CHAPTER - II

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THULUVA VELLALAS
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Caste system is a unique feature of the Indian society. Caste systems are moral systems that differentiate and rank the whole population of a society in corporate units called castes. The caste is generally defined by descent, marriage and occupation. Elaborately differentiated and ranked caste systems have developed especially in regional societies in India over the years. One such well developed unit identified with characteristic norms and styles of functioning is the Thuluva vellala caste. It is basically confined to South India and is an offshoot of the main stock the vellalas.

The human race needs many things for its survival and continuance. Food tops the list of various needs of the human race. People involved in agriculture to fulfill this prime requisite of mankind were known as vellalas. It is on account of this, agriculture is considered as the top most occupation. Men all over the world may take up different enterprises and industries as their source of earning and way of life. But ultimately, the world depends very much only on agriculture, because that is the most vitally necessary and really productive vocation. It has its troubles and problems, but it is still the worthiest of all occupations.\(^1\) The farmer who

\(^1\) Kural 1031, "The world depends on the plough, more than on any other avocation in life; Despite hardships, therefore agriculture is still the best" Dr.N.Mahalingam (General Editor) (Trans), Tirukkural, Vol.2 (Coimbatore, 2000), p.1028.
raises food crops is given the highest status in society. The vellalas who were the great farmer caste of the Tamil country were strongly represented in every Tamil district. The etymology of the word vellala gives different but appropriate meanings from time to time and by narrowing down the differences a more accurate and acceptable meaning can be evolved. The word vellalan was derived from the term vellanmai. Men involved in water resource management diverting and channelising the floods towards their cultivable lands were perhaps named as vellalas. In Tamil language vellam means flood. Dr. R. Nagasamy, Director of State Archaeology (Retd) had stated that the term 'vellalan' would have originated from the Tamil term 'Vel' which means 'land' or 'soil'. It is to be noted that the potter whose profession is making mud pots is referred to as 'Vetkö' in inscriptions. This confirms the view that the term 'vel' means land or soil. A traditional story regarding the origin of vellalas mentions that several thousands of years ago, when the people were not civilised enough to know about agriculture a severe drought hit the land and the starved people prayed to Bhudevi the goddess of earth to come to their rescue. In response to their prayer, the goddess produced from her body a man carrying a plough who

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showed them how to till the soil and support themselves. His progeny were
the vellalas.\textsuperscript{6} The vellalas are also referred to as belonging to Gangakula
since according to another tradition the vellalas sprang into existence from
the interior parts of the earth on the banks of the Ganga river.\textsuperscript{7} The
connection between the vellala and land and water strengthens the view
that the vellalas were engaged in cultivation.

The people of Tamilnadu had practised agriculture from very early
times. There were references to vellalas in Tamil literary works. Literature
of any language does not stop merely in projecting its richness but actually
as a mirror reflects the life of the people and their lifestyle. Infact every
race has a record of its own past in literature. The Sangam literature refers
to the presence of five divisions of land viz. ‘kurinji’, the hilly plain, ‘mullai’,
the park land region bordering the forest, ‘marudam’, the plain cultivable
land, ‘neidal’, the Coastal region and ‘pālai’.\textsuperscript{8} The waste land in mullai and
Kurinji was classified as Pālai. Denudation of forests and arable tracts
causd creation of Pālai.\textsuperscript{9} Marudam formed the fertile cultivable land.

\textsuperscript{6} H.A. Stuart, \textit{Manual of North Arcot District}, Vol.I (Madras, 1895),

\textsuperscript{7} Edgar Thurston and K.Rangachari, \textit{Castes and Tribes of Southern

\textsuperscript{8} Tolkāppiyam, Poruladikāram, Ahathinai Iyal 5.

\textsuperscript{9} Silappadikāram canton XI 64 to 66.
Pattupāttu one of the ten Tamil idylls gives the following description of Marudam

"This fertile marudam land, the king’s domain, contains the brown stemmed kanchi, watery reeds, soft fields, fair gardens and small villages."\(^{10}\)

The men who lived in marudam were cultivators and from them emerged the vellalas. The earliest and ancient literature on Tamil grammar Tolkāppiyam which is few thousand years old had mentioned about the vellalas. It mentions about the presence of four classes or divisions among people on the basis of their duties to the society. The four classes were andanar (brahmins), arasar (kings), vaisyas (mechants) and vellalas (farmers).\(^{11}\)

In the age of Sangam vellalas were grouped under two categories. The division was based on their economic status. The distinction was made between men owning agricultural land and men who worked on others’ land\(^{12}\). The former were called ‘uluvithunbōr’ and the latter as ‘uluthunbōr’.

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\(^{10}\) Malai padukadām lines 4490-53 - Pattupāttu, Ten Tamil Idylls. J.V.Chelliah (Trans) (Madras, 1967), p. 34.

\(^{11}\) Tolkāppiyam Poruladikāram, Ahathinai Iyal 5.

vellalas who owned agricultural lands also held high posts under the kings in the civil and military administrations. They were treated with respect by the kings and were allowed to take part in pleasures and entertainments. They received many titles such as the ‘vel’ and ‘arasu’ in the Chola country and the ‘kavidi’ in the Pandya country. The class was also engaged in domestic and external trade. The vellalas classified as uluthunbor constituted the class of small farmers. They were economically weaker and formed a lesser rank in the society.

The vellalas had been connected with velirs. This theory was initiated by N. Raghava Iyengar in his book History of Velirs. According to him the vellalas were the descendants of velirs.\(^\text{13}\) He says that the velirs were descendants of Lord Krishna, the hero of the epic Mahabharata, and they migrated from Dwaraka in the north and settled in the south under the leadership of sage Agathiyar. To support this view he made references to Tolkāppiyam\(^\text{14}\) and a poem by Kabilar of Sangam age addressed to Irungovel, ruler of a petty principality.\(^\text{15}\) The fact that velirs were the precursors of vellalas has been totally accepted by M. Arokiaswamy.\(^\text{16}\) This view was refuted strongly by M. Venkatasamy Nattār in his book


\[^{14}\] Tolkāppiyam, Ahattinai, Šūtrā 32.

\[^{15}\] Puranānuru, Stanza. 201.

