Chapter - II

PRE-COLONIAL AGRARIAN SITUATION
1. IRRIGATION SOURCES

Tanjore region has a rich agricultural tradition, the origin of which can be traced back as early as to the pre-historic times. Agricultural tribes made progress in the region during the Sangam Age. Natural advantages and the availability of water generated conditions favourable for the development of a rich paddy culture. Water requirement for agricultural prosperity was realized by the state, the commoners and the poets. Naturally, efforts were made by the state to harness all available sources of water through a good system of regulation. Cropping pattern indicates the predominance of seasonal supply, rational behaviour of peasants and state revenue policy. Traditionally land remained as the most productive asset and the biggest employer. No wonder, ownership over land provided high value status. Among the crops, rice had both ritual value and status value, since rice eating was valued high over other food items. Due to these factors there was a stiff competition for control over the irrigated paddy lands.

The various stages of agricultural production created segmentation of agricultural communities on class lines. Wars and conquests and migrations and emigrations made periodic alteration in the class structure. The entry of feudalism and establishment of feudal practices added and strengthened the class structure. A close nexus was formed between caste, class and power. In the distribution of rights and rewards among the agrarian communities, visible inequality prevailed and it was a source of constant struggle leading to violent disturbances. The system of land revenue assessment and its collection was not
uniform or scientific. The state demand was not fixed with the consent of the farming communities and it was arbitrarily fixed, always to suit the exigencies of the time. Against the mismanagement of revenue administration there were periodic protests, some of which are recorded in the inscriptions. This chapter discusses some of the basic issues relating to agriculture, that prevailed during the pre-colonial age in the Tanjore region.

Irrigation is defined as the scientific application of water to soil for the purpose of supplying moisture beneficial to plant growth. It is the obvious means of making agriculture relatively independent of the vagaries of rains. It involves the application of water resources, either by proper channelising of flowing rivers and rivulets or by the utilisation of water from 'natural dams' such as lakes and tanks. The development of water resources assumes an added significance for reasons, which are both geographical and natural.

In the sub-continent, where the monsoon rains are erratic and inadequate, artificial irrigation is a compelling necessity. Such artificial means of irrigation were of remote antiquity in south India. Original irrigation system began in south India during the Megalithic times. Historical records prove that the kings and princes paid greater attention to irrigation, right from the early centuries of the Christian Era. Scarcity due to seasonal failures and crop destruction caused by flood conditions during heavy downpours made the rulers to devise ingenious methods to retain and regulate natural sources. In the Tanjore delta region, artificial irrigation must have begun parallel to the
development of agriculture. It is difficult to state even the approximate period of its execution.  

The significance of irrigation for agriculture was realized from very ancient times. The yearly freshes in the Cauvery formed the occasion of a carnival in which the whole nation from the king down to the peasant took part. Rivers, rivulets, streams and tanks were considered as divines and were incorporated in the ritual system because of their water wealth. Since their supply depended entirely on natural precipitation of rain from monsoon currents, the peasant communities created rain gods and goddesses and propitiated them to get timely and bountiful supply of rainwater. In the entire Tamil Nadu one can see that the Goddess Mariamma is being worshipped in almost every village in one form or other. ‘Mari’ means rain and therefore ‘Marriamma’ is the Goddess who brings rain. Mariamman temple festivals usually coincide with the arrival of the first showers from monsoon. There is a proverb, which emphasizes the importance of rain for agriculture:

“Mariyalladhu Kariyamillai” meaning that nothing can be done without rain.

While describing the important constituents of a kingdom, Thiruvalluvar, rightly assigns priority to water. He lucidly writes,

“Water from rains and springs, a mountain near and water thence; these make a land, with fortress sure defence”.
Among the essentials of the habitable village, good water supply was given the foremost importance by the early Tamil poetess Avvai who aptly puts it:

"Niragam Porundiya Uragathiru", i.e., reside in a place where there is plenty of water. Riverbeds ensure good water supply and that is why early habitations were located on the river banks. The importance of a river adjoining a village has been emphasized by the same poetess as follows:

"Arilla Uruk-Kalagupal" which means that a village without a river is a dreary waste.

Tanjore has the advantage of a relatively ensured supply of water due to its location in the Cauvery delta. Cauvery is one of the major rivers of the Indian Peninsula and for Tamil Nadu, it is a ‘natural precious boon’. It is referred to as ‘Dakshina Ganga’ or ‘Southern Ganges’ in the Vedic lore. It finds mention in many a piece of literature, epic, poetry and drama that have been made in this land. Tamil literatures is replete with pious and fervent admiration for the life giving properties of the river. Regarded as a scared river by the Tamils river cauvery, rises in the Brahmagiri, near Talakaveri in Coorg. Legend-based poetry ascribes its origin to sage Agastya. Cauvery flows generally south-eastwards across the plateau. Making great falls as it descends the Eastern Ghats it traverses the Carnatic low land past Tirchirappalli and Tanjore to reach the Bay of Bengal. The Cauvery is supplemented by a number of tributaries. On its course across Mysore, the most important are the Kabbini, the Hamavati and Arkavathi. In the plain, the course of the river is strongly controlled by the structure of the country as is well shown by its
straight course and acute bends. In Tamil Nadu the main tributaries are the Bhavani, the Noyyal and Amaravathi. After the confluence of the Bhavani it changes its southern course for a south-eastern direction and then takes an east-south-easterly route before forking a third time to form the island of Srirangam. Immediately below Srirangam, the river divides into two, the Coleroon and the Cauvery, the latter repeatedly branching off into canals thus ramifying the entire surface of the Tanjore delta. The water of the Cauvery is used extensively for irrigation by Karnataka and the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. But in Tanjore it is used to the fullest.\(^\text{11}\)

For better management of water rivers need to be controlled. Karikala, the early Chola king, was the forerunner of controlling river Cauvery. He raised earthen embankments and introduced the technique of cutting inundation channels. He made use of the locally available material to carry out the task. The technology adopted by him shows the foresighted wisdom of the ruler.\(^\text{12}\) Karikala seems to be the pioneer in the construction of an irrigation network in the region. He constructed Kallanai (Grand Anicut) across river Cauvery. For improving cultivation through extension of irrigation facilities he is said to have employed 12000 Singalese prisoners of war.\(^\text{13}\) Grand Anicut across Cauvery river and the irrigation structures that were appended to it made the Chola king and his kingdom great, fertile and prosperous. For over ten centuries the old work remained in tact and all modern improvements were made up on it. The Grand Anicut was intended to regulate supply in the
Cauvery and to drain the surplus flood water away into the Coleroon during floods. It is regarded as one of the greatest engineering feats of ancient India.

Karikala was also responsible for excavating a number of irrigation channels from the Cauvery. This fact is unmistakably testified in the Tamil epic Silappadikaram. These channels enabled the water of the river to flow into the cultivable parts of the Chola territory. He was also responsible for the promotion of tank and well irrigation system. They were dug to enable lands inaccessible to the river irrigation to get the benefit of regulated water supply. Pattinappalai rightly observed; “Kadukonru Nadakki Kulam thottu valam Perukki”, which means, he wrecks where forests were, now hamlets rise, ‘he deepens tanks, makes rich the land’.

