PART I.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

UPTO A.D. 1920
CHAPTER - TWO.

EARLY HISTORY OF RURAL GOVERNMENT

IN THE TAMIL COUNTRY

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CHAPTER I.

EARLY HISTORY OF RURAL GOVERNMENT IN THE TAMIL COUNTRY.

The Land and The People: The land of the Tamils is the seat of an ancient civilisation. The original inhabitants of the Tamil India "had developed a higher culture," and ... attained so dominant a position in Southern India as to give its greater part the name Tamilakam in ancient times".¹ Telkappiam, the most ancient among the extant Tamil works, gives rather a coherent picture of the socio-political life of the Tamils, which was elaborated by the later Sangam poets.² The ancient Tamils divided this land into five natural divisions: Mullai, the forest region; Kurinji, the montaneous region; Marudam, the agricultural region; Neidal, the coastal region; and Palai, the desert region. The dwellers of these different regions developed in course of time their own socio-cultural-political institutions characteristic to these regions. It is suggested that organised government under a king originated in the Mullai tracts.³

Any discriminating student of Sangam literature can discern the process of transition of civilisation of this land from the rural into the urban pattern. "..... there are reasons to believe that this transition from primitive life to complex civilised life first took, place in Tamilagam".⁴ The existence of distinct regions within such a small territory was an important factor contributing to the way of life of the ancient Tamils. Such a situation has had a profound impact on the origin and
evolution of local institutions in the Tamil country. No less important is the situation of Tamilnad itself in the extreme south of the peninsula, which has successfully saved the country from the successive political challenges of the various dynasties which governed the North. Besides these, the enormous distance between the seat of royal power and the villages, the lack of quick communication, the absence of an organised bureaucracy and the paternal attitude of the kings were the other factors favourable for the continued autonomy of the rural local bodies. Thus the ancient Tamilaham, besides being a seat of a self-contained civilisation, provided a well-favoured background for the natural growth of the village political institutions.

PROFILE OF SANGAM POLITICS (3rd Cen. B.C. to 3rd Cen. A.D.)

Sangam Monarchy: Though it is agreed that the history of the Tamils begins with the Sangam Age, the exact age of the Sangam remains controversial. The Sangam monarchy, though hereditary and despotic, was enlightened, benevolent and popular. The king's political strength really depended on the support and happiness of his subjects. And the people looked upon his benevolent rule even as the world looked upon the rains. The first known historical Chola king, Karikala, is credited to have constructed "embankments of the Kaveri river, a hundred miles in length". The citizens in turn happily volunteered their services for the army and in the construction and maintenance of public utility projects. No wonder the Sangam kings not only promoted public welfare but also respected public opinion.
**Territorial Divisions:** The Tamil kingdom was politically as well as administratively divided into Mandalams, kurrams, Nadus and Urs. The territories comprising the Chola, the Pandya and the Chera mandalams were the original major mandalams. Below the mandalam there were Kurram, Nadu and Ur. Though there is a controversy about whether Nadu was the sub-division of Kurram or vice versa,\(^8\) it is unmistakably clear that in between Mandalam and Ur there were the Kurrams and the Nadus. "The kingdom was perhaps not strictly politically divided into provinces; districts or divisions but there were references to show that such divisions for administrative purposes was not entirely unknown".\(^9\) In short, a four-tier provincial administrative system was in vogue during the Sangam Age.

**Ur Namram:** The existing literary references are not helpful in knowing about the composition and functioning of the assemblies of Kurram and Nadu though it is claimed that "Nadu was the union of Urs and it consisted of the representatives of the Urs."\(^10\) On the contrary the extant evidences threw more light on the Ur Namram. From time immemorial the village has been in Tamilnad as elsewhere in India the basic unit of administration. In the Sangam literature village was called Ur.\(^11\) The residents of the Ur were known as Uravar. It was customary for the Uravar to meet and transact the local governmental business and to manage the affairs of the village through the village assembly called Ur Namram or Avai.\(^12\)
The village assembly used to meet in a common place known variously as Manram, Pediyil, Ambalam or Vedigai. In short, the rural folk used to assemble in a central place in the village to carry out the political-judicial activities.

**Selection of Uravar:** The members of the Ur Marram were the virtuous elders of the village. They were chosen on the basis of their worldly wisdom, character and education. Were they elected or selected? And how? A singularly unique literary reference provided the answer. The members of the Ur Marram were selected by the Uravar. The names of the Ur representatives were written on the palm leaves, tied together with a twine and placed inside a pot which was closed with a royal seal. Then a royal official will remove the seal, open the pot and read out the names of the representatives. The kudavelai system, which was very well developed and widely practiced later during the Chola period was already in vogue in the Sangam Age. "We may trace to these primitive folk gatherings, at least in part, the beginnings of the highly developed system of village government which came into existence and functioned so admirably in later Chola times".

