CHAPTER 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN TAMILNADU

4.0 INTRODUCTION

In Tamilnadu, villages as a whole form a social unit from which "community" life obtains. They have evolved with or out of specific symbols, both tangible and intangible, which represent the social cum utilitarian interest of various social groups that constitute the village community. This chapter outlines the various criteria that govern the layout and the spatial planning of the settlement in Tamilnadu, such as caste and ritual order, temple and religious activity, economic activity and development. This is done so as to present the various dwelling types against the background of the settlement. This chapter also dwells on the ideas of 'sacred' that manifests itself in the spatial planning of the settlement and the ordering of the various elements within. This is done with special reference to the case study villages.

In South India towns and villages have evolved unconsciously with some natural advantage in their favour. The settlements have mostly grown round the temples, for the existence of a temple implied sanctity and hence sanitation of the surroundings, an assured water supply, fertile land and other amenities of life which one values the most. There is a proverb in Tamil, which says, "live not in a place where there is no temple." People are attracted in large numbers to places, which have become famous on account of the temple and this helped trade and commerce to
evolve naturally. Thus temples were the starting points for the growth of any settlement. Likewise a palace could also be the starting point of fortified settlements and houses were built around them. However examples of such settlements are very rare and few and assumed an urban scale.

Where temples are the focal points in any settlement there were four streets concentric to or in close proximity to the temple where the priests and the servants of the temple, namely the Brahmins resided. These four streets round the temple were also used for processional purposes. The streets around were occupied according to the social ranking of the various caste groups. In the case of the palace, the ministers, the advisers, the soldiers, the rich merchants and the Brahmins were housed in streets planned around the palace, beyond which the other caste groups were distributed according to social hierarchy.

4.2 COMPONENTS OF A VILLAGE

The villages have been stratified according to three regions classified. The 18 villages identified for case study are therefore selected according to region and within the region random sampling is done to choose the villages which are close to places of cultural and historical interests. From the case studies it is seen that every village in Tamilnadu consists of:

(i) the inhabited part or the 'natham',
(ii) the tank or any other source of water supply,
(iii) the cultivable lands, and
(iv) 'poramboke' or public lands, generally left fallow, and used as grazing ground, where nothing better is available for the purpose.

(Ref. Plate No: 6)

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137 Ibid. Page 75

138 Natham is a Tamil word which means settlement

139 Poramboke is a Tamil word which means no- mans land
COMPONENTS OF A VILLAGE

Village layout comprises of:
1) Natham or the inhabited settlement
2) The tank or source of water supply
3) The cultivable lands
4) The poromboke or the public lands generally left fallow or allotted to the harijans (colony)
The inhabited part or the *natham* usually occupies a stretch of land, which is above the flood level. Within the *natham* certain parts of the land were common such as lands used as pasture, to collect wood and cow dung for fuel, and to obtain mud, wood and thatch for building. The main village bathing pools, cremation and burial grounds and threshing floors are also common, held under the aegis of the *panchayat*.\(^{140}\) The 'poramboke' lands are sufficiently elevated and ordinarily uncultivable, but useful for various communal purposes or are allotted to the lower castes for purposes of dwelling as it is generally away from the main settlement/natham.

The normal occupation of the bulk of inhabitants of a village is agriculture and the various operations connected with it are dependent on the seasons.

### 4.3 PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

In Tamilnadu the typical pattern of settlement can be classified as compact and rectangular, with streets laid in a geometric manner, either concentric to or focusing on a temple at the notional centre of the village. This is true of villages in every region. Houses here form house rows with common walls. This pattern breaks up at the fringes of the settlement where new developments have taken place and houses are spread apart in plots or are clustered together. The ‘untouchables’ live in a separate hamlet or ‘colony’ away from the *natham* (Ref. Plate: 7) where houses are clustered together. There is a clear definition of spaces and a hierarchy still obvious today between streets or areas of a village. The temple, distinct and situated in or near the centre of the village is said to shed its sanctity all around. Brahmins lived on the streets around the temple, often in separate quarters called the *agraharam*\(^{141}\) set apart for them.

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\(^{140}\) Local governing body

\(^{141}\) *agraharam* is the Tamil word meaning the dwelling streets of the Brahmins
UDAIYALUR VILLAGE
KUMBOKONAM TALUK
THANJAVUR DISTRICT

TOTAL AREA: 485 Ha
IRRIGATED: 362 Ha
CULTIVABLE: 362 Ha
WASTE: 81 Ha
OTHERS: 48 Ha

Source: Udaiyalur Panchayat Office

CASTE STRUCTURE

BRAHMINS

IYER (Ayar)
IYENGAAR (Ayyangar)

