CHAPTER I

Early History
The Royal House of Travancore traces its descent from the Chera Dynasty, the most ancient of all the ruling dynasties in India.\(^1\) From very ancient times, there were three kingdoms in South India, the Chera, the Chola and the Pandya. Travancore was under the Cheras. The hegemony of the First Chera Empire is believed to have continued till 600 A.D. The Cheras ruled over South India. Their territories lay on both sides of the Western Ghats. When the great Chera Empire broke up, a branch of that dynasty which had settled down at Padmanabhapuram, was able to exercise its sway over a small part of their former possessions.

Kulasekara Alwar is regarded as one of the earliest kings of Travancore. He was a great poet and scholar in Sanskrit and Tamil. His beautiful poems are admired even to this day. In the ninth century A.D Udaya Marthanda Varma, the king of Travancore inaugurated the *Malabar Era*.\(^2\) It began on 15 August, 825 A.D.

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2 The origin of Kollam Era or Malabar era in 825 is attributed to the rise of Quilon (Kollam), as an important sea-port town.
The Ays were the earliest ruling dynasty in Travancore. They had established an extensive kingdom of their own. In fact, up to the beginning of the 10th century AD, the Ays were the dominant power in the south. Their Kingdom extended from Thiruvalla in the north to Kanyakumari in the south including the Western Ghats which comprised its most important portion. Ay kings who ruled over Travancore were Ay Andiran, Titiyan, Atiyan, Titiyan II and Nanchil Porunan.

From the ninth to the eleventh century A.D the Cheras were in possession of large portions of North Travancore. After the downfall of the Pallavas in the eighth century, the Cholas became the most powerful sovereigns of the Deccan and they naturally turned their wistful eyes towards Travancore. Raja Raja Chola I, at the close of the tenth century conquered Sucindram and Tirunandikkarai and Kulottunga I also known as Rajendra Chola, subjugated Cape Comorin, Kottar and Vizhinjam, but these foreign conquests do not appear to have seriously affected the position and prestige of the rulers of Travancore, known as

Venad during that period. The kings of Venad fought valiantly against the Pandyas and the Cholas who attacked their kingdom. They were able to drive away the invading hosts and preserve their integrity and independence.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Ravi Varma Kulasekhara (1299-1311) of Quilon not only brought the whole of Kerala under his sway, but also took advantage of the internecine quarrels of the Pandyas and the hopeless efforts of the Cholas to push his conquests as far as the Chenglepat district and crown himself Emperor of the whole of South India at Congeevaram in 1312-13 A.D.

Ravi Varma was also a distinguished poet and patron of letters. He was popular as ‘Samgramdhira’ or firm in battle. The possessions of Venad, however, were lost in the deluge of the Mohammedan inroad that swept the Carnatic shortly after. But when Kampana of Vijayanagar drove the Mohammedans from Trichinopoly and Madurai in 1371 A.D. and the Pandyas returned to power, it

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5 Epigraphical records prove the destruction of Kanthalur Salai-the Takshasila of the South-by the Cholas during 999 to 1124 A.D. ‘Kanthalur Salai Kalam arutharuli’ means the destruction of 95 seats or kalamas or plates of Kanthaloor-the Vedic College located at Vizhinjam. During the war, it was shifted to the Mahadevar temple of Aryachalai of Trivandrum. (Ulloor S. Parameswaran Aiyer, op. cit., p.16).

became possible for *Venad* once again to extend her conquests as far as *Kayal*, a sea-port in the Tinnevelly district in the middle of the fifteenth century, as testified to by the Mohammedan traveller Abdur Razzack.

