CHAPTER III
SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE PEASANTRY

The peasantry were those who were actually involved in agriculture and its related work. The Cholas were imperialistic; they collected the tributes and taxes from conquered territories. But the principal revenue came from the land tax. There were different types of land-ownership patterns. The Vellalas were landlords and most of them were cultivators. They were at the top of the social ladder. The Brahmadeya land granted to Brahmins, the Chaturvedimangalam, the whole village or land granted to learned Brahmins, the land or village granted to the temple as Devadana and the land granted to a person for his service called Jivitha or service tenure constituted the land-ownership pattern of the period. The land ownership patterns were almost same during the reign of the Cholas and Pandyas. Peasantry during the period under study belongs to different castes and communities.

Vellalas

The Vellalas were a influential community among the non-Brahmins and were farmers by vocation. There were several categories of the Vellalas. During the Chola period itself, the distinction had emerged based on the region they occupied and lived, such as Tondaimandalam Vellalas, Karkatta Vellalas, Nanchilnad Vellalas and Kongu Vellalas. They were land
owners and cultivators. The Vellalas lived in the Vellala Kudiyiruppu. In the villages, the Vellala peasants were the proprietors of lands. The term “Vellala” has been mentioned in a number of inscriptions during the period of the Cholas and Pandyas. The Vellala landlords were also called as Kaniyalar.

The Vellalas were the great farmer caste of the Tamil country and they were strongly represented in every Tamil district. The word “Vellalan” is derived from the word Vellamai, (Vellam - water, anmai - management) meaning cultivation and tillage. Gustav Opert considers “Vellalans” to be etymologically with pallan, palu, palli, etc. The word meaning the lord of the “Vallas” or “Pallas”. There is a legend for the origin of the word “Vellala”. The story of this origin is as follows: Many thousand years ago they were called “Vellalars” because they controlled the flood water (vellam) and utilised it for agricultural purposes. The majority of them were cultivators. But a small section of them took up other professions such as cattle breeding and weaving and a few of the big land owners as absentee landlords also.

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There were variations in the customs and manners of the different sections of the Vellalas. While all the other categories of Vellalas employed Brahmin priests in their sacred ceremonies, the Kongu Vellalas employed sometimes their own caste men for the purpose. The Vellalas who were mostly the agriculturists were a very limb of the society. There were two types of Vellalas; the superior and the inferior - the superior Vellalas owned land and the latter were actually cultivators engaged in tilling. The superior Vellalas had the right of marriage with the royal families. The inferior Vellalas being the lowest in the hierarchy is indicated by designating their women folk Kadaisiyar women of the Sudra class.\footnote{327 N.Subramanian, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.258.}

Probably it was about the 9th century A.D. that the various subdivisions among Vellalas appeared. Principally they were connected with agriculture. But from early period there had emerged the distinction between Ulvittumbar and Ulutunbar.\footnote{328 \textit{Idem.}} The Ulvittumbar were owners of the lands and engaged agricultural labourers for cultivation and tilling the lands. Ulutunbars were small land holders; they worked themselves in their lands. Though in later times, there were interchanges among them, upto the end of the imperial Chola period, certain sections like the Kondaikkatti Vellalar and Karkarta Vellalar were pre-eminently 'Ulvittumbar' or landlords.
The Vellalas inhabited the Pandya kingdom around Madurai and Tirunelveli. They had almost all the lands in their possession.\(^{329}\)

In order to settle Brahmin in *Kodanrama Chaturvedimangalam*, the king purchased the lands from *bhumiputirar* (owners of land) or *Nattumakkal* who had enjoyed the tenancy right over the villages and who were all Vellalas.\(^{330}\) These Nattumakkal belonged to the Vellala Community. The Pandya king Vira Pandya (1253 A.D.) who had the bhumiputtiran seems to be patron of the Vellalas.\(^{331}\) The Vellalas who were called, *kodikkal* or betel vine clan, so called because they cultivated the *kodikkal*.\(^{332}\) Members of this class were found in all parts of Madurai district.

The original stronghold of the Kondaikkatti Vellalas was Tondimandam. Later they spread from there throughout Tamil Nadu. Some of the Vellalas were employed in the kings court and others as military leaders during medieval period. Some of the Vellalas were employed as the officials by the King and some others were recruited for military services. A certain Udaiva Divakara Muvenda Velan was an official in the court of Maravarman Sundara Pandya I.\(^{333}\) Tavapperumal\(^{334}\) and Nilagangarayan\(^{335}\)

\(^{330}\) *A.R.E.*, 1936-37, Para 43.
\(^{334}\) *A.R.E.*, 119 of 1938-1939.
belonged to the Vellala community. They served as officers in the courts of Jatavarman Sundarapandya I and Maravarman Vikrama Pandya III respectively. The title Muvenda Velan was given to the high official of the Vellala, which was frequently mentioned in the later Pandya inscriptions. An epigraph from Tiruvannamalai records two commanders of belonging to Vellala community.

The Vellalas were self-denying followers of Saiva faith. They burnt the dead. Early marriages were also usual among the Vellalas. Their widows did not remarry. Polygamy was unknown. The chastity of their females was jealously guarded. All the Kodaikkatti Vellalar even within the same village did not intermarry.

The Vellalas can be divided into vegetarian (Saiva Vellalar) and non-vegetarian based on their food habits. Among the Saiva Vellalars Sekkiliar of the 12th century and Meykandar of the 13th century A.D. were famous. Sekkilar was a Kondaikatti Vellala while Meykandar was a Saiva Vellala belonging to the Kalappalar group.

The Organisations of Vellalas

The Vellalas had their own organisation called Chitrameli ('meli in Tamil means "plough share"). It was a large organisation. Groups of

335 A.R.E., 236 of 1936-1937.
336 A.R.E., 365 of 1959-60,
Villages under this organisation was called *Chitrameli periyanadu*. The Chitrameli Periya Nadu was an organisation of agriculturists, appearing quite early in the Chola period, in the latter half of the eleventh century A.D., in Tamaraippakkam, North Arcot District. It was known as Rajendra Chola Perkkalar. Some of the villages of the organisation had the name *chitramelinallur*, *chitrameli chaturvedimangalam*. An epigraph from Tirukoilur, belonging to Virapandya Deva records that the organisation of *chitrameli periyanadu* agreed to give annually one *padakku* of paddy for each plough and one *kuruni* for each man to meet the requirements of the temple at Chitrameli-vinnagar alias Tiruvidaikkali. Its members were called *Chitrameli Periyanattar*. They were also known as *Bhumiputhirar* and *nattumakkal* on account of their dependence on land. They enjoyed the tenancy right of the village. The *nattumakkal* belonged to the Vellala community. The Pandya king Virapandya also had surname, *bhumiputhiran* the patron of agriculturists. The *chitrameli-periyanattar* worshipped the plough-share. That was also adopted by them as their standard unit of measurement. They controlled the entire production of grain and its import and export. They made substantial contributions to religion and society at large.

