Chapter I

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The payiram of Tolkāppiyam¹, the earlier grammar extant of the Tamil country, has given a vivid account of the southern part of the peninsular India between northern Vēṇkaḍam hills and southern Cape Comerin, which had Bay of Bengal and Arabian seas in east and west as its boundaries respectively. From the early days to the end of the tenth century A.D. it comprised of the Chēra region i.e., the modern Kerala, most part of the modern Kamātaka and Āndhrā regions along with the other areas. Modern Pondicherry was also included in it². According to N.Subrahmanian, the Vēṇkaḍam hill of the north and Cape Comerin of the south along with the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea in the east and west respectively were its demarcated boundaries³. Thus it was having a vast stretch of land divided as Kuriṇji, Mullai, Marudam, Neidal and Palai⁴.

1. Tolkāppiyam, Payiram, 1-3.
4. Tolkāppiyam, Porul: 5.
Within those geographical limits there existed big monarchical states such as Chērās, Chōlās, Pāndyas and Pallavās along with the availability of small states such as Kāṭṭūrnādu, Kārinādu, Kōnādu, Mukkāvalnādu etc., as mentioned by Purananūru⁵. In all those areas the vast majority of the people were leading only a rural and agrarian life⁶. Since “agriculture was the major important economic activity”⁷ it was treated as the chief and foremost of the occupations⁸. The industrious and hard-working Tamil population was a peasant-centered one, hence the Tamils of that age were known for their simple and self-sufficient economy. The cultivation of paddy, vegetables, grains and pulses being principal items of food of the Tamils, compelled most people of the Tamil country to engage themselves in different agricultural operations.

The treatment of agriculture as an excellent profession⁹, the consideration of the cultivators as the primary supporters of others and the reality that “they alone live who live by agriculture” will expose the superior nature of agrarian life in the social structure of the Tamils. Such

5. Purananūru: 61, 80, 122, 150, 389 etc.
8. Tirukkural, 1031-1040.
9. Ibid., 1031.
factors even highlight the estimate of agriculture as a fundamental profession\(^\text{10}\) in almost all the areas of Tamilnadu. The part of the Tamil land utilised for agricultural operations was called marudam in the conventional and fourfold divisions of land in Tamilnadu viz., "\(^\text{11}\) Kuriṉji, Mullai, Marudam and Neidal. As no attempt has been hitherto made on that line to explicate the agrarian life of the Tamils, and as the agricultural life of the Tamils between the third century B.C. and 1070 A.D. is not exposed in a continuous way, it is endeavoured to bring out the distinctive agricultural activities in a coherent way in the ensuing pages. Since the study of the agricultural set-up in a continuous historical perspective, is warranted \(\text{10}\) that will assist the analysis of the agrarian pursuits through the ages upto 1070 A.D.

Agriculture, being a prominent economic activity, was closely associated with the intensely cultivated lands. It placed the farmers at the apex of the social ladder, because if the farmers are not available the world will not move. So a study of the agriculturists and agriculture in the Tamil country through the ages up to 1070 A.D is a must. The repeated

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 1033 and 1036.

occurrences of certain agricultural terms like velānmai, velānkuḍi, velālar, velanvahai etc., in different Saṅgam classics point out the value of agriculture. The estimate of agriculture and agriculturists will also expose the economic pursuits of the Tamils. The compatible nature of agriculture with different aspects of life such as nature, geography, politics, religion, economics, etc., allows such an approach on that line.

The preparation of the soil by ploughing and manuring was the initial aspect of farming mentioned by Pattinappālaī. This aspect also forms the primary effort of agriculture. “The reduction and expansion regularly of land was a continuous process. This may be regarded as the ecological concomitant of the social development and assimilation of tribal people.” With that evolutionary process of tilling, the society proceeds to the operation of ploughing. Such continuous and regular measures of agricultural activities too compel one to have an analysis of agriculture. “The prosperity of agricultural economy depends to a large extent on the facilities provided for irrigation, and the importance of securing an adequate water supply was recognised in South India from very early

times"\textsuperscript{14}. The Tamil country too adopted such measures. The rain was the primary and fundamental source of irrigation. Agriculture in the Tamil country was a customary and tradition oriented one. Hence it becomes imperative to note that the agricultural functions were based on the transitory seasons and seasonal rains. For having an estimate of the different seasonal activities such aspects also should be analysed. To have an uninterrupted continuity, the process of manuring should be regarded and estimated. The involvement of agriculturists in the various preparatory measures should have compelled them to achieve a maximum yield by adhering to various steps. Such aspect compels to estimate the means of manuring adopted during the period taken up for discussion.

