CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF LAND-OWNERSHIP
(2nd Century A.D. to 1770)

Tamilnadu had been functioning within the geographical barriers, on its north formed by the westward-swinging Eastern-Ghats, on its West by the Western-ghats. Literary traditions in Tamilnadu are not much earlier than the Sangam classics. Whatever character we have, earlier to them (for eg. early cave records) are not amenable to any rational analysis as historical material. It is a well accepted axiom that Geography of a region furnishes the essential back-drop to the matrix of its cultural motivations. Tamilnadu is eminently illustrative of this axiom which has verily held the key to the differentiation and integration of regional cultures, that throve from prehistoric times. Of the three dynasties, the Cheara, Chola and Pandyya, it was the land of the Cholas that had the largest stretch

1. Sangam classics: Comprise of Ettutthokai (Eight Anthologies) and Paththuppattu (Ten idyls).
of arable land at least from the early historic times. The political interests of the early Tamil dynasties did not exceed their chosen geographical spheres. So-far as Tamilnādu is concerned, the leap into pan - Indian political hegemony is noticeable only from the advent of the Imperial Chōlas. Early Tamil-history is primarily the conspectus of who among the three (Mūvēnáthar) of the zone was holding the upper hand at any given time. It would be unreasonable to rule out, the uniting and dividing effect of geography that was at the very base of political behaviour on the parts of these dynasties. 

The Four-fold division of the land(excluding the Pālai, which is essentially of a rain-shadow barren tract) into Kurinji, Mullai, Marutham and Neithal is an index of a degree of variegated and to some extent exclusive socio-cultural life of the country, the norms differing in each of these physiographic divisions.

2. A well known Tamil poem conventionally attributed to poetess Avvai declares

-Chōlanādu Šōrūdaittū
Pāndianādu Mutudaittū
Toḍainādu Sānrūrūdaittū"


4. Tīnai: Reference to such physiographic divisions is made by Sangam Literature, Ilampooranār the Commentator (13th Century A.D) gave general interpretation of these terms. Nachchinārkkikinar, the commentator(15th Century A.D) interpreted them in terms of "Behaviour".
It is Marutham which was most prosperous and habitable. The Marutham people received and conserved the impulses moving into Tamilnādu by land routes. The character of the entire early Tamil classics, supports the thesis that highly systematised social hierarchy and groups were achieved only by the early historic times - the period of the Śaṅgam classics.

In terms of production of food-grains Marutham gets the first place. The balance between habitable tracts and unsuitable terrain in Central Tamilnādu has been one of the key factors in the distribution of ancient vestiges, growth of its agricultural potential and movement of impulses in the early historic-period. The Iron-age culture distribution over Tamilnādu indicates that the coastal strip within five or ten miles of the coast in the districts south of South Arcot have very meagre vestiges. This suggests that the coastal strip, especially in Tanjore-district, was heavily water-logged and was apparently unfit even for sporadic habitation, not to mention permanent settlements. It was mainly because of the irrigational activities of the early

5. K.V. Soundara Rajan; The Iron Age Culture Provinces of India (Bharatiya Vidya - 1963)
Chōlas of the early historic period apparently, that the Chōla country became an area fit for cultivation and habitation and was to become the veritable rice-bowl of the Tamil country. In the pre-Christian centuries, the Kāvēri delta must have started almost within a few miles of Tiruchirāpalli, with the original Kāvēri meeting the sea near Puhār or Kāvērippattinam and with the other branch namely Kolliyād (Coleron) flowing further north to join the sea near Porto-Novo. The best part of the Tanjore district south of this main Kāvēri, especially its South-east part, could have been a swamp or brackish waste-land such as part of Vedārāṇyam (or Pt. Calimere) even to-day.