**Functions:** The Ur marram discharged the political administrative and judicial responsibilities. They collected the taxes and transmitted the amount due to the king to the royal treasury. They took good care of the security, peace and prosperity of the area under their jurisdiction. The protection and maintenance of the rural roads were the
responsibility of the village assembly. Rendering justice to the village folk through arbitration of petty disputes was the major concerns of these bodies. In effect, the village institutions "had more powers than present day panchayats and necessarily village elders exercised ample powers".17

REVIVAL OF RURAL GOVERNMENT: 3rd to 9th Century A.D.

The Sangam Polity was upset by "a mysterious and unique enemy of civilization, the evil rulers called Kalabhras".18 As a result, we know next to nothing about the political condition of the Tamil country from the middle of the third century A.D. to the third quarter of the Sixth century A.D. The crowned monarchs lost their power and sunk into obscurity. Finally, after a prolonged "dark political pall",19 the Pallavas and the Pandyas freed the Tamil country from the Kalabhra yoke.

Traditional divisions retained: The Pallava kings gathered the threads of the traditional local institutions and wove their administrative superstructure with them. "..... We see there is a considerable development in rural administration, for which perhaps it would be difficult to find analogies in the Artha Sastra. We may describe the government under the Pallava rule as being composed of a Central Government very much like that projected in the Artha Sastra and a local government of a more indigenous character, which had attained to a high degree of development."20
Similar patterns of rural local government functioned in the Pandyan country as well.

The Pallava country was divided into Rashtras or Mandalams. Each Rashtra was divided into Vishayyas or Kottams. 21 Nadu was in between the Kottam and the Ur which was the fundamental unit of administration. The early Pallava inscriptions and the charters of the later and greater Pallavas throw light on the administrative arrangement. Pallava pattayams or charters refer to Munda Rashtra and Venge Rashtras as the Andhra provinces of the Pallava country. Tondai Mandalam is called as Tundaka Rashtra. It is claimed that even before the Pallava took over, Tondaimandalam was divided into twenty four Kottams and the Pallava kings mostly retained the traditional nomenclature of the territorial divisions. 22

Vitality of Village Assembly: Despite chaos, instability and disruption consequent to the Kalabhras onslaught, the one institution that kept the torch of local political tradition alive was the autonomous self-organised village and its assembly Ur Mamram. The village, thus, continued to be "the primary cell of the body politic, and the vitality of its institutions is well attested by hundreds of inscriptions from all parts of the country". 23 The very fact that the Ur Mamram continued to survive the Kalabhras holocaust demonstrates the tenacity and the innate strength of the rural local bodies.

Ur Mamram: The members of the Ur Mamram were known as the Perumakkal or the elderly persons. The Mamram which was
the village assembly divided itself into several sub-committees and carried out the activities of local concerns efficiently. The references to 'Erivariya Perumakkal' and 'Thottavariya Perumakkal' confirm the existence of the Tank committee and the Garden Committee. Those who were concerned with temple administration were known as Amirthaganathar. The villages were in general called Ur, the exclusive Brahmin villages as 'Brahmadesya Chitrur' and the villages dedicated to temples as 'Devadana Chitrur'.

**Functions:** Though the village assembly was maintaining local peace and order, looking after temple activities, dispensing justice and carrying out other civic functions, it bestowed such attention on agriculture and irrigation. Separate lands called 'Krippati' were entrusted with the Uravaiyar or the members of the Ur Manram, the income of which was spent on keeping the tanks in good repairs. The custom of the cultivators contributing certain quantity of paddy for this purpose was in vogue. Interest from cash endowments and a part of general income was also ploughed into this useful work. Wherever necessary the central government also extended its financial support. Irrigation facilities were thus ensured during this Pallava period.

**The Sabhas:** In contradistinction with Ur of the non-Brahmin villages, we come across the functioning of the Sabhas of the exclusively Brahmin villages called Chadurvedimangalas or Agraharas. The members of the Sabha acting as a body was
known as Sabhайa. The terms Sabhaiyar and Mahasabhaiyar were also used to denote the members of the Sabha.\textsuperscript{28} The functions of the Ur Manrams and the Sabhas were similar. The Sabhas seem to have developed almost simultaneously in the Pallava and the Pandya countries. In the Pallava territory there were more than twenty Sabhas at work in the eighth and ninth centuries, most of them in the Tondamandalam.\textsuperscript{29}

"The Pandya and Pallava inscriptions ... show a system, very similar, but not quite so developed, in operation throughout the Tamil Country."\textsuperscript{30} These Sabhas may be regarded as the precursors of the local bodies which were perfected during the Chola period.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF GRASS-ROOT GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CHOLAS.

9th to 13th Century.

