INTRODUCTION

The Tamil Country, situated in the southern region of peninsular India is the home of the Tamils. Across the centuries it experienced varied political systems, whether it was tribalism, oligarchy, monarchy, feudalism or imperialism. Feudalism is identified with medieval Europe, but it was not confined either to the medieval period or to Europe. In one form or other it existed and flourished across the World. The Tamil Country was no exception. Feudalism is defined in different ways. In a political sense it is a decentralised structure of society in which private individuals exercised governmental authority over the population, who depended upon them for protection and living. Such a polity existed side by side with the central authority, either depending upon it or not depending upon it. ¹ In an economic sense it was a method of holding land—the land lord giving land to the tenants for cultivation in return for services. Such a system in varied dimensions flourished in different regions, including the land of the Tamils.

The Tamil Country, known as Tamilakam in the distant past, extended from Kanyakumari in the south to Tiruvenkatam, a mountain range of the Eastern Ghats, in the north and from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in

island of Sri Lanka by the Sixth Century B.C. The Tamil Kingdoms particularly of
the Pandyas the east. The present day Tamil Nadu, Kerala and the Chittore
District of Andhra Pradesh formed parts of the Tamil Country, otherwise referred
to as Tamilakam or Dravida. Recent researches indicate that there existed Tamil
habitations in the and the Cholas extended their survey to this island. However,
the situation changed as a result of migrations and invasions. The western region
of Tamilakam developed a cultural identity of its own with Malayalam as its
language and become Kerala. With the Telugu settlement in the northern region
adjoining the Tiruvenkadam Hills, Chittore and southern Nellore became parts of
the Telugu speaking Andhra Desa. The rest of Tamilakam was constituted into a
separate state in 1956, when the provinces of India were reorganized on linguistic
basis and is at present called Tamil Nadu.  

Situated north of the equator with in the tropics Tamil Nadu with an area of
130357 square kilometers has retained it's Tamil identity. The eastern and southern
shores are washed away by the seas. Though natural harbours are seldom, the land
adequate rainfall. As a result terrible heat regions and renders life miserable in


3. In 1956 South Travancore in Kerala was merged with the Tamil areas. The
reorganised state was called Madras State and since 1957 as Tamil
Nadu. (B. Maria John, Linguistic Reorganisation of Madras Presidency, Nagercoil,
1994, pp. 78-93.)
summer seasons. In November-December during winter the North East Monsoon brings in rain, that itself through cyclones and tempests causing considerable damage to life and property. The river systems are the Pennar, Kaverai, Vaigai, and Tampraparni but except the second all are dry during the most part because of its location on the high way of the seas between the East and West has attracted the attention of foreign traders, missionaries and invaders from the distant past. The coast is noted for its fishing grounds and pearl banks. The two mountain systems, the Eastern Ghats and the Western Ghats join at Nilgiris, making its terrain picturesque. However, as a rain shadow area the state seldom receives of the year. Total rainfall is about forty inches, quite inadequate for a tropical area. As a result the people living in most of the state are to make a precarious living, depending upon the monsoons which are not very dependable. Poverty, insecurity and labour intensive farming have contributed to the rise of moneylenders, middlemen, and chieftains exercising considerable influence on the economy of the common people.

Most of the population belong to the Dravidian stock, while the rest to the Adi Dravida and Aryan groups. Tamil is the popular language, yet a large section of the inhabitants has Telugu as the mother tongue. Most of the people follow Hindu religion, while others Islam or Christianity. In early times Janism and Buddhism flourished in the Tamil Country, but they declined with the rise of Brahmanical of Hinduism by the ninth century. The Hindu society was caste based and as such it
did not recognise equality of men. While the caste system contributed to
distinctions among the people, the concept of fatalism created a situation
favourable for the preservation of caste distinctions. When the ideal of human
dignity and human equality, was lacking, it served as a philosophical justification
for the acceptability of the idea of high and low. In consequence, the inhabitants
were prepared to accept the status that they had.

The political life of the people was marked by ups and downs as in case of
other peoples. The inscriptions in different languages- Tamil, Prakrit, Kannada,
Telugu, Sanskrit and Persian as well as literary sources usually in Tamil, English
and French shed light on the changing fortunes of the powers. Colin Mackenzie,
Robert Sewell, V.Rangacharya, Burges and Natesa Sastri and a host of other
scholars through their pains taking effort collected many of the records for
preservation of historical evidences. For the medieval period most of the sources
are in Persian and Marathi languages. As many of these records are lost, it is not
possible to have a comprehensive idea about the political situation of the period.
The evidences that have survived restrict their scope to revenue and military
transactions, as the state was yet to take a keen interest on socio-economic activity.