SUDRA

CHRISTIANA (converted)
PADAYACHI
PALLAR
AGAMUDALAYAR
THEVAR
PILLAI
VELAIYAR

NON BRAHMINS

VATHIMAL
VAADAMA
AATH ASHTIRAM
PRAKASHEVANAM

SETTLEMENT PATTERN
Udaiyalur Village Thanjavur District

PLATE: 7
The typical pattern found in almost all parts of Tamilnadu undergoes variations due to climatic and geographical conditions as outlined below:

4.3.1 Interior River and Rain Fed Plains

The villages of Udaiyalur (Ref. Plate 8) and Thirukarukavur (central Tamilnadu) (Ref. Plate 9), Pathamadai (south Tamilnadu) and the villages of Ayyangarkulam, and Mungapattu (North Tamilnadu) found in the interior river and rain fed plains, are illustrative of the compact and rectangular pattern, where houses are compacted together forming house rows centred on a temple.

The village of Padmanabhapuram (South Tamilnadu) the home of the erstwhile King of Travancore is centred on the palace complex. (Ref. Plate No: 10) However the pattern of settlement remains compact and rectangular being confined within fort walls. The dwellings of the lower caste groups find their place outside the fort walls.

The village of Alwarthirunagar in Tirunelveli district of south Tamilnadu while conforming to the compact rectangular pattern is elongated so configured because a river and a canal to the north and the south respectively form its natural boundaries. Besides a road on the northern side, which connects two important towns has bearing on the present growth of the settlement. (Ref. Plate No: 11, Fig.1)

Vazhapandal near Arni is also of the elongated rectangular pattern so developed, as it is sited on the banks of the River Cheyyar. (Ref. Plate No: 11 Fig.2) Also passing through this village parallel to the river is a road, which is a bus route and connects two other important villages. Hence the linear pattern is further emphasised.
Udaiyalur has a compact nucleated rectangular pattern with the Agraharam occupying the space around the Vishnu koil. The Non Brahmin castes live on streets around the agraharam and the colony for the harijans is located around half a kilometre away from the main settlement.

Developmental activity has generated centres of community activity around Village Administrative Office and the schools. As these are located outside the main Natham all castes participate in this space.
The pattern of settlement is rectangular, with the streets laid concentric to the temple in the inner core comprising of the agraharam or the Brahman houses. The other streets are laid perpendicular or parallel to the inner core and consist of houses in rows.

Most houses have a double thinnal; the outer lower one is for the passers by and the inner upper one is for the use of the household, for relaxing, socializing etc.

The brahmans live in the Agraharam around the temple, while the harijans live in a colony away the main settlement, closer to the fields.

The brahmans are the agricultural landlords while the lower castes work as laborers on the fields or perform menial tasks for the landlords.

THIRUKARKAVUR
Located near Papanasam, in Tanjore district
Thirukarkavur is famous for its Siva temple
Dedicated to Sri Mulavananda and Sri Garabharakshambikai. 1000 years old this Chola village is located on the banks of the R. Mullai a tributary of the River Cauvery.

POPULATION: 1720
NO OF HOUSEHOLDS: 414

A SMALLER SHRINE AND DWELLINGS JUXTAPOSED
The belief that the height of the houses should not be greater than that of the temple, and that a flat roof is not good for the occupants, have retained the character of the single storey sloped roof houses in the immediate environs of the temple.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN
THIRUKARKAVUR VILLAGE; THANJAVUR DISTRICT
CASTE DISTRIBUTION

PLATE: 9
PADMANABHAPURAM

SETTLEMENT PATTERN: Compact rectangular centered on the Palace and defined by fort walls.

CASTE DISTRIBUTION: The various groups are distributed according to the ritual rank around the fort. The harijans are relegated to areas beyond the fort wall as belonging to the outer and this is undisturbed even today.

SCHEMATIC LAYOUT OF THE VILLAGE

SACRED TOPOGRAPHY: The village is dotted with a number of temples and religious elements. The processional streets are to the north of the settlement for the convenience of the king and his courtiers.

NOT TO SCALE
Prepared by Author
Vazhapandal village takes an elongated rectangular pattern or linear configuration because of the river. 

Alwarthirunagar takes an elongated rectangular pattern because of the constraints of the river and canal flanking both sides of the village.

