CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRAVANCORE AND TIRUNELVELI IN 1700 A.D.

Southern India was divided by three great kingdoms in the earliest time, they are Chera, Cholas and Pandyas. Native tradition represents the eponymous ancestors of the Pandyas, Chera and Cholas as three brothers living together at Korkai, a town which tradition and historical research alike have identified with the place of that name, four miles from the mouth of the river Thamiraparani, in the modern Srivaikundam taluk. ¹

Eventually a separation took place, Pandyan remaining at home, while Chera and Chola went forth to seek their fortunes. Chola founded a kingdom in the north, while Chera founded one in the west. The Cholas seem to have ruled in the Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts. The Chera established themselves in Travancore, Malabar and Coimbatore, and the Pandyas in Madura and Tinnevelly. This traditional account of the boundaries of their dominions is roughly borne out by all that we know of them from properly historical sources. ²

Travancore had a very enchanting historical past and from very ancient times, it was under a monarchical form of government. The ruling family of

¹ Caldwell, R., History of Tinnevelly, New Delhi, 1982, p.12
² Pate, H.R., Gazetteer of the Tinnevelly district, Madras, 1970; p.40
Travancore traces its descent direct and unbroken from the Chera dynasty, one of the three great dynasties of early Tamilakam.³

In later times Travancore was divided into a number of small states and principalities. The early chiefs of Travancore were called Thiruvadi, who were referred to as Venad chiefs.⁴ Travancore rose to political prominence in the 12th century A.D. It was only the southern most nadu or province of the empire of Kulasekharas and its governors were subordinate to the Perumals of Mahodhuyapuram. The Venad kingdom obtained an independent status in the beginning of the 12th century A.D. At that time the royal house belonged to the Kizhperur family.⁵

Towards the later half of the century a branch of the Ay family which had set up residence at Tirupapur and another (Cheravai) which had its headquarters at Atantruthi merged in the Venad family With this merger the ruler of Venad came to be designated Cheravai Muppan and the heir-apparent Tirupapur Muppan. The former as the reigning sovereign lived in the Panamkavil Palace at Quilon and carried on the administration of the kingdom. The Tirupapur Muppan functioned as the Koyiladhikarikal with his residence at Tirupapur, nine miles north of Trivandrum, exercising his authority over the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple and other temples of Travancore.⁶

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³ Chakravarthi Gupta, Early history of south India, New Delhi, 1894, p.83
⁴ Sreedhara Menon, A survey of Kerala history, Kottayam, 1967, p.156
⁵ Ibid., p.157
The first Travancore ruler about whose reign we have any authentic information is Ayyan Adikal Thiruvadikal in 849 A.D. The next Venad ruler of whom we have inscriptional evidence is Sri. Vallabhan kotha.\textsuperscript{7} 974 A.D. Govardhana Marthanda succeeded Sri. Vallabhan kotha and he ruled in the last quarter of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century A.D and early part of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{8}

The names of the rulers of Travancore in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. A.D are not known to us. During this period of the Chola-Chera war Venad suffered havoc at the hands of the Chola invaders. In 1096 A.D; the city of Quilon itself was destroyed by kulothunga’s army. Meanwhile, the Chera capital of Mahodhayapuram was burnt and Rama Varma Kulasekhara moved to the south at the head of a large army in a determined effort to beat back the advancing Chola forces. The perumal set up his headquarters at Quilon and directed the military operations against the Cholas. He seems to have abdicated the throne in favour of his son and retired from public life\textsuperscript{9}. There is a local tradition of Eraniel that the founder of the Venad royal house by name Kulasekhara passed away at the local palace. As the history of Venad as an independent Kingdom begins with Rama Varma Kulasekhara, he may be regarded as the founder of the Venad royal house.\textsuperscript{10}

The immediate successor of Rama Varma Kulasekhara on the throne of Venad was Kotha Varma (1102-1125 AD) most probably his son. He had four

\textsuperscript{7} Sreedhara Menon. A., op.cit., p.157
\textsuperscript{9} Sreedhara Menon. A, op.cit., p.157
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p.158
sons, they are Kotha Kerala Varma, Vira Ravi Varma, Aditya Varma and Udhaya Marthanda Varma. All these sons ascended the throne of Venad one after the other. 11 Kotha Kerala Varma (1125-1155 A.D) also called Vira Kerala varma was an outstanding ruler. He rebuilt the temple of Sri. Padmanabha at Trivandrum. 12 He also made gifts of land to the temple at Sucindram, hereafter described as “Vira Kerala Chaturvedimangalam”. The lands so gifted lay in different villages of Nanjil nadu such as Karkadu, Tenvalanallur, and Tekkanputhur. 13

Vira Ravi varma (1155-1165 A.D.) who succeeded Vira Kerala varma, was a powerful sovereign of Travancore. Nanjil nadu continued to be under the sway of the Travancore king during the reign of this ruler. Aditya Varma succeeded Vira Ravi Varma. He ruled from 1165 to 1175 Udaya Marthanda Varma (1175-1195), the successor of Aditya Varma, was an illustrious ruler. 14

The successor of Udaya Marthanda was Vira Rama Varma (1195-1205) of the Vellayani inscription. Vira Rama Kerala Varma (1205-1215), otherwise called Devadaram Kerala Varma was the next Venad ruler. His reign saw the construction of temples and the formulation of special rules for their management. The temples at Viralam (Vira Keralapuram) and Katinamkulam were constructed during his reign. 15

11 Nagam Aiya, Vol. II, op.cit., p.49
12 Sreedhara Menon, op.cit.p.159
13 Kanyakumari district. Gazetteer, Madras, 1995, p.73
14 Ibid., p.74
15 Ibid.p.73
Vira Rama Kerala Varma was succeeded by Ravi Kerala Varma (1215-1240), who figures in the kandiyur inscription (1218 A.D) and also the Manalikara inscription (1236 A.D.) Ravi Kerala Varma bestowed special attention on the Suchindram and Padmanabhaswami temples. The Subramaniaswami koil, the first of the shrines to be erected outside the main Suchindram temple, was constructed by Queen Unniachi. Since the days of Ravi Kerala Varma the Namboothiris were appointed to perform pujas in the temples of Nanjilnadar.\textsuperscript{16}

The next Travancore ruler was Padmanabha Marthanda Varma (1240-1253 AD). He was the Contemporary of Jatavaraman Sundara Pandya (1251-1268), the famous Pandyan warrior king. Perhaps, he is the king who is alleged to have been killed by Vikrama Pandya who died in 1264 A.D.\textsuperscript{17}

The history of Travancore from 1253 to 1299 is lost in confusion. The records of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya and his successor, Maravarman kulasekhara (1268-1310) testify to the establishment of Pandyan hegemony over the reign. The Pandyas seems to have led an expedition to Travancore and captured Quilon as is evidenced by the records obtained from Tirunelveli District describing Mara Varman Kulasekhar as Cheranai Venra and Kollam Konda.\textsuperscript{18} The most celebrated ruler of Travancore during this confused period of its history was Jayasimha. Quilon and the surrounding regions came to be called Jayasimhanad or Desinganad after Jayasimha. The death of Jayasimha

\textsuperscript{16} Sreedhara Menon. A., op.cit., p.160
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.160
\textsuperscript{18} Kanyakumari district Gazetteer, op. cit., p.74.
gave the signal for the outbreak of a civil war between his sons and nephews. Ravi Varma kulasekhara, the son of Jayasimha by his Queen Uma Devi, came out successful in this war. It is worth mentioning that Ravi Varma Kulasekhara was the last of the Venad kings who came to the throne according to the patrilineal system of succession.  