4. Colin Mackenzie noted down the inscriptions in his Collections, Robert Sewell
in his Lists of Antiquities, V.Rangacharya in his Inscriptions of the Madras
Presidency and Burgess and Natesa Sastri in their Tamil and Sanskrit
Inscriptions. Their works are found of inestimable value for historical research.
The Persian sources and the Marathi records that have survived, are preserved in Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras, and Saraswathi Mahal Library at Thanjavur. The European records are much relevant to the study of the nature and extent of feudalism that developed and flourished in the Tamil Country through the subject was not treated as such. The Factory Records of the Dutch, the Danes, the French and the British tell of the local chiefs, but their primary concern was commercial transaction. However, as the British gained Political ascendancy, their records deal much about the feudal lords of the period, particularly the poligars and the zamindars of particular reference are their records coming under the categories of Political consultations, of the Board of Revenue, Military Consultations and the Sundries, belonging to different departments. However, all that they contain cannot be taken as true and balanced for at the most they represent different versions.

These sources throw considerable light on the making of the political system. They tell not only of the rulers but also of the feudatories and the land grants made by the rulers to varied agencies, contributing to the rise of a feudal order. The historical period of Tamilakam when rainfall is about forty inches, quite inadequate the Sanga begins with the Sangam Age, that is identified with the first three centuries of the Christian Era m classics were believed to have been
The early history of the Tamils was centered on three ruling houses the Pandyas, the Cholas and the Cheras - collectively known as the Muvendar or three Crowned Kings. Madurai in the south, Thanjavur on the banks of the Kaveri and Vanchi on the west coast served as the respective centers of their authority. As these rulers established their empires, they had their capitals in different provinces too. In fact the historical trends in the Tamil Country were centered on the vicissitudes in the political fortunes of the three powers until external forces moved into the scene. The tradition is that the Early Pandays ruled over a vast empire but due to a deluge, a part of their country was lost to the sea. Nedunjelian II, the greatest among them, ruled over the country by 210 A.D. He defeated the Cholas and the Cheras and established the supremacy of the Pandyas over the Tamil Country. However, the Cholas led by their ruler Karikalan, asserted their authority over the Tamil Country, with the decline of the Pandyas. Among the powers of the Sangam age the Cheras were noted for their daring exploits. Senguttuvan, the most powerful of the Early Cheras, created a vast empire in South India and led expeditions to the north. However, frequent conflicts among the Tamil powers

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5. Among the historians there are differences of opinion on the age of Tamil classics. However on the basis of a comparative study of Sangam literature with the Thevarem Songs and the synchronism of Senguttuvan, the Chera prince, and Gajabahu of Sri Lanka this conclusion about the chronology of Sangam classics, that is first to third centuries is arrived at. Sangam is form the word sanga which means academy. Pathupattu on Ten Idylls, Ettuthohai or the Eight Anthologies, the Tirukkural, Silappadikaram and Manimekalai are the well known works of the classical period of the Tamils.
weakened them and prepared the ground for the kalabra conquest by 250 A.D.

During the Sangam period monarcy appeared as an indispensable institution and it was endowed with absolute powers. The king was to give protection to his people and to safeguard their welfare. In the Sangam Literature there are no references to any popular resistance to the will of the monarch. This was because peace between the ruler and the ruled was stressed upon as that between father and son. Yet different chieftains held possession of vest tracts of land and exercised an independent or semi independent authority. Among them are mentioned the chiefs of Viyalur and Kalukar in the central region and the tribal lords of Velir, the Banaes, the Muttaraiyars and Kodumbalur. Also there are references to Pari of Parambu, Cari of Kovalur and Adigaiman of Tagadur. These feudatories usually professed loyalty to one king or the other of the three ruling dynasties and served them in command of their levies. They had their strong holds in inaccessible terrains supported by their private forces, they maintained their influence. For want of information it is not possible to ascertain the nature of their relations with their subject population.

The Kalabras, who conquered Tamilakam from the Muvendar the Pandays, the Cheras and the Choles of the Sangam period, ruled over the Tamil

County for three centuries. Believed to be of Kannada descent, they established themselves on the hill tracts of the north and subsequently moved into the plains. The ruling powers, the Pandyas and the Pallavas, sought to check their advance but were overwhelmed. With their seat of power at Kaveripatnam, the Kalabras subdued the three powers and extended their sway to Sri Lanka. They gave political unity to the Tamil Country and reorganised the administration on the basis of division and sub-division of their territories. The Kalbras retained possession to the land until they suffered defeat in their wars against the Pandyas and the Pallavas during the sixth century A.D. In view of the general paucity of source material it is not possible to know the feudal situation.

