Puṟanāṉūṟu 126 (abbreviated as Puṟam 126) does not have a description of such a war sacrifice. I assume Hart had deleted these lines in the final version that was published as Hart 1987. It is interesting that in his draft he attempted to use the negative evidence of lack of use of 'Antaṇaṉ' or 'Pārppāṉ' to argue for the priest to be a Paṟaiyaṉ while disregarding the positive evidence of the use of '*mantiram*', which indicates the priest was most probably a Brahmin.

[25] Hart 1987: 468f. also misinterprets the social status of *pulaiyaṉ*, a drummer, mentioned in Puṟanāṉūṟu 287.1. Hart's interpretation of the poem suffers from two problems. For one, Hart has missed the fact that the poet addresses not one drummer but two drummers. One drummer is called '*pulaiyaṉ*' and the other is called '*iḻiciṉaṉ*'. As a result, Hart has gone wrong by arguing for the low status of a *pulaiyaṉ* based on an

poetry. In the following sections, we shall critically examine the Classical Tamil usages of five key words, '*iḻicinaṉ*', '*pulaitti*', '*pulaiyaṉ*', '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*', and '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*', and try to arrive at their early meanings.

3. The Meaning of '*Iḻicinaṉ*'

The word '*iḻicinaṉ*' is traditionally derived from the stem *iḻi* 'to descend, dismount, fall, drop down, be reduced in circumstances, be inferior' and interpreted as a low caste person. Such a derivation of '*iḻicinaṉ*' from '*iḻi*' does not explain the second half of the word, –*cinaṉ*. Here, the person-noun-gender marker is –*aṉ*[26]. That leaves us with an affix *ciṉ*. The closest affix that needs to be considered is –*iciṉ*-. If we have to analyze the word as consisting of –*iciṉ*-, then the stem of the word should be a past/completive stem of '*iḻi*', such as *iḻint*-[27]. Since we do not have a past completive suffix such as –*nt*-, in '*iḻicinaṉ*', the traditional interpretation of '*iḻicinaṉ*' is wrong. The only way to explain the word '*iḻicinaṉ*' is to derive it from the stem '*iḻicu*' as given below.

> *iḻici + iṉ + aṉ > iḻicinaṉ*[28]

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erroneous identification of *pulaiyaṉ* with *iḻicinaṉ*. The second flaw in Hart's interpretation is that, as we shall see later, the traditional interpretation of '*iḻicinaṉ*' as 'low one' adopted by Hart is wrong too.

[26] Rajam 1992: 645, 933, 1014

[27] See Rajam 1992: 543, 603. Actually, the use of -*iciṉ* would also require the person-noun-gender marker to be -*ōṉ* and not -*aṉ*.

[28] Cf. from *añcu* 'to fear', we get *añci + iṉ + aṉ > añcinaṉ* (Rajam 1992: 650). For the reduction *iṉ > ṉ*, see Rajam 1992: 891-93.

A past participial form of '*iḻicu*' is found in Tirumaṅkai Aḻvār's Periya Tirumoḻi (2.8.7), a post-Classical Tamil text, as given below.

> *muḻuci vaṇtu āṭiya taṉ tuḻāyiṉ*
> *moym malark kaṇṇiyum mēṉi am cāntu*
> *iḻiciya kōlam ……………………….*

Here the Āḻvār describes the figure of Viṣṇu in the temple at Aṭṭapuyakaram as "the form with the cool garland with closely arranged cool sacred basil flowers into which bees have entered and having sandal paste smeared ('*iḻiciya*') on the body".

A probable Jain inscription from Iraṭṭaṉai near Tindivanam in Tamil Nadu has the name '*ponniḻicu* [read *ponniḻicu*] *umai*' meaning 'Umā smeared with/plasterd with gold'. See Ettirācaṉ 2004: 135.

According to Dravidian Etymological Dictionary Second Edition (DEDR), Ta. *iḻicu* and *iḻuku* , 'to daub, smear, rub over (as mortar)', are cognates (DEDR 505). *Iḻicu* is not derived from DEDR 502 *iḻi* 'to descend, dismount, fall, drop down, be reduced in circumstances, be inferior'. In Classical Tamil poetry, we find *iḻuki*, the past-participial form of *iḻuku*, once in Puṟanāṉūṟu 281.3. It is indeed possible *iḻukiṉaṉ > iḻuciṉaṉ > iḻiciṉaṉ*. *iḻukiṉaṉ > iḻuciṉaṉ* is possible due to the palatalization of -*ki*-> -*ci*- as in *aḻiṅkil > Ta. *aḻincil* [29]. *iḻuciṉaṉ > iḻiciṉaṉ* is possible where -*ḻu*- > -*ḻi*- under the influence of -*i*- in the next syllable as seen in *eḻutiṉēṉ > eḻitiṉēṉ*. [30] The post-Classical Tamil form '*iḻicu*' might have resulted from the reinterpretation of the stem in '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' as '*iḻicu*' while the original verb stem is '*iḻuku*'.

In the Classical Tamil texts, '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' occurs three times. In two occurrences, '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' refers to a drummer[31] and the third occurrence refers to a person stitching a cot[32]. The old commentary for Akanāṉūṟu 19 refers to a drum called '*iḻuku paṟai*' and Perumaḻaippulavar Po. Vē. Comacuntaraṉār, a well-known modern commentator, explains further that the sound produced by the rubbing of the drumstick on this drum is comparable to the sound of the owl. The fact that a drum is called '*iḻuku paṟai*' establishes that the action of '*iḻuku*-ing' (rubbing) is associated with drums. Both rubbing and smearing are actions involving the movement of one object over and in contact with the surface of another. In the case of *iḻiciṉaṉ*, he could be called so because of his actions involving rubbing in connection with drumming. Thus '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' (< *iḻukiṉaṉ*) makes eminent sense referring to drummers.

As for the third occurrence, here *iḻiciṉaṉ* is making a cot in a hurry partly because of the impending village festival. It should be remembered that in the Classical Tamil society one person was not restricted to a single occupation. We have a potter functioning

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[29] Burrow 1943-46/1968: 49. Although, the Tamil Lexicon does not list it, Peruñcollakarāti, a lexical work published by Tamil University, Tanjavur, lists the variant '*iḻuciya kōlam*' in addition to '*iḻiciya kōlam*' discussed above. Also note *muḻuci* in Periya Tirumoḻi (2.8.7) cited earlier is a past participial form of *muḻucu* 'to dive, dip, get in, enter' which is a cognate of *muḻuku* 'to bathe the entire body by dipping or pouring, sink, be entirely immersed (as in business)'. See DEDR 4993.

[30] *South Indian Inscriptions* 6 (1928/1986) 148.

[31] Puṟanāṉūṟu 287.2 and Puṟanāṉūṟu 289.10

[32] Puṟanāṉūṟu 82.3

as a priest as they do even today.[33] We also have bards who go fishing.[34] We have a priest engaged in making conch shell bangles.[35] So, a drummer stitching a cot is not unusual too and his role in the impending village festival could have been drumming. Therefore, the notion that the word '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' is derived from '*iḻi*' and means 'a lowly person' is based on folk etymology. Consequently, the interpretation of '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' occurring in Classical Tamil texts as a 'low one' is wrong even though it has been the traditional interpretation for several centuries. This leaves us with the words '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*', '*iḻipiṟappāḻaṉ*', '*pulaiyaṉ*', and '*pulaitti*'. Let us look at the usage of the word '*pulaitti*' in Classical Tamil.

4. The Nature of Pulaitti/Pulaiyaṉ

Traditionally, '*pulaiyaṉ*' and '*pulaitti*' are interpreted as 'outcaste man' and 'outcaste woman' respectively. But it should be noted that a washerwoman is described in a poem as the '*pulaitti* with excellent qualities' as given below.

> *nalattakaip pulaitti pacai tōyttu eṭuttu* (Kuṟuntokai 330.1)

The use of the descriptive term '*nalattakai*', meaning 'one with excellent qualities', indicates that the person is held in high esteem, as shown by the following example from another Classical Tamil text.

> *nallēṉ yāṉ eṉru nalattakai nampiya*
> *collāṭṭi niṉṉoṭu col āṟṟukiṟpār yār*   (Kalittokai 108.17-18)

> Who can argue with you, the one with excellent qualities who
> thinks, "I am a good person"

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[33] Naṟṟiṇai 293.2 (with the reading '*palikaḷ*' instead of '*paṉikkaḷ*'), Naṟṟiṇai 200.1-4, and Brubaker 1979: 133.

[34] Akanāṉūṟu 196.1-4

[35] Akanāṉūṟu 24.1-2

In the Kalittokai example above, '*nalattakai*' is used to describe the qualities of a heroine. So, when the same is used to describe the washerwoman, it is hard to justify the interpretation of '*pulaitti*' as a base/outcaste person based on the assumption '*pulaitti*' is derived from '*pulai*' meaning 'baseness, defilement'.

Another reason to reject the notion of baseness associated with '*pulaitti*' is that it is used to refer to a priestess who worships Murukaṉ, the quintessential Tamil god. Classical Tamil texts also refer to the priestesses of Murukaṉ as '*kuṟamakaḷ*' meaning 'the woman of the *kuṟavar* community (the people of the mountain).'[36] Naṟṟiṇai 276.4 refers to the heroine and her friend as '*kuṟavar makaḷir*', meaning 'women of the *kuṟavar* community.' Moreover, when one considers that Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai also calls Vaḷḷi, the wife of god Murukaṉ, '*kuṟavar maṭa makaḷ*,'[37] a virtual synonym of '*kuṟamakaḷ*', one cannot consider the status of the priestess of Murukaṉ to be 'low' or 'base.'

In Kalittokai 117.7, a basket-maker is described as '*mātarp pulaitti*' meaning 'beautiful/loving *pulaitti*'. This instance also does not offer any reason to consider the status of the *pulaitti* to be 'low' or 'base'

The above usages mean that '*pulaitti*' could not mean 'base/outcaste person' and consequently '*pulaiyaṉ*' could not have meant a 'base/outcaste person' and '*pulai*' could not have meant 'baseness, defilement'.

5. Meanings of '*Iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'

It has been suggested that the term '*pulaiyan*' has been used to refer to a funerary priest in Puṟanāṉūṟu 360, while in another poem, Puṟanāṉūṟu 363, a funerary priest has been called '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'. Interpreting the term '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' as a low-born person, the post-Classical Tamil tradition has interpreted '*pulaiyaṉ*' also as an outcaste person. Let us see if these interpretations are valid.

Puṟanāṉūṟu 360.16-21, describing a royal funeral rite, calls the funerary priest '*pulaiyaṉ*' ('outcaste' in the traditional interpretation even though there is no basis for such interpretation from within the poem) as shown below:

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[36] Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai 241-45

[37] Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai 101. Naṟṟiṇai 102.8 uses '*kuṟavar maṭa makaḷ*' to refer to the heroine.

14

After the bier has been laid to rest in the salty land where spurge grows
abundantly, they stay on the grass and partake the toddy and a few grains
of rice which the priest (*pulaiyaṉ*) gives, and then are consumed by fire.
Even after this, many who simply ate and grew fat will not attain fame.

As seen below, Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 calls the royal funerary priest as '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'
(traditionally interpreted as 'person of low birth' or 'outcaste') instead of '*pulaiyaṉ*'.

> *kaḷḷi vēynta muḷḷiyam puṟaṅkāṭṭu*
> *veḷḷil pōkiya viyaluḷ āṅkaṇ*
> *uppilāa avippuḻukkal*
> *kaikkoṇṭu piṟakku nōkkātu*
> *iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ īyap peṟṟu*
> *nilam kaḻaṉ āka vilaṅku pali micaiyum*
> *iṉṉā vaikal vārā muṉṉē*
> *cey nī muṉṉiya viṉaiyē*
> *munnīr varaippu akam muḻutu uṭaṉ tuṟantē*   (Puṟanāṉūṟu 363.10-18)

Hart and Heifetz (1999: 207) translate this as:

> …Before the grim day comes when on the burning ground
> where thorn bushes grow wound together with spurge
> on that broad site where the biers rise up and a man of caste
> that is despised picks up the boiled,
> unsalted rice and does not look
> back and gives it
> to you so that you accept a sacrifice for which you have no desire
> with its dish the earth itself, before that
> happens, do what you have decided to do
> and utterly renounce this world whose farthest boundary is the sea!

One can see that Hart and Heifetz translate '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' as "a man of caste that is
despised". But this statement contradicts what Hart (1975b: 134) says when he discusses
aṇaṅku, the sacred power among Tamils as follows:

"It is natural that it should have been associated with events connected with disorder, with the increase of entropy. Most notable of such events from a human viewpoint are death and, to a lesser extent, disease or any other condition different from a normal state. Especially in the case of death, the most extreme case of human disorder, *aṇaṅku* was felt not only to be involved as a cause, but also to be produced. A locus of irremediable (but, in certain situations, controllable) disorder was thought to touch all around death, like a whirlpool.