The Cholas dominated the political life of Tamilnad from 850 A.D. to 1279 A.D. The rural local government found its heyday under the active encouragement of the Imperial Cholas, particularly Parantaka I (A.D. 908-955). Copious records are available to tell us about the working of the institutions of local government. Of the innumerable records, the inscriptions known as Mahasabha records numbering 646,\textsuperscript{31} throw much light on the composition, powers and activities of the rural local bodies.

The whole country South of Tungabhadra was united and held as one kingdom by the Cholas. The kingdom was divided into Mandalam, Kottam/Valamadu, Nadu and Urs.\textsuperscript{32} For instance,
Ur Ukkal was in Pegur Nadu, of the Kaliyur Kottam in the Tondaimandalam. Similarly, Kamarathur was in the Kalothunga Valamadu in the Sayankonda Cholamandalam. In fact the Chola administration was built on the bed-rock of rural local institutions.

Each Mandalam was divided into many valamadus or Kottams. Though the inscriptions are mostly silent about the administrative arrangement of the Valamadu, a rare record, however, refers to the transaction of a valamadu assembly which guaranteed the safety and protection of the villages in its charge and made itself financially liable for it. On the contrary the inscriptions are of great help to us in knowing about the Nadus, Urs and Sabhas.

Nadu was a territorial division like the Ur as well as the assembly known by the same name. The expression 'nadu-imaiida nattom' i.e. residents of the Nadu met as Nadu suggests the representative as well as the corporate character of this institution. The members who constituted the Nadu were known as Nattar, who were the representatives of the people.

Land revenue administration was one of the important duties of the Nattar. They appointed pujaries or priests to the temples; levied fines for causing damage to arable land or the highways; assigned responsibilities for the conduct of the affairs of the temples within the jurisdiction of the Nadu concerned; and co-operated with other Nadus, village assemblies and with individual officials in the administration of justice and other matters of common concern.
The Ur was the primary assembly of the residents of the non-brahmadeya village. The word Ur means village as well as the assembly of the village. This is clear from the expression 'Uraga izainda Urom.' Since the area of the Ur was much less than that of Madu it was possible for the residents to meet at Uravar to transact public business. The Ur assemblies were not 'mere congregations of local residents to discuss matters without any formal rules or procedure.' They carried out their activities through their executives called 'ganam' or 'alumganam' or 'mi-yalum-ganam' or 'Uralvargal'. The meeting of the Ur assembly was held in the temple or mandapam of the village if there was any. The actual strength of the executive body, the method of their appointment, the scope of their work, the procedure adopted at their meetings and the relationship between this body and the Ur are not, however, clear. Since the Uravar would have been aware and perhaps acquainted with the working of the Sabhas it might be reasonably assumed that their relationship might have been more or less similar to that of the Sabha and its various or committees.

The Sabha was the general assembly of the exclusive brahmadeya village. Like the Ur, the Sabha was the basic unit of administration. It controlled the local affairs through its well-organised executive organ. Unlike the Ur, the Sabha had a more complex machinery of local administration. The Sabha or the members of the Sabha evinced great interest and fully participated in the proceedings of the assembly since they were the exclusive share holders of lands in the village.
residents of the village attended the meeting of the Sabha to discuss and decide matters of common concern and to select their representatives for the different committees of the Sabha. Two distinct contributions of the Brahmadeya village government system to the growth of rural local self-government in Tamilnad are: 1) Variyan system; and 2) the Kudavelai system.

**The Variyan System:** The origin and early development of the Variyan system are yet to be unravelled. The number and description of the different variyans were not uniform as also the method of selecting their members. The Sabhas and the variyan system seem to be inseparable from the beginning and the evolution of the variyan system in the past culminated in the perfect formulation and functioning of the system during the Chola period.

Altogether we come to know of the existence of the following twelve distinct variyans: 1) The Erivariyan (Tank Committee); 2) the Tottavariyan (the Garden Committee); 3) the Samvatara variyan (the annual Committee providing general supervision); 4) Panchayara Varyyan in charge of Famine Relief; 5) the Poon Varyyan (Gold Committee); 6) the Kundamba variyan (the Wards Committee); 7) the Kalani variyan (the Fields Committee); 8) the Vadakalani variyan (the North Fields Committee); 9) the Kamakku Varyyan (the Accounts Committee); 10) the Kalinga Varyyan (the Sluice Committee); (11) the Tadivali Varyyan (the Roads Committee); and, 12) the Udasira variyan (the Aliens Committee).
All the members of the Committees were called Variappamakkal of the Nahasabha or the Perumguri as the case may be. The Selection to the Samvatsara variyam, which was "the most important, influential and dignified of all the Committees" preceded that of other Committees. The candidates aspiring to become members of this Committee should have served on the Garden Committee and the Tank Committee and, besides being men of ripe old age, they should be advanced in learning. The number of members constituting the different committees was not uniform. In Uttararamar the Samvatsara Vairiam consisted of twelve members; the Pan-Vairiam eight members and the remaining three consisted of six members each.