Velirvarālātrīn Āraichi. He had pointed out that the age of Ramayana preceded that of Mahabharata and the Sangam age preceded the Ramayana period. So the possibility of Agathiar of the Sangam age to have brought the Yadavas of bharatham period and made them settle in the south does not stand well. Likewise R. Poongunran epigraphist in his article ‘Velir yā r?’ asserts that velirs were the descendants of shepherds and had nothing to do with vellalas. He says that the term ‘vel’ has been used in Tamil language to mean Lord Muruga,18 Lord Manmadan (god of love)19, leader or head man20 and land or soil.21 According to him velir might be the plural for the term ‘vel’ which also means headmen.22 He concludes that the velirs were lovers of warfare, had possession of large cattle and in course of time asserted their position and ascended to the rank of chieftains.

Dr. K.K. Pillai is also of the opinion that identification of velirs with vellalas is unconvincing. He asserts that Ayvels of the Sangam age were not vellalas

18 ‘Kadambar Neduvēl’, Perumbānātrupadai, 75, Venri Neduvēl, Kurunthogai, 111.
19 ‘Kamavēl kottam tholudhār’, Silappadikāram Canton IX, Line 60.
21 Vētkō-Potter.
but belonged to the shepherd class since several epigraphy of Ayvels describe them as descendants of Yadava origin.\textsuperscript{23}

Vellalas, the farmers of the Tamil society had always enjoyed a high status among the people of Tamilnadu throughout the different periods of history. While chronologically tracing it from different ages, it vividly confirms the privileged position enjoyed by the vellalas. During the Sangam age (5th BC. to 3rd C.A.D.) they formed one of the four occupational groups namely, ‘andanar’, ‘arasar’, ‘vanigar’ and ‘vellalas’. Though the vellalas are mentioned as the fourth group they cannot be equated with the śūdras of aryan society. Tolkappiyar speaks only of the four occupational groups and not of all castes. Tamil society was never ordered on the varnashrama pattern. Firstly, arasar (kings and princes) here cannot be equated with the Kshatriya community of the northern classification, secondly the śūdra class was missing in the classification of Tolkappiyar, thirdly the right or inter marriage granted to the arasar and vellalas defeated the rigour of the northern varna division.\textsuperscript{24}

During the medieval period (600 - 1300 A.D.) the process of progressive sanskritisation was evident. Brahmanisation was the dominant feature of this period. Caste and subcaste formation went on unabated. This


period also bears testimony to the high status held by the vellalas. Bhakti movement was an important event of the medieval period to which the vellalas had their own share of contribution. For a long time bhakti or devotion to god remained a subject of scriptures for theoretical discussion and for the rishis to be imparted to the students. But in Tamil country bhakti became a practical experience and canalised itself in a movement and became nerve centre of the masses in the Pallava period. Emerged as a popular movement it represented a new way of life and thought. The Hindu religion faced challenges from several rival religious systems at different phases of time. This trend was much pronounced in the Tamil country from sixth to ninth century A.D. The reaction of Hinduism to the spread of Buddhism and Jainism found expression in the Bhakti movement. The leaders of the Tamil Bhakti movement were broadly divided into two different groups viz., the ‘nayanmars’ and the ‘alvars’. The ‘nayanmars’ were devoted to the worship of Siva and ‘alvars’ to the warship of Vishnu. They practiced a new type of bhakti, a fervid emotional surrender to god. Appearing as contemporary and co-operative in their venture, these saint leaders toured all over Tamil country, visited the shrines of their respective deities and adored them with ecstatic devotion. From among the sixty three nayanmars, sixteen belonged to the vellala stock. They were (1) Arivattāyar (2) Ilayānkudi (3) Āyarkōnkalimār (4) Kōtpuliyār (5) Sakthiyār (6) Sakkiyār (7) Serutharaiyār (8) Thirunāvukkarasar (Appar) (9) Mankanjanār (10) Munaiyiduvār (11) Mūkkar (12) Vayilār (13) Kalippagaiyār
Virānminḍār (15) Thilagavathiyār and (16) Kundaiyūrkizhār. The fact that Thilagavathiyār one of the 'nayanmar' was a woman of the vellala community deserves special mention. The vellalas had their shares of contribution to vaishnavism as well. Nammalvār who is considered the heart and soul of Vaishnavite movement was a vellala.  

The high status enjoyed by the vellalas continued during the Chola rule. Pingala Nigandu one of the earliest Tamil lexicons which belonged to the Chola period (850 - 1279 A.D) groups the vellalas under the vaiśya sect. According to the lexicon the vaiśya sect was referred to by different names which included the term vellala also. The very same text confirms the involvement of vellala community in three main occupations namely cattle rearing, earning wealth and cultivation. Accordingly they were known as Govaisyas, Dhanavaisyas and Bhuvaisyas. In Kambar's Ramayana which is attributed to the Chola period, it is stated that honour of placing the crown on Rama's head was given to a vellala by the sage Vāsishta. The vellalas besides their knowledge in agriculture acquired over the years, also served as ministers and high officials. They were conferred with the title 'Muvenda velā n' by Chola kings. The practice of honouring the vellalas

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26 Pingala Nigandu. 772 Śūtra.
27 Ibid., 774 Śūtra.
with the title of ‘Muvenda Velān’ reached its peak during the reign of Rajendra II (1052 - 1064 A.D.) and Vera Rajendra (1063-1070 A.D.) and decreased later. The following table substantiate this fact.²⁸