"It is from this starting point that the negative characteristics of sacred power for the Tamils can be derived. The disorder resulting from death must be controlled by certain people, the low castes, who are also affected by the disorder they help control. Any dead substance which comes from the body, such as menstrual discharge, blood, or hair, carries with it a potential for disorder and chaos and must be controlled."

Based on this theory, one would expect only low castes to be involved in funerary priestly activities. If Hart is correct, one could not expect a high caste person to be engaged in any such activities supposedly held in low esteem by the ancient Tamils. In fact, Hart (1975b: 118) in explaining how Brahmins acted as intermediaries between Tamil culture and Indo-Aryan culture, confirms this expectation:

"This shows how the indigenous customs spread into Indo-Aryan culture: before a group was assimilated, Brahmins would come into it and adopt those values most admired by that group in order to gain respect. Thus the custom would have gained a foothold in the Brahminic religion and would be perpetuated when descendants of the Brahmins wrote lawbooks or copied texts with the appropriate insertions."

As for Brahmins adopting the indigenous ways, in agreement with the above view of Hart, we do find that Brahmins did become Tamil poets who composed poetry that imitated native bards acting as messengers as in the case of Kapilar[38] addressing chieftain Pēkaṉ. Moreover, although not mentioned by Hart, as shown by Kalittokai 72, the

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[38] Puṟanāṉūṟu 143

16

Brahmins also became actual messengers between the hero and heroine just like the *pāṇaṉ* 'bārd' and *pulaitti* 'washerwoman'! [39]

> Hart (1975b: 132) also says:
> "It must be remembered that, to the ancient Tamils, sacred forces were dangerous accretions of power that could be controlled only by those of low status. When the Brahmins arrived in Tamilnad, it was natural for them to disassociate themselves from these indigenous forces and to characterise themselves as "pure," that is, isolated to the greatest possible extent from polluting sacred forces; indeed, if they were to gain the people's respect, they had very little choice … It follows that the Brahmins had to adopt from the high-caste non-Brahmins many of the customs whose purpose was to isolate a person from dangerous sacred power."

But, notably, Hart (1975b: 41) portrays Vedic Brahmins as funerary priests in a Classical Tamil poem that should be called the Rosetta Stone for Tamil socio-cultural history:

> "The Tamils did believe in a Valhalla to which warriors who died in battle would go; indeed, so strong was their belief that a warrior should die in battle that they would cut with swords men who had died in bed before burying them, as in Puṟanāṉūṟu 93:
>
> > Who is left to defeat in battle
> > advancing as the strong-thonged drum roars out?
> > Those who came could not prevail before your vanguard,
> > but scattered and ran.
> > The mean kings there died
> > and so escaped the rite
> > that would have rid them of their infamy:
> > when they had died in bed,
> > their bodies would have been taken,
> > and, all love for them forgotten,

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[39] Kalittokai 72.18. The post-Classical epic Cilappatikāram (13.47) also presents Kaucikaṉ, a Brahmin, as a messenger between Mātavi, the courtesan, and Kōvalaṉ, the hero.

to purge them of their evil,

Brahmins of the four Vedas and just principles

would have laid them out on green grass

prepared according to ritual,

would have said,

"Go to where warriors with renowned anklets go

who have died in battle

with manliness their support,"

and would have cut them

with the sword.

They died there, great one,

while you received a fine wound

as you attacked, making battle scatter

and bringing down on the field of killing

elephants whose rut hummed with striped bees

as it trickled into their mouths."

What is interesting in this poem by Auvaiyār, the famous poetess, is that Vedic Brahmins[40] are described as participating in a burial ceremony—not cremation—and that too by cutting the corpse. One can only imagine the amount of polluting forces unleashed by this act, if Hart's theory is correct. If Vedic Brahmins adopted the values and practices held in high esteem by the Tamil society, then Brahmins should not have become funerary priests and that too ones who cut the dead body if such action was the basis for designating the performers of such actions as low caste people. This means only one thing. There was no opprobrium associated with funerary priests which means they were not considered outcastes or low-born.[41] This also means that there was no occupational pollution associated with a funerary priest.

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[40] In the above poem, Hart has translated '*nāṉmaṟai mutalvar*' in the Tamil text as 'Brahmins of the four Vedas'. But Tamil '*mutalvar*' meaning 'first ones' seems to be the plural equivalent of Sanskrit '*purohita*' meaning 'placed foremost or in front, a family priest'. Thus '*nāṉmaṟai mutalvar*' means 'family priests following the four Vedas'.

[41] Hart's theory of *aṇaṅku* was justifiably criticised by V. S. Rajam 1986: 262 n. 22, who notes:

"… Hart says that there were special classes of people such as bards and other low caste people, whose occupation was to keep this power in its condition; they themselves were thought to be dangerous, as they had to possess *aṇaṅku* in order to control it elsewhere.

Earlier, we have also seen that most probably a Brahmin who acted as a priest performing ritual worship of the war drum made of leather was called the 'high one'.[42] This means that the indigenous Tamil priests were held in high esteem by the society and naturally Brahmins had no reluctance to taking up those occupations. So a *pulaiyan*, an indigenous Tamil priest, could not have been an untouchable or low-born. So how do we explain the terms '*pulaiyan*' and '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'? To answer this question, we have to consider the influence of Jainism on Classical Tamil culture.

6. Jainism and Classical Tamil Society

It must be noted that from within the Classical Texts *per se*, there is nothing to indicate *pulaiyan* or *pulaitti* was untouchable or of low social status. On the other hand, *pulaitti* is positively described as one with excellent qualities. It is only through the linkage provided by the Puṟanāṉūṟu poems 360 and 363 that there is anything to suggest that the occupation of funerary priest was considered negatively by some tradition in Tamil Nadu. Given that neither Vedic nor native Tamil traditions considered the funerary priest to be of low status, what could have been the tradition that influenced Puṟanāṉūṟu 363?

It must be remembered that at the time when Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 was composed, North Indian eschatological views were competing with native Tamil views. This is obvious when one compares Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 with Puṟanāṉūṟu 364. Both poems are addressed to the same hero. We already looked at Puṟanāṉūṟu 363, which exhorts the hero to renounce the world. Now, consider Puṟanāṉūṟu 364 in the translation below.[43]

Hart seems to make this inference from the poems which indicate that in ancient Tamil society, drummers played different kinds of drums in order to enhance their king's *aṇaṅku* in battle where the *aṇaṅku* of the victorious king's dead enemies would be supposedly unleashed. In addition, the drummers played and the bards sang to protect the wounded hero from the animals. Since these animals, according to Hart, were 'impregnated' with sacred power, he seems to conclude that the drummers and the bards were associated with *aṇaṅku* by partaking in war activities or in the aftermath of the battle. As per Caṅkam poetry, neither 'the bards' nor other 'low caste people' had any association with *aṇaṅku*; one cannot claim that they possessed *aṇaṅku* in order to control it elsewhere. Their involvement in battle or funeral rites does not adequately substantiate their proclaimed association with *aṇaṅku*."

[42] See section 2.2.

[43] Puṟanāṉūṟu 364 is given below.

   vāṭā mālai pāṭiṉi aṇiyap

O great one who fights bravely, come let us enjoy,

with the wife of the bard wearing a garland that will not wither and

the bard having on his head a large lotus flower that did not

bloom in a lake and shines like a flame,

throwing a big black male goat on the red fire and

eating big pieces of rich meat cooked with seasonings with our

tongues reddened from drinking liquor, moving the meat around in

our mouths and giving to those who solicit gifts!

It will be hard to do those things on the day we go to the burial

ground with its urns, where in the hollow of the old tree with many

roots descending to split the earth and swaying in the wind an owl

keeps shrieking!

As one can see, the tone of the poem is very different from that of 363. Although it is supposed to deal with the same eschatological theme as poem 363, poem 364 emphasises enjoying life here on earth while it lasts. But poem 363 advises renunciation. Poem 364 talks about burial while poem 363 talks about cremation in reference to the same king. The author of poem 363 seems to be influenced by a different tradition. What was this tradition?

This is where the religious history of ancient Tamil country becomes significant. Based on epigraphy, we know Jainism has been present in the Tamil country as early as the 2nd century BCE.[44] The presence of Jainism is also indicated by references to Jain monks[45] and possibly Jain householders[46] in Classical Tamil texts. Puṟanāṉūṟu 166

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pāṇaṉ ceṉṉik kēṇi pūvā
erimaruḷ tāmaraip perumalar tayaṅka
maiviṭai irumpōttuc centī cērttik
kāyam kaṉinta kaṇṇakaṉ koḻuṅkuṟai
naṟavu uṇ cevvāy nāttiṟam peyarppa
uṇtum tiṉṟum irappōrkku īyntum
makiḻkam vammō maṟappō rōyē
ariya ākalum uriya peruma
nilam paka vīḻnta alaṅkal palvēr
mutumarap pottil katumeṉa iyampum
kūkaik kōḻi āṉāt
tāḻiya peruṅkāṭu eytiya ñāṉṟē

[44] Mahadevan 2003: 135

[45] Akanāṉūṟu 123.2, Maturaikkāñci 476-483

indicates the presence of some in the Tamil land who were opposed to the Vedic tradition. Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai 243 indicates the presence of some opposed to the sacrificial worship of Murukaṉ by the priestess. Given the adoption of native Tamil rituals by Vedic Brahmins, and the known presence of Jains in the Tamil country, the people who were opposed to the Vedic and native Tamil worship were most likely Jains. So, could Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 be influenced by Jainism?

An argument identical to the one in Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 is made by the author of the Jain epic Cīvakacintāmaṇi (ca. 9th century CE). Here, the king who has renounced his worldly life explains the uselessness of worldly life to his queens who wants him back as a householder, in the chapter called Muttiyilampakam 'Chapter on Release'. [47]

> *uppilip puḻukkal kāṭṭuḷ pulai makaṉ ukuppa ēkak*
> *kaippali uṇṭu yāṉum veḷḷiṉ mēl kaviḻa nīrum*
> *maippoli kaṇṇiṉ nīrāl maṉai akam meḻuki vāḻa*
> *ipporuḷ vēṇṭukiṉṟīr itaṉai nīr kēṇmiṉ eṉṟāṉ* (Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2984)

This can be translated as follows:

> He said, "When the priest (*pulai makaṉ*) gives the boiled rice without salt
> in the cremation ground, I will eat that offered by his one hand and lie on
> the bier, and you will spread the tears from your collyrium-adorned eyes
> over the floor of the house. You desire that (useless) life! Now you listen
> to this." [48]

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[46] Maturaikkāñci 476

[47] Vijayalakshmy 1981: 123 says, "It can be stated without hesitation that it is a Jain religious work garbed in Kāvya form. It contains the whole philosophy, especially in Muttiyilampakam."

[48] Cīvakacintāmaṇi 1986: 1451. Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar, the medieval commentator (14th century CE) of Cīvakacintāmaṇi, explains '*pulai makaṉ*' as '*purōkitaṉ*' (< Skt. *purohita* 'a family priest'). Interestingly, the commentator suggests that the priest was called '*pulai makaṉ*'–apparently pejoratively–because he was engaging in actions/rituals inappropriate for his own caste thus implying that the priest was a Brahmin who was doing something beneath his caste status. Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar suggests that the priest could have been a barber too. (In either case, according to Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar the priest was not an untouchable.) It should be noted, however, that there is no specific information in Puṟanāṉūṟu 360, Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 or Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2984 about the funerary priest being either a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin such as a barber. Naṟṟiṇai 293 mentions a potter serving as a priest and Puṟanāṉūṟu 228 mentions a potter making a funerary urn to intern a dead king's body, but there is no explicit reference to a potter being a funerary priest.

The similarity in the rationale given for renunciation in both poems, Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 and Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2984, is very striking indeed. In fact, Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar compares the funerary priest in Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2984 to the *pulaiyaṉ* in Puṟanāṉūṟu 360 and *iḷipiṟappiṉōṉ* in 363. Given that the Cīvakacintāmaṇi is an epic following a non-Vedic religion of renunciation, Jainism, the author of Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 was most probably a follower of Jainism too. This suggests that the term '*iḷipiṟappiṉōṉ*' could have been used in Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 from a Jain perspective. An examination of the Jain tradition seems to confirm this hypothesis.

6.1 The Jain Tradition and 'Iḷipiṟappiṉōṉ'

According to the Jain tradition, the infinite number of karma-driven rebirths can be classified into a small number of categories, as explained below.