The variyam system was not the unique feature of the Uttararamar Sabha alone, which had five committees. Amaninagaraya Chaturvedimangalam had nine variyams and Tiruppakkadal and Kaverippakkam had three new variyams each. True, the Uttararamar inscriptions throw more light on the constitution and working of the Sabha and its variyams than any other records. There are, however, evidences to indicate that the variyam system was widely prevalent throughout Tamiland. "By their references to the Vairiyams in other places, however, the inscriptions lead us to suppose that the method of entrusting details of executive work to committees was generally followed by the other Sabhas when they found such details too much for a single executive Committee". Further, the Variyam system promoted the specialisation of small group of Sabha members in particular functions of the local authority. By handling a wide
range of problems it saved a great deal of time of the village assembly. This arrangement obviously permitted free and detailed discussion than was possible in the full assembly. It also provided an excellent scope for local residents for fuller participation in the process of decision-making. In short, the systematic employment of committees for executive work in rural administration, which was the result of a fairly long period of experiment, trial and error, became a distinct feature of rural local self-government under the Chola kings.

**THE KUDAVOLAI SYSTEM**

The members of the Committees were carefully selected. Rigorous membership eligibility qualifications were insisted upon. The prospective candidate should be local resident living in his own house, owner of a tax paying land, aged above 35 but below 70, educated, acquainted with business, and a man known for his honest dealings and of virtuous disposition. In a few villages the minimum qualifying age was fixed at forty. Women were eligible for membership. Those who had served on any Committee for the previous triennium, the defaulters and their relatives, incorrigible sinners guilty of theft, adultery, incest, drinking intoxicant liquors, taking briefs and the outcasts, mentally unsound persons, village bullies etc were scrupulously debarred from membership of the Committees.

The actual method of selecting the members was by the lot (Kudavolai) system. Under this arrangement, initial
selection of members was confined to those who were duly nomi-
nated by the ādumbus or wards. Then the residents of each ward
assembled and each one of them was required to write down on
a palm-leaf ticket the name of the person of his choice. These
tickets were collected and arranged in separate bundles corres-
ponding to the number of wards. All such bundles were put into
a pot which was placed before a full meeting of the general
assembly. One of the bundles was picked out from the pot,
the tickets of which were put in another empty pot, shuffled
well and an innocent boy was asked to pick out a ticket which
was handed over to the mādyastha who received it and read out
the name on the ticket which was also reread by all the priests
present. The Committee member of each ward was thus selected
and the selected members were then assigned to various variyams.

The method of functioning of the Ur and the Sabha was
more or less similar. The distinction between the two was not
as rigid as it appears to be. It is known that in some places
the Ur and the Sabha coexisted wherever new Brahmin settlements
were superimposed on more ancient communities. Instances are
not wanting to show that the Ur functioned along with the Sabha
by itself or jointly with it according to the nature of the work
on hand. Sometimes one village was administered by two
assemblies. In short, both the Brahmadeya and non-Brahmadeya
villages had more or less the same village administrative
arrangement.42
The Village assembly was usually summoned by the beating of the drum. It's meeting was held in a public or open place in the village—in the temple or mandapam or on the bank of a tank or under the shades of a tree. Once summoned the assembly met at the appointed time and if necessary it transacted its business at night also. The meeting was thrown open to all the residents of the village without any reservations and the discussion was free, fair and full. Wilful and malicious obstructions were there and the obstructers were either warned or fined. It is, however, understandable that in the course of discussion, the opinions of the land owners and the men of learning, experience and character naturally swayed the assembly proceedings and "the assertion of the stronger and the acquiescence of the weaker" perhaps prevailed. The village Madyastha committed the transactions of the assembly in writing.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS:

The rural local bodies enjoyed rather sweeping powers and performed many functions which embraced, regulated and even controlled the entire spectrum of the village life. Particular attention was paid to the preservation of local peace, a prerequisite to community development. The village Madyastha was there not only to record the resolutions of the assembly but also to mediate, adjudicate and arbitrate in local disputes. Initially all offences and disputes were dealt with by the village assembly; but when the magnitude of the crimes became
grave and unmanageable then it invoked royal intervention, in
which case the king issued "stringent orders" to punish or
penalize the culprits.

Since land was the principal source of the material
well-being of the people much care was bestowed on the acquisi-
tion, disposal, sale, assignment and utilization of this
basic asset. All lands except the crown lands, temple lands
and private lands were held in "absolute ownership of the
village assembly which exercised all the rights involved in
such ownership." The lands paraambek, reclaimed and acquired
were legally vested in the village assembly and were managed
by it. All land transactions were made strictly in accordance
with legal requirements. Being a great land lord the village
Assembly bestowed its best attention on the proper maintenance
of the irrigation works. It kept the wells, tanks, channels,
slides and embankments in proper repair. Though they were
mostly constructed by private or royal benefactions, the
responsibility of maintaining them was that of the local bodies.
The entire village community was involved in this important
work and at times they were done at the joint expense of the
villagers and the custom came to be known as Kudimaramat.