Rulers of the Šaṅgam epoch took keen interest in improving agricultural productivity. They cleared forests and reclaimed waste and virgin lands. The Classics refer to soil-fertility and high productivity. Crop-rotation, transplantation and other technical advances followed in due course. Tanjore (Thanjāvūr) being in the Kāvēri delta had the fullest advantage of all the innovations. An "Agrarian Society" emerged. Royal interest,


soil-fertility, and increased production attracted settlers. Large-scale agrarian settlements came into existence. The Smith, the Carpenter and other skilled workers too settled in the region as they found enough chances to make agricultural implements. "Villages" came into being accommodating craftsmen and ploughmen. Some of them became owners of land and others toiled for them. The toilers are spoken of as "Vinai Vālar". Land-owners enjoyed social esteem. A category of members of the society, styled as "Ilichanar", have been engaged in agricultural operations. They are ranked low in the social hierarchy.

The land-owners are drawn mainly from the community of "Vellālas". "Brahmins" as land-owners are few in number. The main trend of land-owning process consequently seems to have a denominational connotation


9. Vinai Vālar - 'Skilled labourers'


R.Chempakalakshmi: "Urbanisation in South-India"(Sec-
tional presidential Address - Forty-Seventh Indian History - Congress-session, Srinagar 1986) p.8.

as "Vellānvakai". K.A. Nilakanta Sastrī suggests that 'Vellān' means cultivator and "Vakai" refers to the nature of ownership. The traditional Vellāḷar land-owning peasants cultivated the lands and retained the "Kīlvāram" (Lesser share) and paid the "Mēlvāram" (Larger share) in kind, mostly to revenue officials. Hence, they were known as "Iṟaikudikāḷ". Evidently, the tax-paying village belonged to "Vellān vakai". The well-known commentator of Tamil classics of the medieval period, Nachchinārkkinīyar makes a subtle distinction between "Uḷuthu Uṇpavar" and "Uḷuviththu-Uṇpavar", among the Vellāḷa ranks. "Uḷuthu Uṇpavar" were those who engaged themselves in tilling the soil and "Uḷuviththu Uṇpavar" caused the cultivation of the soil with the help of others who toiled for them. The land owning non-cultivating Vellāḷas enjoyed esteemed social status. Some of them also filled covetable posts in the bureaucratic set-up.

The landed gentry, commonly known as "Perun kutikāl", also engaged bonded labour to cultivate a portion of their estate, besides leasing a portion to non-Vellāla cultivators ranked lower in the social hierarchy. Such employees were "Share-Croppers". This clearly suggests that at this point of time, in the history of Tamilnādu, land-ownership had become "Private and Communal". The Saṅgam Classics do not make exclusive mention of the activities of the Village community. References to terms like "Manṛam" and "Pothiyal" in the Saṅgam works mean that they were open venues where some social festivities of the village were conducted.

In the succeeding centuries too, the Vellānvakāi tenure with features of cultivating and non-cultivating peasantry continued to operate. But, modifications in the nature of land-ownership and management were inevitable, when political changes took place, since the third century A.D. Since the advent of the Pallavas of Kānchi to power, agrarian activities gained momentum and even "Non-marutham" tracts came under the


pressure of the plough. Improvement of irrigation caused expansion. The interval between the Ninth and the Twelfth Centuries A.D. is marked by this expansion in agrarian pursuits. Of the Six-hundred and forty-six inscriptions relating to the working of "Brahmadéya-Sabhas" distributed all over the Tamil-country, two-hundred and thirty four are found in the District of Tanjore. Most of them have been found in the Deltaic-area of Nāgapatnam, Māyūram, Nannilam, Kumbakōṇam, Pāpanāśam and Tanjore taluks. At this time "one out of every three villages was a Brahmin - Village in the Tanjore country".