> "Four main birth categories or destinies (*gati*) are set forth: those of gods (*deva*), humans (*manuṣya*), hell beings (*nāraki*), and animals and plants (*tiryañca*) … Three of four gatis are said to have a corresponding realm or 'habitation level' in the vertically-tiered Jaina universe; thus gods, humans, and hell beings occupy the higher (heavenly), middle (earthly), and lower (hellish) realms respectively" (Jaini 1979: 108).

Of these, gods and hell beings are born spontaneously without parents. As a result of good deeds, human beings are born in the world of gods, which is above the human world. When their karmic effect runs out, they are supposed to fall down/descend to be born as human beings. Similarly, due to bad karma, human beings fall and are re-born as hell beings. For instance, Sūyagaḍaṃga 1.5.1.5, an ancient Jain text originating in around the third or second centuries B.C.,[49] says:

According to Brubaker 1979: 133-138, in modern South India, besides barbers who are sometimes assisted by the washermen, potters and Dalits also officiate as funerary priests for different groups, and all of them participate in animal sacrifices. Based on Puṟanāṉūṟu 93, one cannot rule out the possibility that in Puṟanāṉūṟu 360 and 363, '*pulaiyaṉ*'/'*iḷipiṟappiṉōṉ*' could have referred to a Brahmin priest. (See footnote 40.) For the date of Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar, see Zvelebil 1975: 72.

[49] The date of the text is based on Dundas 2002a: 23.

The impudent sinner, who injures many beings without relenting, will go to hell; at the end of his life he will sink to the (place of) darkness; head downwards he comes to the place of torture.[50]

Similarly, the Jain tradition held that a monk who returns to the life of a householder would go down to be born as a hell being after death.

Consider the following from Dasaveyāliya Sutta 11.7:

aharagai-vāsivasampayā

The same verse rendered in Sanskrit is:[51]

adharagati vāsopasampadā

W. J. Johnson (1995: 25) translates this as:

 (To return) means going down (after death).

Is there any evidence that these Jain beliefs prevailed in the Tamil country? In the 12th century commentary by Aṭiyārkkunallār for the Tamil Jain epic, the Cilappatikāram, we find the following interesting sentence in the commentary for Cilappatikāram 14.26.

iṉip pēriṉpattait tarum tavattil niṉṟōr ataṉai viṭṭu iḻitaliṉ viḷaivākiya nirayattuṉpattaiyuṟutalumām[52]

[50] The concept of hell as a place into which a sinner falls down (is re-born into) is found in the Tamil tradition also. Tirukkuṟaḷ 919 states that the soft shoulders of prostitutes constitute a hell into which bad men without proper character fall/descend. The Tirukkuṟaḷ (ca. 5th century CE) was authored by Tiruvaḷḷuvar who was "probably a Jain with eclectic leanings" according to Zvelebil 1975: 125f.

[51] This verse is part of the Cūlika 1, an appended chapter of the Dasaveyāliya Sutta. As the title says, it is a later addition to the main text, but still old. According to Dhaky 1993: 188, too, this chapter is considered quite ancient. We should consider it to have existed before the beginning of the Christian era.

[52] For the date of Aṭiyārkkunallār, see Zvelebil 1975: 191.

Further, it may also indicate the sufferings of hell that was the result of those who left the ascetic tradition which they had followed seeking bliss, and went down.

Although the commentary on the Cilappatikāram is several centuries later than the Dasaveyāliya Sutta 11.7, it seems to be following the same belief that held that a monk who returns to the life of a householder would go down to be born as a hell being after death. It is significant that the commentator uses *iḻi-* to describe going down. With respect to injury to animals, as given below, Cilappatikāram 10.90-93 show a belief that is not very different from the Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta 1.5.1.5 mentioned earlier.

> *eṟi nīr aṭai karai iyakkam taṉṉil*
> *poṟi māṉ alavaṉum nantum pōṟṟātu*
> *ūḻ aṭi otukkattu uṟu nōy kāṇiṉ*
> *tāḻ taru tuṉpam tāṅkavum oṇṇā* [53]

> If we are to go on the bank of the canal containing rushing waters and if
> the crabs with beautiful spots and snails suffer because we walk as we are
> used to, not being considerate to them, the resulting suffering of ours in
> the next birth in hell will be unbearable.

This suggests that at least with respect to basic beliefs related to non-injury there has been no discontinuity in Jainism in the Tamil country between the time of some of the old canonical texts such as the Prakrit Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta or Dasaveyāliya Sutta and the time of the medieval Tamil commentary of Cilappatikāram by Aṭiyārkkunallār. [54] So, we are not remiss in comparing the Cīvakacintāmaṇi (which is a few centuries earlier than Aṭiyārkkunallār's commentary) with the still earlier Puṟanāṉūṟu.

In Tamil, '*iḻi*' means 'to descend, dismount; to fall, drop down; to be degraded, disgraced, reduced in circumstances; to be inferior, low in comparison; to be revealed; to

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[53] The translation is based on the commentary by Aṭiyārkkunallār.

[54] At the time of the composition and compilation of the Dasaveyāliya Sutta, Śvetāmbara Jainism was not present in Tamil Nadu. According to Mahadevan 2003: 135, there are no references to Jain sects in the early Tamil epigraphs and so he concludes that the Tamil epigraphs pre-date the schism between the two sects.

enter into'. '*Iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' can be literally interpreted as 'one who has descending birth',[55] where:

iḻi = descending (verb stem acting as an adjectival participle)
iḻipiṟappu = descending birth (nominal compound)
iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ = one who has descending birth (adjectival noun)

Regarding the Tamil adjectival noun, Rajam 1992: 472 says:

> "… There is no particular time indicated by an adjectival noun.
> An adjectival noun can be translated as 'X has Y' or 'X with the quality Y', where X is denoted by the PNG suffix and Y is the nominal stem serving as the base for the adjectival noun …"

Given the soteriological views of Jainism, it appears that '*iḻipiṟappu*' 'descending birth' really refers to 'hell birth' or 'hell' which is different from the life of present birth on earth. We should note that as an adjectival noun, grammatically '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' can mean the future birth of the funerary priest as a being in hell. This is not as strange a usage as one might think.

According to the author of Puṟanāṉūṟu 5.6, those who lacked compassion and love in this life are '*nirayam koḷpavar*' meaning 'those who attain hell'. Similarly, Akanāṉūṟu 67.6 has a variant reading '*nirayam koṇmār*' meaning 'those who will attain hell' referring to the hunters in the arid region. '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' seems to be nothing but a different way of saying '*nirayam koḷpavar*' but in the singular. It should be noted that in his explanation for Paripāṭal 5.20, Perumaḻaippulavar Po. Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār, the modern commentator, considers the term '*iḻinta piṟappu*', synonymous with "*iḻipiṟappu*", to refer to hell beings also.

A post-Classical Tamil verse from the Jain text, the Ēlāti 67 (ca. 650-750 CE) ascribed to Kaṇimētāviyār, calls the seven hells of Jain cosmology '*iḻikati*', which is a hybrid word consisting of Tamil '*iḻi*' and '*kati*' (from Sanskrit *gati*).[56] In post-Classical

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[55] 'Descending birth' may sound inelegant compared to 'rebirth in hell', but we need to have 'descending' to conform to the meaning of '*iḻi*' and differentiate it from the non-Jain interpretation of 'low' caste birth in this world and thus to bring out the connection with Pkt. *aharagai* (Skt. *adharagati*). The 're' in rebirth has to be argued out only through the meaning of descending.

[56] For the date and authorship of the Ēlāti, see Zvelebil 1975: 120f.

Tamil texts '*kati*' has been used by Tamil Jains as well as Buddhists to refer to *piṟappu* 'birth'.[57] Thus '*iḷikati*' and '*iḷipiṟappu*' are synonymous with Sanskrit '*adharagati*' or

Tattvārtha Sūtra 3.1 of Umāsvāti mentions seven hells. According to Johnson 1995: 46, the Tattvārtha Sūtra is believed to have been written between 150 CE and 350 CE.

Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2817 mentions seven hells:

> *ceṟiyac coṉṉa poruḷ teḷintār cērār vilaṅkiṟ peṇ ākār*
> *kuṟukār narakam ēḻum…*

Vijayalakshmy 1981: 141 translates this as "People who had realised the facts explained above, i.e. about right faith, will neither be born in the animal world nor as a woman. They will neither go to any of the seven hells."

[57] Cīvakacintāmaṇi 270:

> *tollai nam piṟavi eṇṇil toṭu kaṭal maṇalum āṟṟā*
> *ellaiyav avaṟṟuḷ ellām ētilam piṟantu nīṁkic*
> *cellum ak katikaḷ tammuḷ cēralam cērntu niṉṟa*
> *illiṉuḷ iraṇṭu nāḷaic cuṟṟamē iraṅkal vēṇṭā*

Vijayalakshmy 1981: 136 translates this verse as:

> If we count the number of our previous births they are even more than the grains of sand in the ocean. We did not have any connection in those births. We are not going to have any connection in the births we are going to get after this birth. Therefore do not worry over the relationship we had only for two days [i.e. for short period].

See also Maṇimēkalai (30.95-96) for the use of '*kati*' to mean 'birth'. Moreover, Maṇimēkalai (20.2-7) describes the prison in the city of Pukār being converted into an enclosed complex consisting of a Buddhist temple, a monastery, a kitchen, and a dining hall as given below:

> *nirayak koṭum ciṟai nīkkiya kōṭṭam*
> *tīppiṟappu uḻantōr cevviṉaip payattāṉ*
> *yāppu uṭai nal piṟappu eytiṉar pōlap*
> *poruḷ puri neñciṉ pulavōṉ kōyilum*
> *aruḷ puri neñcattu aṟavōr paḷḷiyum*
> *aṭṭil cālaiyum aruntunar cālaiyum*

This can be translated as:

> As if those suffering in hell births because of the results of good deeds attained appropriate good births, the enclosed complex with the removal of the cruel hell-like prison and (establishment of) a temple of Buddha desiring Meaning, a monastery of those with compassionate heart, a kitchen and a dining hall …

Prakrit '*aharagai*'. Is there any other evidence that the Jains used '*iḻi*' as a verb to refer to a sinner going to hell (Skt. '*adharagati*' or its equivalent)? Indeed, we find such evidence in an 11th century inscription from Gawarwad in Karnataka.

> "When the base [*pole*] Chōḷā [sic!], failing in his position, deserting the religious practice of his own race, set foot upon the province of Beḷvala and burned down a multitude of temples, he gave his live head in battle to Trailōkyamalla, suddenly gave up the ghost, and brought about the destruction of his family, so that his guilt bore a harvest in his hand. That deadly sinner the Tivuḷa, styled the Pāṇḍya-Chōḷa, when he had polluted these temples of the supreme Jinas erected by the blest Permānaḍi, sank into ruin ['*aḻid adhōgatig iḻida*' better translated as 'perished and descended into hell']."[58]

Later, describing the result of the actions of Cōḻa, the inscription says:

> "As the Chaṇḍāḷa Chōḷa with wicked malignity worthy of the Kali Age had caused to be burnt down and destroyed the dwelling of the great Jinas, which was like the work(?) of Indra, it fell indeed into ruin."[59]

By the time of this inscription of 11th century CE, Tamil '*pulai*' and Kannada '*pole*' acquired the meaning 'polluted'. So, one cannot rely on this inscription to ascertain the original meaning of '*pulaiyaṉ*'. However, this inscription does show that a non-outcaste, the Cōḻa king, is described by the Jains as descending into hell because of his actions. Thus this inscription shows that Jains did use the verb '*iḻi*', the Kannada

What is interesting is that the prison is compared to hell and so when suffering in prison is compared to suffering in '*tī-p-piṟappu*' we should understand '*tī-p-piṟappu*' to mean 'hell'. Maṇimēkalai 12.61 also uses the word '*tī-k-kati*' meaning 'hell'. (We should note that '*tī*' also means 'hell' as in Tirukkuṟaḷ 168.) Thus we have two parallel sets of usages, '*iḻikati*' and '*iḻipiṟappu*' on the one hand and '*tī-p-piṟappu*' and '*tī-k-kati*'on the other.

[58] Barnett 1919-20/1982: 345. I thank Robert Zydenbos for his input in translating "*aḻid adhōgatig iḻida*" (Personal communication by email, May 16, 2007). 'Cōḻa' is referred to as 'Chōḷa' in the inscription.