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>King</th>
<th>Year (A.D.)</th>
<th>No. of inscriptions</th>
<th>No. of Muvenda Velāns</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uththama Cholan</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rajarajan I</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rajendran I</td>
<td>1012</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rajadirajan</td>
<td>1018</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rajendran II</td>
<td>1052</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Verarajendran</td>
<td>1063</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Adi Rajendran</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kulothungan I</td>
<td>1070</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vikramacholan</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kulothungan II</td>
<td>1133</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rajarajan II</td>
<td>1146</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Rajathirajan II</td>
<td>1163</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Kulothungan III</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Rajarajan III</td>
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<td>236</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Rajendran III</td>
<td>1246</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sekkiḷar, whose original name was Arunmouzhi Thevar was a vellala of Tondaimandalam region. He served as a minister under emperor Kulottunga II (1133 - 50 A.D.). Periyapuram, the great book of the saiva saints on an epic pattern was composed on the heyday of the Chola dynasty.

by Sekkijar. The women of the vellala community were treated with respect. This is evident from an inscription at Kaveripākkam in north Arcot district which throws light on the fact that vellala woman should not be called to the public and asked to pay taxes.\(^{29}\) The privilege enjoyed by the vellalas during Chola period is also evident from the fact that they were exempted from death sentence. Even when a vellala accidentally killed a person, death penalty as a punishment was not imposed on him.\(^{30}\) The assumption is irresistible that vellalas enjoyed special rights of exemption from extreme judicial punishment like the brahmans. What the rationale of such exemption is hard to see unless it is that like the priestly class that took care of the spiritual needs of the society, the vellalas who took care of food production were considered worthy of leniency.\(^{31}\) Among the many guild organisations that existed in medieval south India particularly in the rural areas there was an organisation known as Chitrameli periyanāttar. This was an organisation of the vellalas and was called after ‘meli’ an instrument essential for agriculture. These organisations are referred to at times in inscriptions simply as perianattavar or periyanadu. The term meli (medi, in Telugu) meaning plough and chitrameli meaning beautiful plough. It is interesting to note that some of the slabs or stones or plates on which

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their inscriptions are inscribed contain the sketches of the plough along with other figures such as the bull, serpent, drum, Pûnakumbha etc.\textsuperscript{32}. Besides some villages also came to be named after the plough or Chitrameli organisation itself. For instance, the village of Medikurti is referred to as Medikuru in Tamil as also in Telugu.\textsuperscript{33} This organisation also exercised administrative, financial and judicial powers.\textsuperscript{34}

During the period of later Pandyas also (1090 - 1352 A.D.) the vellalas continued to enjoy the influential position. During the days of Vijaya Nagar rule (1336-1565 A.D.) the empire was divided into several provinces placed under the control of Nayaks. Viswanatha Nayaka (1529-1564 A.D.) Nayak of Mudura under Krishnadevaraya had an able and efficient Commander-in-Chief Ariyanatha Mudali. Ariyanatha Mudali besides establishing peace in the region was the founder of the polygar system in Tamil Nadu. He was a vellala who hailed from Kanchipuram.\textsuperscript{35} The vellalas continued to remain high in social status next only to the Brahmins in the seventeenth century as well and they were the most

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} ARIE, 1953-54, p.6. (ARIE - Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy).
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid also No.6, 18 & 26 of 1953-54.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} SII, Vol.V. 496 (SII - South Indian Inscriptions).
\end{itemize}
numerous among the caste Hindus. The learned among the vellalas called themselves as ‘Mudalis’ which means leading in the forefront or Principal man. Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the ‘Mudalis’ were dubāshis providing a link between foreign traders and the local market thus playing an important role in business transactions.

The vellalas were always alert and careful in retaining their status in society which they had maintained consistently over the different periods in the history of Tamilnadu. So after the advent of the British and with the introduction of the census system when they were classified as śūdras in 1871 census they immediately objected to it. This is evident from the communication of the Madras Municipal Commissioner’s office dated 18th August 1871 addressed to petitioner S. Causi Viswanatha Mudali. The petitioner had objected to the classification of vellalas as śūdras and insisted that they were vaiśyas. In the communication it was stated that the vellalas claim to be considered as vaiśya was not denied, and hence forth each caste would be entered in the census report as such in the

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37. M.A.Sherring, Tribes and Castes of the Madras Presidency (Delhi, 1975), p.112.

alphabetical order and no classification of communities would be done.39 This system was continued in the 188140 and 189141 census. But once again in the 1901 census the vellalas were classified as śūdras42. The same census report says that some castes were dissatisfied with this sort of classification and vellala caste was one among them.43 People of vellala community came out with views insisting on belonging to vaiśya group. From 1911 the castes were classified according to their traditional occupations and vellalas were classified under the group of cultivators44.

The vellalas besides being adept in the art of agriculture have gained other skills as well. They were quick to make use of advances in the education system. As early as 1871 a vellala became a post graduate of the Madras University45. The vellalas also proved their efficiency as karnam or Village Accountants. By using iron styles with case, the vellalas used to

40. Lewis McIver, Madras Census Report 1881, p.133.
43. Ibid., p.130.
44. Census of India 1911, Vol.XII, p.184.
write on cadjam or palmyra leaves even in lamplight as it can be done in daylight. It was remarkable that evenwhile running by the side of Tashildar's (revenue officers) palanquin the vellalas could take the dictation and had the ability to do arithmetic calculations with strictest accuracy.\textsuperscript{46} The vellalas were also industrious and frugal. Their frugality was proverbial. The frugal tendency was seen in the women folk also. A vellālachi (vellala Woman) used to be content with one blue cloth or something equal to a saree of the present day and her food also limited to dry grains cultivated from their own fields\textsuperscript{47}. The vellalas by their industry and frugality created wealth, supported the administration and could find the money for imperial and district demand as their own proverb says "The vellalar's goad is the ruler's sceptre"\textsuperscript{48}. The vellalas were compared to the clouds that bring prosperity to the land. Because of their agricultural equipment and what they produced in agriculture not even the most powerful could do without them. They became masters in the art of tilling the soil and were in possession of instruments of agriculture that gave results and never failed.\textsuperscript{49} The Tamil Lexicon lists ten characteristics of


\textsuperscript{47} H.Lefanu (Compiled), Salem Manual, p.132.

