

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF KONGU VELLALARS

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### Introduction

Kongu Vellalar is a sub-caste of Vellalar community found in the western region of Tamil Nadu, India, which is known as Kongu Nadu. The Kongu Vellalar were classified as a Forward Caste (General class). The word Gounder is mainly used as a caste name by the Kongu Vellalars, a Kshatriya clan in Tamil Nadu, who are also called the Vellala Gounders. Kongu vellala meaning Ganga Vallala in Sanskrit or the one who rules the Gangavadi (Similar to Hoysala "Ballala"), not to be mistaken with the mistaken Velala or farmer. Caste systems are traditional, hereditary systems of social stratification. The social framework of the Kongu Vellalas has several unique features. Many of these features are extinct.

### Objectives of the Study:

- To know about the details of Kongu Vellalars
- To Know the Social Structure of Kongu Vellalars
- To understand the origin of Kongu Vellalars
- To Know the Marriage system of Kongu Vellalars

### Origin of Kongu Vellalas

The Kongu Vellala Gounders were referred as Gangakulam meaning the one descended from the King Gangadatta (Sanskrit: meaning "the one" given by the Goddess Ganga) in Tamil, Hindu literature and religious works. The name Gounder is a caste title derived from the Sangam Tamil word Kamindan (root word being Kavunda) which means "people who protected land, people and country" and was originally accorded to the "Feudal Lords" of the Kongu Nadu who had distinguished themselves bravely and fiercely in protecting the honour of the Kongu region and its people. References to this can be seen in the copper-plate inscriptions of the Chola, Chera and Pandya Dynasties of Tamil Nadu. It is also found in the later Ganga and Pallava Dynasties of South India. The name Gounder is the Prakrit of Sanskrit word Gamunda, meaning head or chieftain, which is Kaminda(n) in Tamil. Gounder was a hereditary title of the Village Headman in the system of decentralised panchayat administration in South India. The root word Kavunda became Kavundan. This system gained greater prominence and wider political ascendancy during the reign of King Durvinita of the Ganga dynasty. The posts of the Village Headmen is hereditary and was usually bestowed on the Kshatriya warrior clans of the Kongu Nadu and hence accustomed to the ruling Gangakulam. The ancient recorded history of Kongu Nadu and Tamilakam reveals that the Chola warriors expanded into then heavily forested Kongu territory, took up agriculture and made the lands cultivable. They are traditionally considered to be Tamil speakers of the Kongu Nadu, an ancient division of Tamilakam that includes parts of northwest Tamil Nadu, portions of neighbouring Kerala and the southern Mysore region of Karnataka. They are one of the prominent castes within the Tamil community who have their roots in the Sangam Tamil Culture. Their elaborate marriage festivities are mentioned by Kavirayar Kambar in his famous Kongu Mangala Vazhthu songs.

The term 'Valavu' is generally used among the Kongu Vellalas. It may denote the area inhabited by the Vellalas, but it also denotes brethren within a clan. Lands of members of valavu were apportioned to one side. As many as ten valavus were in a village. The valavu denomination could be found in a clan. If two or three clans lived in a village, the minority clan, lived in a separate valavu. Those clans that joined for occupational needs generally

lived on the adjoining valavu. The village lands were strewn for the valavu. And no particular portion is the exclusive property of valavu. Hence the idea of the researcher is indifferent.

### Social Structure

The social framework of the Kongu Vellalas has several unique features. Many of these features are extinct. Vellalas in the remote villages have retained these characteristics. These distinct features were firmly entrenched in the usage of ancient Tamils. They are to be found also among the hill tribes. Among the Vellalas of Tamil Nadu, the Kongu Vellalas have a separate and unique clan structure the absence of which among the tougher Vellalas confirms the notion that the Kongu Vellalas were indigenous people of the Kongu country.

Among the Vellalas of Tamil Nadu, the Kongu Vellalas have a separate and unique clan structure the absence of which among the other Vellalas confirms the notion that the Kongu Vellalas were indigenous people of the Kongu country. The Kongu Vellalas variously call their social denomination as kudi, kulam, and kuttam as they been in vogue. The term 'kudi' means family, lineage, descent, caste, race, tongue, home, mansion, inn, etc. In early periods, the term kudi meant lineage and decent. In later periods it also denoted village and clan. In Cankam literature the word kudi is found. The Cankam usage is comparable to the Sanskrit word gotra. Among the Kongu Vellala clans the term kudi does not find currency except for only one clan namely Varaghuthinnapperunkudi. Probably that group might have been formed out of natural consanguinity.