Source: Vazhapandal Panchayat Office

Source: Alwarthirunagar Panchayat Union Office

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

ELONGATED RECTANGULAR PATTERN

PLATE: 11
Development of communication and the introduction of bus routes in the village currently influence the growth of the settlement and promote the development of commercial activities. This is visible not only in the villages of Alwarthirunagar and Vazhapandal but also in the village of Ayyangarkulam. The village of Ayyangarkulam in Kancheepuram district of North Tamilnadu takes an L-pattern because a road connecting two towns skirts the village on the northern side. (Ref. Plate No: 12)

4.3.2 Coastal Areas

In the coastal areas of Tamilnadu the villages have evolved unconsciously taking the natural advantage of the seacoast along which they have developed. These settlements are directly related to the activities at sea and the seashore, as most people are fishermen. As a lot of the fisherman’s work spills into the open space around his house whether it is mending or drying the nets, cleaning and drying of fish etc. the houses are set apart from each other. As the humidity is high in these villages this also facilitates free flow of air. However the basic form remains rectangular with roads running at right angles to each other and main roads perpendicular to the waterfront. The villages of Soothikuppam, (Ref. Plate 13) Cuddalore District and Muttam, Kanyakumari District are illustrative of this type. (Ref. Plate No: 14)

In the village of Pulicat (Chinglepet District) two configurations are seen—the fishermen settlement and the traditional settlement with caste groups arranged in hierarchical order. While the houses of the fishermen are extrovert in nature because of the nature of occupation, the rest of the settlement is configured around the temple in a hierarchy of spatial arrangements. (Ref. Plate No: 15)
THE MAIN ROAD IS THE NEW CENTER OF COMMUNITY INTEREST

COMPACT GROUPING OF COURTYARD HOUSES ARE FOUND BOTH IN THE OLD AND THE NEW SETTLEMENT

STREETS RUN PREDOMINANTLY IN THE EAST-WEST DIRECTION AND HOUSES ARE ORIENTED TO THE CARDINAL DIRECTIONS. THE NEW SETTLEMENT HAVE CAUSED THE COMPACT RECTANGULAR PATTERN TO EVOLVE INTO A L-SHAPED PATTERN. THE GROWTH IN THIS DIRECTION HAS BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE MAIN ROAD THAT CUTS THROUGH THE VILLAGE.

Source: Ayyangarkulam Village Panchayat Office LAYOUT MAP

TEMPLE AND THE AYYANGAR KULAM AFTER WHICH THE VILLAGE IS NAMED

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

AYYANGARKULAM VILLAGE KCHEEPURAM DISTRICT

PLATE : 12
Fishing activity is done both at sea and at the back waters.

The waterfront is dotted with many small shrines and elements which the fisher folk worship before going out to sea.

The entire settlement is oriented to the activities of the sea and the waterfront; that is fishing.

Features of settlement:

- This a fishing village sandwiched between the sea on the east and river on the west.
- Pattern of settlement is rectangular with all streets perpendicular to the sea shore.
- The houses are oriented to the cardinal points and are loosely grouped together in individual plots.

Outdoor stage for recreational activity set up on the waterfront.

Settlement pattern:

- Population: 3577
- No of Houses: 358

The village is oriented to the activities of the sea and the waterfront.
No plotted development is seen and the common spaces in between the houses are used by the people to mend their net or to salt and dry fish.

Features of Settlement

The settlement is linear with the concentration of houses along the waterfront and therefore work domain.

Boats and catamarans are docked next to the waterfront.

Open space in front of the church forms the loci for community activities.

Settlement seen against the backdrop of the church.

Land slopes steeply down to the sea creating an informality within the settlement layout.

Source: Prepared By Author

Settlement Pattern

MUTTAM VILLAGE
KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT
COASTAL VILLAGE

PLATE: 14
Fishing which engages the people is centered in the surrounding backwater.

**River based Settlement:**
Developed with backwaters all around and the river as the base for all activities. The pattern of settlement is loosely built with scattered houses.

**Fort based Settlement:**
Area around the fort established by the Dutch in 1610 AD

**Temple Church and Mosque based Settlement:**
The religious centers form the focus around which the communities are organized. The pattern of settlement here is compact and rectangular.

Source: Pulicat Village Panchayat Office

**Plate: 15**

Source: Pulicat Village Panchayat Office
4.3.3 Upland Regions

In the upland regions we see the imposition of a geometric order in a highly contoured site mainly attributed to cultural factors. This is most visible in the Badaga, Toda and Kota villages in the upland regions of the Nilgiri Mountains. The streets are strictly oriented north-south and the houses are oriented to face the east and the south irrespective of the natural terrain and other constraining features of the topography. (Ref. Plate No: 16) The houses are formed into house rows, which do not front the streets, but common space, which is accessed from the street. The lower caste people who often provide labour in the tea estates of this region are located within the estates where they work.

4.4 CASTE, RITUAL ORDER AND THE SETTLEMENT:

All villages are multi-caste settlements and the settlement pattern shows the conspicuous features of residential segregation between the castes. The manifest distinctions of caste in any village are residential segregation; traditional patterns of commensality and services between the castes. A caste can be considered as a system of division of labour, in popular terms- as a system of co-operation, as a system of allocation of rights and obligations at birth and as a system of belief and ritual.