342 *A.R.E.*, 172 of 1941-42.
343 *A.R.E.*, 91 of 1941-42.
345 *A.R.E.*, 117 of 1900
346 *A.R.E.*, 75 of 1903.
Nattar

The nattar were the dominant peasant in the locality, judging from their functions in many of the grants of land recorded in the Chola copper plate. The nattar were identified as the chief executors of 'orders' establishing newly created Brahman settlements. They were involved in the demarcation of the lands comprising of such settlements.\(^{348}\) The functions of the local bodies were the control and regulation of land, management of irrigation works, temples, collection and remission of taxes.\(^{349}\)

Pallar

The name “Pallar” appeared in the Sangam works. They were the descendants of the pre-Tamil and pre-historic people.\(^{350}\) The next to the “Paraiyar” the Pallar are the major untouchable community in Tamil Nadu. They represent an important organ of the village economy. During medieval times they formed the bulk of agricultural labour. They were usually employed in the cultivation of paddy lands. The “palla” women were to be considered particularly skilled in planting paddy seedling and weeding paddy plants. They were specialised in the art of paddy cultivation even from the Sangam age. There are many references to women of the "last class" namely kadaiciyar working in the paddy fields. The “pallas” are also denoted by the title of kadaiyar. The ancient heroic tribe called

\(^{349}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.66.
“malla” described in the Sangam classics were probably the ancestors of “Pallars”.  

The “pallas” settled mostly in the Southern most part of the country known as Pandyan region in ancient times. Some of them were found in the Chola region also in such districts as Trichi and Tanjore and in the Kongu region such as Salem and Coimbatore districts. Only a very small proportion of them were found in South Arcot district. Their number was practically nil in North Arcot and Chingleput districts.

From the ancient times they were noted for their skill in wet cultivation. Therefore, a majority of them lived on the banks of the rivers like Cauvery, Tamparapareni, Vaigai and their tributaries, Amaravathi and Bhavani, where fertile lands for wet cultivation were found in abundance. Pallas, both males and females are perhaps the only people who stick onto their traditional occupation from ancient to modern times.

All the more the Pallars were a class of agricultural labourers. The name “Pallar” is derived from the word "Pallam" means a pit or a low lying region. Since wet lands were usually found in low lying areas and “Pallas”

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usually engaged in the cultivation of paddy in such lands, it has been suggested that the caste name 'Pallar' derived from the word “Pallam”.\textsuperscript{353}

It is further suggested that the name is connected with the wet cultivation, in which they were experts and which was always carried out on low ground. The Pallas are described as a very numerous, but a most abject and despised race. They were farmers and usually slaves in almost every sense of word. The Pallas earning by the ceaseless sweat of their brow bore handful of grain to stay the pangs of hunger, and a rug with which to partly cover their nakedness. They were found in almost every village, they were toiling and moiling for the benefit of Vellalas and others. Like Parayas, the Pallars also settled in mud-huts in the fields far removed from the villages where the higher castes lived. Their hamlets were called \textit{pallachcheri}. They were untouched by the life and habits of the higher castes such as Brahmins and others. They barely separated from that of Paraiyas, the \textit{Paraicheri}.\textsuperscript{354}

The Pallas are called themselves as Deventra Kulattar or descendants of Indira. According to a legend the sweat of the Deventra fell in a plant growing in the water from which arose child who became the ancestors of the Pallars namely Vadivelu Kutumpan.\textsuperscript{355} There are some others who say


that Devendra created these people for the purpose of labouring on behalf of Vellalas. Whatever their origin, they were the slaves of the Vellalars, in the ancient times and regarded by them merely as chattels. They were brought to Pandya mandala by the Vellalas.\footnote{Edgur Thuston, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.473.} Probably they are one of the aboriginal races of South India.\footnote{J.H.Nelson, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.58.}

An inscription of medieval period compares the kutumbas (one branch of Pallar) with Pandya kings. According to it there was a severe famine in the Chera, Chola and Pandya countries.\footnote{K.R.Hanumanthan, \textit{Op.cit.}, pp.102-103; Quoted in \textit{A.R.E.}, 508 of 1926; \textit{A.R.E.}, 588 of 1926; \textit{Ibid.}, Part II, p.18.} The Pandya king went to Devendra, sat on the same level with him, demanded equal privileges with him and came to earth with four devakanni\textit{ar} and cultivated sugar canes, plantain, palmyra and several varieties of paddy for which he brought from the heaven. He also dug twelve thousand wells in a single day and solved the problem of drought. In recognition of his services, he was given the title \textit{Devendra Kutumpan} and bestowed some privileges. This legend is useful to understand that the Pallas were experts in wet cultivation from time immemorial and responsible for the cultivation of wet crops like sugar cane, plantain and paddy.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp.102-103.}

According to another tradition the Pallas sprang from the union of Sudra male and Brahmin female and that the Pallas were an ancient community of Tamil Nadu, owners of land and great cultivators of the wet
land, of the country. They were suppressed into slavery in course of time by the powerful tribes which came from other parts of South India. In fact, they were a well organised community. Their headman was called *palakan*, the chief guru *samiyar*, the priest *valluvan* and servant called *otumpillai*.360 In Madurai district, the head Pallan was called *kudumban*; and he was assisted by *kalati*, the messenger entitled *varian*. The duty of the *varian* was to summon the people to attend the council meetings, festivals, marriages and funerals.361

There is a proverb in Tamil that one can count the variety in paddy and not that of Pallas, it is because of the large number of sub-divisions among them. In the Pandyan region the divisions are *Ayya, Amma, Atha, Agna*, and *Kadaignan*.362

The Pallas did not marry outside of their caste nor there was marriage among their own sub-castes. The young man could marry the daughter of his father's sister and this was considered his hereditary right of the young man. Marriages were performed only after the boys and girls attained the marriageable age.

