Chapter VIII

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From the endeavours made in the preceding chapters to bring out the agrarian life in the ancient Tamil country up to 1070 A.D. the following conclusions are arrived at. The subject being a vast one and the materials connected with it are also of distinctive nature, they highlight the distinctive aspects of the agrarian life of the Tamils. It also reveals that the agrarian pursuits centred on multifarious activities.

Agriculture was the prime occupation of the Tamils as other people of the world. As agriculture was the basis for life, it compelled them to place it at the highest pedestal and to assign greater veneration to that profession. It is noticed that without leaving even the minute details of the different aspects of agriculture during the period taken up for study, the farmers were industrious and dedicated to their task. Selection of appropriate land and reclamation of different uncultivable lands were in vogue then. Due to their knowledge the qualities and kinds of lands and also of the ploughs and ploughshare, much stress was assigned by them for ploughing as a primary initial measure of the commencement of agricultural acts. Agriculture was a prime need of the people for having
their foodstuffs. As such, proper attention was devoted to produce more by paying attention to the seasons. Much importance was paid to rain and the Tamil farmers were depending more upon monsoon and seasonal rain than ground-level water for irrigation facilities. The seasonal vegetations expose the knowledge of the Tamils about nature and seasons. In the same way they concentrated more on tilling and ploughing. Being experts and professionals they believed that proper manuring and weeding will certainly serve as canvas for prosperity. Green manuring captivated their attention much. No modern system of manuring was available. Their widened knowledge of various kinds of agricultural implements, though not equal to that of the modern techniques, reveals that they attached greater importance to their own personal industrious nature, manual labour and man-power.

The terms such as vellālan, vellālar, ulavar, kālamar, arināngar, sāmaikuḍi indicate that the peasant community of that period was assigned an unique and recognised place in the society. It was protected mainly because of their services. The idea of division of labour was an actual practice in the agrarian life of the Tamils. The terms like kālamar, tonda ulavar, vennel arinar, nelari tōluvar, kalanar,
Énalkāppor, etc., explain that the Tamils were methodical in executing the agricultural operations. Uniform and systematic procedures were adopted. Women labourers were involved in agricultural activities such as transplantation, sowing, weeding and harvesting. There were specific set of women even to collect cotton. Due to economic reasons and promptness of execution, women should have been employed in sowing, weeding, harvesting, pounding etc. Their earnestness would have gained such arrangements.

Agricultural life was not free from difficulties of various types. Natural oddities such as floods, droughts etc. caused calamitous effects over agriculture, which was a tradition-oriented and customary one. The agriculturists were so zealous and enthusiastic in executing their activities.

The land was the primary and prerequisite for the agricultural activities. The ancient Tamils divided the lands on geographical considerations and were much fascinated in the division of lands such as Kuriṇji, Mullai, Marudam, Neidal and Pālai. The catalogue of lands indicates that they had categorised the lands on the basis of the geographical setting, on the fertility of the soil, on the consideration of
possessive rights on economic priorities on the basis of the yield etc. The farmers showed keen interest in their agrarian life while utilising the lands for agricultural purposes. The dire-need of gaining sufficient food materials, the evincing interest in cultivation and the efforts taken by kings and village sabhās widened the reclamation of lands for cultivation and it was a customary practice throughout the ages. Further it suggests that the Tamils were not interested in wasting lands. It is estimated that the village councils (Sabhās) administered the lands of the specific areas. As the taxes were collected by the local bodies and transferred to the state coffer they were empowered to introduce and proper, maintenance and promotion of irrigation facilities of different categories. They had the privileges of grading the lands and estimating the taxes. They gave importance to standardisation. This allowed the agrarian life to serve as a link between the common public and government agencies.

The protection and preservation of cultivable lands as well as the produced yields from them were the significant aspect of the agrarian life. They stand to prove the attitude of avoidance of wastage and savings, which prevailed among the cultivators. In anticipation of a trouble-less future they undertook various courses of actions. The preservation of
irrigation tanks, wells, canals and other features did not escape their eyes. The agrarian life was mostly a cautious and earnest one. The linear measurements and others were kinds of measurements based on the cautious policy. To avoid disputes, to have the exact estimate of landed properties and to know the exact income from land and yield, they were keen. The lands, which were used as endowments for carrying out various philanthropic activities, suggest the efforts under taken by the people in treating the cultivable lands as a measure of transaction. The lands were leased, sold, transferred and mortgaged.

