



## CONTROL TECHNIQUES ADOPTED IN KAVAL SYSTEM BEFORE 1947 AT TAMILNADU

*Dr.R.Ramanujam M.A, B.Ed, M.Phil, Ph.d*

*Associate Professor,*

*Research Centre in History,*

*Sri S.Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College (Autonomous),*

*Sattur, Virudhunagar District.*

---

### ABSTRACT

With growing crimes and increasing offences in the ancient period, the peacefulness of the society was absolutely disrupted. The ancient rulers and the controlling authorities have realized the worth of this issue. They worked continuously to safeguard the citizens. For this purpose, sincere measures were taken by them and appointed the *Kavalkarars*. The present study aims to understand the concept of *Kaval* system and its controlling techniques towards it. The study also investigates the salient features of the *Kaval* system and the conflict between the colonial state and the conflict system. The results reveal an important insight concerning the factors that are majorly responsible for motivating as well as de-motivating the people behaviour towards the *Kavalkarars*.

**Key Words :** *Offences, Kavalkarars, Colonial, Conflict*

### INTRODUCTION

*Kaval* System was an ancient and indigenous institution of Tamilnadu. This was a hereditary village police office bestowed with well defined rights and responsibilities. Ample references were available regarding *Kaval* system in *Sangam* literature, and in the inscriptions of Pallava, Chola and Pandia kings. The terms like *Ur Kappar* (Protector of the Village) in *Purananooru*, (*Sangam* literature) and *Nadu Kaval* (*nadu* means bigger or wider territorial division), *Padi Kaval* (*Padi* means village or land) and *Perum Padi Kaval* (*Perum* means



bigger or wider) in the inscription of ancient kings of Tamilnadu proved the existence of *Kaval* system in Tamilnadu right from the *sangam* period. Those who were engaged in this duty were known as *Kavalkarar* (guardian or protector). Most of the *Kavalkarars* were from the martial communities of Tamilnadu with a long history of recruitment in the army, such as the Maravars, Kallars, Agamudaiyars, Naickers, Padayachis and Udayars though the participation of other communities like the Kuravars, Valayars and Parayars cannot be discounted. As protectors of people and their belongings these *Kavalkarars* tended to enjoy special privileges and considerable power.

---

## 1. Historical Background

*Kavalship*, a source of income, was a symbol of power, social status and prestige. As the custodians of the people and their belongings, *Kavalkarars* were highly influential and commanded both respect and fear in traditional society. During times of political crises when the apex bodies of political power became weak these *Kavalkarars* often exercised power like independent rulers in their area of control. On the basis of the available source materials it could be ascertained that right from the ancient period this *Kaval* system successfully survived through the ages in some form or other with different nomenclatures and regional variations up to the first few decades of the twentieth century.

The immediate pre-colonial political power structure of Tamilnadu presented a picture of a three-tier system. At the top were the rulers of kingdoms of Tamilnadu followed by the *Palayakarars* in the middle order and the *Kavalkarars* at the tertiary level, as minor partners. With the arrival of the British East India Company on the political scenario of Tamilnadu as a contender for political power, the traditional power and influence enjoyed by the *Kavalkarars* came under threat. In the ensuing conflicts some of the *Kavalkarars* fought against the Company individually while some others made common cause with the *Palayakarars* in their wars against the Company. The policies adopted by the Company against the *Kavalkarars* in the days to come were governed and conditioned by these early conflicts. So in the pre-colonial politics of Tamilnadu the *Kavalkarars* were a power to reckon with, and the *Kaval* system was an integral part of the society both urban or rural.