[59] Barnett 1919-20/1982: 346. According to Jha 1991: 29, Caṇḍālas (also written as Chaṇḍālas), along with the Śvapākas and Mātaṃgas, were part of the indigenous Indian tribal population that was tabooed and subsequently damned as untouchables in the pre-Mauryan post-Vedic times.

equivalent of Tamil '*iḻi*', and '*adhogati*'*,* an equivalent of Skt. '*adharagati*' or Pkt. '*aharagai*' or Tamil '*iḻikati*'*,* meaning 'hell' or metonymically 'hell birth'. Thus we can conclude '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' in Puṟanāṉūṟu means 'one who will go to hell' or 'one who will have hell birth.'[60] In this connection, it is interesting to note what Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta 2.2.25-27 says in connection with occult practices:

> "Some men differing in intellect, will, character, opinions, taste, undertakings, and plans, study various evil sciences; viz. (the divination) … from changes in the body, … from seeds; … incantations, … oblations of substances; … the art of Cāṇḍālas, of Śabaras, of Draviḍas, of Kaliṅgas, of Gauḍas, of Gāndhāras; ... These and similar sciences are practised (by some men) for the sake of food, drink, clothes, a lodging, a bed, and various objects of pleasure. They practise a wrong science, the unworthy, the mistaken men. After having died at their allotted time, they will be born in some places inhabited by Asuras and evildoers. ..."

One should note that Classical Tamil texts mention that indigenous Tamil priests performed divination using *molucca*-beans, often motivated by the need to divine the reason for changes in the body of a love-sick girl as in Naṟṟiṇai 282. Akanāṉūṟu 98.18 mentions that a Tamil priest praised the exalted name of Murukaṉ, the god. As we saw earlier, in Patiṟṟuppattu 30.34, a Tamil priest utters incantations. Both indigenous and Brahmin priests offered sacrificial offerings. According to Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta 1.5.1.2-3, evildoers suffer punishment in hell. This suggests that, according to Jain beliefs, Tamil priests would, after their death, be re-born in hell.

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[60] Kalittokai 118.1-3 uses the Tamil verb '*eḻu*' meaning 'to rise, ascend' to describe a soul dying and going to heaven. This suggests that the use of '*iḻi*' meaning 'to fall, descend' is natural to describe the action of going to hell. According to its editor, U. Vē. Cāmināthaiyar, the post-Classical Tamil Jain text Peruṅkatai 1.47.170-171 (ca. 9th century CE) uses '*iḻi*' to describe a *deva* who descends from heaven to earth after exhausting his good karma. Gopani and Bothara 1989: 44 translate the 12th century Jain teacher Hemacandra's Yogaśāstra 2.47 as "The *himsa* which is committed, in order to please the forefathers, as laid down in the Smritis (the Brahmanic scriptures) by the dull-witted people, paves the way for existence in a birth in the lower regions." What is interesting is that 'existence in a birth in the lower regions' is the translation of '*durgati*' in the original, thus indicating the continuing significance of the vertically-tiered universe to the Jain way of thinking.

  Based on the discussion so far, we have to differ from Rajam's interpretation of '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' as 'he of lowly birth' (see Rajam 1992: 440). But her statement regarding '*iḻinta*' in '*iḻinta mīṉ*' that, in most cases, '*iḻinta*' signifies movement in a lower direction provides the semantic basis for the case of '*iḻipiṟappu*' in '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' resulting in agreement with our interpretation of '*iḻipiṟappu*' = '*iḻikati*' = hell.

We should note that the Cōḻa king is described in the inscription as '*pole*' the Kannada equivalent of Tamil '*pulai*' and is described as polluting the Jain temples. He is also called a Caṇḍāḷa. Jain doctrine did not have a notion of pollution as Hinduism did and the Jain notion of impurity was related to unethical acts like violence and not birth. Hence Jainism could not be the source of the notion of caste.[61] But Jains lived as part of a larger society which believed in birth-based *varṇa* hierarchy. Jaini (1979: 67f.) notes that the Jains of Mahāvīra's time undoubtedly believed in some kind of *varṇa* hierarchy but they made no doctrinal claim of a divine origin for that hierarchy as did the Brahmins, nor did the Jains hesitate to admit even the outcastes, or untouchables into their order. In Uttarajjhayaṇa Sutta 12.37, an early Jain text, gods praise Harikeśa-Bāla, a Jain monk born in a family of Śvapākas, in the following words:[62]

"The value of penance has become visible, birth appears of no value! Look at the holy Harikeśa, the son of a Śvapāka, whose power is so great."

Similarly, the Ratna-karaṇḍa-śrāvakācāra 28 of Samantabhadra (4th century CE), who probably hailed from the Tamil country, says that even a Mātaṃga is divine if he possesses the Right Faith of Jainism.[63] Thus, according to the prevailing views of this period, the religious status of a person depended on conduct. Wiley (1999: 115) explains how the earliest Śvetāmbara commentary (not later than 5th century CE) traditionally

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[61] Personal communication by email, March 21, 2008 and April 28, 2008.

[62] According to Johnson 1995: 4f., the Uttarajjhayaṇa Sutta, at least in part, is as old as Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta but it was not committed to writing before the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century CE. In his research on the common Arya stanzas in the Uttarajjhayaṇa Sutta (also called Uttarajjhāyā), Alsdorf 1966: 157 says, "It is a well-known and generally recognised fact that in the metrical parts of the Jain canon the use of the Āryā metre is one of the simplest and surest criteria for a distinction between older and later strata." According to Alsdorf 1966: 158 n. 2, the chapter 12 of Uttarajjhayaṇa Sutta does not contain a single stanza in Āryā metre. Alsdorf 1962-63: 132 suggests that more probably the common nucleus of this story and a parallel Buddhist Pali story go back to an original in proto-canonical Eastern Prakrit. Thus in content and form, the story of Harikeśa-Bāla seems to be old.

[63] Samantabhadra preceded Pūjyapāda (see Williams 1963/1983: 20). Williams 1963/1983: 19 says that Samantabhadra "would seem to have been a native of the Tamil land."

attributed to Umāsvāti, Svopajña, explains Tattvārtha Sūtra 8.13 dealing with gotra karma as given below. [64]

> "There are two kinds of gotra: high and low. *Ucca gotra* is that [*karma*] which brings about excellence with respect to *deśa* (location), *jāti* (mother's lineage), *kula* (father's lineage), *sthāna* (rank), *māna* (esteem), *satkāra* (honor), *aiśvarya* (prosperity), and so forth. *Nīca gotra* is the opposite. It brings about birth as a *caṇḍāla*, a *muṣṭika* (cheat), a *vyādha* (hunter), a *matsyabandha* (fisherman), a *dāsa* (slave) and so forth."

Even here, one does not see any linkage with the four-fold Brahminical varṇa hierarchy in this discussion. Jinasena (9th century CE) developed a Jaina *varṇa* system paralleling the Hindu *varṇa* system according to Jaini (1979: 288-295). This system incorporated features like hypergamy which allowed men to marry women of lower status and not *vice versa*, and a Brahminical prejudice against members of the *śūdra varṇa* who were excluded from certain higher religious practices. According to Wiley (1999: 119), such practices included the ritual of *upanayana* as well as taking the *mahāvrata*s and *aṇuvrata*s. The *gotra*s of those belonging to the upper three *varṇa*s were defined as *ucca* (high) and *śūdra*s and *mleccha*s were considered *nīca* (low). Wiley (ibid.) adds that, Vīrasena, Jinasena's teacher, however, disagreed with Jinasena's views and defined karmic *gotra* as 'conduct' lineage, which was distinct from social *gotra* or 'caste' lineage and that those who practiced good conduct belonged to the *ucca gotra* and were eligible for the higher religious practices. Wiley (ibid.) also notes, "By so doing, Vīrasena reasserted the long-held *śramaṇa* position of the primacy of conduct as a determinate of religious status at a time when this idea was apparently falling out of favor among the Digambaras in South India."

The Gawarwad inscription seems to provide further evidence for the changing social attitudes of the Jains. It shows that even though Jain doctrine did not have the notion of pollution as the Brahmins did, by the 11th century CE, at least some of the Jains

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[64] For a discussion of the authorship of the Svopajña, see Johnson 1995: 46f. *Gotra karma* determines whether one will be reborn into high or low families. Regarding the *gotra karma*, Jaini 1979: 125 says, "There has been some disagreement on the precise meaning of this term; for Jainas, it appears to be concerned not simply with mundane aspects of the birth environment, but rather with whether that environment is more or less conducive to the pursuit of the spiritual life." All Sanskrit words in the discussion of *gotra karma* have been italicised here while Wiley (1999) does not italicise some of them.

seem to have been influenced by the notion of pollution in Hinduism too.[65] In this case, the pollution was said to be caused by a person who was not an outcaste by birth. Of course, in the case of a powerful Cōḻa king, this negative evaluation of him by Jains was of no consequence. But such an evaluation would have had a far more deleterious effect on a not-so-powerful Tamil funerary priest (*pulaiyaṉ*).

In the Classical Tamil text Puṟanāṉūṟu, in addition to the one occurrence of '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*', we encounter one instance of a semantically equivalent term, '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*'[66]. It is used to refer to a person who beats a drum amidst the hunters of the arid region. When one compares the use of '*nirayam koṇmār*' in Akanāṉūṟu 67, one can see that we have the same rationale for the use of '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' as we have for the use of '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'.

From the Jain perspective, such an appellation makes eminent sense. The Tamil priests perform animal sacrifices, and hunters kill animals. So these people would go to hell according to Jainism.[67]

That Jains included among the Caṇḍālas people who were not untouchables in the Tamil society ca. 9th century CE is indicated by the earliest Tamil lexicon, Tivākaram (ca. 9th century CE) authored by Tivākarar, a Jain, who includes *kavuṇṭar* along with *pulaiñar* among Caṇḍālas.[68] Today, the caste title Kavuṇṭar (also spelled as Gounder) is used by many dominant upper caste groups that include Vēṭṭuva Kavuṇṭar who, as indicated by their name, must have been hunters originally.[69] This indicates the basis on which Jains considered a group to be 'base'. The lifestyle of a hunter which involves killing of animals is anathema to Jains for whom non-injury to other living beings is a

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[65] Discussing a somewhat similar situation with respect to Jains subscribing to the notion of *sūtaka*, the polluted status due to the birth or death of a relative, Dundas 2002b: 19 says, "It would appear that *sūtaka* is a state informed by brahmanical ideology which the Jains, despite their differing doctrinal views on the rebirth process and ritual pollution, have subscribed to for cultural reasons."

[66] Puṟanāṉūṟu 170.5

[67] See Cīvakacintāmaṇi 2770. Although Puṟanāṉūṟu 363 does not specifically mention an animal sacrifice, there are many Classical Tamil poems such as Akanāṉūṟu 242 mentioning animal sacrifice by a priest.

[68] Tivākaram 1990: 79

[69] The term '*vēṭṭuva*' is the adjectival form of Tamil '*vēṭṭuvaṉ*' meaning 'hunter'. Although later than Tivākaram, many medieval inscriptions from 10th to 15th centuries CE from the Coimbatore district with a significant presence of Kavuṇṭars indicate the transformation of several tribal communities into caste communities. Earlier transformations such as this must have been the basis for the view found in Tivākaram. See *Kōyamputtūr Māvaṭṭak Kalveṭṭukaḷ* 2006: xix.

cardinal principle. So it is not surprising that the Jain perspective would include a *pulaiyan/pulaiñan*, who sacrifices animals, in the category of the Caṇḍāla too.

This interpretation explains all the facts about '*pulaiyan*' and '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' or '*iḻipiṟappāḻan*' found in the Classical Tamil texts. There is no reason to suppose untouchability or caste practices existed in the ancient Tamil society. That Brahmins in ancient Tamil country would not hesitate to take up funerary priesthood involving cutting of the bodies or priestly ritual for the leather drum indicates there was no occupational pollution associated with it by the Tamils. One should also note that Brahmins took to functioning as messengers between hero and heroine just like the bard and washerwoman. This shows that there is no textual evidence that the bard and the washerwoman were considered low or polluted by the ancient Tamils in any context. (It should be noted that those Brahmin immigrants who came to the Tamil country in the pre-Common Era had already broken with orthodox Brahminic tradition and were probably not averse to taking up non-Indo-Aryan customs in their new land, the adoption of cross-cousin marriages being an example.)[70] Also, the mainstream Tamils performed animal sacrifices just like the Vedic Aryans did. So, there was no conflict of values on this score between the Brahmin immigrants and the mainstream Tamils. The people who criticised these practices were Tamil Jains based on their emphasis on non-violence.

An important finding resulting from the lack of notions of occupational pollution or untouchability in the Classical Tamil society is that it also affirms the lack of the notion of caste in that society.

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[70] In the orthodox Brahminical view, regions outside the Āryāvarta were impure and one who went to those places had to perform expiations. For instance, the Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtras 1.1.2.13-14 state the following:

> The inhabitants of Avantī, of Aṅga, of Magadha, of Surāṣṭra, of the Dekhan, of Upāvṛt, of Sindh and the Sauvīrās are of mixed origin.
> He who has gone to (countries of) the Āraṭṭas, Kāraskaras, Puṇḍras, Sauviras, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, or Pranūnas shall offer a Punastoma or a Sarvapṛṣṭhā (iṣṭi).