There is undoubtedly an increasing number of "Brahmadéyas" (Gift to Brahmins) during medieval times. Such lands that were granted to Brahmins were "Cultivated" to begin with. Lands owned by traditional agriculturists under the tenure of Vellān Vakai had to be taken away. The Kāsakudi - copper Plate of Nandhivarman Pallavan makes a special reference to this eventuality. The


21. Text is as follows: "Palkūnra Köttathu Kīlvenāṭtu Pūṭhurum Kudiyūrurum ... . . . . munperrōraī mārri kudineekki Brahmadéyamākka perra Nallur nārpērppar"
technique was perfected and actively adopted in the reign of Rājarāja Chōla I. An inscription of the seventh regnal year of the king, refers to a general order passed in respect of the Brahmadéyas which states "Kāñis" (estates) of all persons other than brahmins, be sold out; exemptions are made to cases of servants holding lands under service tenure". 22 Rājarāja appointed a special officer to supervise the process of eviction. To maintain the unique character of the Brahmadéyas, Rājarāja insisted that, if a brahmin of a Brahmadéya village mortgages or sells his share of land to any Sūdra (lower in rank in the ladder of caste-hierarchy) he should be thrown out of the community". 23

This practice fostered communal feeling of ownership. 24 Ritual and conventional injunctions did not allow the brahmins to engage themselves in agricultural operations as tilling, sowing, reaping and the like. Hence the need arose for forming organisations like the "Sabha" for management of agricultural activities. Actual cultivation had to be done by share-croppers and serfs

23. Ibid., p.579
belonging to communities ranked lower in the social-order castewise. The "ūr's" of Vellān vakai village were parallel organisations. The "ūr" was filled by Vellāla land-holders. They managed agricultural operations and exercised control over other communities who were either "share-croppers or serfs".

The custom of granting lands to Hindu temples (Devadāna), conferred the status of land-owners to these religious institutions. The custom seems to have taken roots in the early medieval period. Temples (Kōils) existed in Tamilnadu since the Śaṅgam age. Leaf, flower, fruit or water was offered to the Deities by the faithful. Construction of structural temple began during the rule of the Pallavas of Kānchi. Since then, as a consequence of the 'Bakthi-Movement' and royal-patronage, temple-building became widespread and many temples arose in the Tanjore country. The enormous cost of maintenance of these temples, commanded large endowments in the shape of land-grants. Members of the royal-family, state-officials, feudatories and Village assemblies granted lands to the innumerable temples.


"Dévadāna" lands were "Iraiyili lands" (Tax-free lands).

The veracity of the claim of profusion of land-grants to temples can be judged by taking into account, the large endowments made to the Brahadeesvara temple at Tanjore. "Thirty five villages were granted to this Temple, five of which had thousand acres of arable land; five had five-hundred to thousand acres; three from five-hundred to three-hundred acres and six above fifty to hundred acres". 27 "Towards remuneration to be paid to the temple-staff 576.25 Vélis (i.e. approximately three-thousand acres) of land" were also granted. 28

The middle Chōla-period witnessed construction of temples in Tiruchchēṅkāttān-Kudi, Thiruvaiyāru, Thirukkadaiyur, Nāgapatnam, Thiruvalanjuli, Thirumullaivādi, and other places in Tanjore district. 29 They were well endowed, though not on a par with the Brahadeesvara temple at Tanjore.

Not only that 'Dévadāna' lands were carved out of Vellānvakai but some of the Brahmadéya lands were


also transferred to build up the pool. Those who lost by such transfers were compensated with gifts of land elsewhere. For instance, five villages granted to the Brahadeesvara temple namely Peraiyur, Andakkudi, Sulur, Kusavur, Kottaram, were all of Vellanvakai villages and two others were of Brahmadeya villages. Evidently, the Cholas of Thanjavur must have given importance to Devadana tenures. Even then the Devadana lands were placed under the custody of the brahmins to a large extent and with the Vellalas to a lesser extent on tenancy basis. These managerial classes maintained the temple, and conducted rituals out of the share of produce fixed as dues to the temple. They however cultivated only a portion of the lands, sub-letting the rest to others, carrying out agricultural operations with the help of serfs and slaves. The "managerial-class" enjoyed the surplus profits.

