The economic activities of the Pudukkottai region had a direct bearing on historical development. The megalithic burial sites at Sithannavasal and the presence of tombs in large numbers were the evidences of early human activity in this area. The occupation of the natural caves by the ascetics of the Jain order, references to places and chiefs of this region in 'Sangam Literature' and the discovery of Roman coins in Karukkakurichi indicates that it was a region inhabited by people from early times.

In accordance with the physiographic classification, Pudukkottai is mainly mullai (jungle) tract with small hillocks found here and there. During summer it would degenerate into palai (desert) conditions because of the scarcity of rain. According to Tamil literary tradition Kallars and Maravars were the people of palai region, while the pastoral people, the ayar occupied the mullai land. The Kurumbars were another group of people who migrated into this tract and were living in the Kolathur region of the princely state of Pudukkottai.

The resource base of the Pudukkottai tract was not very sound. The lands were not fertile. Rivers are only seasonal streams and the tanks are mainly rainfed. So agriculture had always been difficult, if not an impossible task. The
eco-system and the conditions that prevailed here partially
corresponded to Stein's intermediate nadu, Baker's plain and
Dirk's marginal economy zone, which were neither dry nor wet.
As a result, the natural resources were exploited by rudimentary
agricultural operations in the beginning. It gave way for
attacks and plunders between peasant and non-peasant
inhabitants. To eke out a living, cultivation of crops on land
and rearing of cattle were practiced.

The Vellāla peasantry from the neighbouring wet zones
initiated agrarian practices on the tract watered by Vellar. It
is claimed that along with them eighteen castes of people were
brought for settlement. They included potters, washermen,
barbers, scribes, tailors, garland makers, shepherds and bards.
Along with them joined five classes of kammālars, three classes
of vannijars and vālayars. The often quoted Terkkattur
manuscript reveals that the Vellālars of Kānādu were brought
to this area by the Chola king and the Vellālars of Kānādu were
settled by the Pandya kings. To Dirks, the settlement pattern
indicates the stimulating role of the king to promote
settlement. The community thus settled gradually evolved
themselves into a medieval agrarian order. Vellāla farmers were
bent over the plough and so there came into existence farms and
settled villages in the Vellar basin.
The developed agricultural and mercantile activity had a natural advantage of the tract which resulted in prosperity and power. The pastoral-agrarian form of social life led to the worship of Murugan, the god of war and fertility to whom offerings of rice and blood were made. The peasants could produce paddy, cereals, vegetables, condiments and fruits through agriculture.

Farming necessarily meant ownership of land. The copper plate grants referred to the Vellalars of this region as Nilattarasu (rulers of the soil), as opposed to Muñjarasu (crowned kings). It was assumed that the crowned kings were a reference to the Cholas and the Pandyas.

In places of settlement different workmen got their subsistence in various ways. The smiths, potters and washermen received annual assignments of paddy, soon after harvest. Agricultural and agriculture supporting classes gradually reached a stage of maturation and material occupation during the early centuries of the Christian era. The internecine disputes about the use of land, temples, tanks and rights to the waters of Vellar, disturbed the peace of the region. The bareness of the land and the famine conditions were the reasons behind the attacks and counter attacks among them. Paddy cultivation needed the help of others for sowing, transplanting and harvesting operations. So agriculture depended upon the ability to command and control others to work on the soil.
The peasant settlement as indicated by inscriptions, refers to tanks, wells, sluices and land grants. With the expansion of agriculture, local assemblies began to show keen interest in the reclamation of virgin lands, renovation of tanks and ayacuts. The local population decided the type of local assemblies like the Sabhā of the brahmins, the Ūr of the agriculturists and the Nagaram of the merchants. The assemblies were rooted on land and tried to sustain agriculture against drought or floods. There were regions where land was not surveyed but held jointly. The produce was shared among themselves. The local assemblies maintained records to show the extent of lands held, riparian rights, sluice use particulars and the taxes levied or exempted. The local assemblies were forced to shoulder such responsibilities. Custom and collective vigil facilitated the working of collective management of land by the local assemblies.

The chola inscriptions at Munisandai dated about 870 A.D. and 941 A.D. respectively refer to the Aīṁṉūṟṟuvār, a merchant guild of five hundred members. They were traders who visited different towns of South India. The merchant guild Kodumbalur Manigrāmam was very active and they participated in the socio-economic activities like construction of temples and renovation of tanks. The Pudukkottai region, because of its route character, played a vital role in the inter as well as extra local level of trade. The presence of itinerant merchants of the Aīṁṉūṟṟuvār
and Manigrāmam associations, clearly attest to the prevalence of over-seas trade.

Some times the nature of the local assembly changes because of castes, which started originally as occupational groups. References to this fact are found in many inscriptions. Subbarayalu mentions about communal corporate bodies. The Īr, the Sabhā and the Nagaram. The Īr was the corporate body of the Veḷḷāḷa landholders in Veḷḷāḷa Vagai villages, the Sabhā was the corporate body in the brahmin villages and the Nagaram was the corporate body in the mercantile villages. The economic status was an important factor connected with land holding. Veḷḷāḷa landlords granted lands to Brahmins and temples at Tiruvarangulam, Kudumlyanmalai, Kunnandarkovil, Vadavalam and Kalasamangalam.