The Sabha or the Ur acted as rural bank and as public
trustee of all the village property. As the guardians of
public endowments, charities and trust properties, the village
assembly was discharging an enviable responsibility at the
grass-root level. This is considered to be a unique function of the Tamil rural local bodies. In short, "It possessed, sold, acquired and alienated corporate property; it acted as the trustee of public charity of all kinds; it received deposits, bequests and loans of money, paddy and land, and carried out the stipulated conditions and objects from the interest." The temple and the Sabha were like the two ends of the axis round which revolved all communal and even individual activity. The village assembly exercised considerable control over the temple since the temple was "the most powerful economic corporation." The qualifications and tenure for the temple archakas or priests and their turns of worship were fixed by the village assembly, which also supplied different kinds of labour for different services such as those of watchmen, treasurer, accountant etc. The endowments for the supply of flowers, oil, ghee and other offerings and provisions for the recital of hymns were administered by it.

Maintenance of public roads, the main means of communication, was one of the responsibilities of the assembly. It is on record that when a certain road in a village had been submerged under water and "became unfit to be used even by cattle", the village assembly concerned decided not only to repair but also to widen the damaged road. It, therefore, acquired the required lands by purchase from the rights of the village and got the road repaired for transportation.
The village assemblies had the right to levy new taxes and remitting old ones. Collection of land revenue, professional taxes, licence fees, tolls and imposts for the state constituted an important function of the local bodies. The collection of royal revenue and dues was also entrusted with these bodies. It may be noted that in so far as the collection of royal revenue was concerned these bodies "acted as mere agents of farmers of the royal revenue".53

Provisions for social and cultural amenities, which enriched local life of the village community, were not neglected. The temples besides catering to the religious needs of the people served as the centre of all activities of popular culture and amusement also and the village council was responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of temples. Schools and hospitals were attached to temples and they were assisted by the local bodies. Those who desired to put up rest-houses and to provide for the supply of drinking water were aided and supported by the village assembly. Distinguished individuals were honoured by the assembly during festival days for meritorious services rendered by them.54 Similarly suitable public recognition was given to the philanthropists and private donors, who made public endowments, with a view to stimulating the flow of private charity.

Inter-village Co-operation: Whenever necessary the local bodies of two or more villages came together and co-operated in tackling inter-village issues. Two village bodies, for instance, joined together with some temple authorities, for
the preservation of ancient endowments to the temple. In another instance, a Sabha and the Ur agreed upon a scheme to delimit the extent of lands enjoyed tax free by the local people. An instance of joint sale of land belonging to the three villages is on record. Thus the local assemblies often co-operated with one another and with other corporations in pursuance of common objects and this was "effected without any direct reference to the Central Government."  

Central-Local Relationship: The ancient and medieval village in the Tamil country was not an isolated phenomenon. There were several contact points between the local government of the village and the king's government. In practice the village was regarded as part of the overall political set up. Every village was under the protective care of the monarch. The king's officials served as channels of communication and connecting links between the villages and the Central Government. For all practical purposes, however, the rural local bodies were autonomous and central interference in their functioning was only casual. There might not be "anything of the nature of a political institution between the village and the central government," nor any administrative unit between the village and the kingdom and the available evidence clearly shows that there was more or less intimate connection between the two.

The famous settlement of the Uttaramerur constitution was made in the presence of a royal official. When a village

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assembly misappropriated temple money and the matter was brought to the attention of the king, he inquired into the case and fined the assembly, if found guilty. Another assembly repeated the misconduct of its member and sought royal intervention.

When an intruder intimidated an assembly and confined the members in the temple, the matter was brought to the notice of the king and justice obtained. In one instance, when the local administration of a village was disrupted by factionalism and violence the king intervened, prescribed rules for the convening of the council meeting, ordered that those who were guilty of wicked deeds to be fined in proportion to their offences and restored order. A number of similar instances are on record to show the intervention of the Central government in the affairs of the local government to set the things right.

When the Central government became weak, the local government asserted its independence and even turned indifferent and defied royal regulations. In such a situation the village assembly by passed the king's government. There was an instance when a Sabha instead of regulating its own affairs or seeking royal guidance, referred its constitutional and other arrangements to another local body for arbitration. When a new tax called Penvari was imposed even on waste lands a village assembly refused to pay that tax which led to the arrest of the village authorities and compulsory collection of the new impost. In one instance disregarding the village assembly, the king commanded the villagers to supply servants to the temple and to pay for their support, in addition to the usual taxes that they
had to pay.\textsuperscript{66} "... it may be that by the end of the reign of Rajaraja III, the Central government, having lost its efficiency, failed to command the confidence of the people ... the officials of the king's government even disturbed the smooth working of local institutions by their intrigues with particular factions."\textsuperscript{67} In short, the rural local bodies functioned freely when they were left to themselves, sought central intervention whenever the local crisis became unmanageable, became indifferent when the royal authority was weak and at times fell a prey to bureaucratic suppression.