Yet another variety of land-tenure in vogue during the period is known as "Service Tenure". In lieu of their services to government and other public institutions, lands were assigned to public servants. Of the seven elements of the State, Bureaucracy was considered as

one. The bureaucratic machinery was perfected by the Imperial Cholas of Tanjore. Yet, cash-payment by public treasuries seems to have been rare. The popular method had been that of assigning to each, according to his status, a certain extent of land. Absolute proprietorship was implied including the right of inheritance. Such assignments often included a whole village or even district. Many officials are described as leaders of particular villages or 'nādus' (Udaiyān, Kilān). It was open to assignees to sell or otherwise alienate or give away in part or as a whole the rights assigned to them.

In some cases the public-servants had the rights in revenue or 'larger share' (Melvāram) of the produce of lands. This practice is more often adopted in remunerating Military officials. Lands allotted to Public-servants either as "Jeevitham" or as a right to enjoy the revenue only are known as "pre-bendal estates". They fetched one-third or two-thirds of the crops of

33. Ibid.,
34. Ibid.
wet-lands or one-fifth of the produce of dry-land for the beneficiary.\textsuperscript{35} Two Inscriptions (dated 1117 A.D. and C. 1121 A.D.) speak of the grant of certain extent of arable land as "Veerabhoga" assigned to Kaikōlas from Merkar-nādu, who served in the palace of Gangaikonda Cholapuram.\textsuperscript{36} Lands assigned thus were originally in the possession of Vellalas. The transfers often reduced the status of the Vellalas to that of tenants of the 'Jeevitham holders' or as cultivators of public servants with rights in the revenue.

Village-assemblies too assigned lands to their servants. Temples parcelled out their lands and assigned them to its servants. Individual donors too assigned lands for particular services—(Āriyak-kūttu Tattārakkāṇi etc.) In the ninth regnal year of Rājnrāja I, an endowment for the annual performance of Āriyak-kūttu was made (c994 A.D.)\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, from the fourth regnal year of Rājendra I, at the temple of Tiruvārūr, an endowment of Tattārkkāṇi is recorded.\textsuperscript{38} Temple-lands were assigned as "Bhōgas" for performance of stipulated services.

Villages-assemblies also created "Bhattavrittis"

\textsuperscript{35} E.Kathleen Gough : "Modes of production in Southern India" (Economic and political Weekly—Annual number Bombay.1980P.343.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.,
for the maintenance of teachers in schools or for those who made discourses on Purānic themes. Lands were also allotted to artisans, carpenters, village-physicians and others performing socially useful services. Lands assigned to the custodians of village-tanks are designated as "Éripatti". 39

The end of the Chōla reign seems to have witnessed some modifications in the patterns of land-ownerships. N. Karashima opines that the changes had occurred because of new economic developments that the later half of the rule of the Imperial Chōlas witnessed. The imperialistic expansion of Rājarāja I and RājendralI paved the way for the flow of wealth by way of booty, and tributes from outside the Tamil country. The wealth was distributed among the people. 40 The productivity had also increased due to the improvement of the Irrigation system. The ground for the growth of big land-lords owning vast estates had been well prepared. 41 The gulf that already existed in economic status in terms of land-ownership had widened. Large-scale land-transfers among individuals or between institutions and temples are


40. Noboru Karashima: "The Prevalence of private land ownership in the lower Kave'ri valley in the late Chōla period and its historical implications" (Paper read at the joint seminar of Japanese and Indian Scholars held at the Madras University-5.3.1980) P. 1 and 10.