\textsuperscript{48} F.A.Nicholson (Compiled), Coimbatore Manual, p.56.

\textsuperscript{49} Eugene F Irschick, Dialogue and History, op. cit., p.197.
vellalas viz (1) anaivali nirral, (2) alintorai niruttal, (3) kaikkatanarral, (4) kacivakattunmai, (5) okkalporral, (6) ovamuyarc, (7) mannirai tarutal, (8) orrumaikotal (9) viruntu puram tarutal and (10) tiruntiva volukkam. From the circumstances that vellalas were hospitable velanmai itself came to mean generosity.

There are some tamil proverbs which express the cultural distinction of vellalas. Few of them are

1. Though you may face an evil star, never oppose a vellala.
2. Agriculture is only agriculture if done by vellalas.
3. A vellala won't eat if he can't invite a guest to join him.

A curious caste division, viz., ‘Valangai’ and ‘Idangai’ (the right and the left hand castes) existed in the Tamil society. Many conjectures have been made to identify them, and trace their origin, but none seems satisfactory. In a set up of that nature the vellala community stood apart equidistancing from the two groups and remained neutral.

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51 Kural 81.
The only purpose, of a family life of virtue and wealth, is to command the means of extending hospitality to guests N. Mahalingam (Gen.ed), (Trans), Tirukkural, Vol.1, op. cit., p.146.
Inspite of distinctive characteristics, the vellala caste over a period of years diffused widely and made it possible for other castes to acquire the name and position of vellalas. Such of those recorded were the ‘vettuva vellala’, ‘puluva vellala’ and ‘illam vellala’ who were originally ‘vettuvan’, ‘puluvan’ and ‘panikkan’ respectively. In fact the readiness with which the vellala mix with other castes is compared to the brinjal, a vegetable that mixes palatably with any kind of food\(^5^4\). A Tamil proverb goes to the extent of saying how step by step a Kallan may come to be known as a Maravan and by respectability develop into Agamudayan and slowly become a vellala.\(^5^5\) But still by their ubiquity status and prestige the vellalas were present throughout the Coromandal plain and interior upland. Due to their dominance in plain and upland this agrarian society continued to remain as a group and maintained its identity.

The vellala community over a period of years due to several factors developed a number of sub-divisions or sub-sects. The various factors which accounted for division of vellala community were the migration of vellalas from one area to another, settlement in new areas, change in their food habits and change in the social scenario\(^5^6\). When kingdoms expanded into empires, such a growth and transformation encouraged the vellalas, the

\(^{54\text{}}\) Census of India, 1961, Vol.IX, Part VI, No.4, p.46.


\(^{56\text{}}\) Pulavar Manian (ed.), Varalātril Velān kudigal, op. cit., p.31.
THE CHOLA MACRO REGION
tillers of soil to migrate from one zone to another. At times these migrations were encouraged by rulers. The reduction of forest and expansion of regularly cultivated land was a continuous process. The practice of moving to new places and establishing themselves became a routine affair. When the vellalas settled in new areas they came to be called after the name of the town of their settlements as sub-sects. There are as many a 110 sub sects of the vellala community.5

The vellala community was first of all split into four main divisions named after the tract of the country in which the ancestors of each originally resided. They were (1) Tondaimandalam vellalas or the dwellers in the pallava country, the present Chengleput and north Arcot districts the title of which were ‘mudali’, ‘reddi’ and ‘nainar’ (2) Soliya or man of Chola country, the Tanjore and Trichinopoly districts of the present day, the members of which were called ‘pillai’ (3) Pandya or inhabitants of the pandya kingdom of Madura, Tinnevelly the titles of which were also ‘pillai’ and (4) Kongu or those who resided in the kongu country which corresponded to Coimbatore and Salem, the men of which were called ‘kavandans’.6

5 Ibid., pp.71-72.
6 W. Francis, Madras Census Report 1901, p.183.
Thuluva vellalas belonged to the group of Tondaimandalam vellalas. Tradition has it that Karikāla (2nd C.A.D.) had a son by his marriage with a Naga princess whom he crowned as the ruler of Tondaimandalam and gave the title of Adhonda Chakravarti. The Tondaimandalam area was initially full of forests and was inhabited by wild tribe called Kurumbars or aruvalars. Adhonda Chakravarti subdued this tribe and established his authority. He cleared the area of woods and brought the area under active cultivation. This task he was able to accomplish with the vellalas who were encouraged to migrate to Tondaimandalam by his father Karikāl Chola. The vellalas who migrated to this area were the Thuluva, Coliya and Kondaikatti vellalas. The Thuluva vellalas migrated from Thulunadu in south Canara and the Soliya vellalas from the Cholanadu. The Kondaikatti vellalas were so called from binding their hair in a tuft on the top of their head instead of leaving a small block (Kudumi). Of these the Thuluvas constituted by far the greater body of settlers and were induced to remain and bring the whole province into cultivation by the peculiar privileges (caunimaunyam, miracis) politically conferred on them. This point is brought out by Professor M. Mariappa Bhat in his article on


"Tamil-Tulu Early contacts and a glimpse into occupation among Thuluvas". He states that

'There is a great community among the Tamils called Thuluva vellalas or vellalas. Tradition has it that during the days of the Karikal Cholan (2nd C.A.D.) the Thuluvas were settled in the present Tondainadu which was a forest area and the land was brought under cultivation. The thick forests of Tondainadu was brought under active cultivation by the construction of tanks and canals. Evidently the agriculturist (vellalas) of Thuluva who found the original home too restricted for agricultural enterprise found the riverine region of Tondai Nadu more inviting and settled there".62