The Pioneering work of Karikala was systematically maintained by the Vijayalaya line of Chola rulers. The irrigation structures under their patronage were associated with their names. The main purpose of Viracholan Vadavarru, running to the north of Tanjore, was to store the flood water in an artificial tank in the village called Vadavar and also to irrigate dry lands. Madurantakan Vadavaru branched off from the Kallanai on the Coleroon, north of Tirupanandal. These two must have been constructed during the time of Parantaka I. He was responsible for diverting the Cauvery water into Manni river. Uyyakkondaanaru is another distributary of Cauvery flowing across the greater portion of Trichirappalli taluk and ultimately ending up in a large tank in the village of Valzhavandankottai. The river, which runs from Kundamurutti alias Kaduvai and branching off near Sundaraperumalkoil is
called Mudikondan and Mudikonda Cholaperaru. Another river called Viracholanaaru branches off from Cauvery near Kumbakonam and reaches the sea near Tranquebar. The Vikramanaaru, which takes its course from Cauvery near Kutralam was dug during the reign of Vikramachola. Inscriptions refer to Neriyudai Cholan Peraaru, Parantakan Peraaru, Jananalapperaaru, Kirtimartandan Peraaru, Sungamavirtha-Chola-Peraaru, Karikalachola Peraaru and Rajendra Cholaperaru, which are yet to be located. Apart from the construction of above channels, chola rulers were also pioneers in constructing tanks, sulices, canals, etc. Some of their irrigation works are given in Table 1.

### Table -2

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<th>Sl. No.</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Sinduvalli Tank, Mysore</td>
<td>C. 1070-71 AD</td>
<td>Kulothunga I</td>
<td>ARE., 5 of 1895</td>
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**Canals and Sluices**

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<td>14</td>
<td>Uyyakondan Channel, Trichy</td>
<td>985-1013 AD</td>
<td>Rajaraja I</td>
<td>S11., Vol. I, p269. ARE 82 of 1890</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>PeriyaVaykkal-Sluice Musiri, Trichy</td>
<td>C.1219 AD</td>
<td>Rajaraja III</td>
<td>ARE, 1891, p14.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Uyyakkondan channel Head Sluice, Trichy</td>
<td>C1070-1120 AD</td>
<td>Kulothunga III</td>
<td>ARE., 1891, Para 4,S11., vol.IV, No. 396, p.120.</td>
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The role of early kings to improve the irrigation system was commendable. Yet, the contribution made by the local agencies like the village committees, private individuals and temples in the construction of irrigation networks cannot be ignored. Village committees seem to have done substantial work towards expanding irrigation facilities. They dug channels and made bunds. For making bunds and constructing channels, Rajaraja II sold some common wastelands of Thiruvaipadi village. Sometimes the construction of irrigation works was entrusted to a single village or a group of villages. Instances show that the village had to bear the profits and losses separately.
according to the prevailing rules and conditions. The village committees not only constructed irrigation works for agricultural purposes but also dug tanks for the temples. For example, during the time of Rajendra III (A.D. 1219) a tank was constructed for the temple of Tiruthuraipundi in Tanjore district.\textsuperscript{18}

Private individuals were also encouraged by the state to construct irrigation channels and tanks. They carried out such works, to improve themselves as well as their relatives. They constructed tanks and made gifts of lands below the tanks for their maintenance. Such lands were exempted from taxes and other liabilities.\textsuperscript{19} Besides constructing tanks, canals, wells and sluices, private benefactors also gifted plots of land for their maintenance.\textsuperscript{20} It may be mentioned here that during the time of acute famine, they, identified themselves with famine-striken people and undertook the excavation of tanks as a relief measure. During the time of Kulotunga III, there was a severe famine in the village of Thiruvannamalai and rice was selling at one-fourth of a measure per kasu. Two enterprising persons started relief works in the form of putting an embankment for the river and the construction of a fresh tank and sluice gate at the village out of their private funds. They also cleared the forest and reclaimed some lands. It is further mentioned in the record dated A.D. 1201-02 that the labourers were paid in gold, paddy or any other form that they so desired.\textsuperscript{21}

Another agency for the execution of irrigation works in those days was Temples. As landowning institutions, temples provided a lot of facilities for promotion of agriculture. It should however, be noted that the temples did not
involve directly in this activity. On the contrary, they bore the cost of construction and granted lands to interested individuals to undertake such tasks. On certain occasions the temples made joint ventures with the Sabha to excavate tanks. The temple as well as the state inspired the private initiative by granting inam to the active individuals who undertook the relief work. An inscription dated A.D. 1201-02 records the famine relief work rendered by two individuals by constricting a tank with a sluicegate out of their own funds. Apparently they were rewarded with grant of lands as inam by the temple authorities of Thiruvannamalai.22

There were agencies for repairing and maintenance of all the canals, channels, tanks, sluices and wells. Erivariyums or tank boards functioned under the Cholas to look after the maintenance of the tanks and watercourses. Similarly Kudimaramath system was very popular. ‘Kudimaramath’ literally means maintenance and repair (maramath) of watercourses and storage tanks by the farmers (kudi) themselves.23 This was essentially meant for keeping the distribution system in good condition. This was done by a system of labour contribution depending upon the size of lands held by the farmers. Where direct labour could not be arranged, equivalent amount was collected in cash. The work involved the desilting of the field channels and the feeder distributaries just before the arrival of monsoon. Reforming the banks and clearing weeds were the essential tasks performed. Even today, in the Cauvery delta, which is the largest single block of irrigated land in the state, all the 1505
‘A’ class channels and the 19000 k.m. of branch and minor channels in the old delta are being maintained only through Kudimaramath.\textsuperscript{24}

Cultivation in the Cauvery delta region depended on the freshes of the rivers arising out of the south-west and north-east monsoon precipitations. There was rarely any period when the paddy fields could not get the benefit of both the rains simultaneously.\textsuperscript{25} Cauvery-fed canal irrigation brought the dry lands on the south-eastern corner of Tanjore under irrigated cultivation. Captain Baid Smith, who made an investigation on the watering efficiency of Cauvery system states that the average quantity of land irrigated in the Tanjore region annually from the Cauvery and Coleroon prior to 1856, was 5,73,187 acres. Trichirappalli and South Arcot, the other beneficiary areas, had only marginal gains from Cauvery supply; 40061 and 17365 acres respectively.\textsuperscript{26}

A critical survey of the pre-colonial irrigation system gives us a gloomy picture. The ancient ruling houses maintained a system of water distribution, which was less scientific and technologically conservative. Seasonal failures and drought conditions were not uncommon. Under such situations people depended on lift irrigation, which was familiar to them from the very early centuries of the Christian Era. Sangam literary works – the Ahananuru, Maduraikanchi, Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, etc., mention the existence of lift irrigation. In Silappadikaram, the poet Ilango Adigal, describes the lift irrigation devices, particularly the bucket, the water-lifts and palm-leaf baskets. In the tenth canto of the same work it is thus described:
“By finding her (Cauvery) movement arrested by the barrier – the ancient with its doorway – she noisily leaps beyond it in the sportive mood natural to her first freshes. No sound other than this can be heard, we can hear there neither the sound of the bucket nor of the water-lift; neither the usually loud picotah nor the palm-leaf bucket used in irrigation.”

