CHAPTER - II

TAMIL SOCIETY UNDER COLONIAL SETUP

Tamil Nadu: geography and extent:

The geographical features of a country influences the civilisation and culture of the people living there. The customs and manners of any land have its origin in the times of yore and are handed from generation to generation. Tamil Nadu, the country of the Tamils, is situated in the eastern side of the southern tip of the Indian Peninsula. The old Madras presidency consisted of Tamil Nadu, great part of Andhra Pradesh and some parts of the present Kerala and Mysore.

In the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth century, when the Mughals had established their Subhas or provinces in the south, the entire southern part of India south of Godhavari was known as the 'Carnatic', with its two broad divisions - Golkonda carnatic and Bijapur Carnatic. It is in this carnatic region that the British found political advantage and established the Madras Presidency composing the Tamil Nadu and the surrounding regions. The eastern sea coast of the Tamil country was known as the Coromandal Coast.

1. "This is Tamil Nadu", Twenty first International geographical congress, [Madras, 1962], P.1.
Geographically Tamil Nadu can be divided into two natural divisions: the eastern coast plain and the hilly region along with north and west. The coastal plain is subdivided into (a) coromandal plain comprising the districts of Chingleput, South Arcot and North Arcot, (b) the aluvial plain of the Kaveri delta extending over Tanjavur and parts of Tiruchinapalli districts and (c) the dry Southern plains in Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts.

In a statement placed before the House of Commons in 1913, the Madras Presidency or the Presidency of Fort. St. George, as it was called then, was described as occupying the north-east by the newly created provinces of Bihar and Orissa. It has irregular northern boundary touching Hyderabad state and Bombay Presidency; Mysore state to the west and on other sides founded by sea. For administrative purpose the Amini divi and Laccadevi islands formed parts of the presidency.

Establishment of the Madras Presidency:

(a) British Acquisition of Madras: The British East India Company with the object of establishing trading

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3. East India (progress and condition), statement exhibiting to moral and mental progress and condition of India 1911 - 12, (London, 1913) P.9.

centres acquired Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, which later become the capitals of Bombay, Bengal and Madras presidencies respectively. There were several trials and tribulations, before the English established in textile trade, for which purpose they established a factory at Surat in 1612. On the east coast they established their factory at Machilipatam, the great part of the kingdom of Golkonda on the Coromandal coast. But Dutch rivalry, Portuguese jealousy, and the oppresson of the local muslim officials of the sultan of Golkonda, forced them to abandon Machilipatam. The factories established in 1621 at Pulicat (Puli-Kattu) and at Armugaum in 1626 had to be given up owing to Dutch rivalry and unsuitability of the people for trade. When the court of directors of the East India company at London decided to dismantle the factory at Armugaum, in 1638-39, the English Agent at Machilipatam sent his subordinate Francis Day to find out a suitable site for the English factory. Day visited the neighbourhood of Madras in 1639, and obtained a grant from the Raja of Chandragiri, through the good offices of Damarla Venkatadri, to build a fort at Madraspatnam. the construction of Fort.St.George began in

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6. Ibid.
March 1640. As Madraspatnam grew in importance, it came to be known by the simple name Madras. On 24th September 1641 it was made the chief of the English factories in the east Coast. The privileges of English at Madras were conferred on them by Mir Jumla, when he conquered the neighbourhood of Madras in 1644. "In 1684 Madras was made a presidency." In 1688 it was provided with a municipal government with a Major and ten Aldermen, of whom seven were to be Indians. The development of Madras city on the Modern lines belongs to recent History.

(c) Conquest of Tamil Nadu:

The city of Madras has been described as the 'birthplace' of British India. It is, in fact, from their headquarters at Fort St. George at Madras that the East India Company acquired the whole of the Carnatic including Tamil Nadu. This they were able to achieve through wars, alliances with the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Arcot. The British diplomacy also played an important part.

