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Caste-class dynamics: The case of a south Indian village

Selvam, Solomon, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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A

Caste-Class Dynamics:
The Case of A South Indian Village.

By
Solomon Selvam

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of
New York.

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

4/3/91
Date

Michael E. Brown *in*
Chairman of Examining Committee

4/3/91
Date

Catherine A. Silver *in*
Executive Officer
Deputy

William Korbun

Professor Michael E. Brown

Professor Paramatma Saran
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

CASTE-CLASS DYNAMICS: THE CASE OF A SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE

by

Solomon Selvam

Adviser: Professor Michael E. Brown

The dramatic eruption of caste and communal riots by the upper-caste organizations that instantly toppled the government of prime minister Viswanath Pratap Singh in November 1990, signifies among other things that caste is an enduring reality in India. These developments testify that casteism, in its praxis and ideology, is still down to earth in Indian society: from the social life in the huts of the interior villages to the top corridors of power. Casteism is pronounced in work and wage distribution and allocation of resources in countryside as much as in the allocation of portfolios and other official positions in the urban centers. Mate-selection, and conduct of marital and all other cultural and religious ceremonies remain unshakably caste-bound.

Yet individuals, groups and strata based on wealth have clearly and visibly emerged from the ranks of all the castes. The class elements emerge in confrontation and in coalition with caste factors. Caste values largely persist despite the class elements getting institutionalized in Indian development. While the battle of caste and class

factors become intense in overtaking one another, these factors together as a single process, greatly determine the social life in Vagaikulam, the field of my ethnographic study, as they do throughout India. This coalition of class-caste factors, at time prevents, and now contributes to the process of polarization of properties in Vagaikulam. This incessant interplay of caste and class factors in every aspect of social life makes possible a "dynamic" rather than parallel development. I call it the "caste-class dynamics", influencing every aspect of social life: economy, polity, culture, religion, education, business, marriage, etc.

The ethnographic study highlights: 1. The ways in which capitalization determines the fluctuating dynamics of the caste-class relations in Indian villages, and limits and opportunities for the socialization. 2. The caste-class dynamics function more often than not as a single process influencing the entire social fabric: economic, political, cultural and religious events in the village. 3. And in a given issue, either the caste or the class factors have an edge over the other, while the class elements are increasingly pronounced.

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My brothers, sister and I would not have gone to

higher studies if my parents D. William Moses and S. Grace Mahamayee, had not provided us with the financial and moral support. My father and mother virtually struggled to promote our studies. I very respectfully submit my gratitudes to my parents.

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Table of Contents

Chapters	Page No
I Introduction	1
1. Outline of the Main Argument	
2. Review of Literature	
3. Methodology and Sources of Data	
4. A Theoretical Perspective	
5. Socio-historical Background	
II Madurai and The Madurai Region	30
1. The Ecological Setting	
2. Ancient Rule, Society, and culture	
3. The People and their occupations	
4. The Changing Communities	
III Vagaikulam	58
1. A Social History of the Village	
2. PK: Piranmalai to Vagaikulam	
3. The Caste Composition	
IV Economy and Caste	99
1. Agriculture	
2. The Land Tenure System	
3. Three Kinds of Farming	
4. Size of the Landholdings	
5. Concentration or Fragmentation	
6. Non-Farming Occupations	
V Workings of Caste and Class Dynamics	149
1. Tradition and Modernity	
2. Inequality in Opportunities	
3. Marriage and Family Relations	
4. Inter- and Intra-caste Relations	
5. Property Exchanging Hands	
6. Political Parties and Behavior	
VI Politics of Caste-Class Dynamics	194
1. Caste, Class, & Landownership	
2. Beneficiaries of Modernization	
3. Collapse of the Non PK Businesses	
4. Culture, Religion, etc.	
5. Force, and Social Violence	
6. Political Mobilization	
VII Conclusion	218
The Fluctuating Dynamics of Caste-Class relations	
Appendices	236
Bibliography	244
Autobiographical Note	250

LIST OF TABLES

Table No	Name of the Tables	Page No
1	Commercialization of Grains, 1950 & 1989	101
2	Population and Land Ownership: PK and Non-PK	105
3	Caste and Ownership of Land in 1950 & 1989	106
4	Population of Vagaikulam in 1950 and 1989	107
5	External Sources of Income to Vagaikulam	109
6	The Top 25 Landlords in 1950	118
7	The Top 25 Landlords in 1989	119
8	Fragmentation Process: Then and Now	121
9	Land Holders By Family in 1950 and 1989	124
10	Peasants in 4 Tiered System: 1950, 1989	127
11	Shops in 1950 and 1989 By Caste	138
12	Restaurants in 1989 By Caste	139
13	Incomes From Employment Services	142
14	Traditional Bullock Cart Transportation	152
15	Traditional Cattle Ploughs: 1950, 1989	154
16	Payment of Wages in Kind and Cash	155
17	Houses: Brick, Tiled, Mud-Walled, Huts	160
18	Divorce : 1950-70, 1971-80, 1981-1989	170
19	Landowning Lineages, Combined Ownership	182
20	Moneylenders By Caste in 1989	197
21	Tea-Stalls, Restaurants by Caste	200
22	Ownership of Consumer Stores by Caste	201

Glossary

Ambattayan refers to the barbers' caste.

Bengal is a linguistic region in the east, divided by the British into East Bengal and West Bengal in 1906, primarily to suppress the budding militant anti colonial struggles. The east became part of Pakistan when the British divided the Indian Subcontinent at the time of independence in 1947, and eventually became a sovereign independent Bangladesh, with the decisive intervention of Indian army in 1971, while the west remains as West Bengal state within India.

Buddhism and Jainism, the two powerful sects founded by the non-brahman advocates; Gautama Buddha and Mahavir Jain of justice, peace, and equality.

Cholas, the Tamil Kings who ruled the Tamils and the

Dravidian region based in Tanjavur, between roughly 3000 B.C. and 1400 A.D.

Cholam, an indigenous grain now improved by the agricultural department.

Cheras, the Malyalam Kings who ruled the Malayalis and the Dravidian region roughly between 3000 B.C. and 1400 A.D.

Dravidian is the name of the people presently living in the southern states of Anthra Pradesh, Karnataka,

Tamilnadu, and Kerala.

Hinduism, the total way of life of the people designed and dictated in the Hindu works such as Manu Sastra and the Bagavat Gita.

Kambu an indigenous grain, and now improved.

Kuthiraivalli, an indigenous grain is somehow survives among the peasantry.

Kezhvaragu, an indigenous grain still popular among the villagers.

Karumathur Kottaimandai, Chellampatti and Eluvampatti are villages, known for their traditional court system, the panchayat.

Kanyakumari is town lies on the southernmost tip of the peninsular India, bordering the state of Kerala on the west, and touching three oceans; the Bay of Bengal, the Arabic Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

Koozh is liquid food made out of local grains such as cholam, kambu, etc.

Kozhu is a iron instrument used in the front of the plough which effectively tills the land.

Kaveri, the biggest river in the state of Tamilnadu and not perennial, originates from the adjoining hills of the state of Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Kerala. The river

irrigates, among other region, the Tanjavur delta; the districts of Trichi, Tanjavur, and Pudukkottai, and joins the Bay of Bengal in an ancient place called Poompuhar.

Kuravar are the caste which knit and repair the domestic baskets.

Madurai, the capital of ancient indigenous rulers, the Pandiyas as well as of the Nayaks and Nayakkars of Telugu region. The British later used this town as headquarters to subjugate and subsequently rule the southern Tamils.

Mandai is the meeting place for council or the village court to discuss and settle all the public issues, including excommunication.

Mannar, Gulf of, separates the East coast from Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.

Mochai, an indigenous lentil belonging the Beans family still available. Pasipayaru, Thattampayaru are some of the other local lentils.

Nagore, a town on the east coast, east of Tanjavur, is a religious center for the muslims and for trading and fishing activities.

Nayak, Naicker, Naicken, Naidu are different terms to refer a caste of people.

Pandias, the Tamil Kings who ruled the Tamils and the Dravidian region based in Madurai, between roughly 3000 B.C. and 1400 A.D.

Pathupattu, Ettuthogai are the two collections of famous Tamil literary works of the Sangam Age.

Pannayal is semi-bonded laborer referring both the male and female, and young and the old. It still exists but very rapidly disappearing, and it will not be in practice in the 21st century.

PK refers to the Pramalai Kallar, one of the three-Kallar, Maraver and Agamudayar- dominant castes of the region.

Putharai Vannan are the Washerman for the Untouchables who occupy the lowest position and status in the caste hierarchy.

Pangalis is a term refers to the paternal brothers and their internal relationships.

Poligar, the petty "kings" established in different parts of Southern Tamilnadu by the Nayak rulers to collect the land revenues from the peasantry. Pulithevan, Kattapomman, Marudhu brothers of Sivaganga were some of the notables.

Pallans are one of the Untouchable castes or Harijan (Hari=God, Jan=children) named by Mahatma Gandhi, are historically doing the menial jobs for the higher castes.

Parayans (parai=inform by beating the drum) are one of the

Untouchable castes, doing historically the menial jobs.

Sakkilians are one of the three main Untouchable castes, who occupy the lowest within these three castes.

Samai, an indigenous grain, disappeared from agriculture.

Sangam Age, (sangam means academy) the golden age of the Tamil self rule and the Tamil literature, architecture, medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy, etc.

Saivism and Vaishnavism are the sects within Hinduism

Tamaraparani is another a river further south in the state of Tamilnadu.

Tuticorin, an ancient town on the east coast, a place where the pearls were picked in ancient times for the trade with the Roman empire, etc., and was the place of colonial revolt, notably by Va. Wu. Chithambararm Pillai in defiance of the British imperialism by setting up an independent maritime trade with a ship of his own.

Telugu, the language of the Telugu people and one of the five Dravidian languages; Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Tulu.

Tamil, the language of the Tamils, considered to be one of the most ancient language.

Taluk, is an administrative unit within a district, second

from the bottom managed by the officer belonging to the Administrative Service known as Tahsildhar.

Thuvarai, an indigenous lentil, a dear item in the Tamil food. The old and the improved varieties are cultivated.

Thinai, an indigenous grain, popular in Tamilnadu until the late 1960s, the advent of the green revolution.

Varaghu, an indigenous grain still in use in the villages.

Vaigai, a river on whose bank the (ancient too) modern city of Madurai is situated.

Vagaikulam, the twin village-the field of the study, lies 18 miles west of Madurai City. Since Kattu naicken saved the Tirumala Naicker from an wild tiger, the King named the village for the incident as Vagaikulam meaning vagai=victory, kulam=pond, and gifted the village and its surrounding lands to the people of the village.

Vannan are the Washerman for the entire village.

Vijayanagar Empire, a Telugu based empire, north of Madras ruled South India until 15th century, whose military commandeered by one Viswanath Nayak by the Emperor Krishna Deva Raya in 1507 A.D., to defeat the muslim invaders in Madurai region, established the Nayak dynasty in Madurai, of whom the most popular was the King Tirumala Nayakkar.

Yer is the name for the plough, driven a one person and pulled by two oxen or buffaloes, in wet and dry ploughing.

Zamin, a person named by the British in-charge of collecting the land revenues from the peasantry.

*

Diagrams

1. Caste-Class Structure: Theoretical Model	221
2. Caste-Class Structure: Vagaikulam Model	221
3. Caste, Class, Social Structure before Changes	234
4. Caste, Class, Social Structure after Changes	234

CHAPTER I

A. Placing the Main Argument in a Broader Context

The dramatic eruption of caste and communal riots by the upper-caste organizations that instantly toppled the central government of Viswanath Pratap Singh in November 1990, signifies among other things that caste is an enduring reality in India. These developments testify that casteism, in its praxis and ideology, is still down to earth in Indian society: from the social life in the huts of the interior villages to the top corridors of power. Casteism is pronounced in work, wage, and job distribution and allocation of resources in the countryside as much as in the allocation of portfolios and other top official positions in the urban centers. In the ideological, political, religious and cultural domains, issues such as mate-selection, conduct of marital ceremonies and death and funeral rites, and ceremonies and all other religious and cultural behaviors remain unshakably caste-bound.

Scientific and technological advances and achievements mean very little as far as the supposed disintegration of the culture of the celebrated caste system of India, and its continued implications in the economy, politics, and inter- and intra-linguistic and religious relations of Indian society, are concerned. This state of affairs, my research findings in Vagaikulam reveal, continues unabated. Caste as a structural form of

social life is sustained by a number of religious, moral and other rules.¹

Yet individuals, groups and strata based on wealth have clearly and visibly emerged from the ranks of all the castes. The intensity and rapidity of this trend is higher among the non-Untouchable than the Untouchable castes. This sets the stage for India as a country of rich and poor rather than the one historically and traditionally consisting of higher and lower castes.² This trend is acknowledged by Indianists and domestic scholars of Indian social structure.

Most social science research, both before and since independence, shows the trend of caste and class factors increasingly brought into confrontation in the political and economic context of India. However, they have failed to study the other side of the process, the coalition of caste and class factors in a given social event, phenomenon, or process. Caste and class factors are in coalition as much as they are in opposition depending upon which one of them is dominant or weaker in a given issue and time.

Although the influence of caste on economy, polity, religion, and culture is ubiquitous, it is overwhelming and more intense in the villages of India. Vagaikulam, the subject of this study is a classic example. The origin of class elements can be traced to the introduction of a very

slow and yet historical transformation of the landed properties from communal ownership and yield to private interests, which started in the dawn of the invasion of the Aryan tribes from central Asia. The Moghul invasion and the British colonization of India, and the methods they exercised to collect revenues from the Indian peasants, introduced and strengthened this trend. The self rule of India since independence completed the process of privatization of land. The land reforms introduced by Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi have maintained and strengthened the caste system rather than abolishing it. An immediate consequence is that landed property can be bought and sold at free will, endangering the stability of peasant life and forcing and creating a rural-urban migration that swells the ranks of the slum dwellers and increases urban poverty.

The duality of the modern development, the progress and the backwardness, contains another duality in caste retaining its values in its battle with class elements in Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in India.

The modern class elements emerge in confrontation and in coalition with caste factors. Caste values persist in Indian sociopolitical life despite the class elements institutionalized in Indian development. While the battle of caste and class factors becomes intense in overtaking one another, these factors together as a single process

greatly determine the social life in Vagaikulam, as they do throughout India. This coalition of caste-class factors, at times prevents, and now contributes to the process of polarization of property-ownership in Vagaikulam. This incessant interplay of caste and class factors in every aspect of social life makes possible a "dynamic" rather than parallel development. I call it the "caste-class dynamics" influencing every aspect of social life in Vagaikulam: economy, polity, culture, religion, education, business, marriage, etc. The arguments advanced throughout the analysis would, among other things, test this hypothesis. Before I pursue that task, I would like to highlight the status of caste-class studies already carried out pertaining to this and other regions elsewhere in the country.

Review of Literature:

The researchers engaged in the study of stratification and class structure in India fall broadly under three categories. The first comprises those who focused on caste: Louis Dumont, M.N.Srinivas, Michael Moffatt, G.S. Ghurye among others. The second includes those who studied during the post war period the emerging classes: A.R. Desai, John Harriss, Utsha Patnaik and others. And the third, smaller group consists of those researchers who paid attention to both caste and class factors: were Kathleen Gough, Djurfeldt and Lindberg,

Andre Beteille, Joan Mencher and others.

These studies viewed caste as remaining the major social construct, or class development based on property ownership rapidly absorbing the caste system, or the caste and class factors having effects on social structure. None of these studies had paid any serious attention to nor analyzed the fact that caste and class factors have been more often in coalition than in confrontation, owing to the rise of private property. This constitutes a single process, which I call the "caste-class dynamics" in the Indian village. The salient aspect of the dynamics is the great and lasting dynamism which gives the process of caste-class dynamics influence over virtually every social phenomenon, as caste and class influence one another.

The logic of confluence of the caste and class factors into a single process of caste-class dynamics, and the influence of caste on class, and vice versa, and the impact of caste-class dynamics on the economic, political, and sociolcultural processes in Vagaikulam are the subject matter of this dissertation. These dynamic and inter-related processes have escaped the attention of social scientists who studied caste in India. The American and European scholars, in their studies, did not have the patience or the proximity to observe the intimate caste and class elements which supplement one another in Indian society. The attempt to study this distinguished social

category is the unique feature of this proposal. Historical changes have occurred and continue to occur in all three domains of the dynamics: the changes in caste system, in class-the development of propertied and working strata-and in the social structure.

Inquiry into the traditional occupations and the prevailing division of labor in Vagaikulam, as in other villages, will reveal the changes in the three domains. In the economy of Vagaikulam there exist three kinds of division of labor: the caste (traditional) division of labor, modern division of labor, and sexual division of labor. The first and the second exist side by side while the third exists within both. The traditional division of labor based on caste occupations, in which each caste or group of castes is assigned to a particular task, which may or may not produce surplus value, is known as the hereditary division of labor. As landed property and agriculture became commodities to be bought and sold in the market for private interest, and a corresponding rise of wage labor producing class elements, a modern division of labor was created, springing from the traditional caste structure of Vagaikulam. The women continue to do their traditionally assigned work in modern agriculture. Women's labor in crucial agricultural operations, such as transplanting and threshing, has not been replaced by men, just as the male labor in ploughing, driving carts, etc. remains non-replaceable by women. Most of the crucial

operations in cultivation have been assigned according to the gender performance which I call the sexual division of labor, which prevails in the hereditary as well as the modern division of labor in Vagaikulam.

The rapid modernization and commercialization of agriculture and the concentration of land-ownership has led to the greater development of the modern division of labor, in proportion to the gradual dissolution of the hereditary division of labor in Vagaikulam. Concomitantly, the accumulation of property strengthens the polarization process based on property ownership and non-ownership. This in turn erodes the economic bases of the caste system, while retaining its social, cultural and religious aspects more or less intact, at least until now. Whether this development in the Indian village is a direct challenge to the Marxist theory of "base and super structure" depends on whether the inconsistency between the economic change and the unchanging caste culture is lasting or momentary. Since the dominant caste, the Pramalai Kallar in Vagaikulam, use their lineage position to acquire wealth, keeping other lineages and castes out of competition, the caste and class factors do not operate separately. On the contrary, the caste and class factors are in some crucial times brought in conflict and other times in coalition vis-a-vis its influence on the social structure of Vagaikulam. The sociological studies pursued

so far do not explain these complex issues involved in the caste-class dynamics.

However, caste has long been an important object of social scientific research as it is an important social construct in India. The classic and the modern sociologists differ in their approach to the status of caste in the World of sociology.

About the influence of caste in India, Marx writes; "a country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindoo, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste...Modern industry resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary division of labor upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power." Weber termed the caste a status group, meaning no historical and social significance is involved without going into the history of the rise and disintegration of the caste system. Srinivas, (1959) states that the caste occupations (hereditary division of labor) contribute to the stability of the society. Edmund Leach says that "caste is inconceivable without the hereditary division of labor". Bailey, a Western scholar of caste, asserts that economic development in India has begun to effect important changes in the caste system, the most significant being the emergence of "caste associations". This means the changes in caste do not necessarily strengthen the class elements, rather they influence the caste interests in modified form

while accepting class values. Hence, the linkage and submerging of the caste and class factors into the single process of caste-class dynamics.

The most relevant questions, then, for researchers and planners alike are:

1. What are the social impacts of the caste-class dynamics on the land-ownership, power structure in Vagaikulam? Has the process of polarization absorbed or replaced caste, or class become more important than caste? Or will it become entangled with caste in complex ways?

2. The next question is whether, and to what extent caste-class dynamics increasingly overshadow all other institutional aspects of the society.

The other important issues raised in this dissertation are discussed around these two main questions.

I analyze these two questions (and the related issues) and their dynamic interactions in seven major social domains of the village structure. 1. Inter and intra lineage competition for the control of ownership. 2. Modernization and non-farming occupations. 3. Collapse of the petty businesses owned by the non-Pramalai Kallar castes. 4. Concubine, pre and extra marital affairs. 5. Sociocultural and religious affairs. 6. Murder, violence, and other social thuggery, 7. political

organizations, mobilization, and voting behavior.

It should be noted here that the emergence of landlordism has historically been supported by the capital and investment generated from non-farming occupations: moneylending, business and teaching for the agricultural sector have been neglected in favor of the industrial sector in the region. There is no consistent and timely state financial help, which leaves farmers and landlords with no option but to combine and supplement farming with non-farming occupations, discussed in detail in Chapters IV and V.

My data show that the landlords are in coalition while at the same time they are in perpetual competition to buy off land property from one another and other peasants in the village.

I have documented evidence, discussed in Chapter VI, that the caste-class dynamics are not in land-ownership alone, but played out in the wider arena: each and every social aspect of the village community. Hence caste-class dynamics are not two parallel phenomena, instead, at present, they are two-dimensional, and interwoven in a complex, multi-dimensional network in the village community. I discuss how the entire village community is in one way or another affected by these processes of polarization of land-ownership, and the dominance of caste-class dynamics.

In the cultural arena my field studies show that there is a greater conservatism in family practices and ideologies as opposed to the growing modern rationality in agriculture, petty businesses and market related practices in the community. The tensions implicit in this growing split of production from domestic life are mirrored in intergenerational conflicts, and in relations between men and women.

At the general level, the caste-class dynamics revolve around the politics of the dominant Pramalai Kallar lineages for property and power. These lineages keep all the other groups and castes out of the economic and power structure, and at the same time, draw each member of the community into the dynamic network either by lining them behind the respective lineages or by neutralizing them to upset the balance of forces in the closely knit social structure of the community. These main arguments are employed as flexible loose sets of hypotheses in the community analyses that follow.

In any given time and space, external factors, man made or environmental, are monumental and overwhelming to a village community. However, in a classic sociohistorical situation in an Indian community like the one in Vagaikulam, caste-class dynamics are both withstanding and supplementing class development. Sivertsen's view of a village in the region is relevant

here: 'Although the incorporation of the little community into a wider polity is caused in the first instance by external factors, the process is determined by pressures resulting from the close interaction within the local community of groups diversely placed with respect to privileges, disadvantages and stresses'.³

The physical and emotional attachment and dedication of the peasants to their land and the farming occupation for their subsistence, along with the continued status and power of the landlords, are historically firmly established aspects of the village community life here. Every peasant and landlord of every lineage goes to bed and wakes up every morning with his or her own dream, version, and plan of life for the future, consistent with their conditions and status. This is true of the other service castes and the Untouchables whose dynamics only a community study can reveal to the outside world.

Research Design and Methods

B. Research Design and Methodology, and Sources of Information

An ethnographic study alone will be the most appropriate to test the kinds of hypotheses that I have proposed in this dissertation. Since macro level studies and reports by themselves diminish the accuracy of analysis of relationships that underlie the caste-class dynamics and the polarization at the village level, micro

level study will fill the gap; hence the indispensability of the village level community study to my thesis. On the other hand, the ethnographic study reveals the historical and prevailing characteristics of the caste-class dynamics in the village. The major methodological purpose of this design is to describe the complex caste-class dynamics in a village in its entirety

My Prior Knowledge and Awareness in Ethnographic Studies

We designed and chose the case study to describe the caste-class dynamics due to this particular methodology's relevance, necessity, and appropriateness. It is my understanding that there is no richer analysis of the social and religious organization of a village community than Dumont's work on a south Indian village. The comprehensive ethnographic method he used is the first application of that kind in the history of Social Anthropology and Sociology in which the ethnographic method has played a role in facilitating the analysis. Hence the relevance of my choice of this method to study the caste-class dynamics. My own earlier involvement in community studies, and my long association with both the prospects and problems of such studies facilitate this project.

My previous community studies include: 1. Literacy, illiteracy, migration, and alcoholism in the same village, Vagaikulam (1982-83). 2. Drug addiction, and criminal behavior in a neighboring village called Keela Chempatti

(1979). 3. Untouchables and communal riots in Avaniapuram, a suburb of Madurai, and Jothilnayakkanur, an interior village near Elumalai, in Madurai district (1980). 4. Role of women in peasant movement in Koilpathu, a village near Tanjavur. These community studies, among other things, have taught me three most important things to be observed in such studies: 1. The daily and long-term behaviors reflect the inter and intra caste, and inter and intra class relationships which are so intimate and close, and which can not be obtained through interviews nor found in any previous documentation; 2. The researcher/investigator in the field has to go to the level of the peasants to get information about their conditions and interaction with other forces; and 3. Any sort of explicit and implicit association, sympathy, and/or taking sides with one party or the other on local issues, will render the case study simply impossible.

I chose this village because it is best known to me. I have observed village affairs in the sociological and the social anthropological senses since 1975; I am therefore a participant-observer. My involvement in the community provided me with the opportunity of knowing the close and intimate workings of caste-class dynamics that appear in Chapters IV, V, and VI. Further, I am uniquely qualified to play the roles of both "insider" and "outsider" because 1. I have known this village in detail. 2. My family and I stand outside the socioeconomic

and power conflicts of the village. The added research advantage in the field is that I do not belong to either landlord or working class background in the village.

The research site, Vagaikulam, is neither close to a city nor is it in a remote rural area of India. It lies just 18 miles west of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, the seat of the rulers of the region since before Christ to the time of the British.

The village has been connected by daily bus service to Madurai via Tirumangalam since April 1977, and to Usilampatti via Chellampatti since 1981. The closest railway junctions are at Valandur and Karumattur (Madurai-Bodinayakkanur route), and at Tirumangalam (Madurai -- Trivendrum (Kerala) route), since the late 1880s. The bullock cart and later the train were primary modes of transportation for the peasants and urbanites in the region until the 1940s.

Primary Sources

I have used local sources, field observations, informants, and "inventories" to describe this village in regard to social structure, castes, lineages within caste, stratification, classes, and the distribution of power. I have provided descriptions of relevant aspects of culture and everyday life. The village documents were made available for consultation by the village Administrative

Officer-the history and fragmentation of land-ownership, expansion of cultivated lands, and the non-farming occupations (moneylending, teaching, petty businesses), concerning where, when, and how these processes stand and shape the caste and class dynamics in the village. The three main informants are: 1. P.T. Rasuthevar, 2. K.S. Karuppathevar, and 3. Mangathoppu Sinnandithevar. They have provided histories of the dominant and the service castes: the Thottiya Naicken, The Pramalai Kallar, and all the Service castes. The three informants belong in the three "ruling" lineages which trace their common ancestry to the Ulagatheven lineage. The first informant is also popularly known as "Karaveettu Rasu". He is well-informed about the historical and contemporary affairs of the village. The second informant is a veteran leader of the moderate branch of the Communist Party of India. He is a man of social concern and involvement in the present affairs of the village. The third informant Mangathoppu Sinnandy passed away on February 7, 1990, just after I completed the fourth phase of my field study. His funeral procession was one of the largest such gatherings, suggesting the respect he and his lineage commanded in Vagaikulam. He was a very elderly man (his actual birth date not known) roughly 95, and known for his knowledge of the origin of the Pramalai Kallar settlement in the village. All three informants are important members and leaders of the traditional village councils and the courts.

Two people who enormously helped me in the investigation are: Angathevar Baskaran, 32, of Pullakkapatti, an aeronautical technician by training, with extensive knowledge of historical and political situations in the village, in India and abroad; and Sinnandivathiar Natarajan, 33, the eldest heir of the top landlord in the village who provided information about property exchange in the village.

The village administrative officers, former and present, provided me with all the necessary data on the history of demography, and land structure, and other relevant issues. Ponnuchamy, the present VAO (who is presently under suspension presumably for financial irregularities) a Pramalai Kallar by caste and a native of Koodaloor, a Thevar village situated near Cumbam, outside of the Kallar territories near the border of the state of Kerala. The former Officer belongs to the Mudaliar caste, an erstwhile land-owning caste, whose history in the village coincides with that of the Thottiya Naickens.

I have cross-checked the accounts and versions of these main informants with others in this and the neighboring villages where the caste, affinal, and agnate kinship ties have historically been established. I have matched these accounts wherever possible with the recorded documents which are available in other historical works. Even on the period of settlement and or departure of the

main castes--the Thottiya Naickens and the Pramalai Kallar--my informants seemed to be more or less correct, as I have matched them with the available archival and historical documents.

For other data I have depended on other people who are traditional sources of information such as the people involved in murders and violence; the barbers and the washermen in the village. These two service communities are as precious for contemporary sociological and anthropological studies as the archives for ancient and medieval social history. The men and women of these service castes have access to almost everything. It can be confidently stated that nothing that develops or happens in and around the village can escape the attention and knowledge of these men and women. The sources for them are: 1. The nature of their occupation which puts every family in daily and periodic touch with them; 2. The women of the two communities by tradition until this day go around households to collect cooked food twice a day, morning and evening.

For the most sensitive and secret issues such as concubinage, premarital, and mistress affairs, and the rates of moneylending, I have depended on gossips, tales, the oral deliberations and proceedings of the village courts, and funnel type inquiries, and for the service castes, on the oral notes of gossips over the last 20

years.

I have gathered data on institutional and cultural variables such as literacy, ecology of caste and class settlements, inter-caste and intra-caste conflicts and coalitions, political association and behavior, alcoholism, gambling and Untouchability to the extent of their relation to the interaction of caste and class. I have had access to the village archives available with the former and the present village Administrative Officers, for these data.

The village of Vagaikulam is atypical in one way, in being a non-Brahman village. Otherwise it is a village like any other in India (at large), and displays the classic scene (Table=10) stratified and polarized into rich and poor, differences of castes, educated and illiterates, political activists and unsophisticated peasants, the usurious moneylenders and the alcoholic drug addicts, gamblers, businessmen, and daily earners, superior and lower castes and reflected differences derived from the continued practice of Untouchability. This tiny village is unique to have sent two of its peasant folks abroad for research studies.

My (seemingly) heavy dependence on empirical sources is due to my methodological needs and the importance this research gives to the ethnographic approach. In any case this is balanced by constant consultation with references

from the published works on similar and other relevant studies in the region, conducted since the 1940s, which appear throughout the dissertation.

I have not relied on any one single technique, method, or investigator, for the study warrants the researcher to employ any method deemed convenient in the field and situation he is in.

Finally, a point on the development of my research interest should be made here. This village and other villages were the localities of my studies until I earned my first M.A. Subsequently I spent four years in Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi to write a thesis on "Women in Indian Peasant Movements", in 1983. All my degrees are in sociology, although I have done higher level courses, and extensive readings in other social sciences.

Throughout my education in Sociology from my village-town to midtown Manhattan and my observation and awareness of the mainstream sociocultural and political processes, I have been exposed to high standards. My wide travel in Europe, Asia, and North America has provided me with the opportunity to meet and observe people of various social, racial and political cultures.

First hand information on most dominant social issues has broadened and enriched my understanding of social systems, change, and development. Thus I have

set to write this thesis with sufficient theoretical and methodological knowledge of tradition versus modernity, the east versus west, and the developing versus the developed world. It is from this understanding and background that I have approached the study to test hypotheses on caste-class dynamics in the village of Vagaikulam.

A Note On Theoretical Perspective

The emergence of empires, Middle-Eastern and European, and their intervention in Indian society, beginning from the medieval period in the 14th century, was decisive, and their social consequences on its people and their economics, culture, and politics are epoch making and irreversible. These consequences have transformed the state of the colonies and the empires, the conquered and the conquerors.

The 300 hundred years of British colonial trade and rule in India, is particularly important to understand the contemporary status and position of Indian society. Although the three centuries of British rule in India is like a flash of lightning in the very long history of India's civilization, culture, and language, colonial rule contributed immensely to the building of the nation, as much as it exploited its resources. Had not the British emerged triumphant after defeating other colonial rivals and domestic monarchs, and unified (although later

partitioned) India, the political geography of India would look somewhat similar to that of modern Africa. British rule transformed the country's social, economic and political structure. The heyday of British imperialism and its departure coincided with a worldwide modern civilization of material development, modernity in social life, and radicalism in political culture. What and how much these changes have influenced the Indian villages, and in particular Vagaikulam, a typical Tamil village in South India, is the subject of this study. The focus is on the economics, politics, culture, and religion of the traditional caste and the emerging class strata in the village community.

A Theoretical Survey: Sociohistorical Background

The dismantling of the colonial empires, following the Allied Forces' victories in World War II, coincided with the emergence of social research on India and the newly independent countries. Emphasis was largely on urbanism, state, class, caste, and economy as those countries prepared for autonomous development and nation-building. The insurgence of new forces appears to have prompted these intellectual activities. Social scientists engaged in such research encountered results which national rulers had not expected.

The focus of these studies was growing poverty accompanied by emerging authoritarian and semi-democratic

states with varying degrees of economic and military dependence upon the developed western states. The Indian political economy is similar in significant ways to the economies of the other developing nations.

Following Baran's lead, Barrington Moore, Jr., Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank, Ralph Miliband, and others have analyzed the political economies and the patterns of development of these societies. These scholars attribute key aspects of "underdevelopment" to the dynamics of the modern world market, and the developmental path forced upon the developing countries in this context.

However, there has not been sufficient focus on the dominance of "caste-class dynamics" in these countries, India in particular; this is the subject of my thesis. Research on the "periphery" of world capitalism substantially contributes to an understanding of the core as well as the periphery, and therefore to a more inclusive theory of social change than is otherwise possible.

Ancient traditional values and "postmodern" technologies coexist in India. Bullock-carts remain a major source of transportation, while, at the same time, indigenously developed short, medium, and (soon) long range ballistic missiles are stationed and launched. Despite free India's goal of eliminating caste restrictions and abject poverty, both ironically continue

to worsen. Caste, religion, class, language, and nationality, determine among other things the outcome of national elections, and the staying power of the central and the state governments in India. These categories have been the subjects of research since colonial times (4). Western scholars at first ignored class. Later, caste and religion were thought of as little more than matters of tradition. The tendency among western and even indigenous scholars to neglect or minimize one or the other, has been consistent.

However, the issue of caste in India's development and in research, has been enlightening as well as challenging to social theories. Caste has been a resource for the development of sociology, and a force to reckon with in the development and class politics at the village level.