The Pallas themselves conducted their marriages.363 Widow marriages and divorce were most common among them.364 The tying of

**tali** was common. Their common food consisted of rice, vegetables and meat; they did not eat beef like Paraiyas and therefore considered themselves superior to them. But they eat beacon which loath some to the other caste Hindus.\(^{365}\)

The Palla young men excelled in some martial arts such as **silambu**. During festivals and other important occasions they simply thrilled the audience by exhibiting this skilful art. Other caste people learnt **silambu** from Palla teachers. They were very industrious and generous.\(^{366}\)

The Pallas were mostly of followers of Saivism. They worshipped village deities.\(^{367}\) Some of them worshipped Vishnu also.\(^{368}\) Many of them worshipped several village deities, such as Kali Amman, Ellai Amman, Sellachi, Sathan and Mallan.

The Pallas took part in seedling and harvest festival. In Perur near Coimbatore they took part in the festivals organised at the time of planting paddy seedlings. Whenever the lands were ploughed in certain places, Pallas were asked to plough first and then the others followed them. This ceremony was called **ponner** (golden plough). They were the people who controlled the flow of water in sluices of lake and decided the distribution

of water. Suffice it to say, the Pallas from cradle to grave were attached to agriculture, which was the only source of their livelihood.

Paraiyar

One of the most downtrodden castes in Tamil Nadu is that of the Paraiyar. There is a doubt that whether they were known by the same name in the Sangam age. There is no doubt, the name Paraiyan is found mentioned in the Purananuru. It is seen that he belonged to the caste of drummers. There is a view that the Paraiya was known as the “Pulaiyan” in the Sangam age. The term Paraiya is derived from the root word "Parai" which means a kind of drum. The occupation of the Paraiyar was tom-tom beating. They beat the drums on festive occasions in the temples and on all occasions, good and bad, for the caste-Hindus. They were also announcers of the Government orders. Large number of them were agricultural labourers and domestic servants. Some others served as grave-diggers, watchmen, scavengers, hunters and potters. During the medieval period, the Paraiyas were engaged in many odd tasks such as cultivation, weaving, fighting in the army, drum beating, watching in village, doing funeral service and attending to other menial jobs. They seem to have possessed property and pay taxes. The Paraiyan and Pulaiyan were considered low in society, segregated and put to many disabilities during

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369 Ibid., pp.172-173.
this period.\textsuperscript{373} At present the Paraiyars are found throughout the Tamil country whereas the Pulaiyans denote a particular scheduled caste in Kerala.

In the earlier times the Paraiyas were drummers and labourers. They were treated as part of the temple staff but all of them were engaged in drum beating alone. They played a significant role in the village communities. Some were involved in weaving also. The Paraiyas as a caste seem to have enjoyed certain privileges during the Chola period. When the paddy was removed from the straw it was to be measured by a Paraiyan and perquisites were given to him.\textsuperscript{374} \textit{Periyapuram} mentions that the Paraiyas had lands as their own. It is called \textit{Irai\-yili parai thudamai}. They cultivated in those lands.\textsuperscript{375}

Paraiyas lived in villages. Their settlement or habitat was called as \textit{urar nattam}. The term is invariably coupled with the \textit{ur-irukkai}.\textsuperscript{376} or the \textit{Ur-Irukkai-nattam}.\textsuperscript{377} meaning village site. In some cases the village was smaller than the average type, such one being generally denoted in inscription as \textit{padagai} i.e. hamlet.\textsuperscript{378}

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\item \textit{S.I.I.}, Vol.II, No.5 Section 6.
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Some inscriptions mention the separate quarters called cheris, for habitation of artisans and other classes of people. An inscription of Rajaraja I (1014 A.D.) speaks of the cheries of the Paraiyas. Those who worked in the fields were called Ulapparayar who lived in a separate cheri. There were two living quarters for them - the eastern quarters in which menials (or) Ur paraiyar lived and the western paraichcheri in which the Paraiya cultivators (Ulapparayar) lived. The paraichcheri ponds and the wells of the Parayas were exempted from the taxes. The Paraiyas were not permitted to draw water from tanks or wells used by the caste people. The burning ground of the Parayas was also exempted from the taxes. Certain Paraiya villages were taxed perhaps owing to their comparative prosperity. Paraichcheris were also called as Paraiyar Kudiyiruppu. A record of Jatavarman Sundarapandya I refers to a paraichcheri known as Bhuvanamuludutaicheri, named after his queen. On the other hand, the word ‘cheri’ denoted just a settlement of people during the period.

In the inscriptions of Rajaraja I, this caste has been mentioned under the name "Paraiyan". In recent times several sub-castes among the Paraiyars emerged, like samban, sangidian, soliyan, konga, morasu kilakkattai, katti, and valangamattu. There is a belief not only among the Paraiyars but among others as well that they occupied in the past a much higher position than at present. Some of the privileges which they enjoyed in land seemed to have been gained from the higher castes. The lower

important village servants like Talayari and Tothi have been generally held by the Paraiyar.382

Each community lived in its own cheri (colony); it is mentioned in a record of Jatavarman Sundarapandya I. Like them the merchants also lived in their cheris called Kunnuruvan cheri.383

The Paraiyas played a significant role in the local administration of the country. In the fourth regnal year of Maravarman Kulasekhara I, a sale deed was made by the Urar. A number of village office-bearers who signed the document were Paraiyas. They were periyanattupparaiyan, kananattupparaiyan, arasarmi kapparaiyan and akalankapparaiyan. This record clearly shows that the Paraiyas were office bearers of the township and they were literates and who signed the sale-deeds themselves.384

An inscription found in the Sugandhavaneswara temple at Perichchi koyil which belongs to Virapandiyadeva records a quarrel between the Paraiyas and residents of 24 villages in Tiruttiyur muttam, in which there was some bloodshed on both sides. Gangayan, one of the king's officers intervened and made an amicable settlement between them. According to that settlement, the Paraiyan should beat the drums (murasu) for the caste-Hindus on all occasions, good and bad and should receive in turn a paddkku (measure) of paddy and a fowl. Every resident of the village

383 A.R.E., No.59 of 1900.
(parru) who was entitled to the services of these people should part away a measure from his produce a kalam and a tuni of paddy to them every year.\(^{385}\)

Another profession which the Paraiyas occasionally took up was beating of drums on festival occasions and marriages. During the medieval period, a tax was levied from those who performed such functions. An inscription of Rajaraja III mentions a tax called paraiyirai.\(^{386}\)

Some of the Paraiyas seem to have been engaged in weaving also during the medieval period. They had separate loom called paraittari. A tax called paraittariyirai was levied on them. In Sarvamanya villages granted by the Cholas in the 13th century the remittance of a number of taxes including tax on paraittari is mentioned.\(^{387}\)

Another inscription reveals the fact that the drum beating Parayas had no lands of their own and they subsisted on the perquisites granted to them by the villagers. But Periyapuranam says that Paraiyas were granted with rent-free land called paraitutaimai.\(^{388}\)