Epigraphic data also indicate the prevalence of picotahs and baskets for lifting water. Ettapulam and Ettapadam are the expressions often used in the Tamil inscriptions to categorize land irrigated by means of picotah (water lifts). Etta, Ettam or Etram are the terms current in local usage in South India even today.

Lift irrigation methods can be arranged under two broad heads in south India. They are:

1. Discontinuous water supply from rivers, canals, streams and wells and
2. Semi-mechanical devising methods

In the discontinuous water supply method, there were three different types.

(1) Lifting water by using baskets or bags, which were made up of palm leaves. The basket was employed for baling out water from deep channels or streams to nearby fields. In Tamil it was popularly called iraikudai or iraivatti. It was one of the simplest contrivances handled by the application of human labour

(2) By the Pulley wheels method, water was raised by the application of human labour through a wheel with a pail
attached to it. When raised water was bailed out into troughs of wood.

(3) In the third method, animal power was used to draw water from well. In this method, a pair of bullocks move down from the slopes, specially constructed to the wall of the well, lifting behind them a bucket or a leather bag which is discharged into the connecting channel by means of a rope. After discharge, the bullocks walk up the slopes until they reach the top. By this time the bucket will reach the surface of water again and get filled. The process is repeated and this method was popularly called Kavalai etram.

In the semi-mechanical devising method, two important techniques were adopted. They were, counter weight method and balanced weight method. In the earlier method the bucket was efficiently balanced with counter weight. In the latter method the bucket was balanced by the weight of the human body. The innovation of lift irrigation methods paved the way for more intensive cultivation.

A critical survey of the pre-colonial irrigation system reveals that it had many shortcomings. The ancient ruling houses maintained a system of water distribution, which needed changes in tune with the requirements of the present times. It was more an inundation system than a controlled irrigation model. It must have been defective on this score from the very beginning. Before the advent of the British rule these works had been badly neglected on
account of internal wars and political intrigues. In 1801, when the East India Company took over Tanjore, irrigation in the delta region was in a bad shape. The channels were silted up and more lands were left uncultivated for want of proper water supply.  

2. AGRICULTURAL PATTERN

Agriculture was the product of man's acquaintance with the natural world and his innovative mind, influenced by food and catering requirements. When the early foragers domesticated animals and plants, it set the trend towards the beginning of agriculture. The discovery of fire and metal activated the farming interest of primitive men. In the beginning it was essentially shifting cultivation. Only when men began to settle down in places, where water resource was abundantly available, some permanency to agriculture appeared. By devising new technologies and adapting old techniques of production, men progressed in the field of agriculture. However, it is very difficult to assign the period when men first took to agriculture. It was actually a process that reached the concrete form after a prolonged period, spreading over thousands of years. Primitive man and his mind coordinated with natural and geographical conditions, devised techniques, invented technologies and updated them in tune with the requirements of production. The transition from hunting gathering to settled agricultural life brought about a qualitative change in the life of man in society.
The economic foundation of the Sangam Age was determined by the natural setting and ecological elements. Geophysical features of Tamilagam and its variant forms created socio-economic and cultural divides. The evolution of distinct eco-culture was referred in the contemporary literature as ‘tinais’, which were Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham, Neydal and Palai. Among the ainthinais, it was undoubtedly in the Marutham tract that agriculture formed the principal occupation. The land was fertile, water supply was abundant, and artificial irrigation supplemented the natural advantages. The Sangam Tamils had a broad agrarian classification of land into Vanpulam, the miscellaneous non-agrarian region and menpulam, the purely agrarian marutham region. Vanpulam included all the hill slopes, arid plains and pastures, obviously quite larger than Menpulam, which is exclusively the wet land plains of paddy cultivation. The material basis of Menpulam was one of advanced plough agriculture. Farmers knew the technique of harnessing the bullocks at their necks with cross-bar (nukam) to a ploughshare (meli or molzhi), obviously iron tipped for furrowing. Animal power was widely utilized for various agrarian jobs like threshing, pounding, etc. It is clear that this relatively advanced farming economy of Menpulam had produced a surplus, large enough to support variety of artisans and craftsmen engaged in works directly or indirectly related to farming. The Cauvery basin is an excellent marutham or Menpulam area, where the thick alluvium is best suited to agriculture. Agricultural land was generally classified into three categories. They were:
1. ‘Nanjey’ (Nirarambam) or irrigated wetlands, in which paddy, sugarcane, plantain, etc., were cultivated.

2. ‘Punjey’ (Kadarambam) or the rain-fed dry lands in which varagu, cambu, cholam and other cereals were cultivated.

3. The third classification was a mixed one, which depended upon some reliable irrigation sources either from wells or from rainfall. All types of crops were cultivated in the mixed zone.33

Nanjey cultivation was the most distinctive character of the Coromandel plain, north of the Cauvery basin. It was spotted with numerous and scattered peasant localities, separated by large and small tracts of inhospitable land.34 Many villages clearly display a pronounced geometric design, with feeder channels running west to east and north to south, dividing fields into regular blocks that were often sequentially numbered in inscriptions.35

In the Cauvery delta region, Nadus were the primary units of agriculture. The agricultural strategies were drastically different, determined by the availability of water. In the older riverine irrigated areas of the deltas a basic mode of cultivation could be followed almost invariably. Rice being the principal crop, the prevailing cropping pattern was dominated by rice cultivation. Two crops, the Kar and Pisanam, were raised in the fertile tracts. In the core delta region of Tanjore, paddy was cultivated as wet crop and in the upland region rice culture was done under rain fed condition.

Ancient Tamil literature provide detailed picture about agriculture. The farmers got up early in the morning and went to their fields where they
collected and heaped the previous season's hay sticks. Ploughing was the rudimentary process for cultivating the land. Paddy fields were ploughed by ploughshare fixed to a yoke drawn by bulls. In few cases buffaloes were employed to draw the ploughs. The importance of deep ploughing for efficient cultivation was fully realized from earlier days. Ploughmen were highly respected in the society. Thiruvalluvar wrote a chapter on Uzhavu, dealing with agricultural operation. He rightly puts:-

"The ploughers are the linch-pin of the world; they bear them up who other works perform, too weak its toils to share."