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10. Nageswami R., Art and culture of Tamil Nadu, (Delhi, 1980), P.131.
in the acquisition procedure.\textsuperscript{11} Not withstanding the threat presented by the French in their expansion policy, they acquired in 1767 the Jaghir of Chengelpet from Nawab Mohammad Ali of Arcot in return for the services rendered to him against Chanda Sahib, Nanja Raj of Mysore and the French. As a result of the Mysore wars between 1792 and 1799 resulting in death of Tippu Sultan, they acquired the western region of Tamil Nadu by the treaty of Srirangapattam. In 1799 they imposed a treaty on the Marathas of Thanjavur and forced the Maratha ruler to part with his kingdom on the Kaveri delta. "With the acquisition of Kongu Nadu from Mysore, Thanjavur from the Marathas and the Carnatic from the Wallajahs, the English gained possession of the entire Tamil country"\textsuperscript{12}.

\textbf{Countinuing Colonial Rule by Charter Acts} :-

After the conquest of India the purely commercial character of the East India Company's administration did not continue long. The British Parliament had its vigilant eyes cast on the affairs of the Company and even Clive's administration was brought under the scrutiny of the London Parliament. The Regulating Act of 1773 was passed to check some of the Company's more undesirable activities\textsuperscript{13}. Under

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Henry Davision Love., \textit{Op.cit.}, P.105.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Rajayyan.K., \textit{History of Tamil Nadu : 1565 - 1982}, (Madurai, 1982), P.211.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Kabir Humayun., \textit{The Indian Heritage}, (Bombay, 1955), P.28
\end{itemize}
the provisions of this Act, Warren Hastings became the first Governor-General, under whom were the Governors of the provinces. Pitt's India Act of 1784 placed further restrictions on the Company and its officers. The impeachment of Hastings revealed again the grave defects in the administration and led to demands for greater Parliamentary control. The British Parliament had realised that if India was to supply regular revenue, it had to be properly governed. Hence, under the Regulating Act of 1773, the structure of the Mughal administration was maintained as much as possible, while the British were left free to concentrate on revenue collection and trade. The British government had the policy of renewing the life of the East India Company as a trading unit by passing the Charters Acts at regular intervals, and controlling the company's administration through those Acts. In addition to the charter Act many other Acts were passed to regulate and strengthen the administrative machinery in India.

According to the provisions of the Regulating Act, the Governor-General at Bengal and the Governors of Bombay and Madras were required to obey, the orders of the Directors of the East India Company at London, and keep the Directors constantly informed of all matters affecting the interests

14. Ibid.,

15. Ibid., P.28
of the Company. The Governors of Bombay and Madras were made subordinates to the Governor-General. The Governor-General was given legislative powers. The act also provided for the establishment of a Supreme Court with a Chief Justice and three Puissant judges. To bring discipline in administration, the Act prohibited the servants of the company receiving presents and bribes. 16

Pitt's India Act, passed in 1784 was important due to the fact that it made the Governor-General supreme over the Governor of other Presidencies, namely Bombay and Madras Presidencies. According to the Act, "The British Parliament claimed supremacy over the possessions of the company in India" 17. The Charter Act of 1793 renewed the charter of the Company for 20 years, while the Charter Act of 1813 renewed the Company's Charter for another 20 years. The Act of 1813 deprived the monopoly of the Company to trade with India and made certain rules in regard to Indian revenue. Again, the Charter of the Company was Renewed by the Charter Act of 1833. 18 This Act centralised in the administration of the Company in India. The Governor-General in Bengal became the Governor-General of Power India and was entrusted with the

16. Rajayyan.K., op.city, P.213

17. Mahajan.V.D., Modern Indian History (1707) to the present Day, (New Delhi, 1988), P.258

18. Forthnightly report dated on 19th January 1927, No.255-1, Public Department, (Madras, 1927), P.1
powers to control, Superintendent and direct the Civil and Military affairs. Other Presidencies Bengal and Bombay—came to be under the control of the Governor-General.) The number of the Madras Governor's council was reduced to two. The Charter Act of 1853 renewed again the Charter of the East India Company and "allowed it to retain possession of Indian territories in trust for Her Majesty, her heirs and successors", until Parliament should otherwise provide."\(^{19}\)

With the so-called Mutiny of 1857, when the Indian spirit rose against the wayward rule of the East India Company, there was an agitation in England against the constitution of the rule of the Company in India. Along with Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, 'came the Government of India Act of 1858 abolishing the rule of the East India Company\(^{20}\). This Act declared that henceforth India shall be governed by and in the name of the Queen, and vested in her all the territories and powers of the Company. However, the Government of India had to be carried on by the Viceroy on behalf of the Queen, while the military and naval forces of the Company were transferred to the Crown\(^{21}\).