\(^{388}\) Ibid., p.159; Periyapuranam, Tirunalaipovarpuranam, Vol.3.
One *puvan paraiyan* who provided irrigation facilities for a waste land and made it cultivable is described as *Araiyan anukkas*. The title *Araiyan* is usually given to a soldier of the Chola army and the title *anukkan* is normally given to a private secretary of the king or some body who is near the person of the king. Therefore *puvan paraiyan* may have been a member of the body guard of the king. The land which was made cultivable by the efforts of *Puvan* was named as *paraiyan vacakikal*.389

The Paraiyas were also included in village assemblies and they were to take an active part on important matters such as remission of taxes, loyalty to a particular chief etc. The leaders of Paraiya took part in such assemblies and they were called as *parai mudalies*. The title *parai mudali* meaning the first among the others or principal person.390

There were *paraicheris* during the times of Maravarman Sundarapandya.391 It is clearly stated in an inscription issued by Rajaraja Chola II that the lands occupied by the certain castes were exempted from taxation.

Some of the inhabitations of the Parayas were called as *Tintacheri* or Untouchable *cheri*. This was mentioned in another inscription during the

The paraiyas worshipped generally *amma* (Mother). Sometimes they worshipped Kanniyamma (*virgin*) or seven virgins.  

The Valluvar who seemed to have been the sub-sect among the Parayas, were the priests of the Paraiyar. The Valluvar considered to be of a caste superior to that of the Paraiyar. They did not inter-dine or intermarry with the Paraiyar. The Paraiyar were usually Saivas, but they were in fact demon-worshippers. They worshipped a number of several village gods and goddesses. It was due to the hectic missionary activity after 16th century many Paraiyas were converted to Christianity.  

Polygamy was in vogue among the Paraiyas. Besides, the widow remarriage was common, through there was no formal ceremony in all such cases.  

**Pulaiyas**  

The beaters of battle drum were called as Valluvas and Pulayas in ancient Tamil literature. The Pulaiyas were described as drum beaters in funeral processions. The drum beaten at such times was called as *cappari* meaning funeral drum. Therefore, the word Paraiya as professional name must have been applied at first only to those who beat drums in funeral
processions. Later on the word some how came to be applied to other Pulaiyas also.  

The Pulaiyas of ancient Tamilagam also served as priests at times. One of the meanings given for the word *pulaiyan* in the Tamil lexicon is *prohita* or priest. In Sangam classics Pulaiyas are described as performing certain priestly ceremonies in the cremation of ground. 

There is a view that Paraiyan was known as *pulaiyan* in the Sangam age. References to Pulaiyans are found in *Purananuru* as well as *Kalittogai*. In these contexts he is not only associated with drumming but also several menial kinds of work. The Pulaiyas were agricultural labourers and slaves. Some of the Pulaiyas were doing *urpulamai*. The Saiva saint Nandan was doing *Urupalamai*. Besides the land owners great and small, there were other dependents on agriculture. There was a large class of landless labourers, an agrarian proletariat, some of them were in condition of serfdom. They assisted in the operations and shared the produce of agriculture. Each village had a staff of hereditary menial servants. Servants of the lowest social class were remunerated for their service to the community by shares in the common land of the village. 

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Adanur, was in the merkkanadu, on the banks of the river Kollidam. As part of the fertile marudam (paddy fields), Adanur abounded in extensive paddy and sugar cane fields, mango and coconut groves and plantain and flower gardens.399

In Adanur the affluent landlords who amassed their wealth chiefly through yields from the wet and dry lands lived comfortably. In the fields of the rich all the agricultural operations such as ploughing, sowing, transplanting the seedling, watering, manuring, weeding, scaring away the menacing birds, harvesting, threshing, tending the cattle etc. were done by the agrarian serfs.400 The labourers living in nearby pulaippadi (the living quarters of the Pulaiyas) were untouchables. They constituted the cheap labour force and played a crucial role, by their hard labour and through their sweat and toil, these slaves produced more material wealth. As a consequence, the population of Adanur increased. In this settlement Saiva devotees lived in large numbers. It was one of the strongholds of Saivism. There was the colony of Pulaiyas, situated in the outskirts of the town. It was here Nandan was born. In that hamlet of Pulaiyar, Nandan lived with his kith and kin in the little old thatched huts (purkurumbai ciri) over which creepers of the bottle plant had been trained. Condemned to live in appalling conditions of the segregated locale variously termed as pulaippadi

400 Ibid., p.18, Verse 1045.
and *kadainar irrupu*, the Pulayas of Adanur passively succumbed to sub-human conditions for ages.\(^{401}\)

The life of the poor classes in the villages - those who were in the lowest rank of the social order, may be gained from the picture of Adanur, with which Sekkilar opens his account of the life of paraiya saint Nandan. Despite some literary exaggeration, *Periyapuram* clearly informs the realities of country life at that time.

In the outskirts of that town, Adanur, was a small hamlet of Pulayas studded with small huts under old thatches over spread by *surai* creepers and inhabited by agrarian labourers engaged in menial occupations. In the thresholds of the huts covered with strips of leather, little chickens were seen moving about in groups; dark children who wore bracelets of black iron were prancing about, groups carrying little puppies whose yelps were drowned by the tinkling bells which girded their waists. In shade of the marudu trees, a female labourer (*ulatti*) sent her baby to sleep on the sheet of leather; there were mango trees from whose branches drums were hanging; and under the coconut palms, in little hollows on the ground, the tiny-headed bitches lay quiet after pupping. The red-crested cocks crowed before dawn calling the browny Pulaiyar to their day's work and by day, under the wide shade of the kanji tree spread the voice of the wavy-haired Pulaiya women singing as they were husking paddy; by the side of tanks full of warbling birds, the music of many instruments accompanied the drinking fetes of Pulaiya women who wore on their heads fragrant flowers.

and ears of paddy-corn, and who staggered in their dance as the result of intoxication. In this abode of kadainar the lowest caste, there arose a man with a feeling of true devotion to the feet of Siva. He was the unrivalled Nandanar who inherited as his share communal service in the neighbouring township (urpulamai). Depending for livelihood on his share of communal land (land set apart by the town for Paraiyas in communal employ) and following the profession that was his by birth, he used to supply to the temple of the Lord of Trident, leather and straps for making drums, strings (guts) for lutes of various types and bezoars for the worship of God of Gods. Works of this class were indeed in a condition of serfdom, adscriptilebae with no freedom of movement. 402