Ravi Varma Kulasekhara ascended the throne of Venad in 1299. Till the death of Mara Varman Kulasekhara in 1310 he was a feudatory of the Pandyan ruler, as is evidenced by the Trivandrum inscription in which he uses the Pandya title Mara Varman along with his name, but there after he claimed over lordship over the Pandyan kingdom. It may be noted here that Ravi Varma Kulasekhara had married a daughter of Mara Varman Kulasekhara and this was the basis of his Claim to the Pandyan throne. He was one of the most outstanding figures in the long line of the kings of Travancore. He was a distinguished conqueror and he assumed the title Sangramadhira (firm in battle). He raised the position of Travancore as a powerful militant state, by his conquests.  

Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma, (1314 – 1344 A.D.), the successor of Ravi Varma Kulasekhara, was the first Travancore king to ascend the throne according to the matrilineal system of succession. He seems to have been the Travancore ruler who was defeated along with Vira Pandya by the Kaktya ruler  

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20 Kanyakumari district Gazetteer., p.75.
in 1317 but he still continued to exercise authority over certain parts of the Tirunelveli district.  

The next ruler of Travancore was Kunnummel Vira Kerala Varma Thiruvadi. He might have ruled from 1344 to 1350. It is on record that he donated 157 paras of paddy lands to the temple of Sri Padmanabha and also paid 3000 panams as atonement for the sin of causing death to certain Pothi Brahmins.

The period from 1350-1383 A.D. was a bright period in the annals of the Travancore kingdom. It was the glorious partnership of the two illustrious brothers, Ravi Varman and Ravi Aditya Varman. The Muslim raiders from the Tamil country frequently harassed the Thovala region in the early part of the reign of Ravi Varman (1350-1376). New palaces were built by him at Kottar and Amaravati and either of the two princes used to stay in the south in an earnest endeavour to strengthen the frontier defences and check Muslim raids.

Ravi Varman is the author of the historic Thiruvithamcodeu inscription which registers a gift of land for feeding twelve Brahmins in the Thiruvithamcodeu temple during the Vaisakam annual festival.

Aditya Varma Sarvanganatha (1376 -1383 A.D.) who succeeded Iravi Varman was a highly accomplished and cultured ruler. He was a poet, scholar and musician of considerable merit. An inscription in the Krishnancoil temple

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21 Nagam Aiya, Vol. II, op.cit., p.50
22 Sreedhara Menon. A; A, op. cit., p. 228.
23 Ibid., p. 228
24 Kanyakumari district Gazetteer., p.76
at Vadasery furnishes us an impressive catalogue of Sarvanganatha’s intellectual attainments such as his proficiency in grammar, music, smithies, Arthasastra, Puranas and Tarka.\textsuperscript{25} Tirupapur Muppan Aditya Varman showed his martial process by defeating the Muslim raiders of the south and checking the tide of Islamic advance. He was also described as capable of handling 36 kinds of weapons.\textsuperscript{26}

Aditya Varma Sarvanganatha was succeeded by Chera Udaya Marthanda Varma (1383-1444). His is the longest reign recorded in Travancore history. He ruled over territories on either side of the Western Ghats. Cheranmahadevi was the favourite residence of this ruler. From the time of Chera Marthanda, Travancore gradually extended its sway in to the interior of the Tirunelveli region.

During this reign the Zamindar of Rettiyapuram invaded Valliyur, but he was beaten back by prince Ravi Varma (Trippappur Muppan). He was the patron of the Suchindram temple and he built its Sabha Mandapa.\textsuperscript{27} The immediate successors of Chera Marthanda were Ravi Varma (1444-58), Sri Vira Rama Marthanda Varma Kulasekhara (1458-69) and Kotha Aditya Varma (1469-84). The last mentioned of the rulers resided most of the time of at Kallidakurichi in the Tirunelveli district.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} Gopinatha Rao T. A., Travancore archaeological series Vol., I, Department of cultural publication, Govt. of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1908, p.153.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p.154
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p.152
\textsuperscript{28} Sreedhara Menon. A., op.cit., p.230
Ravi Ravi Varma (1484-1512), the next Travancore ruler, established a sound system of administration. He checked the powers of the yogakkar (Trustee) of the Sri Padmanabha swami temple and their partisans. During his reign the Empire of Vijayanagar had risen to power in south India and it embarked on its aggressive activities on the borders of the Venad kingdom. We have the testimony of Albuquerque the Portuguese Viceroy, that the Travancore ruler defeated the Vijayanagar king (Narasinga) in battle.

The relations between the Portuguese and Travancore commenced during the reign of Ravi Ravi Varma, the Portuguese having been given facilities for trade in pepper at the port of Quilon. Ravi Ravi Varma was succeeded by Ravi Kerala Varma who died in 1514 and then by Jayasimha Kerala varma who ruled till 1516. The later ruler has been identified with the prince who figures in the Parasurama Perumteruvu Pillar inscription of Kottar which records the grant of several rights and privileges to the depressed classes.

Bhutalavira Sri Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma (1516-1535) was the next Travancore ruler. A brilliant warrior, he extended his conquests further into Tirunelveli and conquered the major part of that district from the Pandyas. He assumed the title Ventuman Konda Bhutalavira in commemoration of his victory. A new palace was built by him at Viramarthanda Chaturvedimangalam in Kalakkad and it became the headquarters of Udaya Marthanda.

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29 Sreedhara Menon, A., op.cit., p. 231
30 Kanyakumari district Gazetteer., op. cit., p. 77
This Travancore ruler married a Chola princes and called himself Puli Marthanda after the family emblem of his wife. He also built a dam named Virappuli dam. He made handsome donations to temples in the Nanjilnad – Tirunelveli region, e.g., the temples at Ambasamudram, Mannar kovil, Kalakkad and Suchindram. 31 His religious tolerance can be well understood by the fact that he made liberal gifts by way of lands to the Jain temple at Nagercoil. He helped the Paravas at Kumar Muttom who were Christians by releasing them from the strong hold of the local Hindus and relieving them of the offensive taxes levied upon them. 32

**Bhutalavira Udaya Marthanda Varma and Vijayanagar**

The reign of Bhutalavira Udaya Marthanda Varma witnessed a major clash between Travancore and Vijayanagar. The Travancore king had granted political asylum to Vira Narasimha (Chellappa) a rebel feudatory of the Vijayanagar king. Achutha Raju, the king of Vijayanagar, deputed his chief minister and brother-in-law, Salaka Timma, to punish the Travancore ruler and bring back Chellappa. 33

An epic battle took place between the forces of Travancore and Vijayanagar on the banks of the Tamiraparni. The Travancore king was defeated and forced to acknowledge the supremacy of Vijayanagar. He handed over Chellappa to Salaka Timma together with presents of elephants and

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31 Sreedhara Menon. A; op.cit., p. 230-231
32 Ibid., p. 234
33 Kanyakumari District gazetteer, op.cit., p.78
horses. Inspire of his defeat Udaya Marthanda still continued to exercise sway over large portions of territory in the Tirunelveli region. Udaya Marthanda Varma was succeeded in 1535 by Bhutalavira Ravi Varma. During the reign of his successors Rama Kerala Varma and Aditya Varma there were frequent clashes between the king’s officers and the tenants of the temple lands.

