trading groups owing allegiance to Buddhism and that Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia through trading channels. However, while trade was an important vehicle of cultural transmission, there were other agents as well. The activities of Chinese and Indian monks are an important part of the story of the spread of Buddhism to China. And the fact that rituals in Southeast Asian courts were dominated (as in India) by Brahmanical practices points to the presence of Brahmana ritual specialists in those courts.

Aspects of Social Change in North India and the Deccan: Varna, Caste, Gender

All the developments discussed thus far in this chapter had social implications. However, there are a few aspects of social history that require further, separate discussion. The four *varna*s and *ashrama*s remained the pillars of Brahmanical ideology, represented in the Dharmashastra texts of this period. The earlier idea of *ashrama*s as alternative paths was, however, firmly replaced by the idea of their being consecutive stages. Outsiders such as the *yavana*s were absorbed into the *varna* scheme and were accounted for through the theory of *varna-samkara* (mixture of *varna*s). In the early Dharmasutras, the *yavana*s were described as the offspring of Kshatriya men and Shudra women. The *Mahabharata* variously describes them as the sons of Yayati; as born from the sage Vasishtha's cow (along with others such as the Pahlavas, Dravidas, and Shakas) to destroy Vishvamitra's army; or as Shudras. The *Manu Smriti* refers to them as *vratya-kshatriya*s—Kshatriyas who were degraded due to their non-performance of the sacrificial rituals. Such references indicate a tension between social incorporation and exclusion.

Jati, lineage, and occupation continued to be important bases of social identity. The texts do not give detailed evidence regarding the functioning of caste. They do, however, reflect a preference for endogamy and a hereditary element in occupations. There are also references to people of the same profession living in separate settlements or in distinct parts of settlements. As for restrictions regarding giving and accepting food, texts tend to talk mostly about those at the top of the caste hierarchy—the Brahmanas—and those considered outside the pale of caste society—the Chandalas.

The *Manu Smriti* contains a more detailed discussion of Chandalas than earlier texts. Some of its statements are a continuation of what earlier law givers had to say, but what stands out is the complete segregation of this group. The Chandala is to live outside the village (10.51). He can enter a village or town for performing functions assigned to him, but is to be distinguished by marks at the king's command (10.55). He is *apapatra*—i.e., food for him should be placed on the ground, and he must not eat out of other people's dishes (3.92). Several Jataka stories suggest that the injunctions regarding untouchability in the *Manu Smriti* were close to prevailing social practice. In these stories, the Chandalas are portrayed as a despised people living in separate settlements, whose sight and touch were considered polluting by others. They included corpse removers, cremators, executioners of thiefs, sweepers, public performers, hunters, and fruit sellers. The extreme prejudices against Chandalas are echoed in Jaina texts as well.

The existence of *jati* or caste distinctions and hierarchies did not mean that the system always operated with complete rigidity. There are indications of an element of social flexibility, reflected, for instance, in the recognition extended to the offspring of unequal unions. The *Bhaddasala Jataka* tells the story of how Prasenajit, king of Kosala, was furious when he found out that the Sakyas had tricked him into marrying the daughter of a Sakya prince by a slave woman. The king repudiated his

wife and son, but took them back when the Buddha told him that the family of the mother did not matter; it was the father's family that counted. There is a Jataka story of a prince who, in the course of a love affair, apprenticed himself successively to a potter, basket maker, florist, and cook. Other stories tell of a prince becoming a trader, and a young man from a noble family becoming employed as an archer. Brahmanas are portrayed as taking to trade, living as hunters and trappers, farming, hiring themselves out as cowherds, etc. Of course, all these are instances of a person of a higher social station adopting vocations of the lower orders. Stories of successful upward mobility of lower-status groups are few.