Thus the Thuluva vellalas were immigrants from the Thulu Country, a part of modern district of south Canara who were invited to Tondaimandalam after its conquest by the Chola king Adondai Chakravarti63. That there was


NADUS AND KOTTAMS IN TONDAIMANDALAM
such reclamation of land and farmers settlement at the time of Karikāl cholan is seen in the idylls of Pattinappālai.⁶⁴

The vellalas who migrated from Tulunad in south canara were essentially Tamils. Tulunad in those days formed a part of Tamil country. Tolkāppiyam the ancient Tamil text refers to the entire area between Tirupati in the north to Capecomerin in the south as constituting Tamilagam.⁶⁵ Tulunad finds mention in Ahanānuru a literary work of the Sangam period. It is referred to as a country in whose forests the peacocks peck at the well grown jack fruits.⁶⁶ Thus Tulunad formed an integral part of Tamilnadu.


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⁶⁴ Pattinappālai - 283 - 84
"Kādu Konru Nādu Ākki Kulam thottu valam perukki"

⁶⁵ Tolkāppiyam cirappu pāyiram, pp.1-3.

⁶⁶ Ahanānuru - 15.

The Tondaimandalam region extended from Sriharikota in the north to Pinauguay in the south and it comprised of nearly one hundred and sixty miles of area. The boundaries of Tondaimandalam were pavazhamalai or coral mountains, the range of eastern ghats in the West, the sacred hills of Tirupathy in the north. The resounding sea was to its east and Pinauguay was its southern boundary.

The four main kingdoms of Tamilnadu were famous for their richness in certain aspects. Ouvaiyar the poet of the Sangam age had mentioned about these riches in a traditional verse. The Chera kingdom was rich in elephants, Chola kingdom in rice, Pandya country for its pearls and Tondainadu was famous for its wisemen.

The Thuluva vellalas who settled in Tondaimandalam contributed to the prosperity of the region. The Tamil scholar Muthukumaran in his book 'Thirupurasundaripillai Tamil' published in the year 1858 mentions many facts about Thuluva vellalas. As per this book the Thuluva vellalas of Tondaimandalam region comprised of 12,000 clans. The region they dwelled consisted of twenty four divisions called kottams. These kottams

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were subdivided into sixty four nādus which in turn comprised of 999 villages. They were quite prosperous, religious, generous and main contributors of land revenues to the government.70

From Tondaimandalam the Thuluva vellalas had migrated to different parts of Tamilnadu. During the reign of Chola king Rajendra I (1012-1044 A.D.) about 48,000 families of Cholamandalam and Tondaimandalam region had moved to Nulambadi the present Kolar region and true to their community engaged themselves in cultivation. This migration of vellalas to Nulambādi and exemption from payment of certain taxes and other concessions conferred on them by their king to encourage agriculture in this area is vividly seen from the inscription of this period71.

There had been migration of vellalas from Tondaimandalam to Kongu region as well. The Pālayapattu genealogies of British period record invariably these migrations. Kaifeits of Kalingarāya and Pallavarāya are some of the examples.72 Kongu inscriptions also mention these migrations. The vellalas of Tondaimandalam who were well versed in cultivation were elevated to high offices in Kongu region.73


From Tondaimandalam the vellalas had migrated to hilly region like Kolli, jawadu shervorayan and kalrayan hills. People who lived in these areas are in possession of copper plates of Chola and Vijayanagar periods. These plates refer to the ancestors of these people as having migrated from Kanchipuram.74

There had been vellala migration from Tondaimandalam to Madura country during the Nayak’s period. Ariyanatha Mudali who served as dalavai and Chief minister to Viswanatha Nayakar (1529-1564 A.D.) was a vellala of Tondaimandalam region. He hailed from the village of Meippedu in Kanchipuram. He received basic education in Tamil and training in martial arts. He had natural mastery over the subject of mathematics and astrology. Romance contributes to him feats of personal prowess and solutions of difficult and abstruse problems, which attracted the notice of the Raja and procured for him startling elevation from post to post until atlast he became the dictator of the Vijayanagar empire. He was uncommonly prudent and orderly minded statesman with a keen eye for practical organisation and administration. Among the many rulers, generals and public men that fit across the pages of Indian history and vanish into darkness as soon as their meteoric career is over, there are comparatively

74 Pulavar Manian (ed), Varalātril velán kudigal, op. cit., p.34.
few substantial statesmen whose wisdom, foresight and zeal were such as to introduce a new institution or policy which became an enduring factor in the history of their country. Ariyanatha Mudali is one such personality. He had left as monuments of his genius, institutions which have not died to the present day. He was a versatile genius and could acquaint himself with as much felicity in the field as on the court. He took prominent part in the establishment of the Nayak dynasty of Madura and co-operated with its founder, Visvanatha in the government of the kingdom. For more than half a century after Viswanatha's death, he was the pivot of the infant kingdom, the trusted minister and advisor. This was because of the amiability of his manners, the modernization of his counsels and his tact in managing the desire and temperament of three successive rulers of Madura. His equestrian statue in the pudumantapam at Madura is a substantial relic of importance. When he died in 1600, he left the kingdom a well defended state with sound finance and efficient army and a wholesome policy to be pursued by his successor. He sent for his relatives from Kanchipuram in Tondaimandalam and made them reside in the fertile lands of Solavandan a village few miles west of Madura. He made provision for everything that was considered necessary to the immigrants comforts. A fortress and three hundred houses were built for their protection and

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75 Prof.V. Rangachari, Indian Antiquary, Vol.44, 1915, pp.62-64.
convenience. A temple was also erected and a guru was brought from Kanchipuram to officiate there in and perform the services to which the people of mudali caste were accustomed to. This migration of vellalas took place in the year 1566. The other dependents of this great mudali are said to have been placed in Nagari, others in Thirumangalam, Pathaneri and other villages. His contributions were not confined to the political field. He has made endowments to temples and had his share of contribution to architecture. He constructed the thousand pillared hall in Nellaiyappar temple in Tinnevelly and Meenakshi temple in Madurai. The mantapam of the sixty three saiva saints also owes its existence to him. He had donated many articles of jewellery to goddess Meenakshi of Madura and a silver throne for Lord Siva. There is reference to his endowments to temples in Madurai Thiruppani Malai.