On Aditya Varma’s death in 1544 Sri Vira Kerala Varma (1544-45) succeeded to the throne. The famous Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier, was carrying on missionary activities in Nanjilnadu during this period. The Travancore king is said to have given him all facilities to carry out his evangelising mission. A notable clash of arms took place between Travancore and Vijayanagar during this period.

The real motive behind the Vijayanagar expedition into Nanjilnadu was to prevent the large scale conversion of the Paravas on the fishery coast to Christianity. The immediate causes of the conflict were however, the failure of the Travancore king to make regular payments of tribute to Vijayanagar as well as his continued raids into Pandyan territory. The Vijayanagar army under Ramaraya Vithala won a victory. St. Francis Xavier played an important part in arranging the settlement of the conflict between Vijayanagar and Travancore.

The immediate successors of Bhutalavira Sri Kerala Varma were Rama Varma (1545-56) and Unni Kerala Varma. It was Rama Varma who concluded

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34 Pachu Muthathu, The History of Travancore, Trivandrum, p. 83
35 Pillai K.K., Sundaram Temple., p. 44
36 Sreedhara Menon. A, op.cit., p. 232
the peace with Vijayanagar referred to above. During his reign the Vijayanagar army under Vithala again invaded Travancore (1558), but this time Vithala was defeated and his army fell back panic–stricken. Perhaps, he was himself killed in the battle or in the confusion that followed it. With this victory, Travancore threw off the Vijayanagar yoke. Sri. Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma was the successor of Unni Kerala Varma. His immediate successors were Aditya Varma and Rama Varma. Another Rama Varma also seems to have been on the throne from 1610 to 1611 and on his death Ravi Varma ascended the throne.

**Invasion of Tirumala Nayak**

The most important episode of the reign of Ravi Varma (1611-1663) was the invasion of Nanjilnadu by Tirumala Nayak of Madurai. In 1553 Viswanatha Nayak, the founder of the dynasty, subdued the Pandya ruler and reached the borders of Nanjilnadu. The right to collect tribute from Nanjilnadu which the Nayaks claimed for themselves as the heirs of the Vijaya Nagar Empire provided the pretext for the Nayak incursions into Nanjilnadu. The object of Tirumala Nayak’s expedition was, in fact, twofold, viz, to compel the subordination of the Travancore chief to Madurai and to get possession of the fabulous wealth of Nanjilnadu.

The earliest mention of Tirumala Nayak’s invasion is found in Nittu issued by the Travancore king in 1662 AD, regarding remission of taxes to the

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37 Pillai K.K., op.cit., p.44
38 Ibid., p. 45
39 Sreedhara Menon., op.cit., p.233
Nanjilnadu riots who could not cultivate their lands as a result of the invasion. The record makes it clear that the first invasion took place in 1634 AD. The inscriptions obtained from Nanjilnadu during this period show that the forces of Tirumala Nayak invaded and ravaged Nanjilnadu several times and that the whole region was in a state of anarchy for about half a century. Ravi Varma (1663-1672) and Aditya Varma 1672-77 were the immediate successors of Ravi Varma.

Umayammai Rani now assumed the regency as Ravi Varma, the heir-apparent, was only a minor prince. The period of her regency which lasted from 1677 to 1684 was one of major political developments. The story of the cold-blooded murder of five of the six sons of Umayammai Rani by her enemies by drowning them in the Kalippankulam tank at Manacaud in Trivandrum was for long accepted as true, but it has since come to light that Umayammai Rani had no children at all. This piece of evidence coupled with the fact that the capital of Travancore at this time was Kalkulam and not Trivandrum has served to expose the myth of the so-called Kaippankulam tragedy.

Umayammai Rani was a woman of courage and ability. She kept the yogakkar under strict control by insisting on the regular submission of the accounts of income and expenditure of the temple. During her regency the question of the adoption of a member to the Travancore family cropped up.

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40 Ibid., p. 234
41 Kanyakumari District gazetteer, op.cit., p.731
Umayammai Rani adopted her own nominee, Kochu Raman Unni Pandarathil. Her action was resented by Kerala Varma of the Peraka Tavazhi (Nedumangad). This prince at first wanted his brother to be adopted but later he himself claimed sovereignty as the eldest member of all the branches of the reigning family (Vanchi) taken together. Provoked by Umayammai Rani’s action Kerala Varma enlisted the support of the Kottarakara branch and invaded Trivandrum.

Umayammai Rani withdrew to Varkala for reasons of safety and collected an army there. Kerala Varma and his army proceeded to Neyyattinkara. At this juncture the senior Rani of Attingal (Umayammai Rani’s sister) died and Umayammai Rani made three adoption from Kolathunad. Kerala Varma was enraged at this action and he moved towards the capital Kalkulam at the head of his army. Umayammai Rani’s forces now promptly proceeded to the south and met Kerala Varma’s army in battles at Kalkulam and Edakkod. The battles were indecisive. In the meantime, a truce was arranged in which Kerala Varma was offered the status of a junior prince and he withdrew his forces to Nedumangad.

Kerala Varma was formally adopted in to the Travancore royal family and conferred the title of “Prince of Hiranyasimhanallur” (Eraniel). The prince applied himself first to the task of clearing the country of the Muslim hordes. He pursued the Muslim invader and met him in battle at Thiruvattar. The

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44 Kanyakumari District gazetteer, op.cit., p.732
45 Ibid., p. 733
invader was killed along with many of his followers. Umayammai Rani was brought back to Trivandrum from Nedumangad in triumph. Kerala Varma thereafter helped the Rani in managing the affairs of the kingdom. His policies, however, caused deep resentment among the local nobles and a conspiracy was hatched against him. In 1696 A.D., he was assassinated by the conspirators within the precincts of his own palace. Kottayam Kerala Varma has immortalised himself as a bold social reformer by issuing the famous proclamation of 1696 A.D. stopping the old custom of pulappedi and Mannapedi in Travancore and giving relief to large sections of people from the fear of molestation by pulayas and Mannans.46

**Polity and Life in the 17th century**

A Survey of the general state of polity and society in Kerala in the 17th centuries is essential for a proper understanding of the history of the period. The political and social structure of the land was feudal in character. It has already been made clear that there was no organised central government in Travancore during this period, the country having been split up into a number of Nadus or principalities each of which was under a local chieftain called the Naduvazhi. The powers of the Naduvazhi were vast and varied but they were limited by the local tara organization. The tara was the local territorial unit of the Nairs organised for civil purposes and it was governed by representatives of the caste. In view of the special position occupied by the tara kuttams or local assemblies in the life of the community, the Naduvazhi was the head of a

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46 Sreethara Menon., op.cit., p.236
feudal aristocracy with limited authority and could hardly function as an arbitrary despot.\textsuperscript{47}

The Naduvazhi enjoyed several sources of income. An important source of income was the Chunkam or customs revenue from imports, exports and transports. A succession fee called Purushantaram was levied from every person who assumed charge of family property on the death of the previous owner. We have the testimony of Sheik Zain Uddin that land tax was not levied from any class of agriculturists.\textsuperscript{48}

On the other hand, ten per cent of the profit was collected from all merchants and businessmen, irrespective of caste or creed. Naduvazhi could take over the estates of his decaying neighbouring chiefs. Fines (Pizha) of various kinds were levied from the subjects. Those who wanted to fight duels (ankams) paid large sums of money (nattukizhi) to the chiefs who made arrangements for the fight. The properties of nobles who died without legitimate heirs (Attaladakam) also fell to the lot of the Naduvazhi and enriched his coffers.\textsuperscript{49}