At the more general level, the modern technological and scientific waves and tides that increasingly integrated global economic activities, have thus far been unable to wipe out India's caste system or its worsening poverty. The complex cultural integration of castes, religions, and linguistic groups remains a source of both change and resistance to change.

At a more concrete level the caste and class factors overlap and supplement one another, act together and confront one another at other times. Thus, the caste-class

dynamics increasingly overshadow all other institutional aspects of society: economy, polity, education, culture, and religion. That is why I have chosen to explore the caste-class dynamics in the village of Vagaikulam, since only a micro level study will bring the complex dynamics of caste, lineage and class factors into theoretical articulation.

I have organized this dissertation in seven chapters, followed by a Bibliography and Appendix which includes photos taken in Vagaikulam between November 1989 and February 1990. I have given necessary footnotes and the relevant references at the end of each chapter. I have quoted other references in parenthesis when I discussed my analytical and theoretical points in the light of other researchers.

I discuss a theoretical and methodological introduction to the dissertation and place the main argument of the proposal in a broader context in Chapter I. A brief review of literature on caste, stratification and social structure is followed by a general discussion of theoretical and sociohistorical issues in sociological research in India. It makes the argument that the study of caste-class dynamics is a central issue, rather than seeing caste and class as separate (entities) in world sociology.

A sociohistorical background of the Madurai region

from its pre-class time through Moghul and British rule, to the present populist regime in the state of Tamil Nadu, is given in Chapter II. It briefly surveys the social changes the region has undergone during this time, which was a lengthy period of rivalries among various powers, domestic and foreign, for the control of economic resources. The chapter also discusses the demographic composition of caste groups in the region.

Chapter III, provides the reader with the turbulent history of Vagaikulam: the arrival and departure of various castes roughly from 1600 to 1989 A.D. It discusses the dominant, Service, and Untouchable castes, and the social constitution of the inter- and intra-caste, and inter- and intra-lineage relations in the village.

The main issues of the dissertation are discussed in Chapter IV. It analyses the state of the divisions of labor: the hereditary, and the modern divisions of labor, each containing the sexual division of labor within it. It discusses traditional and modern agriculture, the differentiation of peasantry, and the emergence of various strata in the economy of Vagaikulam. Most significantly, this chapter discusses the relations between the caste and class factors on the one hand, and the caste-class dynamics and the process of land-exchange in Vagaikulam. It discusses the relationship between the polarization of peasants based on the land-ownership and the non-farming

occupations such as moneylending, teaching, business, etc. which have lasting and close bearing on land-ownership, and the caste and class structure in Vagaikulam. The discussion poses more fundamental question as to what is the basic tendency in the Indian model of development citing the case of Vagaikulam. The data shows that there has been no sweeping concentration of property as in Europe in the 19th century owing to the caste and lineage factors at the apex, while landlessness among the poor peasants is a growing phenomenon at the bottom of the social structure of Vagaikulam.

The interplay of caste-class dynamics and the social structure is the focus of analysis in Chapter V. It extends to the growing conflicts that exist between the tradition and modernity as confrontation and coalition exist between the caste and class factors in Vagaikulam. The inequality in social relations, the state of housing, clothing, diet-habits, marital and familial relations, and inter- and intra-caste relations are the other major issues I discuss in this chapter.

The politics of the caste-class dynamics in the major arena of social structure: land-ownership, non-farming occupations, hereditary occupations, sociocultural, and religious affairs, and political mobilization are discussed in Chapter VI.

In the conclusion, I sum up the entire discussion of

the prevailing and growing tendency in the caste-class dynamics of Vagaikulam. Further, the concluding discussions highlight the rich empirical evidence and the theoretical articulation of this study. A major conclusion of this study is that neither caste nor class elements have been able to eliminate the other.

Footnotes

1. Dagfinn Sivertsen, When Caste Barriers Fall, 1963, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, p. 9.
2. Some social scientists, eg., Gail Omvedt, have argued that the conditions and status of higher and lower castes correspond to that of rich and poor.
3. Sivertsen, 1963, p. 11.
4. Marx, Oliver C. Cox, Max Weber, and others wrote extensively during the 19th and 20th centuries on British colonial rule, caste, religion, and class in India with varying emphasis. See the Bibliography for specific works on these subjects.

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CHAPTER II

Madurai and Madurai Region

A monographic and ethnographic study of a village is enhanced when the study is set in a sociohistorical background -- the various economic, political and cultural forces that have been at work in the region or the continent. More important is the fact that the village is located in the Madurai region in Southern India, which had been a principal scene of rivalries and war, division and integration during the reign of indigenous monarchs and Western rule, not to mention domestic and European imperialists, since before the time of Christ. The history of these politics and wars for market and power have profoundly influenced the shape of the structure and characteristics of the Madurai region and its people. The village of Vagaikulam, the subject of my dissertation, has always been an active and integral part of this region, during both the heyday of the struggles for power and subsequent peaceful development.

The Madurai region as part of present day India has been inhabited by what are said to be the descendants of the Dravidian stock, the natives of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization of Mohenjadora and Harappa. India is named for the Indus River. The archaeological evidence shows that these civilizations were independent of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Chinese cultures, had possessed highly developed architecture, technology, science and

art. It is reported that the value of "zero" was found in India. The use of cotton for clothing is one of India's major gifts to world civilization.¹ Frederick Engels suggests a point in his famous study, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man":

"Many hundreds of thousands of years ago, during an epoch, not yet definitely determinable, of that period of the earth's history geologists call the Tertiary Period, most likely towards the end of it, a specially highly--developed race of anthropoid apes lived somewhere in the tropical zone-- probably on a great continent that has now sunk to the bottom of the Indian Ocean. Darwin has given us an appropriate description of these ancestors of ours."¹

The origin of human life, the early cultural and material development, and civilization are so deeply rooted in this part of the world that an opinion expressed by natural and social scientists such as Charles Darwin and Frederick Engels is corroborated by extant texts in ancient Tamil literature such as Tholkappiam.

Madurai, The Tamil Heritage and Its People

Madurai has been the capital of kingdoms and empires since before Christ, and hence one of the oldest capital city in India. Vagaikulam village, the subject of this study, lies twelve miles, (in straight pedestrian path which remains in use until this day) to the West of Madurai. Transfer of power in Madurai, by heredity, war, or by occupation has always had its immediate effect on

Vagaikulam,⁴ and more so, as industrialization has progressed rapidly in modern times.

Few nations can rival the cultural, linguistic, philosophical, heritage of the Tamil people for whom Madurai has been the political and cultural capital. Colonial and religious powers: Muslims and Christians, French, Danish, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, and English have come, fought wars, occupied the country, ruled its people, and departed. These powers have come and gone. However, Madurai, the citadel of the Tamil people has remained.

The Ecological Setting

The Madurai is situated principally between latitudes $7^{\circ} 57'$ and $11^{\circ} 10'$ North latitude and between longitudes $77^{\circ} 30'$ and $79^{\circ} 85'$ East; it lies entirely within the tropics. From north to south it is about 480 miles long and from east to west 170 miles broad. A vast plain and belt of lowland, the country extends from the Western Ghats to the Bay of Bengal. The southern ranges of the Western Ghats, which form the dominant topographical feature of the country, attain a height of 8,000', when they reach the limits of Madurai, and then gently slope down to the South terminating near Kanyakumari, the tip of the continent in the Indian Ocean. The (east) coast is comparatively unbroken, yet it furnishes natural harbors at Nagore and Tuticorin. The Gulf of Mannar, famous for its pearl banks, lies beyond

the southeastern coast. Lying half way on the Maritime routes between the east and the west, the country has commanded a large trade from time immemorial. The Kaveri, Vaigai, and Tampraparni are the major rivers. Accessible from all sides, because of the absence of any insuperable natural barriers, the land has shared in the political, economic, and cultural influences of nearby regions.

Being a tropical region, Madurai has a fairly high temperature for the major part of the year. With proximity of the seas and the occurrence of the monsoons, the weather can turn violent and stormy. In 1963 and 1977 storms devastated and caused the countryside much damage.

The soil is black-cotton or red and alluvial. Granite and clay occur at all places. The fertility of soil together with a moderate rainfall accounts for good crop fertility in the region. The country is overstocked with sheep and cattle.⁵ The abundant resources as well as the accommodative climate have rendered this region attractive to the inhabitants as well as to foreigners.

The people by and large belong to the Dravidian Stock, though small sections are aboriginal or Aryan group. The population is largely Hindu, but Christians and Muslims are also numerous. Tamil is the popular language. The great literary works in Tamil have not only enriched the cultural heritage of the country, but throw

much light on the land's past.⁶

Ancient Rule and the Country: Pandya-Chola Period:

The Early Pandyas ruled over Madurai early in the Christian era. The Cholas, the other dominant power which was to rule Madurai later, held their pioneering flag over the Kaveri basin, adjacent to Madurai during the first five centuries after Christ. The first stage of the Pandya-Chola domination over Madurai came to an end by about 300 A.D. The Kalabrahs, a tribe from the north, kept it under their sway subsequently for about two and a half centuries. 7

During this Early Pandya rule, agriculture (and village life) was prosperous and the ecology and environment were not damaged. The Asiatic mode of production, the self sufficient social formation may have prevailed during this period.

In the first quarter of the fourteenth century the latter Pandyas too made their exit from the political scene of Madurai.¹⁰

Society, Agriculture, Architecture and Culture:

Both the Pandyas and Cholas, among other things, promoted agriculture, commerce, architecture and arts. The discovery of a large number of Roman coins in the country testifies to the great volume of trade which the country commanded. After the fall of the Roman Empire trade with Europe dwindled, but the country established in

the meantime commercial relations with the Arabs, Jews, and the Chinese. During this time, King Solomon was reported to have commanded large ties with South India.

At the domestic front, the Pandyas and the Cholas very actively promoted agriculture.. The country retained its independence for most of the period -- and served as the homeland of extensive empires and evolved efficient administration based upon self governing institutions. These provided the Madurai country with a conducive environment for peaceful agricultural and cultural development; great architecture constructed numerous monuments, especially temples. The great Tamil literary works, Sillappatikaram, Manimekhalai, Ettuthogai, and Pathupattu--the masterpieces in Tamil--were productions of the famous Sangam -- Academy, which flourished at Madurai during the first three centuries of the Christian era. While Hinduism grew into two prominent sects, Vaishnavism and Saivism,¹¹ there emerged two great sects opposing Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism which subsequently spread all over the world.

Madurai in the eve of British Consolidation:

The Madurai country, its people, agriculture, and culture suffered greatly during the period that followed the Pandya-Chola epoch. The rising tide of Afghan imperialism beginning in 1311 swept over South India. A man known as Khilji was appointed as Governor of Madurai.

In 1323 the Delhi based Mohammed bin Tughlag created a province called Ma'bar with its head quarters at Madurai.¹²

[Thus entered the Muslims and Islam into Madurai country where the immediate ancestors of the Pramalai Kallar, the dominant people of the Vagaikulam, lived. It must be noted here that Dumont's view of the origin of the Pramalai Kallar was to have taken place among the Ambalakkarar, well after 1311 A.D. Hence the Pramalai Kallar is one of the youngest castes in India.]

These developments not only obliterated the independence of Madurai but reduced it to a vassalage under the Delhi Sultanate.¹³ These developments sealed any prospective emergence of the native kings and emperors once and for all until the popular independence struggles of the 20th century which drove the British colonial forces from the Continent (and yet retaining the economic ties in modified form). These rules had serious repercussions in the traditional economy of the Madurai region.

The decline of Delhi-Sultanate by the first quarter of the fourteenth century offered an opportunity to Madurai to assert its independence. In 1370 the Vijaynagar Empire (Hindu) of the neighboring Telugu country defeated the forces of Delhi Sultanate at Madurai and began to rule since then. Emperor Krishna Deva Raya (1509-1530 A.D.), the greatest of the Vijayanagar dynasty,

reorganized the administration of the country and created a province in the South with Madurai as its headquarters and his general Viswanath Nayak as his viceroy.

This was not the first entry of the popular caste called Nayaks, Naidu or Naicken into the Madurai region. There were accounts of Naidus coming to the Tamil region to escape the periodic drought and famine in the Telugu region. Some of such earlier migrants were the ancestors of Veerapandya Kattapomman, the history has seen. And some others settled in the village Vagaikulam prior to the Pramalai Kallar advent. However, the Nayaks have become an integral part of Tamil society in their involvement and contribution to farming, art, culture, and music.

The Nayaks (the administrators) of Madurai asserted their independence when the Vijayanagar empire begun to decline in the second half of the 16th Century and established the Nayak dynasty of which the greatest and most benevolent ruler was Tirumala Nayak (1623-1659 A.D.) of Madurai. This development is important for Pramalai Kallar.

The king's declaration of self rule for the Pramalai Kallar in the territory, and their occupations in Temples, took place in 1655 A.D., the height of the King's rule in Madurai. The Foundation Charter in brass is still with the present heir of the Tirumala Pinnattevar lineage

residing in Dharmathuppatti situated one north of Tirumangalam. The social background in which the King Tirumala Nayak made peace with the belligerent Pramalai Kallar for the entire kingdom was threatened by the belligerent Vijaynagar empire and its unloyal allies, the Mysore and Thanjavur rulers.¹⁵ The king could not afford to have a formidable local enemy at his door when his enemies were encroaching on his territories. The Pramalai Kallar's ancestors, the Ambalakarars, and their fraternal sub-caste, the Maravars, had been honest allies to the king once an agreement was made. Hence, the protracted and consistent fighting strength of the Pramalai Kallar, coupled with the highly weakened and threatened dynasty of the Nayaks in the 1640's, prompted the King Tirumala Nayak to befriend the Pramalai Kallar of the country known as Kallarnadu in the western adjoining region of Madurai.

The Nayak rule of the Madurai region continued with ups and downs and defeats and victories, characteristics of the long history of the Tamils.

Nevertheless, the Nayak period is important in several respects. It saw some features of the ancient culture at work, for the Nayaks, like Cholas and Pandyas patronized arts and literature, constructed great monuments like the Minakshi Temple and Tirumala Nayakkan Palace, promoted Hinduism, and maintained irrigation works. Their administration was not overcentralized for

they depended upon the feudal Chieftains--the Poligars--for the supply of troops and upon the village communities for the distribution of justice. The period served as the background of some of the major developments of later years.

The decline of the Nayaks coincided with the rise of auxiliary powers in Madurai country. The Setupathy Maravars in Ramanathapuram, Pulithevar in Nelcatanseval, Thevars of Marudhu brothers in Sivaganga, Kattapomman, Umathurai, Vellaiyathevan in Panjalankurichi, were some of the Poligars who emerged in Madurai country. These provincial kings organized coalitions among themselves and with the "lesser enemies" (the Dutch, French, and Danish) with mass support among the peasantry. Cutting across castes they put up historic resistance and fought bravely against British imperialism. Mention must be made here that among the heroes, Pulithevar,¹⁷ with meager troops and arms, put up a most historic resistance (for five months in one place in 1761) against the British-Muslim domination.

However, a few petty kings such as Tondaman of Pudukkottai and the King of Ettayapuram openly collaborated with the British to protect their petty kingdoms that helped the British to complete their conquest of the Continent in general and the Madurai region in particular. It must be remembered that in the great battle for India, Madurai was the last to fall to

the British. This gave the English a freer hand to use India, "the jewel" for the empire "the crown" in Europe. Everywhere in India, the British involved Muslim and Moghul rulers in the final phase of their war to subdue India. They fought against the contemporary colonial powers and the Hindus. The muslim kings collaborated with the British while the hindu kings fought against colonial forces. The British finally emerged triumphant in 1801.

From then on British involvement everywhere in India expanded and intensified. The saga of British imperialism from 1801 to 1947, marked a fundamental change in people's lives and their occupation, agriculture in Madurai country, as elsewhere in the subcontinent.

Since India's independence, land reforms have not fundamentally changed the character of the land tenure system. The earlier tenants have become owners and the working peasants of all castes including the untouchables continue to be poor or landless peasants.

The village of Vagaikulam is one such peasant community, where the landlords and landless, higher and lower castes, educated and uneducated reside together. These caste-class dynamics are the subject of the analyses in the pages that follow.

B. The People and Their Occupations

We have seen how Madurai was the seat of Pandya

kings until the beginning of the 14th century. Subsequently, the Vijayanager Nayak Kings ruled over Madurai for nearly three centuries. In between, there were short interludes of Muslim and Maratha rule. All these rulers left their people in the area. During the Muslim reign some forcible conversion to Islam took place. During the British days, Christian missionaries were active in converting a large number of local people to Christianity. The district has a variety of religions and ethnic groups, based on their occupations, an account of which is given below.

1. Agricultural Communities

(1) Vellalas:

The most prominent of the castes going under the broad generic name of Vellalas is the Kongu Vellala community which is predominant in Palani and Dindigul Taluks. This community could be found in large numbers in the adjoining Coimbatore district. They are very hard working and thrive well. Their capacity for toil in the fields is proverbial. They sink wells wherever sub-soil water is to be found, and carry on garden cultivation throughout the year. They have enriched themselves by specializing in cultivation of cash crops. They are generally frugal. They marry off their daughters very late. They do not allow divorce or remarriage. Burial is their most popular method of disposal of the dead.

Apart from Kongu Vellalas, Solia Vellalas and the Pandya Vellalas can also be found in all the taluks of the district. They style themselves as Pillais. The bulk of them have entered business. They too do not allow divorce or remarriage of widows. The Vellalas constitute about 12 percent of the population of the district.

(2) Agamudayars:

The Agamudayars in the district form about three percent of the population. They style themselves "Thevars". Agriculture is their mainstay. Some specialize in betelvine cultivation. They are educationally backward. They do not generally allow divorce or widow marriage. They consider themselves a little superior to the Kallars and Maravars.

(3) Kallars:

The Kallars in the district come to about ten percent of the population. There are several endogamous sects among them. They are most predominant in the taluks of Madurai, Melur and Tirumangalam. They are a fierce people. In former days they were treated as a criminal tribe. They have now settled in agriculture and other occupations and their depredation activities are on the wane. The literacy among them is appreciably improving -- thanks to the Kallar Reclamation Scheme. Some of the sect among them are the Terku Nadu Kallars; Kill Nadu Kallars, Melur Nadu Kallars, Easa Nattu Kallars, Pramalai

Kallars, etc. They have strong community organizations to instil social discipline among them. They generally allow divorce and widow marriage. Burial is the most common method of disposal of the dead among them.

(4) Maravars:

The Maravars form about three percent of the population of the district. In several respects they resemble the Kallars socially. They are predominant in the taluks of Madurai and Tirumangalam.

(5) Thottia Naickens:

This is a Kambalam caste. They were originally migrants from Andhra during the time of the Vijayanagar kings. A few of them owned Zamins which are now mostly taken over by the Government. Their caste-title is Naicken. Though Telugu is their mother-tongue, they are quite conversant with the local language of Tamil. They allow divorce and widow marriage. They follow the Vaishnavite faith. They are most numerous in the taluks of Dindigul, Nilakottai, Kodaikanal and Periakulam.

(6) Okkaligas:

The Okkaligas are most predominant in the taluks of Periyakulam and Nilakkottai. They are also known in these parts as Kappilia Gounders. Tradition says that they were once migrants from Mysore via Coimbatore. They are good agriculturists. They are divided into a number of exogamous sects for purposes of marriage alliances. These sects have totemistic tendencies. They generally allow

divorce and remarriage, though of late there is a tendency to ban these practices. Their caste hierarchy is powerful, starting with Goundan for a village. Cremation is the common method of disposal of the dead.

(7) Anuppu Goundars:

This community is said to be descended from migrants from Mysore. They are mostly found in the Cumbum valley. Their mother-tongue is Canarese. They are divided into a number of septs called Kilais which are exogamous. They generally follow the Vaishnavite faith. They are educationally backward.

(Kunnuvans):

The Kunnuvans are the principal cultivating people of the Palani Hills in Kodaikanal taluk. It is believed that they were once Vellalas of the plains. They also go by the name of Mannadians. They are divided into three endogamous sects. They allow divorce and widow marriage. They generally cremate their dead.

(9) Vanniars:

The Vanniars in the district form about one point five percent of the population. They are most numerous in Nilakkottai taluk where they go by the name of the Kalla Viliyar Goundars. They are mostly petty landowners. They are backward in education and economic conditions. They allow divorce and widow marriage.

(10) Reddiars:

Though the Reddiars in the district form a minority community, there are some rich landholders among them. They are affluent than most other communities. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage. Telugu is their mother-tongue.

(11) Idayans:

The Idayans in the district form about three percent of the population. There are several endogamous sub-sects among them. Pancharan Kitti, Kal Katti and Pendukkumekki are the main sects. They invite Brahmins to officiate in their marriages. Most of the sects do not allow divorce or widow marriage. Konar is the caste title for them. Though a few of them in Madurai are well-off, they are generally backward in rural parts.

II. Trading Communities

(1) Chettiars:

The group of Chettiars consists of several castes, the chief of which is the Nattukkottai Chettiar. This community of people is found mostly in Madurai. Formerly they were bankers. Now they have turned to business and industry and many of the textile mills in and around Madurai are owned by them. They have several interesting social characteristics. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage. They are divided into several septs called Kilais. The people of each sept have a temple of their own. They generally cremate the dead. There are both

vegetarians and non-vegetarians among them. The other Chettiars found in the district are Manjaputhur Chettiars, the Arya Vysya Chettiars etc.

(2) Labbais:

The Labbais are the Tamil speaking Muslims. They form about three percent of the population of the district. They are most numerous in the taluks of Palni, Periyakulam, Melur and Dindigul. They are a shrewd and calculating people. They can be found engaged in different trades. They style themselves Rowthers. They seldom marry the Urdu speaking Muslims. In their social ceremonies, they follow several customs which are clearly Hindu in origin. Though economically a little advanced, educationally they are backward.

(3) Baliyas:

The Baliyas form about two percent of the population of the district. They were migrants to these parts during the time of the Vijayanagar kings. A few of them are in agriculture but many of them are in petty trades. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage. They adopt Naickans and Chettiars as their caste-titles.

III. Weaving Communities

(1) Patnulkarans:

The Patnulkarans in the district form about two percent of the population. They are most numerous in the taluks of Madurai and Dindigul. They are also known by the name of Sowrashtas in Gujarat. Their language is

Sowrashta. They follow many of the customs and manners of the Brahmins. There are some very rich businessmen among them in Madurai. There are both vegetarians and non-vegetarians among them.

(2) Kaikolas:

The Kaikolas form less than one percent of the population of the district. They are found mostly in Palni and Dindigul taluks. They are invariably non-vegetarians. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage. They are not so good as the Patnulkarans or the Devangas in the art of weaving. The Kaikols weave only coarser varieties of handloom cloth. They are educationally backward, though some have entered business lines and are prosperous. They style themselves Mudaliars or Pillais.

(3) Devangas:

The Devangas, otherwise called Sedars, belong to a minority community. Among them there are both Telugu speaking and Canarese speaking sects. They call themselves Chettiars. They are good at weaving finer varieties of sarees and dhotis. Many people of this caste have now entered business.

IV. Artisan and Service Communities

(1) Kammalans:

The Kammalans in the district form about five percent of the population. They are found in all the taluks. The Tamil speaking sect among them are most

numerous. The Telugu speaking among them form a minority. They are engaged in gold jewel-making, carpentry, blacksmithing, brass vessel making and idolmaking. They are educationally backward. They wear sacred thread. They do not generally allow divorce or widow marriage. They bury the dead in a sitting posture.

(2) Vaniyans:

The Vaniyans are the oil pressers. A few of them are in other trades. They are generally very backward in formal education. They do not allow divorce or remarriage. They call themselves Chettiars.

(3) Other Servicing Castes:

The other servicing communities in the villages are the Vannan, Ambattan, Andi, Kosavan and the Oddan. The Oddan in the district form nearly 1.7 percent of the population. They act as well-diggers, masons and stonecutters. Some of them are prosperous as building contractors. The Vannans who form nearly 1 percent of the population in the district and the Ambattans who form about 1 percent of the population are generally in a very backward condition, both economically and educationally.

V. Laboring Communities

The laboring communities in the district consist of the Pallars, Pariyans, Chakkiliyans, Valayans, and Kuravars. Of these, the Pallars are most numerous. They form about 7.0 percent of the population. They are mostly

engaged as agricultural laborers. There are several sects among them which are endogamous. They are educationally and economically backward. Next to them are the Paraiyars who form about 5 percent of the population. The Chakkiliyans are most numerous in Palni and Dindigul taluks. The population of Scheduled Castes as a whole comes to about 15.3 percent of the population of the district. The Valayans though not listed as belonging to a Scheduled Caste are very backward community. They form a sizable number in the district. They are mostly employed as agricultural labourers. Many eke out their living by collecting firewood and selling it in villages. In former days, they were treated as belonging to a Criminal Tribe. Though their activities on these lines have subsided their economic condition has not improved much.

VI. Other Communities

(1) Brahmins:

Among the other communities, the most important is the Brahmin. They form about 2.5 percent of the population of the district. There are several sects among them. The Tamil speaking are most predominant. The Telugu speaking and the Canarese speaking Madhwas belong to minority sects. The Tamil-speaking Brahmins consist of the Ayyangars and Ayyars. Ayyars have several sub-sects among them. All the sects are generally very advanced in education. They are mostly employed in offices, banks and business firms in various capacities. A few of them have

entered business and industry and are quite prosperous. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage. They generally cremate their dead.

(2) Indian Christians

The Indian Christians form about 3 percent of the population. They are found mostly in the Taluks of Dindigul, Kodaikanal, Periyakulam, and Madurai. The bulk of them belong to the Roman Catholic faith. They are in various occupations.

(3) Nadars:

Though the traditional occupation of the Nadars is tree-tapping, they are now found mostly in business lines. The Nadars in the district form more than 2 percent of the population. This is a thriving community. They do not allow divorce or widow marriage.

The Contemporary State of Castes in Vagaikulam:

The Indian caste system has undergone monumental changes, and yet retained its status differences spring from the persistence of traditional occupations. The vertical mobility of middle and lower castes and the decline of high caste economic power have taken place. The classic occupational boundaries, dictated in the Hindu Code, the Manu Shashtra began to blur with the coming of changes in the lands, introduced by the Moghul rulers. The British policy of commercialization of landed property

accelerated and completed the process which was faster and more rapid among the first three castes, (Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vysias, Sudras, and the Untouchables) and extremely slender among the latter two castes. The process of change what the sociologists describe, the mobility is meager among the Untouchables, who fall outside of the four-tiered caste system, and occupy the bottom in the social hierarchy, and hence the power and status.

The contemporary inter-caste relations are gradually broadening in the economic arena and in modern occupations in the urban centers. As far as religious, cultural practices, specifically th marital, family and sexual relations are concerned there is hardly any inter-caste relations. Horizontal mobility among the various castes is very slender. The incidences of inter-caste marriages are very few, which are in urban places. The unwritten caste code forbidding the inter-caste marriages is down to the marrow of everyone's bone in the nearly 500,000 villages of India.

Mahatma Gandhi declared India lives in its villages who sensed the pulse of the peasant folks and hence could led them en masse in the historic anti imperialistic campaign to a grand victory. Despite limitation of his leadership in preventing India from breaking-up and the non-realization of his great ideals of establishing Ramraj, a casteless, classless society through non-violent means, his perception of the rural India made his

leadership achieve the core of his campaign, independence.

The caste boundaries and the differences exist more among the last two categories; the Sudras and the Untouchables. The former, by and large, is a peasant caste, consisting hundreds of sub-castes, while the latter are service castes; Barber, Washerman, grave-digger, sweeper, drainage-man, and the Carpenter, the Blacksmith, and the Goldsmith, etc.

Occupations of these castes, what M.N. Srinivas (1979) says, to the peaceful stability of the society, although he acknowledges the lower-caste inspired social revolts now and then in Indian history. The caste system in Vagaikulam performs the same task about for the maintenance of the reproduction of the social structure. It is a hereditary division of labor among the agrarian caste for the production and the reproduction of the social structure in Vagaikulam. This caste and the sexual division of labor continues at the cost of social equality of the Untouchables while the modern world had witnessed incessant struggles for equality and liberty.

The economy of Vagaikulam will suffer from the pace of its development, if the traditional-hereditary occupations were to stop forth with, or collapse instantly. The village economy needs the service of the various service castes for the successful operations of cultivation in agriculture which forms the mainstay of the

economy in Vagaikulam. The blacksmiths and the carpenters have to provide service for the maintenance of the wooden and iron instruments for the ploughing and the related activities; the untouchable women's labor is a must for the transplantation of paddy (rice) nurseries, settling the threshing floor (kalam pudaithal) during harvesting, which could not be replaced by any other labor or instruments.

For these tasks the women are paid in cash and for the winnowing, paid in kind, a traditional practice is likely to continue for the unforeseeable future. The untouchable men perform various jobs depending on the particular caste they belong. Vagaikulam has seven untouchable and semi-untouchable castes with whom the higher castes do not interdine nor exchange utensils nor the cooked foods. The untouchable men guard the reservoir, the irrigation, oversee the distribution of waters, do messenger by beating drum of any death in and around the village, dig grave-yard, carry prestations in the family festivals, sweep the streets, carry away the dead animals, and similar menial service jobs for the entire village.

The other untouchable castes such as Washerman, and Barber perform the tasks very regularly. A slight delay in the delivery of these services invites instant bombardment of curses and at some times physical abuses. The blood stained clothes of all the mensurating women, the clothes

of the sick will be laundered more often than the regular clothes by the Washerman and women. The Vellala caste, also known as Kosa Chettiyars or Kuyavars, among otherthings, play the role of priests in almost all the temples of Vagaikulam. No other than the assigned man by the family and endorsed unanimously by the entire people can perform the priest role. Any confusion in the order of primogenitor (the eldest son succeeds on the death of his father) creates chaos as in the Virumandi and the Nalla Kurumbaiyar temples of the Karumathur Nad.

The indispensability of the services of the Service castes is felt in each aspect of the economic, social, religious life of Vagaikulam. The untouchability is constitutionally abolished, and no adult can morally defend the maintenance of the caste system, and yet the caste values in its strict observance and practice continues unabated in Vagaikulam as elsewhere in India. However, the untouchable protests sponsored by the Ambedkar People's Movement is gaining sympathy and support among the Untouchables although it is not yet established in Vagaikulam.

Footnotes

- ¹Stanley Wolpert, A New History of India, 1982, Oxford University Press, New York, 2nd Edition, p. 19.
- ²Frederick Engels, The Part Played by Labor in the Transition From Ape to Man, in the Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, introduction by Evelyn Reed, 1972, Path Finders, New York, p. 171.
- ³An old Tamil Saying can roughly be translated in this way: "Even before the stone, and soil came into existence, came the Tamil people, their language and civilizations" meaning the ancientness of this region in the history of humanity.
- ⁴This brief historic account of Madurai county is based on the following works: K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, 1974, M.K. University Press, India; K. Appadurai, Tennattu Porkalangal, 1957, Madras; K.A. Nilakanda Sastri, The Pandiya Kingdom, 1938, London; and other works cited then and there.
- ⁵L. Dudley Stamp, The World, 1961, Orient longmans, Bombay, pp. 96, 98-106, and 107.
- ⁶K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, 1974, M.K. University Press, pp. 19-20.
- ⁷K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, p.20.
- ⁸K. A. Nilakkanda Sastri, The Pandiya Kingdom, 1929, Luzari and Co., pp. 50-98.
- ⁹For details, see K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, The Colas, 1955 Madras University Press, pp. 110-301. 10. Subsequently, the Pandyas made a remarkable recovery during the last decades of the sixth century. Kadungon (590-620 A.D.), one of their chiefs, founded the first Pandya Empire. Greatly expanded by Maravarman (670-710 A.D.) and Raja Simha (730-765 A.D.), the empire included the entire peninsula of India, extending up to Nellore. The Madurai based empire reached the zenith of its glory under Varaguna I (765-815 A.D.), the most powerful of the Pandyas. Their imperial sway over south India lasted for four centuries, after which the Pallavs of Kanchi stepped into their place.

Each transition had an impact on the society and its

people. Nevertheless, the revival of Chola power ushered in another period of greatness for South India. Aditya I, (870-907 A.D.), the first of the imperial Cholas, founded the Chola ascendancy in Thanjavur. His son and successor Parantaka I (907-953 A.D.) conquered the territories extending up to Nellore. Raja Raja, the Great, (985-1016 A.D.), the most powerful of the Cholas, promoted peaceful, executed irrigation schemes, and built architectural monuments. He organized the local administration based on some sort of franchise, probably the first in the world. Equally great was his son and successor, Rajendra Chola, (1016-1044 A.D.). A staunch imperialist, he occupied Ceylon, and subdued the rulers of Malaya, and Sumatra, and invaded Bengal and Orissa. Kulothunga I (1070-1120 A.D.), the last of the great Cholas, undertook a land survey in 1086, the year in which his contemporary William I (1066-1087 A.D.) of England completed the Domesday Survey. However, his prestige suffered a severe blow in consequence of the loss of the overseas provinces. As the Seventh Century drew to an end, increasing disorders engulfed the Chola empire.

Now the Pandyas began to emerge again in the midst of Chola decline. By the beginning of the twelfth Century A.D., Jatavarman Kulasekhara (1190-1216 A.D.), founded the second Pandiya Empire on the ruins of the Chola Empire. His brother and successor Maravarman Sundara Pandya (1216-1238 A.D.), subdued the Cholas and annexed Thanjavur. Jalavarman Sundara Pandya (1251-1268 A.D.), the greatest of the later Pandyas extended the borders of the Pandiya Empire up to Nellore. His successor Maravarman Kulasekhara (1268-1310 A.D.), conquered the northern parts of Ceylon. After his short lived glory, the Pandyas fell a prey to internal conflicts and foreign invasions.

