CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSION

The Pudukkottai State is a modern political unit, created by the Thondaiman dynasty which started its career in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The erratic rainfall, the enervating climate and the thirsty soil of the region have made it a dry agro-climatic zone in Tamil Nadu. Added to this is the absence of any perennial river system. In such a physical environment the people of the region had worked hard to lead a hand to mouth living. Even now, the region which forms the core of the present Pudukkottai Revenue District, remains economically backward.

As per the ancient Tamil tradition, the Pudukkottai State can be classified as a mullai land and during drought conditions it exhibited Pālai (desert) traits. From ancient times it was inhabited by the pastoral people of the mullai land and the martial communities like the Kallar, Maravar and Vālaiyar. However, the location of the region in between the Kaveri and Vaigai basins enhanced its utility as a buffer state. The ruling houses of these basins vied with each other in establishing their hegemony in this tract. Further, it provided connecting links for the traders, both inland and foreign, from ancient times.
In the medieval period the peasant elite of the Kaveri and Vaigai basins - the Vellālas extended their agrarian activities with royal patronage. Hence, they dominated the socio-cultural life of the region during this period. But after the decline of the Cholas and Pandyas they started loosing their grip and the martial communities were in the ascent. By appropriating Pādikāval rights the locality chiefs of the martial communities behaved like little kings. Finally, one among the little kings, in collaboration with others established the Thondaiman dynasty. He strengthened his position by way of land grants in the form of Jāgir, Amaram or Aljivitham to his kith and kin. With this, the domination of the martial communities was complete.

The establishment of the British power put the Thondaimans in a tight corner. They had to follow a cautious diplomacy if they wanted the prolongation of their dynastic rule. This they did by helping the British in their campaigns against other native powers and by liberal contributions to the British war fund. The protective umbrella of the British safeguarded the Rajah from threats; rebellion and conspiracy. After 1801, the British tried to tighten their control over the Princely State indirectly but powerfully through their political agents and residents.
In spite of the loyalty of the Thondaimans, the British were sending warning signals time and again by way of withdrawal or restoration of titles conferred on the Rajah or by taking control over the police force of the state, perhaps to remind the Rajah that he was wearing only a "Hollow Crown" (as Dirks puts it). Any way the Princely State continued its existence till its merger with the independent India. Perhaps the British had the realisation that annexation would have landed them in trouble. The continuance of the Princely State would enable them not only to control the martial communities through the Thondaimans but also use them in their imperialistic designs. Further, it is doubtful that annexation of this dry agro-climatic zone with a fragile economy would be beneficial to the British.

The introduction of Agrarian Economy in the medieval period, saw the creation of agrarian settlements, coupled with land reclamation with provision for irrigated agriculture. The agrarian techniques introduced during the medieval period remained more or less the same during the period under study, of course with slight changes in the form of introduction of cash crops like groundnut. The government also tried to introduce modern techniques borrowed from the
British. Specially trained instructors were appointed to guide the farmers in this regard. But all these efforts did not yield the expected results. Of course, man cannot control and change natural conditions drastically and as usual agriculture here depended on beneficial rains.

As noted above, the area under paddy cultivated rose to 1,61,000 acres with very good rainfall (in 1920) but fell to a mere 36,000 acres with poor rainfall (in 1934). Further, the total paddy output of the state was only two third of the total requirements. Hence, the state had to import paddy from the neighbouring areas. Added to this was the cost of cultivation which was higher in Pudukkottai, both for wet and dry farming, when compared to other areas. So, it is natural that people would be left with only meagre agricultural surplus, which may not be sufficient during drought conditions. If this is so, it is very difficult to imagine the plight of the service and dependent castes when cultivation was to be abandoned due to adverse conditions, who would have no other choice but to flee the country. The emigration chart (Appendix XIV) is a clear testimony in this regard. But the introduction of cash crops like groundnut brought considerable profit to the land owners,
particularly the Kallars, with consequent changes in their way of life.

The agro-climatic condition had made water a scarce commodity here. To cope up this adverse situation, the Pudukkottai farmers had evolved the interlocking system of tanks which was in existence since the medieval period. In this way the farmers put the available water to the optimum use. The Thondaimans inherited this traditional system and saw to it that it was properly maintained. They also wanted to augment the water resources. The Holdsworth dam at Kadayakudi still stands as a mute witness to the interest evinced by them in this direction. In maintenance of irrigation works the Darbar introduced some innovations, besides following the traditional kudimarāmath system. Land grants in the form of Mirāci umbalam and Vettī umbalam can be cited in this context.

The water available at the surface level had already been put to maximum use. So, the Darbar decided to encourage well irrigation; trained persons were employed in the construction of wells. The Darbar also granted liberal loans for this purpose. As a result the number of wells
shot up to 14,373 by 1893-94. Certainly this would have helped garden cultivation which also included cash crops.

As noted above, the Vellālas from the neighbouring regions were responsible for the introduction of agrarian economy here. But land relations underwent a drastic change under the Thondaimans. The tenurial system served as a means to distribute land to his supporters. Of course, tenures like Kuḍi umbalam aimed at getting the basic services from the artisans and dependent castes in the village. But the Jāgirs and Amaram or Ālívitham grants were certainly of a feudal nature and can be compared to the Mansabdari system of the Mughals. In addition to this, land grants to Brahmins and temples served for legitimising the Thondaiman rule and to enhance the prestige of the Dharma Samasthanam.

As noted above the best lands were given to the Brahmins and temples. It is not unlikely that the Jāgirdārs and Amarakārar also were treated like-wise. All these land holdings were in the hands of non-cultivating land owners, necessitating the involvement of tenants and other labourers in the cultivation process. Of course, Inām settlements could have affected the power and prestige of these absentee land lords to some extent. However, both in the case of Inām
settlement and assessment of land revenue the Darbar tried to follow the British policy and the process appears to be one of trial and error method, the ultimate aim being an enhanced revenue to the State. All these factors affected the tenants and labourers. Even the marginal land holding peasants were forced to go for cooly work in times of drought. In short, the land system under the Thondaimans served as a surplus extracting mechanism in which the condition of the actual tiller of the soil was much affected.

The term peasant or peasant community has been taken as a reference to all the people involved in cultivation, either directly or indirectly. The martial communities, because of their proximity to the king and the Nāṭṭukottai Chettiārs and the Vellājas to a lesser extent exercised control over land, as non-cultivating land holding elite. The marginal land holders, though of considerable number, were economically insignificant since they were forced to work as coolies during adverse conditions. The Vāḷaiyars, the artisans (the service castes), and the Pāḷḷar and Pāṟaiyar (dependent castes) provided the tools and man power required for agriculture. So, there emerged a peasant community in to which the land holding elite, the marginal land holders, the tenants, the
service castes and the dependent castes played their specified roles - all revolving round land. All these groups interacted with each other resulting in an integrated social set up, recognising social stratification with accompanying honours. The existing social set up based on land relations very well reflected in Temple affairs, of course giving room for occasional tensions.

To conclude, the advent of the Thondaimans marked the culmination of a process in which the martial communities were gaining dominance over the Vellāḷa peasant elite who were in the forefront during the medieval period. In the new set up, the martial communities exercised control over land, and the erstwhile land holding elite, the Vellāḷas, had to accept this fact. The establishment of the British Raj added another dimension to this state of affairs. The very continuation of the Thondaiman dynasty was at the mercy of the British. However, the fragile economy of the region seems to have saved the Princely State from going into oblivion by way of merger. Thus, Agriculture and land system can be said to have shaped the destiny of the people of the Pudukkottai state from the king down to the dependent caste.