18. Forthnightly report dated on 19th January 1927, No.255-1, Public Department, (Madras, 1927), P.1
20. Sukhodayam., Arani, 2nd April, 1925
21. Satyavadi on editorial regarding the British rule, Mysore, 20th December, 1922.
After the Queen's proclamation in 1858, there were a number of changes in the Viceroy's executive council. By the Indian Councils Act of 1861 he was given the power to create new provinces, and the power to appoint Lieutenant Governors. He was given the powers to alter or divide the limits of any Presidency, province or territory. Agitation against British administrative methods was the dominant feature everywhere in the country, for the British generally did not give laws to better the condition of the people, not were the Indians properly represented in the Viceroy's Council and the Provincial Councils of Madras and presidencies. In 1877 Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, which signified practical hegemony of England over India.

Race and Language:

The ancient people of south India are grouped under Dravidian race and Tamil Nadu was generally known as Dravida Nadu. The Kadas and the Puliyars living in the South-Western past of Tamil Nadu may be taken to represent the early racial group.

22. Forthnightly report 1921 letter from the secretary govt of madras to the secretary, Govt of India, Home Dept. dated 20th May 1921. No. 1730-1.


The language of the Tamilians, spoken and written, is Arava or Tamil. It is the oldest, richest and most highly organised of the Dravidian languages, plentiful in vocabulary, cultivated from a remote period. It has copious literature couched in shendamil or perfect Tamil, in contrast with the colloquial form of speech, which is called Kodum or coolom (rude). The language has an alphabet of its own.

Hindu Religion:

Religion plays an important role in the mundane and spiritual life of man. Nilakanta Sastri aptly describes the role of religion in respect of Hindu society. Thus the important aspect of the Hindu religion was its concern from the earliest times with all aspects of the individual and social life of man and its attempt to regulate the social set up in the light of an accepted philosophy. The concept of Dharma, the entire system of Varnas (classes) and Astamas (stages of life), and all the rituals to be observed in daily life and in the important crises of the life cycle belong to this sphere. Religion aims at the manifestation of divinity already in men, makes no distinction between man and man, between the high and low, the rich and the poor,

25. Ibid.,
26. Hudson. T.C., Indian census Ethnography; 1901 – 1931 [New Delhi, 1931], P.34.
the strong and weak. All are equal in the eye of religion. Tamil Nadu has emerged from the primitive Nature worship to the Aryan way of worship, in the process of which it is influenced by several religious doctrines.

The most primitive form of worship in Tamil Nadu is represented by the village gods who were propitiated by awful bloody sacrifices and by putting up devil dances. The village deities were Mariyamman, Kateri and such other primitive gods and goddesses. Later, with Saivism, Murugan and Siva came to be the oldest among the popular deities. Murugan "has a clear evaluation in Tamil Nadu and different kinds of worship beginning with the veriadal (a kind of devil dance) and animal sacrifice and culminating in the sophisticated puja performed by the Brahmin priests to the accompaniment of Vedic chants. These priests appear to have belonged to Saiva Kalaumkha sect, who advocated Sakti cult and advocated even human sacrifices to appease the gods. The deity was housed originally in humble brick structures, later in exavated cavities in rocks and still later in elaborately structured edifices - the temples.


The Tamilians have built great temples all over Tamil Nadu known for their architecture. During the Pallava period were built the structural temples of Kailasanathar at Kanchipuram, Virattaneshvara temple at Tiruttani' and other temples. The Cholas were great builders of temples. Some were named after living kings and queens and dedicated in their names to gods and goddesses whether Saivite or Vaishnавite. Some temples were named after those who were dead. Thus, the Rajarajesvvara temple at Tanjore was built by Rajaraja I and dedicated after him while still he was alive. The Arinjingesvara temple of Melpadi was also built by him in the name of Arinjinaga, who had died at Arur. A temple in memory of Kulottunga Chola I was dedicated in the 7th year of Vikrama Chola his son. It was called Kulottunga Choleswara temple.