10. K.A. Nilakkanda Sastri, The Pandya Kingdom, Luzari\Luzari and Co., London, pp. 138-214.

- ¹¹For details, see Nilakanta Sastri, The Cholas, pp. 466-500, and 604-605.

- ¹²R. C. Majumdar, (Ed), The History and Culture of the Indian People, the Delhi Sultanate, 1960, Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, Bombay, pp. 53-279.

- ¹³K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, 1974, p. 23.

- ¹⁴According to Tamil Reckoning (the year Jaya) and the dates of the reign of the King Tirumala Nayakkar. This text dates probably from 1655

A.D., Dumont, 1986, p. 155.
¹⁵K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, 1974, pp. 25-26.

15a. The successive Nayak rulers were; Chokkanatha Nayak (1659-1682 A.D.), Muthuvirappa Nayak III (1682-1689 A.D.), Chokkanatha Nayak II (1680-1732 A.D.), an infant on whose behalf Queen Rani Mangammal, the widow of Chokkanatha Nayak I, ruled as regent till 1706 A.D.¹⁶

In Queen Rani Mangammal's time, the roads into the Paramalai Kallar country were built and the Tamarind trees were planted which remain until this day. In addition local irrigation tanks were dug and agriculture was encouraged. She was succeeded by Chokkanatha Nayak II who ruled until 1732 A.D., after which followed a period of external aggression and internal conflicts. The Delhi-based Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb, a son of Emperor Sha Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal, exacted large contributions from Rani Mangammal. The capital was shifted to Tiruchirappalli. Another female ruler, Rani Minakshi took over, and Prince Vijayakumara was proclaimed in Madurai. As internal feuds and conflicts for succession intensified, chaos followed. Rani Minakshi was manipulated from power and committed suicide. Prince Vijayakumara Nayak and his Bangaru Nayak escaped to Sivaganga after Madurai was taken over by Chanda Saheb on behalf of the Delhi Moghuls. Thus came the end of Nayak rule in Madurai.

¹⁶R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, History of the Nayaks of Madurai, 1924, Oxford, pp. 168-222.

¹⁷K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai, 1974, p. 209.

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Chapter III

The two peasant communities of Chinnor and Periyoor situated one furlong apart, constitute the village of Vagaikulam. Both segments have their own school, barber, washerman, carpenter, and untouchables for sweeping and cleaning up. The lineage and kinship relationships both affine and agnate are intricately interwoven in a complex community network. For all the administrative (village council), fiscal (for the state, Federal affairs, and the religious festivals), and political (voting) purposes, these two segments constitute one single unit. Therefore, I treat them as one village in my study.

B. Vagaikulam: A Social History

Vagaikulam is a classic village whose origin, like that of most others, is undocumented. Nor is any oral account available anywhere, for "India has experienced many waves of immigration, internal migration, and conquest. Throughout the history of the country migrant, sometimes conquering, groups of different cultures have piled up on top of each other." 1 However, the latest two epochs, waves of migration, the Naicken immigration, and the Pramalai Kallar arrival to Vagaikulam are available, mostly in oral accounts handed down from generation to generation. These views on the village history are supported, among other things, by the fact that the T. Naickens are invited annually even now to Vagaikulam to

receive primacy and be honored first in the festival of their family God, Ayyanar Karuppu at Kanmai Karei, the bund of the village tank.

The first of the two arrivals to the village was the Thottiya Naickens. The period of the Naickens' immigration to the village is not known. However, there is a strong clue: The Thottiya Naickens and all Naickens as a whole entered into the Tamil country only after the Viswanatha Nayak was appointed as a viceroy at Madurai by the Vijaya dynasty emperor Krishna Deva Raya, the great, which was in 1509 A.D. The following account of the history of the Naickers settlement in the village of Vagaikulam was collected from all three informants; P. T. Rasuthevar, K.S. Karuppathevar, and Mangathoppu Sinnandythevar.

According to P.Muthu Thevar, an authority on the history of Thevars, in the beginning of the 11th century, people of Bellary under the jurisdiction of the Vijayanagar Empire (the area of the modern states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) began to move south to Tamil country as the muslim invasion of the south. One such emigrating group of peasants headed by Bommi Naicker appeared at Vagaikulam which may have already been populated by among others, the Mudaliyarrs, Chettiyars, and all the service castes and the Untouchables.

Of the 72 Poligars, the Palayakkararkal (the representatives who collect revenues for the King of Tirumalai Naicker dynasty in this case) who controlled the greater Madurai region, 63 were Naickers, 5 were Thevars, and 4 were Gounders. (This suggests the time of the Bomminaickers entry Vagaikulam is about during the height of the Nayak rule at Madurai since the the region was under the effective control of the Naicker, Thevar and Gounders who are known as the petty Kings, who were later to wage a protracted challenge to the British encroachments for the establishment. This was around 1650 A.D. which I will take up later to determine the most likely probable time of the Naickers' entry to Vagaikulam.)

Foundation tale

Soon after the Naickers' appearance at Vagaikulam, the Ulagathevan and Ondha Thevar brothers also settled in Nattamangalam, my informants claim, although they are uncertain about the time of the brothers' arrival. (The time of either group, the Naickers' or the Thevar brothers' settlement could not be provided by the informants) Ulagathevan, the eldest of the two brothers who had left Athur, appears at Vagaikulam initially as watchman for the paddy and other properties of the Naickers. Thus the cordial relationships, from the beginning, between the Naickers and the Thevars, continued, the informants asserted.

The Bomminaicker led Naickers consisted of both agnates and affines. The affines, under the leadership of Sinnappanaicker settled in a nearby place called Sevelpatti, situated in half a mile south of Periya Vagaikulam. There exists now a reservoir and Sikkandamalayan Temple.

Before the Naickers had left Bellary for Vagaikulam, their family Goddess "Jaggamma Devi" came in the

dream and told them to carry the God Karuppusamy along with them wherever they were to settle down. The Goddess further told them that She will be witness if and when the situation and you need me. The Naickers acted accordingly by installing the Karuppu God in their own house to their life in Vagaikulam. That part of Vagaikulam is called Terku Theru of Kanagathevar Vageira in contemporary Vagaikulam. The well situated in the east of the main Terku theru, it was told, was dug by Bomminaicker himself, and was used for domestic purposes and religious festivals such as the Amman Pongals. This practice continues to this very day.

As the settlement of Thevars progressed and time passed, many changes took place which entirely changed the history of the village altogether as it stands today. One such development is the history of the village tank which remains the backbone of the irrigation system of the wet-lands in the village. One Ramathevan, the son of the elder sister, Ulagathevan, the founder of modern Vagaikulam, was the chief figure in the development of the tank which is popularly known as Kanmai. He started digging the tank for an expanded area of cultivable land warranted by the population growth in Vagaikulam. (I discuss the full history of the development of the tank later in the chapter). He found an idol of the God Ayyanar in the process of digging the tank, and the village Assembly subsequently unanimously decided to install the Ayyanar God at the bank of the reservoir. Soon after, Ulagathevan persuaded (and Ondha Thevar too ?) Bomminaicker and his people to install their God, Karuppu along with the Ayyanar, at the bank of the reservoir. Hence the temple of Ayyanar became the temple of the Gods of Ayyanar and Karuppusamy. This movement of Karuppusamy God from Bomminaicker's house to the tank bank heralded the beginning of the decline of Naicker in Vagaikulam that led to their total extinction in the village which I take up later.

The idols are annually dedicated, until this day, to the gods of Karuppusamy and Ayyanar, from the house of Bomminaicker. The presiding authority, primacy (Mudalmal), in all the Temples of the village: Karuppusamy, Mandhai Amman, Muthalamman, Perumal Kovil, Vinayagar Kovil, belong to the descendants of Bomminaicker presently living in adjoining villages such as Kangeyanatham, Nakkalakkottai, and Mettuppatti. However, the grand processions (Sami Bavanai Varudhal) are led by the Mayandi Kodangi of Nattamangalam Adhisivan temple and the Sikkanda malayan Kodangi. The background of the departure of

the Naickers from the village is an important issue for its relations with the settlement of the Thevars in the village. My main informants opine that as time passed the demographic strength of the Thevars increased and the land changed hands from the Naickers to the Thevars. This process in an extended period of time led to the decline of the Naickers position and influence in the village. Subsequently the Bomminaickers left Vagaikulam for the neighboring village Kangeyanatham, two miles south of Vagaikulam, while other Naickers moved further south to Nakkalakkottai, Pokkampatti, Kuppalnatham, Vannangulam, and Vagaikulam. Some Naickers left for Mettupatti, one mile west of Vagaikulam. Still others emigrated to Jaggampatti (name derived from their original family Goddess, Jaggamma), Ranganathapuram and other villages near Vaigai Dam Andipatti.

As Bomminaicker with his descendants left the village, he had handed over the presiding authority (mudalmal) as part of his dowry to his direct affine, one Sinnappa Naicker who remained in Vagaikulam. In the very next festival, Mayandi Kodangi asked the Bomminaicker for the traditional permission for conducting the festival. Sinnappa Naicker showed up, saying "pullakkurra mudalmal" in the Telugu language, (the language of the Naickers before they emigrated from Bellary), meaning Bomminaicker has given the primacy (mudalmal) authority to me. (pulla=color, kalai=bull, kurra=given to me, mudalmal=primacy authority). Since the Thevars do not understand these Telugu terms, Sinnappa Naicker, from then on, was known as Pullakkurra Naicker. This continues until this day. Later around 1850 A.D. the Sinnappa Naicker did not have any heir and hence the presiding authority given back to the then available descendants of the original holder, Bomminaicker who lived in the adjoining village of Kangeyanatham. This has been in practice during festivals for the last five generations.

The order of Mudalmal as it is practiced now is as follows: 1. Soo. Po. Periya Kamayasamy Naicker, a descendent of Bomminaicker living in Kangeyanatham. 2. The descendant of the Sevelpatti Naicker, the affine of Bomminaicker residing at Kangeyanatham. 3. The descendants of Naranappa Naidu residing at Mettupatti. 4. The descendent of Bolinaicker residing at Nakkalakkottai, one mile further south of Kangeyanatham. 5. Then come three Thevars (moondru thevars); the descendants of Ulagathevan of Vagaikulam, Ondhathevan of Nattamangalam, and Ochathevan of Vagaikulam (Son of Ulagathevan by an irregular union).

There could be three explanations for the departure of the Naickers from Vagaikulam. According to their own version of events, the Naickers settled elsewhere in the region because they had insulted their Goddess, Jaggamma by neglecting their service to it, and hence the Goddess punished them by driving the Naickers from Vagaikulam and subsequently subjected them to enduring hardships; loss of their human lives (the elders) and cattle, destruction of property, affluence, and identity. As part of this divine curse, a five year old girl of the Bomminaicker family drowned in the auspicious family well whose water only should be used for the domestic religious festivals until this day. According to their caste and clan tradition, they cremated the body. A piece of cloth covering the vagina of the girl's body and the nail of thumb remained unburnt in the cremation. Without noticing these, the Naickers completed the remaining funeral rites the next morning and returned home. A black cobra picks up these two items, the piece of vaginal cloth and the finger nail, and deposits them in a neighboring thorny cactus until three generations later a Bomminaicker descendant comes possessed in the form of their lineage Goddess (kula deivam), Jaggamma, finds them, to complete the ignored and forgotten honor due to the Goddess, Jaggamma. It is claimed by the Naickers that these two symptoms of the unburnt cloth and the finger nail were the indications of their Goddess coming in vengeance. Since the Naickers did not notice these, they were punished by killing them and

their cattle, and finally drove them away from Vagaikulam.

My three informants, without disputing or contradicting the above explanation for the Naickers' departure from the village, offer their own version. As the Thevar population increased steadily, which coincided with the death of the elder Naickers and their cattle, (used for their agricultural operations), resulting in the decrease of wealth and influence and decline in the population of the Naickers, they gradually moved out.

My commentary:

The dramatic increase of the Thevar population of the Ulagathevan and Cheppan lineages, as opposed to the sharp and sudden decline of the Naicker population and correspondingly their wealth, worked as the dominant factors in the process of the Naickers's departure. These factors were strengthened by the following: 1. The Thevars may have had been more dedicated in their farming hoping to improve their position from landlessness to farmers: 2. Their militant and martialling physical and social characteristics may have worked to institutionalize their settlement while the same traits, independent of the Thevars's awareness, may have intimidated the Naickers who were without their leaders, and hence lacked guidance in crises for agricultural and social life. Dumont's view of Kallar's presence had gradually made other caste groups

leave, confirm our point with respect to the Naicker's departure from Vagaikulam.

The Thevars of Vagaikulam today insist that there had never been conflicts nor any attempts to drive the Naickers away from the village. There are other factors which worked in favor of the Naickers' departure which I take up later.

The period of the Naickers entry to the village is equally important to the discussion of the village history. Large scale Nayak (or Naicken) population settlement took place in Tamil region only after the Nayak attained their independence when the Vijayanagar empire began to decline in the 1540s. By 1600 A.D., the Nayaks had established their position and by 1623 the greatest of the Nayak dynasty, King Tirumala Nayak succeeded to the crown at Madurai. The question now is whether they founded the village Vagaikulam or simply entered with the troops of the Nayak king.

During the sixteenth century, the region, in which Vagaikulam is situated had been populated. Dumont's account of Pramalai Kallar in the area sheds some light on the original people of this region. He opines that "Kallar arrived when the territory was already populated"(2). This suggests that it is highly probable that the Thottiya Naickens were an established group in the region in the 15th century. Hence, Muthuthevar's

account of Naickers' settlement in the 11th century remain a very likely possibility. The service castes like the Chettiyars, the Untouchables, the Kusava Vellalars, who remain in the village until this day, might have been in Vagaikulam when the Naickens arrived. On the other hand, we have some definite idea about the Naickens' arrival in Vagaikulam probably between 11th and 12th A.D. When could the Pramalai Kallar, Ulagathevan have appeared at Vagaikulam? It must have been at least a few generations after the Naickens appeared at Vagaikulam, because the latter were well established when the former came.

When did Ulagathevan and Ondha Thevan work as the head watchmen at Athur village? The answer to this question will shed light on the arrival date of Ulagathevan to Vagaikulm. Dumont quotes Nelson about the movement of the Pramalai Kallar, in the West of Madurai:

"Relying upon (the king, Tirumala Nayak's grant) the recipients (the Kallar) encroached step by step, until at last they or their descendants penetrated as far as the village of Aneyiur and there firmly established themselves. In the course of time they grew estranged from the parent stock (Ambalakarar, east of Madurai), and were distinguished as the Aneyiur or Melnadu kallar (Thevar) (Nelson, P.-47). Following Turnbull in Ward, P-8) the same author notes the mis-deeds of the Pramalai Kallar at the end of the 18th century (P-112 ff): troops were needed in Aneyiur, the road from Dindigul to Kambam was impassable (1795).(3)

The village Athur from where the two brothers, Ulagathevan and Onthathevan were said to have fled, is on

the Dindigul Kambam line. In these areas, the Kallar had "(f)irmly established themselves" around 1795. The two brothers would have sought these peoples' help if their departure was around 1795. Hence, the time the two brothers left, should be well before 1795, probably between 1650 and 1700. So it was during the mid 17th century that the two brothers may have founded Sakkarapatti village, and moved to Nattamangalam. Then the elder brother Ulagathevan appeared at Vagaikulam. The time of 300 years (1700) also roughly matches the well established position of Naickens, when Ulagathevan appeared at Vagaikulam to do watchman job for agriculture.

Until today the present generation of Ulagathevan is either 11th, or the 12th generation. This view of mine is strongly supported by the fact that Thirumala Pinnathevar of Dharmathupatti who is the eleventh in the line of the headmanship of Pramalai Kallar country established by King Tirumala Nayak in 1655 A.D. (Dumont, 1968, p. 155). Therefore Ulagathevn's entry into Vagaikulam must have been in the late 17th century. This view of mine is supported by the oral historical account from my informants which says that the Naickers left the Vagaikulam before the British took over the Administration in India in 1801. Now I would like to turn to the movement of Ulagathevan and Onthathevan to Nattamangalam and the former's subsequent settlement at Vagaikulam.

The Pramalai Kallar: From Piranmalai to Vagaikulam

The two Pramalaikallar brothers Ulagathevan and Ondha Thevan were head watchman in the late 1700s in a village called Athur which is in present day Nilakkottai Taluk, Dindigul District. These two brothers made a dramatic flight from the village after setting it ablaze because they were denied their traditional honor, a primacy in the religious festival of the village. A neighboring Poligar Sakkarappa Naicken, gave refuge to the two brothers and protected them from the the troops of the fallen village.

(Later, one of the two brothers, Onthathevan named one of his four sons as Sakkarathevar after their protector, Sakkarappa Nayakkar. And the place Sakkarathevar settled came to be known as Sakkarappatti.)

The two brothers continued their flight further south to a village called Vedamangalam, inhabited by the Vedar caste, whose traditional occupation was hunting. The Thevar women were consistently ridiculed by the children of the Vedars when the women went to fetch water in clay pots. The Thevar brothers went to the Keel Nattu Ambalam leader near Piranmalai to get help to end the continuing humiliation of their women. The Kilnattu army, accordingly, appeared and destroyed the entire village except the Thevars. They honored the Kilnattu army by changing the village name from Vedamangalam to Natta Mangalam. The Thevars further asked the Kilnattu leader

what else they could do to show their gratitude. The leader asked the Thevars to plant a stone in every Thevar village and the Thevars did accordingly. Of the two brothers, Ulagathevan, the eldest left the village of Nattamangalam for a neighboring village, Vagaikulam, to combine the watchman and farming occupations. Vagaikulam already should have had some level of agricultural development and corresponding civic administration in which the Thottiya Naicken castes were dominant over the other service castes. The younger brother Ondha Thevan remained and settled in Nattamangalam. All the Thevar lineages of the Nattamangalam belong to Ondha Thevan. The life and history of Ulagathevan and his six lineages in Vagaikulam are complex, with its ups and downs because Ulagathevan had to settle the problems with his mistress on property and the Temple.

As the Ulagathevan descendants multiplied and other Thevar lineages from elsewhere in the Pramalai Kallar country moved into Vagaikulam, the original inhabitants, the Thottiya Naicken, began to leave the village. These Thottiya Naickens settled in neighboring and distant villages within a 30 mile radius: Porrupu Mettuppatti, Kangeyanatham, Kuppalnatham Vannangulam, Vagaikulam, NakkalakKottai, Chennampatti, Chinna and Periya Pokkampatti, Vannangulam and Vagaikulam, and Adhikaripatti (near Elumalai), Jakkampatti and Rajagopalanpatti near Vaigaidam Andipatti.

As Vagaikulam slowly became Thevar village, so did the Ayyanar Karuppu God, the family god of the Thottiya Naickens, become the Thevar God. Though there have been no Naickens in this village for the last six generations, the Naickens from the above mentioned villages are annually invited and given primacy (Mudanmai) in the festival of the God Karuppu. Likewise the Vedars' Adhi Siva Temple became the Thevars' Adhi Siva Temple when the Vedamangalam became Nattamangalam. Among the seven gods in the Siva Temple at Nattamangalam, four belong to Ondha Thevar of Nattamangalam and three belong to Ulagathevan of Vagaikulam.

A dispute in the allocation of the seven Gods due to Ulagathevan's wife was settled by one Cheppan of Kovilangulam situated near Karumthur. Cheppan subsequently settled in Vagaikulam, whose people are of the Cheppan lineage. The Ulagathevan and Cheppan lineages are in affine relationships.

Ulagathevan had an affair with a woman of Madippanur village who was a pedestrian-dry fish sales-woman. A son was born to them and named Ochathevan, When the son attained adulthood, he came with his mother to claim the hereditary lineage. When the woman initially left after the affair she had told Ulagathevan "If it is a boy, he will come for his share, and if it is a girl, she will come for her dowry." ("Aanu perantha vaareesikku varum,

ponnu perantha seerukku varum") But Ulagathevan denied the affair. Vagaikulam, still dominated by the Naickens, called the village court which mandated an ordeal in burning butter (a tradtional and customary way of settling such dispute) for Ulagathevan. OndhaThevan's hand was burnt and it rotted when he went through the ordeal on behalf of his brother. The hand in the ordeal was not supposed to burn if Ulagathevan had been honest in the denial of his affair.

The village court instantly ordered Ulagathevan to give the due property to Ochathevan. , It was given, but a share in the family god Adhi Siva at Nattamangalam, or the village god, the Ayyanar Karuppu at Vagaikulam, was denied. Hence Ochathevan founded his own temple between the Vagaikulams, to worship Kalyani Karuppu. The people of Madippanur along with the Ochathevan and his mother settled in that village too. Since the Madipanur people did not belong to the Eight Territories of the Pramalai Kallar, they were integrated into the village and they organized themselves as the Kattamayan lineage. They worship "Kaluvanathan" at Karumathur. They are in agnite relationship with the Ulagathevan lineages.

Ulagathevan, from his legitimate marriage, had three sons: Kanakkan, Chinnandi and Mottayandi. Kanakkan moved southwest to another village, Perunganallur, some of his descendants moved further and settled in Puliampatti and

Kavanampatti. Mottayandi was married in Vikramangalam, and he brought back to Vagaikulam his co-brother, one of the three Sikkanda Malayan brothers working in Piramalai mandabam in Tirupparankundram. This is how the Sikkandan Malayan lineage was established in Vagaikulam. I will discuss this later.

Sinnandi alone of the three sons of Ulagathevan stayed in Vagaikulam. He had two sons: Sinnandi and Periyandi. The latter did not leave any heir, while the former had seven sons: 1. Chokkan, 2. Machi, 3. Chinnamayan, 4. Kilavan Thavasi, 5. Thevan, 6. Tharagan, and 7. Karuppan. Of these seven sons, Chinnamayan and Kilavan Thavasi did not have any children. The remaining five have established lineages in this village (see the chart no. 1 & 2) The accounts collected in unstructured interview at Vagaikulam do not answer the question why Ulagathevan had to leave for Vagaikulam soon after successfully and firmly establishing his position in Nattamangalam. The elders, the priests, Pusari, Kodangi, and Samipudukkies brush aside this question. There had been no territorial dispute between the brothers, but there were religious disputes involving the seven gods at the Adhi Siva temple of Nattamangalam, which was solved by Cheppan who had accompanied the two brothers when they left Athur. We do not know whether the religious dispute between the two brothers took place before or after Ulagathevan moved to Vagaikulam. It probably occurred

after his settlement at Vagaikulam, for the two brothers were busy earlier in settling themselves in these villages.

Our informants do not provide any clue as to why Ulagathevan chose Vagaikulam rather than other neighboring villages. Were the neighboring villages such as Tidiyan, Valandur, Uchappatti, Valangakulam already occupied? Or did Ulagathevan simply want to expand his control and influence? Or did the conducive climate and ecological settings, and the fertile wetland in Vagaikulam attract him? Or did the already well established Vagaikulam of the Naickens provide him with his traditional watchman occupation that the two brothers left behind at Athur? The historical and circumstantial evidence suggests the latter four factors may have influenced him to move to Vagaikulam around 1750 A.D. It is also important for the project to determine why the settled Naickens began to leave soon after Ulagathevan appeared at Vagaikulam.

All the informants in the village claim that there had never been a total or a large scale Naicken exodus from Vagaikulam for Ulagathevan and his son Sinnandy and their descendents remained as a minority for three successive generations or a hundred years. Two of his three sons, Kanakkan and Mottayandi, moved to Perunganallur and Vikramangalam respectively. Ulagathevan himself was forced by the village court to give a share to

his son Ochatevan born of an illegitimate union with a woman of Madippanur. He never established undisputed authority nor did his next two generations did so for the strength of the PK remained weaker than the Naickens. It was only Ulagathevan's great great grandson, Sinnandi's seven sons and their descendants (see the chart) who made their politics and economics dominant in Vagaikulam. Thus Ulagathevan never established his authority, but his fourth generation descendants caused the gradual emergence of PK power in Vagaikulam. Thus, the PK's ascendeancy to economic and political power of the village was gradual and generational. Hence, neither Ulagathevan nor his descendants, forced or would have fought the Naickens to leave the village.

The Pramalai Kallar in particular, and the other Thevans, Ambalakarar, Maravar, and Agumudiyar in general had remained grateful to their friends, both individually and as a caste. The Thevar's gratitude and loyalty to their friends who helped them in need are some of the laudable characteristics of the Thevars in particular and the Tamils in general. The Vellayathevan for Kattapomman, Setupathy Maravars, Ambalakarar, and Pramalai Kallar for the Nayak dynasty at Madurai are cases in point. The relationships between the Thevars and the Naickers were historical. They remain friendly and hospitable until this day. So does the relationship between the Thevars and Naickers of formerly of Vagaikulam, for the latter are

regularly invited to be honored first among others in Purattasi Pongal Festival in Vagaikulam. For all the above factors, Ulagathevan and his descendants would neither have forced nor manipulated the Naickers to leave the village. The contemporary lineage of Ulagathevan is sympathetic and emotional when the subject of the Thottiya Naickers is raised.

However, objective and subjective conditions may have been at work in Vagaikulam, independent of the willingness or unwillingness of the Thevars and the Naickers. Unrelenting boldness, martial characteristics, behavior, and outlook, are historical to these people. Equally so are their attachment to land, and the occupations, and their fierce dedication to defend them. These might have created, in proportion to the increase of Ulagathevan descendants, discomfortness and uneasiness for the Thottiya Naickers. The Thottiya Naickers moved to various neighboring villages. The fact that they named one village Vagaikulam near to Vannangulam undoubtedly demonstrates among other things, that the departure of the Naickers from the original Vagaikulam was involuntary. The entry of the Sikkanda Malayan lineage, and already settled Ochathevan, Sinnudayan, (Cheppan) Kattamayan lineages might have strengthened this social trend. As these Pramalai Kallar lineages became firmly established, based on farming partly by felling trees and creating new farms, the Naicken began to leave the village

The Sinnudayan lineage in Vagaikulam emerged due to one Cheppan, who fled the Athur village along with the Ulagathevan-OndhaThevan brothers. Cheppan moved to Karumathur, and then moved back to Vagaikulam to settle a religious dispute, prompted by Ulagathevan's wife who partitioned the seven gods at the Adhi Siva Temple of Nattamangalam. Cheppan solved the dispute and subsequently settled in Vagaikulam. Cheppan's lineage is affine to the Ulagathevan lineages. Hence, the Cheppan lineage was contemporary with the Ulagathevan lineage.

Another PK lineage is Madavanai, which belongs to one of the six Thevats of Karumathur Nadu. They are settled in Chinnavagaikulam. They are affine to the Ulagathevan lineage. One A.V. Mayandi vathiar was popular in the lineage had been widely known among the educated communities of Usilampatti and Tirumangalam Taluks. People of this lineage generally do not get involved in petty politics of the village.

Ochathevan, the son of Ulagathevan's illegitimate union with a pedestrian retail businesswoman of Madippanur village, established the Kalyani Karuppu lineage. These people enjoy good reputation of whom Thangachamy Pusari in particular is an extremely honest and reputed headman in Vagaikulam.

The relatives who had come with the businesswoman to

claim the heritage on behalf of Ochathevan, from Madippanur, established their own lineage known as the Kattamayan lineage.

The other 12 PK lineages didn't have affinal relations with the Kattamayan lineage until the present generation. So far only seven marriages have taken between the Kattamayan and other PK lineages. One of them ended in divorce.

Sikkanda Malayan is the second largest lineage in demographic strength, landownership, and political influence. Of the three sons of Ulagathevan, namely (1. Mottayandi, 2. Kanakkan, and 3. Sinnandi) Mottayandi married a woman in Mullipallam (near Cholavandan) and thus became the co-brother of one of the three Sikkanda Malayans serving in Pramalai mandabam in Tirupparankunram. Subsequently, Mottayandi citing the availability of large fertile wet lands, invited his co-brother, the Sikkanda Malayan to Vagaikulam. The other two Sikkanda Malayan brothers followed the first one and all the three arrived and began to settle in Vagaikulam. Infuriated by, and fearing a potential numerical and power domination by the three Sikkandan Malayans, Sinnandi, the only one remain in the village, excommunicated Mottayandi for the Adhi Sivan Temple and all the other temples in the village. Sinnandi and his five (originally seven) sons made the Sikkanda Malayans as affines rather than agnates. Having made them affines excluded the Sikkanda malayans from any share in

the traditional temple. However, things have changed over the time.

Sikkanda Malayan Lineage

The Sikkanda malayan lineage is very organized, and they never let the public know the inter and intra family cleavages that exist within the lineage. These people claim that they came from Tirupparankundram which is not one of the eight Kallar territories, nor one of the twenty four secondary villages, nor is it within the Kallar country. Their lineage God is worshipped in the Sikkanda Malayan (Tenkarai Karuppu) Temple established half a mile south of Vagaikulam.

According to one Doraisamy Andithevar (Sikkanda malayan) of Poruppu Mettuppatti, their peoples' However, affine relations, between them and the Ulagathevan lineages have existed for many generations.

One former member of the State Legislative Assembly from Thirumangalam constituency, Mr. R. Saminathan, a lawyer belongs to this lineage. These people are very inclusive, self-contained, protective, and not outgoing, which prompted the researcher to further investigate their history and the origin of their ancestors at Tirupparankundram, since they do not belong to the eight (territories) Nads, nor does their place of origin Mullippallam, near Cholavandan, fall within the Kallar country. What Dumont, who studied the history of the PK,

says is very relevant to the Sikkanda Malayans of Vagaikulam.

"A good informant of Karumattur nad brought up a certain Sikkanda Malayan as the maternal ancestor maternal ancestor of the secondary lineages. Now Sikkandarmalai is the name of Tirupparankunram rock, named after the muslim tomb on its summit...

...Tirupparankunram brings up the Mandapam or hall held in common by the Pramalai Kallar near this temple. There the council of the (Pramalai) nad held its sessions, we are told; there too lived three Sikkanda Malayan brothers, whose duty was to clean and maintain the building. Those were impure functions: these people had to deal with the leavings of feasts, etc."(4) (Louis Dumont, 1986, P.294)

This account prompts the researcher to ask whether the ancestor of the Sikkanda Malaiyan lineage at Vagaikulam was one of the "three Sikkanda Malayar brothers" in Tirupparankunram. If not, who else could have been their ancestor there since the Vagaikulam Sikkanda Malayans acknowledge to this day that they came from Tiruppurankunram? Neither Dumont nor other researchers, including myself, could find any other Thevar group living then in Tirupparankunram except the three Sikkanda Malayar brothers who Dumont says were known as Panikkars, "diminished Kallar. For example two or three households of them are found here and there, in Sikkampatti (Kokkulam) and in two secondary villages.(5)

Madulai or Thangalacheri lineage:

This is the fourth largest lineage and many of them

were prosperous landlords until the 1950s. These people came to Vagaikulam from a neighboring village, Thangalacheri, which lies 4 miles to the south, from which they derive their name, Thangalacheri. Originally, their ancestors lived in Marnadu, near Manamadurai in erstwhile Ramnad district, east of Madurai city. They had moved to Thangalacheri and some generations later they moved to Vagaikulam and resided there as the Thangalacheri lineage.

They are a very dedicated farming community, not aggressive, nor involved in any organized violence. This lineage has extensive affine relations with the Ulagathevan lineages. The first two men, Periakarupann and Thilagar who went to college from this village in the late 1950s belong to this lineage. Neither of them completed their degrees, the Bachelor's and the Master's respectively. Most of them lost their landed properties to the top landlord Sinnandi Vathiar and other Ulagatheran lineages, primarily through moneylending. The first president of the village council in free India, Mr. Viswanathan belongs to this lineage. Its members are peaceful and tolerant peasant folk.

Periavathiar lineage:

Daniel Periasamithevar and his wife Seeniammal with their first son appeared at Vagaikulam some time in 1909 and started primary school on their own and at their own

cost. Upon running it very successfully for next two years, the young couple got their school recognized by the the American Presbyterian Missionary on June 8, 1911. Since he was the first teacher and headmaster of the school, he was known as Peria Vathiar (Big or Head teacher). So are his five sons' descendants known until this day. He came to Vagaikulam from the neighboring village of Sorikkampatti where his ancestors who had come from Keela Urappanur, the head village of the entire Kallar Country, settled. His actual lineage is known as Karichan Koottam(lineage) whose people live in Keela Urappanur until this day.(6)

One Kuttayan Kaluvan, Peria Samythevar's father, had to move to Sorikkampatti under special circumstances. A girl in his family was married to someone in Sorikkampatti. Her husband was constantly harassed by his lineagemen over property disputes. Kuttayan kaluvan was sent there to protect his sister and brother-in-law. The continued trouble to the couple lengthened his stay and eventually he settled down and established his own lineage in Sorrikampatti. One of his six sons was Peria Samythevar who, with his wife, were later to come to Vagaikulam as the first teachers. He converted to the American Presbyterian Missionary faith in his education at Kattuppangala school in Tirumangalam. Hence the Christian name, Daniel is added to his family name. He was born into a big landlord family whose landed properties remain, though partitioned, among his five sons in Sorikkampatti among other village. In Vagaikulam he quickly won peoples respect and confidence for his educational, religious and social services. Among other things he arranged many marriages of which the Kirukku Mayan Mokkachamythevar's marriage to a girl at Nattamangalam is important. He was equally involved in farming, and soon became a landlord. His children, five sons and adaughter; Samuel Santharaj, Ulli alias William Moses, Cross Solomon, John Rathinam, Marteen Lazarus and Mary Pappa Daniel were educated and popular. His rapid success and rising popularity in Vagaikulam, and elsewhere in the Kallar

country brought him jealous, mainly from Ulagathevan lineages. At point there was some futile attempt to slender his image on the pretext of his father-in-law's marriage to the daughter of one Noothi Ambalam of Valayangulam, a village south of Madurai Airport.