41. Ibid.
noticed. Karashima cites many examples from the Tiruchirapalli region.\textsuperscript{42}

The district of Tanjore could not have been an exception to this general trend. Karashima himself cites a Vēdāraṇyam inscription. Titles like 'Udaiyān', 'Kilāvan' and 'Araiyan' suggest the emergence of affluent landed gentry. Similar titles like "Pillai", and 'Mudali' must have been assumed by land-lords of other castes than brahmins.\textsuperscript{43} There is enough evidence to conjecture that the martial communities should have also been benefited. Military expansion should have provided them the opportunity to acquire private wealth. The Chōlas recruited soldiers for the army and in the process drew heavily from communities like "Kaḷlar" and "Palli". Such martial-communities had enough opportunities of appropriating a lion's share of the war-booty.\textsuperscript{44} The Socio-economic corpus now included the martial communities too. Along with brahmins and Veḷḷāḷas, a new

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} N.Karashima: "South-Indian history and Society" studies from inscriptions 850 A.D. to 1800 (O.U.P.Madras 1984) Pp.31-35.

strain of estate owners were added. The new economic climate created a situation of individual purchase of lands with the wealth acquired by self-effort. "Private ownership" along with "Communal ownership" had come into vogue towards the close of the rule of the imperial-Chōlas.

The Nāyak and 'Marātha' rulers followed the practice of the Imperial Chōlas. They are the predecessors of the British East-India Company. The Tanjore-country experienced intermittent wars and the effects of the absence of a strong central power were acutely felt. "Fourteenth-Century TamilNadu did not witness the peaceful and prosperous days of Chōla-Pāndyas". The view is supported by Serof and Pavlov. Imposition of heavy duties that began during the reign of the Nāyaks, reached its peak during the rule of the Marāthas. Andre Freire, since remarking on the oppressive policies of Eköji, says that "he even appropriated


47. R. Sathanathier: "Tamilakam in 17th Century" (Madras 1956) p.83.
the treasures of the pagodas and their large possessions."  
Fathers Britto, in his letter (1683) says that "Ekōji took away four-fifths of the produce ...... that the sale of the whole harvest was not sufficient to pay the tax."  

Famines too, did not spare the Tanjore country. Proenza gives information that Tanjore under Vijaya Rāghava Nāyak suffered from severe famines.  
Travellers from abroad who visited the country during this period refer to the famines of 1618-19; 1645; 1659-60. Production of food crops was affected.  
The rulers of the land were unable to meet the deficit in production of crops. Agriculture being the back-bone of the economy, its failure wrought havoc. Improvement of techniques and expansion of irrigational facilities became dreams. Reclamation of land could not be undertaken and total extent under the plough remained constant. Patterns of land-holding too remained static. Veḷḷānvakai, Brahmadēya, Dévadāna and other types of tenure of Chōla

49. Ibid., p.174.  
50. V.Viriddhagireśan: "The Nayaks of Tanjore" (Journal of Annamalai University. Volume X No.2, December 1940) p.231.  
times continued to hold sway. The hereditary, 'land-
grant economy' was perpetuated.

The Nāyaks and the Marāthas too made grants
of lands and increased the number of settlements. Brah-
mins, .Temples, and charitable institutions known as
"Chathrams" were the beneficiaries. Grant of lands of
sizable areas are less in number and 'Service grants'
are rarely met with. The grant of about ten villages
to twelve brahmins residing in the Nāttiyakāpuram in
Śīrkāli Śeemai during the reign of Shāji and another
dated 16th August 1735 of a grant of a village in the
reign of Tukkōji in Pattukkōttai Śeemai to a Pattar
of Ramēśwaram temple for running a feeding house are
on record. ⁵² The grant made to the Nāgore Durga, during
the reign of Pratāpsingh appears to be larger in extent
as it consisted of fifteen villages. ⁵³ Pratāp Singh
seems to have welcomed Śāṅkarachārya of the Kānchi-Mutt
to Kumbakonam and endowed the Mutt liberally. ⁵⁴

Out of sixty inscriptions of land-grants
made to the Thyāgaśār temple at Tiruvārūr, forty-eight

⁵² Rangachari. : " Topographical Inscriptions of the
Madras Presidency 1919, Tanjore District" - No. 839
A and B.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ K.R. Subramanian: "Marātha Rājas of Tanjore" (Madras
1928) p.48.
belong to the Chōla period and the remaining to the later period. It is to be noted that the grants made by the Nāyak and Marātha rulers were not of 'Villages'. They were merely vast or extensive areas of land. The settlements were in the form of "Agrahāras". Grants made to temples and other institutions were not massive. Regarding the obligation of maintenance of lands the latter rulers have not ushered in changes. The Chōla system of village administration continued.