As emphasized in an earlier chapter, there was a close connection between caste and roles and relations within the household, especially those between men and women. Texts of this period contain many apparently contradictory statements about women. For instance, the *Manu Smriti* both praises and reviles women. Olivelle ([2005], 2006: 29–36) suggests that the nature of the statements vary according to the issue being discussed. Where the discussion is about how men must guard their wives (9.14–16), women are described as lustful, fickle, hard-hearted, and completely untrustworthy. On the other hand, where the discussion is about how men should respect women (9.26–28), the latter are described as bearers of many blessings and as none less than Shri (the goddess of fortune) within the home. Where the discussion is about how men must not abuse women (3.56–58), Manu states that the gods rejoice where women are revered; where they are not, no rite bears fruit. The *Manu Smriti* emphasizes the husband's control over his wife and her property; but it also states that the wife cannot be sold or repudiated, and that she cannot be treated as chattel, since she is obtained from the gods and not received like cattle and gold in the market (9.95). The husband is also supposed to support the wife in all circumstances, provided she is faithful (9.95).

Apart from individual statements and the contexts in which they are made, it is necessary to identify the broader social and family roles and structures valorized in texts such as the *Manu Smriti*. The strengthening of the patriarchal nature of the family and the increasing subordination of women is reflected in various ways in Dharmashastra works of this period. Women withdrew from public life, their access to knowledge was diminished, and they were increasingly dependent on male kinsmen. The preference for sons over daughters was accentuated and women were increasingly relegated to the domestic sphere. The increasing restrictions on their sexuality were reflected in the great emphasis on chastity. Pre-puberty marriages were one way of ensuring this.

Vijay Nath (1993–94) has examined the changing relationships between women and property in Brahmanical texts from the time of the *Rig Veda* to the 5th–6th centuries CE. She argues that by the time of the Smritis and Puranas, women were relegated to a position of almost complete subordination and subservience, and were treated as items of property, on par with Shudras. Women had a low priority among claimants to inherited property in the early Dharmasutras. But, according to Nath, from about the 2nd century BCE, the law givers recognized and gave prescriptions regarding women's right to inheritance. It should be noted, however, that this only applies to *stri-dhana*. According to the *Manu Smriti* (9.194), *stri-dhana* includes six types of gifts—those received before the nuptial fire, in the bridal procession, those given or taken as a token of love (by her father-in-law or mother-in-law), and those received from her brother, mother, or father. However, it did not include inherited property or even property acquired by a woman through her own labour. Regular property rights continued to be essentially governed by rules of patrilineal inheritance. Nath extends her argument to assert that women's rights to inherit immoveable property were significantly

acknowledged and expanded in the later centuries (Gupta and post-Gupta periods) in order to maintain the family's control over property and to prevent it from escheating to (i.e., being taken over by) the state.

The Smriti texts do not deal with the details of marriage ceremonies, but they have a number of statements concerning marriage in general. The *Manu Smriti* (3.4) states that after completing his studentship, a *dvija* male should marry a girl who belongs to his own *varna* and possesses good qualities. The anxiety to marry girls off as early as possible was connected to the great importance attached to maintaining female chastity and producing children. Several Smritis reflect the idea that every menstruation that a girl has means a missed opportunity of conceiving a child; such a situation was considered equivalent to the killing of an embryo (*bhruna-hatya*). Unlike the earlier Dharmasutras, which stated that girls should be married on attaining puberty, later texts advocated pre-puberty marriages for them. Manu (9.94) states that a 30-year-old man should marry a 12-year-old girl, and a 24-year-old man should marry an 8-year-old girl. Apart from the young age of girls at marriage, this prescription also suggests a great age gap between bride and groom.

Like other Dharmashastra works, the *Manu Smriti* prefers marriages to take place within the *varna*, but acknowledges the existence of inter-*varna* unions and extends approval to *anuloma* (hypergamous) ones. The *Manu Smriti* (9.22) states that like a river merging with the sea, a woman attains the qualities of the husband with whom she is joined through marriage. However, the mixture of *varna*s that arose though *pratiloma* marriages is condemned as leading to chaos and ruin, and the king was enjoined to prevent them. Unlike the *Baudhayana Dharmasutra*, the *Manu Smriti* strongly disapproves of marriage of a man with his maternal uncle's daughter or paternal aunt's daughter. It also disapproves of the sale of daughters (i.e., accepting bride-price), but lays down certain rules for situations arising out of this practice. For instance, it states (8.204) that if a particular girl has been shown to a man and another one is given to him, he can marry both of them for the same price.