The concept of caste first of all represents a model of ritual order. In accordance with this the Brahmins are traditionally attributed with greater virtue and have more restrictive rules with regard to pollution and purity than the others and are accorded greater respect. They are officially recognised by all sections of population as the highest caste. Next to the Brahmins come the Sudras or the non- Brahmins, with the 'untouchables' at the lowest ranking position. The Sudras comprise of all other jatis like the artisans, herdsmen, merchants, barbers, washer men, and carpenters.
PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

The pattern of settlement is compact rectangular and all houses are oriented either to the east or the south. The main street runs in the east-west direction and the open spaces in front of a row cluster is accessed from this.
In certain contexts, e.g., commensality and inter-caste services, this hierarchical aspect is clearly manifested. Caste members avoid those below them and accept cooked food only from those above them. It is moreover, reflected in the type of duties an inferior caste performs for the higher caste. The position of the *Sudras* in this hierarchy is fixed in relation to the Brahmins and untouchables, but status within the intermediate range of *Sudras* is indeterminate. The various *Sudra* groups cannot be ranked in any unilinear order that is universally accepted and no one is willing to accede to the other a superior ranking. Rank amongst them may be acknowledged based on the landholdings and wealth that a specific group could hold. However, these groups do inter-dine and hold temple assemblies together, though they do not intermarry. In the context of this research it is not important to define the hierarchical order. It is enough to examine social relations between various social groups in terms of more 'on the ground,' proximate and general criteria of group properties, and of the stresses and pressures to which the respective groups are exposed.

In the traditional context all streets except the streets where the Brahmins live and in the colony occupied by the 'untouchables' have residents from more than one caste. These groups nevertheless live in strict social segregation. These three groups also have their own burial or cremation sites. Temples are located at the ends of or on each street. The grounds in front of the temples in the non-Brahmin streets serve as the sacred places for caste meetings of the traditional type. Political meetings are rarely held.

All higher caste groups avoid the hamlet of the 'untouchables'. The 'untouchables' are themselves barred from entering the Brahmin streets. Very rarely will an 'untouchable' enter the Brahmin’s back yard to unload some agricultural produce though night soil removal from latrines is done by them. Usually they will deliver the goods at the edge of the street from where it is carried further by the *Sudra*. The *Sudra* Street on the other hand, may be freely entered by the untouchable caste. *Sudras* are allowed to pass freely through the Brahmin Street.
The 'untouchables' are prohibited from drawing water from wells that belong to the other castes and from bathing and washing in places used by the others. However since each street normally has its own well, the question of ritual contamination does not arise. If this is lacking then water is taken from the nearby river or tank.

The position of caste within the ritual order is probably seen most plainly in the system of duties and services in which one caste performs inferior tasks for the castes above it or superior tasks for the caste below. The rendering of such services are general duties enjoined on a caste in accordance with its ritual status as a whole, but the caste members do not necessarily earn their living that way. Many duties, which represent the obligation of a lower caste to the higher caste, are performed in situations of pollution where the higher caste is subject to stricter rules than the lower caste. For example when a Brahmin dies then it is the duty of the Sudra to carry the body to the cremation ground. Sudras in turn are carried by the Pariah. Pariahs cremate the bodies and keep watch over the remains during the night. Confinement is regarded as a strictly polluting condition among Brahmins only. The woman is secluded from the rest of the house and is fed and attended to by a Sudra woman. The Barber's wife is traditionally the mid-wife, but however today many Brahmins and richer Sudras give birth in hospitals.

Today, many instances now point to the fact that the ritual order is not as strong as one may suppose it had been formerly and the model itself has become ambiguous. The weakening of the traditional order relates first of all to the development of certain elements in the economic structure and to the intrusion of new political ideas. The less privileged groups in order to better their position, and the privileged groups to protect their own interests, associate at different levels, one caste with another, and sections of one caste with members of different castes. In doing so they may collide with the established principles of caste. These principles, however, still influence the tactics being used and the pattern of alliance and opposition. For the
support of its ritual position, for example, the higher caste depends on the services of the subordinate castes. Though the high caste power has been openly challenged this change does not reverse the ritual order. The Sudras who are in opposition to the Brahmins still call the Brahmin priest to officiate at their ceremonies.

In villages today the other castes occupy a relatively independent position due to their economic advancement and because of the movement of the Brahmins away from the village. The Brahmins have settled down in towns and cities in search of better jobs and operate their agricultural holdings as absentee landlords or their lands and houses in the villages have been sold away to other caste groups. The same is the case with the wealthier Sudra who has migrated in search of better opportunities. When people move away from their original domains then all visible boundaries of caste are broken though in the sense of the ritual order this continues to persist. Sudras in the villages now have greater control than it was in the past and the separation of this group with that of the 'untouchable' is still evident. Though the Sudras may have bought lands and houses from the Brahmins and have moved into the agraharam streets, and the 'untouchable' may freely move within, he is still prohibited to dwell within the main natham. The survey of all villages showed this strict division of the village into its natham for higher ranked groups and the hamlet or colony for the outcastes. Though no physical barriers or points exist in these 'villages demarcating the so called sacred areas from that of the profane these boundaries of caste exist in the cultural memory of the people and are still evident in the behaviour of the people.

