

## COMMUNITIES, CORPORATIONS AND THE STATE IN MEDIEVAL SOUTH INDIA (VI<sup>TH</sup> -XIII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

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### ABSTRACT

It is well known that there were numerous territorial communities and exterritorial corporations which played considerable role in social life and administration in Tamil states of Pandyas, Pallavas, Cholas, and, at lesser extent, in their contemporaries in Karnataka and Andhra. They flourished from the VI<sup>th</sup> up to the XIV<sup>th</sup> centuries.

It was a unique socio-political structure. From one side, nothing juridical could restrict a central power to interfere into local or corporative life. From the other side, there existed wide spheres where a state influence was really absent.

This situation cannot be understood as a survival of a primordial order and as a stage of development from a primitive to a state society. The notorious “Indian village community”, “a little republic”, did not exist “from the times immemorial”. Many communities had rather late origin and in the considered ages were strengthening and not diminishing their social roles. Simultaneously a state became stronger and bureaucratic machinery became more complex. Feudal features of the social order also were developing. So the perspectives of the society were various. In Vijayanagara period the bureaucratic-feudal model won. This is outside the topic of present paper.

**Key Words:** South India, state, community, corporation, medieval, relationship.

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It is well known that there were numerous territorial communities and exterritorial corporations (guilds), headed by collective bodies, which played considerable role in social life and in keeping law and order in South Indian medieval states. These were non-brahman village communities (*yr, yrar, yravar*), brahman village assemblies (*sabha, sabhayar, perukguri, paruðai*), town self-governing bodies (*nagaram, nagarattar*), area macro-communities, embracing several or dozens of townships (*naðu, nammar, nammavar*). Hindu temples as well represent a peculiar type of area or corporate communities (collective management, institutional property in land, semi-autarkical economy, a replica of the Jajmani system). Beside these, there were guilds of various professionals in trade and artisanship, embryos of castes or already constituted castes, and supralocal trading corporations, acting all over South India and far off outside India. For our present purpose it is important that these corporations had their

own centers in various places of Southern India and interacted with other local communities in pursuing common interests.

In Karnataka non-brahman townships were governed by bodies, designated as some number of “families’ (“60 *okkalu*”, “50 *okkalu*” and so on). Brahman self governing bodies were called *mahajanas*, also with some numerical denomination (“70 *mahajanas*”, “120 *mahajanas*”, “500 *mahajanas*” and so on). As to the macro-communities, their existence in medieval Karnataka is doubtful. The territorial divisions bearing some conventional numbers (for instance, Puligere-70, Ananduru-300 or Banavasi-12.000) sometimes appear in inscriptions as bodies (juridical persons), and in these cases there are grounds to believe that they had a corporate structure, but much more often these divisions with numerical designation were usual administrative units, ruled by vassal princes or appointed governors. Trade and artisan’s associations were developed in Karnataka not less, than in Tamilnadu.

Social order in Medieval Andhra principally did not differ from the Tamilian’s or Canarese ones, but it is much less explored. As to Kerala, her social structure was permeated with communal principles, but had deep peculiarities.

In this paper I shall touch only the material from Tamilnadu. The main reason for this restriction is that historical sources (inscriptions) from Tamilnadu were studied more profound and deeply, than from any other region of Southern India, and exactly the Tamil states gave main food for the discussion on the substance of an Indian medieval state [State, 1997]. The present paper lean heavily on the works of Burton Stein, R. Tirumalai, N. Karashima, Y. Subbarayalu, and also of K. R. Hall, R. Champakalakshmi, H. Kulke, Synthia Talbot and many other Indian, American, Japanese and German scholars. For chronological analysis we shall use a rough division into periods: Pallava (VI<sup>th</sup>-IX<sup>th</sup> centuries), Chola (X<sup>th</sup>-XII<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Pandya (XIII<sup>th</sup> beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Problems connected with medieval communities and guilds are numerous. All of them can not be touched in this paper. I shall concentrate on the problem of their mutual interaction and their position vis-à-vis a political power (of a king or of local magnates). Through this I hope to come to some understanding of socio-political structure of the Tamil society of definite centuries as a whole. But, running ahead, I should admit, that I do not propose any definition for this society, because it is a unique one, and the known models (segmentary; feudal in the European sense; Asiatic and so on) are unsatisfactory. Invention of a new definition would be a meaningless effort.

All these communities arrived not earlier than the VI<sup>th</sup> century. During the **Sangam period** (II<sup>nd</sup>-VI<sup>th</sup> centuries c.e.) there are no evidences of their existence.

The only hint on communal life in that period are mentions of place for common gathering in a village: *mazham* (Iṣṣilappadikaram, XII, 11: Tirukural, 820, 1138)<sup>1</sup>. But the same word means “a stall”, a place for keeping cattle [Iṣṣilappadikaram, XII, 13].