However, the Peria Vathiar brushed these aside and got two of his children, a son and the daughter married to a bride and groom respectively of the Ulagathevan lineages. His second son Ulli alias William Moses, a Pasumalai High School dropout, became very popular for his among other courage in hunting, and other martial characteristics. His other sons, Cross Solomon, and John Rathinam were the first to bring audio instruments like radio, and and the bycycle to the village when they returned form Tehran, after World War II. His eldest son Santha Raj was one of the few in the district to graduate from Senior high school. His youngest son Lazarus and his four sons were industrious and innovative men in technical works.

The Peria Vathiyar lineage, being of the latest and the smallest, has greatly contributed to the economy by setting examples and helping others to achieve success particularly in the field of education (7). Although the image of the 2nd generation in the lineage suffered, the third generation has re-established itself.

Caste Composition: PK, Service Castes, the Untouchables

The unusual feature of the village caste system is the absence of Brahmans who occupy the top position in the apex of the caste hierarchy. The Brahmans presence in the entire Kallar Country is minimal. Sindupatti is the only place where Brahmins live in the vicinity of Vagaikulam.

Of the eighteen castes, (see the table) in the village, the one which exercises domination is the Pramalai Kallar, who dominate in terms of demography,

economics, politics, religion culture, education, and businesses. Vagaikulam has 12 different PK lineages. They migrated to Vagaikulam from different area within and outside of Kallar country from the period roughly 1750 to 1911 A.D. The first was the Ulagathevan lineage from Athur, and the latest the Daniel Periyasamythevar lineage from Keela Urappanur of Karichan lineage, via Sorikkampatti.

The Pramalai Kallar are the most conservative among the three major castes-the Kallar, the Maravar, and the Agamudiyar in the region (Dumont; 1986). The first among the three, the Kallar has two subdivisions; the Isanadu Kallar in Tanjore region, and the Nadu Kallar in Madurai region. The Nadu Kallar is divided into two; Kilnadu Kallar or Ambalakarar, and Melnadu Kallar, known as Pramalai Kallar.

The Pramalai Kallar separated themselves from the Ambalakarar in the first half of the seventeenth century A.D. from a region that lies west of Madurai city. The PK began to settle in the territories immediately northwest and east of Madurai stretching upto Dindigul, Veda sandhur in the north, and Cumbam, Gudalore, Bodynayakkanur in the West bordering the state of Kerela.

The Pramalai Kallar remain the most traditional in their social, religious, and cultural practices. However, to a considerable extent, they have begun to move from

traditional mediocre farming to white collar employment, and other occupations, such as moneylending, teaching, and petty, retail and large scale businesses. Moneylending is becoming increasingly popular among the PK in the cities in the Kallar region and in as distant cities as Trich, Tanjore, and Madras. (see Chapter IV, section 6)

The most remarkable development and advance in the field of higher education is among the caste people. The PK is probably the only caste that has been taking advantage of the modern education facilities in the region. There are four colleges and one major university situated in the PK territory; there were none until 1968. By the turn of the 21st century, the PK will be the most highly educated caste group in numbers, and second only to the Brahmin in percentage.

The frontier villages of the Pramalai Kallar Country are Vadivelkarai and Vilacheri in the east, Pachakoppanpatti, Pannikundu, Kalappanpatti, Madippanur in the south, Thirumanikkam, Manuthu, Nakkalappatti in the west, and Vikkramangalam, Kachirayiruppu, and Kadupatti in the north. The area situated between these territories is referred to as Kallarnad or Kallar country. There are roughly 250 villages of which the Pramalai Kallar dominate about 125 villages. Though the PK began to settle down to the west of Madurai in general, they originally established eight Nads or territories, and 24 Ubagramams

or secondary villages, and then spread to other places as time progressed and population increased. There are many a kallar dominated villages of different significance fall outside of the Kallarnadu.

Nattamangalam and Vagaikulam belong to the secondary level villages of the Kallar Country. As the Ulagathevan and other PK lineages established themselves the Thottiya Naickens moved out, and the service and untouchable castes were remained.

It is necessary to present the account of the composition of castes before I proceed to discuss the economy and the social structure of the village.

The Pramalai Kallar:

I have discussed all the 11 PK lineages, presently residing in the village, Chokkan, Machi, Thevan, Tharagan, and Karuppan, Ochatevan, Sinnudayan (Cheppan), Kattamayan, Sikkanda Malayan, Madhulai or Thangalacheri lineage and the Daniel Peria Samythevar lineage. I discussed them in the probable order in which they migrated to Vagikulam.

Chettiyar:

Business Community The Chettiyars are a very ancient caste community of the Dravidian Stock in the Southern part of India. The Chettiyars who reside in the Tamil region can be divided into two broad categories based on

the language they speak; Telugu Chettiyar and Tamil Chettiyars. Nadumandala Chetty, Vaniba Chetty, Valayalkara Chetty, are Telugu speaking Chettiyars, whereas Kasukkara Chetty, Nattukkottai Chetty, Seda Chetty, Kosa Chetty, and Saluppa or Solia Chetty (possibly one caste?) are Tamil speaking Chettiyars.

The Vagaikulam Chettiyars belong to the later one. There are only 52 of them residing: 23 men and 29 women. There are two post graduates, 3 undergraduates and five high school graduates from this community. Petty and retail business is the historic and contemporary occupation of these communities in Vagaikulam as elsewhere in the region. These communities, as part of their business diplomacy and strategy never antagonize or confront any individual or the community for fear of losing their permanent customers.

Lately, however, as the table shows, PK people have taken over these businesses. As a result, the Chettiyar people have begun to conduct other businesses: Santhuras, the most established Chettiyars here has gone to the neighboring State of Andhra Pradesh to carry wholesale business(8). This Chettiyar could not buy any wetland in Vagaikulam but has bought some in the neighboring village Munduvelampatti. True to the characteristics of their traditional business, the Chettiyars are highly motivated in providing quality and efficient service to their customers, a trait which is

missing in the PK business people who have taken it over lately. Owing to the regular transport connection to Madurai via Tirumangalam since April 1977, the village people go to town for their purchases. This is another reason for the collapse of retail businesses in the village. Mention must be made here that all the weekly markets in the Kallar territory, Thummaikkundu, Valandur, Chekkanurani, and other places, have completely disappeared; yet another indication of the modernization and development in the region, and the decline of traditional businesses in the countryside. The Chettiyars' origin in Vagaikulam predates that of the Nayakars.

Kuyavars:

Kosa Chetty or Vellala Chetty Among the service castes, the Kuyavars have been very active in the religious affairs of the village. This is the only caste which has dual occupations, as both artisans and priests. As artisans they make idols of Gods and other idols (Uruvaram) used in the Purattasi Pongal Festival. They charge for each idol. They also provide the priest for the same festival (God, Ayyananar Karuppu). This suggests very clearly that this community's origin in Vagaikulam also predates the Thottiya Naicken.

The Kuyavars make a kind of large clay pot for storing grains, and chimney and tunnel instruments (to

filter rain) to fix on the roofs of the houses. These communities have affine relations with the Kuyavars of Nattamangalam Ayyampatti. Kuyavars generally maintain a strict neutrality in the political affairs of the village. One such neutrality in a religious dispute prolonged the celebration of Purattasi pongal. The PK lineages disputed the rank in which they are honored in the festivals. The problem ended in a compromise without changing the status quo. The population of Kuyavars is 19: 9 males and 10 females. Both the men and women are involved in other occupations. Their neighborhood is on the periphery of the PK, area inhabited by the washermen and the untouchables, and an internal village road separates the one from the other.

Carpenter, Blacksmith and Goldsmith.

For the last 15 years there have been no goldsmiths. The blacksmith and the carpenters have been very active; traditionally and today, they derive their subsistence from these occupations. Since modernization of agriculture and housing structures has not been completed, and is unlikely in the near future, the blacksmiths and the carpenters will continue to flourish..

These communities are not untouchables, and their houses are located in the heart of the village, between the two segments of the village. Their strength is 27; 13 men and 14 women. These men are busy all through the year

in their traditional occupations. The agricultural communities do not antagonize these service communities for the latter can deliberately hamper their work and which affect their farming. Their women do not do other work, and remain at home. Total dependency on the male income, hence these women are playing the classic role of womanhood, that is producing the progeny and heir to their husbands.

Barbers:

They are an inauspicious caste. They are the smallest service community, and hence their social and family life is isolated and lonely. There are 10 people in the community: 5 men and 5 women.

Barbers live at the east end of the village. No one wants to look at them in the morning (which is inauspicious in Hinduism). They have two occupations. Haircutting is their breadwinning occupation. The caste system has assigned other activities too: cleaning, and decorating the dead body at the funeral, conducting the funeral in which the final separation of the dead from the living takes place, and setting the body before the cremation or burial. They collect a small amount of money for each of these services.

These village barbers are only for the upper non-touchable castes. The untouchables have their own barber

and washermen who are the lowest in the caste hierarchy. For haircutting and shaving, the barbers are paid in kind and occasionally in cash. The wage is grain from the threshing floor, once, twice or thrice an year, depending upon the number of crops the customer's family cultivates. The landless higher castes have to pay fixed amounts of grain annually. The barbers also get a big bundle of paddy grain stalk from the threshing floor each year.

The barbers are resourceful people with regard to the secret family and social life in Vagaikualm: concubines, and the pre and extra marital affairs due to the barber women's incessant accessibility when they go daily to collect cooked food from every household. The barber men also have proximity to all the men when they come to have their hair cut.

In their occupations, the barbers continue to use just scissors and water from a specially designed lead bowl. They don't use oil and shampoo, or they won't get paid. The barbers are not around during the auspicious occasions and places: wedding and puberty functions since religious and caste values have regarded the barbers a despised and inauspicious caste. Presently there are two barber families for approximately 1200 higher caste men in the village.

Washermen:

The Washermen, like the barbers and carpenters are

among the busiest communities throughout the year. The urbanization and modernization of the village people have changed the clothing pattern as well. More clothing is needed for an average person, because of frequent mobility, and the dramatic increase in school attendance. Contrary to the bad omen the barbers carry, washermen and women are considered to be an auspicious sign for people before they begin any important issue/task. A washerman's wage is exactly like the barbers. They charge a fee for ironing clothes, since this is a recent phenomenon, a colonial introduction to the non material culture of the people. This has changed the washermen's occupation as a whole. The British colonial rule has created forces and relations of production, whose social implications, among other things on the social cultural field of the indigenous people, are profound, historical, and irreversible.

Traditionally, once a month, they launder the clothes. They go around the houses to collect the dirty ones and return the laundered ones mostly on the same day or the next, for the villagers' may not have many sets of clothes. They keep inferior donkeys for carrying the clothes back and forth from the laundering place, which is usually a pond. They use detergents and soap only when the customers buy them and tip them on emergency occasions. They use self-produced steam (Vellavi) to help clean the stained and soiled clothes. Most of the clothes are white

or similar in color.

The washerman's other traditional activities are providing clothing to perform certain ceremonial rites such as Neermalai when the dead body is still at home. They receive grain for the service. Washerwomen are hardworkers as they launder on their feet together with their men.

The Untouchables:

The Pallan, Parayan, Chakkili, Kuravan, and Putharai Vannan are the core of the Untouchable Castes. The latter are washermen for the former castes. Hence they are more untouchable than their masters, who are untouchables themselves. The caste system based on some sort of class activity, goes down to the bottom, to placing each of the thousand and more castes in its defined place in the caste hierarchy. These untouchable communities have been performing the menial physical jobs ever since the caste system was founded. They are ruthlessly forced to continue these occupations indefinitely by the higher caste coalitions that dominate economics, politics and power.

These menial jobs are divided among untouchables according to the relative impurity of the job at hand. The drum beating, the announcer, carrying the dead animal, digging the graveyard for burial and cremation, are some of the most undignified activities any group can be

forced to do for others. This is current practice in Vagaikulam, and other Indian villages.

Following the constitutional abolition of untouchability, the presence of the leftist parties and individuals has provided the untouchables with entry into the tea stalls and restaurants to the village. Their children are now admitted into the village schools.

However, there is no attempt as of October 1989, as in other villages influenced by (the Untouchable) Dr. Ambedkar's movements) to stop the people from performing their traditional menial services to the higher castes.

Commentary: The development of productive forces and relations has not dissolved, but made the service caste occupations like carpenter, blacksmith, washerman and barbers more modernized and sophisticated. However, the Untouchables are increasingly awakening and attempting to reject the age old menial assignments, as the ongoing Bodynayakkanur caste riots in September-October 1989 indicate. In the next fifteen to twenty years they will mobilize themselves to completely give up their menial services to the higher castes. It, is however, a hard task.

The Demography, Housing, and Ecology

The total population of the village is 2,805 (1379

men and 1426 women) It was 1889 in 1960, and 1684 in 1950. The Pramalai Kallar, the overwhelming population here, as elsewhere in the Kallarnad, constitute more than 84 percent of the total population and own collectively 97 percent of all land in the village. All the non-P.K. castes and the service and untouchable castes combined together constitute the remaining 16 percent of the population, and own just 3 percent of the land. The area of the village is 2.47 square miles.

Of the total land, 21 percent is wet land and 63 percent is dry. The village irrigation tank occupies 15 percent of the land while homes, the school, the graveyard (Mayanakkarai), roads, ponds, temples and other public places cover the remaining 1 percent. Most of the village politics revolves around the competition that stems from the attempts by the main P.K. lineages to takeover consolidate and control the 21 percent wet-land.

A unique feature of the social structure of Vagaikulam is the educational background of its inhabitants and the growth and development this generates. A popular regional saying about the village illustrates this; "Oh! Vagaikulam! It is famous for its education and politics". The village has 134 college and university graduates, 4 M.Phil. graduates, 30 post-graduates, 74 undergraduates and another 26 will graduate in two years. Additionally, there are three persons who pursue their doctoral studies of which two of them are abroad; one in

the United States and other in the Soviet Union, and third is in a University in New Delhi. Over and above this, there are 85 school teachers with two year teacher-training-school degrees, employed throughout the Kallar region; 26 others who are similarly trained are unemployed. Among the younger generation the trend is more promising; there are 102 high school graduates and 63 more are graduating in the next two to three years. Also 58 children of the middle class farmers and landlords are studying in distant boarding schools with hopes of getting a better education. There are 16 high school graduates serving in various capacities in the Indian Armed Forces. It is a very remarkable advancement in the field of education compared to the situation in 1950, when there was not even a single college graduate in the village. There was only one high school graduate Samuel Samtharaj of Peria Vathiar lineage and 48 teachers with middle school diplomas. These educational achievements of Vagaikulam are unparalleled and unprecedented in the third world. They are mainly due to the educational programs originally launched by christian missionaries, including American methodists since time of Rev. Stanley Jones, the British Administration and the government of independent India. At the turn of the 21st century there will be roughly some 400 college graduates in Vagaikulam, which is a substantial responsibility for the state to tackle. Already, some 57 college graduates and 89 high school

graduates are unemployed in this village.

Hotels, teastalls, restaurants, and shops are other important aspects of community life in Vagaikulam. There are 11 restaurants and teastalls, and 12 stores selling essential consumer items and stationery. These features explain the modernization of social life in the village. The politics of caste and class in these businesses are dealt with in the chapter VI.

50 percent of all the houses are mud walled and huts with thatched roofs. Another 48 percent of the houses are built of mud walls with cement coatings and tiles roofs. Stones are used in the walls. Only 2 percent or 12 out of the 505 dwellings are brick houses of which only 3 were built after 1960. Among the untouchables 28 of the 73 Parayar caste households had tiled roofed houses. The rest of them are one or two roomed huts. None of the houses have any bathroom facilities whatsoever. The villagers use open fields and farms adjoining the village and the banks of tanks to respond to the call of nature. They usually bath in wells and use marcova and karuvialei tree branches for brushing their teeth. At other times is soil too.

In 1950, 97 percent of all the houses were either mud or roofed huts and only 9 were brick ones of which 4 completely collapsed in the 1960s. The dramatic 50 percent drop in the number of mud houses, and rise in the tile

roofed houses manifest the rapid modernization of social material, (not the social cultural) life that is underway in the village as part of the modernization of Indian society as a whole.

The ecology of the caste-based housing settlement is typical of scenes elsewhere in Indian villages. The Untouchable colonies are separated by only pedestrian paths and/or perpendicular internal roads of the village. But these houses face away from the houses of higher castes. The housing settlements among the castes like social behavior, are based on pure and impure stigmas.

Footnotes

1. Kathleen, Gough, Rural Society in Southeast India, 1981, Cambridge University Press, P. 26.
2. Dumont, Louis, A South Indian Subcaste: Social Organization and Religion of the Pramalai Kallar, 1986, Oxford, New Delhi, P.19.
3. Dumont, Louis, 1986, P. 148.
4. Ibid., 1986, P. 294.
5. Ibid., P. 295.
6. Ramalingam the most prominent among them, after his service in Tamil Nadu government, lives on his farm, that lies west of the bus road that crosses the village Keela Urappanur.
7. The third generation of this lineage continues this hereditary occupation, and guidance for higher education at various levels.
8. I interviewed this popular businessman, Santhuras Chettiyar during my field study in 1988. He told me that he has plans to expand the business in the Northern State, while simultaneously continuing the traditional village shop- business through his wife. His entire family like other business castes and communities, is involved in business.

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CHAPTER IV

The Economy and Caste

The village economy is largely based on agriculture, in which the dominant landlords and the big farmers have historically combined money-lending and other related businesses. Moneylending has played a historical and central role in the rise of landlords and rich farmers in the village. Petty trade and commerce: shop-keeping, restaurants and tea-stalls, legal/illegal liquor, and marijuana sale, are increasingly taking place. Teaching and other employment in the service and defense sectors are notable non-farming occupations among the villagers. These have substantial financial impact on farming and the transfer of land ownership which are the mainstay of the village economy.

Agriculture: Modernization and Commercialization

The modernization of agriculture and the commercialization of agriculture are the dialectical processes of a single phenomenon, the development of capitalism in farming. The modernization of agriculture, engaged in the production for external markets, affects almost every aspect of the social structure in Vagaikulam: a. technological changes, organic composition, nature of exploitation, etc., b. land tenure system, instruments of production, and social wealth, c. ownership of properties and its effects on stratification, d. work: the hereditary

and the modern division of labor and workforce; e. conditions of life including housing.

The impact of modern agriculture and the cosmopolitan market are substantial on matters as clothing, life style, gender relations, marriage and family, patterns of caste, lineage, and class associations, religion, school and education, and the media, local market, home premises, behavior in streets and groups in Vagaikulam. I discuss each of this issues in detail in chapters V and VI in the context of caste-class dynamics in the social structure of Vagaikulam. For now, I must focus on caste-class dynamics with regard to the agricultural and other sectors of the the village economy.

The instant and ubiquitous effects of the village produce exported to the cosmopolitan market, and the external market influencing economic activities, are on the mode of payment in Vagaikulam. The wage in kind such as grain has been replaced by wages in cash since most crops are cash crops. In other words cash crops replaced the traditional crops that accompanied the change in payment of wages from kind to cash. As most farmers cultivate cash crops, the farm workers are freed from depending on any particular landlords, and now work wherever and whenever they can find work which is seasonal. The peasants go as far as a place like Madras, 370 miles from Vagaikulam to find job during the off season. Lately, the jobless peasants began to go to

Madurai city for overnight work and return next day. The workers dependency has been diversified. The formal and informal social manners and behaviors have undergone changes. The value of the land has increased substantially due to the increased volume and market for the cash crops. The lineage and the family coalitions have become more established to assert their social power and status.

The objective of the production is increasingly destined for markets rather than to meeting the village consumption needs. The cultivation of the indigenous grains: thinai, cholan, kambu, kezhvaraghu, has slowly disappeared (a general trend in the Indian agricultural sector), and the other grains and lentils; samai, kuthiraivalli, Kaanai have not been seen since the 1960s.

Table 1

Commercialization of Crops in 1950 & 1989

1950	1989
Rice, varaghu	Rice
Tinai, Kezvaraghu	Cotton
Samai, Kuthiraivalli	Peanuts(Groundnuts)
Kaanai, Mochai	Onion
Kambu, Thuvarai, Cholan	

Sources: Interviews and notes from the field.

The items listed under 1950 are foods that were used mostly for domestic purposes and the rest for the market,

four decades ago. However, the situation is totally different now as most items that are produced currently are destined for the market. The absence of these indigenous crops is proportionate to the increasing presence of the cash crops such as cotton, peanuts (ground nuts), sugar cane, onions, etc.

Rice used to be the major crop, but it has become only one of the many crop which are instantly exported to the external market to pay back the farmers' loan and/or to meet the fresh family expenses, schooling, wedding, etc. As a whole, the village agriculture is rapidly commercialized, an epochal change, what Marx could have called the development of capitalism, and the completion of the integration of the erstwhile colonies into the capitalist world market whose social implications are manifold in Vagaikulam.

This process accompanies a structural change in the village where caste based hereditary occupations were institutionalized for many epochs. The British imposed industrialization followed by the free Indian government began to alter the landscape, the social fabric and more importantly the economy, and the inter caste relationship and caste-class dynamics in an irreversible manner in Vagaikulam as elsewhere in India. The survey of the history of land tenure system- hereditary ownership, partitioning among the heirs, and property changing hands should reveal among other things, what is fundamentally

transformed in the village, the land ownership pattern and land use. Therefore, the increasing modernization in agriculture and in social life together gradually changed the entire economy and the social fabric in Vagaikulam.

The technological changes in the cultivation and irrigation systems, and modern chemical fertilizers have revolutionized agriculture as a whole. Particularly the changes in turnover time and in the volumes of output are quicker and more profitable which mostly benefits the farmers who lies above the middle of the land ownership structure. The nature of exploitation of land and labor has been steadily intensified. Two or three crops a year, instead of one, have been routine. An incessant use of land, felling of trees to increase the cultivable lands, and the higher exploitation of the natural resources of the soil are some of the consequences of modern agriculture in Vagaikulam. The labor participation has become so intensive that the semi-bonded laborers (pannayal) had to be freed from one or one group of landlords to make labor available. During the peak seasons of agricultural operations, the men and women laborers have hardly any time for anything other than a little sleep and lengthy working hours in the muddy fields.

The organic composition of capital in agriculture has drastically changed corresponding to the changes in the agricultural instruments and in the hereditary and

modern division of labor in Vagaikulam. Earlier the variable part (V) of capital dominated the composition while presently the constant part (C) has more in the organic composition. The family labor: husband, wife, and the children constituted the variable capital, V, while the simple instruments such as the wooden plough, bullocks, home grown nursery crops, and natural manures constituted the constant capital, C.

The composition has changed to the extent that the farmers have to invest hard cash in modern fertilizers, seeds, and to pay wages in cash, etc., The participation of what Marx called, the variable capital, V, got intensified as the number of turnovers (crops) has increased. On the other hand the instruments of production and the distribution of land and wealth have also changed in Vagaikulam, which now has three Ford tractors for agricultural operations. While the concentration of land at the top is taking place, the split and movement of the landed properties at the bottom is due to the poverty and partitioning of the small and poor peasants in Vagaikulam. Hence the accumulation of wealth and growing impoverization are simultaneously developing and I discuss each one of these processes in detail in the following pages of this chapter.

I have preferred to organize the data in the light of what is central to this chapter, the economy, land ownership, and the power structure that determines caste-

class dynamics, and vice versa, in this village.

Table 2
Caste Wise Distribution of
Population and Land Ownership in Percentage

S.No.	Castes	Population	Land Ownership
1	P. Kallar	84%	97%
2	All other castes	16%	3%

Source: Records of Village Administrative Officer

The Pramalai Kallar caste alone constitute 84 per cent of the population and own 97 per cent of all the land in the village. All the remaining castes, including the service and the Untouchable castes combined form the remaining 16 percent and own a mere three percent of the land. Most untouchables own no land. Within the Pramalai Kallar caste a group of 25 families own one fourth of all the land in the village. The Pramalai Kallar caste, it is obvious from Table 2, enjoys the benefits of controlling the land and dominating the economy in Vagaikulam. From these, follow the Pramalai Kallar's domination of all other aspects: retail business, moneylending, political behavior, religious affairs, and sociocultural processes in Vagaikulam which I discuss in detail in the following chapters.

Table 3
Caste and Ownership of Land

Caste	1950	1989
P.K.	91 %	97 %
Chettiyar	—	0.24 %
Ambalam	0.24 %	—
Untouchables	1.52 %	2.40 %
Carpenter	0.24 %	0.24 %
Mudaliar	6.50 %	0.44 %
P.Washerman	0.04 %	0.04 %

Source: Records of VAO.

The PK caste has considerably improved its share from 91 to 97 per cent in a period of 40 years in the total land-ownership of the village. While the Mudaliar caste has lost all its land, to the PK. The competition for landed property is completed in favor of the PK caste. The competition is presently among the various lineages within the dominant caste, the PK. The absence of any ownership by non PK castes to any substantial extent has logically shifted the arena of competition to the land-owning PK lineages in Vagaikulam. If any non PK caste had owned sufficient amount of land, then competition would have been inter caste, rather than, intra-caste, within the various lineages of the PK caste itself. This in turn is increasingly between two or three dominant land-owning lineages: the Chokkan and Karuppan lineages of the caste,

which I discuss later in the chapter. In the meantime it will be useful to have an idea of the caste composition of the population.

Table 4

Population in 1950 & 1989

Caste	1950			1989		
	men	women	total	men	women	total
PK	653	663	1316	1163	1199	2362
Chettiar	19	21	40	23	29	52
Washerman	13	11	24	9	7	16
Pallar	19	17	36	12	8	20
Parayan	75	76	151	116	121	237
Sakkili	21	20	41	14	17	31
Ambalam	6	5	11	5	5	10
Barber	7	7	14	5	5	10
Kuyavar	6	6	12	9	10	19
Carpenter	10	12	22	13	14	27
P.Washerman	5	3	8	3	4	7
Mudaliyar	5	4	9	7	7	14
Total	839	845	1684	1379	1426	2805

Since the British introduction of land reforms to facilitate the collection of revenues, the land ownership is based on the financial ability of the purchaser and the need of the seller in Indian society. The village situation is characteristic of the national scene. The financial ability among the peasant folks comes not from farming alone but combining it with moneylending,

business, teaching, and other money generating activities. The need of the marginal/small land holders to sell comes from what my data shows: the uncleared accumulated debt, with the exorbitant compounded rate of interests, caused by monsoon failures and/or price fall on farm produce at harvest time; unexpected expenses of funerals, sudden sickness, the death of a bread winning bullock (for ploughing), dowry, and other expenses.

The land ownership is individually oriented and transferred in patrilineal line. This has strengthened since Louis Dumont studied Kokkulam, a neighboring village. There are hardly any absentee landlords and the absence of share-cropping and tenant¹ farming by contrast with the neighboring Tanjore delta, are noteworthy. Excepting the service caste, the Pramalai Kallar and the Untouchables are historically involved in farming in the village.

There are four main categories of peasantry, a picture that roughly corresponds to the national scene: 1. Big landlords, 2. Middle farmers, 3. Marginal and small peasants, and 4. The landless working poor. There are points of overlap mostly between the latter two, among the peasant categories. The marginal and small peasant men and women regularly perform work on the land of big landlords and farmers for wages, which will supplement their income from their own fragmented farming.

The non-farming occupations, which have autonomous sources of income, regularly bring substantial amounts of money to the village economy. Teaching and service in the Army, are some notable ones.

Table 5

Autonomous Sources of Income to the Village Economy

Teaching	Army/Police	Other Services
85	16	15

Source: Records of VAO

The total annual income of these 116 employees (the mean is Rs 2000) is roughly Rs 2,784,000. Even one-third (the other two-thirds spent on schools, clothing, food, etc.) of this total sum will amount Rs 928,000 saved, which annually flows into economy of Vagaikulam. Most of this becomes usurious capital for moneylending at exorbitant rates. Notable for this are the Bose-Vasugi couple, and A.S. Palanichamy. There are other sources of income coming into the village economy. The middlemen's commission in the market, moneylenders' income from other villages, income from market management of the neighboring towns, etc. These are substantial amounts coming into the village economy regularly. Corresponding to this, saving takes place in purchasing gold jewelry. These explain the emergence of these inhabitants as new farmers, and their family affluence. Examples are Sinnandi Vathiar,² the top landlord, and Kundumani-Mary Pappa, Ramasamy-Alagamma, Bose-Vasugi, and others.

There is a capital departure, which is larger than the inflow, since most poor farmers sell their produce instantly on the external markets, and spend the income on urgent family needs. Those who have begun to settle in the neighboring town of Tirumangalam since the late 1970s also take some capital out.

This phenomenon of savings, capital departure and inflow does not give any added significance to banks, for Vagaikulam does not have one. Tirumangalam, the closest town has a few national banks. Traditionally the villagers invest their money in the moneylending business, and buying gold jewelry. They have never developed the habit of saving cash by depositing it in banks. This explains the state of savings in India as a whole. This has some bearing on the village economy.

B. Agriculture and the Land Tenure System

The importance of, and the income from agriculture remain greater than other sources of income, and crucial for an overwhelming majority of the people of the entire third world. These billions of people (the People's Republic of China included) reside in rural areas, earn their livelihood and draw their subsistence from agriculture. Agriculture plays a vital role in feeding an increasing non-agricultural population in urban areas, as well as supplying much of the raw-materials for agro-industries and through exports financing a large bulk of

imported capital and goods for indigenous industrial development. To a great extent, growth in agricultural production and its distribution contributes as well as determines the rate and pattern of development in a developing country such as India. The prevailing agrarian structure in India evolved by and large, during the colonial period.³

There have been land reforms before and since independence, but the most vital means of production in agriculture, land and labor have not yet been settled properly.

Since the mid the 1960s green revolution has occurred only in certain pockets of the vast area of India. The rest of the country is left with the traditional way of cultivation with a little technology here and there. The village of Vagaikulam is a classic case.

The prevailing characteristics and the pattern of farming are important to understand the caste-class relationships revolving around land ownership in the village. A brief account of the various kinds of farming that have historically prevailed in the village will reveal, among other things, the changing relations, forces, and mode of production in the village agriculture and economy.

Three Kinds of Farming

The kind of farming depends upon the pattern of irrigation and the ecology of the land. Accordingly there are three kinds of farming in Vagaikulam agriculture:

1. Dry-land cultivation, which depends exclusively on monsoons, 2. Wet-land cultivation, which depends on irrigation from the village tank, and 3. Well farming, which depends on irrigation supplied from well water.

Dry-land Cultivation

Dry-land cultivation solely relies on the seasonal monsoon and periodic rain, whose delay and failure have an arresting impact on the prospects of cultivation and the peasants who depend on it for their survival. Ground nuts (peanuts), millet, (indigenous grains), lentils, beans, and other local grains; kuthiraivalli, cholam, kambu, samai, thinai and kezhvaraghu, are some of the popular grains of dry-land cultivation.

The dry-land cultivation is based on one crop per year if there is a timely and adequate monsoon. The very existence of dry-land cultivation itself is due to the absence of any irrigational facilities to roughly 700 acres, 64 percent of all the land in the village. In any one decade the number of years of successful dry cultivation is three or four. The economics and politics, shaped by the caste-class dynamics of the village,

revolves around the remaining 21 percent of the land. Hence the competition to obtain the fertile land is rapid, intense, and complex in a community of many castes and lineages.

Since the Constitution of India sets no limits for the amount of property that can be owned, the drive for individual or family ownership is the dominant process in the economic life of Vagaikulam. The ceiling of land reform does not have any effect on the landlords who have successfully manipulated the ceiling act to maintain their level of ownership. The village has common land in addition to the land in use for the school, Temples, graveyards, village council buildings, and the bus-stand, reservoir, tanks, ponds, etc., All of these properties and the income from the tamarind and other trees are used for the common purposes of Vagaikulam. The Golden bonds purchased during the 1960s remain unencashed, since most of the village elders and the leaders who signed them have since died. Ploughing and tilling by humans and animals, are the most frequent and ordinary aspects of labor in dry cultivation. The income from dry cultivation is minimal in the village economy, but critical to the small and marginal peasants who do not have alternative sources of income. Well irrigation plans by individual farmers are increasingly transforming the dry land. This process of increasing the cultivable land coupled with the cash crops with quicker turnovers has maximized the value of land.

Growing inflation has strengthened this process.

Well Farming

Digging and deepening the earth in a square form, until a sufficient water level is found, creates a well, whose water is used for cultivation when the monsoon is insufficient, and when modern and traditional irrigation facilities are not available. Smaller wells are dug within the village for drinking waters. There are separate wells for each of the castes in the village. The Untouchables are still forbidden to take water from the wells of the higher castes, which I discuss in Chapter V.

The water rights of well irrigation belong to the farmers who dug the well and set up the modern pump system. This is set up on one's own land. Others cannot claim the rights for water for they do not own the land. There are roughly 150 well farms situated in the village territory. 90 per cent of the wells will dry up if there is no monsoon for one year. The development of capitalism and the modernization of village agriculture, as elsewhere in the region, introduced cash crops: cotton, ground nuts, sugar cane, onions, etc. These have made well-farming, even within the fertile wet-land, the backbone of village agriculture, and hence the economy. The coming of electricity, modern chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and high yield varieties of crops have transformed fundamentally the characteristics and importance of

farming. Hence, this has altered the relationship between labor and landlord, on the one hand, and the service castes and the farming castes on the other. Proportionate to the significance of farming in general and the cash crops of well-farming in particular, the competition is rapid and intense among the landlords to acquire land. More rapid is this process among the various Pramalai Kallar lineages in the village. The classic examples in this regard are: Sivanathevan Mayandi (and his sons, Sinnandi, Pandiyan, and Paramasivam), Ramasamy Vathiyar, and Sinnandi Vathiar.

As the cash crops becomes more popular, the agricultural produce is increasingly exported to the external market. These new forces and relations of production have changed the mode of production, the way in which the worker is paid, and how his surplus is appropriated by the landlord.