The reasons for which husbands can abandon their wives, according to the *Manu Smriti*, include if the wife is notorious, afflicted with disease, addicted to alcohol, cruel, treacherous, insubordinate, barren, a spendthrift, or harsh in speech. The text discusses how long a man should wait before abandoning a wife who has such faults. The text suggests that a barren wife should be given up in the 8th year, one whose children die in the 10th year, one who has produced only female children in the 11th year, but one who speaks harshly should be given up at once. On the other hand, it states elsewhere that a sick but virtuous wife who looks after her husband should never be insulted or abandoned; her husband should only take another wife with her consent. The *Yajnavalkya Smriti* (1.74) asserts that if a man gives up his first wife and marries again, he must look after her, otherwise he will incur sin. There are other indications of the prevalence of po-lygyny in the Dharmashastra, such as in the discussion of the property rights of a man's sons born of various wives.

For women, on the other hand, lifelong monogamy is presented as the ideal. The *Manu Smriti* disapproves of widow remarriage. It asserts (9.47) that a daughter should only be given away in marriage once. On the other hand, it refers elsewhere (9.175) to the *paunarbhava* as the son of a woman who has remarried because she has been widowed, abandoned, or because she wants to do so. In the *Manu Smriti*, the idea of temporary self-denial and celibacy for widows in the earlier Dharmasutras is replaced by lifelong strictures: 'A woman when her husband is dead, may, if she chooses, emaciate her body by subsisting on flowers, roots, and fruits, but she should not even take

the name of a male stranger. Till her death she should be forbearing, observe vows, be celibate, and should hanker after that pre-eminent code of conduct that is prescribed for women devoted to their husbands. On her husband's death, if a virtuous woman abides by the rule of celibacy, she goes to heaven, even if she be sonless' (*Manu Smriti* 5.157–160).

The *Manu Smriti* considers *niyoga* (levirate) a despicable custom, describing it as *pashu dharma* (the *dharma* of animals). However, it lays down certain procedures that should be followed if recourse to *niyoga* must be had. The *Manu Smriti* (9.69–70) states that if a woman's husband dies after *kanyadana*, his younger brother should marry her and should unite with her once a month till a son is produced. The text (9.67) recognizes a son born out of a *niyoga* union as *kshetraja* ('born of the field', i.e., the woman).

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The Jatakas as a source of social history

The Jatakas can be used to reveal aspects of the everyday lives of ordinary people. They reflect a society marked by deep differences based on class and caste. The themes of hierarchy and pollution taboos occur frequently in the stories. Uma Chakravarti points out that while the popular narrative format ruled out a direct discussion of Buddhist philosophical themes, the stories were moulded in order to convey certain unambiguous messages emphasizing Buddhist ethics. The Buddhist monks must have drawn on a pool of existent folklore, and given it a Buddhist tinge.

The Jatakas consist of stories within stories. Each tale has four parts. There is an introductory story set in the age of the Buddha. Then comes the main story, set in a mythical past, wherein the Buddha appears as the protagonist or witness. The third part is a verse that summarizes the crux of the story, and the fourth and final part links the story of the past with the present. As is the case with other folk tales, the Jatakas deal with real concerns and issues of human society, even when the stories apparently deal with animals. Animals, like humans, are described as living in an unequal world. Sometimes, an inferior animal is made to realize his inferiority vis-à-vis superior ones. At other times, weaker animals are shown as getting the better of stronger ones through cunning. For instance, there is the story of the boar who was challenged to a contest by a lion. The boar dreaded the encounter because he knew he was no match for the lion. His fellow boars thought of a strategy—they suggested that he roll about in dung for seven days, and that the clean and finicky lion would refuse to fight him. They were proved right; the lion could not stand the stink and conceded defeat.

In the *Setaketu Jataka*, a Chandala is shown subverting the Brahmanical notion of pollution: A well-known teacher had a Brahmana student who thought a great deal of his high caste. One day, the student happened to come near a Chandala. The Brahmana was horrified at the thought that the wind might strike the Chandala's body and then strike him, thereby polluting him. He therefore ordered the Chandala to move to the leeward side of the road so that he did not stand in the wind's path. He himself moved to the windward side. However, the Chandala did not oblige.