Another significant and prominent aspect of agricultural prospects is the utilisation of the various agricultural implements in agrarian pursuits. It is quite obvious that the modern scientific and technological agricultural measures would not have found their place in the then agricultural pursuits. Anyhow the reverence and importance attached to that profession should have been mainly due to their aims of achieving a

\textsuperscript{14} K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{op.cit.}, p.583.
proper yield. Such continuous activities would have enabled them to employ different implements and methods. So to have knowledge of the implements used and the techniques adopted in using them an estimate of such acts becomes warranted. In fact it will widen the scope of having a complete knowledge of the agrarian life.

A study of the peasant community will disclose the nature of the community and will help to notice the different types of people who were involved in the multidimensional agrarian processes. Possession of Agriculture land was a prestigious social value. So "it was the deliberate object of everyone whatever his occupation, to have a small plot of land he could call his own". In addition to the above there are ample references about the existence of various kinds of ownership of land including communal ownership. The terms sabhāmānjikam\(^{15}\), Ùrmañjikam\(^{16}\), Uṟpodu\(^{17}\), will expose and corroborate the above facts.

There are ample references about the availability of different varieties of labourers engaged in agriculture and wages they received for their

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16. 266 of 1901. AŘE  
17. 42 of 1903.
services. Digging was done at the rate of fifty *kulis* per *kasu* in 906 A.D.\(^\text{18}\)

Under such circumstances the landowners were engaged in the divergent agricultural accomplishments. By estimating the different kinds of labourers employed in such acts one can understand the implementation of the principle of division of labour in the execution of agricultural activities. It is also obvious that among "a fairly large class of landless labourers, an agrarian proletariat, some of whom were in a condition of serfdom, assisted in the operations and shared the proceeds of agriculture". Further, there were many hereditary menial servants who served as subordinates and they obtained remunerations for their services. Such aspects, will divulge the importance assigned to the employment of different experts in the agricultural activities. The employment of hired labourers to serve in the gardens of temples by receiving a standard rate of paddy\(^\text{19}\) also enables one to have an analysis and knowledge about the role of labourers the various in agricultural prospects. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri has rightly observed "such labourers were not peasant proprietors by any means, and were nearer the class of hired

\[\text{18. 104 of 1929.}\]
\[\text{19. 172 of 1915, 45 of 1925.}\]
labourers than of tenants; they were entitled to use the house-site near enough to the place of their work and to get wages fixed in advance, the proceeds of their labour on land being altogether the property of the institution that owned the soil on which they work. The women were not prevented from involving in the social life and activities. They were employed to execute less skilled occupations especially in agriculture as female labourers.

In addition to the generalised measures of agrarian activities, to have the portrayal of the agrarian life of the Tamils, one must have the knowledge of the hardships and difficulties, which hindered their agricultural operation and processes. The existence of centralised monarchy, the availability of different kinds of land ownership, the employment of specific kind of labourers, according to needs and requirements the analysis of the effects of the natural calamities such as droughts and famines, the creation, maintenance and upkeep of irrigation facilities, the economic activities such as purchase, sale and exchange of lands and produced agricultural yields etc., should have caused many

problems to the farmers and public. The reactions of the cultivators under such critical situations also should be studied. Then only the study of the agrarian life could be approached in an appropriate way. By employing the available primary and secondary sources the facts concerning the above aspects will be disclosed in the separate chapter on “Agrarian pursuits”.

For the regular agricultural operations availability of land is the primary need, and work could not be carried out without the sufficient quantum of land. So it is essential to have an estimate of the varieties of lands brought under cultivation in the Tamil country through the ages. The taxable lands called ȋraî lands and the non-taxable ȋraîyili lands were the common classifications by the state on the basis of agriculture. There were 14 kinds of lands under cultivation\(^\text{21}\). The land known as payal nilam was the land possessed by private land holders\(^\text{22}\). The lands of the cultivators were categorised as vēllān vahai, ķivitham etc. Donated lands were known as brahmmadeya, dēvadāna, pallichandam, sălābhōgam Thiruvidayāttam, udirappatti, etc. Such classifications were available

\(^{22}\) Ibid., Vol. II, p.351.
during the periods of the Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas. But almost all the lands were fertile and prosperous due to their irrigation facilities.