In the village of Alwarthirunagar the ritual concepts of purity and pollution were very strong. The Brahmins of this village refused to allow this study to be done for two whole days. Only when they were convinced of its academic interest did they allow us to even sit on the thinnais of their houses. (Ref. Plate 17)

142 The study of the village was undertaken by the author of this work and the students of School of Architecture and Planning.
ALWARTHIRUNAGAR

The village is planned concentric to the Alwar temple. It is a compact rectangular plan slightly elongated because of the constraints of the river and canal on two sides of the settlement.

The Brahmin and the Pillais occupy the inner rings, while the merchants and traders occupy the outer parts of the settlement. The harijans occupy a linear stretch of land outside the village along the canal.

Recent growth has occurred towards the eastern end of the village and a number of Muslim and Christians have settled down here.

Source: AlwarthiruNagar Panchayat Union Office
In the historic settlement of Padmanabhapuram the fort wall clearly defines where the higher ranked groups live and the where the untouchables, Muslims and Christians live. This segregation, which is part of a history that is 400 years old, still exists today. Besides here the palace being the focal element dictated the positioning of the various caste groups around it. (Ref. Plate 10)

Only one instance of the division of caste is tangible in the physical fabric of all villages in Tamilnadu, i.e., the street names. The streets around the temple and thus the agraharam streets are called the Sannidhi Street or the Mada Street with the orientation of the street- north, south, east, west- prefixed. This naming of the agraharam streets is based on the car processions connected with temple worship during the time of festivals. Besides this village streets are named after the caste group occupying the street or after the name of some prominent member of the caste. However the government with its intentions to remove the strictures of caste has abolished the caste name normally suffixed to the name of the street. Besides streets could also be named after the deity presiding on the street. In some villages where an increase in commercial activity is seen, streets could be named after the kind of activity it generates- bazaar theru, and the like.

To conclude, caste creates a boundary within the spatial structure of the village- it demarcates, separates, emphasises and generates not just the existential entities and phenomenon, but also most of the abstract intangible aspects of human existence. The duality of this boundary is apparent at many levels- political, social, domestic and administrative. Though these barriers have given way, new ones promoted by political intrusions have taken their place and it is still evident that groups come together to better their position, and to protect their own interests thereby indirectly promoting the feelings of caste. Despite land reforms the conditions of the lower castes persist as they continue to serve as agricultural labourers; in all the vertical interdependency between the castes continues. In spite of
changes and reform the village continues to be a compact unit and neither the factions nor the modern conditions appear to be seriously modifying the pattern of settlement.

4.4 SACRED TOPOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT

The word 'sacred' describes any thing that is sanctified by religion, activity or by being a part of the ritual. It cannot be applied exclusively to religion although the most of whatever is considered sacred pertains to religious activity. The concept of every space having a value on what may be a scale of spiritual importance is peculiar to many traditional societies and in India plays an immensely vital part in the village on many different planes of understanding. This phenomenon not only affects the built form but also affects the settlement in a much more subtle way. The presence of a temple or shrine or sacred tree affects the activity of the street profoundly. The activity in the street further affects the activity at the settlement level. The different physical and geographical levels that are affected by this phenomenon constitute the sacred topography of the region.

The articles and spaces that are considered sacred in the religious sense are recognised due to social and cultural memory using a set of rules with varying interpretations that have passed from generation to generation. This has led to a trend of using these spaces and articles in a certain way i.e. the human response to a space also affects the sacred geography. The fact is that there exists a scale of spirituality, which generates spaces and with them certain connotations that require analysis.

The word 'sacred' has two inferences- it could either refer to spaces, articles and phenomenon that possess religious significance or it could also refer to the ritualistic practices like bathing, eating and relaxing. The first of the viewpoints is applicable at the level of the street and settlement levels while the latter is appropriate.

143 Bazaar means market in most Indian languages and theru is a Tamil word which means street.
for the individual housing unit and to a smaller extent to the street. The word ritual too may be broadly divided into two categories- secular and religious. They both have two subdivisions based on frequency – annual and daily. This duality helps to arrive at conclusions to emphasise the relationship between where things are and how people live. This geo-spiritual relationship is crucial to the existence of any society. The ritual importance of the house and its sacred topography is discussed in the later chapters.