He stood his ground on the windward side of the Brahmana and said that he would obey the Brahmana only if the latter could answer his question. The Brahmana accepted the challenge, but was unable to answer the question. As a result, he had to put up with public humiliation at the hands of the Chandala.

Several Jataka stories project prejudices against women, similar to those present in the Buddhist canonical texts. Women of the upper classes are frequently described as innately fickle, untrustworthy, and adulterous. The *Bandana Mokkha Jataka* tells the story of a queen who extracted a promise of fidelity from the king. She herself, on the other hand, commited adultery with every single messenger the king solicitously sent to ask about her welfare. On the other hand, there are stories of women from humble families, who, along with their menfolk, are shown seeking moments of pleasure in the midst of a life of hardship and poverty.

SOURCE Chakravarti [1993], 2004

While the Dharmashastra texts contain various prescriptions about the ideal roles of women belonging to the upper echelons of society, other texts introduce us to women from different backgrounds, associated with different vocations. In the Pali Jatakas, apart from queens, nuns, and courtesans, we encounter women associated with various occupations such as basket making, weaving, and dying.

Our window into gender relations expands still further when we look at non-textual evidence, especially inscriptions from various parts of the subcontinent (see Shah, 2001). Some record the activities of royal women. For instance, royal women of the Satavahana family are prominent in the epigraphic record and exercised intitiative in making donations in their own right. We can also note the use of matronyms by some Satavahana kings; names like Gautamiputra and Vasishthiputra suggest the king took on his mother's *gotra*. In the Brahmanical system, *gotra* is inherited from the father, not the mother. The evidence of kings named with reference to their mother is therefore significant, but it does not necessarily constitute evidence of matriarchy or even matriliny. Matronyms may have been a way of identifying parentage in a polygynous situation. Or they may reflect the prevalence of forms of marriage that the Brahmanical tradition considered less than appropriate. The use of the same matronym by more than one king also raises the possibility that some Satavahana kings may have practised cross-cousin marriage. We can note a Nashik inscription, seemingly a copy of an inscription issued by Gautamiputra Satakarni and his mother, which describes the composer as a woman *pratiharakshi* (doorkeeper) named Lota. Numerous royal and elite women appear as donors in inscriptions of the Ikshvaku period at Nagarjunakonda.

Inscriptions also reveal the activities of countless non-royal women. As we shall see further on, such women appear in large numbers as donors at Buddhist sites. The evidence of a similar high incidence of female patronage in favour of Jaina establishments has been less studied. These instances do not necessarily tell us anything specifically about norms of inheritance. But they do suggest that certain women had some degree of control over the economic resources of their households. Finally, if we want to look for women of this period, we have to move beyond the words found in texts and inscriptions into the realm of images. As we shall see further on, various aspects of women and femininity are represented in the sculpture of this period.

Ancient Tamil texts reflect processes of interaction between the northern Sanskritic and the southern Tamil cultures. The Sangam poets were familiar with the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* legends. In fact, the Chola, Chera, and Pandya kings claim to have fed the warring armies on the eve of the war. This should be understood as an attempt on the part of these dynasties to connect themselves with the epic tradition. The *Tolkappiyam* states that marriage rituals were introduced into Tamil country by the Aryas. We know that Buddhism, Jainism, and the worship of the gods Vishnu and Shiva also travelled from north to south. Reciprocal exchange between Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages is also evident in early texts.