Udaya Marthanda Varma surnamed Bhutalavira, who ruled over *Venad* at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was a sovereign of singular prowess and may not be inaptly compared to Edward III of England. He ruled over large portions of Tinnevelly and exacted tribute even from Ceylon. He also married a Chola princess, just as Ravi Varma had married a Pandyan princess in the fourteenth century and the Chola kings Parantaka I and Parantaka II had married Kerala princesses in the tenth century. A treaty was also entered into with the Portuguese in 1516, this being the first treaty of Travancore with a European power. In 1532, Achyuta Raya of Vijayanagar overran South Travancore and *Venad* had to make peace with that great Hindu empire. In 1544, there was another invasion of Travancore by Vittala Deva, son of Rama Raya of

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Vijayanagar, apparently for the recovery of the tribute left in arrears by Venad and with a view to chastise her for being an ally of Portugal. The impending calamity was averted by a timely peace with Vittala. When the Nayaks of Madurai stepped into the shoes of the Vijayanagar kings after the eventual overthrow of the latter at the battle of Talaikottai in 1565, Muthuvirappa Nayak in 1606 and the great Tirumalai Nayak himself in 1635, led expeditions against Travancore.

It is said that Francis Xavier, the Catholic priest and missionary marched in front of the Travancore army with a crucifix in his hand and his sudden appearance produced a panic in the ranks of the enemy. The enemy was beaten back with great loss. The Maharaja received Francis Xavier and said, "They call me the great king, but hereafter for ever they will call you the Great Father".

During the reign of Unni Kerala Varma, Thirumalai Nayak of Madurai sent an army to invade Travancore about the close of 809 M.E. (1634 A.D). Eravi Kutti Pillai, the matchless soldier, was the commander of the Travancore army. He fought bravely to the last

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12 K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance, Newyork, 1922, pp.187-188.
though he was treacherously attacked by an assassin from behind. His head was to be sent to Thirumalai Nayak, but one of his soldiers rescued it from the enemy and placed before the Maharaja. The Maharaja attended his funeral procession and then called on the hero’s mother and consoled her. As a result of the invasion, crops were destroyed, houses plundered and the ryots suffered heavily. The southern parts of Nanchilnad remained under the rule of the Nayaks for sometime more. Unni Kerala Varma granted to the English merchants a site for a factory at Vizhinjam.

The feudal nobility in Travancore had become very powerful. The king’s power was reduced to nothing. Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple at Trivandrum owned most of the lands in the State. By a settlement, the management of the temple was assumed by a council consisting of eight Brahmin priests and the Maharaja. The Maharaja had only half a vote while the other councillors or Yogakkar had eight votes. The Yogakkar divided the lands owned by the temple into eight districts. Over each district a nobleman was appointed for the collection of revenues. These noblemen came to be known as Ettuveetil Pillamar—‘Lord of the Eight

K.M. Panikkar in his ‘Malabar and the Dutch’ says, “During the reign of Raja Aditya Varma who ruled from 1661 to 1677, the feudal anarchy in the State took the most violent forms. The palace of the Raja was set on fire and later on the ruler himself was poisoned”.

As there was no male heir to Aditya Varma, Umayammai, the Queen of Attingal, succeeded to the throne. Attingal was one of the five branches of the Trippappu family. The others were Travancore, Desinganad, Elayadathu Swaroopam and Nedumamgad.

A Mughal soldier of fortune known as Mukilan invaded the southern part of Travancore in 855 M.E. (1680 A.D.). The invasion is known as ‘Mukilan – padai’ (Mughals invasion). The Yogakkar and Pillamar did not oppose him. He, therefore advanced on Trivandrum and encamped at Manakad. The Rani herself left the capital. Thus the Mughal Sirdar became the master of the country between Thovalai and Edava. The Rani appealed for help to Kerala Varma, the Raja of Kottayam. Prince Kerala Varma was a great

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15 K.M. Panikkar, Malabar and the Dutch, Annamalai Nagar, 1959, p.162.
16 P. Sundaram Pillai, Some Early Sovereigns of Travancore, Madras, 1943, p.35.
17 T.K. Velu Pillai, op. cit., p.75.
soldier and poet. He collected a large army and defeated the Mughal chief at Thiruvattar. Mukilan fell in the battle. After restoring the Rani to her former position, he built two palaces at Trivandrum and lived in one of them. But Kerala Varma was assassinated in his palace by the agents of the Ettuveetil Pillamar. Umayammal Rani was a very remarkable queen. In 1684, the English East India Company obtained permission from her to build a factory at Anjengo.\textsuperscript{18}

The English had then established their factories in Travancore viz., Anjengo, Vizhinjam and Kovalam.