**DECLINE OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE VIJAYANAGAR RULE:**

**14th to 17th Century.**

**Muslim invasions and Vijayanagar Rule:** The rule of the Imperial Cholas came to a close in the last quarter of the 13th century and the second Pandyan imperialism was also on the wane. Taking advantage of the situation, Sultan Malik Kafur, the sword arm of Sultan Alaeddin Kilgi, marched into the Tamil country on 10th March, 1311 and returned to Delhi on the 25th April, 1311. This was the first ever Muslim invasion of Tamilnad, which was followed within a decade by another on slaughter by Khushru Khan, the general of Nuhurak Shah (1318). Jalaludin Aslan Shah, a Governor sent by Mohammad Bin Tuglak, established the Sultanate of Madurai, one of the twenty-three provinces of Muhammad's empire, in about 1329-30 A.D., which survived for five decades with varying degrees of
control over different parts of the Tamil country. It came to an end in 1380 when Madura was captured by Kamarakampanna, the younger son of Bukka Raya I of Vijayanagar. The prolonged Vijayanagar rule over the Tamil country came to an end with the death of Sri Ranga III on 16th December 1672 and the rule of the Nayaks of Madura (1529-1736) with the death of Rani Meenakshi in 1736.

The local bodies managed to survive the plundering raids of the Muslims and the rapacious rule of the Sultanate of Madura. The traditional territorial division of the kingdom into Mandalams, Valanadus, Urs and Sabs was adopted by the Vijayanagar rulers. The Mandalams of the Chola days came to be known as Rajyas and they were ruled by Mahamandalesvaras or provincial governors, who were the princes of the blood royal. During the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509-1630) the Tamil country was divided into five Rajyas, viz. 1) Chandragirirajyam; 2) Padaividurajyam; 3) Tiruvadigairajyam; 4) Chelarajyam; and 5) Pandyarajyam. Each Rajyam was divided into valanadus and valanadus into Nadus. The Urs and the Sabhas were the basic units of administration.

The Nadu was the political subdivision below the Valanadu. Royal gifts were made to temples with the approval of the Nattar and there were occasions when gifts were made at the request of the Nattar. The Nadu assembly instituted festivals in the temple, sold lands; remitted certain taxes on Devadana
lands is order to provide for temple worship, festivals and repairs; registered agreements for the payment of Rajagaram dues to the king; made joint gifts of certain taxes payable by the tenants for certain services, offerings and worship in the temple; made annual gift of oil for a perpetual lamp and for torches on festival days; sold land to the temple to pay off their dues to the government; and made endowments to temples. Thus it will be seen that the functions of the Nadu assemblies were restricted to managing the affairs of the temples.  

Like the Nadu the Uravar also confined mostly with the affairs of the temples. They were concerned with making gifts of taxes to the temples; assignment of the collections made through tools, and duties on articles of merchandise to the temples; selling of lands to temple; endowing land and house sites for offerings and worship; transferring of land in favour of the temple; bestowing of padikaval rights on the neighbouring Uravar; conferring honours and titles on those who rendered distinguished services; receiving gifts on behalf of temples; auctioning the monopoly right of cutting trees in the forests in order to pay the dues to the government; appointing executive officer to the temple with the approval of the temple trustees; giving of certain lands in lieu of money borrowed from the temple treasury; and selling lands to pay the Kadamai or government dues. Uravar was seldom mentioned in the later records and individual agreements since contracts replaced the corporate activity of the Ur. As a result, the Ur institution
The Sabhas survived only in ten places in the whole of the Tamil country and after the period of Mallikarjuna (1459) there was no reference at all in the inscriptions to the existence of the Sabha. In the light of this fresh evidence the conclusion that "In the Brahmadeya villages, however, the village assemblies which were known as Sabhas, continued to function as vigorously as before" can not be sustained.

The functions of the Sabhas were not many. They registered sale of land, repaired irrigation tanks and sluices; distributed tax-free lands to the Brahmins and to the temples; and collected taxes from the settlers in the village for conducting certain services. Some Sabhas, known as Vidwan-Mahajana-Sabhas, seem to have discharged judicial duties. Besides collecting jodi or quit-rent from the ryots and paying it into the imperial treasury, these bodies brought the grievances of the villagers to the notice of the Raya and had them redressed. About the other activities of this body, which it performed so well during the Chola period, we know precious little. The vestiges of the Velliyan System seem to have lingered in a place or two. The view that "The Sabhas or the Mahasabhas began to decline from the later half of the 13th Century and then disappeared at the close of the 15th Century may well hold the ground."
CAUSES OF DECLINE.