The period that followed witnessed the revival of the local powers - the Pandyas, the Pallavas, the Cheras and the Cholas. By 575 A.D. the Pandyas of Madurai and the Pallavas of Kanchi asserted their independence. Raja Simha, the ruler of the Pandyas, occupied Kongu Nadu in the north from the Pallavas, while another prince, Nedunjeliyan, suppressed the feudatories and consolidated his authority. The Pallavas in the meantime established themselves in the northern region of the Tamil Country and expended their conquests in the north. This brought them into a prolonged conflict with the Chalukyas of Vatapi, marked by invasions and counter invasions. The struggle culminated in the Chalukya conquest of Kanchi and it led to the decline of the Pallavas. Though the Pallavas made their
exit from power, they bequeathed a proud legacy of cultural achievements in architecture, arts and fine arts.

In the ninth century A.D., the Cholas taking advantage of the conflict between the Pandayyas and the Pallavas, gained possession of the Kaveri delta. Before long, they occupied Tondaimandalm in the north and Kongu Nadu in the northwest. By 910 A.D. the Chola forces sacked Madurai and invaded the southern island of Sri Lanka. The greatest among the imperial Cholas were Raja Raja I (985-1012 A.D) and Rajendra I (1012-1042 A.D) Under their able leadership the Cholas embarked upon imperial expansion and maritime glory. They conquered the most of the western coast from the Cheras and the northern region of Sri Lanka. As a result, the Cholas gained control of the western trade. As the Cheras and the Sinhalese sought to join in an alliance against the Cholas, Rajendra Chola found it essential to send a second expedition to the island. Accordingly the Chola army marched from Elam in Sri Lanka to the south, defeated the Sinhala forces, captured King Mahindra V as prisoner and annexed the island with Empire by 1017 A.D. After this victory Rajendra Chola supported by the Chalukyas of Vengi, took the field against the Chalukyas of Vatapi, but suffered reverses. In a second battle he defeated the Chalukyas and made the Tungabhadra region secure. As the ruler of Kalinga supported the Western Chalukyas in this war the Cholas found it essential to undertake a major expedition to Orissa too. After defeating the Kalinga forces, the Chola army invaded Bengal and gained a victory over the rulers,
Dharmapala and Mahipala. To commemorate these exploits Rajendra Chola built a new capital and called it Gangai Konda Cholapuram. In the mean time there erupted a conflict over trade with Sri Vijaya in South East Asia. As the restrictions imposed upon Chola trade appeared humiliating a naval expedition was sent to the eastern islands. Kataram, the capital of Sri Vijaya, was sacked and the island was made a province of the Empire. This daring venture culminated in a good will mission to China in the interest of promoting trade. Military exploits and naval expeditions made the Empire extensive and wealthy. However, this trend could not be sustained by the later rulers. Internal conflicts and religious feuds between the Vaishnavites and Savites weakened the Empire. By 1279 the Pandyas defeated the Cholas and took possession of Thanjavur. This marked the end of the Chola Empire.

The political system of the Tamil Country under the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Pandyas was marked by a feudal character. The empire was divided into mandalams or provinces province into districts or Kottams and district into groups of villages or madus. The Uttaramerur and Ukkal Inscriptions throw light on the working of local bodies. The head of the nadu was the nattar. As the villages and the nadus enjoyed local autonomy, the local chiefs wielded much influence and authority over the inhabitants. There are references to feudatories and tributaries. They collected taxes from the local people, gave them protection to the central authority. Thus the inscriptions dated in the third and twelfth years of Kulothunga
Chola’s region found at Kongur and Kiranur give the names of Sundaram Nilaiyudaiya Perumal, Udaiyar Viranarayana and Chola Narayana Pallavarayan. The inscriptions of Virarajendra Chola brings to light the names of several feudatories. Among them are mentioned Solem Lankeswaradeva and Uttama Chola Pallavarayann. In general these chieftains were called samantas. The advent of Brahminical religion in the Tamil Country and the ascendancy of a Hindu priestly class contributed to the rise of a class of landlords, adding a new dimension to what could be called feudalism. The practice of making land grants to the Brahmin priests and their religious houses called mutts marked a significant step towards feudalising the local economy. Such a custom was sanctified by the injunctions as laid down in the Dharmasastras, the didactic portions of the epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas. In fact the Anusasana Parva of the Mahabharata devotes a whole chapter to the praise of making gifts of land to the Brahmins. Such a dictum was accepted by the rulers of India particularly after the fifth century A.D. If the Guptas adopted this practice in North India the Pallavas in the South. The Cholas, the Pandyas and even the rulers of petty

8. Ibid., p.80.

While Ramayana deals with the exploits of Sri Rama, Mahabharata with the war between two Aryan tribes, Kauravas and Pandavas. The Puranas, another literature of the Aryans, tell of creation of world, geneology of gods, ages of Manu and history of dynasties.
pretenses but no law took him to task. In the absence of any respect for human rights, the administration of justice was clubbed with revenue. No judicial training was provided. Judges were recruited from the different sections of the population without any discrimination as to their previous training and employment. Judicial service was open to men of different shades, ranging from the clerks to military and revenue officers. Jagirdars, bankers, and physicians occupied the judicial offices, though the Hindu Jurisprudence requires that the judges should be pandits who 'studied law. Thus the renters and amulda rs who had no knowledge of jurisprudence were given the right to decide cases in a crude and summary way. These circumstances together with depredations by free booters made it essential for the inhabitants to seek the protection of feudal lords and render to them services. It was in such a situation the feudal institutions emerged and flourished.  