The word 'kulam' means family, lineage, caste, tribe, nation, herd, folk, school, collection, assembly, etc. As blood relations have their reflection in the clan organizations the above meanings have been given by the word. The tradition of calling Kongu Vellala kulam is a rarity, the Nayak inscriptions are an exception as they refer to kulam. Presently the word kulam is synonymous with kudi. The word 'Kuttam' has not occurred in the inscription but now it denotes clan among the Kongu Vellalas. The meaning of the word 'kuttam' is not based on consanguinity but on artificial creations of groups.

### Marriage systems

The Marriage systems of Kongu vellalars are not known from inscriptions. The marriage bonds were arranged in the same village network. Further in the medieval period transport facilities were meager leading to marriage arrangements within a regional limit. Men and women of the same clan cannot have marriage relationships. They select their marriage partners from other clans and include them as new members of the clan and allotted to them house sites and agricultural lands. There are no marriage relationships was admitted with these fraternal clan. According to Bailymarriages among the groups were mainly to strengthen the relationship. This groupism of exogamous type and snaps its marriage bonds of alien groups. A migratory person while being admitted to the clan, blood relationship play a prominent part as otherwise his admission into the fold is difficult.

### The Khasi tribes

In Meghalaya mountain ranges dwell the Khasi tribes. Their forefathers lived in South-East Asia regions from as early as the twentieth century B.C. Their main occupation was agriculture. They maintain the matriarchal system in India in the pristine ancient form. In the Khasi tribal system, matriarchal descendents enjoyed land ownership rights. The numerous oral traditions that are the hallmark of this tribe have not so far been enumerated in order. The Men and women of the same lineage cannot have matrimony since their relationships are of one fraternity; as for example, the Diengdoh, Syrgiar, Mairung, Majial, Manar and Magar tribes were prohibited to entertain matrimony with one another of the same clan. A Khasi tribes were mainly matriarchal in character, rights were accorded to relatives and descents of mother's side only and the father's side was treated as belonging to outside.

### Totemism

Totemism is a system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant. The entity, or totem, is thought to interact with a given kin group or an individual and to serve as their emblem or symbol. Totemism exists among the people of Asian and African continents. A clear view of the origin of totem is still a dream, but some scholars have come to certain conclusions regarding their origin. Morgan deals with Red Indian totemism and his observations and conclusions are helpful in understanding South Indian totemism. According to him totemic symbol is the result of bountiful affection in the rearing of pets and pennames. And symbols were revered with as much fervour as they worshipped and venerated their forefathers.

The term *totem* is derived from the Ojibwa word *ototeman*, meaning "one's brother-sister kin." The grammatical root, *ote*, signifies a blood relationship between brothers and sisters who have the same mother and who may not marry each other. The origin of totemism in prehistoric times is difficult to determine. In a majority of castes origin of totem concept has been conveniently forgotten however advanced the castes may be. The gotra tradition in Brahmin community is but a continuation of earlier clan traditions. Chattopadhyaya has written well about the origin and the present state of totemism

### Nature of Totemism

Totemism is a complex of varied ideas and ways of behaviour based on a worldview drawn from nature. There are ideological, mystical, emotional, reverential, and genealogical relationships of social groups or specific persons with animals or natural objects, the so-called totems. The totems were worshipped as deities in the Kongu country. It is carried out in the spirit of fraternal rights. All the members of a clan participated in the rites. Worship of tutelary deities inculcated the group consciousness among the members of the clan. But, in due course, this consciousness was destroyed by the rise of private ownership.

### Conclusion

Social structure is often treated together with the concept of social change, which deals with the forces that change the social structure and the organization of society. The Vellalas of Tamil Nadu, the Kongu Vellalas have a separate and unique clan structure the absence of which among the together Vellalas confirms the notion that the Kongu Vellalas were indigenous people of the Kongu country. In fact the Vellalas of the Kongu country had borrowed the clan structure from the Vettuvass. Among the Kongu Vellalas it has been noticed that there are no less than 160 clans.

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