Wet-land Farming

The cultivation is carried out with water from the village tank whose reservoir has been connected with the Vaigai Dam, situated some 50 miles west of this village. Previously, the monsoon alone would fill the village tank, known as Kanmai. The tank was dug by the village people themselves, and later developed and enlarged by the British administration. A Mudaliar of the neighboring village, Kalappanpatti, employed then in Madurai

collectorate advised one Ramathevan of Vagaikulam to dig a small bond to start with, when the latter approached him for digging a large tank for village irrigation.⁴ Hence the village tank, a life-line of the village economy, was developed stage by stage.

The distribution of water rights in wet-land crops is among those who own land in the irrigation area. An untouchable family called Madayan oversees the general regulation of water distribution, while the concerned farmer takes full care to see his crops are kept adequately irrigated.

The tank is situated in 219 acres which irrigates 339 acres of the fertile wet-land, the source and target of the economics and politics of the caste-class relationships in the village.

The periodic monsoon enhances the durability and quantity of the irrigation, and hence the crop yield. The intensive labor participation is characteristic of the fragmented farming and the land tenure system, whose implications for the yield I have already shown. I will discuss these more in the following pages, under Land Tenure System.

Ploughing is carried out mostly by bullock or buffalo, and occasionally by tractor, which is expensive for the marginal and small peasants who constitute the majority of the peasantry in the village. There are two

tractors, owned by two different farmers: Sivanathevan Mayandi and Kattamayan Mokkasamy. Ploughing and leveling the ploughed land are done by men. The other functions works in the farming are performed by women. Sowing, seeding, nursery, transplantation, manuring, watering, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, are all carried out by and large in traditional ways: by hand with the traditional wooden and iron tools. As cash crops are becoming more pronounced, the importance of paddy (rice) cultivation in wet-land farming is losing its traditional dominant place in the village agriculture and economy. Changes in the land ownership system are of fundamental importance to the discussion here. The following tables showing the changing ownership are generated from the data collected from the Village Administrative Officer of Vagaikulam.

Table 6
The Top 25 Families and the Size of their Holdings

1950

S.No.	Name	Lineage	Wet Land	Dry Land	Total	Remarks
1	Chandra Sekar	Mudaliar	10.00	41.50	51.50	lost sold
2	E.C. Sadamaya Thevar	Chokkan	14.00	25.00	39.00	split
3	M.N. Seenithevan	Thangalacheri	6.00	20.00	26.00	lost sold
4	D. Sivangalalthevar	Chokkan	10.00	15.00	25.00	split
5	M. Mayathevar	Cheppan	10.00	15.00	25.00	split
6	Viswanathan	Thangalacheri	4.00	20.00	24.00	lost sold
7	S. Mayathevar	Chokkan	4.00	20.00	24.00	
8	K. Sinnathevar	Thagalacheri	1.00	20.00	21.00	lost
9	S. Paraman	Karuppan	6.00	15.00	21.00	split
10	Vellaithevar	Cheppan	10.00	10.00	20.00	split
11	K.M. Paulsamy	Cheppan	2.50	15.00	17.50	split
12	Chellappandian	Thevan	6.00	10.00	16.00	maint
13	U. Sadamayan	Chokkan		15.00	15.00	split
14	Sinnasamy	Sikkanda Malai	4.00	10.00	14.00	split
15	K.Periasamy	P.V. lineage	5.00	7.00	12.00	split
16	K.A. Mokkalamy Thevar	Kattamayan	3.00	8.50	11.50	imp split
17	R. Sivangalai Thevar	Chokkan	8.00	2.00	10.00	
18	Nallandi Mayathevar	Tharagan	3.00	7.00	10.00	split
19	B.C. Sinnathevar	Thangalacheri	2.00	8.00	10.00	
20	C. Perumal Thevar	Karuppan	3.00	6.50	9.50	
21	A.V. Mayandi	Cheppan	2.00	6.00	8.00	split
22	Muthusamy Thevar	Sikkandamalai	2.00	6.00	8.00	split
23	M.K. Ramasamy	Thevan	2.00	6.00	8.00	improved
24	K. Arjanathevar	Karuppan	2.00	5.00	7.00	split
25	M. Perumalthevar	Karuppan		7.00	7.00	

Sources:

Mr. Ponnusamy, Village Administrative Officer, Vagaikulam
Mr. Thiagarajan, Former Karnam (Village Administrative Officer)

The Research investigators:

Mr. Angathevar Baskaran, M.A., M.A.,
Mr. Sinnandyvathiar Natarajan

Table 7
The Top 25 Families and the Size of their Holdings
1989

S.No.	Name	Lineage	Wet Land	Dry Land	Total	Remarks
1	Karthigai alias Subramanian	Thangalacheri	2.00	21.00	23.00	new
2	K.C. Ganesan	Thangalacheri	1.00	20.00	21.00	new
3	Muthuveeran Sinnandithevar	Chokkan	16.00	4.00	20.00	new
4	K.A. Mokkasamy	Kattamayan	3.00	13.00	16.00	improved
5	Chellappandi	Thevan	10.00	5.00	15.00	improved
6	Thirumal Kandan	Thevan		15.00	15.00	new split
7	Ramalingam	Sikkandamalai	2.00	10.00	12.00	new
8	Thenmayan	Sokkan	2.00	10.00	12.00	new
9	T. Thangarasu	Kattamayan	2.00	10.00	12.00	new
10	Sivasamy	Sokkan	2.00	10.00	12.00	new
11	K.P. Sinnandi	Sokkan		12.00	12.00	new
12	Kundumani	Karuppan	7.00	4.00	11.00	new
13	A.V. Mathialagan(CV)	Cheppan	5.00	6.00	11.00	new
14	Paramasivam	Chokkan	2.50	8.00	10.50	new
15	P. Sivamayan	Karuppan	5.00	5.00	10.00	new
16	Pusari Thangasamy Thevar (CV)	Ochattevan	3.00	7.00	10.00	new
17	M.K. Ramasamy	Thevan	2.00	8.00	10.00	improved
18	Annakkodi	Karuppan		10.00	10.00	new
19	Periakaruppan	Karuppan	6.00	3.00	9.00	new
20	Malarvili	Chokkan	1.50	7.00	8.50	new
21	Pualsamythevar	Sikkardamalai	5.00	3.00	8.50	
22	Mookkan (CV)	Karuppan	1.00	7.00	8.00	
23	Pandiyan	Chokkan		8.00	8.00	new
24	N.C. Mayandi	Karuppan		8.00	8.00	new
25	U.S. Rajappa	Chokkan		8.00	8.00	new

Sources:

Mr. Ponnusamy, Village Administrative Officer, Vagaikulam.

Mr. Mr. S. Thiagarajan, Karnam (former Village Administrative Officer)

Land Tenure System

The size of the land holdings is a major factor in the development of agriculture. Farming in both the large scale (collectivized and privately owned) and on fragmented land has had far reaching consequences in the agriculture. The privatized large-scale farming in the US and the collectivized Soviet agriculture now being dismantled provide us with many comparisons. However, the fragmented farming in Vagaikulam seems to show intensive cultivation and higher volumes of produce. The major beneficiaries are the landlords in the village and the middlemen in the urban market.

This development of polarization in the new agrarian economy offers an opportunity for workers' movements, but this has not visibly developed because the caste and lineage factors interplay with class elements. There are two scales of farming in the village: medium size, and fragmented farming. A group of 25 families own one-fourth of all the land in the village (see Table 7) while the remaining 342 families own the other 75 percent of the land, which was extremely fragmented in 1989.

Table 8

Fragmentation Process
The top 25 landlords together owned and controlled

1950	430 acres	35%
1989	301 acres	25%

The top 25 families have lost roughly 10 per cent of their ownership in the last 40 years: from 35 per cent in 1950 to 25 per cent in 1989. Simultaneously the individual size of the landlord's ownership has also decreased, from the biggest landlord, Chandrasekhar Mudaliar's 51.50 acres in 1950 to Ganesan's 23 acres in 1989. This is a substantial change. Despite at the top of the structure a group of 25 families still own 25 per cent of all the land, and at the bottom, the fragmentation process is very steady.

Size of the Land-holdings

The competition for land which is primarily among the various lineages of the Pramalai Kallar caste alone is unprecedented in the village. The prestige and status of the villager is determined by the size of the family's land holding. Hence the various Pramalai Kallar lineages have been in perpetual competition to buy land. The frequency of sales among the top and middle level farmers less, resulting in eventual fragmentation due to the partitioning among the sons of a given

landlord/farmer. The peasants are emotionally attached to their land, which the successive generations of the lineage have been farming for centuries. The fragmentation of the last 50 years, as shown in tables 6,7,8, is going to increase in the coming generations, unless a sweeping land reform, such as collectivization, takes place, which is unlikely in the near future. Comparison of Tables 6 and 7 shows the shrinking of the average ownership of the top 25 farmers from 1950 to 1989. No new farmer in 1989 has accumulated more than 23 acres, and most purchases were in dry lands which are lesser yielding than wet lands. In 1950 the top landlord had 50.51 acres, whereas the size in 1989 is 23 acres, less than half.

What is significant is a two fold process that is developing. 1. The gradual fragmentation of land ownership, and the emergence of new farmers combining farming with one or two non-farming occupations such as moneylending, teaching, and petty business. Our data indicates that 13 out of 20 new farmers among the top 25, are moneylenders, teachers, or businessmen, or combine all of these occupations. This development confirms one of my main hypotheses: A farmer, by farming alone, cannot establish himself as a landlord, but has to be supported by one or another of the non-farming occupations, as the village situation clearly demonstrates. Periya Sinnandi by moneylending, teaching, and Pig-breeding initially;

Kundumani by teaching and other sources of income; Rasuvathiar by teaching and other sources of income, Rajappa by teaching and service employment, are classic cases to have emerged as new farmers among the top 25 landlords in the village. I discuss each of these non-farming occupations in the next section, because now I want to provide a detailed account of the differentiation within the peasantry: different peasant classes in the village social structure.

The village is stratified into many layers. Six major strata can clearly be identified based on their occupations and the sources of their incomes. These classes can be classified in the following way: 1. big landlords with 20 or more acres of land, moneylending business, 2. Farmers with 9 to 10 acres with or without moneylending and/or teaching, 3. Farmers with 5 to 9 acres, 4. Marginal and small peasants with 2 to 4 acres, 5. The rural poor with one acre or less of land, and 6. the landless poor with no land at all living on daily work when they can find it. There is a business community of a few Chettiyar families totaling 52 members. There are service castes: washerman, barbers, carpenters, and others who form a service community, totaling 66 people. And the working Untouchables belong to the landless working class category.

Table 9

Among the Land Holders Family Wise and in Percentage

	Up to 1 acre	2-4 Acres	5-9 Acres	10-19 Acres	20 & above	Total
1950						
N	73	105	27	9	10	224
%	32.59	40.87	12.05	4.01	4.46	
1989:						
N	153	144	52	15	3	367
%	41.68	39.23	14.16	4.08	.81	

The increase in poor peasants (up to 1 acre) is not to be taken as the landless becoming land holders, but the small or marginal peasants becoming poorer.

1. An increasing number and percentage of families are becoming smaller and smaller land holders.
2. Fragmentation is taking place rather than concentration.
3. Sixty-seven percent of families owned two acres and above in 1950.
4. But 58 percent of families owned two acres and above in 1989. Major changes are taking place in the land tenure system with regard to the size of the land holdings which are of fundamental importance to my thesis since the process affects the relationships among the dominant lineages on the one hand, and the various castes on the other hand. Table 4 shows a substantial increase

in the number and percentage of families becoming smaller and smaller land holders in the village. Another important development in the village is in poor peasants holding less than one acre. The increase among the poor peasants as the table shows from 33 percent to 42 percent is another major development in land ownership.

The increase among the poor peasants is not to be taken as the landless becoming land holders instead, as Table 10 shows, the marginal farmers owning 5 to 9 acres have become poorer.

An equally remarkable development is among the top land owners. As Tables 6 and 7 show, the top 25 landlords owned 35 per cent of land in 1950 whereas the top 25 owned only 25 per cent of land in 1989. This trend in terms of families means those who owned 20 acres or more in 1950 were 4.5 per cent of the families, whereas in 1989 these families who owned 20 acres were just less than one percent. At both ends of the land tenure system, the poor and the top landlords have begun to shrink in their size of land holding. The fragmentation of ownership is a growing phenomenon in the village.

For the purpose of clarity and analysis, and to understand the caste-class relationships involved in the land ownership it is necessary to place the entire agrarian communities in a four tier Stratification System

(see the Table 10).

There are sharp differences among four major agrarian strata, as Table 10 demonstrates. All four strata have undergone substantial structural transformation in the last 40 years.

The top landlords owning 10 to 23 acres of land (23 acre is the largest ownership) constituted six per cent of all families in 1950. Whereas they now constitute only 3.5 per cent of families, a 45 per cent reduction. The landless and the poor peasants owning less than one acre, were 52 per cent in 1950, and they increased to 58 per cent in 1989, a dramatic growth of working people. The small and marginal peasants, as the same Table 10 shows have decreased to 29 per cent in 1989 from 33 in 1950. The decrease occurred as pauperized peasants have been swelling the ranks of the working and poor peasants.

An equally remarkable development is among the middle level farmers. While the percentage of families among the top landlords has decreased, and among the working and poor peasants increased, it must be noted that the middle class is growing in the village.

Table 10

Peasants in Four Tiered Stratification in 1950 and 1989:

Landless and Poor Peasants Up to 1 acre	Small Peasants 2-4	Middle Peasants 5-9	Landlords 10 and 23	Total
1950:				
163	105	27	19	314
(51.91)	(33.43)	(859)	(6.05)	
1989:				
291	144	52	18	505
(57.62)	28.51	(10.29)	(3.56)	

The growth of middle farmers is a typical tendency of transition toward capitalist farming in the village region. Fragmentation at the top, as a result of competition among the rich farmers, growth of middle farmers due to non-farming occupations, and pauperization and proletarianization of small peasants, the faster and bigger turnover in modern agriculture and the significant growth of the workforce, are some of the classic tendencies of capitalist development. Pauperization is a process in which the small and marginal landholders loose their property to the rich farmers and landlords. Proletarianization is a process in which the marginalized and pauperized peasants are pushed to a living by simple and pure wage work, with or without politicization and/or unionization. These two processes are the dialectical

tendency owing to the growth of capitalist farming in Vagaikulam. This tendency is further strengthened by inherent economic and natural calamities such as price increases in essential commodities and farm inputs, falling prices for the farm produce, hoarding, and exorbitant lending rates, and the failures of monsoon rains, plant diseases and insect destruction of crops, and other factors. These developments indicate the clear shift from feudal farming to the emerging modern capitalistic farming in Vagaikulam. The rise of the capitalist elements emerges in confrontation and in coalition with the traditional, feudal elements of caste and lineage values as the inter-caste and intra-caste conflicts occur. The strength and the weakness of these caste and class dynamics are in varying degrees dependent on a given issue and time in Vagaikulam.

Despite the non-farming occupations and modernization, the fragmentation process among the top landlords is steady. The intra lineage conflict to prevent a third lineage from buying land, and inter-lineage conflicts to buy land from the poor peasants only hinder, (but do not reverse) the sweeping concentration of land, in fewer hands in Vagaikulam. This explains the reduction of individual size of holdings at the apex of land ownership and the substantial growth of middle farmers in Vagaikulam. This is a reflection of the class structure of Indian society as a whole. Of the 850

million people in India, roughly 300 million are loosely considered to belong to the middle class, the biggest single class in any country in the world. The middle farmers owning five to nine acres of land have grown to more than 10 per cent in 1989, from 8.5 per cent in 1950. I prefer to call them middle-farmers rather than middle classes because of economic and social conditions in the context of the social structure in Vagaikulam. These farmers do not make savings in banks, but instead in jewelry, and they have some stability in the sources of their income.

The distribution of land holding families, in terms of how much land each stratum owns, constitutes an important aspect, of the social structure of the agrarian community (see Table 10)

A group of nineteen families owning ten or more acres owned roughly 39 per cent of all the land in 1950, whereas a group of 18 families own just 27 per cent of all the land in 1989, a remarkable reduction in the total ownership of the top landlords. Fragmentation of property ownership is an important phenomenon.

All three major trends: the increase of the landless and working poor, growth of the middle class, and fragmentation of large scale ownership are steady. The most remarkable aspect of the land tenure system in Vagaikulam is the increasing landlessness and the working

poor, as opposed to the slow and steady concentration of big ownership, however reduced in size, as Table 5 shows. In addition to this, about 50 to 60 families have left the village after losing their land. The dramatic loss of land resulting from the peasants' debts to the landlords, non-availability of daily work, and related financial conditions led these impoverished peasants to migrate to neighboring districts such as Thanjavur, where three crops a year grow in its delta. Some of them return occasionally to redeem their mortgaged lands, but most of them choose to remain in their new homes for the better working and living conditions. This is an internal and rural-rural migration. The other tendency is the migration of male youth to the urban centers such as Madurai, Madras, and other places, since 1984. This is a seasonal and rural -urban migration. These men migrate only when there is no work in Vagaikulam and return with their pockets full of money once the agricultural season begins. The revenues flowing into the village from these workers also add to the polarizing tendency in one way or the another. This is a growing tendency as the youth are attracted by the work, wage, living, and entertainment conditions available in the towns and cities.

B. The Non-Farming Occupations

The non-farming occupations can be divided into two:

1. Farm-related occupations that generate income among the village communities within its territory of which

moneylending, petty businesses like tea-stalls, restaurants, shops, etc., and 2. Other occupations that take place outside of the village which are an external source of incomes such as teaching, employment in the civil services, and careers in the Army and police departments.

Moneylending: the lender, the borrower, the exchange of his land.

Among all the non-farming occupations, moneylending has been associated with farming for a long time. Its origin could be traced to the time when the public ownership of land was transformed into private ownership whose early phase can be identified with the coming of Moghul rule and its forced collection of higher taxes. However, it was the British who, by constitutional laws and regulations, transformed the land into individual ownership and cultivation, through a land-tenure system known as the "ryotwari" system in the region.⁵ For the individual ownership, the British did not provide any financial facilities to meet the cultivation cost. It is my contention that the absence of such financial facilities encouraged gradually the emergence of the lender and borrower, developed possibly from the ranks of the then semi-educated official in the British administration, landlord and/or commercial elites.⁶

The moneylending occupation needs further discussion

since it has been playing an important role in land ownership and the village economy as a whole in Vagaikulam. The top landlord, Sinnandi Vathiar and most of the next level farmers have been merciless moneylenders at exorbitant rates of interest. The top landlords, Sinnandi Vathiar, Terkuveetu Mayandi, Muthumayan Sivangalai, S. Bose, and A. S. Palanichamy are important examples.⁷ The volume of transaction of each moneylender is not revealed, but may be anywhere between Rs 500 to Rs 150,000 for each lender.

My investigation shows that the terms and conditions of this business between the lender and borrower, the landlord and the peasant, are paramount factors in land-exchange hands, a major theme of this dissertation. The confirmation of this trend by other studies suggests that moneylending and the polarization of land ownership are historical processes in the village communities. Dumont's study supports this view:

"there certainly are a number of people in this village who are indebted to other castes, especially to those living in the towns. But the loans are relatively rare compared with loans arranged among the Kallar. The latter are generally secured by land whose possession passes to the lender (in mortgage). Thus the need for cash leads to a movement or change, if not immediately in land ownership at least in the possession and use of land".⁸

Moneylending, as elsewhere in the Kallar country, has been playing a partisan role on the side of the landlord, and to the disadvantage of the rural poor, in the village of Vagaikulam.⁸ Hence, this occupation has

been playing a critical role in the changing status of land ownership.

The non existence of personal savings, and the non-availability of financial institutions that can support the needy poor and small farmers, have strengthened the presence of the moneylenders, and their business.

The village Cooperative Society established in Vagaikulam and other villages to support the small and marginal farming has been manipulated to the extent that these facilities serve the rich farmers and landlords. These landlords in turn lend the public money at exorbitant rates of interest to the very poor peasants who have been kept from utilizing the loans intended to help the marginal and small peasants. Everyone, from the poor peasant in the village to the Premier in New Delhi, knows the situation. Those who influence the state apparatus and who gain from it are the rich. The plight of the poor farmer continues.¹⁰ Yet another study in the neighboring Tanjore district finds: "The Brahman landlord owned sixty acres in and near Kumbapettai and managed by a cultivator of the Potter Caste, this landlord's family managed a business in milk, and food stuffs in Thanjavur. He himself had a relatively well paying government appointment as a tax officer in Madurai was also a moneylender."¹¹ And it is important to note further, "the richer landlords could thus make profits over and above those normally accruing from owning more land, by

engaging Pannaiyals instead of coolies, by selling paddy on the black market, and by moneylending."¹²

There have been, as these studies in different parts of the region suggest, historical ties between landlordism and moneylending¹³ on the one hand, and the polarization of land ownership and moneylending on the other. Thus the marginal and small peasants are at the mercy of the moneylending land lords. This dependency of the poor on the rich is reproduced, and increases each year. The availability of the rural cooperative bank is of practically no use for the needy dependent peasants.¹⁴ What Dumont observed about the conditions of village co-operative banks in Tengalapatti and Kokkulam in 1940's is the same in Vagaikulam in 1989. "In principle, loans are to be stopped (by the rural co-operative bank) for the whole village if some one does not repay" (Dumont: 1986,129). Getting a loan from any bank (most banks are state owned) involves a consistent approach and bribery at each level, and is thus a costly and time consuming activity. The standing crops in the field cannot wait for manure and pesticides. And when finally the loan is sanctioned, the money will not be useful for the crop is already over. Thus, the poor peasants' dependence on the local moneylenders, who are just waiting in the wings.

Petty Retail Businesses: Shops and Restaurants

There is one caste community whose traditional

occupation is business in the village. They are Chettiyars by caste whom I have already discussed in Chapter II and III in the sections on trading communities and caste composition respectively. Here I will provide an account of the changing nature of these retail businesses, the caste-class dynamics involved and its implications for the land ownership system in the village.

The presence of many stores and shops selling school supplies, and grocery items was due to the relatively high level of literacy in the village since the early 20th century, an early period for an average Indian village. The 2805 people of the village until very recently depended substantially upon the shops for all essential commodities and for the minor agricultural instruments. Thummakkundu weekly market situated two miles southwest of the village was the place for shopping for essential commodities and buying and selling live chickens, goats and sheep. The regular transport connection to Vagaikulam, and most other villages in the area, included the collapse of these weekly markets. Since then, people shop in the towns. However, the village retail businesses continue with a reduced volume of sales. The beneficiaries of the weekly market were both the small businessmen and the peasants in Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in the region. Since the collapse of the weekly markets, the peasants spend money

shopping in the regional towns, which means the money goes to the urban businessman and hence the industrial sectors. Modern transport facilitated the industrialists in accumulating the rural produce of Vagaikulam.

The other major social consequences in this respect are the departure of businesses to the town, and the arrival of modern agricultural equipment. The most significant developments are the linkages of the rural and urban economies, and at the same time the undermining and neglect of the agrarian sector in favor of the industrial sector. Contact with urban life and the modernization of social life seems to me of equally great importance in terms of changes in behavior and culture which I discuss in the following chapters. The collapse of the weekly markets and the modern transportation and development of urban sectors are interrelated issues. The urban sector benefits more from the plight of rural resources destined to town than the rural sector benefits from the urban resources. Hence the work of the poor peasantry in Vagaikulam enriches the landlords and the distant industrialists, while also helping to develop the economy of the village and the nation as a whole.

As the non-farming businesses such as moneylending and teaching became more prominent in the village, the Pramalai Kallar men began to enter retail businesses, a traditional occupation of the Chettiyyar service caste for

many centuries, since before the Thottiya Naickens came to the village. Chettiyaramma, Thavamani, Thevar and Thanavijayan were popular figures, and later on one Rajangam, (a native of Keelappudur in Usilampatti) in the tea stall - restaurant business. Coffee and tea are served all day beginning at 4 a.m. This business has become popular since the 1950's.

Among the shop owners who supply all essential commodities, one Annakkodi of Karuppan lineage has taken over the entire business in this line from the Chettiyars. As a result the Chettiyars either left the village or changed their line of business. Annakkodi has established himself as the leading shop-owner, selling all consumer goods and services. Thus, he is becoming a rich farmer from his status as a landless peasant in the mid 1960's.

The restaurants are the other business group which has been very active in the non-farming financial activities of the village. Thevar, Thavamani, Chettiyar, Rajangam, Thanavijayan, as earlier mentioned are the leading restaurateurs, all of them belong to the Pramalai Kallar caste. The emergence of Pramali Kallar men in retail business in the village has its caste-class background.

The success and failure of these businesses here as elsewhere in the region depends on the ability to sell

the merchandise at credit and collect payment periodically. The business community here is traditionally the Chettiyars, in a village where the Pramalai Kallar, traditionally martial caste, constitute 84 per cent of the population. The moment the businessman presses to collect payment he antagonizes and loses the customer who can do business with rival shops of which there are many. As time progressed the relatively passive Chettiyar caste businessmen could not do well in the business, and the Pramalai Kallar stepped into their shoes. Annakkodi is a classic example in this regard, who is a Pramalai Kallar and the dominant retail businessman in the village.

Table 11
Shops in 1950 and 1989 and by Caste

Castes	1950	1989
Chettiyar	6	2
Kallar	4	9

Table 12

Restaurants in 1989 by Caste

(there were no restaurants in 1950)

Caste	1989
Chettiyar	3
Kallar	9

Now the customers cannot delay or evade paying the shop-owners, and their debt will not be allowed to continue or accumulate by the PK businessmen.

The sale of illegal liquor and marijuana are other recent lucrative businesses in the changing economy of Vagaikulam. Although alcoholic drinking has been a traditional habit, formerly it was among the landlords and military veterans, but lately the youth has begun to drink. Now roughly 60 per cent of the people in Vagaikulam have some form of drinking habit, and a couple of dozen people are addicts. The traditional drink was toddy, a juice extracted from palmira trees, but now illegal liquor similar to vodka is locally made. There are two families engaged in the production of this liquor as their full time occupation.

The owner produces the liquor illegally in the traditional way and invests the money generated from this in farming, in land and related activities. As the drinking population increases, so does this business in the village.

Teaching, Civil Service, and Army/Police

Vagaikulam is probably the village with the highest number of graduates in the entire country. A unique feature of this village social structure is its modern education and the growth and development it promoted. A popular saying that exists about the village in the region confirms this: "Oh! Vagaikulam! it is famous for its education and politics". There are 134 college and university graduates; four M.Phil graduates, 30 post graduates, 74 undergraduates and 26 more are graduating in the next one or two years. Additionally, three are in Ph.D programs. One is in the United States; and woman who has just finished her Master's and is registered for the Ph.D in Kiev, the USSR. And the third one is writing his Ph.D at a University in New Delhi. All three are siblings, belonging to the Periaavathiar lineage. Another woman after obtaining her PhD is teaching in the local university, and yet another is a Civil Engineer, working in a state department. All these five belong to one family, although the latter two women were born in neighbouring villages.

Additionally, there are 85 school teachers with two year teacher training degrees, employed throughout the Kallar region, and 26 more who are unemployed. Among the younger generation the trend is more promising; there are 102 high school graduates and 63 more will be graduating in the next two to three years. And some 58 children of the middle class farmers and landlords are studying in boarding schools, the parents hoping to get their children better educated than in the local village schools, There are 16 high school graduates, serving in various capacities in the Indian Armed Forces.

In 1950, there was not even a single college graduate nor was anyone attending college. There was only one high school graduate, Samuel Santharaj, the eldest son of Peria Vathiar, and 48 teachers with middle school diplomas. By the turn of the 21st century there will be some 400 college graduates alone from this village, a substantial responsibility for the state to employ. Already some 57 college and 89 high school graduates are unemployed in this village.

These educational programs were founded by christian missionaries, first by American Presbyterian since before the time of Rev. Stanley Jones and continued by the British Administration and the government of free India. These educational achievements and the employment derived from them, not withstanding the present unemployment, are

unparalleled and unprecedented in its impact on the economy and social structure of Vagaikulam.

Table 13

Incomes From Employment Services

(Outside sources of income to the village)

Year	Teaching	Military/Police	Other Services	Total
1950	49	11	0	60
1989	85	17	28	130

The average income of an employee is Rs 2000, at a conservative estimate, bringing a total of $2000 \times 130 =$ Rs 260,000 entering the village economy monthly. Hence the farmers with these salaries can do very well in their farming and family. Most of these employed people belong to the Pramalai Kallar caste.

The other subsidiary occupations are 1. Middlemen commissioning grain and cattle sales, 2. Black market sales of grains and liquor, etc. Many peasants and some unemployed graduates (146 of them) have taken up the business, illegally transporting the country made liquor to the towns. It is very lucrative trade, like drug trafficking in North America, although the former is in a smaller volume. I have observed and made inquiries of

some of the young men and women involved in this covert business.

All those interviewed pointedly said to me that it is highly profitable in terms of time, investment and profit. These young and old peasants have nothing else to do due to the continuous failure of the monsoon and crops.

What surprised me was a young M.A. degree holder, the son of a former village leader, was deeply involved in trafficking the illegal liquor in larger quantities, to neighboring towns. He is only one of the many educated and uneducated who were idle or desperate, or both, whose financial conditions drove them to this illegal business.

The village women are also actively involved in this. Presently there are two Kallar families whose full time occupation is in liquor production. There are three retail sellers, who are different individuals from the producers. All of them belong to the Pramalai Kallar caste for they alone can collect money from the drunken and rude customers. Roughly 60 per cent of all the men in the village have the habit of drinking. All the successful businessmen have invariably become farmers, and the farmers become rich farmers, and the rich farmers landlords. It is very clear from the investigation that all the non-farming occupations: moneylending,

employment, petty businesses, legal and illegal, and other profit generating activities have been supplementing the village economy. Farming, thus, like business, cannot be seen in isolation from the land ownership structure for both are interwoven in the general process of the polarization of land ownership however slow it is. The caste-class dynamics, as in farming and the other main activities of the village economy, work as pull and push factors in the polarization of land ownership among the closely knit village community.

Farming and non-farming and non-farming occupations, land-ownership and landlessness, draw the entire village community into one single unit. Thus the people of every caste, higher and lower strata, the landlord and laborer are drawn, independent of their willingness and awareness, into one community in which the struggle for property and power are played out constantly and progressively, taking external factors into account. As a whole, whatever the business people are engaged in, they either return to, or simultaneously carry on farming. Land ownership remains a dominant source of power, authority and social status whose implications for the social structure are profound.

In concluding remarks I would like to discuss the movements of the landed property which is very complex, governed not only by economic laws and also by the caste-

class dynamics which I have cited through out the discussions, forms the center of the economic relations of Vagaikulam.

Caste-class factors act as an obstacle to free exchange of land in Vagaikulam. Land is not just sold to any able farmer. The seller first offers to his blood brothers, who may buy it with their own money, or by borrowing from the lenders, selling jeweler, etc. Failing this, the seller offers to his paternal brothers (pangalis), then any distant relative, then any one in the lineage. If none of these people is willing or able to buy, then the third lineage man comes in, who still belongs to the same caste. Of course there are internal politics shaping the events in one way or the other in this regard. However, never a non-PK family can ever buy land be it agricultural or house site, from a PK family, the caste and lineage factors are such a strong influence.

However, an influential PK landlord could buy land from a member of any caste in the village, by virtue of his economic power or other means. Thus the caste and class factors together create the process of a dynamic relationship that determines the property and social relations in Vagaikulam. This network of caste-class dynamics extends to, and overwhelms the entire social fabric in Vagaikulam. It follows from this that whatever

a pattern of ownership that by and large determines a unit's economic relations that also overwhelmingly influences the sociocultural and political aspects as it is in Vagaikulam. Of course there are degree of difference which I take into account. A detailed discussion of the interplay of caste and class factors on the land-ownership and the concomitant power structure, and its implications for the social structure of Vagaikulam, follows, in chapters V and VI.

Footnotes

- ¹Share-cropping, a pattern of cultivation in which the owner landlord rents the land to the tiller who is invariably a landless Untouchable or a non-Brahmin caste, in a written/unwritten agreement that the latter pays the former a fixed amount of the yield or a sum of money annually or per crop. The terms "share cropping" and "tenant farming" are employed interchangeably.
- ²The landlord, Muthuveeran alias Sinnandy is also known as Peria Sinnandy, or Sinnandi vathiar. He was not one of the top 25 land-owners in 1950. His father was, but the properties had to be partitioned into three equal shares for the three sons. The other two remain as marginal peasants, and one of whom worked as primary school teacher and sold out most of his share to his eldest brother, the top landlord under discussion.
- ³Utsa Patnaik, Development of Capitalism in Agriculture, Social Scientist, Vol. I (2), Sept. 1972. p. 17.
- ⁴See the appendix titled as "The History and Development of the village tank.
- ⁴The British in order to facilitate the process of revenue collection from the indigenous peasants through the appointed, and nominated representatives: the poligars, petty kings, the collectors, and others introduced three patterns of land ownership; Zamindari, Mahalvari, and Ryotwari, and the latter is under discussion. However, the British retained the right of being the eminent proprietor of all the land in its territorial sovereignty, and allowed the peasants an amount of land (arbitrary way) for which the present will pay the British Indian State an agreed fee (cash) annually. The amount of the fee depends on the nature of the land and crops.
- ⁶The emergence, development and the present state of this usurious capital in the village economy deserves a serious discussion, and I am separately developing a lengthy paper on this.
- ⁷Among the new moneylenders, one primary school teacher S. Bose, son of Merku Veettu Sivangalai, is so

ruthless and ambitious in this usurious occupation, combines his teaching and moneylending. His wife is teacher and involved in this too. The monthly salaries and loan from this business. He is involved in multiple concubine affairs and also premarital affairs, see Chapter VI.

⁸Louis Dumont, A South Indian Subcaste: Social Organization and the Religion of Pramalai Kallar, 1986, Oxford, New Delhi, p. 129.

⁹There are so many families who have lost their lands of whom the classic example is Madulai Sinnathevar (in 1950 list of the top 25 landlords). The third largest landlord in 1950 lost all his lands, and had taken up other little jobs in Northeastern India, near the Chinese border.