Also, according to Georg Bühler, the translator, the country of the Kāraskaras was in the south of India. This means that those Brahmins who came to the Tamil country from the Āryāvarta must have been adventurous to begin with. So, they probably had a proclivity to take up non-traditional activities that their counterparts in the Āryāvarta might have disapproved. See Deshpande 1993: 84-85 for a discussion of the concept of Āryāvarta.

See Trautmann 1981: 303 for South Indian Brahmins practicing cross-cousin marriage ca. 200 BCE.

Anthropologists who have studied the modern Indian society have underscored how fundamental the notion of ritual purity/pollution is for the caste system.[71] When there is no purity/pollution difference between Brahmins and *pulaiyan* as portrayed in the Classical Tamil texts, there is no reason to assume the presence of a caste system in the Classical Tamil society. However, as we shall see, this state of affairs would change in the post-Classical Tamil society.

6.2 Post-Classical Etymologization of 'Pulai'

Based on the Jain attitude towards animal sacrifices and meat eating we discussed earlier, one can see why the post-Classical author, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, probably a Jain with eclectic leanings, said the following in his Tirukkuṟaḷ (ca. 5th century CE): [72]

> *kolai viṉaiyar ākiya mākkaḷ pulai viṉaiyar*
> *puṉmai terivār akattu*   (Tirukkuṟaḷ 329)

This can be translated as:

> The Ones engaged in acts of killing are the ones who are *pulai viṉaiyar* (the ones engaged in acts of *pulai*), in the mind of those who know baseness (*puṉmai* = *pul+mai*).

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[71] Tyler 1973: 148-157 says:

> "… the jāti system consists of named categories that are hierarchically ordered and the hierarchy constrains social relations. The differentiating criterion underlying both the categorization and the hierarchy is the concept of purity and pollution … The concept of purity/pollution does not derive from or refer for its justification to economic and political criteria. Its ultimate reference and derivation is always sacerdotal and ritualistic… the Brāhman and the untouchable embody the two poles of purity/pollution, and their unalterable positions reflect more clearly than anything else the persistence and primary importance of purity/pollution to the whole jāti system."

Jains, however, have a different viewpoint. According to Jaini 1985: 88, there is no place for the Brahmin in the Jain social hierarchy with his position taken by the Śramaṇa.

[72] For the date and author of Tirukkuṟaḷ, see Zvelebil 1975: 123f.

This is the first time *pulai* and *puṉmai* are associated in Tamil literature. Thus the foundation for the folk etymology of *pulai* < *pul-* is laid in the course of emphasizing the non-violence principle of Jainism. It is from this point onwards that '*pulai*' comes to be associated with baseness. The Maṇimēkalai, a post-classical Tamil Buddhist work whose author displays enormous respect for Tiruvaḷḷuvar, has a similar interpretation of the term '*pulai*' associating it with drinking liquor, lies, lust, killing, and deceit, which have been avoided by the exalted ones.[73]

In the post-Classical Tamil period, Buddhists in the Tamil country criticised meat eating as well albeit with a slight difference. The Maṇimekalai suggests that Buddhists in the Tamil country did consider vegetarianism to be the ideal and meat eating to be bad. However, under unavoidable circumstances eating the flesh of animals that have died of old age was acceptable to them. Vēluppiḷḷai (1997: 88f.) notes:

> "… it is interesting to observe the Cātuvaṉ-Nāka Nakka tribal chief dialogue in the sixteenth chapter, entitled, 'The Story of Ātirai Offering Alms'. The tribal chief says: 'Give this young man a lovely tribal girl, warm wine, and plenty of meat'. When Cātuvaṉ rejects these gifts, the chief is angry. Cātuvaṉ replies 'The discerning have rejected mind-fuddling wine and the taking of life. The death of those who are born and the birth of those is [sic!] like sleeping and waking. As we know that those who do good reach the heavens and the rest fall in deep hell, the wise have rejected these two evils.' …

> "The chief wants to adopt a virtuous way of life but he says that he cannot give up meat and wine, so late in his life. Cātuvaṉ recommends him to eat only flesh of animals dying of old age and not to kill people who land there from shipwreck."

While Vēluppiḷḷai paraphrases Cātuvaṉ's recommendation to the chief regarding meat eating, a literal translation of the relevant Tamil text would be, "Avoid the evil way (*tī tiṟam*) towards all living beings except those animals that die growing old." One can see clearly what Tamil Buddhists thought about eating meat even though they seem to have accepted it when unavoidable.

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[73] Maṇimēkalai 24.77-80

When Brahminic Hinduism won in its struggle against Jainism and Buddhism in the post-Classical Tamil period, *pulai*-ness came to be associated with beef-eating.[74] But the Brahmins and some non-Brahmins had by then been Jainised to be vegetarians and ultimately they came to occupy the top rungs of the post-Classical Tamil social hierarchy.

In order to appreciate fully the influence of Jainism in the Tamil society we have to figure out the original meaning of '*pulai*' before the advent of Jainism. For this, let us look at the etymology of '*pulai*' in a more rigorous analysis.

7. 'Pulai' and Pollution in Dravidian Languages

We saw earlier what '*pulai*' could not have meant in the Classical Tamil texts, i.e., '*pulai*' must have had no sense of 'baseness' or 'pollution'. But, in order to reconstruct what '*pulai*' did mean, we shall have to use Dravidian linguistics as well as Classical Tamil philology.

Scholars who have studied modern South India have noted the importance of social hierarchy and the notion of purity and pollution. Brubaker (1979: 129) said:

> "It is in village India that the caste system is most at home, and it is generally in the villages of the Dravidian-speaking South that the hierarchical ordering of society in terms of purity and pollution is most highly articulated."

Slater (1924: 53) even posited a Dravidian origin of the Indian caste system. According to him,

> "the caste system is much stronger, much more elaborate, and plays a much larger part in social life in South India than in North India; and it reaches its highest development in that part of India which is most effectively cut off from land invasions from the north, the narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. This fact is by itself sufficient to prove that caste is of Dravidian rather than that of Aryan origin."

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[74] Tēvārappatikaṅkaḷ 6.95.10

The above scholars simply projected current conditions into the distant past. Hart (1987: 468) supported the theory of the origin of the caste system among Dravidian speakers by providing a linguistics-based explanation for '*pulai*'. Discussing the notion of caste as he saw in Tamil texts, Hart states,

"Perhaps the most revealing word in all the poems is *pulai*, which, according to the *Tamil Lexicon*, means baseness, uncleanness, defilement [incurred from contact with a ritually polluting substance or person], evil, animal food, outcaste, and stench. It is clearly cognate with the Dravidian root *pul*[75], which the DEDR traces through several languages. Among its meaning in various languages are Kannada pole meaning menstrual flow, impurity from childbirth, defilement, Koḍagu *pole*, pollution caused by menstruation, birth, or death, Tulu *polè*, pollution, defilement, and far afield, Brahui *pōling*, stain, stain on one's character. Most of the Southern languages have some equivalent for Tamil *pulaiyaṉ*, man of low caste. In early Tamil literature, *pulai* or a derivative is sometimes used as a term of abuse (as *paṟaiyaṉ* is used even today); in Maṇi. 13, for example, it is used in scolding a Brahmin, who stole a cow from a sacrifice, while in Kali.72.14, a women [sic!] uses the term (in the feminine) in abuse to her husband's courtesan. Similar uses include eating meat (Iṉṉā 12.3 - a later text; this is a common meaning in later times), and visiting prostitutes (Tirikaṭu. 39.1, also a later text)."

Hart seems to be tracing the notion of pollution and the resulting notion of untouchability all the way to the time of the Proto-Dravidian language. But, as we shall see below, there are significant problems with the notion of pollution being an indigenous cultural element of the speakers of the Proto-Dravidian language.

In this context, it is important to keep in mind that Srinivas (1952: 105) and Bean (1981: 588), who have studied the notion of purity/pollution in South India, consider that Koḍagu '*pole*', a cognate of Ta. '*pulai*', refers to ritual impurity or ritual pollution and not to ordinary lack of cleanliness. In fact, Srinivas (1952:105) warns:

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[75] It seems by 'Dravidian root' Hart indicates Proto-Dravidian root.

"A simple association of ritual purity with cleanliness, and ritual impurity with dirtiness, would be a neat arrangement, but it would falsify the facts. One comes across ritually pure robes which are very dirty, and snow-white clothes which are ritually impure."

Accordingly, in the following discussion, unless otherwise specified, pollution refers to ritual pollution.

The Tamil Lexicon meanings for '*pulai*' quoted above by Hart have been separated by DEDR to be grouped under two different items, #4547 and #4552. The words in #4552 deal with 'flesh'. But, the words in #4547 fall into two semantic clusters centered on 'meanness/badness of character', and 'pollution'. In discussing how different words were grouped in DEDR, Burrow and Emeneau acknowledge[76]:

"The semantic problem has been handled conservatively. It is clear that in each language independently, items not originally homophones have merged because of the language's phonological changes…On the other hand, it often seems that there were homophones in PDr, since it seems impossible to find anything but an ad hoc, or even at times improbable, connexion between the series of meaning for the two groups of etyma. Here there is much room for difference of opinion as to what semantic developments are probable or plausible, but we have thought it wise to be conservative even when it involves abandoning the groupings of the Tamil Lexicon or Kittel or other dictionaries."

Thus, Burrow and Emeneau had thought of '*pulai*', meaning 'meanness, pollution', of DEDR 4547, and '*pulai*', meaning 'animal food', of DEDR 4552 to be homophones but etymologically and semantically separate in origin. Hart seems to have chosen to connect them by providing an association between flesh and pollution through his theory and thus positing a common etymology.[77] But, if the association between flesh and pollution were

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[76] Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (p. xvi)

[77] Hart and Heifetz 1999: 334 state, "'Flesh' is the translation of *pulavu*, a word whose etymology probably connects it with *pulai*, 'impurity', 'pollution', and *pulaiyaṉ*, an untouchable." Hart and Heifetz 1999: 310 state, "A Pulaiyaṉ is an untouchable—a person contaminated with dangerous power (*pulai*), the same sort of power inherent in a menstruating woman or in meat."

true for the earliest periods of Dravidian society's existence, then it must be true for the Classical Tamil period also. To override Burrow and Emeneau's views, one has to prove this association through independent Classical Tamil data that demonstrate the use of '*pulai*' in the sense of 'flesh' in Classical Tamil. But we know that there is not even a single occurrence of '*pulai*' in the sense of 'flesh' in Classical Tamil.[78] Moreover we have already seen earlier that Hart's theory of pollution arising from flesh is invalidated by Puṟanāṉūṟu 93. On the other hand, the connection between flesh and baseness is only provided in connection with the non-violence principle of Jainism as first suggested by Tirukkuṟaḷ in the post-Classical Tamil period.

Secondly, the arrangement of DEDR implies for '*pulai*' a root with a radical vowel *o* as in **pol-*. G. S. Starostin, too, reconstructs a root with a radical vowel *o*, as in **pol-*[79] for DEDR 4547 while Krishnamurti (2003: 11) reconstructs a root with a radical vowel *u* as in **pul-* with a meaning 'pollution' for the same. This divergence among Comparative Dravidian linguists regarding the radical vowel highlights the problem of *i/e* and *u/o* alternation in Dravidian[80] and the difficult problem of reconstructing the original radical vowel and the associated meaning.[81] None of the above-mentioned linguists

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[78] There are more than 70 instances in Classical Tamil where the forms, '*pulavu*', '*pulā*', '*pulāa*', '*pulāl*', and '*pulāal*', are used referring to 'flesh'.

[79] http://tinyurl.com/24bg65 visited 4/30/2007.

[80] For a discussion of the *i/e-u/o* alternation in Dravidian, see Burrow 1940-42/1968: 18-31; Krishnamurti 1958: 458-468, 1961/1972: 111-118; Subrahmanyam 1983: 201-224. There is evidence that this alternation is not confined to the cases where the derivative vowel is –*a*, as has been posited by Burrow and Krishnamurti. For example, see DEDR 4281 Ta. *puy*, *poy* 'to be pulled out'; DEDR 3728 Ta. *nuṟukku*, *noṟukku* 'to crush'; DEDR 3698 Ta. *nuṅku*, *noṅku* 'tender palmyra fruit'.

[81] Words meaning 'meanness, badness' should be reconstructed with **pul-* and belong together with Ka. *pul* 'mean' in DEDR 4301. Words 'currently' interpreted as meaning 'pollution' should be reconstructed with **pol-* as we discuss in the following section where their original meaning will be explored too.

analyzed Classical Tamil texts philologically.[82] As a result, they did not realise that '*pulai*' (< *polay)[83] could not have meant 'pollution'.

On the issue of tracing any linguistic or semantic feature to the Proto-Dravidian stage, consider the following statements of Franklin Southworth[84].