The street is the primary organisational element in any Tamil village. The street not only dictates activity but also demands it. It flows into other streets; it gives the houses purpose and direction. The rituals of a house seep into the street through the *thirmai*\(^{144}\), which is nothing but a transitional boundary. Each house not only keeps the area in front of the house and therefore the street clean but also adorns it with *kolams*\(^{145}\). The part of the street in front of the house becomes an extension of it and the *thirmai* becomes part of the street. These facts lead to an understanding of the communal responsibility that the house feels for the street and how the street becomes part of the dwelling's ritual behaviour.

The street is ritualistic not only in the secular sense but also in the religious turn of phrase. The streets of every village are dotted with religious elements and shrines and each of these has religious significance for the different communities. The houses in their front yard provide small shrines, generally for worship for the passerby on the street. These small religious elements normally embedded in the wall of the house or its compound are found at T-junctions of streets. Besides each street has its own deity enshrined in its own small temple. When the villager comes out of the house he removes his slippers as a sign of respect and turns towards the direction of the temple and prays before he proceeds on his daily work. The street therefore becomes sacred because of these small displays of worship.

\(^{144}\) *Thirmai* is a low earthen platform in front of the rural dwelling.
and its environment is kept clean to preserve its sanctity. These shrines are important nodes of activity on a day to day scale and fulfil their immense potential during the annual festival season. The street, it may be said transcends its initial purpose to serve as a link and a connective tissue and becomes the generator of things and a setting for the activity like none other.

The streets around the temple- Sannindhi Street and the Mada street- are broad so as to permit the temple processional car to move around for darshan or worship. The other streets are narrow- 4m to 5m- enabling movement. Under such conditions houses on both sides shade the streets. As streets are narrow social intercourse across street from thinnai to thinnai is possible.

There is a rich variety of temples in a village. There are caste and sub caste temples and cult temples. Besides every village has its own presiding deity to which a temple is built at the notional centre of the village.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter the temple is not only a place of worship but also the main centre and the initiator of village activities. Temples are the guardians of traditional culture and the venue for a large amount of social and philanthropic work as well as education. The people were ritually and traditionally bound to the temple and a whole lot of activity is centred at the main temple. The streets round the main temple were traditionally for the dwellings of the Brahmins, a context that is changing. As the untouchables were not allowed into the streets of the Brahmins, the temple was closed to them. Thus during the annual festival of the temple the deity moved out of the temple into the village in procession whence all sections of society could have his darshan. The streets of the village come alive during these festivities and attract a lot of commercial activity with hawkers putting up temporary structures to sell their wares.

145 Ibid Page 45
146 Ibid. Page 43
147 darshan means worship in Hindi
In the villages of Alwarthirunagar, Tirunelveli district; Udaiyalur and Thirukarukavur, Thanjavur district, this demarcation of the most sacred is still visible. A lot of Brahmins still live there or continue to own the properties and this has been instrumental in keeping the idea still alive.

In the village of Ayyangarkulam14*, Chinglepet district there is no evidence that it was a Brahmin dominated village in the past, the streets having been taken over by other caste groups and street names being changed. Even worship at the main village temple is a subdued affair as Brahmins have moved out of the settlement, the street and caste temples having gained importance.

Besides temples, tanks and sacred trees form an integral part of the sacred geography of any village. The tanks are not only for ritual ablutions by the Brahmins but served for the daily rituals of bathing and washing for the village folk. They became centres or nodes of activity and have an impact on the activity at the settlement level.

Besides villages have a common open space known as ‘manram’. Most often this is a platform provided under the shade of a tree and is the seat of justice as well as seat of local government. The village elders meet here under the leadership of the headman to discuss issues related to the village. In order to ensure the sanitary conditions of the place a small shrine or a temple came to be associated with it. Thus this space of the village came to have both religious and secular connotations. In the face of caste segregation this space is a symbol of village ‘unity’ and the unquestioned authority of the village headman and the elders. However in the present day due to political intrusion and other administrative legislation this space has lost its secular function.

14* Ayyangar is a sub sect amongst the Brahmin community; Aiyar being the other. The village Ayyangarkulam is so named because it was originally a Brahmin settlement. However it is over three decades that the Brahmins of this place have moved to the nearby town of Kancheepuram.
To conclude every village has this hierarchy of sacred elements starting with the village temple to the caste temples and deities of streets. The ritual intent of these structures is enmeshed into the physical fabric of the village and their importance to the rural folk manifests itself in the numerous daily and annual rituals; both secular and religious. Thus life in the village cannot be envisaged without a perception or understanding of these in built characteristics.