¹⁰The poor small peasants do not have bargaining power with the village cooperative banks, because the landlords and the rich farmers of the village with their money power, and political connections in the towns bribe the banking officials to execute their deals.

¹¹Kathleen Gough, Rural Society in Southeast India, 1981, Oxford, p. 237.

¹²K. Gough, *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹³Moneylending was an institutionalized social process among the village communities as early as the 1940's. The interest rates as Dumont shows are very high. "There are some very real usurers. One of the village headmen lends small sums (Rs 10) to the tenant of the single shop and to others with a daily income, and comes every day to collect interest. A rich Kallar in the neighborhood lends money at 25 per cent which he borrows at 12 per cent (from elsewhere in the town?). Dumont, *op cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁴What Dumont observed about the state of the village cooperative bank's financing conditions at Tengalapatti and Kokkulam in 1940's is the same in Vagaikulam in 1989. "In principle, loans are to be stopped (by the rural coop. bank) for the whole village if some one does not repay", Dumont, 1986, p. 129. *

Chapter V

The workings of caste-class dynamics.

The social implications of the role incessantly played by caste-class dynamics on the education, culture, religion, politics, gender and other sociocultural issues are profound in the social structure of Vagaikulam which will figure prominently in the discussions that follow in this chapter. We will confine the analyses to the main thesis, the state of caste-class dynamics in the social structure of Vagaikulam. The attempts to study the issues of caste and class independent of one another do not expose the real substance of the social structures, the forces that are at work. One major consequence of such a flawed approach is the ineffectiveness of the governmental solutions offered to economic crises and social poverties in general and the increasing eruption of communal riots all around the country.

By contrast, in a new approach, I would like to discuss each and every major and minor social issue that I have documented during my field work, in the context of the main hypothesis I have originally proposed in the project: Caste and class factors, incessantly influencing one another, together influence the entire social structure of Vagaikulam, while transforming themselves.

The sweeping political and economic changes of the world and the status of historical social constructs, such

as caste, in India, are some vital issues in Indian social science research. Tradition and modernity, the status quo, and the nature of caste, lineage, and class stratification in Indian society are much researched issues whose theoretical positions are contested as the state of these phenomena are ever-changing, dynamic, and unabated. My empirical study, supported by demographic and economic data, provides the necessary materials for the analytical discussion in this chapter.

Vagaikulm, like the larger scenario in India today, represents some of the the classic features of tradition and modernity, the remnants of age-old feudalism, and budding development. Periodic elections; the quotas and reservations in education, employment, and health programs for the Untouchables, minorities, and women; support and solidarity with suffering groups abroad; are some of the hallmarks of the Indian polity. The production of missiles, supersonic jet fighters, and manufacture of increasing volumes of goods and services for domestic and international markets are some results of the scientific and technological advance of Indian development. And yet the killing of women over dowry, communal riots based on caste, lineage, language, and religion, are as feudal as any practices in the world. The feudal and revolutionary, the traditional and modern, and the oppressive and liberating, are factors that coexist in Indian society. Conditions in the village are similar to the national

situation stretched here.

Vagaikulam's social structure based on caste and class stratification, land ownership and power structure, and caste, lineage, and class rivalries, provides opportunities for a serious discussion of the changing nature of the village. These features dominate the religious and sociocultural affairs of Vagaikulam. The most spectacular development is its high level of educational achievement, which is a salient feature of the village social structure. The increasing inflow of external capital, the flight of indigenous capital, and the lineage-based conflicts over property and social position constitute the other side of the dialect of structure and process. The influences of these negative forces and their implications are progressively comprehensive and ubiquitous in regard to social structure.

The changing characteristics of the social structure have to do, on the one hand, with modernity, social conditions, culture, politics, village justice, internal and external conflicts, marital patterns, and divorce; on the other hand, they have to do with living standards, including food, housing, clothing, health, intra-caste and inter-caste tensions, untouchability, and in regard to all of these, the land tenure system.

Traditional or Modern?

A key methodological question in the studies of rural community is about the status and the characteristics of the village community per se: how traditional and/or modern is the community? Most researchers now concede that India has been moving rapidly toward a modern national configuration, citing various indications. However, the single most important parameter used for discussing the issue of tradition versus modernity in India is the 'mode of living'. A serious debate involving researchers in and outside of India was published in the Economic and Political Weekly in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Among the participants were Utsha Patnaik and Ashok Rudra. A brief survey of the contemporary state of agriculture and the consumption of grains reveals a great deal about the state of modernization in various areas and in regard to various aspects of Indian society.

Table 14

<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Bullock</u>	<u>Cart</u>	<u>Transportation</u>
Village	1950		1989
Chinnoor	60		04
Periyoor	80		05
Total	140		09

Source: Records of VAO, Vagaikulam.

The bullock carts have historically served as the primary mode of transportation for many a century which is the life line of the village's economic ties with the external world. The establishment of regular bus transportation to Vagaikulam since April 1976, from Tirumangalam and the connections to all the three main routes to Madurai, Usilampatti, and Tirumangalam, is part of a development over two decades that has caused the near extinction of the historic mode of rural transportation: the bullock cart. Until the late 1940s, the people of Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in the country, had to walk many miles to catch a train; and even during the British period the people of the village walked mostly barefoot (one of the historic traditions that remain even today among the villagers) to places as far as Rameshwar, situated 250 miles away on the east coast near Sri Lanka. Most villagers travel only within an area of approximately 100 mile radius. This remains true, despite the development of transportation facilities.

What accompanied this modern transportation that slowly replaced the traditional bullock cart, transportation is the movement of goods (farm produce), labor force, and capital, back and forth, and vice-versa. Sociologically, the village society gradually began to be modernized, a process which continues. The economic implications of these processes have already been dealt with in chapter IV. Equally important are the changes that

accompanied these developments in the agricultural sector, the power base of the lineage and class, and politics in the village. The appearance of three motor tractors has caused the slow disappearance of bullock ploughs.

Table 15
Traditional Cattle Ploughs *

Village	1950	1989
Chinnoor	79	7
Periyoor	154	50
Total	224	57

Source: Record of VAO, Vagaikulam

* A peasant "driving" a couple of bullocks, buffaloes or cows (occasionally donkeys or the inferior breed of horses in North India) to pull the traditional wooden combined with an iron rod instrument known as the Indian plough, or kozhu, will till the land. The depth of ploughing depends on the pressure and force with which the peasant drives the cattle-plough which is otherwise known as a "Yer".

The introduction of electric pumps for irrigation and tractors for ploughing, coupled with the periodic failure of monsoons (due to ecological destruction) have led to the reduction in cattle ploughs from 224 in 1950 to 57 in 1989, a dramatic development that confirms the processes of modernization are at work in the village agriculture. It is more or less true of the region, and more so in the Northern parts of India such as Punjab and Haryana, the pockets of "green revolution" of the 1960s.

Table 16
Mode of Payment in Kind & in Cash

Work	1950	1989
Transplanting(female)	1 padi	Rs. 6.00
Wheeding(female)	1 padi	Rs. 6.00
Cutting bund(male)	Rs. 1.50	Rs.15.00
Bullock plough(male)	Rs. 3.00	Rs.25.00
Harvesting(both)	6 marakkal	12 to 20 (marakkal)

The peasants are beginning to be paid in cash for most of their work. Daily wage is the predominant form of payment, and manufacturing, construction, and industrialization are on the increase. Hence the developmental process is modern though it is uneven regionally, and unequal in the allocation of resources to the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, and in its distribution and consumption aspects.

Ever since the British took over the country and introduced different kinds of land reform on the one hand, and destroyed the indigenous handicrafts and manufacturing (to impose their trade on the Indian working people) on the other hand, there has been industrialization and modernization in the division of labor which continues unabated. Indian independence and the indigenous planning and developmental programs did not fundamentally alter the course and objective of the industrialization mission set

by the British: production for market and for the profit of private individuals and groups. Rather it suited the domestic land lords and industrialists who have been increasingly collaborating with international capital in various degrees. The social consequences of the industrial and developmental programs emanate from these forces. The modest modernization program has performed an historical task: Unification of the culturally and linguistically most diversified nationalities in to one working union of India.

The modernization and urbanization processes were interrelated phenomena in India more than anywhere else in the third world. The rapid rural-urban migration, and the expansion of the cities are unprecedented in the history of modernity. The civilizational and cultural heritage, and its persistent continuity in Indian society are motivations for the Indians to pursue modern production programs rather than the ancient cultures and values. Hence, there exists a separation of material production processes from sociocultural values which is reflected in everyday life--the conflicts and harmonies--in the village.

The conflict between these two explains the presence of greater conservatism in family practices and ideologies than in production and market related practices. In the higher phase of these developments, the presence of tensions implicit in this growing split of production from

domestic life, is reflected in intergenerational conflict, and in relations between men and women. I will take these up in chapter VI.

The objective, mission and pace of modernization and developmental programs are ubiquitous in India, and yet uneven, and unequal in their development and in their consequences. In the cities, towns and suburbs these processes are rapid to the extent that middle class life in the inner cities of Bombay and Delhi is in some significant ways similar to that of New York and Chicago.

However, what I call the core culture remains unaffected on the periphery and in rural India: marital and family relations, religious practices, social customs and the authority of village justice etc. On the other hand, modernization in production relations and forces in Vagaikulam is interwoven with land ownership and landlessness. Thus modernization as an engulfing productive force helps further polarize land ownership in Vagaikulam as it does in the industrial sectors. Thus the production relations in Vagaikulam are increasingly modernized in an irreversible process, while the traditional and conservative family practices and ideologies remain.

Unequal Opportunities in Social Relations

Finding a permanent source of income and livelihood

for the people of Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in the countryside and in the urban slums, is the dominant concern and a source of conflict for the majority of the people in the village and the country at large. This concern overwhelms the social activities of the people, particularly those who are struggling day and night to meet their basic needs.

I have already discussed in chapter IV the plight of the landless and poor peasant communities who constitute 58 percent of the people in the village. This is well above the national average of those who are living below the Indian poverty line: about 40 percent of the nation's 850 million people. The government of India has set the limit as an income of \$400 a year for a family of five.

However, the real income which is Rs 5 for women, and Rs 15 for men per day if they work, in the above category, is less than half of what the government of India has set as the minimum wage; which indeed is subminimum for the survival of a family. The official minimum wage for men is Rs 25, and Rs 20 for women in the agrarian sectors. The poverty and pathetic plight of 58 percent of the people in Vagaikulam is the result of loss of lands by the poor peasants coupled with joblessness, monsoon failures, etc.

A sufficient land ownership or regular availability

of employment in agriculture or related sectors is critical to the survival of the peasant communities in the village, as elsewhere. The revenue of the average household in Vagaikulam is based on the wage obtained for their work. The minimum wage is Rs 25 for adult men and 20 for adult women per day. However the vagaikulam landlords and rich farmers pay Rs 10 or 15 for men and Rs 4 or 5 for women for five hours of work. They are paid two-fifths, and one fourth respectively of the official minimum wage. Despite this, there have been no wage struggles, since there is no large scale land ownership. The largest land holdings 23 acres, and only three landlords own 20 or more acres of land. On the other hand land ownership is getting more fragmented. As a result there have been no wage struggles and there is unlikely to be in the near future so long as the fragmentation of ownership continues.

The nature of housing is another important issue that reflects the economic, caste, and lineage background which deserves adequate attention to understand the social structure of the village.

Table 17
Houses, Brick, Tiled, Mud walled, and Huts

Caste	1950				1989			
	Brick	Tile	Mud	Huts	Brick	Tile	Mud	Huts
Mudaliyar	-	-	1	-	-	2	-	-
P.K.	9	-	143	73	12	201	141	24
Ambalam	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	1
Chettiayar	-	-	4	3	-	6	3	2
Washerman	-	-	1	3	-	-	2	5
Pallar	-	-	1	7	-	3	-	7
Parayar	-	-	8	43	-	28	15	30
Sakkili	-	-	-	8	-	-	-	12
Barber	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
Kuyavar	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Carpenter	-	-	3	1	-	1	3	-
P. Vannan	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Total	9	0	162	143	12	242	164	87

The dramatic development in the housing pattern was the emergence of tile-roofed houses with mud or cement walls. The availability of technology to make tiles, since 1950, has reduced the number of huts and mud-walled houses in the village, this is not the case in all the villages in this and other regions. A survey on the state of housing shows very clearly that factors of modernization

are at work in the village, a symptom of property development in the national economy.

Housing conditions are frugal. The housing settlements are crucial to understanding the village structure. In the village, 50 percent of all houses are made of mud and walls, and the huts have thatched roofs. Another 48 percent of them are made with tiled roofs and mud walls with cement coatings. Only 2 percent, or just 12 out of 505 houses, are brick-built, of which only 3 were built after the 1960s. Among the untouchables of the Parayar Caste households, there are some tile roofed houses. The rest of them are overwhelmingly huts with mostly one or two rooms. No house, including the brick ones, has any bathroom facilities whatsoever. These are open-air in farms adjoining the village and near the tank-banks. Well-bathing (open-bath) has been the traditional mode of washing, and marcova tree branches are used for brushing teeth.

In 1950, 97 percent of all houses were roofed mud huts and only 9 were brick, of which 4 have completely collapsed since the 1960s. The dramatic 50 percent drop in the mud huts and houses, and rise in the tile roofed houses exemplify the rapid modernization of Indian society as a whole.

The settlement of houses based on the "purity" and "impurity" of caste-status reflect the pattern of the

social and cultural life of the village. The highest caste's (Mudaliyar) houses are situated at the west end of the village while the lowest ones' (Kuravar) are at the east end. The ruling castes' houses are situated between these two settlements. Although these houses are seemingly closer in than other places, these high-caste houses are very clearly separated by village roads from the untouchable settlements. The service castes such as the Chettiyars, Carpenters, and Blacksmiths, but not Untouchables are settled in the center and among the dominant PK castes for the services of these castes' occupations are needed in everyday life for the villagers: shops, tea-stalls, carpentry, blacksmith work for the village peasantry.

The most obvious social effect of these caste-based segregated settlements is the reinforcement of social-cultural relations in housing patterns, which institutionalize the caste differences, which in turn implicitly maintain and/or sharpen the economic differences that exist among the various strata in the village. Thus, even the ecology of the housing settlements -plays a complimentary role in the class polarization processes in the village.

The ecology of the caste-based housing settlements is typical of the scene elsewhere in Indian villages. The Untouchable colonies as mentioned are separated by only pedestrian paths and perpendicular internal roads of the

village, which helps keep the untouchability alive and serves, the lineage and class interests of the dominant castes, and the class that has emerged from the latter. But these houses' entrances are not toward the higher caste houses. The housing settlements, like social behavior, are based on pure and impure stigmas.

The diet of the villagers consists of mostly of indigenous grains such as Cholan, Kambu, Kezhvaraghu, Thina, etc. During the harvest time, and in the middle and top landlords' houses, rice is served for dinner, and some educated-middle-class families use rice for all three times. Non-vegetarian dishes such as goat, chicken, fish, and lamb are eaten once a fortnight or month. Beef eating is forbidden among the high caste Hindus for cattle are religious, and used for agricultural purposes. The Untouchables alone eat beef since fresh chicken, goat and lamb, are too expensive for them. The Untouchables also eat crabs which they grab while they work in wet paddy fields. However, goat, lamb, and chicken are regular non vegetarian dishes. The former two are costlier while the latter is raised in almost all households in the village.

Clothing and Related Issues

Frequent contact with urban life occurs when the children of peasants, rich farmers and landlords are admitted to schools and colleges. For agricultural purposes this has led the village communities to slowly

modernize their social life to the extent that it does not threaten the family practices and ideologies. However, the clothing pattern of the villagers has not radically changed. Most men and women do not have more than two sets of clothes. Men have more clothes than women for the former are more mobile and travel frequently. Spending more on clothing affects the family budget. Male and female youth have identified with good clothes which bring them recognition in their peer groups in Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in the region. Younger women and men have more clothes than their parents and grand-parents combined, since the younger generation is modern and democratic in their outlook, a source of intergenerational conflicts, which, I think, will be more pronounced as time goes in Vagaikulam.

It must be emphasized that the style of dress of children and youngsters is totally different from their parents. The three generations: the grand parents, parents, and children that presently live in the village, have witnessed the most radical changes in clothing in their own life time, corresponding to the changing relations with the urban world. The grandmothers never wore blouses, the mothers never saw frocks or gowns. The girls wear both of these, and any new, fashionable clothes available in Madurai. As a result, the average person in the community spends three to four times more than their immediate ancestors did on clothing.

An example of intergenerational conflict reveals the attitude of the younger people in Vagaikulam. They seem to prefer to make their choice in voting on the basis of what they see and hear in politically oriented movies, campaigns, and speeches, rather than through the traditional support of Congress Party. The younger generation is more informed about the sources of poverty and corruption than the previous generation. On the cultural front, the younger generation is increasingly making individual choices according to personal preference in marriage alliances (within the caste), although the arranged marriage system remains by and large unbroken in the village. Another arena of intergenerational conflict is the preparedness of the youngsters to protest against economic injustices such as wages, although there has been no organized union movement to date in the village. Notable among the generational differences is the relatively high participation of women in family decision-making processes concerning finance, work. etc. Since the most visible process is mobility, style of dress deserves more attention.

Marriage and Family Relationships

Marital and familial relations are a major arena where intergenerational conflicts and relations between men and women in the changing village social structure arise and get resolved depending upon the economic

conditions and political and cultural awareness of the family and the community in which they are situated.

One hundred percent of the marriages are arranged by their parents, or elder brothers and sisters in the absence of their parents. It must be noted here that issues such as premarital and extra marital affairs are as fiercely opposed as inter caste marriage. There is no social issue which is more contentious than these two. Murders have taken place, and continue to take place, over these in Vagaikulam as in the region. Many girls' and women's lives have been ruined over these strictly forbidden relations. The peasant communities in Vagaikulam are classic examples of these social taboos. However, these incidents do (rarely) take place (see chapter VI), in Vagaikulam, and increasingly so in urban and metropolitan centers. A recent survey by a daily paper finds that roughly 30 to 36 per cent of female college students in places like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore, and Trivandrum have had sexual partners in and out of college. The percentage for the males reaches roughly 50 to 55 percentage. There have been rumors that some girls from this village have had both serious and non serious male friends, while boys have reportedly had friends. A couple of "love-marriages" (within the PK caste), were encouraged by the girls' mother have taken place in the village.

Marriages are arranged in an exogamous rule within

endogamy. The P.K. are exogamous to the extent that they do not marry within their own Nadu or territory, which is identified by its temple. The P.K marry within the eight territories, not outside of their subcaste, hence they are endogamous. Mostly the parents, or elder siblings in their absence, arrange the marriages. The marriages mostly take place in homes, with some in temples, and only those marriages that incur disapproval from either side take place in the registrar's office. The Tamil months of Aadi, Purattasi, and Margali are forbidden times for marriage, since these times, according to Tamil Hindu religious traditions, are not conducive for starting family life. Solemnization of marriages during these times is astrologically forbidden, because the cosmic forces would not work in favor of marital unions, according to Hindu religious customs.

There have been minor violations in the rules and conduct of contemporary marriages. However, the continuity of the classic mate-selection process and the traditional solemnization of marriage despite the dramatic changes in material life, clearly indicate the unquestionable respect the village communities give to traditional values. This reinforces, among other things, the continuity of the caste system and its values.

The family system as a whole remains conservative, despite the dramatic growth in higher education, the long

presence of political parties, and changing material conditions. The husband, and later the sons in the order in which they are born, remain the unquestionable head of the family, a classic characteristic of patriarchy. However, the Kallar women in the village, as elsewhere in the region, are more vocal and assertive in their intra and inter family affairs than the women of any other caste in the region. The Untouchable women in the village are notably independent and without any gender- social-inhibitions. The source of this independence is the non dependence of the untouchable women on their men, since the caste as a whole is a laboring caste (historically a non property owning one).

The Untouchable women and men have nothing to lose. The women do not have to produce heirs, for their husbands do not own any property. These men and women have to just depend on their daily wage if they can get their work. Hence the women do not depend upon their husbands for their livelihood; rather they and their men and children depend on farm and related employment by the village landlords. The untouchable people are working class, hence it seems there is no need to depend on their men.

It is from the non-owning nature of the PK ancestry, that comes the PK women's militancy. Though the PK men have become owners in the last few generations, the historical heritage of non ownership forms the basis of their men's militancy which is in declining proportion to

their ascendancy to the land and other property ownership in the village and elsewhere in the Kallar region. Since then the status and position of the Kallar women in general and in Vagaikulam in particular has changed. Previously, the Kallar women were equally militant, corresponding to the economic conditions of the caste as a whole. As late as the 1970s the Kallar women of the neighboring village of Kalappanpatti, very bravely, went on a night mission to take fodder from the neighboring villages to feed their starving cattle during the drought season. The same women, now defying the civil authorities, continue to produce illicit liquor to enhance their condition. As the Kallar men began to own property in land, business, etc., their militancy also declined, for violent behavior more often than not leads to costly expenses which can be met only by selling whatever the property, jewelry, or tools they possess. Hence the militancy of the Kallar men declined in proportion to their acquisition of property. So did the Kallar women's militancy, and their independence decreased.

Presently, many of the most notorious and usurious moneylenders in Madurai, Tirumangalam, Usilampatti, Andipatti, Periyakulam, Theni, Cumbam, Gudalore, and other towns in the region are Kallar men. And the Kallar women are also involved. While caste factors played in the rise of Pramalai Kallar in moneylending business, class factors, as Kallars began to own property, were

responsible for their declining militancy. The business and political activities of the people in Vagaikulam are typical of this process.

Premarital and extramarital relations as I stated earlier, are violently opposed in Vagaikulam. Violence and divorce are the most ordinary ways of settling these problems in the community. The examples provided in the next chapter shed more light on the issue. Virginity at marriage and chastity later, are important features of Kallar family life. The interplay of caste and class factors is overwhelming in this aspect of community life in Vagaikulam.

Divorce takes place among the Kallars and the Untouchables. Mudaliyars and the Service Castes (Chettiyars, Carpenters, Kuyavars) do not divorce, nor do their widows remarry. Widowers do remarry, however. Divorce is a caste community affair as much marriage, and sometimes it is also a lineage affair, if the lineage in question is prestigious, or the ruling lineage in a village.

Table 18

Divorce in the Village

Caste	1950-70	1971-80	1981-1989
P.Kallar	54	24	17
Untouchables	17	12	7
Other Castes	--	2	--

Corresponding to the modernization of agriculture and development, urbanization, education, etc., the Pramalai Kallar and other caste people of the village of Vagaikulam, over the years have sharply reduced their divorce rate, an opposite trend to what has happened in the West. The decline in the divorce rate among the Vagaikulam villagers is proportion to their accession in the ownership of property: land, money-lending, shops, and employment. In the Western societies, since individualism, an inherent tendency of capitalism, forms the center of life, all the sociocultural institutions including marriage and the family have been relegated to secondary place, and uprooted. Hence the high divorce rate in the West. On the contrary, since Vagaikulam is in transition to a capitalist economy and way of life, alienation and individualism are not yet dominant in social life, and the people are more interested in owning property. More importantly, farming needs; family labor, and hence the presence of wife and children are significant for successful cultivation. The community life derived from the heritage of the "Asiatic mode of life", and ancient civilizations defends the family in Vagaikulam from separation, divorce, and other destructive trends.

From my own memory and inquiry in the village and elsewhere in the Kallar region, there has never been a divorce settled in an official court, so binding is the judgment of the PK caste court which remains in force

until this moment. The Eluvampatti and Chellampatti PK caste courts are historically well known, and no dispute whatsoever that has come to either of the courts has gone unsettled. It is equally remarkable that the rulers, from the Pandya kings, to the present government, including the British, have historically respected the verdict of the village courts.

To effect divorce, the thread known as Thali, (the counter part of the wedding ring) is simply cut from the neck of the bride, where it was tied by the groom, and returned to the husband. He, for his part, breaks a stick in two, meaning the union is broken once for all from that moment. Most divorces take place before the first two years or before any child is born. Pregnancy is terminated if the divorce takes place when the pregnancy is not advanced one. For the divorced woman with a child has less chance of remarriage than one without a child. This is also the case among other Indian women.

Once the children reach the age of three or four the probability of divorce is slender. However, even after 25 years of marriage with grown-up children, divorce has taken place on the ground of adultery. Adultery and not meeting the promises of the dowry are the most common factors causing divorce. Presently divorce among the Kallars in the village, as elsewhere in the region, is in decline, for these caste communities are in fundamental

transition; busy in becoming owners of properties by any means: farming, money landing, employment, illegal liquor trade, etc. These caste and lineage factors, as against the class elements, are at work for the strengthening of the caste and lineage pride which in turn help prevent the disintegration and demobilization of caste values in the face of increasing class divisions in Vagaikulam.

The Conduct of Family Life

The family institution in Vagaikulam as elsewhere in the Tamil region remains patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal. The husband remains the head of the family in the village in theory and in practice, although as I stated earlier, among the younger generations the wives begin to take an increasingly active role in familial affairs to the extent that women do not challenge their men's institutionalized patriarchal authority. Getting and giving a larger dowry (gold ornaments), and ownership of larger amount of fertile land remain important power bases, and the most important objective of the family. The entire family participates in the agricultural work to minimize the cost of production.

The development of capitalism in agriculture and increasing polarization of landed property are supposed to create and use wage labor accordingly. However, the continued use of family labor in cultivation poses special problems for the modern division of labor to develop in

Vagaikulam. The profit generated from such farming, utilizing family labor, is used to buy more property in the village. Here caste and non-class (family labor) factors are used to advance the capitalist tendency, in which class factors, such as child labor, cash crops and quick turnover are used to accumulate wealth which is used by a lineage (Chokkan or Karuppan) to dominate the sociocultural affairs of Vagaikulam. The articulation is that the caste and class factors are so dynamic that neither caste nor class can overlook the other factors in the property and social development of Vagaikulam.

Inter-caste and Intra-Caste Relations

The caste system based on the division of occupations has been working despite sporadic conflicts. The inter-caste relations, as ancient as the origin of the caste system, is a theme of abiding research interest for domestic and western scholars. It was also a source of historic conflicts, and the subsequent emergence of Buddhism, Jainism, and later Sikhism in India society. However, contemporary studies Sivertsen (1963) and Gough (1983) have strongly advocated "the undermining of the class divided economic regime" in order to dismantle the authoritarianism of the land lords who are invariably of high castes, as opposed to the rural working people who have been historically poor and who mostly stem from the lower castes.

Vagaikulam village has never witnessed a caste conflict. One caste, the Pramalai Kallar, which forms 84 percent of the population and owns 97 percent of all land in the village, is also in total control of the political, and religious affairs of the village.

However, there has been one development that could have prompted a low-high caste conflict in the village. This involved an Untouchable leader named Sangili who had control over some 100 votes of the untouchables. Sangili is still alive. According to his own account the two candidates; Chellappandiyan and Pommayan Rasu contested for the village council presidency. They belong to higher caste from two different lineages of the dominant caste, the PK. First, Pommayan Rasu had given Sangili a sum of Rs. 2,500, and after a few days Chellappandiyan gave him the same sum. Subsequently, Rasu came and got a sum of Rs. 1,000 from Sangili. Knowing this, Chellapandiyan gave a Rs. 1,000 more to Sangili who made up his mind to vote for Chellapandiyan without returning the remaining money to Rasu. As a result Rasu was hoping to get Sangili's vote in the council (The elected representative from all the wards were to elect one among as the president.) Thus the untouchable leader confused his own caste, having accepted money from both the parties. The other party pressured the leaderless untouchable electorate to vote with the threat of setting fire to the huts. The threats were never carried out. This was the closest to incident that

could have prompted a communal riot. This was during the 1967 civic elections. In 1984, in the elections that were held in the aftermath of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's assassination, some PK men prevented the Untouchables from voting. However, the village elders intervened to insure the Untouchables' voting. The absolute majority by numerical strength of the P.K., coupled with the economic power of the political parties, prompted the semi hooligans of the candidates, as they become on such occasions, to prevent the Untouchables from exercising their franchise in the general elections.

The power base of the PK caste in Vagaikulam is twofold: one factor is their control of 95 percent of land, and the other is their numerical superiority in the demographic structure of the village. Quantity leads to quality. The numerical majority of the PK prevents any possibility of a third caste emerging in Vagaikulam. Voting undermines the tradition of the PK strength in the village, since the smaller parties can make a difference in electing representatives to the village council. Hence, there is an artificial harmony in Vagaikulam.

However, I cannot conclude that this segregated and imposed harmony will last long. The Kallarnadu is engulfed presently by a communal struggle bitterly fought out between the untouchable and all the other castes, in which the Thevars are active participants. The present untouchable movement is organized by the local chapter of

Dr. Ambedkar's Peoples' Movement, a national organization. This, sooner or later, is bound to have an effect on the Vagaikulam untouchables' relations with the higher caste, the PK. As a result they will, refuse to perform the physical menial services for the higher caste. However, they will have great difficulty in mobilization to effectively fight the domination of the high-caste landlords, since the members of the latter also dominate the civil and police bureaucracies in the region, as in the rest of India. Perhaps on class issues such as wages, the slogan of land to the tiller, jobs, etc., there can be a greater mobilization among the Untouchables and the working poor of the caste Hindus and the high castes.

On two different occasions an untouchable man and his son were beaten with sandals by different PK caste farmers, in public places. The former attacker is a lawyer and presently a Member of the Legislative Assembly; using his influence he had his case dropped. The status and position of his caste and class were used to annul a serious criminal case of the untouchables. Had the attacker been a landless peasant things could have been different. In both the cases the attackers were rich farmers and belonged to the high castes, and the victims were landless peasants who belonged to the untouchable castes. The caste and class factors had an equal role in the two developments, inseparable from one another. Both the attackers are rich farmers belonging to the dominant

caste, PK, and both the victims are poor landless Harijans. Had the attackers been landless PK, they would have hesitated to do so. But they were landlords; one is a moneylender and the other is a lawyer. Hence, it is not only the high caste background of the attackers and untouchable background of the victims, but also the landowning and working-class background that affected these incidents. The caste and class factors are involved as a single dynamic.

Maintaining untouchability provides circumstances for the landlords in the village to pay far less than the minimum wages for working men and women. Under-payment in agriculture, as in other sectors, is historically a necessary condition for the propertied classes to flourish. Hence the state apparatus, civil and police, dominated by the high castes, have everything to benefit from maintaining untouchability and not implementing the minimum wage acts.

There is no farm workers union in the village. . The communists have time and again tried to organize the rural poor, but failed because there has never been large scale landlordism as in the Tanjore district.

In the politics and economics of landlordism in Vagaikulam, the landlords have all the advantage. If the PK landless workers begin to talk of demanding more wages and protest, the landlords can use the untouchable labor

exclusively to get their job done. If the untouchables talk of any protest, the landlords conveniently use the readily available divisive technique, invoking the fellow caste men's loyalty to keep the untouchable laborers away. Either way it works for the benefit of the landlords. Hence the maintenance of Untouchability offers a blank check for the profitable operation of landlordism in Vagaikulam, as elsewhere in the Kallar country and in other regions where the rural poor remain unorganized by a progressive party.

The uneven caste relations in Vagaikulam are complimentary to the land-labor relations, and vice versa. The other non- PK castes are not land owning castes, nor are they workers; they provide services, and hence they are not party to the wage and profit issues. However, their occupations are affected by the performance of crops, and hence in the last analysis the entire village community is a single social unit whose daily and long term life are determined by the caste- class dynamics of the village.

Inter-dining is another important aspect of social relations in the village. Only the Chettiyars and the Ambalams eat with the PK, and vice versa. The only caste that does not eat with others is the Mudaliyar, who receive all raw ingredients- fresh vegetables, pounded rice, etc.- from the PK and the other non-untouchable

castes. All the untouchables receive cooked food from the high castes. Among the untouchables, the Pallan and Parayan don't inter-dine with Chakkilian and the other untouchables. The untouchables are not permitted to take drinking water from the wells and tapes allotted for the higher castes. However, one tap that is situated on the border of the untouchable and high caste neighborhoods is shared by both communities. The line for this tap was consistently violated by the wife of a former President of the village panchayat council, before he moved to the neighboring town of Tirumangalam.

The untouchables were forbidden to enter the tea stalls and restaurants until recently. However, for the last 4 years they have permitted to enter the stalls and restaurants, and have separate tumblers, sit on the floor and clean the utensils they use before they depart. The moral pressure of the growing Ambedkar movement allowed these people in Vagaikulam to use the public facilities. As a whole the village inter caste relations are heading for further democratization to the extent that it involves only public places and services.

Inter-dining and inter-caste marriage are more or less as strictly and violently opposed as they were a hundred years ago. The lower castes have not challenged the domination of the higher castes, for they could not do so until the former began to own certain landed property and /or to have some stable sources of income for their

livelihood. This further suggests that the Untouchables are unlikely to receive fair treatment in the economy and politics of Vagaikulam until its landownership structure and the economy, are changed to give them land for their survival.

The caste-class dynamics play the central role in the exchange of land in Vagaikulam. The peasants are historically and emotionally attached to their land, which they have been cultivating for centuries. Hence only two factors can separate the peasants from their lands: a. death and b. manipulation of the moneylending landlords in fraudulent ways.

The exorbitant rates of money-lending, and the non-availability of finance for small scale farming, are important factors for understanding the process of land exchange in Vagaikulam. Gaining land through usurious money-lending has been a principal means in the hands of landlords. Remarkably all these landlords are PK, hence it has been easy for the latter to do the money-lending. This process insures among other things that only the money-lending farmers and landlords of higher castes can stay in the market to buy land. Hence not only is the probability of lower castes buying lands nil, but the same is true for the poor of the high castes in Vagaikulam. The family of the highest caste, Mudaliyar, the top landlord in 1950 with 51 acres of land is landless today, and has

left the village for Madurai city, to work in some low paying clerical job. The caste-class dynamics are such that no social process can escape its influence.