As indicated above, the Pulaiyas of Adanur formed the major labour force they formed the basis of the production process. They worked hard dawn to dusk. And yet they had no share in the enjoyment of the wealth created through their hard labour, sweat and toil, they were kept away from agrarian and animal wealth. They received was just pittance what they possessed as property only dark hovel like huts a few chicks and pups and one or two fruit bearing trees in the pulaijadi. Their women had no oil to apply on their disheveled hair nor decent cloths to cover their bodies. They consume meat and liquor. They took non-vegetarian. Their ornaments were made out of base metals like the block iron. This was their inheritance in the Adanur Pulaijadi. 403

The story of Nandan or Thirunalaipovar as expounded in Sekkizhar’s *Periapuranam* the Saiva Hagiology is a classic example of a silent revolt of a suppressed man against the stratified feudal society in Medieval Tamil Nadu. A sketchy, but an interesting account of Nandanar or Thirunalaipovar found in *Periyapuranam* assumes importance in this context. Information, though of literature-borne, the other corroborative evidences testify to the then extant societal condition and the life and struggle of a spiritual saint of low birth, Nandanar.\(^{404}\)

Nandanar, a Pulaya (Adi-Dravida) by birth must have lived during the intervening period from 660 to 840 A.D. in a Pulaya Village in Adanur, presently in Thanjavur District. It is believed that the Saiva worship flourished in Adanur. Having born into untouchables family, Nandan was destined to live a life of an “independent slave” exploited and discriminated at every level and stage in life. The segregated life, wretched living conditions and hand-to-mouth subsistence levels, had not provoked Nandanar to fight against the perpetrators of the morbid system. He was a devout Saivite and had immense satisfaction in supplying hides, skin and veins of cattle for making instruments for temple worship and other precious cattle products for performing prayers in the Siva temples. On the other hand people belonging to Pulaya Caste alone could supply these materials, since that was the profession earmarked for those untouchables.

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On one occasion Nandanar wanted to offer prayers to Sivaloyanantha Swamy Temple at Thirupunkur. Since untouchables could not enter the temples he was offering prayers to the Lord Siva at a distance outside the premises of the temple. Moved by Nandan’s devotion, Lord Siva made the deity that blocked his sight move aside and facilitated his devotee’s prayers. Thereafter, Nandanar expressed his gratitude to Lord Siva, by digging a pond in front of the temple and returned home.

Having not satisfied with his offering prayers to temples of Lord Siva in and around Adanur, Nandanar developed an ambition to pay a visit to Chidambaram, the abode of Lord Nataraja, situated far away from his village. He sought permission from his landlord to go to Chidambaram. The caste and class-conscious master refused to give permission to his slave. However, he promised to give him the much sought after permission by assigning a difficult task of completing one particular seasonal agriculture operation to him. Nandanar not only accepted the job from his master but also completed it well ahead of the stipulated period of time. It is believed that the Lord Siva himself came to the rescue of Nandanar and helped him complete the difficult work.

Nandanar’s unquestionable faith in Lord Siva had given him enormous spiritual power and determination to overcome the hurdles that were placed before him by the society, in his mission to worship Lord Siva Nataraja at Chidambaram. He had conviction that god was not against the untouchables and it was the high-caste Sanatana (The staunch believers in the Varnasrama social order and other Brahmanical practices) hypocrites,
who were misusing the name of God for their selfish interests. Nandanar after getting permission from his master went to Chidambaram. While cursing himself for having born into an untouchable caste, he standing outside the premises of Lord Nataraja Temple longed for his darshan or sight. Having been moved by Nandanar’s devotion, the Lord in order to take him to His sanctrum sanctorum, instructed the temple priests and Nandanar in their dreams. Accordingly, the homagundam or fire pit was prepared by the Tillai Brahmin priests. It was believed that the homagundam was prepared at the instance of Lord Siva to wipe out the stigma of untouchability, from the Pulaya Nandanar after fire bath. This purification ceremony raises serious doubts about the very concept of God.

However, undaunted by the ordeal that he had to encounter, Nandanar by jumping into the homagundam had stirred the conscience of society to the effect that “the God and religion are not the exclusive properties of one particular caste.” This protest consciousness coupled with a strong desire to visit and worship Lord Nataraja at any cost, burnt like a fire in the heart of Nandanar for long, and at last, it synchronized with a fire ordeal engineered by the representatives of the highly discriminative and exploitative medieval society.\footnote{Ibid., pp.21-31}

Agambadiyars

An agricultural caste mentions in the Pallava inscription is that of Agambadiyar. In the Uttaramerur inscription of Dantivarman this
agricultural caste of peasants or ryots is known as 'Ahambadi Udaïyans. They were not an affluent class of people. They lived in the humble houses in the Pallava period.\textsuperscript{406}

The Agambadiyar cultivating castes are found in all the districts of present Tamil Nadu. In their manners and customs they closely resemble Vellalas. Many of Agambadiyars of Madura district were domestic servants in the Marava Zamindaries during colonial times. The Agambadiyars who are settled in North Arcot district are a class of cultivators who different from the Agambadiyars of Madura district.\textsuperscript{407}

The name Agambadiyar perhaps is derived from the root \textit{aham}, in Tamil language. It means a ‘house’, in another ‘earth’, and hence it has two meanings, house holder and land holder. The suffix \textit{udaiyar} indicate ownership.\textsuperscript{408} They must have been generally influenced by their contact with Brahmins. They engaged Brahmin priests for performing their birth, marriage and death ceremonies like Vellalas. The more prosperous Agambadiyars in the south imitate the Vellalas in their ceremonial observances and the Maravans.\textsuperscript{409}

Adult marriages appeared to have been the rule among Agambadiyars. The marriage ceremony among the poorer Agampadiyars is very simple.\textsuperscript{410}

\textsuperscript{408} \textit{Ibid.}, p.6.
\textsuperscript{409} \textit{Idem}.
\textsuperscript{410} \textit{Ibid.}, p.9.
The more prosperous Agambadiyar celebrated their marriages according to *purani* type.\(^{411}\) The Agambadiyars were Saivaites and they engaged *pandarams* (non-Brahmin priests) to assist in their the funeral ceremonies.\(^{412}\) They worshipped various minor deities such as Aiyanar, Pidari and Karuppusamy also.\(^{413}\) There are references about Agambadiyar in the medieval Pandyan inscriptions. Endowments were also made by Agambadiyars to the temples for various reasons. An inscription found in the Adinarayana temples at Kurumbar, in the 6th regnal year of Jatavarman Alias Tribhuvana Chakkravartin Virapandya Deva records an endowment of two pieces of the land by Agambadi's of Alagiya - pandiya uilupayar of Vilattur for offering and worship during *Tai-ayanam* in the temple of Sundara Pandya-Vinnagar Emperuman.