The Dutch East India Company which was formed in 1502 A.D. had progressed steadily. They had formed many settlements on the Malabar coast after driving the Portuguese from most of their possessions. In 1653, they drove the Portuguese from Cochin. The Portuguese influence disappeared from Malabar by the year 1663 and the Dutch became masters of the entire commerce of Malabar. By 1664, the Dutch had concluded treaties of alliance with the chief princes in Travancore viz., the Rajas of Kayamkulam, Travancore, Quilon, Purakad and Kottarakarai. The main object of these alliances was to secure a monopoly for the trade in pepper and

\textsuperscript{18} P. Shungoonny Menon, \textit{History of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1983}, p.75.
opium. The chief Dutch settlements in Travancore about 1667 were Quilon, Kayamkulam, Purakad, Karunagappalli and Thengapattinam.\(^{19}\)

Ravi Varma, the youngest surviving son of Umayammai Rani, having attained his 16\(^{th}\) year was crowned king in 1684 A.D. Two princes Unni Kerala Varma and Rama Varma and two princesses were adopted from the Kolathu family. Ravi Varma was an able ruler. He defeated and annihilated the Nayak army of Madurai that attacked Travancore.\(^{20}\) When the news of the disaster reached Mangammal, the Queen Regent at Madurai, sent her minister Narasappa with a large army to Travancore in 1697 and Maharaja's army gallantly defended the country.\(^{21}\) The Madurai army was not able to defeat the Travancore forces. Narasappa then plundered the outlying portions of Nanchilnad.

Unni Kerala Varma, the elder of the princes adopted from Kolathunad, succeeded Ravi Varma. He was weak and unpopular, the people looked upon him as a stranger. The Pillamar

\(^{19}\) Secret letter to Batavia, 12 May 1741, See Gallatti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, note on p.83.

\(^{20}\) P.Shungoonny Menon, *op.cit.*, pp.78-79.

became so powerful that the king removed his residence to Neyyatinkarai.22

In 1690 A.D, the English had been permitted to build a fort at Anjengo by the queen of Attingal. It was completed about 1695.23 In 1697, the Pillamar and Madampimar attacked the fort while the Rani gave her support to the factors. In 1721, a great disaster fell upon the factory at Anjengo. The factor who was on his way to Attingal with his annual nuzzur, escorted by a body of soldiers, was attacked and murdered by the chieftains. In 1723 a treaty was concluded by the English East India Company with the Raja of Travancore.24 The Raja was to be in league and united in good friendship with the East India Company. The Company agreed to supply the Raja with the necessary artillery and ammunitions for a fort at Colachel to be erected by the latter. This is the first treaty concluded by the East India Company with an Indian State.25

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24 *Ibid*.
25 P. Shungoonny Menon, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-82.
Unni Kerala Varma died in 899 M.E. (1724 A.D). He was succeeded by his brother Rama Varma, who was adopted with him.\textsuperscript{26} In 1726, Rama Varma on the advice of his nephew Prince Marthanda Varma, arrived at the most important decision in the history of Travancore. This was to pay homage and allegiance to the new Mughal Governor of the Carnatic and to seek his aid for the destruction of the Yogakkar and Pillamar.\textsuperscript{27}

With this objective the king went to Tirchinopoly and entered into a treaty with the Governor of the Carnatic. He agreed to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 3000/- to the Nawab of the Carnatic. The Nawab took him under his protection and sent an army of 2000 infantry and 1000 cavalry to crush the refractory nobles. The Maharaja was to meet the expenses of the army which was to remain under his orders. The Pillamar and Yogakkar fled for their lives.

In 1728 A.D a party of men sent by the Ettuveetil Pillamar attacked the senior Rani and her little son Rama Varma on their way from Trivandrum to Attingal.\textsuperscript{28} The Rani's consort,

\textsuperscript{26} T.K. Velu Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.257-259.