Land-transaction was a measure confining to agrarian life. Mortgage, sale or purchase of lands was the different aspects. Those acts were made permanent by the registered deeds and agreements. There were documents such as Āvaṇam, Svilai Āvaṇam, Vilaiavanaōlai, vilaiāvaṇam, āvaṇakkalari, kaitiittu, etc. suggest the above measures. Donation and gifts of lands by the rulers and private individuals were made for the execution of various religious economic and social activities and they in turn indicate that lands served as a source of unity and solidarity among the people of different walks of life in the society. They served as economic units also. While the paddy and other agricultural
produces are exchanged with other commodities it is clear that barter economy was prevalent among the public as an economic measure during that age. Though minted money was in vogue, it seems that they were not familiar with the people. They did not attach much attention to possess money. It suggests that due to poor knowledge of money value they would have considered agricultural yields as commodities of exchange. Indirectly, they pin-point the superior nature as well as the faith they had over agricultural measures.

Irrigation was another prominent feature of agricultural activities. In the absence of the knowledge of modern techniques of irrigation and due to the imperative needs of irrigation for a prosperous yield, the Tamil farmers, rulers and sabhās were forced to throw greater attention towards the introduction, preservation and promotion of irrigation facilities. Further, as rainwater was used for watering the cultivable lands, they had employed many storage techniques. It is absorbing and interesting to note that people of different categories of life considered the promotion of irrigation facilities as an act of charity. The kings, village assemblies private individuals, philanthropists were also devoting greater attention in expanding the irrigation facilities. The various techniques employed in
irrigating the lands suggest the technical skill of the agriculturist. Further
they were aware of the fact that sufficient irrigation facilities will yield good
yields.

The ancient Tamils without any hesitation, produced foodstuffs to
satisfy the needs and requirements of the common folk of the community.
Paddy, sugarcane and various grains and pulses along with cotton were
produced as chief produces. They devoted their attention towards the
production of commercial crops also. As the Tamils were having profit
motives they should have indulged in such activities. They never deviated
from producing the vegetables of different varieties. The growth of fruit
bearing trees and flower-gardens expose not only the bent of mind of the
Tamils but also that cultivation was of a varied nature. By adhering to
various methods of processings of the agricultural produces, the Tamils
obtained useful commodities in tact. Further, the produces were utilised
for satisfying the other needs of the public beyond using them as food
materials. The palmyrah trees helped the public in many ways. For
instance, while the juice was used as toddy, its leaves were used for
making umbrellas. They were even used to thatch the huts. The root and
fruit were used as eatables. So they led to the introduction of subsidiary
Industries like sugarcane crushing, extraction of toddy, making things out of palm leaves, making sugarcane, rice flake etc. Jaggery making was another subsidiary industry. This was another economic aspect of the agrarian life. Thus there was a harmonious blending of agriculture.

The multifarious taxes associated with the land, agricultural operations, produces and materials create an awareness of the economic aspects with agrarian life. For the promotion of agricultural activities, measures such as remissions and exemptions of taxes were put into effect by kings, sabhas etc. The references about varippottakam, varipothaka kaṇakku etc. expose the economic involvement of agrarian life. The standardised measurements such as mā, vēli, kuḷi, nals, kuruṇi, uḷakku, ulagālandakēl etc. will exhibit the agricultural economy. The various subsidiary industries connected with agriculture suggest that economic operation were unavoidable and inseparable from agrarian activities. Blacksmiths, Carpenters were the essential industrial aspects in making the agrarian life as an uninterrupted one while using various implements.

Thus the agrarian life of the ancient Tamils was prompt and sincere. The efforts of the agriculturists in the varied aspects of their
profession were earnest and sincere. This indispensable profession for life was carried out in collaboration with different sets of people at various stages. The agrarian pursuits brought a unity and solidarity among the people due to their integrated agricultural pursuits. Above all, the agrarian life was the primary occupation and preceded the other aspects of life. It was associated with the different entities like politics, economic, society, culture and religion of the society. The agricultural life of the Tamils was an inseparable one from their routine way of life, which could not be deviated from the regular routine functioning and movement of the society. The agrarian life was at the apex of the social ladder next to kings. The upright-rulers were also forced to concentrate more on the preservation and promotion of agrarian life. Above all agriculture was a basis for a standardised and cultured living.