During this interval of time, in other areas of Tamilnadu, village autonomy had been replaced by the "Ayagar System". Under this arrangement, landowners in villages depended on officers like Karṇam, Reddi, Vettiyan and Talaiyari. Tanjore country could not resist the impact of the new system operating all around. Karṇam, Vettiyan, and Talaiyari were appointed here too. But, they could not supercede the land-owners. Every village of Tanjore, had a village-council consisting


of land-owners. The village-officials had to function only with the concurrence of the decisions of this Council.59 The Councils possessed the right of acquiring or disposing the lands and other kinds of property in the name and on behalf of the village.

During Marātha rule too, the same set-up had prevailed. The Mirāśdars maintained a record of rights, and shares of each land-owner of the village. The record was named "Naṭtukkaṇakku". The 'Naṭtavar' (Proprietors of land) often met to settle questions arising out of the Mirāśdars' share of the productive land and similar queries.60 To manage Temple-lands, trustees were appointed. Land owners, bailing from higher castes in the social-order were drawn to fill the post of trustees. The trustees known as "Sthānikas", protected the interests of the temple and it was through them that the temple tenants represented their grievances. Temple-lands continued to be tax-free (Sarvamāṇya).61


61. Ibid., p. 354.
The rule of the Telugu and Marātha chiefs (aliens to Tamilnadu) witnessed marginal changes as far as land-ownership is concerned. It was a period of intermittent wars and short-lived successes. Migrations of people hailing from different communities, from one part of Tamilnadu to another were frequent. For instance, the community of Kallars began to penetrate the Kāverī basin. Telugu, Kannadiga and Marātha immigrants poured in steady streams into the Tanjore region. They were encouraged by the ruling princes. The expansion of Vijayanagar under Nāraśa Nāyaka brought in a stream of Telugu-settlers. Such streams had members drawn from the Niyōgi, (Telugu brahmins) Kānarese, Tuḻuvan, Kaverities (Vaduka Nāyaks) and Jettis.

The first Marātha colony was planted during Ekōji's rule and was by brahmins. The non-brahmin Marātha immigrants were mostly of the martial class. Among them, ninety-eight families claimed higher social status (Kānnanguḻu). To this section belonged the Rulers

63. Ibid., p.172.
64. Ibid., p.172.
and their kith and kin. The "fighting classes" (Soldiers) were ranked lower in social hierarchy.\textsuperscript{65} The intelligent Telegu and Marātha brahmins were able administrators. Other communities filled the army ranks.\textsuperscript{66} The Bureaucracy came to be filled with Telugu and Marātha immigrants. They were remunerated by grants of lands termed as "Mānyams". Marātha brahmins, particularly became owners of vast estates.

A class of intermediary land-owners were projected in the upland areas of Pattukkōttai and Tanjore. This action was taken evidently to meet demands of diplomacy and political strategy. There was need in these areas to check the turbulent Marava and Kallar chiefs. Representatives were chosen from the Kallar community and endowed with vast landed estates. When Pratāpsingh ruled at Tanjore, there were thirteen chiefs belonging to the Kallar community. Amidst this, "Intermediary landowners" we find a single member belonging to the brahmin community.\textsuperscript{67} This arrangement during Telugu and Maratha rule of Tanjore patently increases the inequality, a vast majority of the population remaining