It is noted earlier\textsuperscript{75} that the Golden Age of Grass-root Government started declining during the last phase of the Chola period and this process was accelerated by the onslaught of the Muslims and the subsequent establishment of the Sultanate of Madura. The temples were deprived of their accumulated wealth and consequently the rural local bodies, which to a great extent depended on the treasuries of the temples to draw for charitable endowments, were left with meagre resources. Added to this "the cold indifference of the new conquerors\textsuperscript{76} (the Vijayanagar rulers) left the local institutions languishing. In short, the political and social institutions of Southern India which were in existence from the earliest times had been shaken root and branch\textsuperscript{77} after the commencement of the Vijayanagar rule.

The Vijayanagar rulers, particularly the members of the Sangam dynasty, were of course conservatives and as such respected the political, social and religious traditions of the Tamils. At last they allowed the local bodies to survive wherever they existed but they were not keen in reviving and activating these ancient local institutions. Though they followed the principle of 'Purvamariyadi chaddat' i.e. preservation of the culture and custom of the people, their support for tradition "does not appear to have had anything to do with the festering of the village republics".\textsuperscript{78} In short, for reasons of their own the Vijayanagar rulers "were not enthusiastic supporters of village communities."\textsuperscript{79}
Militarisation: The Vijayanagar rule of the Tamil country was by nature and necessity military in character. The alien government combined the war-time organisation with the peace-time administration which was or could be anything but conducive to the active functioning of the local institutions. Several villages called Padaippurar were given to military commanders—the Nayaks—and soldiers as remuneration for their military service. "These soldiers were mainly Kammadiyas and Andhras and they were not favourably disposed towards the local institutions." The militarisation of the empire proved disastrous to the growth of the local bodies. Thus the military needs of the Vijayanagar emperors and the feudalistic practices of the Nayaks almost destroyed the most valued civil institutions.

Centralisation and local autonomy go ill together. The highly centralised and bureaucratic Vijayanagar rule desolated the local government in the Tamil country. The mahamandalasvars and their officials, who were least interested in fostering the local bodies, were made responsible for the collection of taxes, receiving endowments for the temples etc. which had been the much cherished functions of the village assemblies. The then existing Nadus, the Ura and the Sabhas were thus brought under the effective control of the provincial government and the royal civil servants ushered the traditional functions of the rural local bodies.
The introduction of the Mayankara system proved to be inimical to the development of rural local self-government. The system refers to the assignment of Ghanabhogan of the communal lands in the villages to the Nayaks who converted them into Mayakamangalam. The gradual replacement of Chadurvedimangalam by Mayakamangalam deprived the villages of their communal as well as the corporate character. The Nayaks were most interested in getting their revenues and least concerned with nurturing of the local bodies. "Just as the townships, the boroughs and the shires lost their administrative and judicial independence after the Norman conquest of England by the effective feudal regulations introduced by William the Conqueror, the Mayankara system deprived the Sabha, the Ur and the Nadu of many of their powers, privileges and duties."85

The Ayagars were the village officials like the Karnam, the Headman or the Talari. They were appointed by the provincial government and as such played the part of its representatives only. The Ayagars served as a link between the villages and the royal government. The Karnam maintained the accounts of the village and kept registers containing all particulars of the lands belonging to the village. The Headman's primary duty was the collection of revenue due to the State. The Talari was the village policeman-cum-detective. By virtue of their position and powers both the Karnam and the Headman
became so powerful and "they were virtually the rulers of the village". The Talari also in course of time became a much dreaded man in the village. Thus the village assemblies yielded place to this group of government officials called Ayagars. The Ayagar system was something new to the Tamil country since they were unknown to the Tamils in the pre-Vijayanagar days and this system was found to be existing during the early period of the East India Company.

But when the Vijayanagar rulers took over the administration of the Tamil country the rural local institutions were already on their wane. To what extent the Vijayanagar rule was responsible for the further deterioration or disappearance of these civic institutions is a point on which the scholars disagree. Dr. N. Venkataramanayya, the author of the 'Studies in the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagar' concludes that "In the Tamil Districts, the ancient Chola territorial sub-divisions remained in tact; and no serious attempts were made to tamper with them by the introduction of the system that had been perfected by the Rayas in the Telugu and Canarese areas." Dr. B.A. Sasturkar shares this view but partially. He reiterates that the rulers of Vijayanagar continued to encourage the local institutions as preservers of tradition but soon qualifies this assertion by saying that they "showed discretion by placing over the local bodies, officers of the central Government".