His son Kalathinatha Mudaliar continued the religious services of his father. His endowment to the Madurai temple for annual chariot festival finds place in Madurai Thiruppani Malai.

77 Madurai Thiruppani Malai, Hymn No.50.
78 Ibid., No.57.
The members of the succeeding generation of Ariyanatha mudali had held important positions in administration and they have contributed to the welfare of the general public. One such member Kadanthal Mudaliyar served as minister in the early years of the reign of Thirumalai Nayakar. He constructed a mantapam called Mudalipillai mantapam in Madurai. His son Jayatunga Mudaliyar was the first officer to be appointed in charge of the entire district of Tinneveli. From 1682 to 1706 A.D. during the reign of Rangappa Nayakkar and his mother Mangammal, the officer of Tinneveli district was one Māvaikumārasāmy Mudaliyar. He constructed many choultries on the route from Kanyakumari to Benares. His son Ārai Alagappa Mudaliyar exercised great authority in Tinneveli. The 'Trivancore sarithiram' refers to the skillful way in which he settled a succession dispute. The Tamil literary works 'Kutrālakuravanji' and Pabanāsapuranam mention the endowments made by him. His relative Dalavai Kumārasāmy Mudaliyar as the provincial officer of Tinneveli had acted as a mediator in the dispute between Palayakars and officials of the East India Company. Thānappa Mudaliyar who served as minister in Tirchinopoly from 1704 to 1735 A.D made endowment to Madurai Sundareswarar Meenakshi Amman temple and set apart certain villages to the scheme. 

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79 Ammaiappa Mudaliar, Tondaimandala vamsavali (Thenkasi, 1933), Introduction.
Thus it is evident that Thuluva vellalas migrated to Tondaimandalam after its conquest by king Athonda Chakravarti. From Tondaimandalam they had moved to different parts of Tamilnadu and settled in those areas at different periods of history. The Thuluva vellalas assumed different titles in different areas of their settlement. In Thondaimandalam they had the title of mudaliars. In south Arcot they are referred to as ‘udayār’ and ‘nayinār’, in Salem as ‘naicker’ and in other areas as ‘pillais’.

The Mudaliārs of the Coromandel coast who were primarily agriculturists, in course of time emerged as groups of commercial importance and indulged in long distance trade. They derived substantial income from agriculture which they invested in maritime trade. When the Portuguese came in contact with the Coromandel coast they searched for trade partners from the local merchant communities whose expertise could be helpful. They found these Mudaliārs with adequate capital to invest and who knew the local languages and the markets. In the early 16th century the Tamil speaking Mudaliārs came forward to help the Portuguese, when they proposed to build a Portuguese fortress in Sunda where a large volume of pepper was produced. In 1522 A.D. they guaranteed the annual sale and

supply of 1000 sacks of pepper. Mudaliārs also advanced loans to the Portuguese. Happy with the prompt repayment of loans, the Mudaliārs appealed to the King of Portugal to appoint Jorge Cabral, who was then the Portuguese Captain, as Captain for life. Similarly in 1527 A.D. when the Portuguese began to default on the repayment of loans Mudaliārs did not hesitate to complaint to the King of Portugal about the poor repayment of loans. Thus in the early 16th century the Mudaliars’ were a thriving business community engaged in maritime trade.81

During the rule of the East India Company the Thuluva vellalas of Tondaimandalam held the prestigious position of mirasidars, who enjoyed the right of ‘Mirasi’. Mirasi was a privileged right to possess land with an exclusive right of sale or purchase attached to it. The mirasidars of Tondaimandalam were also known as caniyatchikarars. They were exempted from any payment to the state. This was an exclusive privilege enjoyed by the mirasidars of Tondaimandalam alone and was known as caniyāchimānyam.82 In the records of the East India Company mirasi is referred to as "Merassee" which implies "inheritance", "privileges"


"proprietary right", "Mirasi privileges" and the "right of inheritance in respect to the soil". The mirasidars were not only exempted from taxes but enjoyed the right to collect certain fees. The taxes were swantantrams or merahs on the gross produce of all land yielding revenue to the state tudivaram or short assessment of the produce of all land under cultivation by non mirasidars. They built their houses on the Nattam or village site and no where else and the Nattam could not be cultivated or appropriated for other purposes. Most important of all, the paracheri, the hamlet where the paraiyas lived was under the control of the mirasidars. They also held right over waste land in the village, in deciding to whom it should be assigned and to receive fee if it was thrown open for cultivation. However their rights were limited by the nature of waste. They held seykal carumbu or cultivable waste with the same right as other taxable land in the village. They could cultivate it or rent it to others. They had no right of cultivation over anadicarumbu or immemorial waste, but enjoyed on it exclusive right of cutting firewood and working quarries. Mirasidars also had certain duties which consisted in payment of certain small taxes as 'merah' to the community for the purpose of internal administration. These taxes were

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83 Mirasi Papers (Madras, 1862), p.376.

84 T.K.Sundai, Caste and the Agrarian structure (New Delhi, 1991), pp.36-37.
spent for 1. feeding of brahmins on particular festival for lighting the village temple and gates, 2. for defraying the expenses incurred on certain anniversaries, 3. for feeding travellers and strangers, 4. for repairing the village well and the temples and 5. for paying brave men who killed tigers. The rights of the mirasidars were more numerous than their duties, the institution being one of the assertion of their rights rather than their duties. Thus the Thuluva vellalas of Tondaimandalam as mirasidars were holding influential position in society.