Temples have played an important part in village administration. In fact, the social and religious life of the people centred around the local temple. "Most of the temples built during the Chola period were royal foundations and as such built by kings or queens, or by great generals and commanders." In addition to its religious duties, the

32. MER, Appendix B; No.139 of 1895.
temple was associated with social service such as (a) hospitality and charity; (b) imparting education, (c) affording Medical relief, and (d) acting as a Bank to the village assembly, in case of need. Temple administration was an important branch of local government in the medieval south Indian Polity. As Mahalingam observes: "besides being an active centre of religious life in the local area, the temple was an important social institution that filled a large place in the many-sided activities of the township, Political, Social, economic and cultural."  

The temples at Srirangam, Chidambaram and Madurai became the centres of vigorous religious activities. "The Madurai Minakshi temple was brought up to its present form and expression in the days of the great Nayaks, especially Tirumalai Nayaka." 35 As Nilakanta Sastri says, the temple was not merely a place of worship: "it filled a large place in the cultural and economic life of the people." 36 Kings and nobles made gifts for the maintenance of great temples like that of Tanjore. The daily routine of large temples gave employment to a number of priests, Choristers, Musicians, dancing - girls, flowerists, cooks and many other classes of servants.


There have been several religio-spiritual movements in Tamil Nadu in the Colonial period. In the 18th Century Thayumanavar, a Saivite mystic poet, sang about the glory of God and the path people must take to attain Salvation has enriched the Tamil literature by his songs. Another mystic saint Ramlinga Swami was the representative of Saiva Siddanta. Saint Ramana Maharishi who had his ashram at Tiruvannamalai had a large number of disciples including Europeans like Paul Brunton. Sri. Aurobindo at Pondicherry taught integralism as the path to Salvation.

Christianity:

St. Thomas is said to have introduced Christianity in South India in the first century A.D. Marco Polo visiting Tamil Country in 1293 AD. mentions the church built by St. Thomas at Mylapur, Madras. In the 16th century there was an active propagation of Christianity after the arrival of the Portuguese but it did not exert any potent influence on the life of people. However, in the 19th century, when by the charter Act of 1813, the East India Company Directors at London issued a directive to promote the introduction of useful knowledge and of religious and moral improvement in India, Bishops were appointed in Madras and other


38. Srinivasachari. C.S., op.cit, P.20
presidencies. Missionaries like Carcy, Duff, Grant and Marshman did a lot to convert people to Christianity. They also spread education and western thoughts through the mission schools established by them. The "effect of Christianity was that the Indian religions tried to reform themselves in order that they might be saved from its attacks. The caste Hindus also changed their attitude towards the depressed classes". With the coming of the Portuguese, the coastal regions of Tamil Nadu including the territories around Kanyakumari became centres for the conversion of Hindus into Christianity. With the formation of contact of the English with converted Christian women, a new class called the Anglo-Indian class was born. This class imitated the social and living style of the British and claimed several privileges from the British rulers.

The Southern most district of Madras Presidency, the Tinnelvelly district had been a favourable field for the missionaries, since it was full of the depressed classes oppressed by the caste Hindus. Christianity offered a new

39. Ramaswami.N.S., The founding of Madras, [Madras, 1977], P.12
40. Mahajan.V.D., op.Cit, P.518.
41. Swami Madhavananda and R.C. Majumdar., Great Women of India, [Calcutta, 1953], P.117.
42. Desabhaktan., Madras, 4th November 1920.
hope in life for these oppressed people. The converted Hindus become "Indian Christians".43