When ploughing was over, it was followed by levelling of the ploughed wetland by means of a wooden leveller called in Tamil 'Parambu' or 'Parambu Palagai'. After levelling, seeds were sown in the wet land. After four or five weeks, transplantation of crops was done with the help of women labour. In the dry lands after sowing seeds, dry fields were levelled with the help of branches of trees and this process is popularly called Parambizhuthal.

Sangam period witnessed steady progress in agriculture, which can be noticed from the methods of crop protection. They adopted advanced techniques in the construction of strong and high platforms on the 'Venkai tree' (pterocarpus bilobus) to scare away birds and animals. On certain occasions they used nets to catch predator animals. When the animals like elephants came to graze the crops, watchers drove them away by shooting arrows at them or throwing the burning torches on them. When wild boars came to eat the tubers, the farmers used a special kind of small tool called 'atar' to kill them.
To chase the deer from the field, hunting dogs were employed. Women also participated in the crop protection activities, but males took the greater responsibility. When crops became ripe, harvesting was done with the help of sickles of different metals. After harvesting was over they selected a plain ground for thrashing and winnowing. There they heaped the paddy, which looked like a golden mountain. By making some dots on the heaps of grains the farmers measured the quantity of their harvest.

In the wetland paddy is the principal crop. Plantain, arecanut, betal leaves, etc., were the other major crops cultivated under dry conditions. In dry lands, farmers cultivated cereals like tinai (Panicum italicum) and various kinds of millets like varagu (Paspalum frumentaceum) and pulses. Sugarcane cultivation was known from the ancient past. Purananuru praises the forefathers of king Atiyaman, who had brought the crop to this country. Tamils also made scientific experiments and crossed bamboo with sugarcane in order to develop a hybrid variety of sugarcane. Intercropping was done, especially after the second season. Different types of grams and pulses like gingelly were raised as intercrops. For long, Woraiyur remained as the centre of tobacco industry. From this we can assume that tobacco cultivation might have been practiced in the upper Cauvery region. Millets, tinais, etc., were cultivated as dry crops.

The important seasons of cultivation were kar and pisanam. The kar season or karif crop extended from June to September. Paddy, sugarcane, ground nut, etc., were cultivated during the first crop season. Pisanam or rabi
season stretches from October to March and the chief crops raised were pulses, grams, millets, etc. Summer crops were raised depending upon the availability of water, either from natural source or from artificial irrigation outlets.

The practice of using animal wastes and green manure for the purpose of fertilizing the soil was common. Coupled with the natural fertility of the soil, artificial manuring served to increase the yield. Sometimes rotation of crops was also attempted as a soil conservation technique. Attention was paid to the removal of weeds, which would otherwise stifle the free growth of crops. A wood-plucker was used in order to remove the weeds. It need hardly be stated that an adequate supply of water at the required time is of supreme importance for successful cultivation. Hence every care was taken to irrigate the right quantity of water at the right time. Over flooding was checked through surplussing arrangements.

Family labour was the most prevalent form of labour input. Both women and men cooperated lavishly with their labour during cultivation and harvesting operations. Except for hard works like ploughing, tilling and seasoning the soil, women labour was utilized to the maximum. During peak seasons children were also employed in the process of cultivation and harvesting. Thus agriculture remained more a familial job. Casual labour, hired labour, contract labour and exchange labour were also employed in agriculture.

Not much direct information on the gross yield of crops could be received from inscriptions. However, the Chidambaram inscription of
Rajakesari Rajendra, gives some details on the yield rate of paddy land. It says that 44 velis of land yielded in all 4500 kalahs of paddy and that melvaram on this was fifty per cent of the gross yield.\textsuperscript{46} It seems that it was the standard yield rate in the Cauvery delta region for a considerable long period. The landlord’s share also continued to be 50 per cent until the days of the Marathas. It is believed that Amar Singh, the Maratha King had changed the rate of melvaram into 60 per cent of the produce.\textsuperscript{47}

We have some knowledge about the unit of measurement employed by the agriculturists. The common measure, for measuring grain was known as “ambanam”. This was in all probability the precursor of the well-known ‘Marakkal’. There is however no means of knowing whether the lower unit ‘Padi’ was in use during the Sangam Age. But ‘Nali’ the equivalent of later ‘Padi’ was known,\textsuperscript{48} since it is referred in Purananuru. The ‘Padakku’ denoting a measure equal to two marakkals, is mentioned in Tolkappiyam and in some of the Padinenkilkankku works.

Geographically, Tanjore region was homogenously connected with the Marutham track, where agricultural operations were intensified a lot. From the Age of Sangam, people were familiar with techniques of agricultural production. The system continued to prevail until the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} century with few improvements. In the process of agriculture, a distinct class structures evolved in which the landowners, tenants, sub-tenants and labourers were directly related to the system of production. Craftsmen, potters, merchants and traders were also linked with land and production. Service and Servile classes
too evolved around the land based agricultural economy. These divisions consequently created a paradigm shift in the society leading to rigid class formation in the subsequent centuries.

3. CLASS FORMATION

The notion of class is an integral part of the materialist approach to history. Class is taken to mean such group of people, who either own the means of production or are deprived of these. In the initial stages of social development dispossession from the fruits of production was the prelude to class formation. Class is an intensification of inequalities and the distribution of surplus accelerates it. It is defined operationally in terms of certain indices. D’ Souza applies the attributional approach to class purely in terms of an ‘order’ comprising upper, middle and lower class categories. R.S. Sharma concludes that the final stage in the development of society is marked by the emergence of class and the state. When advanced food-producing techniques and specialised crafts came into wide use, peasants produced food enough not only to maintain them but also for the maintenance of priests, administrators, professionals, soldiers, artisans, traders, etc. According to Sharma, class in India originated in the early centuries of Christian Era.

Andre Beteille’s study of social stratification in a Tanjore village in Tamil Nadu traces the correlation between caste, class and power structure. He defines class as a category of persons, land owners, tenants and agricestic workers occupying specific position in the system of production. Kathleen
Gough considers the mode of production as the basis of social formation, in which she finds interconnections of caste, kinship, family, marriage and even rituals with the forces of production and production relations. Gough’s pioneering study of Tanjore explains the emergence of a new bourgeoisie the polarization of the peasantry and the pauperization of the working class due to historical transformation in the mode of production. She divides the mode of production in the Tanjore region into five stages. They are:

1. Asiatic Mode of irrigation state (850 – 1260 A.D.);
2. Feudal Mode (1260 – 1770 A.D.);
3. Capitalistic Mode (1770 – 1858 A.D.);
4. Imperialistic Mode (1858 – 1947 A.D.) and
5. Industrial Mode (1947 – till date)\(^{53}\)

In all these modes, the capitalistic element is dominant, but the social formation is constructed by neo-colonial development.