The formal consent of the chieftains obtained on payment of a specific sum was necessary for any noble to adopt an heir. It was called Dattukazhcha. Different kinds of fees for protection were levied from dependents and strangers, e.g., Rakshabhogam, Changatam, etc. The Naduvazhi also received

\textsuperscript{47} Sreedhara Menon., op.cit., p. 237
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 238
\textsuperscript{49} Kanyakumari District gazetteer, op.cit., p. 732
presents (Kazhcha) from his subjects on such occasions as wedding, funeral, opening of new palaces, etc. The plunder of the cargo from the ships that came ashore also helped the chieftain to increase his income. The Naduvazhi had also a monopoly of the various animals captured in his domain. The money received from the sale of women convicted for adultery also brought a large income to chief. This was called *Pulayattu pennu.*

**Kalari**

Notwithstanding the nominal supremacy enjoyed by the Naduvazhi in the kingdom, real power lay in the hands of the Nair Madampimar or nobles. As already stated, the latter supplied the chieftains with troops in times of war and for this purpose they maintained private armies of their own. The kalari where the youth of the land received training in the technique of warfare was an important institution of the age.

The Nairs were the traditional martial class of the land. Apart from the Nairs, the Tiyyas or Ezhavas had also their own martial tradition as is testified by the heroic deeds of Aromal Chevakar celebrated in the Northern Ballads. The Northern Ballads are replete with references to the institution of the Kalari (Gymnasium) and the training in the use of arms (Kalaripayattu) imparted therein. The youth of the land, irrespective of sex, were given training in the Kalari at a very early age. Unniarcha and Kodumala Kunki who figure in the

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50 Ibid., p. 734
51 Mathilagam Records, Curuna 83., Ola 27
ballads were two medieval heroines of North Malabar famous for their martial exploits.\(^{52}\)

**Ankam**

The martial spirit of the people was sustained and nourished by several military institutions. The military combat known as Ankam deserves special mention in this context. According to this custom, if disputes between parties were not satisfactorily settled in the local assemblies of the Kuttams of the tara and the nadu, the parties concerned would have them settled in military combats. A preparation and training for 12 years preceded the fight, for the participants were expected to achieve proficiency in the use of weapons.

The participants in the combats were not necessarily parties to the quarrel but their champions paid for that purpose.\(^{53}\) All those who were approached with the request to take part in the Ankam acceded to the same as a matter of honour. The Naduvazhi was expected to be informed in advance of the decision to fight and paid the Nattukizhi so that he may make all the arrangements for the conduct of the Ankam. It was also customary to pay compensation to the families of those who died in the Ankam. Foul play in the Ankam fight was disallowed and the parties were expected to observe the highest ethical standards while taking part in the combat.\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\) Ibid., Ola 26

\(^{53}\) Ibrahim Kunju., op.cit., p.13

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p.14
Poithu

Another military institution was the poithu. Unlike the Ankam this was a private affair between two individuals or two desam and it was not obligatory to inform the public or the naduvazhi about the impending fight. The famous fight between Tacholi Otenan and Katirur Kurukkal in which the former lost his life was one of this kind. The traditional rivalry between heroes usually ended in poithu fight.\textsuperscript{55}

Kutipaka

Another typical custom of the age was the kutipaka (literally house feud). If any person molested or killed another, the members of the family of the victim would nurse feelings of eternal enmity towards the members of the family of the slayer and would wreak vengeance at the earliest opportunity. “Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” was the accepted dictum. Many a northern ballad narrates the story of the cold-blooded massacre of all the male children born as members of the slayer’s family. A peculiar practice associated with kutipaka was that the chieftain of the nadu took with him the corpse of the victim to his enemy’s house and burnt it along with his house.\textsuperscript{56}

Trial by Ordeal

There was no regular judiciary or written code of laws in Travancore during this period. Custom or maryada governed the relations between

\textsuperscript{55} Travancore Archeological Series., Vol. V., pp. 220, 221

\textsuperscript{56} Sreedhara Menon. A, op.cit., p.257
individuals. The ruler gave the verdict in all cases in consultation with his officers or with the Brahmins in obscure cases. The tara organization also played its part in the settlement of disputes. Law was, however, not equalitarian. 57

The Brahmins were punished only by loss of caste even for the most heinous of crimes. And only the Azhuvancheri Tamprakkal could impose even this punishment. A Nair who killed a person below his caste was in the first instance punished only with the imposition of a fine. Trial by ordeal (Satya Pariksha) was common in both civil and criminal cases. Several forms of such trial were in vogue; thus a man was asked to pick a coin out of a pot of boiling oil with his hand and pronounced guilty or not guilty judging from the state of his hand after a certain lapse of time. Different forms of water and fire ordeals and ordeals by poison and balance were also prevalent. 58

Visscher refers to a peculiar custom of ordeal by snakes or Cobra Capellas. he says, “When a man will not confess a crime they take a mantle and wrap up in it one of those reptiles which are not only poisonous, but are also reckoned sacred by them; after calling on the gods, the accused must thrust his hand into the mantle and lift up the snake. If he be bitten he is considered guilty”. The type of ordeal to which a person was subjected was determined by

57 Travancore Archaeological Series., Vol. V., p. 222
58 Kanyakumari District gazetteer, op.cit., p.732
considerations of caste. Ordeal by balance (Tukku) was reserved for Brahmins, fire for Kshatriyas, water for Vaisyas and poison for Sudras.\textsuperscript{59}

The system of trial by ordeal prevailed in several temples of Kerala, e.g., the famous ordeal at Suchindram which was known as Kaimukku (Ordeal of boiling ghee) was introduced there by the Namboothiri Brahmins who migrated to the area in the wake of the establishment of Venad supremacy. On the evidence, among others, of the Sukasandesa of Lakshmidasa the date of introduction of this ordeal at Suchindram has been assigned to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century or sometime after.\textsuperscript{60}

The Kaimukku was confined to the Namboothiri community and the records of the Suchindram temple show that the vast majority of the trials were conducted in respect of sexual offences committed by Namboothiri women. It was almost a continuation of the Smartha Vicharam under which Namboothiri women accused of adultery were first tried before a caste tribunal of elders. The Polpana Bhattatiri was the chief judge at the Suchindram Kaimukku. It may be noted that not only Hindus but non-Hindus like Christians, Muslims and Jews were also sometimes subjected to trial by ordeal in various parts of Travancore, though in Suchindram it was confined to the Namboothiri.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Travancore Archeological Series., Vol. V., pp. 220, 221

\textsuperscript{60} Mathilakam Records., Curuna 83., Ola 29

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.,
Law of Inheritance

Among the social institutions of the age the Marumakkathayam or matrilineal system of inheritance and polyandrous marriage deserve special mention. The Marumakkathayam or matrilineal system of inheritance was prevalent mainly among the Nairs and a section of the Muslims and the patrilineal (Makkathayam) system among the Brahmins Kammalas, Tiyyas and Mukkuvas.62

Place of Women in society

Women of the age enjoyed considerable freedom in society. Except the women of the Namboothiri community none of the others observed the purdah system. The Nair women used to dress themselves in the best of clothes and adorn the most attractive ornaments and throng public places in the company of their men. They also followed the practice of polyandry without any social stigma being attached to their conduct. It may be noted in this connection that while non-fraternal or disparate polyandry prevailed in North Travancore fraternal polyandry (Pandavacharam) was the usual custom in South Travancore till the beginning of the 17th century. Many reasons are assigned by scholars for the practice of polyandry, but according to Zain Uddin it was adopted mainly to prevent alienation of family property.63

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62 Sreedhara Menon., op.cit., p. 258
63 Kerala Society Papers., Vol. V., p. 33
Castes and communities

The Hindu society of the age was organised on the basis of the caste system. The Brahmins stood at the top of the social hierarchy and among them the Namboothiri were reckoned as the highest in rank. Only the eldest son among the Namboothiri married within the caste and all other had Sambandham with women belonging to the Nair, Ambalavasi or other communities of equal or higher rank. There were also other Brahmin castes like the Tulu Brahmins and the Gowda Saraswathy who came from outside.  