The epic-Puranic tradition contains several legends about Agastya and Parashurama, connecting these sages with trans-Vindhyan India (Sastri [1955], 1975: 70–74). Historians interpret them as allegorical stories, a symbolic reflection of the spread of Brahmani-cal cultural influences to South India. The *Rig Veda* refers to the *rishi* Agastya's curious birth from a *kumbha* (jar). The epics have more to say about him. The *Mahabharata* tells the following story: Agastya was married to a princess of Vidarbha named Lopamudra. Lopamudra wanted him to provide her with all sorts of luxuries without compromising his asceticism. Agastya went to three Arya kings for help, but in vain. Accompanied by these kings, he then approached Ilvala, king of Manimati, for help. Ilvala was a wicked demon who hated Brahmanas because long ago, a Brahmana had refused to grant him a boon making him equal to Indra. He had devised a devious ploy to avenge himself. He would transform his younger brother Vatapi into a ram and offer its meat to a Brahmana. Then, using his special powers, he would recall Vatapi to life and the latter would rip open the Brahmana's stomach and emerge laughing. In this way, the duo had killed many a hapless Brahmana. When Agastya turned up at his court with the three Arya kings, Ilvala turned his brother into a ram and offered the meat to the sage. Agastya ate it, but when Ilvala called his brother to come forth, only air emerged. Due to Agastya's remarkable metabolism, Vatapi had already been digested. Ilvala ended up giving Agastya the riches he needed to satisfy Lopamudra.

In another *Mahabharata* story, Agastya travels south and tells the Vindhyas to stop growing till he returns, which he never does. In the *Ramayana*, Rama tells his brother Lakshmana on the way to Agastya's hermitage that this sage had fought the *asura*s (demons) and had made the Dandaka forest fit for the habitation of Aryas. Agastya is mentioned as an important sage in Tamil tradition. The *Manimekalai* mentions his miraculous birth from a jar and connects him with two Chola kings. Early medieval tradition lists him as a member of the first and second Sangams. A work on grammar called the *Agattiyam* is said to have been composed by him in the first Sangam.

The main thread of the legend connecting Parashurama with South India is as follows: Jamadagni was suspicious of his wife Renuka's fidelity and ordered his son Parashurama to kill her. Parashurama complied and had to expiate his sin of matricide by exterminating the Kshatriyas, enemies of the Brahmanas. He did this and then, on Vishvamitra's instructions, gifted the entire earth to the Brahmanas. Having no place to call his own, he performed a rigorous penance, as a result of which the god Varuna granted him a boon. Parashurama was to stand at Kanyakumari at the southernmost tip of the peninsula. He was to throw his *parashu* (axe) northwards, and could have all the land that fell within the throw. Parashurama did this; his axe landed at Gokarman, and all the land

upto that point became his. He brought in Brahmanas from the north and settled them in villages, providing law codes for them and for others.

It must be emphasized that although ancient texts indicate various kinds of interactions between northern and peninsular India, this interaction was a reciprocal one. The history of South India cannot be seen simplistically as a story of 'Aryanization', with northern Sanskritic influences operating on a passive south. In earlier chapters, we traced the evidence of the neolithic–chalcolithic and early iron age cultures of South India. Here, we will explore the evidence from Sangam poetry. This can be combined with the archaeological evidence of the later megalithic phase in the far south cited in both in this chapter and in Chapter 5.

Sangam literature reflects a society with its distinctive cultural traditions, one which celebrated war and love. Mention was made earlier of the close relationship between kings and bards, and of the *puram* poems that praised the valour and generosity of kings. There are also the beautiful love (*akam*) poems that speak of the love between man and woman. The poet does not speak through his or her own persona, but uses various characters such as the heroine, her friend, her foster mother, or the hero as his mouthpiece. The love poems use an interesting convention of associating themes with different landscapes known as *tinai*, each named after a flower. The *kurinchi* or mountain landscape was associated with the union of lovers, the *palai* (arid terrain) with separation, the *mullai* (pastoral region) with patient waiting, the *neytal* (seashore) with pining, and the *marutam* (riverine tracts) with sulking. The poems use vivid imagery and often rely on understatement and suggestion to convey deep emotion.

Sangam poems contain several incidental references to material culture, often as part of the poem's setting or in similes and allusions. There are references to farming (rice and barley are mentioned), cattle rearing, and fishing. There are also several references to iron. *Kuruntokai* 16 refers to iron-tipped arrows. *Akananuru* 72 compares a bear digging out the comb from a termite mound, the front of which is swarming with fireflies glimmering like sparks from beaten metal, to a blacksmith forging iron. *Purananuru* 116 refers to the proud horses and iron weapons of the kings who came to fight Pari. *Purananuru* 21 talks of a mighty fortress called Kanapper which disappeared like water vapourized by iron heated in a glowing fire by a black-handed smith.