In the regional context, the origin of class system can be traced back to the remote past. Literary sources reveal the existence of classes during the Sangam period. Tolkappiyam, the earliest work on Tamil grammar, divided the classes broadly into two. They were: Melor (higher) and Kilor (lower)\(^{54}\). The melor consisted of Andanar, Arasar, etc, and the Kilor were those who formed the lower social order. Nachinarkkiniyar arranged the Vellalas into two classes. They were Uluvithunbor and Uluthunbor. Uluvithunbor were the big landed proprietors, who held influential official positions both in the civil administration and in the army. They formed the nobility of the time, and
moved in close terms with the royalty. They received many titles such as Vel and Arasu in the Chola country and Kavidi (ministerial rank) in the Pandya country. This class also engaged in domestic and foreign trade. The next class Uluthunbor was constituted out of the small farmers. Kailasapathy also explains the broad dual division of society into Uyarndor and illicinar. The position of dominance was occupied by the chief or king and the landed local elites (velir, kilavan or kilan, talaivan and enthi), collectively referred to as uyarndor (the superior one). The lower categories generally termed as illicinar, were engaged in various 'inferior' activities or in subsistence production.

Purananuru, an important literary work of Tamils reveals that the lower categories of society were termed as illipirappalans i.e., men of low birth. But there is no means of knowing the exact terms of reference to labourers. It is presumable that they were distinct from slaves about whom references are found in some of the Sangam classics. In Tolkappiam the term 'Adimai' meaning slave, occurs. As distinguished from slaves, there were independent labourers called 'Adiyor', who were employed for specific services. All these unmistakably lead one to conclude that there did exist some sort of class system in the Sangam period.

The ancient ruling families or crowned kings (Vendar) emerged in the Marutham tract. Among them, the Cholas represented the fertile agricultural region of the Cauvery valley, which was dominated by the Vellalas. In the commentaries on Sangam works references to the superior Vellala (Land owning groups) and inferior Vellalas (cultivating groups) are found.
dominant land owning groups controlled fairly large areas of agricultural land. It is said that Karikala Chola of the Sangam period undertook a major irrigation work (dam) on the Cauvery near Trichirappalli (Uraiyyur) and engaged in deforestation of Northern Tamil region in order to settle 48,000 Vellala families. Deforestation, emergence of new settlements and expansion of agriculture created a new dimension in the formation of classes. Chilappathikaram, a classical Tamil work, indicates that there was a rudimentary hierarchical ordering of social groups in which ulavars or cultivators were regarded as the first people. The peasantry, constantly expanding and assimilating non-peasant people of the forests and dry plains, were often regarded as inferiors. The matter of super ordinate-subordinate relations within the peasantry is important. Through the evidenced is spare, it may be supposed that there was a constant process of social grading among the various groups of the established peasant tracts in the Coromandal plain. Migrations and wars and conquests destabilized the existing hierarchy of classes. The vanquished tribes lost control over the productive assets, the ownership of which was now transferred to the victorious group. Once established, the conquerors were accustomed to the habit of redistributing the lands among their own men so as to elevate them to higher status. The process of redistribution need not be even. It gave rise to an economic divide within the segments, leading to polarization of class-big landowners, small landholders, dry land cultivators, tenants and labourers. Among them, the big landowning groups exercised power and authority over the rest, which in
course of time became customary. This situation can be quite applicable to the Cauvery delta region. Here the more powerful land-controlling groups sought to differentiate themselves from other agrarian groups.  

In the post-sangam period the expansion of agriculture, and foreign trade created a type of society completely different from the one that existed previously. The most important result was the break up of the old tribal society and the emergence of a class society based on property ownership. On the basis of assets ownership, the agrarian society was divided broadly into three. They were: 1. owner class, 2. tenant class and 3. labourer class.

According to Karashima, in medieval South India brahmanas were securely settled in many peasant villages and localities of the plain. During the reign of Rajaraja I (985 – 1014 A.D.), there was a phenomenal growth of Brahmin settlements in the countryside. Most of the nadus of Cholamandalam, the heartland of the Chola Empire, contained two or three brahmadeyas on an average. Burton Stein claims that Brahmin settlements were situated in the nuclear core areas with advanced agriculture. Epigraphic evidences also show that from the 7th and 8th centuries of the Christian Era, Brahmin colonies were organized on a vast scale. Hundreds of Brahmadeyas came into being as a result of royal gift of lands to various Brahmin gotras. Brahmins were also invited from the north by the kings to establish settlements in their kingdoms. The villages organized under Brahmins constituted the basic unit of polity of that time. The core of social relationship in the Brahmin villages was the ownership of agrarian land, which was predominantly in the hands of the
Brahmins Gough rightly remarks that the Brahmins "own the land, and have administrative rights in about 900 out of the total of 2611 villages" of the district.

By the ninth century, there were also cases of Vellanvagai settlement converted into Brahmadeya villages. Though the Brahmadeyas in the medieval period were initially encouraged by the Pallavas and Pandyas, their growth and expansion were prolific during the days of Imperial Cholas. Of the 646 inscriptions relating to the working of the "Brahmadeya Sabha" distributed all over Tamil Nadu during the time of Rajaraja I, 244 are found in Cholamandalam. Most of them have been found in the deltaic areas of Cauvery, especially in Nagapattinam, Mayavaram, Nannilam, Kumbakonam and Tanjore Taluks. Table 3 shows the distribution of Chola inscriptions and Brahmadeyas in some selected taluks.

**Table – 3**

**Distribution of Chola inscriptions and Brahmadeyas by selected Madras taluks to 1915**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District / Taluks</th>
<th>Total Inscriptions</th>
<th>Chola Inscriptions</th>
<th>Percentage of Chola inscriptions</th>
<th>Brahmadeyas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Arcot</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingleput</td>
<td>1221</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittoor</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nellore</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Arcot</td>
<td>1094</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanjavur</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arantangi</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District / Taluks</td>
<td>Total Inscriptions</td>
<td>Chola Inscriptions</td>
<td>Percentage of Chola Inscriptions</td>
<td>Brahmadeyas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumbakonam</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannargudi</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayavaram</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nannilam</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagapatnam</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papanasam</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattukottai</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirgali</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanjavur</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiruthuraipundi</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Burton Stein, op. cit., pp 308-309.

The predatory expeditions and imperialistic expansion of Rajaraja I and Rajendra I paved the way for the flow of wealth by way of booty and tributes from outside the Tamil country. Large-scale land transfers among individuals or between institutions and temples began with it. There is enough evidence to conjecture that martial class communities like Kallars and Vanniyas had the opportunity to become land owners with the wealth which they had obtained during wars. This new economic climate not only created individual land ownership but also included a few among the martial communities as land owners in the socio-economic corpus along with Vellalas and Brahmins. Thus the Brahmans, Vellalas, Kallars and Vanniyas became the owner-class. In most of the old delta region of river Cauvery, Brahmansa, Vellalas and Vanniyas claimed their land owning rights and in the south and south-west of Tanjore Kallars became prominent land owners. The temple lands or devadana
lands became the deciding factor of agricultural production, which caused the way for the emergence of a new class i.e., tenants.