With the establishment of British paramount over Tamilnadu, the colonial state, particularly during the phase of its consolidation, attempted to replace the indigenous administrative institutions including the *Kaval* system by importing models from the west. The *Kaval* system was seen to be anachronistic and a vestige of medieval times and therefore stern measures were undertaken by the colonial state to eradicate the *Kaval* system. In 1802, as a first step in this direction, the *Desa Kaval* or the *Men Kaval* (country watch) systems was abolished and by 1816 *Kudi Kaval* (village watch) too was abolished by the colonial state. However this move of the Company was strongly protested and resisted by the *Kavalkarars* with determination. Thus a prolonged struggle commenced between the colonial state and the *Kavalkarars* which continued up to 1947. During the course of the struggle a modern police system was introduced in 1859, in the context of the many changes ushered in the socio-economic front because of the process of modernization initiated by British rule. The *Kavalkarars*, who lost their traditional occupation of *Kaval*, could not accommodate themselves with the changing socio-economic conditions which necessitated occupational changes. Consequently they gradually drifted to the world of crime and preyed over the people. The new police establishment introduced by the colonial state met with complete failure in managing the crimes related to *Kaval*. Having lost their hope with the modern police in guarding them against the increasing illegal exactions of the *Kavalkarars* the people at large on their own accord organized a few anti-*Kaval* movements which yielded some fruit but not to the level expected. As a last resort, the colonial Government of Madras armed itself with the infamous Criminal Tribes Act in 1917 against the *Kavalkarars* and the communities they belonged to. However, in the twilight of the Raj, it was the colonial state which was displaced rather than the *Kaval* system.

## 2. Review of Literature

1. Nilakanta Sastri in his celebrated work *The Colas* (1935) based on his extensive study of Chola inscriptions made a brief and value loaded description of *Kaval* system in ancient Tamilnadu. The most interesting observation made by him is as quoted below. The term *Padi-*



*Kaval* occurring more than once in the list of taxes and dues deserves more attention than most of the other items mentioned; for it refers to a universally prevalent system of safeguarding property from theft, especially at night. This was the system by which each village maintained its own *Kaval-karan* who, in return for certain regular payments to him held himself.

2.Natana Kasinathan, in his article, “History of *Kaval* System in Tamilnadu from 300 A.D. to 1600 A.D” (1973) traced the history of *Kaval* system in Tamilnadu upto 1600 A.D. Based on literary and inscriptional source materials this article is more narrative than interpretative in nature.

3.In S.Kadhirvel’s, *A History of the Maravas* (1977) which deals elaborately with the history of the Maravar community in the eighteenth century and its relation with the Nawabs of Arcot and the British East India Company, there is a separate chapter, on the *Kaval* system of pre-colonial period. This work provides detailed information regarding the differences between *Desa Kaval* and *KudiKaval* systems, the duties of the *Kavalkarars*, and the payment made to the *Kavalkarars*. However all these details are pertaining to the *Kaval* system in Tamilnadu that too of the Nanguneri and Kalakad region. Moreover since the author himself belonged to a *Desa Kaval* chief’s family one could feel a touch of hyperbole in his treatment and general information regarding the *Kaval* system since their main thematic interests are different.

4.Another category of works such as *The History of The Madras Police*, published by Government of Madras during the centenary of the Madras Police (1959) and *Law and Order in Madras Presidency 1850-1880* by P.Jegadeesan which extensively deal with the genesis and development of modern police administrative machinery and incidentally provide a brief discussion on *Kaval* system.

5.Another important work in Tamil which deals with *Kaval* system is V.Manickam’s *Pudukottai Varalaru (up to A.D.1600)*. The major objective of this work is to trace the history of Pudukottai region. However in this work there is a separate chapter on the *Padi-Kaval* system, in which the author has made an analytical study over the socio-economic and political circumstances which favoured the genesis of the *Padi-Kaval* system in Pudukottai region during the later part of 12<sup>th</sup> century, and traced the development of this system upto 1600 A.D. He also elucidates the nature of the system and changes it underwent during the process of its



development through the centuries with critical outlook, and justifies his arguments by citing number of inscriptional sources.

6. Yet another important secondary source material in Tamil which deals with the *Kaval* system in *Tamilar Salbhu (Sanga Kalam)* (1980) by S. Vidyanandhan of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Based on *Sangam* literature, he provides a vivid picture about the *Kaval* system during the *Sangam* period (200 B.C-200 A.D) and how the cities, villages and streets in them were protected by the *Kavalkarars*. His portrayal about the physical appearance and vigilant nature of the *Kavalkarars* is very interesting. However his work is confined to *Sangam* period.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

*Kaval* system was an ancient system of policing in Tamilnadu and the *Kavalkarars* were the functionaries of the *Kaval* system. In the modern history of Tamilnadu the *Kaval* system and the *Kavalkarars* is an interesting and vital area of historical investigation and has continued to remain largely unexplored. As share-holders of political power at the tertiary level, the *Kavalkarars* played a major role in the socio-economic and political spheres of Tamilnadu. They also made common cause with other anti-colonial forces, during their struggle against the colonial state. Hence this study aims at tracing the history of *Kaval* system in the colonial period and tries to locate the place of the *Kavalkarars* in the colonial history of Tamilnadu.