The social classification of *varna* was known to Sangam poets. There is mention of the *Arashar* (kings), *Vaishiyar* (traders), and *Velalar* (farmers). The Brahmanas are also mentioned, some of them closely associated with the courts of kings and patronized by ruling elites. They are described as performing *yajna*s, including ones on the battlefield, to ensure victory. In the *Padirrapattu*, the sage Kapila advises kings that they should give important jobs such as those of advisers to Brahmanas. However, the four-fold *varna* classification had little application to ancient Tamil society. The *jati* system was not a feature of this society either.

PRIMARY SOURCES

An ancient Tamil love poem

If mother finds out, let her.
And if this lovely little street with its loose mouths hears, let it.

Before the god at Puhar with its swift whirlpools,
I swear this is all that happened.
In the grove, I and my garlanded friends played in the sea,
made little houses and heaped up play rice.
Then we were resting a bit,
waiting for our tiredness to go,
when a man came up and said,
'Innocent girls with round, soft arms as supple as bamboo!
The light of the sun has faded and I am very tired.
Would there be anything wrong if I ate a guest's meal
on a soft, open leaf,
and then stayed in your noisy little village?'
Seeing him, we lowered our faces, and, hiding ourselves, we politely replied, 'This food is not for you.
It is moist fish, eaten only by low people.'
Then suddenly someone said,
'There, can't we see the boats coming in with their tall, waving banners?'
At that we kicked over our sand houses with our feet.
Of all those who were leaving,
he looked straight at me and said,
'O you who have the lovely face, may I go?'
so I felt I had been ruined.
I answered, 'You may,'
And he, staring at me all the while, Stood tall, holding the staff of his chariot.
Still it seems to be before my eyes.

SOURCE *Akananuru* 110; Poet: Pontaip Pacalaiyar; Hart, 1979: 110

The more relevant basis of social classification was *kuti*. The *kuti* were clan-based descent groups and were central to the early Tamil system of agricultural production. Although associated with lineage and hereditary occupation, there were no real restrictions on inter-dining and social interaction among the *kuti* groups. The process whereby caste took root in South India is not adequately understood. Some scholars see it as a further development of the *kuti* organization. Rajan Gurukkal (1997) suggests that Brahmana landholdings played a key role in eventually breaking down the kin-based system of agrarian organization and the emergence of a new agrarian order and social relationships based, among other things, on caste.

Sangam literature reflects a belief in sacred or magical forces called *ananku* that were supposed to inhabit various objects. The job of carrying out rites and rituals to control the *ananku* was that of groups such as the Pariyans, Tutiyans, Panans, and Velans. They were associated with ritualistic singing, dancing, and trances, and with lighting the cremation fire and worshipping memorial stones. On this basis, George L. Hart (1976: 43) argues that the association of low castes with pollution is of southern origin. *Ananku* was also believed to cling to women. If a woman was chaste, her *ananku*

would be under control and had auspicious potential. Women were considered impure during menstruation and for a number of days after childbirth. Widows were considered extremely inauspicious and dangerous, and were supposed to lead a very austere life.

Sangam poems are pervaded with a warrior ethic. The goal of the hero of the *puram* poems was *pukal* (glory, fame) and a heroic death was greatly valued. It was believed that the spirit of a warrior who died in battle dwelt in paradise. A poem in the *Purananuru* suggests that the bodies of warriors who did not die in battle were cut with swords before the funerary rites, to simulate death in battle. The practice of *vattakirutal* was one in which a defeated king committed ritual suicide by starving himself to death, accompanied by those who had been close to him during his lifetime. The worship of memorial stones (*natukal*) was a corollary of the importance of the heroic ideal. Memorial stones were erected in honour of heroes who died fighting valiantly in battle; the spirit of the fallen hero was believed to reside in these stones.

Different kinds of funerary practices are mentioned in the poems. In *Purananuru* 228, the poet addresses a potter who must make urns for the dead Valavan. There are several references to cremation. In *Kuruntokai* 231, the heroine laments that her lover avoids her as though she were a burning ground for strangers. *Purananuru* 356 gives a fearsome description of a burning ground. In *Purananuru* 363, the poet speaks of the finality of death and of the cremation ground as the final home of great, good kings. There are also references to the exposure of the dead in *Akananuru* 77 and *Purananuru* 231.