The Nairs and the Tiyyas represented the most powerful castes among the Hindus. Next below the Nairs in social rank were the Tiyyas. Their main occupation was toddy-tapping, but like the Nairs some of the Tiyyas also received military training. Then there were the Kammalas or artisan classes, the Mukkuvas or the fisher-folk and several other castes like the Pulayas, Kuravas, Parayas etc., but they occupied only a low status in society and were subjected to all kinds of disabilities.

Social Evils

The caste Hindus like the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Nairs had a privileged status. They were expected to observe the caste rules most scrupulously. Those who violated the rules were subjected to social ostracism and sold as slaves to Christians or Muslims under orders from the sovereign.

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64 Ibid., p. 34
65 Kerala Society Papers., Vol. V., p. 34
Sometimes the offenders were secretly murdered by the relatives to escape the wrath of the sovereign. The evil custom of untouchability was observed by the Namboothiri, Kshatriyas and Nairs. Apart from untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability also existed in a dreadful form. A Namboothiri who happened to be seen by a Nayadi or Pulaya considered himself to have been polluted.

The dreadful custom known as Pulappedi or Mannappedi or Parappedi was observed during this period. According to this primitive custom the members of the lower castes like Pulayas, Mannans etc. enjoyed the privilege of harassing women of higher castes, particularly the Nair caste, during certain month every year. A kind of slave trade prevailed during this age. There were organized bands of robbers who kidnapped the children of the low castes and sold them for pecuniary gain. Children of aristocratic families were also not spared, if circumstances permitted their being kidnapped. Most of these children were sold on the coast to the agents of foreign vessels engaged in trade. There was also agrestic slavery in the sense that slaves were attached to the soil and treated as marketable property.

Among the non-Hindu communities, the Mappilas held a prominent place in society in North Kerala. They were engaged mainly in trade and commerce. They constituted about one-fifth of the population of Malabar

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66 Sreedhara Menon., op.cit., p. 260
67 Ibid., p. 34
during this period. The general picture of society given above is essentially that of North Travancore, but it may be made clear that the conditions in Central and South Travancore were not basically different. Unlike in North Kerala, the Syrian and Latin Christians formed an important element in the population of Central and South Kerala and the played a prominent part in the public life of the land.

Economic Life

Kerala’s trade with foreign countries continued in the 16th and 17th centuries. The major ports of the land were Quilon, Cochin and Calicut, but there were also other minor ports like Cannanore, Pantalayani Killam, Tanur, Chaliyam, Ponnani Purakkad, Anjengo and Tengapattanam, which too played their part in the commerce of the land. Duarte Barbosa who visited Quilon in 1514 refers to it as ‘a great city and god sea-port” in which dwelt Moors, Gentiles and Christians. “They are great merchants and very rich,” says Barbosa, “and own many ships with which they trade to Cholmendel, the island of Ceylong, Bengal, Malacca, Sumatra and Pegu; these do no trade with Cambay. There is also in this city much pepper. It has merchants from all parts of the world and of all nations and religions by reason of the liberty and security accorded to them there, for the king permits the exercise of every religion and yet it is strictly forbidden to talk, dispute or quarrel on the subject”. Apart from the Arabs, the native trading classes like the Mappilas, the

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68 Mathilagam Records., Curuna 83., Ola 31
69 Ibid., Ola 32
70 Sreedhara Menon A., op.cit., p. 264
Chettis, the Gujarathis and the Vyavari (Ravari) Nairs played a leading part in promoting the trade of Calicut. The role of the Mappilas or native Muslims was primarily that of middlemen between foreign Muslims and the native manufactures and growers.\textsuperscript{71}

**Historical background of Tirunelveli in 1700 A.D.**

In the beginning Tinnevelly was ruled by Pandya kings. According to some versions of the Mahabharata, Arjuna visited the country, and the Sanskrit grammarian, katyayana, who lived probably in the fourth century B.C, knew enough of the kingdom to venture a derivation of the name. Another reference to the Pandyas is found in an inscription of Asoka, the emperor and militant evangelist of the great Buddhist Mauriyan Empire, who came to the throne in 269 BC and made extensive conquests in Southern India.\textsuperscript{72} By A.D.615 they had driven the Pallavas to the walls of Kanjeevaram; they claim even to have conquered the Cholas, crossed the cavery and invaded the country of the Pandyas and Cheras.\textsuperscript{73}

The occupation of the entire Pandya country by the Cholas is Rajendra Chola, who commenced to reign in A.D.1064. He is supposed to have reigned 49 years.\textsuperscript{74} In the beginning of the 1\textsuperscript{st} century Karikala Chola ruled the country.

The position of affairs in the pandya kingdom at the beginning of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D is obscure. It appears that the line of Chola-Pandya viceroy’s

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 266
\textsuperscript{72} Pate, H.R., Gazetteer of the Tinnevelly district, p. 24
\textsuperscript{73} Sewell’s lists of Antiquities, Vol.II., p.155
\textsuperscript{74} Caldwell, R., History of Tinnevelly, Madras, 1881, p. 28
instituted by Rajendra Chola I had ceased. The Pandya dynasty at any rate revived. The inscriptions have revealed to us the name of four Pandya kings who reigned before A.D.1190. They are Mara Varman Srivallabha, Jada Varman Srivallabha, Vira-Pandya and Parakrama.\textsuperscript{75}

About A.D.1171 a civil war of succession was fought for the throne going on between two Pandya princes the king of the Cholas and of Ceylon being ranged on opposite sides in the struggle. The two rival claimants were Parakrama Pandya and his son Vira-Pandya on the one side and Kulasekhara Pandya and his son Vikrama Pandya on the other. The Singhalese took the side of Parakrama pandya and the Cholas assisted the Kulasekhara Pandya.\textsuperscript{76} The war is described in great detail in the annals of Ceylon and is referred to in the inscriptions of the Chola king Rajadhiraja II about (1171-1178) and Kulothunga III (1178-1215). It was during the reign of Rajaraja III (1216-1239) that the first fatal blows to the Chola power were dealt.\textsuperscript{77}

The Pandyas were not slow to take advantage of the Chola collapse and the close of the twelfth century marks the beginning of the period of their greatest power. Mara Varman Sundara Pandya I (1216-1235 A.D.) invaded the Chola country and captured Tanjore and Uraiyyur a former capital of the Cholas. Mara Varman Sundara Pandya II (1238-1251 A.D.) we know that he was a contemporary of the Hoysala Somesvara. He actually founded a Brahmin

\textsuperscript{75} Caldwell, R., History of Tinnevelly, Madras, 1881, p. 29
\textsuperscript{76} Pate, P.R., op.cit., p.52
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p.53
village in the name of Somesvara and called it Somideva Chaturvedi Mangalam.\textsuperscript{78}

Jada Varman Sundara Pandya I (1251-1261 A.D.), who succeeded, adopted a policy of bold aggression. Vira Pandya (1262-1267 A.D.) his contemporary, was a still mightier conqueror. He encountered the kings of Chola, Chera and Karnataka countries and defeated them. He captured his throne and all his royal treasures, and planted the Pandya flag with the ‘double fish’ on the Kandy hills.