### 4. Methodology

*Kaval* system was an ancient and indigenous system of police in Tamilnadu which survived through the ages and was in practice to a very limited extent even after 1947. So, tracing and presenting a brief narration of the *Kaval* system and its salient feature is essential. In attempting this, a descriptive method is adopted.

In assessing the nature of the colonial state, the conflict between the colonial state and the *Kaval* system from 1800-1947, the anti-*Kaval* movements in the last decade of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of twentieth century, the analytical method is adopted.

Regarding the genesis and development of modern police system and its prolonged struggle against the *Kavalkarars* a chronological as well as analytical method is followed.



## 5. Relevance of the Study

Much research has already been carried out and secondary sources dealing with different aspects of the history of Modern Tamilnadu are also available. So far there has been no such exclusive study undertaken on the problem of *Kaval* system during the colonial period focusing from the viewpoint of crime. Thus there is ample scope for research. The Researcher has made a sincere attempt to probe further the problem of *Kaval*.

## 6. Role Of *Kavalkarars* In Pre-Independence Period (Before 1947)

*Kavalkarars* over a period of time gained political power and occupied a tertiary position next to the kings and the *Palayakarars* in the immediate pre-colonial political power structure of Tamilnadu. As minor partners of political power they made common cause with the *Palayakarars* during their struggle against the Nawabs of Arcot and the British East India Company (1780-1801). In the non-*Palayakarar* tracts they were rather powerful and behaved often like independent rulers which explains their fairly frequent violation of the socially accepted norms of *Kaval* system.

For the *Kavalkarars*, *Kavalship* was not only a source of income. It was considerably more than that. They considered it as their traditional right, a symbol of political power, prestige, social status and an instrument of social dominance. Hence any challenge from within or out to the *Kaval* system was vehemently resisted and violently responded by the *Kavalkarars*. When the British East India Company emerged as the superior power in the South Indian Politics in 1801 the *Kavalkarars* were a power to reckon with.

The British East India Company, after a prolonged armed struggle against the power centers of Tamilnadu, had established its firm control over Tamilnadu by the turn of the nineteenth century. In consolidating their position the British started to replace the native form of administration with modern models borrowed from the west. But the transplantation met with much resistance from the pre-modern *Kaval* system. Any move on the part of the native people to resist was branded as crime.

The colonial state abolished the different forms of *Kaval* system through its regulations. In 1802, the *Desa Kaval* system was abolished and a new police establishment was introduced.



Similarly in 1816, the *Kudi Kaval* system was abolished and in its place a new police system came into being. Finally in 1859, the modern police administrative machinery was introduced. The tax-free lands allotted to the *Kavalkarars* were also appropriated by the colonial state in the name of new land revenue policies. Despite these stringent measures the *Kavalkarars* were tenacious in safeguarding their rights and resisted every move of the colonial state. Having failed in all its attempts, as a last resort, the colonial state implemented the infamous Criminal Tribes Act.

In consequence of the anti-*Kaval* measures adopted by the colonial state, the traditional power and status enjoyed by the *Kavalkarars* were at stake and their avenues of income were also closed. These circumstances prompted the *Kavalkarars* to indulge in crime. They started preying on the inhabitants who were formerly under their protection.

## 7. Functions of *Kavalkarars*

The primary function of a *Kavalkarar* whether, *Men Kavalkarar* or *KudiKavalkarar*, was to protect the grain, cattle, standing crops and other domestic properties of the inhabitants in the villages under their *Kaval* control from thieves and petty plunderers and to guard the public places like temples, highways, markets, tradefares, choultries and to keep an eye over the strangers and travellers. If any robbery occurred, it was the responsibility of the *Kavalkarars* to trace the culprit and recover the stolen properties, failing which he had to compensate the loss. Rous Peter, Collector of Madurai district while reporting about the functioning of *Kavalkarars* to the District Magistrate in 1811 made the following observation:

The duties of a *Kavalkarar* have always been considered, to watch over the Crops on the Ground, to guard them when reaped, and when threshed, the produce is measured in his presence, and delivered over to his charge entirely; after which whatever loss is sustained, he is considered the accountable person for it. To protect the Village to which he belongs, and should any of the inhabitants be robbed, he is obliged to make good from his own Mauniam Lands, the value of whatever Articles may have been stolen unless he can deliver up the offenders to Justice, and in that case he is absolved from all responsibility. This method in the first instance compels him to guard the village with the utmost caution and in the latter occasions his being alert in the apprehension of the people who had been guilty of the Theft.



He is also to watch over the Circar (Government) Grain wherever it may be deposited within the range of his Cawol, to be a guide to Detachments passing through the Country if required, and to protect all Travelers as long as they continue within his village. These are considered the principal duties of a Cawolgar, there are others of a Minor nature, which it would be useless to mention. In case of failure, they had to compensate the loss. In this way, the head *Kavalkarar* assumed both police and judicial powers.

Frederick S.Mulally of the Madras Police made the following observation regarding the function of rural police system in Tamilnadu district towards the closing decades of the nineteenth century. There were three classes of village police in the Tamilnadu.

## 8. Controlling Authorities In *Kaval* System

1. Taliyaris – These are the government village police paid by the government at rates of ranging from Rs.2/- to Rs.4/- per mensem from the village cess fund levied at the rate of one anna per rupee on land revenue assessment.
2. *Kavalgars* – Zamindar and Devasthanam village Police. These receive no regular pay for their services. Some receive '*Sutantrams*' fees and emoluments at intervals, others enjoy *maniems* or *inam* lands, which are supposed to support countless relations, and connections termed *pangalies* (share holders) while nearly all receive some payment in kind at harvest.
3. *Kudi Kavalgars* – These are private watchmen employed by villagers on their own account for the greater safety of their property. They are usually paid in kind in the understanding that they return an equivalent in values for anything stolen. An agreement to this entered into when the *Kudi Kavalgars* are appointed. Another method was to pass the information to the fellow *Kavalkarars* of the neighbouring villages. By using this *Kavalkarar* network, they were able to monitor the movement of the offenders and locate their hiding places.

## CONCLUSION

Before Independence, Various Control Techniques were adopted by *Kavalkarars*. Eventhough they were in several numbers, techniques followed were differed from each

# International Conference on Multidisciplinary approaches in Social Sciences, Humanities and Sciences

Sri S.Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamil Nadu, India

(MASHS-18)



14<sup>th</sup> December 2018

[www.conferenceworld.in](http://www.conferenceworld.in)

ISBN:978-93-87793-61-3

other based on territory or region, i.e, were not uniform. After the arrival of British, *Kavalkarars* were replaced by formulating Police system, which is followed at present.

## **REFERENCES;**

- ✚ S.Kadhirvel, *A History of the Maravas*, Madurai Publishing House, Madurai, 1977, p.17; Natana Kasinathan, “*Kaval System in Tamilnadu from 300 A.D-1600 A.D*”, *Damilica*, Journal of Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Part-3, Madras, 1973, p.65.
- ✚ S.Vithyanathan, *Tamilar Salpu* (Tamil), Kumaran Puthaga Illam, Colombo and Chennai, 1980, pp.37-40.
- ✚ Natana Kasinathan, “*Kaval System in Tamilnadu from 300 A.D-1600 A.D*”, *Damilica*, Journal of Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Part-3, Madras, 1973, p.65.
- ✚ A.Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, 2 Vols, 1935 and 1937; revised edition in one volume, University of Madras, 1955, pp.533-534.
- ✚ Y.Subbarayalu, interviewed by A.R.Venkatachalapathy, *Kalachuvadu*, Tamil Monthly, 2004, Nagercoil, p.21; V.Manickam, *Pudukkottai Varalaru* (Tamil), Clio Publications, Madurai, 2004, pp.375-395.
- ✚ Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethno History of an Indian Kingdom*, Orient Longman, Bombay 1987, pp.154-155.
- ✚ Pamela G.Price, “*Raja-dharma in the 19th Century South India*”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.13, No.2, July-December 1979, Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi,p.210.

\*\*\*\*\*