Epigraphic evidence in South India bear testimony to the existence of tenant - cultivators right from the Pallava period. The tenant -cultivating system was adopted by landowners, who belonged either to the non-agricultural classes or the institutions like temple. Certain circumstances made it necessary for the temple to lease its lands. First, the priests being brahmanas, were debarred from cultivation by sastric injunction. Secondly, the lands and villages granted to the temples were scattered over a vast stretch of land and it required the employment of tenants. Moreover, the practice of lease saved the temple from the botheration of employing a large number of farm labourers purchasing and maintaining cattle and farming equipments and from maintaining a close supervision round the year. Sub-tenancy was also prevalent. The leaseholders or tenants were free to sublet the lease taken from temples. The lands donated to the dance masters, dancing girls, etc., were not possibly cultivated by them. They were probably distributed among sub-tenants. This might have been the case with all service tenures, which were assigned to the full-time employees of temples. Landowners and tenants did practice agriculture with the help of labourers and thus the labouring class evolved.

Both the owner class and tenants handling larger areas of lands were unable and unwilling to perform all agricultural activities. For cultivation they made use of agricultural labour force consisting of persons with little or no land
and low castes. Subarayalu, opines that the lower section of the peasantry consisted of small Kani holders, tenant cultivators (denoted by the term Kudi or Kudimakan) and the Paraiyas. The other low class communities were Pulayas, Chakkiliyas, Ottaivanni, etc. These economically downtrodden and socially discriminated people, engaged in agriculture, were popularly called labouring class. These labourers differed in several ways from the tenants. The most important difference was that the labourers lacked security of employment. The dependence of the labourers on the landowners or tenants should be taken as the beginning of “feudalism” in the Tamil Country.

Naturally, Kathleen Gough treats the mode of production of this period as a feudalistic mode.

Extensive agricultural production, and conquests ultimately led to flourishing internal and external trade by which a new merchant class emerged. Nadu – Nagaram, became the center of commercial activity, which brought the Tamil region into a large network of inter-regional and overseas trade. In the process the nagarattar merchants, had grown to be the most affluent in Tamil society. Minakshi, claims that the trading guilds like Manigramam, Nanadesis and Ainutruvar might have had their origin during the period of the great Pallavas, when overseas trade with both the West and the East flourished. Natural setting and geographical location of Tanjore delta region supplemented the process. The Cholas encouraged overseas trade through trade missions. Kulothunga I (A.D. 1070 – 1118) sent an embassy of seventy –two merchants to China in A.D. 1077. Tamil Brahmi inscriptions refer many merchant
specialists such as pon-vanikan (gold merchant), koluvanikan (ploughshare merchant or iron monger), aruvai vanikan (textile merchant), uppuvanikan (salt-merchant) and panita vanikan (beverage merchant, probably dealing with toddy).^6

Expansion of agriculture and improvement of trade not only created tripartite class division (owner class, tenant and labourer) of the agrarian society but also many occupational classes. Occupational specialization made further increase in the class structure. Craftsmen and service groups were also integrated with the agrarian class structure. Due to the fertility of the delta region many artisan groups migrated from far off places. For instance some artisan groups of Tanjore retain not only oral tradition about their migration from Sowrashtra, but also use synonymous tool vocabulary as are common in Kathiawar. In a proper village settlement, there was a full complement of occupational castes performing pollution related tasks, such as washing clothes and salooning. They were called the service class. The servile class included the cobblers, sweepers, etc. They were performing functions relating to public hygiene and village sanitation. Slavery was common and it would appear that there were several grades among them. Most of the slaves recorded in the inscriptions were persons sold to temples. One inscription records an incident in which two girls sold themselves, their dependents and their relatives to the temple in Tanjore district.79

The class formation would be incomplete without making a reference to the broad division of the industrial population of the country into the Right-
Hand and Left-Hand (Valangai and Idangai) groups. The origin of this division is unknown. Legends ascribe it to the reign of Karikala Chola. They refer to an occasion, when the two sections laid their disputes before a Chola King, one party standing on the right hand side of the monarch, the other taking a position on the left. But Andre Beteille ascertains that the origin of the right and left hands as social categories, dates from the 10th century A.D., when contingencies of Rajaraja I’s armies were mentioned as Valangai – Velaikkara Padaigal. Several regiments of the army were counted as Valangai in the reign of Rajaraja I. This section is also mentioned in Tiruvisalur inscription belonging to the third year of Rajendra I. In the second year of Kulottunga I, a clash between the Right and Left Hand castes resulted in the burning of the village of Rajamahendra Chaturvedimangalam, located in the Papanasam taluk of Tanjore district. The destruction of sacred places and looting of the temple treasury by the rebels are recorded in the inscription. Scholars propose no unanimous view on the origin of the Right Hand and Left Hand factions. But it is certain that the two did not function as classes, but as integrated groups of privileged and less privileged sections.

4. SYSTEM OF ASSESSMENT AND COLLECTION OF REVENUE

Land revenue was the chief source of royal income from the early period. To determine rent, land survey was conducted. The lands were classified into a number of grades on the basis of composition of soils, irrigation facilities available, the type of crops raised and related other aspects.
The annual yield of each piece of land was calculated and the available surplus was then ascertained by deducting the total cost of cultivation. Finally, all the above details were recorded in a register, which formed the basis of tax assessment.\(^8^5\)

Pre-Chola epigraphs mention different land units like kuli, ma and veli.\(^8^6\) These units formed the basis of revenue survey and assessment of taxes. However, there is no direct evidence on the conduct of a full-fledged revenue survey in the pre-Chola period.\(^8^7\) The efficiency of the land survey and revenue administration under the Cholas were remarkable. The classification of land into a number of grades (tarams) was well known from the days of Parantaka I. In one of his inscriptions six classes of lands are mentioned (emmumilamuthal - arutaramum ulpata).\(^8^8\) Sundarachola’s inscription makes mention about the fourth grade (nalantaram).\(^8^9\) Another inscription belonging to the reign of Uttamachola mentions lands of different grades\(^9^0\) and Mahadanapuram inscription refers to 14 grades (taram), besides unclassed lands called taramili.\(^9^1\)

Tanjore and Gangaikonda Cholapuram Temple inscriptions provide much details on the pattern of classification of land and assessment of taxes. The Tanjore inscription of Rajaraja I records his royal order issued in the 29\(^{th}\) regnal year, granting 49 villages of Cholamandalam to Tanjore Temple.\(^9^2\) The description of each village consists of areas of village, lands to be assessed and amount of paddy to be measured or money to be paid on the taxable land. The inscription made clear idea about the rate of assessment, areas of taxable land
and the amount of revenue assessed in each village. The Gangaikonda Cholapuram inscription of Vira Rajendra provides much valuable information on the measurement of tax-free land. Taxable land was classified according to its nature, i.e., Orupuvilayum Nilam (single crop land), Irupuvilaiyum Nilam (double crop land), Pulvilayum Nilam (grass land), Puvilaiyum Nilam (land reserved for floriculture), etc.93