The European Catholic missionaries lived like villagers on a tiny salary. They estimatated the ceremonies of the church to the local scene. "Their churches were often hardly distinguishable from the Hindu temples, and the processions in honour of a favourite saint, such as St. Antony or the virgin, might have been Hindu processions in honour of Vishnu or Mariyamma".44 Howard Somervell, the Everest climber, was one of the best of the protestant missionaries, who spent the whole of his working career as a doctor without salary or fees, in a missionary settlement of lepers. "Some missionaries adopted the Indian dress and way of life and tried to become as Indian as Possible".45

After the establishment of Fort. St.George in Madras, The English agents of the East India Company invited the Catholics of the nearby portuguese settlement St.Thome to come and settle in the Madras Fort. The new settlers were allowed to take their families with them. They were the first catholics of the town. Since their wives and daughters

43. The Margadarsi., Calicut, 2nd May, 1919.
44. Humphrey Trevelyan. Lord., The India we left [London, 1972], P.150.
45. Ibid., P.151.
formed the great majority of the women in the fort, some of the factors, and soldiers took these daughters as their wives.  

Islam:

Before the Muslim invasion of the North, South India had contact with Muslim traders in about 63 A.D. They had settled in several parts of Malabar and had married the women of the country. The issues of such unions became the Mappilas. On the east coast there were Muslim settlements, of which Kayal Pattanam and Nagore were important. In the eleventh century, Nathadvali a Sayyid prince of Turky appears to have preached Islam and converted Hindus near Thirchirapalli.

Muslim influence in South India was felt long back with the invasion of Malik Kaufar and his war with the Hoysalas and his march towards Madurai. "During the Madurai Sultanate attempts at forcible conversion as well as voluntary conversion for the sake of obtaining political and other advantages, must have occurred and added to the local Muslim population which however has always been a small minority in Tamil Nadu." Travellers like Masudi and

46. Frank Penny., the Church in Madras, [London, no year], P.20


Ibn Batuta who visited Hindustan in the Medieval Age testify to the presence of Muslims and Mosques all along the West Coast. The arrival of the Portuguese checked the growth of Muslim power and ruined Arab trade.

Muslims were not affected by the changes brought about by the British. In the 19th Century Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817 - 1898) was responsible for bringing about changes in the outlook of the Muslims. He introduced political, religious, educational and social ideas among the Muslims. He was in favour of the abolition of the Purdah and education of Muslim women. Later the establishment of Muslim league made the Muslims stronger. In Tamil Nadu the Muslims claimed political rights, and their entry into politics favoured the British policy of "divide and rule".

Castes in Tamil Nadu:

Caste system took a rigid form in the 18th and 19th centuries in Tamil Nadu. The census enumeration of population introduced by the colonial rulers details the several castes and subcastes among the Tamils. Brahmins dominated the society. They are a learned and respected class. Next come Vellalar, the agricultural community with its several subcastes. Venniars were petty land holders.

49. Desamata, Rajahmundry, 24th January 1917.
Chettiars were merchants and trading people. Pattunoolkarans Kaikolars and Sedars (Devangas) were weavers. Vaniyans were oil pressers. Vannan is by profession a washerman. Nadars were tree tappers. Gollars who are pastoral people and graze cattle, were counterparts of the Gollas of Karnataka. the Kurubas appear to be immigrants from Kannada country and speak slang Kannada. Some of the other castes serving the society are Navithans (barbers), Kuyavans (Potters) Pandarams (temple servants), Idayars (shepherds), Kammlan or Asari (carpenter), Thattan (Goldsmith), Kallan or kallsari (Stonemason), Musari (Copper-smith), Kollan (blacksmith). The Maravas of Ramanathapuram district are an advanced community. They were mostly zamindars and go by the title Thevars. Nattu Kottai chettiars are business men, bankers and financiers. Under the Scheduled caste people come Adi-dravidas, Paraiyan, Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan, Kurumban, Pallan, Valluvan, Kuravan and Dombars. The Scheduled Tribes are Koravars, Irulars, Sholagars, Kadars, Muduvars, Pulayars etc.

The Christian Missionaries converted people from such lowest castes in social hierarchy as the Sambavars Parayans


and Nadars. The Paravas living in coastal villages were
converted to Catholicism by the Portuguese Missionaries.
The Todas of the Nilgiris are an isolated tribe who have
preserved their racial integrity, customs and manners.
Labbais were converted to Islam and live mostly on the
Malabar coast. 52.