The various effects of the British rule paved the way for Indian national movement. The political unity of the country, strengthened by improvement in transport and communication and western system of education through the medium of English language roused the feeling of oneness and national consciousness of the Indians. This feeling made them rise against the oppressive policies of British rule like excessive taxation, censorship of the press, denial of appointment to Indians in administration. The members of the Thuluva vellala community had their own share of contribution to the Indian national movement. The history of the Indian national movement is traced from the beginning of the history of the Indian

85 Patricia Joseph, "The Mirasi system in Chengleput district (1760-1820)", op. cit., p.87.
National Congress in 1885. A point worth mentioning here is that in 1884, prior to the establishment of the Indian National Congress, the idea of organising an All India National association was discussed at Adyar in Chennai. In 1884 after the conclusion of the annual conference of the Theosophical society, seventeen members of the society met at the residence of Dewan Ragunatha Rao and planned to establish an All India National Association with branches in all the states. Of the seventeen members who met, two were Tamilians, S.Subramania Iyer from Chennai and C. Vijayaranga Mudaliar, representative from Poona. The members decided that the first conference of the association should be held in Calcutta in the last week of December 1884. It was against this background that the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. Thus the seeds of the huge tree of Indian National Congress was sown in Tamilnadu and it is really a matter of pride for the members of the Mudaliar Community that one of their members had a role to play in this historical event. 'Who is who' of freedom movement of Tamilnadu list as many as 460 members with the caste title Mudaliars as having participated in the national movement.

In Tamilnadu simultaneously with the national movement, another movement called as the Non-Brahmin movement also took place. The aim of the latter was to uplift the masses of the Non-Brahmin community against the monopoly and privileges enjoyed by the brahmins. The Justice Party founded in 1917 championed the cause of Non-Brahmins. C.Natesa Mudaliār one of the prominent leaders of the Non-Brahmin movement was a Thuluva vellala. He was born in 1875 A.D. at Chinnakavanur near Ponneri in Madras state. He graduated from Madras University and further completed his degree in medicine. He had a firm conviction that education alone would lead to the upliftment of the socio-economic status of Non-brahmins. He organised the Madras United League in 1912 which was later renamed as "Madras Dravidian Association". As Secretary of the Association he started collecting funds for the establishment of a hostel in Chennai to be utilized for the education of Non-Brahmins. The establishment of the Dravidian Association Hostel was the first practical step to organise the non-brahmins. The services rendered by the Dravidian Association became the basis for the Justice party. Since the hostel gave shelter to helpless dravidian students of mofusil areas it was aptly called

K.Kumaresan, Dravida Thalaivar C.Natesanar (Madras, 1984), Introduction, p.IV.
the ‘Dravidian Home’. Among the students who stayed in the hostel, the most notable were T.M. Narayanaswami pillai who later became the Vice Chancellor of the Annamalai University and Subramania nadar who later rose to the position of a judge of the Madras High Court. The aspirations of C. Natesa Mudaliar were given a political shape by Sir. P. Theagaraya Chetty and T.M. Nair in Justice Party. He played a key role and succeeded in bringing about a rapprochement between the two prominent leaders. T.M. Nair and Sir P. Theagaraya Chettiar. These three personalities worked united and formed the South Indian Liberation Front on November 20, 1916. Natesa Mudaliar had served as a member of the Madras Corporation and Madras Legislative Assembly. As member of the Corporation he paid much attention to public health and as member of the Legislative Assembly participated in discussions on communal justice for Non-Brahmins. His efforts in establishing the Hindu Religious Endowment Board in 1922 A.D. was remarkable. His relentless activities to settle the problem of Buckingham mill and his effort to save Thiru. Vi. Kalyana Sundaram (Thiru.Vi.Ka.) from the oppressive

punishment of British proved his competence. C. Natesa Mudaliār would help people whenever they approached him regardless of caste, community, status or power. This comes to light from the biography of Thiru.Vi.Ka.\textsuperscript{91} Though Thiru.Vi.Ka was intensely engrossed in the Congress movement and was strongly opposing the justice party he had been helped personally by C.Natesan on many occasions. A. Ramaswami Mudaliār another prominent member of the Justice party was also a Thuluva vellala and had contributed to the party and the movement to a great extent\textsuperscript{92}.

The members of the Thuluva vellala community had realised the importance of bringing together the members of the community scattered in different parts of the state and had formed an association as early as 1914. Ramiah pillai (1892-1967) was bent upon bringing about unity among Thuluva vellalas. He was convinced that the Thuluva vellala community had a tradition of its own and was spread in different districts of Tamilnadu. He authored a book "\textit{Thuluva velālar varalāru}" in which he had brought about the mythological views regarding the origin of Thuluva vellalas and the endowments made by the community to the temple of Lord Subramania at Palani. Ramiah pillai who lived in Aruppukottai near Madurai founded the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Thiru. Vi. Ka. \textit{Valkai Kurippugal} (Chennai, 1944), p.449.
  \item \textsuperscript{92} \textit{Vide Chapter IV} Contributions, pp.148 to 162.
\end{itemize}
Thuluva vellala Bāla Sanmārgha Sabai and Vālibar Sangam (Youth Association). In 1921 he established the Thuluva vellala sangam. Not content with that, he founded the Thuluva vellala Mahājana Sangam in 1932 with the aim of uniting members of the community throughout Tamilnadu. But this association ceased to function after few years. He travelled to various parts of Tamilnadu like Chennai, Thiruvannamalai, Tindivanam, Chengleput, Villupuram, Sale, Atthur, Erode, Coimbatore etc., contacted the people of the community and roused the feeling of oneness among them. He carried out this task on his own and spent a greater part of his wealth for this purpose.