"In the South Asian context ... there is a great deal of evidence to show that phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features have diffused in many cases across language boundaries, and even between languages of different families... Thus, the presence of a feature in two contiguous languages, such as Tulu and Kannada or Tamil and Telugu, is not necessarily evidence for earlier common development. Thus it becomes necessary–perhaps more necessary in South Asia than in other parts of the world–to find criteria for distinguishing between earlier innovations which took place in a single speech community which subsequently split up, and innovations which diffused across existing language boundaries (areal convergence)."

In his recent work, Southworth (2006: 134) considers only those words with cognates in South Dravidian as well as North Dravidian to be reliably reconstructible to the Proto-Dravidian stage. Thus, if one wants to establish that '*pulai*' meaning 'pollution' was a Proto-Dravidian concept, it is imperative that we have a cognate of '*pulai*' in the sense of pollution in a North Dravidian language such as Brahui. But Br. *pōling* does not connote a sense of ritual pollution. Franklin Southworth too agrees that the meaning 'ritual pollution' cannot be reconstructed as the Proto-Dravidian meaning for **pul-* as done by Krishnamurti.[85] Thus the notion of '*pulai*' as 'ritual pollution' cannot be taken as Proto-

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[82] The importance of Classical Tamil philology for Dravidian Linguistics is exemplified by an error in Krishnamurti 1961/1972: 117 who has used the Tamil Lexicon's erroneous citation of '*pukavu*' in Aiṅkuṟunūṟu 314 as meaning 'entering' to reconstruct the etymology of Ta. *pō* 'to go'. But the Classical Tamil word '*pukavu*' means 'food' and not 'entering'. However, there is a Classical Tamil word '*pukuvu*' meaning 'entering' (Puṟanāṉūṟu 160.5) which the Tamil Lexicon and DEDR do not list. Consequently, one cannot support the case for the derivation of Ta. *pō* < **puk-* postulated by Krishnamurti.

[83] PDr. **-ay* > Ta. *–ai*. See Subrahmanyam 1983: 201-224 and 391. See Hart 1975b: 119 for the interpretation of '*pulai*' as "the ancient Dravidian word for pollution".

[84] Southworth 1976: 115f.

[85] Personal communication by email, March 2, 2008.

Dravidian.[86] This further underscores our earlier finding that '*pulai*' could not have meant 'ritual pollution' and consequently, '*pulaiyan*' or '*pulaitti*' in Classical Tamil texts could not have referred to a polluted person.[87] If so, what did '*pulai*' signify?

Untill now, scholars have not realised the basis for the semantic shift that has occurred in the case of '*pulai*'. Discussing the use of '*pulaitti*' in Classical Tamil texts to refer to the washerwoman, Pillay (1969: 208) says, "It is not known how the term 'Pulaitti' came to be employed to denote her, because in later times the class of washerman was not identical with that of 'Pulaiyar'."[88] It is unfortunate that this seeming discrepancy did not lead scholars to investigate the notion of *pulai* diachronically. In order to arrive at the original meaning of '*pulai*', it is worth considering what Fox (1995: 110) says regarding the meaning of a word:

> "The meaning of a word is clearly not properly encompassed simply by
> stating that it refers to a particular object or concept; any such statement
> must include the contribution made by the context in which the word
> appears, its COLLOCATIONS, THE SENSE RELATIONS that exist

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[86] Bray 1978: 241 glosses '*pōling*' as 'stain, stain on one's character, pollution', with the examples "what's the stain you've got on your clothes? ... he put a stain on my character but God cleared me…a stain has been put on as which will last till Judgement Day [Bal. pōlink prob. lw. ; cf. Tam., Ma. pula, Kan. pole, taint, pollution?" It is obvious from his examples that Bray is talking about ordinary cleanliness and not ritual pollution and he was doubtful if '*pōling*' was semantically equivalent to cognates of '*pulai*' in South Indian languages. In any case, DEDR does not include 'pollution' as a meaning for '*pōling*'. Brahui '*pōling*' also does not have any connotation of untouchability.

[87] According to Franklin Southworth, there is a lack of sufficient proof of words referring to untouchability, even at the Proto-South Dravidian I stage. (Personal communication by email, February 23, 2008) According to Krishnamurti 2003: 501f., Proto-South Dravidian I could be dated ca. 1100 B.C.

[88] See the Tamil Lexicon for the meaning 'washerwoman' for '*pulaitti*'. Naccinārkkiniyar had the same problem of having to explain the use of '*pulaitti*' to refer to a washerwoman in Kalittokai 72.14. He solved this problem by calling this usage as *cerarcol* 'word of anger'. However, a philological analysis of the occurrences of '*pulaitti*' (e.g. Puranānūru 311.2) in reference to a washerwoman in Classical Tamil shows that the usage was not based on anger. Interestingly, DEDR 4549 has Tu. *polambuni* 'to clean, wash, rinse'; Te. *pulumu* 'to rub and wash with the two hands, scour' with an implied *pol-. Naccinārkkiniyar also called the usage of '*pulaiyan*' to refer to a bard in Kalittokai 68.19 as 'word of anger'. It is clear that in Naccinārkkiniyar's time '*pulaiyan*'/'*pulaitti*' referred to outcastes; but he did not consider the funerary priests in Puranānūru 360, Puranānūru 363, and Cīvakacintāmani 2984, the bard in Kalittokai 68 and the washerwoman in Kalittokai 68 as outcastes. That is probably why he did not interpret the use of '*pulaiyan*'/'*pulaitti*' in these instances literally.

between the word in question and others, its CONNOTATIONS, and so on."

Accordingly, we shall analyze the Classical Tamil texts with respect to '*pulai*', its collocations, and contextual connotations.

8. The Meaning of 'Pulai'

In trying to derive the real meaning of the term '*pulai*' in Classical Tamil texts, one has to look within the Classical Tamil texts themselves. Considering the phenomenon of the alternation of radical vowels *i/e* and *u/o* in Dravidian, a correct understanding of the term '*pulai*' involves philology and linguistics. Earlier, it has been mentioned that DEDR implies that *pulai* < **pol-*. We also know that DEDR 4550 *poli* 'to flourish, prosper' and DEDR 4551 *poli* 'to shine' are also derived from **pol-*. Based on the Dravidian alternation of *u/o*, one can conceive of both '*poli*' and '*pulai*' to be derived from the same root, **pol-*. Is there any philological basis for us to aver that? Also, is there any philological basis to conclude DEDR 4550 and 4551 are etymologically related and not mere homophones as Burrow and Emeneau have decided? The answers to both questions are in the affirmative. As we shall see below, the Classical Tamil textual evidence leads one to conclude that DEDR 4550 and DEDR 4551 share the same etymon and that '*pulai*' and '*poli*' are indeed derived from the same root **pol-* meaning 'to be bright, shine, prosper, appear grand, be auspicious'.[89]

In Classical Tamil texts, the prosperous state of a king and his retinue is compared to the bright state of moon surrounded by stars[90]. Thus, we have clear philological evidence to show that DEDR 4550 *poli*, 'to flourish, prosper', shares a common etymology, **pol-*, with DEDR 4551 *poli*, 'to bloom (as the countenance), shine'; *polivu* 'brightness of countenance, beauty, splendour, gold'; *polan* 'gold'. The connection between '*poli*' and '*pulai*' is indicated by the following evidence.

In the Classical Tamil texts, the term '*pulaiyan*' is used in connection with the bard (*pāṇan*), drummer (*tuṭiyan*), and the priest. The term '*pulaitti*' is used in connection

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[89] Although the Tamil Lexicon mentions 'to be auspicious or fortunate' as one of the meanings for '*poli*', DEDR has not included it in either #4550 or #4551. Brightness, beauty, and auspiciousness are closely linked in the Tamil worldview as exemplified in this section.

[90] Patiṟṟuppattu 90.17-8, Maturaikkāñci 769-70

with the priestess[91] and washerwoman[92]. An examination of these texts reveals that the bard, drummer, and the priest had an important role in ensuring the auspiciousness and prosperity of the community. Indeed, Hart (1975b: 130) says that "a Pāṇaṉ must sing in a house to make it habitable and put it in an auspicious condition". Moreover, Hart (1975b: 139) states,

> "Pāṇaṉs would be kept in the houses of the rich to impart to the family life of a man and his wife an aura of auspiciousness, and to entertain them by singing songs appropriate to the various times of the day and the various activities of the house. Thus, in Aiṅ. 407 and 410, a Pāṇaṉ plays his *yāḻ* as the hero and his wife play with their son, while, in Aiṅ. 408, many bards are present singing mullai songs (which evoke the fertility of the rainy season) as the couple stays at home."

In Aiṅkuṟunūṟu 408, mentioned above, the man and his wife being in the state of auspiciousness is indicated by the word '*polintu*', the past participial form of '*poli*'.[93]

Also, the aim of any sacrifice was for one or more persons or for the community to attain a state of '*polivu*'/'*polital*', 'brightness, beauty, prosperity, auspiciousness'.[94] The sacrificial altar and the sacrificing priest/priestess have to be in a state of '*polivu*'/'*polital*' too. Moreover, when the bards and drummers play their instruments in the battlefield or in the home of the patron, they say '*polika*', meaning 'may there be auspiciousness and prosperity'.

In the following poems, the auspiciousness of the sacrificial altar is shown:

Consider the following poem [emphasis mine].

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[91] Puṟanāṉūṟu 259.5

[92] Naṟṟiṇai 90.3, Kuṟuntokai 330.1

[93] The role of the bards in causing auspiciousness is repeated by Hart (1975b: 135): "Similarly, a bard was supposed to play the lute and sing in the houses of the high-class people in order to create an auspicious atmosphere, that is to say, an aura of order."

[94] Even in Sanskrit, brightness, beauty, prosperity and auspiciousness go together as in '*śubham*' meaning 'anything bright or beautiful, beauty, charm, good fortune, auspiciousness, happiness, bliss, welfare, prosperity'

muṟi purai eḻil nalattu eṉ makaḷ tuyar marugku
aṟital vēṇṭum eṉap pal pirappu irīi
aṟiyā vēlaṉ tarīi aṉṉai
*veṟi ayar viyaṉ kaḷam **poliya** ētti*
maṟi uyir vaḻaṅkā aḷavai…   (Akanāṉūṟu 242.8-12)

I translate the above as:

> Before our mother says, "I have to know the reason for the suffering of my
> beautiful daughter", spreads different kinds of offerings, and invites *vēlaṉ*,
> the priest, who is ignorant (of the real reason of love-sickness) and praises
> (Murukaṉ, the god) so that the broad sacrificial altar, where the rite of
> possession takes place, becomes auspicious (*poliya*) and sacrifices the life
> of the sheep …

The following lines show the auspicious appearance of the priestess of Murukaṉ, the god
[emphasis mine].

*veṟi koḷ pāvaiyiṉ **polinta** eṉ aṇi tuṟantu*
āṭu makaḷ pōlap peyartal
āṟṟēṉ teyya alarka ivvūrē   (Akanāṉūṟu 370.14-6)

I translate the above as follows:

> Auspiciously adorned (*polinta*) like the priestess who performs the dance
> of possession, I cannot bear to leave you (and return home) removing my
> ornaments like the priestess who leaves (after the performance). Let the
> town gossip.

The following examples show the grand appearance of the bards in the king's
court, who are offered beautiful gifts made of gold. Scholars who have studied purity and
auspiciousness issues in Indian society note that gold is considered auspicious as well as
ritually pure.[95] The first poem has the following text:

> *aḻal purinta aṭar tāmarai*
> *aitu aṭarnta nūl peytu*
> *puṉai vilaip **polinta polaṉ** naṟun teriyal*
> *pāṟu mayir irun talai **poliya**c cūṭi*
> *pāṉ muṟṟuka niṉ nāḷ makiḻ irukkai*   (Puṟanāṉūṟu 29.1-5)

Hart and Heifetz (1999: 24) translate this as follows [emphasis mine]:

> During the day, may the bards crowd around the festive
> sessions of your court and their dark heads and tangled hair
> turn **radiant** with fragrant garlands of **gold**, **beautifully**
> crafted of thin plaques fashioned in the shape of lotuses
> tempered in the fire and threaded onto fine pounded wires!

The second poem has the following text [emphasis mine]:

> *oṉṉār yāṉai ōṭaip poṉ koṇṭu*
> *pāṇar ceṉṉi **poliya**t taii*
> *vāṭāt tāmarai cūṭṭiya viḻuc cīr*
> *ōṭāp pūṭkai uravōṉ maruka*   (Puṟanāṉūṟu 126.1-4)

Hart and Heifetz (1999: 81) translate the above as follows [emphasis mine]:

> You are descended from the lord whose steadfast rule was never
> to run away, that man of eminence who seized gold from the ornaments
> on the foreheads of enemy elephants and then made the foreheads
> of bards **glow**, adorning them with **golden** lotuses that do not fade!