Epigraphical evidences mention the cultivated varieties of paddy like Sambhā, Āḍikuruva, Aippāḷi kuṟuvaḷ, Chithirai kuṟuvaḷ and Naviraḷ. The principal dry crops were Tilāḷ (Satariā Italiā), Varagu (Paspalum Scorbičulatum), Keppai (Eleurine coracana) and Sāmāi (Panicum miliarē). The most important non-cereal crop was Gingili (Sesamum indicum). On rotation, Payaru (Phaseolus), Mango and Horsegram (Dolichos bifforus) were cultivated. Betel is mentioned in many inscriptions. The common vegetable crops were Brinjal (Solamum melongēna), Yam (Typhonium irilobatum), Pumpkin (Cucurbita peopa), Turmeric (Curcuma longa) and Ginger (Zingiber officinala). Sugarcane was also cultivated. Pusanī was probably grown in the off season. Regarding fruits,
the tract produced Mango (Mangifera indica), Jack Artocarpus
(integri folia), Coconut (Cocoanucifera) and Areca nut. There are
only few references to cotton in the inscriptions of this tract.
The absence of references to indigo and groundnut in the
inscriptions of the region, is indicative of their late entry.

Cultivation of crops and their yield depend upon regular
seasonal rains. But in Pudukkottai, rainfall was mostly too little
which led to the dislocation of the agrarian system. So water
is an important input that matters much in agricultural production.
Demands on water caused it as a scarce commodity in many areas.
This dictates the necessity to have an efficient use of this
precious commodity. Tank irrigation emerged as a wise answer
to the onslaught of drought down the centuries. Tanks were
formed by forming a low bund across a shallow valley to hold
the run off water from its catchment. As Pudukkottai depends
mainly on monsoon rainfall, the idea of holding rain water by
constructing a chain of tanks was being practised for a long time.
Maintenance of tanks by the villages was an essential feature to
be looked into. If tanks were not properly maintained the entire
region would show a barren look. Only because of their
maintenance the areas were irrigable.

The extant sources reveal the existence of village committees
which looked after the maintenance and operation of water
distribution of the tanks to the beneficiary farmers. These
committees were called as Eri Varyam (Tank committee). There
was also a system of kuḍimaramath wherein the farmers themselves voluntarily did the physical work to clear the irrigation channels and maintain the tank system. To release water from the tank, devices like maḍai, kalingu, mathaku, thuṃbu and kumili were used.29

When tanks breached, the ayacuts were deserted and the lands became fallow. If the streams were in spate, the feeder channel, tank bund, surplus channel and the ayacut lands were affected. So adequate attention was given to tank maintenance. Land grants were given to guard the tanks. Sluice operators were appointed. Village community as a whole participated in strengthening the embankment, desilting, sluice repairs and removing unwanted vegetation in the tank bed. Generally, enjoyment of fishery rights were linked with tank maintenance. Equitable distribution of water to fields had become an issue of tank maintenance. To tackle such problems of distribution, ancient custom to murai vilukkādu (turn system) was followed on ayacut lands under the ayacut area of a tank.

With the decline of political authority after the thirteenth century, the villagers were forced to sell or grant pādikāval (protection rights) to chieftains. Along with it the peasant community agreed to tax payment.30 Taxes were demanded even under distress conditions. Land dues were collected by fixing normal harvest rates. Yet there were different rates for sambā
and kuruvai cultivation. As a result, Aippasi kuruvai levy was greater than Adikuruvai rate. Among dry crops a gradation was attempted. Well irrigated lands were charged half the rate of seasonal crops. The rates of the adjoining locality were usually followed. Crops, their raising up and yields were verified before the levy.\textsuperscript{31}

The shares of the village produce as demanded by Padikaval holders could not be calculated on quantity basis. A perusal of the epigraphic sources reveal that they touched almost all the crops cultivated. The burden of the peasants was heavy and the oppression was strongly felt. Apart from collecting dues, they exercised special rights over tanks. They even collected milk, hare and fowls from the dependent communities like cowherds, valayars, pallar and parayar. There were many claimants to extract the peasant's surplus labour or surplus produce. Such claims persisted till the rise of the Thondaimans.

The social unrest and rivalry among different chiefs and the damages caused by flood and drought dislocated the agrarian order. As a result, exodus became a reality. Inscriptions from Virachilai, Puvalankudi, Keeranur, Kovilur and Singamangalam indicate the presence of decaying villages and decreasing population.\textsuperscript{32} In brief, the historical period in Pudukkottai was inaugurated by its inhabitants Ayyar, Vellalar, Kallar and Maravar. The resource base of the region permitted rudimentary agricultural
activities with other activities like hunting and herding. The local assemblies looked after agricultural activities against drought and floods. The merchant guilds played an active role in the exchange of various commodities. For the maintenance of the tanks, kudimaramath system was adopted. On the payment of tax to the state, graduation was attempted and rival claims were made on the surplus produce of the peasants. These developments constitute the economic background for an understanding of the agrarian practices of this region.
CHAPTER - III
REFERENCES


3. Appendix, Vide Plate 21.


11. The manuscript belonging to R. Subramanya Velar, filed as a record in the Pudukkottai Chief Court.


19. *Ibid.*, p. 334. Such communal land holdings continued to exist even during the period under study. For details, see Chapter VI.


The prefixes represent particular Tamil months Āḍi: July-August, Aippāsī: October-November and Chitrai: April-May.


The letters of the Madura Mission, reveal that many villages were entirely deserted without even one inhabitant left in them.