The succession of the Pandya King after Jada Varman Sundara Pandya I, is very clear Mara Varman Kulasekhara I 1268-1308 and Jada Varman Sundara Pandya II are kings of considerable power. Jada Varman Sundara Pandyas II died in 1290, and Kulasekhara was murdered by his son, Sundara Pandya, about the year 1308, because he had appointed Vira Pandya, a half brother of Sundara Pandya, as his successor. A conflict ensued between the brothers, Sundara Pandya was defeated.\textsuperscript{79}

The middle years of the fifteenth century mark the beginning of a period during which the Chera king of Travancore succeeded by a series of invasions in wresting, temporarily at least from the paramount power considerable portions of the Tinnevelly districts. Inscriptions of Travancore kings ranging from 1439 to 1532 are found in Thirukurunkudi, Sermadevi, Kalakkad, Mannarkoil and Tirukkalur. One of their local palaces seems to have been at

\textsuperscript{78} Caldwell. R., op.cit., p. 44
\textsuperscript{79} Pate H.R., op.cit., p. 58
Sermadevi\textsuperscript{80} and another at kayal, where a Portuguese caption states (in 1516), “the king of Quilon” used generally to reside.

In 1532, a change came over the scene. The Travancore ruler was rash enough to defy the suzerainty of Vijayanagar. It was apparently in order to effect the reduction of Travancore as well as to defend Pandya king from the encroachments of two Nayakkan invaders that Achutha, the king of Vijayanagar, organised a great expedition into the extreme south of India about this time.\textsuperscript{81} He planted a pillar of victory in the Tamaraparani, exacted tribute from the king of Travancore, suppressed two troublesome Telugu Chieftains, and married the daughter of the Pandya king. The Pandya country was now held firmly in the grasp of Vijayanagar.\textsuperscript{82}

In early years of the eighteenth century, there is nothing to show that the Chera ruler again obtained possession of any part of the Tinnevelly country. In fact we find from the Jesuit letters of the 17th century that the “Badagas” the emissaries of the Madura rulers, were constantly extending their “incursions” apparently in quest of tribute into the very heart of the Travancore country. “The king of Travancore” wrote Father Jean De Britto, in 1683, “is one of the petty princes of India and is tributary to the kingdom of Madura”.\textsuperscript{83}

The period 1532 to 1557 is occupied in a confusing manner by Telugu princes and Pandya kings each of whom is treated in turn by the chronicles as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[80] Pate, H.R., op.cit., p.58
\item[81] Rajayyan K., History of Tamilnadu, 1565-1965, Madurai, 1978, p.20
\item[82] Ibid.,
\end{footnotes}
though he were the supreme ruler. From among this mixed company there emerged the distinct and important figure of Vithala Raja, a prince of the Vijayanagar house, who invaded Travancore in 1543 and was recognized by that power as overlord in 1547-1548. It was during this period of confusion, in 1532, that the Portuguese first set foot on he Tinnevelly coast.

The Dutch first entered the main current of Tinnevelly history at the time of the poligar rebellions. In response to an appeal from Chandrasekhara an expedition was sent to restore the Pandya King under a certain Nagama Nayakkan. He suppressed the disorder and then attempted to make himself king of Madura. Hearing that Nagama Nayakkan had failed to reinstate the Pandya, the Vijayanagar ruler sent Vishvanatha, Nagamas own son, in command of an army, with orders to reduce his father to submission. This he succeeded in doing and was equally successful in procuring the pardon of his father.

The dominions to which Vishvanatha succeeded over which he and his successors gradually extended their power, included, apparently, the districts of Trichinopoly Madura and Tinnevelly. Travancore also occasionally paid tribute. Tinnevelly and perhaps Coimbatore were governed by Deputies subordinate the Nayakkan ruler. According to some copper plate grants he conquered in battle the Thiruvadi i.e. the ruler of Travancore and other kings and annexed their dominions. The Palayamkottai fort and many irrigation works of the district furnished by him. He also rebuilt the town of Tirunelveli.

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85 Ibid., p. 380
Vishvanatha was succeeded after a short rule by his son Kumara Krishnappa (1563-73), who is represented as an able and victorious monarch. The next two reign (1573-1602), first Krishnappa Nayakkan and Vishvanatha II jointly and then Lingayya, son of Krishnappa, were uneventful.\textsuperscript{86}

Muthu Krishnappa (1602-1609), who followed, is said to have founded the dynasty of the Sethupathi of Ramnad and to have given that house a considerable slice of land in the Marava country. On the condition that they should suppress crime and protect pilgrims in that wild and inhospitable region. Muthu virappa (1609-1623), who succeeded is a scarcely more distinct figure.

In the battle of Talaikota, in 1565, the power of Vijayanagar had been dealt an irreparable blow by the combined Muhammad kings of the Deccan.\textsuperscript{87} Muthu Virappa succeeded by Tirumalai Sevari Nayakkan the most powerful ruler and the best known to us of this dynasty. An added trouble lay in the in subordination of the Sethupathi of Ramnad. In Ramnad Thirumalai Nayak had trouble with the Sethupathi and his Marava followers had an unsuccessful attempt to impose his nominee on that principality.

In Tinnevelly he came into conflict with the poligars, headed by Ettayapuram, whose suppression was finally effected by the grateful Sethupathi. His reign was rendered illustrious by works of truly royal magnificence. Among these are the Pagoda of Madura, several public buildings

\textsuperscript{86} Pate H.R., op.cit., p.62
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p.63
and above all the royal palace, with colossal proportions.\textsuperscript{88} He loved and protected the Christian religion, the excellence of which he recognised; but he never had the courage to accept the consequences of his conviction. The chief obstacle to his conversion came from his 200 wives, of whom the most distinguished were burnt on his pyre. Among the public works of Tirumalai Nayak, the largest and most magnificent was the great palace at Madura. He erected another palace on a much smaller scale, but in the same style of architecture, at Srivilliputhoor (in the present Ramnad district) where he occasionally resided.\textsuperscript{89}

Tirumalai Nayaka’s son, Muthu Alakadiri (1659-1662) who succeeded, made an ineffectual attempt to repudiate his allegiance to the Mohammadans: who replied by marching into the Trichinopoly and Madura districts, devastating the country. Muthu Alakadiri was succeeded in 1662 by his son Chokkanatha (1662-1682), a boy of sixteen, who repeated his father’s policy and was equally unsuccessful. He was threatened by a domestic conspiracy and openly went over to the Muhammadans and joined them, in an attack upon Trichinopoly.\textsuperscript{90} Chokkanatha at length took command of the army himself and drove the invaders back to Tanjore.

Soon after, he made a sudden attack upon that place, exacted the submission of the Nayakkan and drove the Muhammadans back to Gingee. So far successful, Chokkanatha within a year (or) two had to pay a heavy price for

\textsuperscript{88} Rajayyan K., op.cit., p. 50
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p.52
\textsuperscript{90} Pate H.R., op.cit., p. 65
his good fortune. A Muhammadan army burst into the Trichinopoly and Madura districts and ravaged the country with incredible cruelty.\textsuperscript{91} Again the siege of Trichinopoly was unsuccessfully undertaken but Chokkanatha had to buy off the invader with a large sum of money. He attempted without success similar reprisals on the Sethupathi of Ramnad who had failed to assist him against his enemies Chokkanatha handed over Tanjore to his half-brother, Alagiri, who soon attempted to assert his Independence.