The Pandya country, as in the Saṅgam age, was comprised of kurinji, mullai, marudam and neidal regions and they had their own individual varieties. Marudam land as usual was preferable for cultivation. Mullai, the forest track was treated as fertile land next to the marudam. It is also worth to note that the assessed lands were known as taramperra lands. Taramili was the non-assessed land. In this context it will be apt and appropriate to have a descriptive catalogue of the diverse kinds of lands. It will be beneficial for the understanding of the qualities of the lands easier and in turn it will widen the scope of estimating the agrarian life on par with the cultivable lands. The study on that line will pinpoint the various reasons for bringing out the multitudes of lands into cultivation. There were lands, which were cultivated due to the possessive rights obtained by donation or endowment or purchase or hereditary rights or transfer or even by exchanges. Such aspects also should be analysed.

24. 3 of 1935-36.
As it was a common issue to adhere to the custom of reclamation of land for cultivation during the *San'gam* age, the same tradition continued even during the succeeding periods continuously. The Pallavas who were also known by the name *Kaduvettis* will attest this fact. The Tamils who were industrious workers gradually brought the wastelands under the cultivation by employing various measures such as economic needs tax concessions, remissions etc. The availability of various inscriptive evidences\textsuperscript{25}, reveal the causes for reclamation. The dissertationist, to estimate and to have a detailed account of the agrarian life of the ancient Tamils has undertaken the above study.

It was a period of conspicuous and renowned monarchies, which carried out the administration on hereditary basis. They left no stones unturned for the social welfare and economic prosperity of the people. Under such a pretext a detailed study of the administration different kinds of lands is a must in estimating the agrarian life. Since the private individuals, temples, *sabhas*, officials and kings had the possessive rights of lands it is essential to take note of the different administrative features

\textsuperscript{25} 485, 506 of 1902, 385 of 1903, 287 of 1911, 357 of 1924.
confining to the agricultural lands. Such an analysis will be beneficial for knowing the financial aspects like the payment of taxes, expenses incurred in connection with the irrigation etc. It also becomes necessary to note down the means of preservation and protection of lands. For, it will enable the regular and uninterrupted continuation of agricultural activities. Since the protective measures are necessary for the agricultural profession to be a constant one, one should have such an analysis too.

Measurement of land is another significant aspect pertaining to agriculture. Without measuring lands exactly it will never be possible to fix up taxes and to carry out land activities and transactions. To avoid landed disputes and to maintain an exact amount of the landed possessions, the total measurement of land should have been calculated exactly. Further, measurements will be beneficial for economic transactions with accurate details. The knowledge about the qualities and amount of seeds to be sown and water facilities and for the calculation of the yield of paddy and other grains also require the study of the agriculture. The existence of barter system encourages the study of the use of money and gold as exchange materials on par with lands, grains etc. It was also a period noted for generous deeds and philanthropic activities and during that
period the people led a life of comforts with unity and solidarity amidst multifarious diversities like caste, wealth, social hierarchy etc. So it becomes necessary to note down the condition of the peasants on that line. It will assist to estimate the role of agriculturists in the society. Agricultural, prosperity should have been undertaken with the co-operation and financial assistance of people of all walks of life. In that context the role of kings, administrative units like the sabhās and private individuals should also be analysed. In this regard one has to give importance to analyse the endowments associated with agriculture. To satisfy the needs of estimating such aspects, a chapter called *Types of lands and transactions* are also given importance.

From the above estimates one should have a picture of the various transactions connected with lands. The study of land transactions has already widened the scope of estimating the agrarian life. The donation of lands and creation of endowments for a continuation of the agricultural activities stress the study of the other aspects related to land transactions without an estimate of the financial aspects such as mortgage of lands, transfer of lands through sale or purchase one cannot have a view about agriculture. The relief from the financial crisis is also a
study of the land transactions. Such a study will pave the way for understanding the different methods of disposal of lands and the various transactions associated with them. In the modern days it is a common procedure to register such land transactions legally. This yields an opportunity to know the ways adopted in making the land transactions as a permanent measure during the ancient period and that will reveal the fact that instruments such as deeds, agreements etc. It is also necessary to know how the Tamils of the ancient period parted with their lands when they are donated and gifted. Such an approach will be beneficial to notice the exchange value of lands, which were available then. Such an analysis on this line will prove the existence of different parties involved in land transactions and also the different situations the lands were transacted.