In 1932 when the Thuluva vellala Mahājana Sabai began deteriorating, an association of Thuluva vellala started functioning in Tuticorin. The second conference of the Tuticorin association was held in 1944 A.D. Ramiah Pillai was invited to preside over the conference and the Thuluva vellala Mahājana Sangam was revived on this occasion. The revived association held its statewide conference at Tinnevelli in 1945. The outcome of the conference was awakening and co-ordination among community people which resulted in the establishment of Thuluva vellala Mahā Jana Sangam in 1945. The association held conferences in different centres but declined due to absence of field workers. Similarly the Mudaliar
Sangam of Bangalore established the **All India Thuluva vellala Sangam** in 1979. Yet another association of the Thuluva vellalas called The Thuluva Vellalar Sangam has been functioning at Chennai since 1939. Poonamallee Uyar Thuluva Vellala Association is another prominent association of Thuluva vellalas functioning at Mylapore since 1946. These associations have played a vital role in serving the members of the community.

The Thuluva vellala community is recognised as a backward community by the government of Tamilnadu. Though the residents of the city belonging to the community are educated and well placed in society, majority of the people living in rural areas are still in a backward state. This point was highlighted by the Community association before the Sattanathan Commission which was appointed (1958-60) by the Government of Tamilnadu to review the condition of backward classes in the state. Similar efforts were made when Backward Class Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr.Ambasankar. B.M. Sundara Vadanan, President of the Thuluva vellala association gave oral evidence before the

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Ambasankar Commission\textsuperscript{95} and furnished a memorandum to M.G.Ramachandran, the then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. The memorandum furnished valid details regarding the backward conditions of the society. The Thuluva vellalas were retained as a backward community inspite of the dissent note of the Chairman of the Commission Mr.Ambasankar because the other members of the Commission did not concur with his view.\textsuperscript{96}

Regarding the social condition of Thuluva vellalas, they have occupied a respectable position in society. The caste system had taken deep roots in the Indian society. Also the number of sub-castes has become innumerable. Caste which is based on birth confers social status on the individual. This social symbol remains with the people throughout their life from the cradle to grave. The Vellala caste had always enjoyed a respectable position in Tamil society. Being cultivators and providers of food to the society, they had this privileged position. Thuluva vellalas being a sub-sect of the Vellala caste naturally enjoyed this privilege. As in the case of any community, family is the primary unit of social life of the Thuluva vellalas. Joint family system was widely prevalent. Joint family had been an important institution in India. It was patriarchal\textsuperscript{97} (having the eldest male as its head). The joint family of Thuluva vellalas maintained a close link between brothers, uncles, cousins and nephews, who often lived under one roof. The immovable property was owned collectively by the members of the family.

\textsuperscript{95} Vide Appendix - III.

\textsuperscript{96} Vaira Vila Malar. \textit{Thuluva Velalar sangam, op. cit.}, p. not numbered.

They used to pool all their earnings and resources, have only one establishment, dine from the same kitchen and work for the common good. There was strict control over female children particularly after their attaining puberty. They were not allowed freely to mingle with any of their age group. This system was followed to avoid any untoward happenings.98

In modern times the social life of different communities have undergone changes. During British period the process of modernisation had been ubiquitous in all sections of society. The introduction of western education and culture in the modern period effected enormous changes in social life. There were changes in structure of Thuluva vellala families. Nuclear families consisting of the husband, wife and children began to replace joint families. Reasons for disintegration of joint family system was due to the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, increase of social and geographical mobility which forced young people to migrate wherever they could find employment. To a certain extent it was also due to assertion of individualism. Restrictions on girl children were gradually removed. They were encouraged to move freely in pursuit of their studies and employment.

Regarding the economic condition of Thuluva vellalas, agriculture had been their main occupation. They had other means of livelihood as well. They invested their earnings from agriculture in commercial activities. Many Thuluva vellalas who call themselves as Arcot Mudaliars have engaged themselves in different trades. Few Thuluva vellalas have become

98 Interview with Mrs. R. Manimegalai (age 85), Anna Nagar, Chennai - 40.
Doctors and Lawyers and some have joined the Teaching profession. Most of them have entered Government Service as Clerks. Few have entered Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service. Many Thuluva vellalas live in villages as small land owners. Due to partition and fragmentation of properties they migrated to cities and began to serve as labourers in Railway Workshops, Port Trust etc. Some of them have become peons. Hence for the over all improvement of the Thuluva vellala Community the community associations played a key role in retaining the backward status of the community. With the recognition of backward status by the Government, the members of the community could avail the various benefits conferred by the government in educational and employment avenues.

Thus the Thuluva vellalas were a sub-sect of the vellalas. They were brought to Tondaimandalam during 2nd century A.D. by King Athonda Chakravarti. During different periods of history they have settled in different parts of Tamilnadu. They have always maintained their status as an influential community. With the arrival of Europeans they continued to retain their status by assisting them in maritime activities. During the rule of East India Company they were influential mirasidars and landowners. With the rise of Indian national movement they have made contributions to it by participating in the historical event and undergoing punishments. Their role in the self respect movement was no less. C.Natesa Mudaliar one of the founders of the Justice Party was a

99 Oral Evidence of B.M. Sundara Vadanam, President of Thuluva Vellala Association before the Ambasankar Commission - Vide Appendix - III.
member of the community. With the improvement in transport and communication facilities the Thuluva vellalas have tried and succeeded in bringing about community awareness among their members scattered in different parts of the state. This had resulted in the formation of Thuluva vellala associations. Inspite of all these developments, the position of many of them in villages continued to be backward. Hence the Thuluva vellala associations played key role in retaining the backward status of the community so that the benefits conferred by the government in educational and employment field can be availed by the members of the community.