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p.173.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{67} Modi Records (Saraswathi Mahal library, Tanjavur), \textit{Vol.III} - Bundle No.127 C, p.8.
"landless". Caste-factors have influenced the process. Yet, Brahmins and Vellālas form the majority. Fresh grants made by the Nāyaks and Marāthas were confined to few communities only, other than Brahmins and Vellālas. The effects of this arrangement on agrarian society can be summarised:

a) Creation of a graded socio-economic structure

b) Encouragement of Tenancy cultivation:

c) Initiation of "Agrestic Servitude" -

Gradation in socio-economic structure can be understood in relation to the general pattern of land-ownership that prevailed in Medieval times. In Medieval times, 'common-ownership of land' had been the prevailing mode. In such a pattern, the rights on land were held commonly. The community formed a proprietary unit in relation to land. The community was the collective-owner over whole or part of the village. Baden Powell defines "community" in this context as a "group of landlords". According to the Imperial Gazetteer it is "Joint ownership of land in village by Mīrāśdars in common". In a 'Joint village', the dominant community


claimed proprietary right over cultivable and waste-
lands, and hence 'oligarchic', clothed in a democratic 
mantle. Whatever be the pattern, the dominance in a 
Tanjore village was by landed aristocrats.

The distinctive feature of "common-ownership" 
was the prevalence of hierarchy of propertied class. 
The propertied class was the "managerial class" - agricul-
tural operations, being carried out by tenants and serfs. 70
The 'Managerial class' in the Vellānvakai villages was 
dominated by vellālas and those in Brahamadēya villages 
by brahmins. In 'Jeewitham' villages, officials Military-
gentry formed this class, which included brahmins and 
vellālas. In 'Dévadāna' villages too, the brahmins and 
vellālas dominated. In an Ėka-bhōga' village, a single 
brahmin land-lord was the manager. 71

The 'managerial class' was responsible for 
production, revenue and for maintaining law and order.
They were at the top of the social and economic ladders. 
Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Washermen and other service -
kin-ship communities were controlled by them. The commu-
unity of serfs belonged to the vast majority of the land-
less. The 'Landless' were to cultivate and their living-

conditions were miserable. They were ranked as the lowest in the social order. (Kadaiśiyar). 72 They formed the "Panchamā" caste comprising of 'Pallars' and 'Paṟaiyars'. They received the minimum share of the produce after the customary seasonal harvests, produce, after appropriation by the Land-lord, was distributed among service-communities, share-cropers and serfs. 73 The land-lords' share was in proportion to the extent of land held by each. This tenure is sometimes styled as "Gana-bhōgam". 74 This was followed by the system of "Karaiyedu", whereby each land-holder was allotted a portion of the land of the village, to be cultivated by him and he was free to enjoy the share of produce thereof. 75 In all these different types of


75. Ibid., p.130.
ownership, the 'proprietary class' did not work in the fields. The system fostered the rise and growth of a 'leisurely-class' of non-cultivators. This was the nucleus that bred the "Absentee land-lordism" of a later era.

In the Vellan-vakai village, the non-cultivating Vellalas land-lords leased some portion of land collectively to share-croppers, and cultivated other portions with the help of slaves. Thus, in the social-strata of the village, the share-croppers came second in rank. On a par with this class were Vellalas of free peasants who were "owner cultivators" (Cultivating by their own labour). The artisan-Communities claimed co-equal status with this group. Slaves were at the bottom of the ladder. Similarly in Brahmadéya villages, the non-cultivating land-lords belonged to the brahmin caste. Toiling non-brahmin communities stood next to them, and the slave-communities fitted themselves in the last cadre.