It is equally important to discuss how the caste-class dynamics fare in the efforts of the 12 PK lineages to buy property from one another and from other castes in Vagaikulam. There are twelve different lineages within the PK caste. The competition to buy land is only among the 12 PK lineages, who constitute 84 percent of the total population. Hence their conflict is inter-lineage conflict not inter-caste. However, presently the rich farmers belong to three lineages, hence the arena of competition is reduced to three lineages: the Chokkan, Karuppan and Thangalacheri.

Table 19

First 4 Landowning lineages and their combined ownership.

Year	I	II	III	IV	TOTAL
1950	Chokkan 113 acres	Thancheri 81 acres	Cheppan 70 acres	Mudaliyar 51 acres	315
1989	Chokkan 1 acres	Karuppan 56 acres	Thacheri 44 acres	Thevan 40	231

Mudaliar is a non PK lineage consisting of only one family. In the last 40 years major changes have taken place. The Mudaliyar lost all their land except some no-yielding dry-land, falling from the the top rank in 1950. In terms of single family the Cheppans lineage was reduced

to the last but one rank from their third rank in 1950. The Thangalacheri lineage declined to the third position. The Chokkans remained in the top position with reduced ownership. Chellapandian of the Thevan lineage had mortgaged a substantial portion of his land. The field is left for the two lineages, Chokkan and Karuppan, who are already in competition for the control of property in the fertile wetland. As the competition narrows down to two lineages the class characteristics are more pronounced than the lineage or caste dynamics within the PK caste. However, the difference among the top 10 landlords is only 10 to 12 acres of lands. Hence any situation like the partitioning or emergence of a new farmer is quite possible. The examples are 1. Sinnandivathiar's property of 21 acres was partitioned between his two sons into two equal shares of 10.50 acre each, which happened a few months ago. 2. Kundumani vathiar emerged as a rich farmer within 12 years of his marriage, from 1955 to 1968. At the apex of the landownership, the tendency is more of split and fragmentation, while at the bottom, a slow process of increasing landlessness.

However, the competition among the five dominant landowning lineages, the Chokkan, Karuppan, Thangalacheri and the Sikkandamalai, is presently very fierce, which is likely to continue, while the peasants and educated employees in other PK lineages have begun to acquire and increase their property holdings. Every lineage in the

village takes the position that landownership is a matter of historical pride, and of status and position in the caste, lineage, and power hierarchy in the village.

Social leisure and the dynamics

The careful observations of chit-chat, gossip, joking, ridicule for fun, etc. shows these are conducted in the relationships of a two way class and power structure as far as the status and position of the lineages are concerned: senior and junior, superior and inferior, aggressive and docile, bigger and smaller, organized and unorganized and so on and so forth.

During the course of gossiping a particular person will try to suggest and at times explicitly assert that his lineage is superior to all other lineages in power and ownership; an attempt to establish both the lineage and class power in the cultural arena of Vagaikulam. Another person will suggest that his relative is the most respected in the area or in the party to which he belongs. On another occasion, some one will say, "your people can not put up a tough fight if it comes to the question of prestige". The response will be equally hard hitting by pointing out that, "your people virtually gave up in that particular struggle". In still another situation some one will say, "we fed your family when it was starving". Another could say "Your father took away all our land through money-lending, due to illiteracy of my grand

father". And so on and so forth; such are the topics of gossip, ridicule and joke. All these things revolve around the lineage, caste, and class politics and affairs of the village.

These cultural expressions are unique, based on the lineage, wealth, power, and the peoples' demographic strength. The caste-class dynamics are equally, clearly mirrored in these aspects of social life in Vagaikulam.

Concubine and Pre Marital and Extra marital affairs

Pre- and extra-marital affairs and sex between higher caste women and lower caste men, are violently opposed in the village, as elsewhere in Indian society. Eloping, inter-caste marriage, concubinage and pre marital and extra marital affairs are traditionally forbidden, and remain socioculturally very sensitive issues in Vagaikulam. And yet, each one of them takes place here, as elsewhere in India.

There were few instances of inter-caste marriage, and they lived in towns. Only one such couple has been living in the village. The man is a carpenter, a lower caste, and the woman is a Naicker, a high caste, and both belong to other villages. Vagaikulam is a sanctuary for the couple. They eloped to the village. They were excommunicated from their communities and villages. When I met them in February 1990, they had children and were

leading a semi-refugee life in Vagaikulam.

Some most sensitive developments in sexual relations have taken place in the village which clearly display the extent of the intertwined caste-class dynamics. The issues took place in the last 20 years, and some of them are still very explosive.

1. An attractive housewife and a mother of a few children, had an affair with an unmarried untouchable youth in the 1970's. So devastating were the consequences, that the husband separated from her and died in a few years, and their children's marriages could not be saved. The untouchable youth was spared, fearing any action on him would expose the scandal and bring a stigma to the lineage.

2. Another incident with which I was familiar is a long standing affair between a primary school teacher and an uneducated woman, both of whom belong to popular PK lineages in the village. He developed the relations with the false promise that he would marry her (a girl's consent for pre-marital sex is extremely difficult among the higher castes). The affair continued even after his marriage to another woman teacher. He had many such affairs before and since his marriage, through his work. His teaching job is transferable job in the district. The respective village courts penalized him whenever he was caught obliging the court to take a decisive action. The penalty is twofold, either to marry or to pay a large sum depending on the caste and/or class status of the woman.

3. Another incident involved an unmarried woman's affair with an untouchable youth, as a result ruining the marriage possibilities of every one in her family.

4. Yet another case is concerned an affair between another young woman of a prominent PK family and an untouchable youth, resulting in a prolonged delay in her marriage to a less affluent man of a PK family. Her marriage possibility itself was threatened.

5. In another case a rich money-lending farmer has been keeping a concubine, a widow with a female

child. Unable to control her husband, the formal wife harassed the concubine by means of hired village "thugs", so that the concubine left the village. The affair continues, however, until this day.

The caste and class background to these cases is obviously significant in settling and/or continuing the affairs in one way or the other. In case number one, the man by his dominant lineage, money-lending, farming and teaching background coupled with his vocal manipulative characteristics, got away with his affairs. The absence of brothers, and a docile family background, and poor farming status of the woman's background contributed to this, despite the fact that the man and woman both belonged the PK caste. In the cases of 2, 3 and 4 it was the prestige of the high caste, the PK, which was at stake. Hence the village court did not even convene, fearing the possible blow to the status of the entire PK caste, if the untouchable was formally penalized. Even the male relatives of the PK caste women, did not attack the untouchable men, fearing that would confirm the rumor of the scandal. In case number 5, and again in 1, the dominant lineage caste and the class, the money-lending and teaching background of these PK men, protected them from being forced to marry the woman (case-1), and give up the widow (in case 5). Here I could not separate the caste from the class and vice versa in analyzing these social relations. Both are equally at work (inseparable in their totality) although at a given point in any of

these cases, caste or class may be more important than the other.

The Kallar men, adults and teen-agers, are known for their casual sex with untouchable women in the former's work places, or the farms, and in the bushes and the jungles around the village. At the same time the untouchable youths cannot have sex with the higher caste women without the latter's consent. Also forced sex is prevalent between the high caste men and the lower caste women.

What emerges, among other things, is the caste and class dynamics involved in this most sensitive aspect of the community's social structure. Landlordism, money power, authority and influence defy and successfully undermine the historically established social, cultural norms and traditions in an increasing way, proportionate to the dominant position and status of the lineage and class of the individuals involved. This is yet another sociological indication of the gradual break-up of feudal traditions of the village social structure. This is equally new ground to argue that the breakdown of sexual rules accompanies the development of the propertied and propertyless strata in the village society.

Political parties and Behaviors

The political parties, their mobilization, and voting behaviour, constitute very important aspects of the

social structure in the village. This village is well known for its secular democratic and leftist politics and activism. All the major national and regional political parties have their organized/unorganized, smaller or larger local chapters in the village whose operations are mingled with the powers of landownership, lineage and caste.

The foundation of the political parties can be traced: the first among them was the Congress party, which was the pioneer political group in India, founded in 1885 in Bombay with the leadership of an Irish catholic intellectual, Anne Besant, who had vowed to fight the British for the obvious reasons. The political parties in the village are: the Congress Party since the 1930's, the Communists in the 1950s, the DMK and the Forward Block in the late 1950s, the AIADMK in 1973. U.S. Ulagappa is a well known communist in the district and in the state who belongs to Chokkan lineage; and the former member of the legislative assembly, R. Saminathan, belongs to Sikkanda Malayan lineage of this village.

A unique feature of the politics of this village is that the landlords have progressively lost their control of the votes of the untouchables. This development has taken place in proportion to the change in the hereditary division of labor and to the changes of the wages of the Untouchable workers from kind to cash over the years,

owing to the development of property in the village, as elsewhere in the country. The wage in cash provides the Untouchable workers of the village with employment independence, and thereby severs their feudal bonds to the landlords. Hence the landlords of the village lost their hold over the Untouchables' work, and to an extent over their women's bodies too. Hence also the changing nature of the voting pattern in the village. These are some classic social symptoms of the modernization and developmental processes that are at work in the village of Vagaikulam and elsewhere in the country, although these processes are not uniform and even in India.

Indian voting is based on universal adult (over 18) franchise. Money power, (cash flow to the apolitical voters on the eve of polling) is omnipresent in the village, be it civic elections to the state or national assemblies. However, it is through the landlords and rich farmers, the dominant caste-lineage men, that the parties attempt to win the electorate's votes. However modern or universal the election processes, we have to take the caste and class factors and the community leaders into account when it comes to the voting pattern of the village communities.

In summing up the discussions in this chapter, it is very important to note the influence of the caste-class dynamics on the social structure of Vagaikulam as a whole. The state of the caste system is no longer free from the

effects of the burgeoning class elements, and the impact of the emerging class to undermine the epoch-old caste system is a growing phenomenon. No assertion that one is more influential than the other can explain any social process in Vagaikulam, because the caste and class factors are not separate nor independent from one another.

The caste and class factors are interrelated and intertwined to make a single process which does not have a specified degree of influence, rather depending upon the nature of the phenomenon in question. If it is an economic issue, the class elements of the dynamics tend to have an edge in its impact. And on the social-cultural issues, certainly the lineage, and caste factors tend to have a clear edge over the class factors in determining the course and the outcome of the process. In the five major social processes discussed in the chapter, the class factors have greater influences on the modernization of agriculture, landownership, and inequality of social relations (housing, food habits, clothing, etc.). And the caste factors have more influence over marriage and family relations, the conduct of family life, Untouchability, and sexual affairs in Vagaikulam. And yet none of the social processes stated above can be explained by any one factor, caste or class, to the exclusively of the other. This makes the influence of the caste and class factors a dynamic process rather than a static or parallel one in Vagaikulam. How this dynamics influences the politics of

the emerging strata and the caste and lineage groups in their attempts to control the economic resources and the sociopolitical and religious authority over the people in Vagaikulam as a whole, is examined in the next chapter.

Footnotes

1. There were other colonial powers, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Danish which were operating in smaller pockets after they were defeated by the British in 1756. These pockets were Pondichery, Karaikal, Goa, Diu and Daman, Lakshdeep, Yanam, Mahi etc., whose presence since the end of the 18th century was minimal and peripheral.
2. The poverty line is the limit set by the government of India above which a family should be financially able to meet their basic needs: Food, clothing, shelter, and other necessary services. The Indian government has set the limit as an income of \$400 a year for a family of five, The New York Times, October 7, 1989.
3. I could not precisely quantify the phenomena for issues such as dating, premarital, extra marital, and concubine affairs are considered beneath the minimum universal dignity of the Hindu religion and way of life. On the other hand the individuals involved do not reveal the affair which suggest the seriousness of the stigma attached to it. These have to be indirectly observed and I have done so on most of the prominent affairs that have taken place so far in Vagaikulam.
4. For details see Dumont, 1986.
5. The author of the thesis is not an exception, despite his wide travel abroad and his studies in the USA. His marriage was 100 percent an arranged one.
6. There is only one outsider so far who has managed to buy a substantial amount of wet lands in the village. One Eluvampattiyan, a PK by caste and a Madurai based urban money lender, took over the lands from the well known woman landlord Kara Veettu Karuppayee.

Chapter VI

Politics of Caste-Class Dynamics

I have shown the dominance of the caste-class dynamics at various levels of the village social structure. These have far reaching consequences for the politics in general and the caste-class dynamics itself in particular in Vagaikulam. The following aspects are discussed to the extent that the politics of the caste-class dynamics influence the major social processes in the village. The modernization of agriculture, urban contact through education and transportation, the non-farming occupations, rural and urban, have transformed the village social structure and modernized the social life of the community only to an extent that has not threatened the upper caste-dominated class system. On the contrary, the data from empirical study show that the stratified village social structure has been reinstated and strengthened, in a modified and more pronounced form.

I have divided this chapter into seven units of analysis to facilitate the discussion. These seven factors range from the economic to the religious. My central concern in this chapter is to study the impact of the politics of caste-class dynamics. My data and the discussion provide me with an understanding that although stratification and the caste system influence one another, the tendency is one of mutual dynamics, rather than the

dominance of one over the other in Vagaikulam. A detailed discussion of this follows.

1. In the landownership system of the village the reality is that there has not emerged so far any landlord from the ranks of the service castes. This confirms our hypothesis that the dominant caste system of the PK in the village has historically prevented such development. The point is that the caste identity, values and praxis of the PK, and its domination over the smaller and the lower castes, remain the important features of the social structure among the village communities in Vagaikulam. The findings of other studies conducted in the region confirm this trend. Dagfinn Sivertsen, Gough and others' studies are important in this respect. The former asserts that "caste still remains important as a form of social identity" (1) and says further that "caste as a structural form of social life is sustained by a number of religious, moral and other rules. (2) Kathleen Gough reports that "it was all too easy for the non-brahman laborers to side with their relatives and take on the role of scabs".(3)

The caste system, in its social practice and ideology, is more established in terms of social construct, time, space, and tradition than the modern class system in Indian society. The disintegration process, due to the commodification of properties, is slower, less central and peripheral than its persistent

values and practices in the social structure. This is all the more true in the village of Vagaikulam, where lineage, a sub-category within the caste system, is the major social construct as well as agent of conflict and mobility of the class in the immediate context.

2. The chief and immediate beneficiaries of the modernization and development processes in the village economy are those who combine and or supplement farming with non-farming occupations such as money lending, teaching and retail businesses in the village.

I have discussed at length the caste and class factors in the success and the failure of these occupations and the social implications with respect to the land ownership pattern of the village. Kundumani Vathiar, Ramasamy Vathiar, Terkuveettu Mayandi, Bose Vathiar, Annakkodi the shop-owner, and others, have emerged as rich farmers due to the income they generated from non-farming occupations, which they have invested in farming, in the last 25 years. These farmers have prospered very well in a short period of time.

The caste-class factors in the non-farming occupations, as elsewhere, in the village social structure, deserve some additional emphasis. The following table shows the present composition of moneylenders operating in the village. Some of them combine three occupations such as shop-keeping, money-lending, and

farming, or teaching, money-lending, and farming, or employment in the army or civil service, moneylending, and farming. Sinnandi vathiar is a classic example. Bose vathiar, Thottavathiar Palanichamy, Thillakurra Sivangalai and Annakkodi, the shop owner are the contemporary examples. There are other persons involved in moneylending, but they are not combining a set of three businesses. Bose and Vasugi vathiars are on their way to becoming big landlords in Vagaikulam.

Table 20

Moneylenders, Caste-wise

P.K.	Chettiyar	Others	Total
9	3	1	13

Hence the moneylending business increasingly plays a central role in the concentration of property and the rise of property-holders in the village economy, which in turn have serious socio political consequences in the power structure of the village. If the lender is a non PK, and the borrower belongs to an aggressive PK lineage in the village, the former in all probability has then to forget the principle of the loan itself. It is equally true with the sales of consumers items on credit by shopkeepers. This explains the slow emergence of the PK families replacing the traditional service castes: i.e. the Chettiars in the retail businesses in the village.

The appearance of the 4 Chettiyar and other caste moneylenders occurred because these moneylenders mostly lend small amounts to the non-aggressive PK people and other non PK caste members to insure the collection of the principle and interest due.

The interest rates are exorbitant, reaching as high as 40 to 50 per cent. Between 1950 and 1960 two bundles of rice for every 100 rupees per year were collected as interest, which is equal to the principle Rs 100 itself. This interest is collected directly from the threshing floor to insure prompt collection. As time progressed, inflation and the price of the rice increased, correspondingly the quantity of rice as interest decreased with the rate of interest, 100 %, being unchanged. In other forms of moneylending in which money is lent and collected on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, the rate of interest is 25 to 50 %. The moneylending business is thus as effective in generating capital and development as it is usurious.

Increasing numbers of people turn to non-farming occupations because the time involved for one cycle of investment is shorter in business than in farming. The frequency of income from retail businesses, moneylending, and teaching is generated on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. The farmers on the other hand, have to sit out and wait five months for an increasingly uncertain yield from farming. Hence a growing number of people opt for business

and other sources of income to combine with farming. This is done to buy land, which remains the sole basis of power, position, and status in the village.

Men of the PK caste alone have emerged as major moneylenders; although there are Chettiyyar and other non PK caste lenders in the village, for the latter are not as formidable or rich as the former.

They are ruthless, merciless, aggressive, tough, and use business methods without any regard or respect for the borrower. These are the minimum requirements for business to survive in the village, as elsewhere in the country. The aggressive and organized lineage characteristics and money power of the PK castes are important issues in the lender-borrower relationships in the village.

3. The collapse of all the non PK retail businesses, such as tea-stalls, restaurants, consumer item shops, stationary stores, pedestrian spice-vendor, and vegetable businesses are worth noting in the context of the caste-class dynamics in the village. Selling merchandise and other retail services on credit is an historical phenomenon among the village communities, for the customers are workers who do not have a free cash flow.

These retail businesses, traditionally and historically owned by the Chettiyyars, the service castes, are threatened with near total extinction in the village.

Aggressive and tough, as for the usurious strata, the moneylenders are "needed" in these retail businesses, which the service castes, including the Chettiars, do not provide for they did not previously need them. However the changing property relations and the heightened competition for land have changed the social relations in the village

Table 21

Ownership in Tea-stall and Restaurants by Caste

Caste	1950	1989	Remarks
PK Caste	2	8	improved
Non PK Castes	3	3	same
Total	5	11	

The PK, which is the dominant caste of the village, have come to dominate the restaurant business also since mid the 1970s. The 3 Chettiar families who still stick to the business are not doing very well compared to their business in previous years. The situation is more pronounced with regard to the consumer stores in the village. The PK business men and women have virtually monopolized this field, which is likely to continue, since the Chettiars, the traditional business caste, have accepted their losing position. This can be seen in the fact that the Chettiars are leaving and establishing their business elsewhere as in the case of Santhuras

Chettiyar, one of the most popular businessmen running a new business in the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh.

Table=22

Ownership of Consumer Stores by Caste

Caste	1950	1989	Remarks
PK Caste	4	9	improved
Non PK Castes	6	3	lost
Total	10	12	

The PK castes have clearly established themselves in the retail businesses, a growing finance-generating non-farming occupation. There is a growing tendency among the communities, the dominant PK lineages in particular, to disrespect and violate the various unwritten civil contracts such as paying back a loan, which have historically embodied the social structure of the village. The tendency to disregard the traditional authority and verdict of the village council decisions and the village courts is a recent phenomenon. This can be traced to the emergence of wage labor, and the use of force and intimidation based on the lineage power and authority in the village. These changing social relations are gradually loosening the classic feudal bonded dependency to a modern dependency. The peasants, farmers and the landlords of the dominant lineages of the PK castes can shop merchandise to a substantial amount on credit, and

they are not pressurized to pay back the money speedily.

The business communities, with their historically nonaggressive and docile characteristics are increasingly unable to deal with the historically martial and aggressive peasants (the PK of Vagaikulam). Hence the shrinking alternatives for some of these communities is to change their occupation to either farming or education. They cannot compete in farming with the PK lineages. Education and/or the change of line and place of business have begun to happen lately. The prominent Chettiyar, Sandhuras, as mentioned earlier, has moved to another state to a bigger business and he is doing well. His sons and nephew have masters degrees in pharmacy and mathematics and are employed in the public sectors.

However, this situation of the traditional Service castes turning to higher education, other employment, and leaving the village for more profitable business is not common to all the service castes and their age-old occupations, nor to all the members of any particular caste. The most important effect of these changes in the occupations of the service castes is that the Pramalai Kallar have strengthened their dominant position in the village by taking over the small businesses from the Chettiyars. On the other hand, the service provided by the PK in the retail businesses is not as efficient or of such quality as the traditional service castes used to offer

until they were knocked out very "peacefully". This aspect of the business relations is likely to further intensify the inter lineage conflicts among the main PK lineages, which will further undermine any potential inter caste conflicts as far as the non Untouchable castes are concerned. However, between the Untouchables and the high castes (primarily the PK), relations would be the potential arena of communal tensions in the future which depends much on the changes in property relations, work and wage conditions of the region.

4. The other area which heavily reflects the caste-class factors of the village social structure is social relations of concubine, premarital and extra marital affairs. I have shown it is only the moneylending landlords and the rich farmers who can afford to keep concubines in a long-term basis. They can silence social criticism by means of the economic power they possess in the village. The poor and marginal peasants can neither afford to have concubines nor manage to maintain them when the scandal comes above ground to surface among the closely built village communities. The poor are unable to have and provide a minimum of recreation and they cannot dream of having any affairs whatsoever.

The top landlord, Sinnandy Vathiar, and a rich farmer, Terkuveettu Mayandi, have kept long-term concubines, both of whom are widows from the prominent PK lineages. One of them is a popular woman in the village.

The lineage, landownership, and money power are the factors that have sustained these two affairs for the last 15 to 20 years. The village council and court did not even bother to convene and question these practices.

Sexual affairs, casual, and long-term, based on a particular individual's sexual preference do take place in the village. The examples are three women of whom two are PK and one is an Untouchable woman. None of them developed any long-term affair since they are all married with children. I have not disclosed the names of the women in most of these affairs discussed, for these are issues of an explosive nature which could destroy the individual and the families as in the past.

Keeping a long-term affair with a woman in the village enhances the status of the farmers, because the men involved are thereby defying, among other things, the village authority due to their lineage and class background and the legitimation it provides.

The caste, lineage, and class dynamics are equally important in the casual, forced and semi-forced sex between the PK men (married and unmarried) and the Untouchable and the service caste women (in a few cases) in the village. These kinds of feudal sexual affairs are more common with the Untouchable women (which on one occasion led the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to dismiss its village secretary from his position and

membership in the party). A prominent PK man had kept an affair with a service caste woman for more than two decades. In this case, his lineage, and personal aggressive power helped him to maintain the affair.

My data pertaining to casual sex between men and women within the PK caste is slender, for they are extremely secretive and not revealed in most cases unless noticed by others. Casual and forced sex outside of marriage are devastating for high caste women, whereas virginity at marriage and chastity afterwards are not an issue for the Untouchable women to the extent that these will affect their life chances. If the class factor (poverty) is the reason for the Untouchable women being taken for granted, it is not the case with the poor women of the PK caste.

Three recent accounts I have collected indicate that the poor PK women are as concerned as the rich PK women about their social status. A young PK man in 1987 made an unwelcome sexual advance to an unmarried PK girl. The latter did not submit and a big scene was created. The village people separated and pacified them. The girl's brothers, bent on revenge, attempted to rape the sister of the attempted rapist. An equal amount of commotion and contention followed. On another occasion a barber of the village named Kuppathatti, the only son and heir to his father and his traditional occupation had to leave the

country because of a sexual advance to a PK woman in a secluded place on a farm. These three developments strongly suggest that in most occasions casual and forced sex between a man and a woman of more or less equal or higher caste are an explosive issue. Other cases discussed in the preceding chapter suggest how low caste women are more frequent victims than the poorest women of the PK caste for the sexual desires of the land-owning, moneylending landlords and farmers in the village.

5. Sociocultural and religious affairs and caste and class factors.

The major arena in which most of the people can participate en masse are a. religious festivals, b. death ceremonies, c. wedding ceremonies and parties, and other social ceremonies. In the village council meetings, only the high caste men meet to take decisions, while the untouchables do not by the age old customs. The Untouchables are historically forbidden to enter the twelve Temples situated in and around the village, even though untouchability has been constitutionally abolished since 1952. The Untouchables overwhelmingly celebrate all the observed functions, excepting Christmas, to the extent that the participation does not involve any sort of inter-dining or entry to the temples. They have no role or responsibilities to play except the cleaning the streets on the eve and aftermath of the festivals and feasts, and the street fairs that follow. The most important religious

festivals are Purattasi Pongal, Thy Pongal and Diwali. See the pictures of all the temples in the village provided in the appendix. The Ulagathevan, Ochathevan, and Sikkandamalayan lineages have their own temples, while the Cheppan (Sinnudayan), and Thangalacheri lineages have their temples in Karumathur and Thangalacheri villages respectively. The Periya Vathiar lineage, although fourth generation converted Christians, identify themselves with their traditional temple, Virumappa Kovil, dedicated to the Viruamandi God, one of the six representing the six Thevars of the Karumathur Nad. (Kesathevar, Kurumbattathevar, Madavanai thevar, Parisapuli, Kakka viran, and Sinnudayan).

Puberty functions exist for both girls and boys. Wedding and death ceremonies are very important social and familial gatherings. Failure to attend on these occasions to play the roles assigned by the concerned relatives, have more or less permanently soured family relations. Those strained familial relations are extremely difficult to re-establish. Each of these ceremonies has certain traditional responsibilities and rites for each of the Untouchable castes to perform. These works, in turn, are divided among the six major Untouchables castes according to the degree of impurity of the assignments and the status of these castes in the hierarchy.

When it comes to the menial jobs like drum beating to announce a human death in the village and the

neighboring and far off villages, carrying away dead animals, and burial of the human dead the PK men and women go to the Untouchables' houses and require them to perform these jobs. However, the high caste does not force the owners of the restaurants and tea-stall to abandon the practice of untouchability. The same high caste people do not force those landlords and moneylenders to respect the verdict of the village councils and courts.

Bitter lineage struggles were fought for an extended period in 1976, threatening the epoch old tradition and heritage of celebrating Purattasi pongal, for an equal share in the leadership among the five fraternal lineages of the Ulagathevan ancestry. The Chokkan lineage wanted to have the Mudalmai (primacy in religious affairs, particularly in the village festivals). This lineage dispute vertically polarized the entire village community undermining the social prestige, credibility, and standing the village has traditionally and historically enjoyed in the Kallar region.

The rise of economic affluence and the corresponding improvements of social position of the different lineages who previously did not have influence brought about a questioning of the traditional order of the lineages in religious and cultural affairs. These changing class and lineage status and positions are noteworthy in understanding the new caste-class dynamics

that have interwoven and continue to play out in the village social structure.

6. The caste-class factors in social violence: murders and other criminal behaviors.

Since physical elimination is the highest form of violence, murder is the denominator to understand how violence and lawlessness interact with caste and class dynamics in the village.

The total absence of murder and violence based on inter caste, and low and high caste rivalries demonstrates the indisputable domination of the Pramalai Kallar and the total subordination of the Untouchable castes to the PK caste who form 84 per cent of the population, and own 97 percent of all the land in the village. The uneven demographic composition and unequal landownership structure are central characteristics of the caste-class dynamics in the village which, among other things influences the social relations under discussion: force, murder, violence, and other criminal behavior. I provide brief accounts of the 8 murders that took place during this century in the village, of which I have followed three cases personally.

The village witnessed 8 murders during the present century up to November 1989. All of them were dramatic in their background and occurrence. A brief account of these eight murders sheds more light on the interplay of the

lineage, caste and class factors that are at work then and now.

The following murders took place in Vagaikulam from 1931 to 1990.

1. Sivangalai thevar and his fellow lineage men of Periya Vagaikulam murdered Sadamaya thevar, on a land dispute in a public place (mandai) in broad day light. The attackers used aruval, an iron (indigenous) lethal weapon. The principle accused, Sivangalaithevar received and served a life sentence of 24 years. The real murderer, it was said, different from the sentenced man.

2. Karuppanathevar of Chinna Vagaikulam murdered his own wife, Velayi, aged 37 by a lethal weapon, aruval in 1939, on a suspicion of the latter's alleged affair with another man in the village. The couple had three children. The villagers, to safeguard the interests of the 3 children, successfully frustrated all the witnesses, and possible evidence against the accused was repressed, which resulted in the acquittal of the murderer.

3. This murder shook the entire region. An elderly guest named Mokkamayathevar of the neighboring village of Vadakkampatti was murdered in his traditional bamboo- cart-bed at night in front of his host Madulai Sinnathevar's residence. The victim was mistaken for the host, Madulai Sinnathevar. Sinnathevar bailed out only his sister's son, Sinnandivathiar, who along with Subbiathevar and Kattamayan Virumandi committed a burglary in the house of Periyavathiar Daniel Periasamy Thevar. Since Sinnathevar did not bail out Subbiathevar, the latter wanted to revenge the former. That is how the murder took place. No one witnessed the murder. Subbiah vathiar, a prominent congress party worker is said to be the murderer because Madulai Sinnathevar, the host had arranged the the release of Sinnandivathiar alone and leaving Subbiathevar when Periyavathiar imprisoned the above three for theft in 1930s. Although the police could not detect the murderer, every one in the village knew that the late Mr. Subbiahthevar committed the murder.

4. One Pulimuthu, 20, the younger son of Sangilimayathevar of the Cheppan lineage murdered

Rasu, 25, a worker in the sugar cane crushing mill in 1965. The issue of the dispute was the time priority of crushing the cane between two PK landlords, Merkuveettu Sivangalai and SangiliMayathevar. This murder took place one morning on the farm of the latter landlord at the site of the temporary crushing mill, situated roughly one mile south of Vagaikulam. Pulimuthu was acquitted for all the witnesses were scared of the potential reprisal.

5. On the same day, one Ranjeetham, the maternal uncle of the victim, Rasu (in the case no. 4 above) of the neighboring village of Sathangudi came with others en masse and murdered the killer's paternal uncle Muthusamy (Pulimuthu's father's brother) since Pulimuthu, his father, and his brother escaped, hearing the approach of the crowd led by Ranjeetham. Ranjeetham was sentenced to life imprisonment.

6. Pulimuthu, who committed the murder and was acquitted in case number. 4, and escaped from being murdered at the hands of Ranjeetham in case number 5, was murdered by a joint action of two brothers Ayyavu and Ayyathurai, sons of Gurusamy of the Sikkandamalayan lineage. The two brothers murdered Pulimuthu in a dispute over a garbage disposal site. This took place on a late afternoon in the middle of a street in the village, witnessed by dozens of people. Both of them surrendered to the police. Ayyavu was acquitted and Ayyathurai was given given a five year sentence. Now both of them lead a "normal" life.

7. One Andi, 37, known as Kirukku Andi among the villagers, a single man, was found murdered by the wayside of the Vagaikulam-Sindupatti road near the rock known as Idivizhundhan Parai. Noticed in the morning by passers by; his murderer remains undetected to this day. Two suspects are Kattamayan Mokkasamy Paramasivam and Thothapappan Pandi. Andi, it is believed, was murdered when he was caught red-handed stealing cotton from the farms owned by the Mokkasamy.

8. Periyakaruppan murdered his wife Seenithayee in his farm house on a suspicion of an alleged affair with an other man. Periyakaruppan hanged himself from a tree in his backyard while he was out on bail. They left three children.

9. One Sinnandi, son of Sivanathevan Mayandi of Chokkan lineage, murdered one Chinnachamythevar in June 1990 for the latter tried to seduce the former's wife, Mrs. Anbuthai. Sinnandi is out on bail, and the case has not come for the hearing.

Caste and class factors and the drive to attain social status, and pride and the arrogance of the lineage power are involved. The victim of the third murder was an established hero, for the acquittal of his murder. The two brothers who killed him are landless laborers (one of whom, prior to the murder, was a semi-street leader) and two of the four sons of an erstwhile mediocre farmer. Both of them got minimum five year sentences, because the witness feared reprisal from the accused (who now had nothing to loose but the prison life).

The sociological point to derive from this is that all the murders took place over properties or property related issues. On the other hand the two brothers, despite their working-class background, wanted to have the right over a land site and thereby to challenge the established "social heroism" of the victim, for which the landless brothers had nothing to loose and had a natural sympathy from the village for the first victim. By doing that, the brothers enhanced their individual, family, and lineage status in the village. The defense attorney managed to get the minimum sentence primarily due to the established aggressiveness of the accused brothers. Hence, the material influences for the brothers are more complex, split into class, caste, lineage, and individual traits and characteristics, with the broader caste and class background.

Violence, intimidation, and use of force are frequent means of settling scores in social discourse. These are used in one way or another to exercise one's caste, lineage and class position over those lower in the social hierarchy and stratification. The PK exercises its power over all the rest of the castes, and the PK-service castes over the remaining castes, and so on and so forth, all the way to the Putharai vannan, (the washermen for the Untouchables) who are at the bottom of the caste and class hierarchy in the village. Likewise, in terms of the landowning and other propertied strata, the top landlord prevails over the rich farmers of all the other lineages including his own, and the rich farmers over the middle ones, and so on and so forth until the landless working poor whose subsistence is solely based on his daily wage in the farm or related arena.

7. Political mobilization and the Caste-class factors.

The presidents, secretaries, and convenors of every local chapter of all the parties belong to the PK caste which dominates the demographic structure, landownership, and sociocultural and religious affairs. Hence the PK caste dominate the politics of the village. The leaders of the political organizations belong, more specifically, to the dominant lineages of the PK caste. The historical absence of large scale landlordism has deprived the leftist parties any opportunity to mobilize the poor

peasantry in the village.

The village is unique in its politics, for it has all the major national and regional political parties and the parties which are based on local and international ideologies (including the CPs); the lineage and the caste politics of the PK. It is equally remarkable to note from inquiries and observations that there has been no institutionalized political movements despite the presence of the numerous political groups and their sympathizers for a long time.