Several factors contributed to the caste system
becoming rigid in Tamil Nadu during the British rule: 
1. The official custom of attaching Brahmin Pandits to British
established law courts till 1864, the rise of Western
educated Brahmin lawyers in urban areas, who tried to apply
Brahmanical laws to all Hindus, the translation of sacred
literature from Sanskrit to English, the formation of Caste
Sabha's aimed at improving the social position of each caste
or group of castes were some of the causes which gave
prominence to the Varna system 53.  

The Vedic Varna System
ranked sudras as the lowest of the Varnas. The term Sudra
originally was used to indicate the tribes dwelling in the
Indus valley, who were reduced by the Aryans to a dependent
condition. Subsequently the Aryans extended the term to all

52. [Ed.] Muthulakshmi Reddy., Stri-dharma, vol.XI, No.1
April-June 1928, Madras, 1928, P.4.

53. Derrett.J.D.M., Religion, Law and the state in India
[London, 1968] , Chapter 8: "The British as Patrons of
the Sastras.
the servile classes. The term sudra was generally applied collectively to all non-Brahmins in South India. The Tamil educated non-Brahmins in the 19th century resented being classified in the ranks of the Sudras, the first to agitate being the Vellalas.

In the 19th century, Educated men all over the country formed a new elite, completely Indian in outlook, though receiving western education. This new Social class superimposed itself over the traditional castes and communities. This new elite was composed of four occupational groups: (1) Traders and merchants, including brokers, commission agents, shopkeepers, businessmen and dubashes employed by the East India co., or by English employers of the Company in their individual capacity: (2) the rent-receiving landlords created by the zamindari system of land tenure; (3) Money-lenders who combined trading in grains and shopkeeping with the business of money lending in the rural areas; and (4) the white-collar professional class which included teachers, journalists, lawyers, doctors and civil servants. In south India, the


55. Ibid.,
members of the new elite consisted mainly of the white collar professions belonging to one class - the Brahmins\textsuperscript{56}.

Customs and manners:

Literary works of the early period and epigraphs of later times provide useful information relating to Tamil Society. It may be said generally that the Tamil Society was an equal society from the early times to the end of the Chola period. People being divided into professional communities, intermarriages were not allowed, and people of different castes were forbidden from commensality on grounds of pollution\textsuperscript{57}. However in certain castes and tribes divorce and remarriages were allowed. The Navis, who were formerly a military caste, and are known also as Thampi, Vanikan, Valiathan, permit inter-marriage and inter-dining\textsuperscript{58}.

Among the aboriginal tribes there were animal and human sacrifices. Hiuen Tsiang describes the Tamil people thus: "The disposition of the men is naturally fierce; they are attached to heretical teachings. The Sanghramas are

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57. Subrahmanian.N., op cit, P.338. \\
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ruined and dirty as well as the priests. There are tens of Deva temples and many Nirgrantha heretics. This is the point of view of an early traveller. Generally Tamils are an elegant people. They are gentle, kind and hospitable. Their food habits are simple. Non-Vegetarianism was prevalent. The common man ate and drank as well as he could, vegetarianism was popularised by the Jains, Buddhists and the Brahmans. Chewing of betel leaves was common, it was customary, as it is at present, to offer betel leaves to guests. Dress was simply suited to the climate. Women cared little about covering their body above the waist and men cared less. Ornaments were worn more profusely than textile garments.

"The people of the country have a custom of rubbing their houses all over with cow dung. Moreover all of them—great, small, kings and barons included, do sit upon the ground only. Every single thing they do is done with reference to astrology and by the advice of diviners, skilled sorcery and magic and geomancy and such like diabolical arts, and some of them are also acquainted with Astrology."
With the advance of time society began to gradually change, but the traditional customs and manners remained unchanged in Tamil Society. There were customary laws which were accepted as a fundamental part of Tamil culture. These laws governed such social institutions as marriage, serfdom and slavery, devadasi system and the like. Temples being religious institutions, governed the dharma of the society and preached piety and charity among the people 63.