An accurate survey of lands leading to a careful recording of land rights in government books appears to have been undertaken sometimes about the middle of the reign of Rajaraja. Inscriptional records prove that Tiruvadigal Sattan, the officer in-charge of the survey operation, made an enquiry into the services conducted in the temple of Thirunoballur - Mahadeva at Devanappalli, i.e., Somur in the Trichirappalli district94. Twenty-eight different revenue surveys are known from the inscriptions, spreading over a total of 49 villages. The revenue survey of Kulottunga I is referred more frequently while the other rulers are mentioned once or twice. Whether the above surveys were conducted throughout the Chola country or not cannot be ascertained from the present state of our knowledge. But it is certain that most of the revenue surveys were conducted in Cholamandalam (35 villages in Tanjore district and 3 in Trichirappalli district).95 For surveying land, they used Chan (one span = approximately 9 inches) ati (one human foot = 10.46 inches) and Piti (one fist = 4.5 inches)96 Nilamalanta-kol97 and Tiruvulakalanta kol were the rods used for land measurement. Rajendra himself assumed the title of "Ulagalandhan".98 The length of the measuring rods and the units of Kuli and
Ma varied from place to place and between years. The following table shows the differentiation:

Table - 4

Table showing the length of different measuring rods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Length of measuring rod</th>
<th>No. of Kulis ma</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>16 chan – Kol</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>16 chan – Kol</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>16 chan – Kol</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Tanjore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Vilantai - kol</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Vilantai – kol</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>South Arcot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>9 ati – kol</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>Trichirappalli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>12 ati – kol</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Tanjore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shanmugam, op. cit., p.72.

After the Cholas, the Nayaks, who were the feudatories of Vijayanagar kings, ruled over Tanjore. They divided the land into amara, pandaravada and manya. Amara, which embraced the greatest number of villages, shared a portion of village’s income to those with local dominance. In the case of pandaravada or crown village, a portion of its income went to strengthen Vijayanagar fortresses, in various parts of the empire. There were two major difficulties in this classification. The first was the contention that the Vihayanagara ruler was the owner of the soil and that the holders of manya and amara rights were ‘lessees’ of conditional tenancy. Holders of these rights were required, as a condition of holding the right, to perform certain specified services, ritual or military. These holders were also subjected to unspecified
restrictions regarding heritability, transfer or sale. The second difficulty with regard to crown villages, military service villages and beneficial villages was that there was no way of determining how many villages could be classified under any of these tenures.

During the Maratha period the land was broadly assessed into four categories. They were: miras land, inam land, state land and waste land including land of extinct families. The last category of land formally belonged to no one; it could be appropriated by village headman or disposed of by the local or village assembly. The miras land was burdened with regular land revenue or the state could give it as inam, usually exempted from revenue burdens.

The assessment of the irrigated lands, under the Marathas which formed by far the most important item in the land revenue of the country was as follows: The productive power of each village was permanently estimated in terms of local measures (kalam) of paddy. The tax payable to the government was a fixed share, the proportion varying in different assessment villages. It was however, not paid in grain but was converted into money at a commutation price fixed every year by the government at the prevailing market rates. Thus the fixation of grain standard of village, the share payable to government and the price of commutation were the three cardinal points of the settlement. An alteration of any of the three would inevitably alter the amount actually payable by the ryots. Without a scientific survey and settlement, ryots could
manipulate the entire revenue from land by a small sliding scale of rate worked with a single safety valve to maintain the equilibrium of the state finance.\textsuperscript{103}

It was apparently the grain rent of the villages, which the successors of Pratap Singh, attempted to raise. Tuljaji was mediating a reform of land revenue assessment when he was deposed in 1773. The work was vigorously taken up by Muhammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot. He employed Dabir Pandit to make a new settlement.\textsuperscript{104} As a provisional step, he put the whole country under the Amani system, according to which the crop was harvested under the superintendence of officers of the government. The actual amount of produce was taken as the basis for fixing village rent, instead of mere estimation of the quantity. The rent could then be collected in kind or its value could be commuted into money payment. The Nawab appears to have preferred the latter method.\textsuperscript{105}

Dabir Pandit made the final settlement known as ‘Dabir Muri’, which was based on cultivators’ accounts of their produce for the last twelve years. It was a source of information likely to be misleading. Perhaps he might have corrected the estimates with the figures provided by the amani administration then prevailing. This, however, resulted in a highly increased assessment.\textsuperscript{106} Therefore, land revenue assessment was periodically reviewed and the classification of land revised from time to time in accordance with changes in cropping pattern, soil fertility and so on.\textsuperscript{107} But there is no data available for calculating the precise ratio between the tax and the yield. Under these
circumstances, any effort to compare the incidence of the land tax under the Cholas and their successors is bound to be unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{108}

Income from land and trade was the chief source of royal revenue. Traditionally, the land revenue demand was fixed as one-six of the produce. This tradition seems to have been influenced by the Dharmasastras.\textsuperscript{109} Apart from the fixed 1/6 of the land revenue to the state, peasants paid taxes on different occasions i.e., during the time of internal and external wars, coronation of kings, temple festivals, royal matrimonies, etc. Hence, most of the income from land was extracted as taxes by the state. In the case of tenant-cultivators, their burden was even more, for they had to pay landlord’s share, fixed under the share crop system. A Tamil proverb rightly states,

\begin{quote}
‘If the ploughman count the cost, not even a quarter of a measure will be left.’\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}
(Uzhuthavan kanakku parthal uzhakku minjathu)

The nature of the charges and king’s share of the produce are nowhere precisely stated.\textsuperscript{111} During the imperial Cholas, the nature of charges depended upon the agency that gathered the tax or due. Tax was collected not only for the kings, but also for local bodies and other agencies of a communal or professional character, which raised levies for various purposes. Ur (Village) assemblies, Nadu, Brahmadeya Sabha, etc., were responsible for revenue collection. Uttaramerur inscription refers to various committees or variyams in which Panchavara Variyam might have been vested with the task of revenue collection.\textsuperscript{112}
The main expense of the king was salaries of officials and maintenance of army and navy. In the higher rungs of public services salaries took the form of assignment of particular revenue item in particular area. Therefore what was paid into the kings' treasury was the net income that remained after deduction on account of such assignments. What remained after paying the charges of administration was the property of the king and entirely at his disposal.\textsuperscript{113}

Taxation was based partly on custom and partly on new demands. Land tax was the major source of national income and it was collected in cash or kind and sometimes in both. Appadurai enumerates 66 items of taxes. One interesting thing is that such items are uniformly found under the Chola, Pandya and Vijanagra rulers. This indicates that the nature and kinds of taxes levied, and not the mode of assessment and collection, that remained substantially the same throughout the period.