A study of the irrigation facilities adopted then and associated with the farmers is another significant aspect. As it is a significant factor in agriculture even today one has to concentrate on the existence of this custom during the early periods. Since irrigation is a prominent and consistent aspect of the agrarian system one has to have the facts about the various types of irrigation methods employed during the early period in the early Tamil country. While estimating the different sources and
methods of irrigation it becomes imperative to have an analysis of the maintenance and upkeep of those facilities. The ancient period had no scientific development, as it is available now. But the farmers and other people of that period possessed the technological skill. So it is essential to study the irrigation method in a separate chapter on Irrigation. This will also throw light on the various irrigation facilities also.

Without assessing the various kinds of agricultural produces, one cannot have a proper study of the farming and agrarian life. Such an analysis will render an opportunity to know the attitude and outlook of the farmers who were involved in the agrarian activities. This kind of study will enlighten the importance attached to the agricultural production of every kind of crop. For narrating the causes for the production of commercial crops, vegetables, fruits, flowers etc., a separate chapter is assigned. That kind of analysis will permit the exposition of the processing of agricultural produces. The study about the agricultural produces will highlight the social and economic aspects of the life of the cultivators of that early period. It will also bring out the cultivated products and their usages.
The study of the **agricultural economy** is indispensable for having a full picture the agricultural activities. Such materialistic approach of the Tamil farmers will exhibit the other social side. As the income from the land tax was the primary source of income of the state during almost at all the periods, is necessary to have the canons of taxation and also the reactions of the agriculturists towards taxation measures. It stresses the importance to expose the tax remissions and exemptions. On the basis of economic grounds, it is a must to have the analysis of the industries associated with the agricultural products then. The economic implications included in agriculture compel to have an analysis of the conversion of agricultural produces as commercial commodities. Such activities will widen the scope in the study of the involvement of professionals and experts in agriculture.

Interpretative and analytical historical research methodology is used in this dissertation. On the basis of the above measures by critical analysis, proper interpretation and comparison both primary and secondary sources are employed. They are principally in Tamil language. The **Sañgam** literature along with the epigraphic records is treated as primary sources. With regard to this study **Pattupāṭṭu, Ettuthogai,**
Pathineñkilkanakku etc., the Saṅgam classics are utilised as primary sources. While Cilappatikāram and Maṉimegalai, the twin Tamil epics are utilised as primary sources, the devotional literature like the Dēvāram, works of the Appar, Sundarar and Gñanasambandar are used as original sources. With the arrival of principal kingdoms such as Pallavas, Pandyas and Cholas emerged the crowned monarchs used the custom of registering various activities in stones and copper plates. So the epigraphic records and copper plates assisted the preparation of the thesis. The Annual Report on Epigraphy, Annual Reports on South Indian Epigraphy, Epigraphia Indica, Indian Antiquary volumes, South Indian temple Inscriptions, Pudukkōttai State Inscriptions are all consulted. The Thirty Pallava Copper plates, The Ten Pandya copper plates, Karanthai copper plates also helped the writing of the thesis. The analysis and interpretation of the different inscriptions of different rulers enabled the dissertationist to notice the different aspects of agriculture. For having a continuous study of agriculture and agriculturists, the land transactions, irrigation, agricultural produces and agricultural economy the information collected are employed by analytical and
interpretative methods. The facts available in various inscriptions are used as corroborative and substantiating, authentic evidences.

M. Gandhidasan, *Kalvettukkalil Arasiyal Samayam Samudhāyam* by M. Rajamanikkanar etc. have been utilised as secondary sources of comparative study.

The entire study is covered on the basis of both primary as well as secondary sources. The sources used are acknowledged by way of foot notes and bibliography.

Thus the study will reveal the different aspects of agriculture of the Tamils upto 1070 A.D. and such a study will find a new place in the Socio-cultural history of Taminadu.