In 1674 a Maratha general, named Venkaji, appeared before Tanjore at the head of a Bijapur force, with orders to turn out the Madura usurper and install the petitioner. Alagiri was defeated, Venkaji occupied Tanjore, and Chokkanatha had exchanged a Nayakkan neighbour for a Maratha. The actual siege was apparently unsuccessful; for in the following year we find the capital in the possession of Chokkanatha’s son and successor. Tirunelveli, apparently was from its position immune from invasion and continued to acknowledge the Nayakkan’s authority.\textsuperscript{92}

Chokkanatha died in 1682 and was succeeded by his son, Ranga Krishna Muthu Virappa (1682-89). The young Nayakkan succeeded during his short reign in recovering a great part of the territory of his ancestors. He died in 1689 at the early age of 26 and was succeeded by his mother Mangammal, who for the next fifteen years acted as regent on behalf of her infant grandson. She

\textsuperscript{91} Pate H. R., op. cit., p. 65
\textsuperscript{92} Caldwell R., op. cit., p. 50
ruled from 1689-1704. She was a popular administrator, and is widely known as a maker of roads and avenues, and as a builder of chourltiers.\textsuperscript{93}

**The role of poligars in Tinnevelly**

The term ‘Poligar’ is derived from the word ‘Palayakkaran’ in Tamil, meaning the holder of an armed camp. Palayam in Tamil, palamu in Telugu and polam in English indicated the territorial possession of the poligar. Granted a legal status under the Vijayanagar Empire the poligars played a vital role in the history of Tirunelveli under the Nayaks and Nawabs.

Their obligations in regard to the payment of tribute to the sovereign administration of justice in their districts and maintenance of troops for the service of the king corresponded with those of the feudal barons of medieval Europe, but differed considerably from those of the jagirdars and zamindars of Moghal India.\textsuperscript{94} The possession of estates was, indeed, the basis of authority of all these chieftains. But while the primary duty of the jagirdar was to render military service to the sovereign, and that of a zamindar to pay rent, the poligar combined in himself both these functions. The concentration of these two branches of duties together with the rights arising therefrom accounted for the vast influence of the poligars.\textsuperscript{95}

The military establishments naturally consumed a large part of their resources. Their military dependents consisted of three descriptions: the

\textsuperscript{93} Caldwell R., op.cit., p. 50
\textsuperscript{94} Rajayyan K., op.cit., p. 52
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p.53
amarum peons, the cattubudy peons and the mercenary peons. The first two groups were paid chiefly in land and the third entirely in money and grain. The amarum peons were granted lands on hereditary basis. Assessed at a very favourable rate, paying only a quit rent, they were jointly bound to pay the rent of their villages. These peons, placed under the command of a sardar or officer in bodies of 20 or 30 men, were required to take a pledge to yield best services to their masters. Their obligations were not only to attend to the summons of the poligars, but also to prevent theft within their villages.

They forfeited their services and lands if they were found disqualified for the discharges of their duties. The cattubudy peons were also given lands. Their tenure was hereditary, but it was less by right than by sufferance. In fact, they were ryots, rendering military service and paid by assignments of waste lands in lieu of pecuniary wages. They served the poligars with pikes and match-locks at their own expense and made restitution of any property, plundered within the villages entrusted to their care. The mercenary peons were recruited only in times of emergency. During active service all these armed men received subsistence in money and grain, exclusively of the other privileges granted to them. The poligar trained a considerable body of men in the profession of arms.

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96 Rajayyan K., Rise and fall of the Poligars of Tamilnadu, Madras, 1975, p.18-20
97 Baliga B.S., Madurai District Gazetteers, Madras, 1960, p. 48
98 Ibid., p.49
The Poligar and his Domain

The Poligar, irrespective of the extent and resource of his palayam, maintained a government of his own. He kept up the nominal officers of state, the principal of whom was called the Pradhan or Dalawa. On every important occasion he held a durbar. He conducted official communications with his sovereign and other rulers through accredited ministers called stanapatis.

The functions of the poligar resembled those of a virtual king. He collected taxes and duties, presided over the distribution of justices, maintained orders and kept his own troops, though the poligar has no right to construct fort and to put any one to death or to inflict a punishment amounting to mutilation without the approval of his king. However he observed these restrictions more by violation than by compliance. He was the administrator of his palayam, commander of his forces, the renter of the ruler and a ryot among his people.

This arrangement enabled the poligar to assemble a considerable number of troops within a short notice. For instance the Sethupathi of Ramnad found it no difficult a task to collect 30,000 to 40,000 armed men in less than 8 days. As a usual practice, the actual cultivation of land was entrusted with a cast of workers, the Pullers, the counterparts of serfs in a baronial estate. The Pullers who tilled the fields of the poligar received a little dry grain for his

100 Rajayyan K., op. cit., p. 54
101 Ibid., p.55
subsistence, but no fixed share of the corps. On the other hand, those who worked in the fields of the sherogars received a fixed share of the harvest. The field-workers were not tied to the estate, but their poverty at times forced them to sell their services for long periods.\textsuperscript{102}

The cultivated lands in the poligar-country were usually classified into four categories, based upon productivity. They were ‘kirsul’ or black cotton ground, free from stones and sand; the shevul or land with mixture of red soil, stones and sand; ‘pottul’ or ground with a mixture of black and white earth, with stones and ‘veppul’ or land with a mixture of brown earth, clay and sand. Productivity was decided on the basis of soil conditions, but this was applied only to the wet lands.\textsuperscript{103}

The poligar’s share of the produce was known as ‘potuchilavu’, which literally meant public expense, it was estimated at 50% of the yield; the assessment being made on the basis of soil conditions. The share of the poligar was regulated by ‘mamool’ or custom. The fluctuation of taxes the want of an established standard in the assessment of dry-grain fields and the intricate details of ready-money collections were real evils in the revenue administration of poligar territories.\textsuperscript{104}

The peasants on their part, relied upon evasive tactics against the encroaching evils. It was a common practice that a ryot managed to possess

\textsuperscript{102} Sathyanath Ayyar, History of the Nayaks of Madura, pp.194, 195
\textsuperscript{103} Rajayyan K., op.cit., p. 54
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 55
greater extent of land than what was found on the records either by keeping the actual extent unnoticed by the officials or by bribing the surveyors. The additional area of which the peasant paid no tax varied from 50 to 100 per cent of the extent of the land for which he actually paid. Thus ultimately there followed a struggle between oppressive exactions and fraudulent evasions.\textsuperscript{105}

**Poligar and the kaval**

In addition to the military establishment of the poligars, there existed a police establishment called the ‘kaval’, The word ‘kaval ‘means ‘watch ‘ and a person who performed the duty was called kavalcara or talayari.\textsuperscript{106} From time immemorial, every village had its kavalcars who were posted either by village communities or by rulers for guarding the villages. The kavalcars belonged to four groups; the ‘arasu kavalcars’, the ‘nadu kavalcars’, the ‘desai kavalcars’, and the ‘stalam kavalcars’. ‘nadu’district,’desai’ or desam direction or region.\textsuperscript{107}