\textsuperscript{27} P. Shungoonny Menon, \textit{loc.cit.}, p.81.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid}, pp.80-89.
Kerala Varma Koil Thampuran saved them by sacrificing his life. He belonged to the Kilimanur House. The Kilimanur estate was conferred upon the Koil Thampuran's family as a free-hold grant in recognition of his heroic services to the royal family. Rama Varma died in 1728 A.D. The early history of Travancore closes with his reign.²⁹

Travancore attained its territorial configuration during the reign of Maharaja Marthanda Varma (1729 – 1758 A.D), who enlarged the kingdom of Venad, consolidated the royal authority, reorganized administration and founded the modern Travancore. He reintroduced the land tax in 1739. When the kingdom expanded and administration became unwieldy, the Maharaja formed a ministry, headed by the Dewan. Administration was now centralised. In addition, he shifted his capital from Thiruvithancodu to Padmanabhapuram in 1756 A.D. He modernised the administration but along with it the State was transformed into a ‘Hindu State’, where Brahmins reigned supreme.³⁰

³⁰ The Madras State Directory, Cochin, 1934, No.VIII, p.3.
To quote the words of his illustrious descendants, the late His Highness Visakham Tirunal Maharaja, as great in letters as his ancestor had been in arms. "Marthanda Varma succeeded to a heritage as thorny as it was poor. The feeble rule of a series of his predecessors had fostered the greed of the surrounding chieftains and the turbulence of internal malcontents to such an extent that their kingdom was almost a misnomer, and their authority nothing better than a mockery. But Marthanda Varma was one of those whom the world produced as a rare individual. He was born to command and conquer. He had the best of schooling and scholarship. He was served by one of the ablest of ministers, (Ramayyan Dalwa). Sully did not serve Henry IV of France more ably and faithfully than Ramayya did to Marthanda Varma. The Baron de Rosny was the very man to remedy this State of matters, rude, obstinate and haughty, but at the same time resolute, active, indefatigable, wholly devoted to his master's interests. Ramayya was unrelenting, unsparing and often unscrupulous to his masters enemies, but his self was merged completely in that of his master. He was as fearless in the council room as he was in the battlefield. With such a minister at his right hand, and with a strong will, abiding patience, and indomitable courage, the Raja not only won
back what his predecessors had lost, but subjugated one after another the neighbouring chiefs who were a perpetual source of trouble".31

The Maharaja, assisted by Ramayyan Dalawa, his trusted minister added Attingal to Travancore, conquered the principalities of Kottarakkarai, Quilon, Kayankulam, Ambalapuzhai (Chempakasserry), Tekkumkur and Vadakkumkur, and severely defeated the Dutch at Colachel, compelling them to conclude a treaty with him at Mavelikarai in 1753, under which they agreed to recede from all engagements entered into by them with other Malabar princes and on no account to interfere in their quarrels.32 The 1741 battle fought at Colachel gave a shock treatment to the Dutch designs in Kerala.33 The Dutch thought of packing themselves off from the Kerala Coast after this battle. This is the first defeat of a European power at the hands of an Asian power-Travancore. The Zamorin of Calicut was repulsed and treaties were entered into with the Raja of Cochin and the Nawab of the Carnatic. This remarkable career of conquest and annexation was followed by consolidation and reform. The suppression of internal dissensions


33 P. Shungoonny Menon, *op.cit.*, p.100.
and the establishment of peace had been accomplished from one end of the country to the other, from Cape Comorin to Mamala near Udayamperoor in Cochin, but the order thus restored could not be considered stable in view of sedition within and jealousy without.\textsuperscript{34} The characteristic foresight of the Maha Raja did not fall him at this juncture. He resolved to signalise his reign by a great Act of State. On the 17\textsuperscript{th} January 1750, he publicly dedicated the entire territory to his family Deity Sri Padmanabha, undertaking to administer it thereafter as His servant and agent. This epoch making event was one of supreme significance. It meant the collection of revenue in the name of God and the expenditure of the same in the interests of the people.\textsuperscript{35} The solemn religious character thus stamped on the constitution of the State has never been lost sight of by his successors on the throne, “everyone of whom has loyally and faithfully striven to discharge the sacred trust”.\textsuperscript{36}

Maharaja Marthanda Varma was, in every sense, a great ruler, but the crucial test of his greatness lay in the attitude of

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp.101-115.