The classification of taxes is implicit in the inscriptions themselves. A study of large number of such inscriptions tells us that the main revenue heads were the following:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[i.] Taxes on land,
  \item[ii.] Excise,
  \item[iii.] Duties on articles of trade,
  \item[iv.] Professional taxes and
  \item[v.] Miscellaneous items.
\end{itemize}

Among the taxes, as earlier pointed out, the most important was land tax.\textsuperscript{114}

The following table shows the amount of land tax in the form of \textit{Kalams} of paddy assessed from A.D. 1011 to 1429 in the Tanjore region.
For revenue collection, lands were divided into many classes, i.e., tax-free lands, tax remission lands and taxable lands. Brahmadeyas and Brahmin controlled institutions like temples and maths were permanently exempted from payment of taxes. In this respect mention may be made on certain tax-free land grants made to individuals who were in the services of the state. Such grants were called by the term 'Jivitham'. Tax-free lands were popularly called ‘iraiyili’. The state lost a sizeable amount of income from these exemptions. The second category of lands was called remission lands. These lands were exempted from tax payment due to inundation and rendered uncultivated owing to floods in the river Cauvery. The remission was granted for a maximum of five years. Such remissions were granted on many occasions such as seasonal failures, droughts, destruction of crops due to wars or animals, etc. However, remission of tax was a temporary arrangement of the rulers to promote agricultural activities and encourage the peasants. The third
division was taxable lands that include all, other than the exempted categories. It was the main source of the state revenue.

In the collection of taxes many agencies were involved. The taxes were collected by officials appointed by the monarchs. Local bodies also helped in the collection of taxes for the State. Revenue fraud was prevalent and in the medieval period it became rampant. It made the peasants to record their protest against some nadus. Thiruvaigavur record, dated 1429 A.D., speaks of one such resistance made by the people of Parantakanadu. The cause for their agitation was that their nadu was being ruined because of the collection of taxes by many persons and unauthorized leasing of land to other persons. So the people resolved that any modification in the collection of taxes should be made only with the consent of the assembled body of the residents of the Mandala. Besides, they demanded that revenue frauds should be severely dealt with. Subramanian claims that failure on the part of the villagers to pay taxes invited cruel punishment such as standing in the sun for the entire day. It seems that contractors were appointed by the state in order to realize taxes from the people. These men often resorted to very crude methods in collecting taxes.

Tanjore revenue declined in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to European struggles. The Nawab of Arcot apparently never acted on previous settlement but adopted amani system. He thought that his administration could extract from the ryots much more than what he could ever have obtained. Indeed in the second year of his rule, he exacted a staggering amount of over eighty lakhs rupees from the district.
The scene was suddenly changed by the devastating invasion of Haider Ali. The divisions of Kumbakonam, Sirkali and Thiruvaiyaru were rendered desolate, and the inhabitants of the rest of the district were much depressed. To restore the prosperity of the country an entirely new system was invented by Bava Pandit. Ruined or depressed Villages, throughout the devastated tracts were clubbed with more fortunate neighbours into units, called Pathakams. These were put under the control of some leading inhabitants called the pathakdars, who were selected by the locals and approved by the government. The result was that it enormously increased the influence of the pathakdars, who shortly became “as over grown and inordinate in power”. They formed alliance with the ruffian and powerful Kavalgars and Palayagars, the Kallars and Vanniyas. In theory, they were the guardians, but in practice oppressors of the public, dreadful to the government as well as to the ryots. They, in fact became renters, making the most favourable terms between government and the inhabitants without the penalty of forfeit. Although removable at the pleasure of the Raja, they scarcely did so on account of their potent alliance with Kavalgars.

The revenue system of the Marathas was vague. During the end of the eighteenth century kaval and poligar systems fell into abuses. Loans were disbursed sometimes through the pathakdars and it often happened that the entire loan amount did not reach the cultivators. In order to relieve the strain on the exchequer, the Raja’s government arranged with local sowcars (money lenders) for advancing money to cultivators on a customary scale to promote
agricultural activities of the state. These sowcars recovered the advance from the ryots at harvest time without any interest. Interest at one per cent per month was paid by the circar to the moneylenders. Some times the landholders received loans and paid interest direct to the sowcars. When government gave Takkavi loans, they were made generally in grain and occasionally in money.

The minister of Tulajajee Rajah, Maratha ruler of Tanjore, was anxious to avoid the destructive effect, which invariably attended the collection of revenue. He was unwilling to undertake the labour of making a settlement with every individual mirasidar. He divided the country into estates or pathakams and let out them to the best bidder for a fixed rent payable in kind. The agreement with the pathakadars was renewed every year. This system of management prevailed generally from the latter years of Tulajajee’s reign, to the surrender of the country to the authority of the British Government.

The discussion made above was not intended to give a rosy picture of the agrarian situation during the pre-colonial period. Literary tradition celebrates the abundance of water and called the region as punalnadu, meaning the land of water. Some of the literary works unambiguously record the flooding of rivers and rich vegetation. Similarly a perusal of the Sangam and Post-Sangam literature gives an exalted situation about the availability of water and the prosperity of the region. There is some truth in the poetic presentation, but on the whole it does not represents the real trend. Of course, poetic license
gives free exaggeration and exaltation of a ruling dynasty and fertility of some specific period.

Agriculture was static, the state appropriating the entire surplus in the form of so many taxes. Rent law was monstrous and eviction was not checked. State sponsored irrigation structures favoured the old wets, mostly tax-free lands. Crop security was at danger and crop destruction during wartime was common. Marketable surplus was very low. Backwardness in transport and communication denied market access. Roads were infested with robbers and waylayders. Agricultural technology was conservative, suitable only for subsistence production. Land utilization for wet crops was restricted to the traditional wetlands located near Cauvery and its distributaries. The absence of storage reservoir acted as constraint to riverine agriculture. The prestigious Grant Anicut was not a storage reservoir, but only a diversion weir, purported to divert the floodwater into Kollidam. "Van Poyppinum Than Poyya Cauvery" (River Cauvery never fails, even if the clouds fail) was a mere metaphor, a poetic expression that has very little validity. Until the construction of Mettur dam, supply in the Cauvery was precarious. Seasonal rainfall was then higher. Yet in the absence of uninterrupted supply of irrigation, agriculture seemed to be a gamble in the monsoon. State sponsored protective and productive schemes were meant to serve the needs of the rich land owning peasantry, temple institution and other free holders.
END NOTES:


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20. Ibid., No. 560 of 1902.

21. Ibid.


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37. Thirukkural: 1032.

38. Narrinai, 131.


40. Narrinai, 13, 393.

41. Ibid, 119.

42. Perumpannarruppadai, 240-41.

43. Ainkurunuru, 260-283.

44. Purananuru, 99.


51. R.S. Sharma, p. XXI.


54. Tolkappiyam, Karpiyal: 3

55. Perumpanarrupadai, 188-195.


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77. R.S. Sharma, p.20.

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86. Kuli 12x12=144Sq.ft. made up of kuli Ma 100 kuli made up of a ma

Veli 20 ma made up of a velli.

87. P. Shanmugham, p.130.

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90. Ibid., pp. 152 – 153.

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