

Cattle Raiding at Night (Yaamam - Aanirai Kavarthal)

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ABSTRACT

The war tradition of the Tamils primarily revolved around the concept of Aram (righteousness). There is no evidence of wars taking place during the night. However, it can be inferred from Tamil traditions that the main reason for wars—namely, the capturing of cattle herds—occurred during the night-time hours (yaamam).

Keywords: Tamils – War – Aram – Yaamam (night-time) – Capturing cattle – Civilization – Megalithic age – Tribal traditions – Bards – Poets – Poverty – Hunger – Kings – Ownership – Land – Fame.

INTRODUCTION

In Tamil cultural tradition, love and heroism are inseparable. The war tradition of the Tamils has a long continuity. Tamils have followed codes of conduct (aram) in the battlefield. However, the war tradition that arose during the early tribal stages was not the same as the later war tradition. This is because we can observe a type of warfare that was neither regulated nor civilized. Therefore, the aim of this article is to explore what kind of war traditions Tamil society practiced before the emergence of the war ethics (aram) followed by the Tamils.

Codes of War

Tamil traditions prescribe certain codes of war. Among them are:

Wars that begin with the beating of the murasu (war drum) in the morning must also be ended with the beating of the murasu in the evening.

Battles should take place only on the designated battlefield.

It is forbidden to attack enemies who are unarmed.

The Tamil society also laid down other codes of war, such as prohibiting attacks on temples, monasteries where ascetics live, and the homes of Brahmins.

However, a major question remains: Were these war codes always upheld under all circumstances?

Causes of War

Poverty and hunger were the fundamental reasons for war.

Desire arising from the divisions of gold, land, and women also served as causes for war.

War might have begun when a strong person sought to subdue and rule over someone weaker.

Likewise, when someone attempted to seize another's rightful possessions, it could have led to war.

Thus, war could have started for many such reasons. Regardless of how wars began, the central question of this research article is: Were the codes of war (por aram) of the Tamils upheld?