

Reading Manuscripts: Observations on Emergence of Medieval Society in South India as Revealed from the Change in Imprecations in Tamil Inscriptions

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These Brahmana brothers have now forgotten the old good habits of Brahmanas and Vellalas and are steeped in the bad behaviour of the low jatis.

—A Tirukkachchur inscription of the thirteenth century

The main source of ancient and medieval south Indian history is inscriptions, which have survived in good numbers for the period from the eighth to seventeenth centuries. If we read these inscriptions, we can recognise the changes that occurred in state and social formation at certain stages during this millennium. These changes may be suggested even by a short passage in a single inscription. I have quoted above a passage from a Tamil inscription (*SII, xxvi-333*) of the thirteenth century surviving in Tirukkachchur¹ in Chingleput District, which expresses, I believe, a perception of the social change felt by the people of that locality at the time. To make it into a history (narrative), however, we have to examine and study many more inscriptions.

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¹This inscription records the atrocities of five Brahmana brothers and the measures taken by local people against them.