The social dominance of one caste or a few lineages at the top of the caste hierarchy, and the pre-eminent position of one or a few landlords at the apex of the land-ownership, have prevented the working poor from being organized into any sort of politics: poor versus rich.

The overwhelming power of one caste and the persistent rivalry between the two top lineages, Chokkan and Karuppan, prevent any one person belonging to one or the other of the two, or any other PK lineage from leading a powerful political group in the village. In this context, the supremacy or the perceived supremacy of one's lineage is more mobilizing than the ideology of a party.(7) The veteran communist leader U.S. Ulagappa, despite long dedication and sacrifice in his political and personal life, could not organize any serious wage struggles or any struggle on pressing issues facing the

village. The landownership, money power, and lineage politics can grossly split any pragmatic political vision and action, as it has done on various occasions in the village, for example in 1967 and 1978 civic and state elections. It is against this backgrounds that the success and failure of the landless poor should be viewed, in their struggles for wages and other legitimate demands.

Thus the political parties, their mobilization, voting behavior and the politics of landownership etc., are interwoven in the complex processes of caste-class dynamics: the PKs and the non PK castes, the higher and Untouchable castes, the original and the later lineages, the dominant and the satellite lineages, the landlord and landless, the lender and the borrower, and so on and so forth.

The complex process of caste-class dynamics in the economics, politics, and culture of the village community presently do not reflect any symptoms of major changes, such as sweeping landlessness or rapid concentration of the landed and other properties. The major changes, it seems, may begin to occur only when the region and the country as a whole change, for which initiative must come from the communities in Vagaikulam, and the working communities from the villages and cities everywhere in the country. An historic task indeed, for the complexities of the caste, languistic, religious, ethnic, and class

factors involved. Yet it is a worth-taking task. Until then, the attempts to mobilize the communities in Vagaikulam and elsewhere in the country based on the rich and poor on the one hand, rather than on the basis of lineage, caste, language, religion, and region, or any other parochial issues, on the other hand, will continue. Yet what are the growing tendencies and the immediate future of the caste-class dynamics are articulated in the concluding part of the thesis.

Footnotes

1. Dagfinn Sivertsen, When Caste Barriers Fall?, 1963, Allen & Unwin Ltd., p.9
2. Ibid., p.9
3. Kathleen Gough Aberle, Rural Society in Southeast India, 1983, Cambridge University Press,
4. This semi traditional and semi modern sugar making industry is set up temporarily and dismantled once the season is over. This is a mobile rural industry owned by a third party belonging to yet another village. The priority of crushing the sugar-cane is based on a first come first basis; but to insure the service, farmers deposit a small amount of money called achaaram.
5. I was nine years old when my mother took me to pay her condolences to the victim who was a distant relative of my mother.
6. Pulimuthu means Tiger Pearl. It is customary and traditional among the PK to name their children as Singham (lion), Veeran (hero), and so on.
7. R. Saminathan of the Sikkanda malayan lineage of this village got elected to the state Assembly from the Tirumangalam constituency in which Vagaikulam is a part, in a sociologically interesting campaign. Saminathan contested and won on the DMK ticket, whose local chapter leaders belong to Chokkan and Karuppan lineages, traditional rivals for land, power, position, and authority in the village. The mutual rivals had to swallow the pill and at the least pretend to campaign, though it is not known who they for voted in the secret ballot. My prediction is that this will last if Saminathan seeks re-election from the constituency for the next term, for the lineages will go back to the caste-class rivalries.

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Chapter-VII

Conclusion

The Fluctuating Caste-Class Dynamics

The analyses of the caste-class dynamics provide many important methodological and theoretical insights within and outside, and for and against the loose set of hypotheses I proposed at the beginning of this study.

The dominant trend that emerges from the discussion of these dynamics is that neither could class dominate nor the established caste system maintain its epoch old superiority over the entire community in Vagaikulam. Instead, the interplay of caste and class factors, what I have termed the dynamic process, "the caste-class dynamics", determines and shapes almost all the social phenomena in Vagaikulam. And yet in a given time and place either class or caste/lineage factors have had more influence over the other in determining the process of a particular phenomenon, while the other plays a less influential, secondary role. My study shows that no social phenomenon could develop completely in dependence or in full independence of the other in Vagaikulam. When the class factor (money power) decides, in the final event, the purchase of landed property, the seller considers the prospective buyers in this order of preference in selling his land: first his own brothers, followed by his

fraternal brothers (pangali), his distant relative, any one in his lineage, and only then any one else in his caste. This I have called a caste factor. The land hardly ever leaves the caste; thus a PK hardly ever sells his lands to a non-PK man in Vagaikulam. The classic example in this regard is the famous service caste man, Santhuras Chettiyar, who had to look to the neighboring village, Munduvelampatti, to buy land, when he could not buy any land in Vagaikulam, despite his financial capability.

The marital alliance offered the classic opportunity for class factors to play a dominant role in Vagaikulam. While the caste factor, membership by birth, is the main criterion for deciding the bride or groom in the scope of the alliance search, the richest bride does not marry the poorest groom. This is a glaring example of what I called the working of class factors.

In politics as in economics and culture, the one or the other of the caste or class factors determines the state of a social phenomenon in Vagaikulam. Hence the caste and class factors together influence the social process in Vagaikulam. The caste system and its values are not independent of the emerging social strata based on class elements and values. This demonstrates the role of caste-class dynamics in determining the course of the social structure. However, the interplay of the caste and class factors is displayed in varying degrees, and not always in the same direction, but at times in opposite

senses.

Lineage, side by side with the class polarization process, is emerging as a social construct with increasing mobilization capacity on issues that concern all the lineages in the village. On the other hand the lineage power has slender influence on issues concerning a single lineage, where class factor matters, for example as to which of the landlords of the single lineage in question has more economic power to buy the particular land.

The discussion based on the empirical evidence of the land-tenure system, lineage and caste power structure, political behavior, and sociocultural and religious affairs, demonstrates that the effects of both opposition and the complimentary relationships that exist between caste and class factors in a given time and situation are rapid and intense. These dual dynamics are more pronounced than the outright domination or disappearance of the one or the other factor of caste and class in the village social structure.

Diagram I

Caste and Class Structure: Theoretical Model

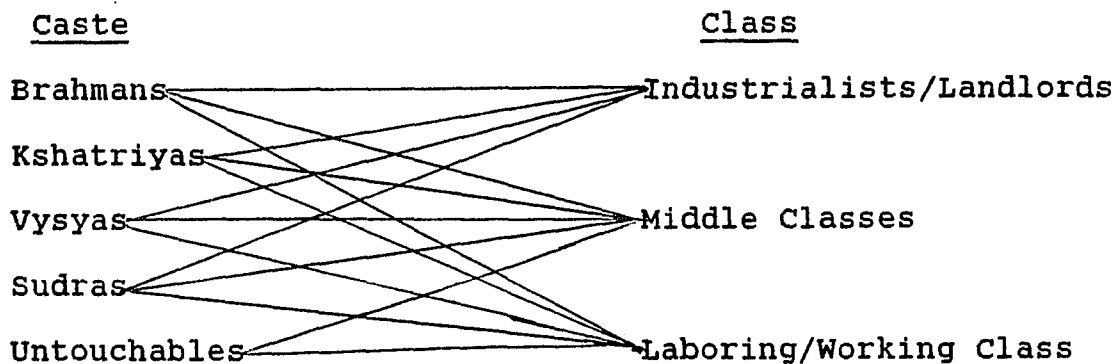
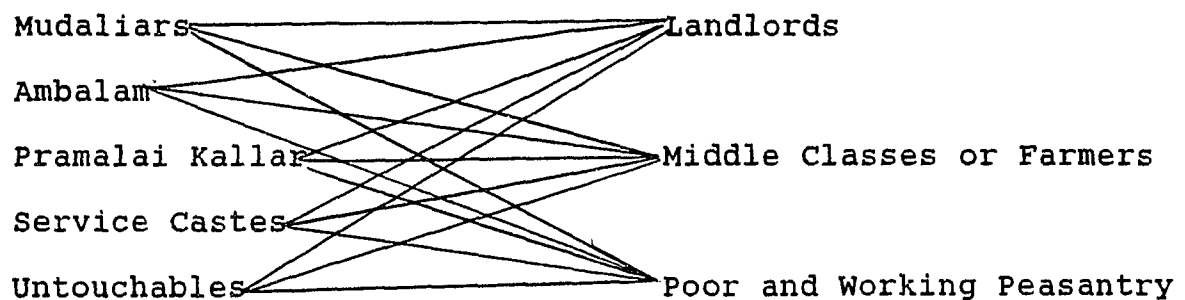


Diagram II

Caste and Class Structure: Model in Vagaikulam



In a given situation, be it land purchase, leadership in cultural and religions affairs, or silencing the village concern over a sexual scandal, both the caste and lineage, and class position of the individual play great roles in Vagaikulam. Hence the status and position of some strata's caste and class background works in their favor and strengthens their previous position, while the status and position of some other strata will adversely affect their already weaker social position in the village communities.

As Tables 9 and 10 show clearly, the processes of sweeping concentration of landed property and polarization of classes are not as rapid and intense as I had proposed in my hypotheses. Nor is the two-tiered class stratification system clearly emerging among the communities in Vagaikulam. And yet the study shows that the rapid marginalization of the poor peasants in the workforce partially confirms my hypothesis of a growing workforce in Vagaikulam. Although at the apex the size of the individual holding has decreased from 1950 to 1989, still a small group of landlords control more than 25 per cent of the fertile and other lands of Vagaikulam. Hence they are loosely in command of the local politics and power structure.

A significant development is the rise of the middle-classes, which the tables show is a formidable social process. The discussion has shed new light on the rise of the middle-farmers as far as the situation in Vagaikulam is concerned. There is a close relationship between some external factors and the growth of the middle-farmers. The teachers who have successfully combined moneylending and farming have acquired property, become self sufficient and finally become middle-class in Vagaikulam. In Chapter IV, I have shown how the top landlord, Sinnandy Vathiar successfully combined moneylending, pig-farming (helped by some Untouchable men of Vagaikulam), and teaching with his traditional farming, and thus dramatically raised himself

to the top land-owning position in Vagaikulam. The notable families of the middle-class, Kundumani-Marry Pappa, Rasuvathiar-Alagamma, Bose-Vasugi, Mr. and Mrs. Sivanandi, Mr. and Mrs. Rajappa, and others, generated capital from their monthly salaries which are an external source. The income from these salaries was used as capital by the employees in subsequent investment in farming in Vagaikulam. These external sources of financial income to Vagaikulam have helped the farmers more in acquiring landed properties, in their children's education, job and marriage, than other aspects of life in Vagaikulam.

There has been no large-scale land ownership among the village communities. The lineage factors, due to the presence of 12 PK lineages and their perpetual conflicts for property ownership, prevent the landlords from rapidly concentrating property. Furthermore the caste-class dynamics help the fragmentation process and hence blunt and prevent political consciousness from emerging among the working strata in Vagaikulam. The working people, as the data show, are constantly drawn in one way or another into the lineage jealousy, rivalries and conflicts. Caste rivalries have undermined the potential struggles of the landless and working poor against the landlords and rich farmers in Vagaikulam.

However, the process of landlessness and increasing poverty, the discussion shows, is a well established phenomenon. Table 5 shows the dynamic growth of landless

and poor peasants over the last 40 years, from 52 percent in 1950 to 58 percent in 1989. At the apex of the land ownership structure, both the numbers of the top landlords and their individual and combined ownership are in decline, a unique feature among the communities: fragmentation at the top and steady and gradual landlessness at the bottom, while the middle farmers are growing in number and ownership. The situation in Vagaikulam, presently, is not the classic one where the concentration of property is rapid along with the corresponding swelling of the ranks of the working people.

This is not the situation elsewhere in the region. Other studies have shown polarization of property both at the top and bottom of the social structure, while caste is rapidly giving place to class factors. These recent studies show some of the social realities that are closely related to this project. Concentration of landed property (Djurfeldt 1975;153), centralization of land ownership (Gough 1981;50), and landlessness (Beteille 1974; 81,165) are rapidly developing in the region. Accompanying these are the growth of the workforce (Harriss 1982; 116) and the proletarianization of peasant life (Mencher 1978; 137). These developments support the emphasis on polarization and its social consequences. However, these studies neglect the dynamic interplay of caste and class factors.

Previous research on Tamil Nadu, carried out between 1950 and 1980, provides evidence of major trends pertinent to understanding rural society in India. Though "the growing glut of agricultural labor resulted partly from an increase in the population" (Gough;52), the studies demonstrate that landlessness was due primarily to the increased "centralization of land" (Gough;372). Thus, the polarization of peasants as landowners and landless laborers is sociohistorical rather than merely a matter of demography. It depended on centrality of ownership which in turn was due to the increased transfer of land. "Ownership of land passes more easily from one set of people to another, and new classes tend to develop" because "land has come into the market" (Beteille, 1965; 221,223). The "likelihood for a rich farmer to acquire land is greater than for a poor one, other things being equal. In agrarian structures based on private ownership rights, we can therefore expect a tendency toward concentration of land ownership in the hands of a decreasing number of rich farmers and big landlords" (Djurfeldt and Lindberg, 1975;174). Further, the much debated issue of caste as an obstacle or an alternative to class polarization has largely been resolved, according to Beteille, as the "class system has progressively detached itself from the caste structure" (Beteille; 221).

The focus in each of the above studies differs in certain respects from my investigation. "Caste or Class

polarization", for Djurfeldt, focuses on poverty; Harriss emphasizes capital and labor; and for Mencher, of key significance is the agrarian social structure. Gough identified social structure and social movement as fundamental; and Beteille emphasized caste, class, power, and social structure. Although Beteille's work is of particular interest to my project, his premature prediction of the triumph of class over caste has neither happened in Thanjavur where he carried out his empirical study nor in my village, Vagaikulam. He discusses class in relation to caste and power. But he too neglects the process and effects of caste and class dynamics, which is the focus of my dissertation.

As I have shown, the workings of the caste-class dynamics are increasingly complex, neither one independent of the other, since they have more often than not merged into a single process in Vagaikulam. A split into caste and class as separate identities and developments is not apparent, and unlikely to take place in the near future in Vagaikulam.

Class polarization based on property is an institutionalized process but very gradual and slow in Vagaikulam. For the process to triumph, both sides of the process, the increasing poverty and landlessness on the one hand, and the rapid concentration of property on the other, have to simultaneously develop, and the latter is not happening in Vagaikulam.

The inseparable caste-class dynamics increasingly dominate all the other institutional aspects of the village structure. I have discussed how these caste and class factors are brought into both confrontation and at times in complementary positions in various aspects of the society: transfer of land, non-farming occupations, money-lending, the collapse of the service castes' business, leadership in social and religious affairs, sexual affairs, political mobilization and behavior.

The slow and gradual modernization processes have rapidly and disproportionately commercialized the village agriculture; cash crops such as cotton, peanuts, onion, and sugar-cane have replaced the traditional crops meeting the consumption needs of the community. As a result the diet has changed: more families, including the poor ones, use rice more often than not, and the traditional, classic diet, koozh made out of the local grains such as cholam, kambu etc., are slowly and steadily disappearing from use in Vagaikulam. People travel more frequently due to the availability of time because of cash crops and the transportation link; roughly 250 to 300 people travel back and forth on a daily basis on the Tiruamangalam, Madurai, and Usilampatti routes. These trends further strengthen the modernization process in Vagaikulam.

On the socio-cultural front, the impact of the caste-class dynamics is more obvious than in other arenas

of social life in Vagaikulam. Despite the commercialization of agriculture, and modernization of social life, social, religious, and cultural values and practices are reproduced with more or less the same degree of tradition. As my discussion shows, there exists greater conservatism in family practices and ideologies. The tension implicit in this growing split of production from domestic life, is mirrored in intergenerational conflict and in relations between men and women in Vagaikulam. There are significant changes in the sexual division of labor, but in the arena of mate selection, the conduct of marriages, dowry, funeral rites, inter-caste relations, views on virginity, chastity, etc., culture has not changed at all. Rather they are more regular and particular in observing these customs and taboos as the lineages, castes and the strata in question attain increasing position and status.

Although an increasing number of females attend schools and colleges, and begin to work, attitudes towards women and woman related issues remain traditional. As the middle classes, traditional and modern, grow in Vagaikulam as elsewhere in the country, the dependency of the women gets further strengthened. On the other hand, the modern division of labor based on technically acquired skills and needs of the people is emerging, as the traditional division of labor by hereditary caste occupations, is slowly breaking up. However, some aspects of this division

of labor continue: the services of Harijans (Untouchables), barbers, washermen, carpenters, blacksmiths, chettiyars, kuyavars, kuravars and other service castes in Vagaikulam. These service castes derive their subsistence exclusively from the above mentioned hereditary occupations. The women do their share, irrespective of the caste and class differences, which insures the continuity of the sexual division of labor within the hereditary division of labor in the economy of Vagaikulam. The modern division of labor, although clearly emerging, is unlikely to absorb or wipe-out the hereditary, nor the sexual divisions of labor based on the traditional caste and gender roles respectively.

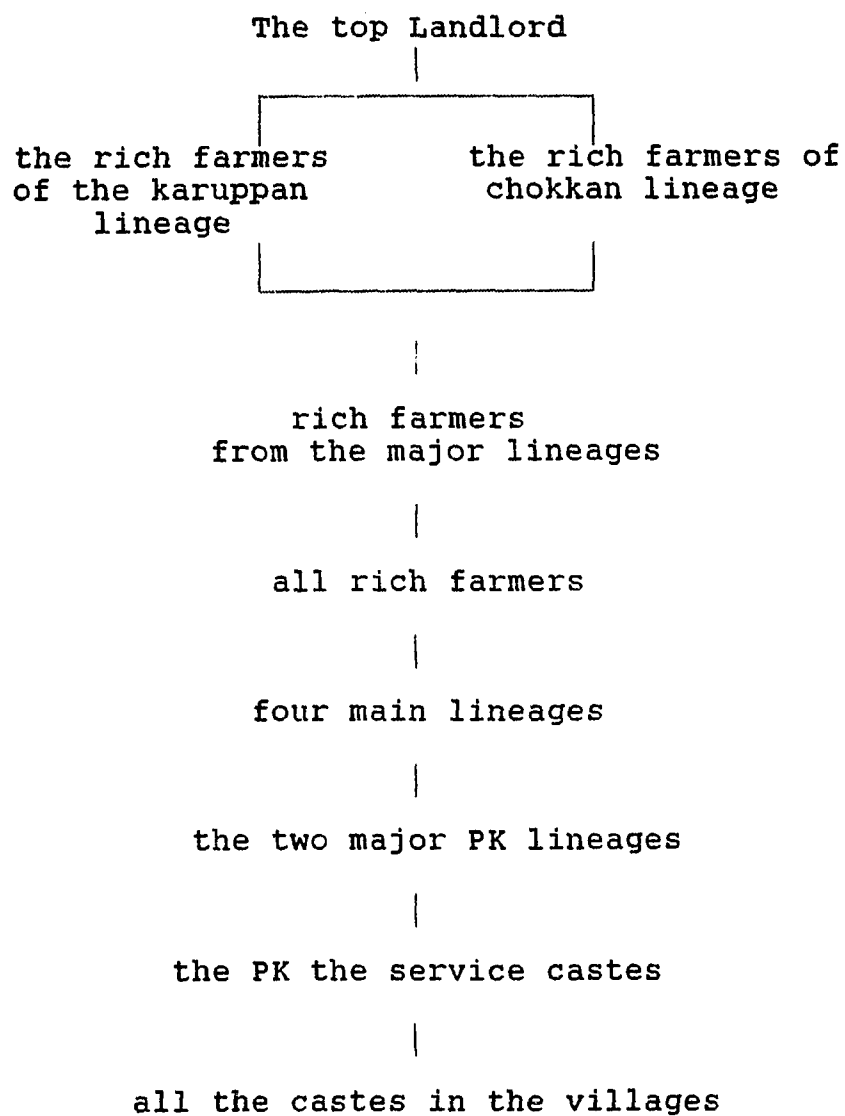
The maintenance of caste based segregation in the occupational, social and cultural life helps the landlords and the rich farmers and middle classes to continue the pursuit of their property ownership, moneylending, and other profitable businesses.

On the political front, social relations based on these caste-class dynamics produce caste associations among the village communities according to caste, lineage, and status symbols. For a long time these peasant communities have been politically misled, primarily due to the practice of caste values, and presently by the conception of superiority and inferiority of the lineage within the caste system. In elections, the campaign among the various lineages is intense, particularly for the

civic bodies. The inflow of modernity and urban values along with the salaries, urban contact and knowledge obtained from spatial mobility, have not altered these traditional and conservative practices, ideologies, tensions and conflicts among the caste and class groups for the control of property in Vagaikulam.

Status, and position in various arenas of the village social structure can be seen in the charts 5 and 6. The caste and class factors are inseparably mixed at the bottom level where the identification of the groups based on wealth and status is unclear. The concomitant tension and conflicts are narrowed or broadened, depending on the issues, the individuals, the lineages and strata, as the data and the charts show. These economic conflicts and tensions are two-fold, between the propertied strata on the one hand, and between the working poor and the propertied groups on the other hand. These conflicts are neither articulated nor reflected in the daily social life. The economic struggles at the top could develop if the top landlords keep the next level of farmers in the caste-class layer from reaching the higher stage. In Vagaikulam it has not happened. The top three landlords have 23, 21, and 20 acres of land, almost identical property holdings. Hence the caste-class dynamics is likely to continue so long as the current pace of the class and caste biased modernization process does not increase in Vagaikulam.

Position and status of the lineages, castes, and class
in the village social structure.



Castes and class tensions and competition for properties
and status in the village

lineage and class conflicts, tensions among the top few
landlords and the landless working poor.

|

conflicts for properties and positions among all the rich
farmers from all the lineages

|

Intra lineage conflicts and Inter lineage conflicts

|

Intra Caste and Inter Caste conflicts.

|

Tensions between the lower and higher castes

* Lineage is descendants of one person within a caste.

Further rapidity or deceleration in the caste-class dynamics depends on the modernization and commercialization of agriculture, the process of development in Vagaikulam. The path and pattern of development in India does not provide much opportunity for a speedy capitalist process in the village. The priorities of the federal and state governmental policies strengthen this trend by giving weight to the industries, because of the longer turn-over time and lower profits of agriculture. Whatever development occurs in agriculture in Vagaikulam is a by-product of the industrial development of the region and the nation as a whole.

The slower the process of modernization in agriculture, the longer the influence of the caste-class dynamics will persist in the economy, polity, religion, and sociocultural aspects of Vagaikulam. The dominant tendency of the caste-class dynamics is likely to be more towards the strata based on property ownership or wage-labor than those based on lineage association, pride, and heritage, as the class elements are already more pronounced in a crucial relationship, that of the land ownership, in Vagaikulam. However, this process, contrary to conflict perspective, is not well articulated.

The state of the caste-class dynamics and its influence over the social structure-politics, religion and culture-can be presented through the following diagrams,

The status of caste and class in Vagaikulam before and after changes

Diagram III

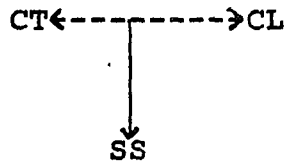
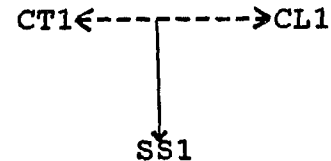


Diagram IV



CT=Caste, CL=Class, SS=Social Structure
CT1=Caste changed, CL1=Class changed, SS1=Society transformed

The diagram III portrays the interplay of caste on class and vice versa, and the caste-class dynamics together as a single process on the social structure of Vagaikulam. The diagram IV portrays a changed situation: The caste and class not only influence one another and the dynamics, as a single process, dominates the social structure, but also, in the process, each one of the three arenas changes itself. As a result, changes occur in caste, class and the social structure in Vagaikulam, which are irreversible. This is a new perspective in the studies of South Asia.

During its long journey, the caste-class dynamics will continue to influence every social aspect, economic, political and cultural, in varying degrees in Vagaikulam as long as there is no major shift in the national level

policies. As the caste-class dynamics continue, class elements will be likely to dominate increasingly the caste features to establish a modern division of labor in Vagaikulam, as it will happen elsewhere in India. The technological transfer, rapid industrialization, development of transport and communication, urbanism, and other related issues are likely to strengthen these trends.

**

Vagaikulam Population in 1950

Caste	C.Vagaikulam							P.Vagaikulam						
	Adults		Children		Total			Adults		Children		Total		
	Men	Won	Men	Won	Men	Won	Tot	Men	Won	Men	Won	Men	Won	Tot
Mudaliyar	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3	3	2	1	5	4	9
P.Kallar	230	232	46	50	276	282	558	308	309	69	72	377	381	758
Chettiyar	5	6	4	3	9	9	18	7	6	3	6	10	12	22
Ambalam	4	3	2	2	6	5	11	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Kuyavar	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3	4	3	2	6	6	12
Carpenter	3	4	2	2	5	6	11	4	4	1	2	5	6	11
Washerman(UT)	3	2	2	1	5	3	8	4	5	4	3	8	8	16
Pallar(UT)	3	4	3	2	6	6	12	8	7	5	4	13	11	24
Parayar(UT)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	64	63	11	13	75	76	151
Sakkili(UT)	5	4	3	2	8	6	14	7	8	6	6	13	14	27
Barber(UT)	2	2	1	1	3	3	6	2	3	2	1	4	4	8
P.Washerman	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3	2	2	1	5	3	8
Total	225	257	63	63	318	320	638	413	414	108	111	521	525	1046

Vagaikulam Population in 1989

Caste	C. Vagaikulam								P. Vagaikulam							
	Adults		Children		Total		Tot	Adults		Children		Total		Tot		
	Men	Won	Men	Won	Men	Won		Men	Won	Men	Won	Men	Won			
Mudaliyar	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5	4	2	3	7	7	14		
Ambalam	4	4	1	1	5	5	10	.	.	.	.	.	.	.		
P.Kallar	371	378	105	109	476	487	963	530	546	157	166	687	712	1399		
Chettiyar	8	10	1	1	9	11	20	10	13	4	5	14	18	32		
Kuyavar	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5	7	4	3	9	10	19		
Carpenter	8	10	1	1	9	11	20	4	3	.	.	4	3	7		
Washerman(UT)	2	1	1	1	3	2	5	5	4	1	1	6	5	10		
Pallar(UT)	3	2	3	1	6	3	9	5	3	1	2	6	5	11		
Parayar(UT)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	94	97	22	24	116	121	237		
Sakkili(UT)	5	8	2	3	7	11	18	7	6	.	.	7	6	13		
Barber(UT)	2	1	.	2	2	3	5	3	2	.	.	3	2	5		
P.Washerman(UT)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	2	2	1	2	3	4	7		
Total	403	414	114	119	517	533	1050	670	687	192	206	862	893	1755		

Caste and Traditional Occupations

Caste	Occupations
Mudaliar	Village Accountant of all Properties
Ambalam	Farming
Piramalai kallar	Farming
Chettiyar	Business, Decorating Funeral Chariot
Kuyavar	Potters of idols, household things
Asari (Carpenter)	Carpenting, etc.,
Asari (B'smith)	Steel work Farming communities
G'smith	Jewelry work
Barber	Haircutting, Beautifying the dead
Pallan	Media by Drum-beating
Parayan	Digging burial ground, etc.,
Sakkili (madayan)	Watching village tank, irrigation
Kuravar	Fixing traditional baskets
Washerman (Vannan)	Laundering for higher castes
Washerman,P (PutharaiVannan)	Laundering for the Untouchables

There are no Brahmans in the village who occupy the highest status and position in the hierarchy of the Indian society.

Caste and Status in Social Hierarchy

Caste	Hierarchy	Classified
Mudaliar	highest	Forward Caste
Ambalam		Backward Caste
P.Kallar		Backward Caste
Chettiyar		Backward Caste
Kuyavar		BC (Semi-touchables)
Asari		BC (Semi-touchables)
B'smith		BC (Semi-touchables)
Barber		Untouchables
Pallan		Untouchables
Sakkili		Untouchables
Kuravar		Untouchables
Washerman		Untouchables
Washerman, P. (Putharai Vannan)		Untouchables

There are no Brahamans in the village who occupy the highest social rank and position in the social hierarchy of the Indian Society.

The Lineages of Ulagathevan Descendents & their Family Strength

I. Chokkan Lineage, 60 families

1. Thambiran Sivangalaithevar
2. Annakodithevar
3. Ra. Sivangalailthevar
4. Ka. Sinnandithevar
5. Sinnandi vathiar
6. Thambiran Sub-Inspector
7. Ku. Pa. Sinnandi
8. Mettukkara Sivangalai
9. Sa. Sinnathevar
10. U. Sa. Ulagappa

II. Machi Lineage, 15 families

1. Duraiyappan
2. J.S. Raju
3. Che. Mookken
4. Sokkalingathevar
5. Mayandi
6. Mokkayathevar
7. Alagarsamy
8. Sokkalingam
9. Annakkodi
10. Sadamayan

III. Thevan Lineage, 15 families

1. Pa. Thevar Sinnandi
2. Ra. Peria Sivanandi
3. Karutha Sivanandi
4. Sinna Sivanandi
5. Kannuchamy
6. Sivasamy
7. Chellappandiyan
8. P. T. Rasuthevar
9. Ramachandran
10. Moorthy

IV. Tharagan Lineage, 15 families

1. Samipidikki Sivangalaithevar
2. Nallandithevar
3. Vadivuthevar
4. Thangarasuthevar
5. Pa. Sinnandithevar
6. Arjunan
7. Mokkasamy vathiar
8. Chi. Ayyavu
9. Na. Ma. Rasu
10. Annakkodi

V. Karuppan Lineage, 150 families

1. Karutha Perumalthevar
2. Perumalthevar
3. Arjunathevar
4. Sivangalaithevar
5. Sinna Sivanandi
6. Mayan
7. K. S. Karuppathevar
8. Mookken Sivangalaithevar
9. Kangani Sivangalaithevar
10. Po. Rasuthevar

VI. Ochathevar Lineage

1. Thangasamy Pusari
2. Ponnusamy
3. Seeni Perumal
4. Rajangam
5. Ma. Seeni perumal
6. Chinnan
7. Kalyani
8. Seenivasagan
9. Selvam
10. Sellathurai

Other PK Lineages in the Vagaikulam

VII. Madavanai, Cheppan Lineage

1. A.V. Ravi/A.V. Mathiyalagan
2. Ma. Pusari Paulsamythevar
3. M.A. Pandiyan
4. Kasimayan
5. Andithevar
6. Mookasamy
7. Sa. Paulsamythevar
8. Pe. Kasimayan
9. Perumalthevar
10. Jeyakkodi

VIII. Kattamayan Lineage

1. Mokkasamy
2. Muthu
3. Karuppathevar
4. Ku. Vellai
5. Alagumalai
6. Sekar
7. Thangarasu
8. Mayandithevar
9. Karuppusamy
10. Paramasivam

IX. Sikkanda Malaiyan Lineage

1. Chinnasamythevar
2. Ramasamy vathiar
3. R. Samynathan, M. L. A.,
4. Rajendran/Palanirajan
5. Palani/Ramu
6. Thevar Muthiah
7. Ramalingathevar
8. Gurusamy Ramu
9. Nallamuthuthevar
10. Selvaraj

X. Madulai or Thangalacheri Lineage

1. Viswanathathevar
2. Periakaruppan
3. Natarajan
4. Chinnasamythevar
5. Chi. Muthusamy
6. Sinnathevar
7. Sinnachamythevar
8. Suppuruthevar
9. Ayyavuthevar
10. Duraisamythevar

XI Periya Vathiar Lineage

1. Daniel Periyasamy Thevar (Periyavathiyar)
2. D. Santharasu
3. D. William Moses alais Ulli
4. D. Cross Solomon
5. D. John Rathinam
6. D. Marteen Lazarus
7. S. Victor
8. W. Solomon Selvam
9. C.S. Suthanthira Daniel
10. George Darious
11. M.L. Felix

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Autobiographical Note

Solomon Selvam, son of D. William Moses and S. Grace Mahamayee, was born after fourteen years of his father's marriage, on 11 November 1956, in Vagaikulam, a village that did not have a post office and bus service. (Sindupatti post, Tiruamangalam Taluk, Madurai district in the state of Tamilnadu). Mother is a retired primary School teacher and father was a farmer. Public school, Kintergarden nor gymnasium existed. Early childhood through college education was provided within the villages; from I to V grade in Kallar Primary School in Tidian Mettuppatti, from VI to VIII in Peria Vagaikulam. After having failed in IX and X grades in Nattamangalam High School, completed the school final (S.S.L.C.) exams with the highest marks and the first rank in the entire school in Thummakkundu. In order to receive the above schooling, I had to walk three to ten miles every day. The first college education was in Saraswathi Narayanan College where I ranked first in the Class. I earned the B.A. in Sociology from Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar College in Usilampatti, and an M.A. in Sociology from Madurai Kamaraj University.

I was awarded the Indian Council of Social Science Research Fellowship (ICSSR Fellow) for doing a M.Phil./Ph.D. thesis on Women in Indian Peasant Movements in Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. Also awarded Overseas Doctoral Fellowship by the Government of India,

to do graduate work anywhere in the world, but chose to enroll (1984-91) in The City University of New York, New York. Obtained another M.A. from Queens College, and M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Sociology from CUNY. I worked as a lecturer in the City University System during 1986-88, and as a lecturer at Wagner College, Staten Island from 1988-89. Currently serve as an Assistant Professor in Claflin College.

Married with two children; a son and a daughter, wife is a Civil Engineer. Fourth generation as educated family.

Widely traveled around the world; Europe, USSR, North America, Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere to participate in conferences and seminars. Interested in debate, research, observation of various ethnic cultures, farming and political activism.