Social condition of women was not satisfactory. The Devadasis or the dancing girls attached to the temple of Madurai were unfortunate creatures dedicated to the shame of the most beastly passions. But some dancing girls who had received high education became worthy scholars. Divorce was permissible in some castes. A man could dismiss his wife by giving her some money and calling her sister. The birth of a female child was looked upon as a burden to the family. Female infanticide, untouchability and slavery were in practice 64.

During the colonial rule there were upper and lower/class differences. The upper classes wielded wealth,

63. Ibid.
64. The Lokopakri., 21st June, 1915.
while the lower classes were economically poor. The Social system had two aspects - one was a grading on the basis of official power and position; the second aspect was an order based on religion and the traditional division of society. The first was a reflection of the political system. The second comprised the caste and subcastes. Rigid caste customs were followed. People of different castes could worship the same gods, observe the same manners and customs, but would not eat together for the fear of excommunication. Inspite of the general taboos, social and economic exigencies necessiated contacts between the orthodox higher classes and the lower castes. Caste regulations were strictly enforced by the caste Panchayats through fines or expulsion from caste. Marriages among all castes were celebrated with great pomp, and funerals were similarly pompous. According to Jesuit observers, women wept for the death of their husbands and relations in a most noisy manner. The practice of engaging women to mourn for the dead with such vigorous noise lasted till the early two decades of the present 20th century. Brahmins were the keepers of the dharma and guided the people in all walks of

life. They were the priests who were consulted in all social and religious matters. Religious vows were common. People climbed on pilgrimage to holy shrines on top of hills, two steps forward and one back, holding in the mouth instruments preventing speech, which were offered to gods after taking the ceremonial bath. People possessed of devil went to the priests, who expelled the spirits by chanting holy charms. Festivals are celebrated in Tamil Nadu with great pomp. Pongal and New year in the month of Thai and Chitirai are important to the Tamilians. Old religious beliefs survived. The small pox goddess, Mariamma, is still propitiated in the Tamil villages. An annual ceremony is held in her honour in the villages of South India.

Rise of New Social Classes:

During the British rule, village life remained as before. The village continued to be governed by castes. There remained the same intellectual stagnation. The Ryotwari system brought significant changes in the rural areas. The new class of Zamindars became powerful and lands began to be rented to the ryots. New social classes evolved

68. Humphrey Trevelyen. Sir., op.cit., P.120
69. Ibid., P.148
70. Ibid.,
in the Tamil society during the British rule\footnote{Madras council, Public Despatches to England, 1799, Vol.3.3, PP 26 – 27.}. In the rural areas there were Zamindars created by the economic policy of the colonial government, the absence landlords, the peasant land owners divided into upper, middle and lower strata, agricultural labourers, the modern class of merchants and modern class of money lenders\footnote{Madras council, public consultation, November 1798, Vol. 230, PP.4072 – 4073.}.

The urban areas consisted chiefly of the modern class of capitalits in the industrial, commercial and financial fields, the modern working class engaged in industrial, mining and transport enterprises, the class of petty traders and shopkeepers, the professional classes such as technicians, teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists clerks and others comprising the intelligentsia and the educated middle class\footnote{Court of Directors, Public Despatches from England, 11th February 1801, Vol.1. 104, PP. 55 – 56.}.

During the early days of British commercial interests, their expanding commercial activities could not have been sustained without the cooperation of the indigenous merchantile group. The merchants who acted as intermediaries between the British and the Indian
communities in trade and commerce and called dubashes. The dubashes knew the local and the English languages and their need to Europeans was necessary due to their ignorance of the laws and habits of the country. The main duty of the dubashe was to facilitate the purchase of raw material for export by the Company and find markets for the imported goods from England. The services of the dubashes were also at the disposal of the Company officials who used him to transact their private business on a regular or temporary basis. Similarly, when the English free merchants arrived on the scene, they found the dubashes an essential appendage in their business operations. The dubashes amassed considerable fortunes as was seen in the case of Pachaiyyappa Mudaliar, who was known for his charities and in whose name the Pachaiyappa college exists even today as one of the leading educational institutes in Madras.