In the case of 'Devadana' villages, right
from the start, cultivation and estate-management were undertaken by the State as well as village assemblies headed by brahmins, Vellālas or Government servants. Direct management by temple-authorities was not possible since the estates were unwieldy. Hence, leasing of lands was inevitable (Lease-system). While leasing the lands, preference was given to brahmins and then to affluent Vellāla land-owners. They sub-let the lands to cultivating tenants belonging to other communities. The sub-tenants were called "Kudimaiudayavar". 76

Land-ownership patterns gave birth to a graded socio-economic agrarian society in Tanjore-district. The socio-economic structure of villages under different tenures during the Chōla period can be briefly indicated thus:

76. Saraswathi Menon: "Historical development of Tanjore Kīsān Movement" - (Economic and Political Weekly Annual - Number, February 1979) p.403.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic structure</th>
<th>Social Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vellān Vākai</td>
<td>Brahmadēya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Kinsmen of affluent Vellāla landowners who were non-cultivators</td>
<td>a) Kinsmen of brahmāns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Landowners

2. Tenancy

Non-Vellālas (Śūdāras)  
Śūdras  
Śūdras  
Śūdras  
Śūdras

3. Agricultural labourers

Pallār and Paraiyār  
Low ranked Śūdāras, Pallārs Paraiyārs  
Pallārs and Paraiyārs  
Pallārs and Paraiyārs  
Pallārs and Paraiyārs
The following marginal changes took place during the Nāyak and Marātha rule:

1. Influence of the traditional Vellāla and brahmin land-holders did not diminish.

2. 'Pillai', 'Udalīyān' and others come into the picture as land-owners

3. Kallar-chieftains become estate-owners as a sequel to diplomacy practised by the rulers

4. Immigrants (alien to Tamilnadu) like Telugu brahmins, and Kannada speaking Marāthas join the ranks of land-owners.

The 'Land owning class' now consisted of members belonging to other communities as well, along with brahmins and Vellālas.

In this agrarian set-up the 'producing class' consisted of share-croppers and tenants. Actual toiling was by serfs. Inscriptional and other evidences provide the following picture. Tenants undertook cultivation by leasing the land from the land-lords. The land-lord enjoyed the "Mēlvāram" right over the land and shared the income with the tenant, based on agreement arrived at after a due consideration of the nature of the soil and the kind of crop raised on it. The share-cropper enjoyed "Kudivāram". They are referred to as "Kudikal".

They were dependent on the land-lords and lived in the houses belonging to their lords. Some of them had hereditary right of cultivation. A heavy burden of payment weighed with these cultivators. During the Chōla days, the rental (Kudivāram) amounted from 1/3 to 2/3 of the produce.

Towards the end of the Chōla period the number of "petty-land owners" had increased. Changes that took place during the rule of the Nāyaks and Marāthas have already been referred to. The country experienced misrule and there was stagnation of agricultural operations. The rulers made heavy demands. The local governors of Vijayanagar, in collusion with the brahmin and Vellāla land-lords, oppressed petty land-owners. Open revolts have been witnessed in the fifteenth-century in places like Tiruvaiyār, Korukkal, and Tiruvaikavir of


Tanjore district. During the rule of Ekōji, exactions reached the peak and small landowners had no option but to either migrate or become tenants. Changes in patterns of land-ownership, did not improve the condition of labourers. The productive labour force was tied to the soil, and in this respect, their condition was analogous to the serfs of medieval Europe.

The unbroken expansion of area of arable land and the improvement of irrigational facilities, created the demand for labour-force during the Chōla rule; supply of labour could not keep pace with demand, and hence the land-owning class had to consolidate the available labour. Controls were inevitable. Mobility of labour was curbed. Slaves were invariably the properties of masters. Inscriptions of Rājendrā II, found at Thirukkārukāvūr and Āchālpuram dated A.D.1177.

81. Ibid., Pp.24-27.


mention that on the death of her husband, a woman inherited "land, slaves, jewels and other valuables and the cattle of her deceased husband". Such conventions were in vogue under the Nayaks and Marathas. The landlord's rights over the serfs have been perpetuated. Slaves escaping to other areas was a common phenomenon, and the condition of the slaves is "comparable to the serfs of medieval Russia".

84. S.I.I. Part II. P.5.

85. V.Vriddhagiresan, "The Nayaks of Tanjore" (Annamalai Nagar 1942) p.49.