Vijaya Ramaswamy ([1989], 1999) has drawn attention to the many references to women and work in Sangam poems and slightly later works, more so in rural than urban contexts. The poems mention women engaged in agricultural activities such as planting paddy seeds and weeding. Tasks such as the husking and winnowing of paddy were performed entirely by women. Young girls kept watch over the agricultural fields and drove away birds and animals. Women were involved in cattle rearing and dairy farming. The terms *ayichchiyar*, *kovichchiyar*, and *idaichchiyar* were used for shepherdesses. As today, so also in early historical times, spinning was done almost entirely by women. Sangam texts refer to women spinners as *parutti pentukal*. However, there are no references to women weavers. Bleaching and washing cloth were other activities in which women were involved. There is an interesting reference in the *Purananuru* to a potter woman of Venni (Vennikuyattiyar); she was also a poetess who composed a poem on the victory of Karikala at the battle of Venni. Women were engaged in basket Fisherwomen were involved in catching and selling fish and the extraction and selling of fish oil. Men and women living in coastal areas made and sold salt. The *Akananuru* mentions beautiful women of the seashore exchanging salt for paddy with peasant women. Women are also mentioned in connection with the making and selling of toddy made out of fermented rice. Garland making and flower selling were other occupations associated with women. Sangam poems often mention the *chevilittai*—foster mothers or wet nurses, who seem to have been closely associated with family members. The *viraliyar* were women bards and dancers belonging to the *panar* community of wandering minstrels. There are also references to kings employing women bodyguards.

PRIMARY SOURCES

A heroic death

Many said,
That old woman, the one whose veins show on her weak, dry arms where the flesh is hanging,
whose stomach is flat as a lotus leaf, has a son who lost his nerve in battle and fled.
At that, she grew enraged and she said,
'If he has run away in the thick of battle,
I will cut off these breasts from which he sucked,'
and, sword in hand, she turned over fallen corpses,
groping her way on the red field.
Then she saw her son lying there in pieces
and she rejoiced more than the day she bore him.
Purananuru 278: The song of Kakkaipatiniyar Nachchellaiyar. Note that this poem, with its graphic and startling glorification of a heroic death, was composed by a woman.

SOURCE Hart, 1979: 199

Sangam poetry shows the existence of a vibrant and sophisticated literary culture in ancient Tamilakam. A 2nd century CE inscription from Mannarkoil mentions the *katikai*. This term, derived from the Sanskrit *ghatika*, may refer to an assembly of learned persons, an institution of higher learning, or a place where such an assembly or institution was located.

Champakalakshmi (1975–76) identifes the 'Sangam age' with the last phase of the megalithic culture in the Tamil region. She further identifies the megalithic communities and their large agricultural settlements with the *velir* (chieftains) and the *velala* (peasantry) of the Sangam poems. She substantiates her argument with a correlation of the *velir* settlements known from literature with the megalithic sites. Apart from identifying such specific correlations, there is a broad correspondence between some of the cultural features reflected in Sangam poetry and that of megalithic sites of the far south. This includes a subsistence base consisting of agriculture, cattle rearing, and fishing; the use of iron; and a milieu in which warfare and weapons were important. The poems, like the megaliths, reflect a variety of modes of disposal of the dead. The hero stones of the poems can similarly be connected with the memorial stones of the megalithic tradition.

Philosophical Developments: Astika and Nastika Schools

The modern distinction between philosophy and religion is difficult to maintain with reference to ancient cultures. Indian philosophical traditions offered different explanations about the nature of reality and knowlege, but they usually also had a soteriological aspect (soteriology means a path to salvation or liberation) and many of them came to be eventually connected with one or other religious tradition. The indigenous term for philosophy is *darshana*, which literally means 'view'. Another important term is *anvikshiki*, which literally means 'looking at', and eventually came to mean logical reasoning. Using a classificatory system from within the tradition, early Indian philosophical schools can be classified into ***astika*** and ***nastika***. The *astika* schools accepted the