4.5 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND SETTLEMENT

The economic activity also is a generator of activities and associations, having an impact on the settlement as a whole. All the villages taken for case study except for the coastal villages were by and large agrarian involving almost the entire village population in some related activity. In the past this occupation of the household engaged both men and women at work. This custom did not prevail among the higher ranked groups who besides being landowners, felt that it was below the status of their castes to work in the fields side by side with hired labour. With respect to agriculture the main work was of course centred in the fields and the threshing of grain was done in common threshing yards near the fields or in the village. Here it is interesting to note that when such spaces are provided within the village they are provided at the edge of the agraharam or at the junction of streets where the agraharam street ends and the other streets begins. This is so located such that the threshing of grain could be done by people of lower castes and then carried into the agraharam by the Sudra. This practice is still evident in the village of Alwarthirunagar, Tirunelveli district and Munugapattu, Vellore taluk. (Ref. Plate No: 17 & 18) This practice is still evident today though the grain is directly transported to the markets from the threshing yards. Even though many houses within the agraharam have been settled in by other castes this traditionally bound ritual is still relegated to the same place.
MUNUGAPATTU VILLAGE

Pattern of Settlement: Compact Rectangular pattern

Religious buildings: The perumal Kovil is the main temple around which the settlement evolved. The other shrines are the Mariamman Kovil, Panchaliamman Kovil, Angalaamman Kovil and the Pillayar Kovil. These are the deities which guard the four corners of the village.

Community buildings: the Chitar madam and the Raghav madam are centres of community interest. Besides a community centre and Baal Vaadi (Day care Center) set up by the government are areas of secular interest.

TELEPHONE EXCHANGE

WATER TANK

VINAYAGAR KOVIL

PANCHALIAMMAN KOVIL

BAAL VAADI (Day Care Center)

Agriculture: The village is mainly an agricultural village with a fair amount of people involved in weaving. Note that the threshing yard is located to the northern end of the village at the junction of two roads

Development: The village has been electrified. Water supply is through a piped system. Post office and schools have been established. These do not alter the nature of settlement but have come up along the fringes of settlement so that all caste groups can participate.
Storage is an annual ritual that engages the household and takes place in the harvest season. The large areas of space that it takes within the dwelling give this activity its prominence. To commemorate this annual event Pongal (harvest festival) is celebrated in the month of January taking a very elaborate form at the village level involving participation of various communities and on a lesser scale within the household. Pongal marks the end of harvesting and the beginning of the new planting season and can be likened to thanksgiving in the Western Countries. This festivity engages men and women; the young and old; the cattle, the bullock carts and other conventional farm implements. (Ref: Plate No:) and is a festival of great gaiety amongst the villages giving rise to fairs and markets. The gifts in cash and kind received from the landlords are spent in the local fairs. As the festival is centred in the temple all associated festivities take place around it.

All other occupations were caste based and they provided essential services to the village. The occupations like those of the barber, the washerman and the carpenter are done in an itinerant manner. Traditionally the barber and carpenter performed their duties at the site of the house whenever called and did not require separate spaces within their dwelling. The washerman’s occupation involved the collecting of clothes and washing and ironing the same. The washing of clothes was done at the river or the tank, on banks specially reserved for them, the vast areas of land adjacent to the same being used for drying out the clothes. The drying of clothes was sometimes done within the village in the common open areas. If at all the ironing of clothes took place then it was done within his dwelling and required no extra space. As spaces within the house had no fixed function the activity could be performed at the convenience of the household.

Besides a number of supportive occupations were also found in most villages. Pottery was one such occupation, which was operated from the dwelling. This activity required not only the storage of raw material like clay, but also involved the drying and burning process and the storage of the finished product. These
THE HOUSES ARE DECORATED WITH COLOURFUL KOLAMS

P O N G A L (H a r v e s t F e s t i v a l)

This is a three day harvest festival and is one of the most colourful events in South India celebrated with great gaiety in the villages. In Tamilnadu, during Pongal, the sun is worshiped to signify its movement from Cancer to Capricorn. On Mattu Pongal, cows and bullocks highly prized in a rural society, are fed the freshly harvested rice as part of the thanksgiving ceremony.

In some towns and villages of the south, the festival is climaxed by a kind of a bull fight when young men try to wrest bundles of currency notes from the horns of a ferocious bull.

PONGAL IS A SPECIALLY PREPARED RICE DISH MADE WITH GREAT COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

FESTIVAL PONGAL

PLATE: 19
activities required large amounts of open spaces and thus the occupation had to necessarily spill in to the open space around the house or on to the streets. Spaces commonly held by groups of families sufficed for this purpose; if not the common spaces of the village were used. The products were made largely for local consumption and for sale at annual fairs within the village or nearby towns. Today the villagers have shifted to the more durable steel and aluminium vessels for storage and cooking, with the result the dependence of the community on the potter has waned. Today pottery as a traditional occupation involving a specific community is not at all visible in the rural areas. Even the traditional centres of pottery in and around Pudukottai in Thanjavur District hardly have a couple of families engaged in this profession and even they thrive only from making terracotta idols and mythic terracotta horses for temples.