The educated middle class was the product of the western system of education inaugurated by the British government. Education awakened in the intelligentsia of

Tamil Nadu an awareness to the disparities in society and in the political field. It gave rise to agitations for political and constitutinal rights. It awakened the National spirit, led to the rise of the Justice party and the participation of the Tamils in the freedom movement launched in Tamil Nadu by such national leaders as C. Rajagopalachary and others.

Tamil Cities During Colonial Period:

The British divided the Madras presidency into districts for administrative purposes, and in each district town the collectors had their offices. Thus Coimbatore, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Salem, Trichinopoly, Tirunelveli and other towns flourished as district headquarters and grew into prosperous cities. Some of them were religious centres.

Coimbatore, where the collector of the district lived, was at the beginning of the 20th century an ugly little town in the dusty plain under the Nilgiri hills, in the pattern an Anglo-Indian country station with all its parochialism and prejudices exhibited in the British Club in which, with rare exceptions, no Indian, other than the servants, were


allowed to set foot. Around the town sprawled the sandy villages with the houses of the principle land owners, the door steps embellished by the women with intricate chalk patterns called "Moggu" in Tamil. Each village had its little painted temples, the communal well, and generally a shady tree like the great banyan tree under which the village assembly met. The lands surrounding the villages were the most fertile and valuable.

Madras at the close of the 19th century was a charming city, inspite of its heat. The most striking memorials of the past were the spacious 18th century merchants' houses in Madras. These classical monsions were perfectly fitted to the lavish way of life of the merchants. In 1930, Madras city extended for about ten miles. Poonamalee is said to be the English corruption of a much more beautiful Tamil name "Poovirunthan - malai," meaning the hill of the flowers. The most curious adventure in women culture had been suffered by one of the Madras bridges orginally named after the architech Hamilton. The Tamil pronounced it "ambaltan", the Tamil word for "barber", so, it got translated and

78. Madras council, Political Despatches to England, 15th October 1928.


became "Barbers Bridge". In the 18th century, the residential part of Madras for Indians was called "Black town", but was prudently altered to "George town" being by the side of Fort. St.George.

Relation between the Rulers and the Ruled:

The British were conscious of being conquerors. There was no social intercourse between the English and the Indians. The manners and customs of both changed. The Tamil subjects adopted the life style of the English while the rulers adopted some Indian ways such as taking bath, using the Panka (fan) in the courts, was offices and in their homes. The English treated the Indians with contempt, had no good feelings towards officials, there was no real communication between the governors and the governed. There was a common dislike for each other.

In the early years of the 19th century India was under the complete control of the British colonial rulers. A very few English women had come to India. As such, the soldiers and British officers in the Tamil region lead Bohemian lives


82. Report of commissioners for the Investigation of Alleged cases of Torture in the Madras presidency 1855, Madras, PP. 9 - 12.

The young English soldiers found matrimony very expensive and early in their career attached themselves to native women, who accompanied the camps and presented their keepers with numerous progeny. The off-springs born to British men by Indian women formed the "Anglo-Indian" society which grew considerably by the time the British left India.

British officers were not free from corruption. Sir Edward Colebrooke, his wife and son and other British government servants were engaged in making money by corrupt ways. In Madras, Governor Elihu Yale and his brother Thomas Yale and made a fortune by private trade with China by purchasing inferior cloth on the Company's accounts to their advantage. Yale was tried. There were also law suits between Yale and the Indian merchants.

Collectors in the districts were very harsh in dealing with the public. No interest was shown by them to improve the condition of the ryots and other people. These collectors were a kind of "English Rajas". Rouse Peter, collector of Madurai had misused seven lakhs of rupees and yet people called him "Peter Pandya" Honouring him with the

84. Ibid., P. 29.
name of the ancient Pandya dynasty. Another collector was conducting a flourishing money lending business with official funds. Thus the collectors were little monarchs of their districts which could be reached only with difficulty by horse or bullock cart.

86. Humphrey Travelyan. Lord., op.Cit., P.130