The tenancy right over the lands was to remain with the donor. The forces on the *puravu* lands were agreed to pay by the *Urar*. They received a lump-sum for the purpose.\(^{414}\)

**Maravars**

The Maravars are having some affinity with the Kallar and Agambadiyar.\(^{415}\) The Maravar formed as a caste as early as the Sangam

\(^{414}\) *A.R.E.*, 278 of 1940-1941.
\(^{415}\) In modern times, these three castes constitute one single denomination as *Mukkulathor*. 
epoch, at any rate by the time *Kalittogai* was composed. The term 'Maravan' is found in several Sangam classics. The term 'Maravas’ was employed to denote one who possessed martial valour probably the caste name itself was described from the general sense of bravery. In fact the Maravars were brave and warlike. They were employed as soldiers in war. But during the times of peace, they and their kinsmen took to highway robbery.\(^{416}\)

The Maravars are found chiefly in Madurai and Tirunelvelly.\(^ {417}\) The Maravar have been described as typical of the earliest Dravidians of India as well. Maravar, like Nadar, Vanniyar and several others claimed themselves to be Kshatriyas.\(^ {418}\) There are several subdivisions among the Maravas. The Kondayankottai Maravar form an important division. In their turn, they are divided into six sub-tribes or as they called as trees. Each tree is divided into three "kilais" or branches though belonging to the same tree are not allowed to inter-marry. Among the Kondaiyankottai Maravans, a girl can never marry her mother's brother, because these are of the same *kilai*. On the other hand the children of brother and sister should wherever possible marry. Among the general body of Maravas and Kallans marriage takes place in the same manner as among Tamil non-brahmins. The marriage takes place in the house of the bride and the tying of the *tali* is done by the sister of the bridegroom.\(^ {419}\) Thereafter the bride is taken to the house of the

bridegroom where they sit side by side on a plank. After receiving the blessings of the elders a feast follows. Widow remarriage is permitted.420

Kallars

Kallars are in many respects the most remarkable of all castes in Madura district. Their name Kallan which is also that for a thief or robber in several of the languages of Southern India is supposed to have been given to them as indicative of their peculiar mode of earning livelihood.421

The Kallar have been known from a time earlier than the imperial Chola period. Mostly they lived in Thanjavur, Trichirappalli, Madura and other Southern districts from an early time.

Some Kallars in the Thanjavur district had assumed titles as kings on a par with the Pallavas. But, there is no communal or racial connection with the Pallavas. Probably some victories won by the Kalla chieftains over the Pallavas induced them to assume these titles. Some Kallars like Maravars enrolled themselves in the Pandiya and Chola armies. The view that the Kallar were only bandits and were not soldiers of an organised army is not correct. Perhaps after the overthrow of the Nayak rule as also in the pre-Pallavan period, the poor among them might have resorted to high robbery.422 This is likely that during the period when they fell on bad days and stripped of their livelihood chances, hence resorted to thieving.

420 Ibid., p.334.
However their major occupation was agriculture since ancient times. It was their marriage custom that usually a Kallan marries the daughter of his father's sister even in spite of disparity in age. The Kallars had been for long adopting a system of limited polyandry which must have been abandoned later by them.

The Maravars bear Saivite sectarian marks, but they worship various minor deities, such as Kali, Karuppan, Muthukaruppan, Periyakaruppan, Madurai (Viran, Aiyanar and Muniyasamy). Among other minor deities they worshipped, in Madurai their chief deity has been Alagarswamy who is the god installed in the famous temple at Alagarkoil. The widow remarriage is permitted. Deceased among them as also among the Maravars and Agambadiyars were cremated.

**Padaiyatchis**

The caste-name ‘Padaiyatchi’ would appear to have been employed in former times as soldiers. Some of them assumed the title Nayakkans. They were mostly of ryots of humble position. The name *padaiyatchi* is derived from word *padai*, a body of troops and *atci* ruler in the same way as the *kaniyatchi*. The ruler of land or proprietor is derived from *kani* and *atci*. The men of this caste are usually called “*palli-padaiyatchis*”. They

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424 *Idem*.
formed a subdivision of “palli” caste. They were employed as praedial slave in Thondaimandala or in the neighbourhood of Madras.426

The Vanniyars

The Vanniyars at the present time are absolutely of belonging to agricultural caste, but there is reason that they are the descendants of ancestors who in former times held a good position among the tribes of south India.427 The name ‘Vanniyars’ get mention in inscriptions.428

The Uralis

The ‘Uralis’ are the only other caste of Tamil cultivators. They are remarkable in number. They are very low in estimation of other castes and very rarely of every men of any wealth or position. The name comes from ‘Ur’, a village and ‘al’ a labourer. Or perhaps the second syllable means ruler. They are purely of agricultural tribes and castes. They lived in rural parts. They tended cattle. They were agricultural labourers and took to hunting wild animals also. They used to collect and sell honey and other jungle products.429

426 Idem.
428 A.R.E., 229 of 1943-1944.
Nattanbadiyars

The Nattanbadiyars are usually respectable cultivators. There are an interesting race of Tamils. They emigrate into Madurai country. They are called Udaiyan and traditions says that they came from the Toraiyur Nadu. They came from a village called Udaiyarpalayam. They were chiefly residents of the great zamindaries. They contrast favourably with Maravans. They are being very frugal and industrious. The name is probably derived from Nattam a village and padi master or possessor.430

Kurumbars

Kurumbars are an insignificant and not very numerous caste. A few of them cultivated the soil on their own account. The majority of Kurumbars lived by less reputable means. They bred sheep and goats in wild jungle places. It was their most common occupation. They are probably descendants of one of the first castes settled in the South. They are supposed to be a branch of ‘Idaiya’ caste.431 Kurumbars have been found a mention in the inscription.432

The Vallabans

The Vallabans were the offspring of a Vellala and Valiya woman. They are now a small and insignificant caste of cultivators. Some of them assert that their ancestors in old times were the lords of the soil, for whose

430 Ibid., p.59.
431 Ibid., p.64.
432 A.R.E., 229 of 1943-1944.
sole benefit the Vellalans used to carry on cultivation. And it has been shown under the head Vellalans the tradition makes the Vallabans to have joined Kallans in attacking and driving away the Vellalas and that the tradition is probably entitled to credence. It is customary among the Vallabans when demising land to refer the fact of them descendants of the Vallabans who lost vallam that is the Vallabanadu in Thanjavur, their proper country.433

**Pallis**

Another most downtrodden community of the period was that of the Pallis. The Pallis claim a Kshatriya origin and legends connect them with Kulasekara Alwar, one of the early kings of Southern Kerala like the Pandyas.434 Like the Paraiyas, the Pallis also were settled in mud huts in the fields, far removed from the village where the higher castes lived. They were untouchables and their life and habits were different from higher castes such as the Brahmins and others. In the Tamil country the Pallis were one of the early communities. Apart from legends, they are definitely known to have been flourishing in the time of the imperial Cholas.435 Like the Paraiyas, the Pallis also were settled in mud huts in the fields, far removed from the village where the higher castes lived. They were untouchables and their life and habits were different from higher castes such as the Brahmins and others.