On the other hand it is argued that the ruler's respect for Purvamariyade had nothing to do with the village assemblies.
The traditional local bodies were much neglected during this period so much so that they were "all but disappeared".\footnote{36} Steering clear between these two opposing points of view it is said that "the attitude of the rulers towards local institutions were sympathetic to begin with, but later, circumstances forced them to leave the institutions to their own fate-to decline".\footnote{38} The palayan system might be "a sagacious combination of freedom and order, that was the most practicable thing that could be done in the circumstances ...."\footnote{99} but this military system of administration militated the growth of the local authority. Under the Nayaks rule the rural local government lost its strength. The Ayagar arrangement sapped the very vitality of these institutions.\footnote{90}

And yet the village assemblies, though declined to a large extent, did not disappear from the scene completely. On the evidence of inscriptions and on the basis of the account given by John Nieuhoff, Prof. R.Sathamathir concludes that "The villages appear to have enjoyed a large measure of local autonomy".\footnote{91} This statement has of course to be modified in the light of later research and must be taken to mean simply that the village assemblies were functioning under the Nayak rule. In the words of Prof. M.Arekiaswamy "Though the system of village autonomy did not apparently flourish to the extent it did during the days of the Colas, the rulers of Vijayanagar also allowed many things to the done by the villages themselves".\footnote{92}
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2. The Sangam literature is the most valuable and copious
   source material for the history and culture of the
   ancient Tamils.

   (Madras, 1929) p.10.


5. (i) Nilakanta Sastri, K.A.: A History of South India
   (II edn., Madras, 1958) p.82.
   (ii) Subrahmanian, Dr. N.: History of Tamilnad up to 1336
        (Madurai 1972) p.54.

6. Tirukkural 542.

7. Smith, Vincent A.: Early History of India (Madras,
   1957 reprint) p.481.

8. (i) Dikshitier, V.R.S.: Studies in Tamil Literature and
     History, p.22 affirms that Nadu was a sub division
     of the Kurram. That the Parambu Nadu of Pari had
     300 Urs (Parambu) confirms this statement.
     (ii) N. Rajamanikam (Tamilvar Atchi p.23) opines that the
          Nadu was a union of Urs whose representatives were
          members of the assembly of the Nadu.
     (iii) Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer (Introduction to Parambu)
          maintains that the Kurram was a sub division of the
          Nadu.

In the light of the above assertions it may be con-
cluded that the sangam provincial administration had
a four-tier system viz. the Ur, the Nadu, the Kurram
and the Mandalam.

11. A fairly big village was called as the Ur, other variations of this nomenclature are Sirur (lit. small village, Puram:324), Madur (ancient village, Silep III:111), and Perur (a big town Purumban:254).

12. The term 'Avai' is generally used in the Sangam Literature to denote an academy of Tamil poets, Royal Court, the court of Justice, Audience Hall or simply a village assembly. It may be of interest to note that the term 'Panchayat' is of recent origin.

13. 'Namram' refers to a congregation of people sitting under a tree (Tirumurugam:226). 'Pediyil' was a common place in village (Puram 76, 79, 371, 375) and, Pattinomalai 246-269). 'Ambalai' was a small building with a raised platform (Madurasithamii 161). 'Vedigai' was a structure (circular, rectangular or square in plan) around a fruit bearing tree at the centre of the village (Maladivari:96).

15. Ahamic 77.
19. Subrahmaniam Suka n.6, p.92.
21. Pallava inscriptions generally mention only the bottom as the largest division.
23. Sastri Supra n.5, p.150

27. The Brahminical migrations from the Aryavarta saw a huge influx of learned men into the Tamil country with royal patronage they were settled in exclusive colonies with all exemptions and material benefits.
28. Mahalingam, Dr. T.V.: South Indian Polity. p.332.
29. Manakshi, Dr.C.: Adam and Soc. Life under the Pallavas, paras.
30. Sastri Cholas pp.267-68.
31. They were distributed as fellows: Tondaimandalam 307 Cholamandalam 300, Pandimandalam 25, and, Kanyakomandalam 14.
32. These self-governing units were called differently in different periods. This tendency was more apparent in late Chola days.
34. 95 of 1920.
35. 273 of 1914.
37. Villages which were donated for the exclusive enjoyment of an individual (nababhoga) were changed into collective ownership settlement (gamabhoga). Thus the management as well as enjoyment was put into their collective responsibility.
39. 62 of 1898 (Rep. p.23)
40. Sastri *Calca* p.285
    Subramaniam *Pandeyra Indira Aranai Atchi Nilai-
    yancal* (Tamil) p.114.
43. The Memur Inscription of Kamra Jadaiyen (*Epigraphia
    Indiae* vol. xi, pp.5-11) gives a detailed analysis
    of the working of the general body meeting of the
    Mahassabha.
44. An interesting epigraph from Tirunelveli (M.E.R.,
    1912-13, p.98) lays down a rule that in no case
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48. The trusteeship function was not quite familiar among
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80. Mahalingam supra n.90 p.372.
82.
82. Sastri supra n.5, p.11.
85. Ibid,pp.143-44.
87. Sastri supra n.5, p.11 and 298.
90. Subrahmanian, Dr.N.: Political and Administration Institutions in Ancient India, p.142.