A kavalcara protected the grain, cattle and domestic property of the inhabitants and guarded the public places like the roads and markets. If any robbery occurred, the concerned kaval car was held responsible for the recovery of the stolen property, failing which for the payment of damages. The services of the kaval cars were rewarded by a fee called ‘stalam kaval’, which

\textsuperscript{105} Lushington’s S.R., Report to the Board of Reverse 29\textsuperscript{th} December 1800, Madras, pp. 9-14
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p.15
\textsuperscript{107} Caldwell R., op.cit., p.104
consisted of a portion of the crop which they protected or a monetary payment in lieu thereof.\textsuperscript{108}

The kaval system was in substance based upon the principle, ‘set a thief to catch a thief. Accordingly, the responsibility of apprehending a thief was entrusted with groups of inhabitants like the Kallans and the Maravas who during this period considered robbery as their profession.\textsuperscript{109}

The two systems - poligar and kaval - complemented each other. The poligars rendered military service to the king, and gave security to the country against external invasions. The kaval cars on the other hand discharged police-duties and preserved internal order. The poligars were for the poligar-territories while the kaval cars were for the circar-lands doing complementary duties. Both the establishments were solely supported by the inhabitants. It was the duty of the sovereign to see them functioning efficiently and separately of each other. The distinct existence of the two establishments appeared essential not only for preventing the over growth of their influence but for safeguarding the interests of the sovereign as well as of the subjects.\textsuperscript{110}

The turmoil which attended the Mughal invasions and the subsequent rebellions created circumstances favourable for the integration of the two systems. The central government distracted by its own problems found it impossible to give protection to the kaval cars in order to enable them to

\textsuperscript{108} Caldwell R., op.cit., p.105
\textsuperscript{109} Rajayyan K., op.cit., p.55
\textsuperscript{110} Caldwell R., op.cit., p.106
execute their duties. The inhabitants of several villages, in consequence appealed to the powerful poligars for protection. The chiefs on their part, readily undertook the new responsibility. They re-appointed the former kaval cars or superseded them by their own servants. In return for their service, they received from the inhabitants a voluntary contribution called the ‘desacaval’. In short, the poligars grew in strength in their service to the Circar villages.\textsuperscript{111}

**Growth of Poligars’ influence**

The period between 1650 and 1760 saw unprecedented growth of the influence of the poligars. The situation of the Circar and poligar villages, mixed together indiscriminately and the holding of farms at favourable rent in the Circar country by the poligars favoured their systematic interference in the village. The chieftains employed different devices for encroaching upon the Circar lands.

One method was to supersede the local authority, in this case, they subjected, instead of removing the usual Kaval cars, in to a complete submission to him and levied an annual contribution from the Kaval cars as a badge of their dependence upon them.\textsuperscript{112} A second method was to induce the inhabitants of the Circar villages to flee to the palayam.

When the Circar servants asked the return of inhabitants, the poligars on their part demanded, as a condition, the recognition of their right to protect the

\textsuperscript{111} Caldwell R., op.cit., p.104
village against exactions. Threatened by the loss of revenue, the Circar servants had no alternative but to recognize the chief as the protector of the village.\textsuperscript{113}

The stormy political situation also contributed to the growth of poligars influence. In an attempts to escape from the terrors wrought by interminable conflicts more villages sought, the protection of the chieftains. Meanwhile, the villages which had already accepted their protection paid enhanced rates in proportion to the increased responsibility undertaken by the poligars for holding the disorders at bay.\textsuperscript{114} Thus the two-fold process-more villages seeking their protection and the kaval villages paying increased rates-enabled the poligars to extend their jurisdiction. Hence the consent of the inhabitants in enhancing the status of the chieftains served as the motivating force.\textsuperscript{115}

The rewards made by the ruler or his governors in return for the poligar’s services also swelled their resources. They sought the military aid of these chiefs in order to defend their authority against the rebellious subjects. The poligars, accordingly assisted a ruler but not as part of their duty to their overlord but in consideration of obtaining rewards. The governors too entered into intrigues with the poligars and connived at their increasing the palayam and interfering with the collection of revenue.\textsuperscript{116}

In consequence, the poligars allowed the Circar only such proportion of the revenue as they pleased. In order to warrant these enormities they would

\textsuperscript{113} Governor Edward Lord Clive in Council, 28\textsuperscript{th} November 1800, Vol. 106, pp. 3191 - 3201
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p.3202
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p.3203
\textsuperscript{116} Pandyan T.B. Rev., The Ancient Heroes of South Indian Peninsula, Madras, p.19
spare a part of the spoil to the public servants. This practice was nothing more than a division of the public revenue. Rapine and violence were not merely connived at but openly assisted and most of the usurpations committed by the poligars received either public sanction or secret encouragement of authority. By these means – some fair, while others unfair—the poligars greatly enhanced their resources and extended the limits of their palayams.117

Under the changed condition, the tax-burden of the villagers increased enormously. The poligars now levied three different taxes under the name ‘deshakavel’. The first was the usual demand consisting of a certain fixed annual payment. The inhabitants suffered a lot if their village declined the size of its population as the tax was not liable to proportionate reduction. The second levy consisted of fees on the ploughts, a small share of paddy from the fields and taxes on looms bazaars and the like. The third was a certain allotment from the standing crops carried over to the circar’s share of the revenue.118

Poligar Warfare

The poligars in common cherished a spirit of independence and turbulence. The absence of any definition of their privileges, their assumed power and the state set up by the, in led them into upholding themselves

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117 Pandyan T.B. Rev., The Ancient Heroes of South Indian Peninsula, Madras, p.19
118 Ibid., p. 20
against the rulers. With forts, a few old guns and a little equipment of stores, they overawed their neighbours.\textsuperscript{119}

The poligars constructed forts of mud or of stone either on deep cotton–plain or on the hills for the convenience of defence. They enclosed the forts with barriers and woods: but appeared vulnerable to heavy cannonade. Their forces consisted of two major divisions the matchlock men and the pike men. The weapons in common use included the cannon, muskets, wall pieces, shields, swords and pikes and match-lock.\textsuperscript{120}

The pike was nothing but the bamboo spear with 18 to 20 feet long. They also used it to aims at target: spear, dagger, sling, bow and arrow. Clay-pellets, prepared by mixing the white of the egg, served the purpose of bullets. Rockets, usually fired into the camps of the enemies, were also in use. A peculiar weapon used by the poligars especially the Kallans was the ‘valaithadi’ or boomerang. These war–like chieftains represented the living force of feudalism and medievalism in the Tinnevelly region. But under the pressure of hostile circumstances, they developed behind the barriers of their miniature states an aptitude for egocentrism, independence and war and not for service, order or loyalty.\textsuperscript{121}

The Poligars were administrators of the palayam, a division of the Carnatic Kingdom. They were direct to pay tribute to the Arcot Nawab in times

\textsuperscript{119} Thurston E., Ethnographic notes in Southern India, Madras, 1907, pp.556 - 557  
\textsuperscript{120} Rajayyan K., op.cit., p. 61  
\textsuperscript{121} Caldwell R., op.cit., p.105
of distress. They were given the command that they should recruit soldiers and proper training should be given. But the Poligars cheated the Nawab. They did not train the soldiers. In times of war untrained soldiers were recruited and sent to the war front which ultimately resulted in the failure of the Nawabs of Arcot in the war fields. Because of this insincere attempts the Nawabs of Arcot failure before the British which ultimately led to the disappearance of the Carnatic Kingdom and the failure of the Poligar system.