The following lines show the auspiciousness wished for (*polika*) the battlefield by the drummer [emphasis mine].

> ***polika** attai niṉ paṇai tayaṅku viyaṉ kaḷam*
> *viḷaṅku tiṇai vēntar kaḷam toṟum ceṉṟu*

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[95] Madan 1985: 13 and 17

*pukar muka mukavai **polika** eṉṟu ētti*
koṇṭaṉar eṉpa periyōr yāṉum
am kaṇ māk kiṇai atira oṟṟa   (Puṟanāṉūṟu 373.27-33)

This is translated as follows:

> May the broad battlefield resounding with your drum become auspicious
> (*polika*).
> The great ones said that they used to go to the battlefields of kings of
> resplendent lineage, praised so that the field becomes auspicious (*polika*),
> and received the elephant as a gift. I, too, beating on the beautiful head of
> my dark *kiṇai* drum so that it vibrates …"

The following excerpt shows how the bard (*pulaiyaṉ*) invokes auspiciousness (*polika*) for
the house of the hero [emphasis mine].

oli koṇṭa cummaiyāṉ maṇa maṉai kuṟittu em il
***polika** eṉap pukunta niṉ **pulaiyaṉai**k kaṇṭa yām*   (Kali.68.18-19)

I translate the above as:

> When we saw your bard, *pulaiyaṉ*, who, because of the usual noise in this
> house, entered our house saying "may it become auspicious" (*polika*)
> mistaking this house for the one where you are having your wedding …

Anthropologists who have studied issues of purity and auspiciousness in modern
India consider marriage to be the ritual of auspiciousness par excellence.[96] It should be
noted that in the poem above, the bard, referred to by the term '*pulaiyaṉ*', is free to enter
a house where a marriage is taking place.[97]

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[96] Marglin 1985: 1.

[97] In contrast, according to Srinivas 1952: 75, in recent times Poleyas, members of a scheduled caste in the
Coorg society, are not allowed into the Coorg ancestral house where marriages take place.

Moreover, a poem in Puṟanāṉūṟu explicitly describes a bard as one full of goodness/auspiciousness.[98] Here a bard (*pāṇaṉ*) is addressed as '*naṉmai niṟainta nayavaru pāṇa*', meaning 'O, likeable bard who is filled with auspiciousness', where '*naṉmai*' means 'auspiciousness', '*niṟainta*' means 'is filled with', and '*nayavaru*'" means 'likeable'.

We have seen the role of the bard, the priest, the priestess, and the drummer in causing auspiciousness/prosperity in the Classical Tamil society. The probable reason for using the term '*pulaitti*' to refer to the washerwoman is similar in that she enhances the brightness of the clothes by her washing. Moreover, the washerwoman also had a role to play in festivals as indicated below. As in fact Hart acknowledges, auspiciousness was associated with festivals.[99]

> *āṭu iyal viḻaviṉ aḻuṅkal mūtūr*
> *uṭai tēr*[100] *pāṉmaiyiṉ peruṅ kai tūvā*
> *vaṟaṉ il pulaitti ellit tōytta*
> *pukāp pukar koṇṭa puṉ pūṅ kaliṅkam…*   (Naṟṟiṇai 90.1-4)

A translation of this is:

> the short beautiful cloth washed during the day and starched by the well-
> to-do washerwoman of the noisy old city of victory festivals who obtains
> clothes with regularity and works without giving rest to her hand …

Thus, we see that the washerwoman is not poor or destitute. Clearly, the washerwoman's washing is important for the celebration of the festivals as well. Thus her work not only brings brightness to the clothes but also presumably contributes to the auspiciousness of

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[98] Puṟanāṉūṟu 308.3. Hart and Heifetz 1999:178 translate '*naṉmai niṟainta*' as 'worthy' which is infelicitous. The Tamil Lexicon gives the following meanings for '*naṉmai*': 1. goodness ; 2. excellence; 3. benefit, benefaction, help, aid; 4. utility, usefulness; 5. virtue, morality; 6. good nature, good temper; 7. auspiciousness, prosperity, welfare; 8. happy occasion; 9. puberty; 10. good karma; 11. word of blessing, benediction; 12. abundance; 13. superiority; 14. that which is new; 15. beauty; 16. Eucharist.

[99] Hart 1975b: 136.

[100] The text follows the Auvai Cu. Turaicāmi Pillai edition which was based on more manuscripts than all other available editions.

community festivals. When the warrior goes to battle, he wears 'the pure white cloth washed by the washerwoman' as described by the text '*pulaitti kaḻīiya tū veḷ aṟuvai*' (Puṟanāṉūṟu 311.2). Given the necessity for auspiciousness in the battlefield as we have seen earlier, the white clothes provided by the washerwoman probably contributed to it as well. Therefore, the usage of the term '*pulaitti*' as one who brings brightness and auspiciousness is very apt with reference to the washerwoman.

Based on the discussion above, it is obvious that the logical association of '*pulaiyaṉ*'/'*pulaitti*' in Classical Tamil is with '*poli*' meaning 'to shine, be bright, be auspicious'. Therefore, Ta. *pulai* and Ta. *poli* are derived from a common etymon *pol-, in much the same way as DEDR 4509 Ta. *putai* 'to bury' and *poti* 'to conceal' are derived from *pot- and DEDR 946 Ta. *oṭi* 'to break' and Ta. *uṭai* 'to break as a pot burst into fragments' are derived from *oṭ-.[101]

Based on the above evidence, we can conclude that the words, '*pulaiyaṉ*' and '*pulaitti*', had positive connotations in Classical Tamil. They did not connote despised persons as happened in later times. We can also conclude that '*pulai*' meant 'prosperity, auspiciousness' (synonymous with Tamil '*polivu*' and Sanskrit '*maṅgala*') and not 'pollution'. Accordingly, '*pulaiyaṉ*'/'*pulaitti*' was a male/female, who was supposed to engender auspiciousness or prosperity through different occupations such as priest, washerwoman, drummer, and bard.[102] They were not considered polluted. This result is diametrically opposite to the traditional view of '*pulai*'. The problem with the traditional understanding has been mainly due to scholars not realizing (1) the impact of Dravidian *u/*o alternation as well as the semantic shift caused by the impact of Jainism resulting in the misidentification of *pol- 'to be auspicious' with *pul- 'to be mean, base' followed

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[101] While the above examples show instances where the replacement of *-o- by -u- has been complete, in the case of Tamil *poṟ-* we also see a variant *puṟ-* in Classical Tamil texts and inscriptions. A Cēra king Irumpoṟai is mentioned in Tamil Brahmi inscriptions as Irumpoṟai as well as Irumpuṟai (See Patiṟṟuppattu 89.9, Mahadevan 2003: 405 and 407). A town belonging to Periyaṉ, a chieftain, is referred to as Poṟaiyāṟu and Puṟantai in literary texts (Naṟṟiṇai 131.8, Akanāṉūṟu 100.13). Puṟantai is a probable abbreviation of *Puṟaiyāṟu as in the case of Kuṭantai < Kuṭavāyil and Uṟantai < Uṟaiyūr.

[102] Interestingly, according to the Tamil Lexicon, on the third day of a Koṅku Veḷḷāḷa funeral, as he pours milk at the foot of a green tree after throwing the bones of the deceased in water, the barber utters the auspicious word '*poli*'. In Telugu, the caste of the barber is called '*maṅgala*'. Brubaker (1979) discusses the ritual roles of potters, washermen, and barbers in Indian villages.

by (2) the Brahminical misinterpretation of 'iḷipirappiṉōṉ' as low-born in this life instead of the Jain usage meaning 'one who will be born in the netherworld or hell'.[103]

With the correct understanding of '*pulai*', it is obvious that those who were called '*pulaiyaṉ*'/'*pulaitti*' in Classical Tamil society were not a despised group of people. They might have been poor. But, as people who were believed to be engaged in actions that resulted in the prosperity/auspiciousness of the society, they were held in high esteem as epitomised by the honourable treatment of the bards by the kings and chieftains. After all, even today many Brahmin *arcaka*s, the temple priests, are also poor, but nobody will consider them to be untouchable because of their low economic status.

9. Post-Classical Tamil Cultural Change

It is well known that during the period when the Classical Tamil poems were composed, there were Brahmins and Jains in the Tamil society. Yet, if Classical Tamil society did not manifest any untouchability or an all-encompassing caste hierarchy in that period, how did it change to be a caste society later on? For answering this question, one has to look at the attitude of the Tamils towards the cultural elements from the north.

9.1 Classical Tamil Attitudes Towards Vedic Culture

Classical Tamil texts reveal that the Tamils of the period were aware of the values of the Indo-Aryan speakers. They were not hostile to the Vedic tradition. At the same time, they also felt very confident about their own Tamil culture. For instance, in Paripāṭal 9.12-26 (ca. 350-400 CE), the term Tamil is equated with pre-marital love and is explained to Vedic Brahmins as one would explain to persons of a different culture.[104]

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[103] It is worth noting that a similar misunderstanding of *u/o* alternation could have prevailed in the case of the homophones, DEDR 4293 *purai*, 'to be defective' (<*pur-*), and DEDR 4541 *purai*, 'to be appropriate, proper' (<*por-*). For instance, '*puraiyil tīmoḻi*' in Naṟṟiṇai 36 can be interpreted as 'defect-less sweet words' or 'improper evil words'. It is from the context we know that the second interpretation is the right one with '*purai*' meaning 'propriety'. On the other hand, in Naṟṟiṇai 236, '*puraiyiṉṟu*' means 'there is no fault' with '*purai*' meaning 'defect'. But the lack of any socio-religious implication associated with '*purai*' has helped maintain the correct understanding of '*purai*' in its different contexts.

[104] For the date of the Paripāṭal, see Zvelebil 1975: 107.

Another poem, Puṟanāṉūṟu 362, translated by Hart and Heifetz (1999: 206), says:

> ... Brahmins! Listen to the uproar
> produced by the assault, its force as hard to withstand as Death
> himself!
> This has nothing to do with your Four Vedas! This is not a matter
> for mercy. It has nothing to do with Righteousness but rather
> Acquisition![105] ...

Another poem, Kuṟuntokai 156, has the hero asking a Brahmin: [106]

> In the words of your unwritten learning
> is there any medicine to unite separated lovers?

The famous poem (Puṟanāṉūṟu 183) by Āriyappaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ 'the Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ who defeated the Aryan army' states that:

> And even among the four classes with difference known, if a person from
> a lower class becomes learned, even a person from a higher class will
> submit to him to study. [107]

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[105] The poem does not have any word meaning 'your' in describing the Four Vedas. But the context suggests that the poet considers that the Vedas belong to the Brahminic tradition.

[106] Kuṟuntokai 156.5-7

[107] Hart and Heifetz 1999: 118 translate the lines as follows:

> And with the four classes of society distinguished as different,
> should anyone from the lowest become a learned man,
> someone of the highest class, reverently, will come to him to
> study!

Hart and Heifetz's translation of *kīḻppāḷ* (< *kīḻ* 'below' + *pāl* 'division or class') as 'the lowest' class and *mēṟpāl* (< *mēl* 'above' + *pāl* 'division or class') as 'the highest class' is unwarranted. What is intended by the poet is the relative position of two classes with respect to each other. In any case, even Hart and Heifetz 1999: 286 say that the notion of four *varṇa*s has never been applicable to the Tamil society.

What Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ refers to is the *caturvarṇa* (four classes) which was prevalent among the Indo-Aryan speakers of North India and was absent in the Tamil areas. In fact, according to Manu, the Sanskrit lawgiver, all the Tamils (Drāviḍa) were Kṣatriyas who did not perform the Vedic rituals and, as a result, sank to the rank of Śūdras. In this, they were similar to the Greeks, and Chinese in the eyes of the Brahmins.[108] Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ may have based his statement on a story such as the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad story of Dṛpta-bālāki of the Gārgya clan and Ajātaśatru, the king of Kāśi. In this story, Dṛpta-bālāki, a Brāhmin, realises that he lacks the knowledge of Brahman and seeks to become the pupil of Ajātaśatru, a Kṣatriya.[109] (As his name suggests, it is likely Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ has had encounters with the Aryan culture.)

      The originally North Indian religion of Jainism has been present in Tamilnadu as early as the second century BCE. In the Classical Tamil period, the Jain principle of *ahiṃsā* has influenced their negative attitude towards the non-Jain Tamil priests and their religious practices. But this attitude seems to have been confined to the Jain community in the Classical Tamil period. It is probably in the post-classical era of the Kalabhra period that, as found in the Tirukkuṟaḷ, the Jain religious view seems to have become very influential in Tamil society with a concomitant semantic shift in the meaning of '*pulai*'. What should be noted is that Jainism criticised non-Jain priests in the Tamil country, *pulai viṉaiyar*, which probably included priests following the indigenous Tamil tradition as well as priests following the Vedic tradition as base people—but not as low castes— for their religious practices involving animal sacrifices.