A record from Uraiyur, issued by the Jatavarman Vira Pandya in his 5th regnal year 1259 A.D. mentions that, three classes of Pallis attended the village assembly along with six classes of artisans. The assembly decided to collect an annual fee of one \textit{panam} from each and every family, residing within the village for celebrating a temple festival. This inscription informs about the part played by the Pallis in the village administration as well as the temple administration.\footnote{N.Alagappan, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.75-76; \textit{P.S.I.}, No.362.}

In early community is that of the Pallis. Apart from legends they were definitely known to have been flourishing in the time of the Imperial Cholas. It is probable that the Pallis were local chieftains known as Sambuvarayars in the Chola country. Certain inscriptions of the time of Kulottunga III, and Rajaraja III mention Sambuvarayan as the title of local rulers. In South Arcot the Pallis have been the dominant caste.

An inscription found in the east wall of the \textit{mandapa}, in front of the Tirukkotisvara temple in the 13\textsuperscript{th} regnal year of Rajakesarivarman alias Tribuvana Chakkravartin Kulottunga Chola Deva, Registers gift of land and house sites in Peruvalur alias Edirillisolanallur by Sengeni Nalayiravan Ammaiayappan alias Rajendra Chola Sambuvaraya a Palli of Munnur alias Rajanarayana Chaturvedimangalam in Oymanadu alias Virarajendra Valanadu, a district of Jayangondasolamandalam to twelve Brahmins and
for offerings and worship to the God Tirukkodiswaram-Udaiyar consecrated by him in the village.\textsuperscript{437}

Sanskritization is conspicuous among the Pallis. They imitate Brahminical ways. Some of them used to adopt vegetarianism. They also discouraged widow remarriage.\textsuperscript{438} An inscription from Peruvalur issued in the 13\textsuperscript{th} year of Kulottunga Chola Deva’s rule, records a gift of land and house site by Palli for offerings and worship the god Tirukotisvaram Udaiyar.\textsuperscript{439}

**Nadars**

According to Robert Caldwell, the ‘Dravidian Study’ fame that ‘Nadars’ were emigrants from the Northern coast of Srilanka. He found there was a caste bearing the name “\textit{shandror}”, of which he said “\textit{shanar}” is etymologically a corruption. He held that the \textit{Ilavas} and \textit{Tiyars} were also descendants of “\textit{shandror}.” One group, known as the ‘\textit{Nadans}’, entered Tirunelveli sometimes during the rule of the Cholas and after a time invited some “\textit{Shanars}” who had come to South Travancore to serve as climbers of palmyra trees. Eventually there was some fusion between the Nadars and Shanars, though later the Nadars of Virudhunagar, Sivakasi and Tirunelveli considered themselves superior to the ‘\textit{shanar}’.\textsuperscript{440}

\textsuperscript{437} \textit{ARE.}, 512 of 1937-1938.
\textsuperscript{439} \textit{A.R.E.}, 512 of 1937-1938.
The Nadars and shanars occupy a peculiar status. They practice abstinence from liquor and beef. Their widows were not allowed to marry again and associated themselves with the higher section of non-Brahmins. On the other hand, their women were not allowed to wear cloth above their waists. Their association with toddy tapping was responsible for their lower social status. They were not allowed entry into temple or the use of public wells. (Now the Nadars have been economically in a better position thriving in the sphere of commercial business). They seem to have been employed as tax-collectors by the Pandya rulers and later by the Nayaks. As hereditary tax-collectors, the Nadars held civil authority over their land in their control. During the period they were called as Nadars or lords of land\textsuperscript{441} and cultivated their lands with the help of landless agricultural slaves belonging to Paraya and Palla castes.\textsuperscript{442}

**Mallar**

The ‘mallar’ and ‘malavar’ belonged to the martial classes in the Sangam age. Malavar are described and associated with cavalry. They marched into the battlefield with horses. One of their chieftains known as Marvallari was called a great Malava. It may be inferred that the “malla” became the Pallas, the untouchables of later times. In fact the Mukkutar Pallu, a later work describing the idyllic life of the “Pallas” clearly identifies with Mallas.\textsuperscript{443}

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., pp.335-336.


\textsuperscript{443} Ibid., pp.128-129.
The *Tivakaranikantu* (10th century A.D.) describes the Mallar were people of Marudam land. They worked both as army men and cultivators. Another 10th century literature, *Pinkalanikantu* also referred to them as belonging to *Marudam* land. The women folk of the Mallar were called as "*Ulathiya"* and *Kadaichiyar* in the *Pinkalanikantu*. *Sankaranarayanaswamy koil puranam* (12th century A.D.) states that the Mallas controlled the floods and irrigated the plants of field. Since they knew the art of controlling the flood, they were also called as “Vellalas.” The Mallas, on the other hand were skilled in cultivating ‘*nanjai*’ crops like paddy, and sugarcane. They were known to crush the sugarcane and prepare the sugar. Kambar also makes a reference about Mallars in his *Kambaramayanam*. Sekkilar describes about the sugar industry of Mallar. They were skilled in the agricultural work. Further, an umpteen number of references are found in other Medieval Tamil literary works about these Mallars as saying they were skilled both in agriculture and army.445

**Muthalis**

The Muthalis are small in numbers. They are highly respectable and influential agricultural caste. They are supposed to be an offshoot of the Vellalas. They are strictly followers of the Saiva faith. The term *Muthali* means leading or principal men.446

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Valangai and Idangai Factions

The caste system during the Chola period became rigid with a mushroom growth of numerous castes or sub-castes. The left hand and right hand factions consisting 98 castes or sub-castes originated in the Chola period. There are several evidences which prove that these factions lasted up to the end of the 19th century and were always in conflict with each other. Even the kings and other administrative bodies of the state had to side with one faction or the other for socio-economic and political reasons at one particular time or the other.447 The Valangai castes usually claimed superiority over the Idangai, though at times the latter claimed superiority over the former. This led to faction between the two classes. There was bloodshed when the tension prevailed. Both high and low castes included in these classes. Only the low castes such as Paraiyan and Pallan took a leading part in the struggle. The higher castes like Brahmin and Vellalas were not taking part in such conflicts. They offered their services as arbiters for settling their disputes.448