Other traditional crafts like metal and copper work, gold and silver work found in villages around the Kumbakonam town, Thanjavur district, were also part of the dwelling activity. This has been de-linked from the dwelling and removed to modern smithies and workshops though a few *stapathis*¹⁴⁹ work from within the home. The profession now employs other people not necessarily belonging to the same hereditary caste. Thus the dwellings are no longer illustrative of the type as it existed in the past.

Centres of weaving both cotton handlooms and silk weaving are found around the historic centres of Madurai, Tirupur, Thanjavur and Kancheepuram. Entire villages practicing this occupation are found in and around these centres. Though many villages in and around Tirupur have mechanised the operation, in villages around the other centres this craft has persisted, mainly because of the support and demand for this traditional product from larger metropolitan cities. This still remains largely a cottage industry operated from the dwelling engaging the entire family in a

¹⁴⁹ *Stapathi* means a master craftsman who has gained knowledge of the craft hereditarily
series of associated activities. Men and women together with children join to make the final product. Spaces not only within the house but also outside the houses and predominately the streets are used for some allied activities such as dyeing, spinning, gumming, etc. Today these villages have formed co-operatives, which look after the sale of the products as well as the supplying of yarn and raw material to its members, with the result that new buildings to house the co-operatives have been put up in many villages.

In coastal villages the predominant occupation is fishing involving both men and women. Whereas men are engaged in the fishing activity, women are involved in the sorting and selling of the fish either locally or in markets. The fishing activity dictates the spatial layout of the settlement as these settlements are directly related to the activities at sea and the seashore.  

Weekly markets, are a feature of rural South India and everywhere they are a traditional institution. They dramatise the economic interdependence of villages and provide a conclusive refutation of the idea of economic self-sufficiency. The areas serviced by weekly markets vary from village to village and have more than a purely local reputation. There is also a degree of specialisation in weekly markets on the basis of goods sold there. Besides periodical fairs are held on the occasion of the festival of the local deities or on sacred days (full moon in Kartik or Chaitra) and are also visited by villagers in large numbers. These fairs serve many purposes, secular as well as religious.

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150 Ibid. Page 94
151 M.N. Srinivas; Village, Caste, Gender and Method: Essays in Indian Social anthropology, Oxford University Press; 1998
152 The month of Kartik corresponds to the months of November – December and Chaitra the month of April – May.
As already outlined economic and social reform have made inroads into a number of villages with the main idea of uplifting the poorer sections of rural society. The pattern of village administration has changed. A President, elected by a democratic process, looks after village governance, and he is supported by staff who have been appointed by the government. To house this function the government has built offices in most villages.

Primary schools under the control of the Panchayat have been built in all villages. Though children of affluent families seek education in better schools in nearby towns the children of the less affluent attend school in the village. Besides the school building doubles up as a community centre and is used in the evenings for adult education programs, and is let out for marriages and other functions. Thus the school not only educates but also provides for community interaction, which were earlier functions centred in the temple.

The provision of street taps and bore wells on almost all streets of the village meant that water is now available at the doorstep and the women no longer have to traverse distances to bathe and wash clothes or to bring water for domestic use. Thus the social interaction women had when meeting at the village well or tank has shifted to venues around the street tap. However the temple tank still holds good for religious ablutions.

As payment for goods and services have shifted from kind to cash the villager depends more on the small retail shops that have sprung up in villages for their daily grocery. These shops form venues of local gossip and social interaction.
4.7 SUMMARY

To summarise: - the settlement pattern of villages in all regions of Tamilnadu is compact and rectangular with very little difference, which is based mainly upon the dwelling patterns. Whereas the dwellings in the inner river and rain fed regions of the state are compacted into house rows fronting the street, the villages in the upland regions of the state are compacted into house rows which front common open spaces rather than the street. The settlement in the inner river and rain fed regions is dense around the notional centre of the village, notably the temple and breaks up into a plotted or clustered development towards the fringes. This is can be attributed to more recent developments and migration to and from the village. In the coastal areas the pattern of settlement is rectangular focusing again on the village temple or on street deities but houses are set apart from each other in a potted or clustered development.

To conclude: - the village as a whole forms a social unit within which a ‘community’ life obtains. The village temples and their mandapams continue to be symbols of village unity and spiritual need as they did in the past. The village wells and tanks, the streets and open spaces may be regarded as another category of symbols representing specific social cum utilitarian interest of sub groups of the village community. Because of development and reform other structures have been added to the village structure and these form new loci of activities in which almost all castes participate. The centres of the village have now therefore shifted to new centres. The village school, the street taps and bore wells, the strips of space in front of the village shops where the customers wait, rest or gossip, are all place of common secular interests belonging to another category of which the post office, the panchayat office are also a part. Thus past history and contemporary interaction among the members and households in the field of social, economical, religious and political activities sustain community life in a village to an impressive extent.