\textsuperscript{35} Selections from the records of Travancore, Part. II, p.16, P. Shungoonny Menon, op.cit., pp.125-127.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
faith and friendship which he adopted towards Englishmen. The English had established a factory at Vizhinjam in about 1644, followed by another at Ruttera (Valiyaturai) a few years later. In 1684 they obtained a piece of land at Anjengo from the Rani of Attingal, where a factory was built in 1695. These concessions exasperated the malcontents, who apprehended a check to their career of organized brigandage in the presence of those powerful foreigners. They attacked the Anjengo factory in 1697 and murdered the foreigners in 1721. The English in their turn resolved to put down all enemies and subject the country to the ruling dynasty. A spirit of mutual attachment thus grew up between the Maharaja of Travancore and the English East India Company, which was strengthened by the helpful solicitude of Marthanda Varma. In 1757, in a letter to the Governor of Madras he is found referring to the Company as his 'old and faithful friend' from whom he was continually receiving great favour. How sincere he was in the profession of this friendship may be seen from the solemn and prophetic death-bed advice that he gave to Rama Varma, the hair-apparent to the throne, in the very next years. He called his heir to his bed-side and advised

37 Ulloor S. Parameswara Aiyer, *op.cit.*, p.22.

him with all the emphasis he could command. Their Englishmen appear to be destined to rise such power and glory as are hitherto unparalleled. Be it your constant aim and endeavour to secure their friendship and support. The subsequent history of Travancore has proved how far this advice has been cherished by the Maha Rajas of Travancore as their most priceless heir-loom.

His successor Karthikai Thirnal Rama Varma (Dharma Raja) reigned during the period between 1758 A.D and 1798 A.D. During the fag end of his rule, he entered into a treaty of perpetual alliance with the English East India Company in 1795 A.D. It was he who permanently transferred the capital from Padmanabhapuram to Trivandrum. He was assisted by two able ministers Ayyappan Marthandan Pillai and Raja Kesavadhas.

Balarama Varma (1798 – 1810 A.D) the weak successor of Karthikai Thirunal Rama Varma came under the influence of the three ministers, Jayanthan Sankaran Nambudiri, Sankaranarayana Chetti and Mathu Tharakan. These ministers raised forced contributions from the people to improve the finance of the State. The most important event that occurred during this period was the

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rise and fall of Velu Thampi. Velu Thampi supported by a large body of men, revolted openly against the practice of extracting money from the people. As a result the Dewan was suspended. Velu Thampi became the Dewan in 1801. During his rule, a revolt in the barracks forced Travancore to conclude a modified treaty of alliance and friendship with the East India Company and to become a subsidiary ally. As per the treaty of 1805 A.D Travancore had to pay a tribute of Rs. 80,000 annually to the Company. The insistence on prompt payment in spite of a bankrupt economy forced Velu Thampi to raise the banner of revolt along with Paliath Achan, the Dewan of Cochin who also came into conflict with the Resident on grounds of interference of the Company in the internal affairs of his State. The uprising was crushed and Velu Thampi committed suicide in 1809 A.D.

With his death, Travancore practically lost its independent status, even its army was disbanded. From then onwards the British interest became the main plank of the administration. All succeeding Rajas and Dewans were satisfied with one aspect of sovereignty, viz, the internal sovereignty.

41 B. Sohanan, Dewan Velu Thampi and the British, Trivandrum, 1978, pp.52-57.
42 C.M. Augur, Church History of Travancore, Madras, 1903, pp.528-529.
The death of Balarama Varma on 16 November 1810 made Rani Lakshmi Bai to ascend the throne in 1810 A.D. She dismissed Ummini Thampi and in his place appointed Colonel Munro, as her Dewan. He undertook a state tour and personally assessed the performance of the officers. The system of recruitment of officers for public services was improved. The economic status of the State was also improved by abolishing the sinecure establishments and expediting collections of long fallen arrears of taxes and simultaneously the oppressive taxes were abolished. An effective system of accounting and audit was introduced. He built up a centralised system as it was in practice in Madras Presidency. The reforms of Colonel Munro considerably influenced the future political system of Travancore.