Very little is known about the origin of the Valangai and Idangai classes, when and what circumstances these classes came into existences, what the different factions of these sects were. Crole the author of Chingleput District Manual gives the traditional origin to these classes. He says that "Karikala-Chola divided the parties and assigned 98 tribes each

having distinctive flags and musical instruments for the use of festivals and funerals."\textsuperscript{449}

Mr. M. Srinivasa Iyer in his article on "Tamil Studies' gives some of the suggestions about the probable origin of the hostility between these two factions. Srinivasa Iyengar avers that the division of the people into the right hand and left hand originated in the Chola country about A.D. 1010.\textsuperscript{450} There is a reference in the inscription of Rajaraja I which records about the Valangai regiments (Velaikara troops of the right hand).\textsuperscript{451} Each of these seems to have 98 sects. The 98 sub-sects of the Idangai class to strengthen their bond of unity extend into compact in the 40th year of Kulottunga Chola III.\textsuperscript{452}

An inscription found at Aduthurai seems to record an agreement among themselves by the Valangai 98 classes and the Idangai 98 classes of Valudalambattuvasavadi against the Brahmins and Vellalas who held the priority right (\textit{kani}) in that district. An inscription to this effect was issued in the 2nd regnal year of Parakrama Pandya Deva.\textsuperscript{453}

\textsuperscript{449} The Chingleput District Manual, pp. 33, 34.
\textsuperscript{452} \textit{A.R.E.}, 59 of 1914.
\textsuperscript{453} \textit{A.R.E.}, 34 of 1913.
The earliest reference in inscriptions is found in an inscription issued by Rajendra Chola Deva I (A.D.1011-104), where the *Valangai* class is mentioned.\(^454\)

In the *Tondaimandalasatakam*, there is reference to curbing down of the insolence of the Kannalarkurumbadakki from which, we may infer that the Vellalas (agriculturists) and Kammalas (artisans) were not on friendly terms. The agriculturists must evidently have asserted that the artisans were servants as the latter had to supply to them the necessary tools of husbandry, that the Kammalas were at some social disadvantage position.

The Tamil poet Kamban makes references in seven stanzas in his "Erelupadu' and said that they were naturally proved that nothing would be done without their help. The *Valangai* and *Idangai* differences seem broadly to have been those between the Kammalas and the Vellalas. Generally these two parties lay their differences before the king who decided the case with one party on his right side and another on to his left. These are the reasons to infer that this event happened in Kanchi, though we do not exactly know the name of king before whom the parties appealed. In this city the differences between these two classes must have existed more or less regularly.\(^455\)

An inscription of Kulotunga III, dated in A.D. 1218, registers that a contract drawn up by the Srtimans cultivating lands of a section of the

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\(^{454}\) *A.R.E.*, 341 of 1904.

\(^{455}\) *A.R.E.*, 1921, Para 47, p.103.
Idankai class of Urrattur assembled in the mandapa of the temple for the benefit of all the 98 sub-sects of the Idangai class.\textsuperscript{456}

There was clash between the right and left hand communities. The village was burnt down, the sacred places and images of deities were destroyed, the treasury of the temple was looted by the robbers. The articles that escaped their spoliation could not properly have been secured in the temple. After the quarrels were over, the village was rehabilitated, the temple was renovated and reconstructed.\textsuperscript{457}

Another record from the temple Mummudi Chola, Vinnagaralvar at Rajamahendra-\textit{Chaturvedimangalam} a \textit{brahmadeya}, mentions that there was conflict between the right and left hand classes. It was unable to safeguard properties and burglary of its treasury and due to this, the assembly of Rajamahendra mangalam received a lumpsum from the temple and exempted certain lands belonging to it from the payment of taxes.\textsuperscript{458}

The Pallas and the Paraiyas also indulged in mutual quarrel as members of the left hand and right hand factions. The Pallas claimed amla flower gardens and flags with the figure of a crab as their honorific symbol. As non-beef-eaten folk they refused the Paraiya to enter into their houses. But a Palla could enter a Paraiya homes. Pallas claim the exclusive right to cultivate the lands and when Paraiya women entered the paddy field, the

\textsuperscript{456} \textit{A.R.E.}, 59 of 1914.
\textsuperscript{457} \textit{A.R.E.}, 1930-1937, Para 37.
\textsuperscript{458} \textit{ARE.}, 31 of 1936-1937.
Palla women would out enbloc. Only in the absence of Palla women, Paraiya women could enter the fields or the threshing mound. The Paraiya had, of course, the monopoly of measuring the harvested paddy and storing it in granaries. Only the Paraiya women should supply cow dung and water for making on the granaries. Thus the privileges of Pallas were demarcated in the Pandya country and other regions where the Pallas were in a majority. But in the regions such as the Chola country where the Parayas were in a majority the entire process of cultivation was in the hands of Paraiyas.

The Paraiyas also quarrelled with the Chakkiliyas since the latter belonged to the left hand faction. Thus the Valangai, Idangai class system was ever prevailed in medieval Tamil country.

The actual tillers of the soil were the Vellalas, Pallas, Parayas, Pallis, Kallar, Agambadiyar, Maravar, Nadar, Pulaiyas and Vanniyar. The rice was the staple food of the Tamil peasantry, because paddy was mostly cultivated. They cultivated sugarcane, vegetables, fruits like banana and jack fruit. The people like Pulaiyas took meat. The peasantry wore coarse cloth. The women did not cover upper part of their bodies. The Saivism flourished during the medieval period. Most of the peasant communities worshipped the village deities. The caste system was rigid at that time. The inter-caste marriages were few and not encouraged but intra-caste marriage system was in vogue and the widow remarriage was found prevalent among some of the peasant communities.

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Thus the society during the Chola times was a stratified one where innumerable castes and sub-castes of occupation-based and tradition-sanctioned mostly centred around agriculture and artisans among them, did agriculture related jobs also. In general the higher castes like Brahmins and other Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra castes who enjoyed a high social status, were comparatively speaking a better of land owing class of people and the large chunk of the Paraiyas and Pallas as also other downtrodden communities who were landless agricultural labourers were for all practical purposes treated as slaves permanently attached to land and the land owners. The polarization effected as a result of the emergence of Vadangai and Idangai castes did not bring in any radical change in the land ownership patters favouring the forsaken population in the medieval Tamil country.