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[108] Manu Smṛti 10.22 and 10.43-44

[109] Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad II.I.1-15. According to Radhakrishnan, "In this dialogue, Dṛpta-bālāki, though a Brāhmaṇa, represents the imperfect knowledge of Brahman, while Ajātaśatru, though a Kṣatriya, represents advanced knowledge of Brahman. While Dṛpta-bālāki worships Brahman as the sun, the moon, etc., as limited, Ajātaśatru knows Brahman as self."

Ajātaśatru said: 'Is that all?' 'That is all' (said Gārgya). (Ajātaśatru said) 'With that much only it is not known.' Gārgya said, 'Let me come to you as a pupil' (Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad II.I.14).

Ajātaśatru said: 'Verily, it is contrary to usual practice that a Brāhmaṇa should approach a Kṣatriya, thinking that he will teach me Brahman. However, I shall make you know him clearly. …' (Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad II.I.15).

We also have the story of the hunter in Mithila to whom Kauśika, a Brahmin, goes to seek knowledge (Mbh1 3.198-203). For an English translation of the story, see Mbh2, 1981: 618-638.

In post-classical times, the Buddhist use of '*pulai*' also reflects this semantic shift notwithstanding whatever differences there might have been between Jain and Buddhist views regarding meat eating. In response, Brahmins and some non-Brahmins seem to have adopted vegetarianism to steal the thunder from the positions of the Jains. It is probably this common viewpoint that formed the basis for the Brahmin-Vēḷāḷar alliance during the Bhakti period (ca. 6th-9th centuries CE) and later.

9.2 Transformation of the Tamil Society

One can agree with Hart (1975b: 55f.) when he says,

> "Brahmins must have been coming from North India for a long time …
> Now, the first Brahmins who came to Tamilnad must have found a society
> utterly alien to them and their way of life … The earliest Brahmins did the
> only thing they could do if they were to stay in Tamilnad: they associated
> themselves with the kings … Thus they had to participate in such
> unbrahminical activities as … cutting the bodies of those who had died in
> bed … Through these activities, the earliest Brahmins made themselves a
> place in the society of ancient Tamilnad. As other Brahmins came to
> Tamilnad, they found that they were accepted and did not need to change
> their accustomed way of life—not, at least as much as the earliest
> arrivals."

With the indigenous religious tradition weakened by the harsh criticism by Jainism, and post-Classical rulers of the Tamil country overwhelmingly supporting Jainism or Brahminic Hinduism, the later proponents of Jainised Brahminic Hinduism branded the officiants of the old Tamil religion as inferior. Even though, similar to the Classical Tamil poets, Nammāḷvār, a Vaiṣṇava non-Brahmin of ca. 9th century CE, used the theme of the *veṟiyāṭṭu*, the ecstatic dancing ceremony common in indigenous Tamil worship, he recommended the Brahminical mode of worship. He characterised *veṟiyāṭṭu* as one of lowliness (*kīḻmai*) and called the drummer participating in that ceremony as '*kīḻmakaṉ*' meaning 'low person'.[110] It should be noted that the Jain-influenced Classical Tamil texts referred to the drummer as *iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*, 'one who will attain hell', only referring to his

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[110] Nālāyira Tivviyap Pirapantam 3069-3070

afterlife and not implying any hierarchical position in the society in this life. But the later post-Classical Tamil texts with Brahminical influence transformed the drummer into *kīḻmakaṉ* 'low person' in the present life. This was probably facilitated by the grammatical nature of the adjectival noun '*iḻipiṟappāḻaṉ*' which was amenable to be interpreted as 'low-born person' in this life incorporating notions of hierarchy. The Śaiva author of a post-Classical didactic text of ca. 825 CE, Ācārakkōvai, advised people not to seek the counsel of *pulaiyar* (referring possibly to indigenous non-Brahmin priests) regarding suitable days to conduct important rituals. He asked them to seek the counsel of Brahmin priests instead.[111] From the hymns of Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi Aḻvār, a Vaiṣṇava Brahmin of ca. 9th century CE, one can see that the society considered the status of *pulaiyar* to be the opposite to that of Brahmins.[112] Kallāṭam 26.11, a Śaiva text of ca. 10th century CE, uses '*pulai*' in the sense of pollution.[113]

Thus the transformation of *pulaiyaṉ* and *pulaitti* who were held in high esteem by the Tamil society into untouchables despised by the society may ultimately be traceable to the non-violence principles of Jainism. Thus, ironically, the centuries of violence directed against the untouchables in Tamilnadu resulted as an unintended consequence from the principles of non-violence of the Jains. But the historical memory of the Tamils regarding their own society and culture seems to have been lost in the post-Classical Tamil period in much the same way as the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas had forgotten that the original word referring to their saints was '*āḻvār*' and not '*āḻvār*'.

Jain, Buddhist, and Brahminic pilgrimage networks connected the Tamil country with regions where other Dravidian languages were spoken. These networks could have facilitated the semantic shift of Tamil '*pulai*' to spread to cognate words in other languages such as Kannada, Tulu, and Telugu in the centuries following the Classical Tamil period. Given that the earliest inscriptions and literary texts in Telugu and Kannada are dated well after the evidence of the semantic shift in Tamil, we can expect that the

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[111] *talaiiya nal karumam ceyyuṅkāl eṉrum*
pulaiyarvāy nāḷ kēṭṭuc ceyyār tolaivu illā
antaṉarvāy nāḷ kēṭṭuc ceyka avar vāyccol
eṉrum piḻaippatu ila   (Acārakkōvai 92)

'*Pulaiyar*' is plural for '*pulaiyaṉ*'/ '*pulaitti*'. For details about the work and its author, see Zvelebil 1975: 122.

[112] Nālāyira Tivviya Pirapantam 914

[113] For the date of Kallāṭam, see Zvelebil 1975: 1.

usage of cognates of Tamil '*pulai*' in these languages would only reflect the meaning of 'ritual pollution' and not of 'auspiciousness'. Even then, one can see the vestiges of the role of auspiciousness in the Tamil utterance '*poli*' by the barber in the Koṅku region during the funeral ritual. The present low social status of the barbers and washermen are most probably due to the semantic and cultural shifts that have occurred in South India after the post-classical Tamil period. Dumont (1970: 48) terms barbers and washermen "specialists in impurity". But going by the discussion above, the Classical Tamil ritual specialists should be understood as 'specialists in auspiciousness or *polivu* or *maṅgala*'.[114]

10. Conclusions

Through an inter-disciplinary approach utilizing Tamil philology, epigraphy, Jaina texts, anthropology, and Dravidian linguistics, a significantly new picture of early Tamil society emerges.

In the Tamil country of the early centuries CE, Vedic Brahmins acted as funerary priests for warriors cutting the corpse before its burial. They also most probably served as priests worshipping the battle drum made of leather. If there was any notion of ritual pollution associated with these activities in the Tamil society, Brahmins would not have chosen to perform them. So, there is no evidence of any indigenous Tamil notion of occupational ritual pollution at the time.

Jain mendicants considered a Tamil priest (*pulaiyaṉ*) to be a base person destined to go to hell in his next birth and called him '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*'. They also considered a hunter to be destined to go to hell and called him '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*'. Thus '*iḻipiṟappiṉōṉ*' and '*iḻipiṟappāḷaṉ*' referred to future births resulting from the karma of killing other life forms according to Jain beliefs. They did not signify low caste status in this life.

The Dravidian linguistic phenomenon of '*o*' > '*u*' alternation led to a folk etymology attributing 'baseness' to '*pulaiyar*' (<**pol-*) instead of 'auspiciousness.' At least as far as South India is concerned, through the folk etymology of *pulai* < **pul-*, 'to be base, mean', the non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) principle of Jainism seems to have contributed to the attribution of baseness to *pulaiyar* from ca. 5th century CE onwards. Mainly due to

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[114] Madan 1985: 22 refers to Marglin calling the *devadāsī*s as 'harbingers of auspiciousness' and 'specialists in auspiciousness'. The ritual specialists of Classical Tamil period, however, precede the *devadāsī*s by several centuries. It is probably not a coincidence that in Telugu the caste of barbers is called '*maṅgala*' (http://tinyurl.com/2qz4zb , visited March 16, 2008).

the impact of Jainism, in the post-classical period some Brahmins and non-Brahmins too seem to have adopted negative attitudes towards early Tamil religious ceremonies. They ascribed low social status to the *pulaiyar* probably facilitated by a misinterpretation of the term '*iḻipiṟappāḷan*'. '*iḻiciṉaṉ*' which, till now, has been considered to be derived from *iḻi-*, 'to descend, dismount, fall, drop down, be reduced in circumstances, be inferior' is to be derived from *iḻuku* 'to rub, smear'.

The lack of any association of ritual pollution with '*pulai*' suggests untouchability could not have been indigenous to the speakers of Tamil and other Dravidian languages. When there is no purity/pollution difference between Brahmins and *pulaiyaṉ* as portrayed in the Classical Tamil texts, there is no reason to assume the presence of a caste system in the Classical Tamil society.

In other words, there were no despised low castes or untouchables in the ancient Tamil society.[115] For more than a millennium, these facts have been forgotten by the Tamil tradition. Tamil scholars, as a result of uncritical reliance on medieval commentators and lack of awareness of the impact of Jainism-induced semantic changes involving key ancient Tamil terms like '*pulaiyaṉ*', have failed to realise the true state of ancient Tamil society. The implications of the argument developed in this study are enormous. The Dravidian speakers as a whole should have had no indigenous notion of untouchability or a caste system. To the extent that parts of the population in regions currently dominated by speakers of Indo-Aryan languages were also originally Dravidian speaking, those parts of the Indo-Aryan South Asia also should have been originally free of untouchability. In short, the Scheduled Castes or Dalits and the lower castes of those

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[115] A term which has been sometimes interpreted as referring to the low caste women of the agricultural tract who works in the field is '*kaṭaiciyar*', the plural of '*kaṭaici*' which the Tamil Lexicon considers to be a variant of '*kaṭaicci*', meaning 'low caste woman of the agricultural tract who works in the field, the youngest girl of a family'. '*Kaṭaiciyar*' occurs once in Puṟanāṉūṟu 61.1. In Tamil society, those who were performing subordinate functions were referred to by words meaning 'young ones'. Other such words were '*iḷaiyar*' and '*piḷḷai*', which referred to warriors and royal officials as well. As such, the terms had nothing to do with low caste. Otherwise, the word, '*piḷḷai*', would not have come to be used to refer to the upper caste Vēḷāḷar. We also have the opposite usage where a person authorised to supervise others was called '*mutali*' as in '*paṟai mutali*' meaning 'the chief among Paṟaiyar' found in medieval inscriptions. Certainly, there were employers and employees in ancient Tamil society. But it does not mean they were organised on the basis of a birth-based hierarchy. According to the Paripāṭal Tiraṭṭu (1.26-7) of Paripāṭal, field labourers and farmers lived on the same street. Such a scenario is unthinkable in some parts of the 21st century rural Tamilnadu. Another instance of misinterpretation involves the phrase '*tāḻ karum pācavar*' (Patiṟṟuppattu 67.17), which the commentator interprets as meat vendors of low status, while it actually refers to meat vendors with the positive quality of humility.

regions dominated by speakers of Indo-Aryan languages must not have been considered low-born originally. But for the information provided by the Classical Tamil literature and especially the poem by the poetess Auvaiyār, the true history of the lower castes of South India and perhaps India as a whole might never have been realised.

There is a need for new critical studies of ancient Tamil texts using a rigorous inter-disciplinary approach involving fields such as epigraphy, religion, and linguistics.

ABBREVIATIONS

Akam - Akanāṉūṟu

BCE - Before Common Era

Br. - Brahui

CDr. - Central Dravidian

CE – Common Era

DEDR - Dravidian Etymological Dictionary (Second Edition)

Iṉṉā - Iṉṉā Nāṟpatu, a post-Classical Tamil text

Ka. - Kannada

Kali. - Kalittokai

Koḍ - Koḍagu

Mani. - Maṇimēkalai

Mbh1 - Mahābhārata Critical Edition

Mbh2 - Mahābhārata Volume 2. Translated and Edited by J. A. B. van Buitenen.

NDr. - North Dravidian

PDr, PDr. - Proto Dravidian

Pkt. - Prakrit

Puṟam - Puṟanāṉūṟu

Skt. - Sanskrit

Ta. - Tamil

Te. - Telugu

Tirikaṭu. - Tirikaṭukam, a post-Classical Tamil text.

Tu. - Tulu

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