Rani Lakshmi Bai died and was succeeded by her sister Gowri Bharvathi Bai (1815-1829 A.D) during whose reign also Colonel Munro continued to be the Dewan. She too opened a period of administrative and social progress.

In 1829, Rama Varma Swathi Thirunal ascended the Travancore throne. He introduced many administrative reforms

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44 C.M. Augur, *op.cit.*, pp.528-529.


like establishment of the munsiff courts for trying small civil and criminal cases. Codification of Law on the British model, introduction of Western education and the creation of separate departments for spreading European engineering, education and for irrigation were some of his reformative measures. He thus represented a period of enlightened administration.47

Swathi Thirunal was succeeded by Uthiram Thirunal Maharaja. He ruled Travancore from 1847-1860.48 He improved the financial condition of the State, by introducing an effective system of collection of revenue.

It was during his reign a crisis developed in South Travancore. The core of the crisis was the agitation of the Nadars of South Travancore par securing their womenfolk the right to wear the upper garments on bar with the women of the higher castes.49 When the agitation took a serious turn, the king called the army to maintain law and order.

Ayilyam Thirunal Maharaja succeeded Uthiram Thirunal in 1860 and he continued in power till 1880. His reign

47 P. Shungoonny Menon, op.cit., p.298.
witnessed certain improvements in the field of agriculture. His successor Visakam Thirunal (1880 – 1885 A.D) initiated some reformatory measures. He condemned the old police system and reorganised it. He separated the police from the magistracy with a view to improve the administration of criminal justice. The most important measure introduced by him was the inauguration of a Revenue Survey and Settlement. He extended grant-in-aid to the elementary education. The native industries were encouraged.50

Sri Moolam Thirunal succeeded Visakham Thirunal in the year 1885. The period of Sri Moolam Thirunal can be viewed as the period of genesis of political consciousness among his subjects. In 1888 A.D, he inaugurated a Legislative Council to understand the pulse of the people, which was the first institution of its kind in any princely State of India. In 1904, he inaugurated the Sri Moolam Popular Assembly.51 His death in 1924 made the senior Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924 – 1931 A.D) rule as regent to the minor prince, Chitra Thirunal Balarama Varma. The reign of Sri Chitra Thirunal Balarama Varma (1931 – 1948 A.D) constituted a period of

constitutional, administrative and social reforms. His period witnessed political struggles, the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, the establishment of the Travancore University in 1937 and the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938.  

After India’s independence, linguistic groups in several States were making concerted agitations for reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. To study and report on the demands advanced, a commission was appointed and announced in Parliament on 22nd December 1953 by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister. The States Reorganisation Commission appointed on 29th December, 1953 submitted its report in 1956 favoring the reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. On the basis of its report on 1 November 1956, the Kerala State was formed, South Travancore comprising the four Tamil speaking taluks viz., Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode were merged with Tamilnadu. Besides these political relations, Travancore had social and

commercial intercourse with Madras Presidency from very early times. The richness of the soil and the facilities which the country had offered for trade, banking and other business, coupled with the means of communications available through the passes at Arienkavu, Aramboly and other places had attracted a large number of people from the east coast. Thus in different ways the people who formed the bulk of population in Travancore had come into close contact with their neighbours.

Agriculture was the mainstay of the people and more than eighty per cent of the people depended on agriculture either as renters or tenants or labourers. By and large it was subsistence agriculture in which every family produced for its living. However the existence of commercial farming was not completely absent. The predominantly rice belts of Nanchilnad the Granary of Travancore had quite a good number of commercial farms.

Land owners and tenants in Travancore formed distinct entities only as conceptual categories. One and the same person could be a land owner, and a tenant. A tenant of one year could be an owner, cultivator in the next year. Similarly an agricultural labourer could become a tenant and vice-versa. Due to this
Multiple class affiliation the same person was often pushed by conflicting interests in different directions. In the process of production a form of vertical solidarity forced the land owners, tenants, and agricultural workers to depend upon each other.