SOURCE OF INFORMATION:

This thesis draws its inspiration from source materials that are available both in Tamil and English. The available materials are classified as Primary as well as Secondary sources. Among the primary sources the epigraphical records and the Madras Government Records constitute the primary source of information for the history of British relation with the Tamil country. Next in importance come the Diaries, Reports and various district Collectorate Records. District

Manuals, Gazetters and the Handbooks prepared by the public officials and Tamil Districts largely form secondary sources.

The Records of the Madras Government kept preserved in the Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai, furnish a wide range of information. They come under different categories, the principal of which are the Proceedings of the Madras Council, Fort St. David Consultations, Sundries, Country Correspondence and Despatches to and from England. The proceedings of the Madras Council called Consultation furnish a comprehensive account of the various official transactions including the views of the members and their decisions. The Sundries form a miscellaneous collection of records related to political or commercial affairs. The branch of records called the country correspondence enclose among other things English translations of the letters written mostly in Marathi, Persion and Tamil sent to and received from the rulers of the Tamil Country or agents of the English East India Company. Despatches from London to Madras contain instructions of the Board of Directors to the Madras Council and their letters of approval or disapproval of what their representatives at Madras did or proposed to do. Despatches from Madras to London, on the other hand, deal in general with the official proceedings of the Madras Council. Reports relating to the political and military activities of the native rulers complied with the collectorate records of Tamil districts have been sources of infalliable guidance for this scholarly venture. Various facts available in
the records of different departments are also utilised for making an estimate of this study.

Another important source material is the Private Diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai, originally written in Tamil, but translated into English and published in twelve volumes between 1904 and 1924 by the Government of Madras enclose notices on military events, political transactions, commercial policy, social habits and family matters.

The Jesuits Letters kept preserved in the Jesuit Archives, Shenbaganur, Kodaikannal, furnish a wide range of information. The Jesuits Annual Letters are available in the form of La Mission Du Madura in four volumes. Originally, these letters were written in Latin and were translated with French by Father J.Bertrand of the society of Jesus. Some of the relevant portions of the La Mission Du Madura have been translated into English by R.Sathiyanatha Aiyar. This material has been of immense value to have a perception of the feudalistic elements of the Nayankara and Palaiyakara systems.

The different branches of the sources furnish wholesome accounts of the British transactions with the Native rulers. But they are not free from bias. The occurrence of coloured statements, twisted accounts, flattering pleasantries, false claims and mutual accusations demand caution. However, through the application of criticism of evidence and corroboration of facts, it has been found possible to reconstruct the history of the Tamil country. Though miscellaneous Tamil ballads, celebrating the
historical events, contribute to the study of the palaiyakaras in regard to their military system. Works like Ramappaiyan Ammani, Panjalamkurichi Azhivucharithirakummi, Sivagangai Charithirakummi, Kattabomman Varalaru and Khan Sahib Sandai throw light not only on the Socio-economic life of the period but also on the military activities of Palaiyakars.

Among the Secondary sources no work seems to have so far made an attempt to study the history of The Tamil Country Transition from feudalism to imperialism. Yet it cannot be denied that a few published works deal to a much limited extent with one aspect or other of the history of the Tamil country. Among them are to be mentioned R.Sewell’s A Forgotten Empire, R.Sathiyanath Aiyar’s History of the Nayaks of Madura, Fr.Hentry Hera’s The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara, T.V.Mahalingam’s Sounth Indian Polity, A.Krishnaswami’s The Tamil Country Under Vijayanayar, R.Caldwell’s A History of Tinnevelly, H.R. Pate’s Tinnevelly Gazetteer, K.Rajayyan’s Rise And Fall of The Poligars of Tamil Nadu, South Indian Rebellion, A history of British Diplomacy in Tanjore and History of Madurai have been well-defined sources of ample information for a proper reconstruction of the historical facts. Gazetteers, Manuals Journals, Weeklies and Dailies have also provided valuable information for validation a host of historical facts. A critical analysis and a comparative study of these different sources and the corroboration of evidences, give a full fleged accounts to finalise this thesis.