A synonym of *mazham* was *potu*, *potiyil* (“common place”). It served as a place for detention of captive women, as well as a “club-house” for men to play dice, to eat and drink (Iṣṣilappadikaram, XII, 166). As was said by T.K.Venkatasubramanian, the fixation of a peasant community in the Sangam period is an elusive problem (Venkatasubrahmanian, 1993: 65).

So, we can not think, that the medieval communities had a primordial origin.

In the **early Pallava grants** one can find some indirect evidences of village communities. The kings, making grants, informed, among others, “the village” or “village holders” (*grama*, *grameyaka*, *gamagamabhajaka*) (IP, nos. 5, 6, 7, 13, 14).

Perhaps it means that a village was understood as an institution, a body. But there are no direct indications of local self-government on village level, as well as on higher levels (in so called provinces: *raumras*, *viuayyas*, *rajyas*).

*Nammar* (plural of *nadu*, “*nadu* dwellers”) as a well formed body of local self-government appears for the first time in an inscription of 546 c.e. They received the royal order about a donation of land to a Jaina religious institution and fulfilled it by demarking limits of the donated plot, walking personally around it and then issued their own order (*avaiyolai*), which is the content of the inscription (IP, no. 92).

Later on under the Pallavas and the Cholas the *nammar* played the same role more than once. These incidences show that the *nammar* obeyed orders of the central power, but at the same time had their own juridical status.

From later inscriptions we were known about other rights and functions of the *nammar*. It is rather informative, that these functions, according to the inscripational evidences, were broader in the Pallava and Pandya periods, and were not so impressive in between, under the Cholas. Let us leave aside any explanation of these phenomenon, and point out that the history of a *nadu* organization was not the history of undeviating disintegration and submission to a state.

*Nammφars* implemented the confiscation of lands of a traitor to the king according to his order (ARE, 100 of 1926), implemented the order of a local magnate to change the rate of taxes (ARE, 406 of 1954/55; A-176 of 1936/37). *Nammars* had their own lands, which they could dispose off. They were collecting

<sup>1</sup>See: other references in: **Subrahmanian**, 1966-a: 660; **Subrahmanian**, 1966-b: 110.

taxes, but were clearly different from fiscal officers (ARE, 282 of 1943/44 ). We know only one instance when *nadu* paid these collected taxes to an official [Subbarayalu, 1973: 41 (917 c.e.)].

They could free from taxes some land (ARE, 290 of 1949/50), settle payments of holders of land and tenants [SII, VI, no. 48, 50, 58 (1169 c.e.)], control trade and traders in their locality (ARE, 151 of 1934/35; IPS, no. 125).

They might jointly with *nagarattar* constitute a new “market town” and give it a new name (ARE, 521 of 1912: 150 of 1935/36). They reconcile a dispute between a Shaivaite and Vaishnavite temples together with representatives of both sides and local magnates (*araiyar*) (IPS, no. 340, 341) and disputes of *agraharikas* with a temple (SII, VII, no. 759; VIII, no. 193).

The degree of autonomy of local macro-communities is a matter for discussion. The majority of Indian historians look at medieval Indian states as analogous to a modern state with all its institutions: the government consisting of ministers as heads of departments; regular administrative divisions and the ramified bureaucracy. For them everything, we find in social and political life of those times is a result of state activity, of some decrees or acts of the government or the king. For them the *nadu* is a unit of governance, introduced by the state, which allowed to it a sort of municipal rights.

This view is no more than speculative inference. There are no orders, or resolutions, or even expressions of royal intentions to create or to transform *nadus* or any particular *nadu*. There are no orders appointing any person for heading of a *nadu*.

Below we shall come back to an “administrative myth”, which prevailed in inscriptions. But as to territorial divisions and administration of them, there was not even a myth of these. No South Indian ruler pretended that he “has determined the borders of *nadus*”, “introduced *valanadus*”, or “put in order the government of *nadus*”.

*Nammar* always appeared as a collective body. One meets in inscriptions terms like *надидайяз*, *надажваз*, which can be translated as “the head of the *наду*”, but in Tamilnadu there are no hints that persons with such titles directed the activities of any particular *nammar*.

Burton Stein came to the conclusion that the Cholas and other Indian dynasties of that period did not realize political power over whole the territory on which their supremacy was acknowledged. Beyond the patrimonial nucleus of the ruling clan they enjoyed only a “ritual sovereignty”. He called this polity a “segmentary state”. The Cholas, according to B.Stein, had no administrative machinery and no regular tax system. The country resources retained in the hands of local leaders, i.e. the *nammar* [Stein, 1980].

This extreme conception was not accepted by majority of historians. Some evidences about the state officials we have, as well as about tax and dues collection into the king's treasure. But the essence of Stein's conception was accepted by many scholars, mainly European and American ones. They believe that control of the central power over the territory in the Chola and other South Indian states was weak, and local communities, sprung by spontaneous activity of the people, enjoyed considerable independence.

One of the questions is interrelations between local magnates (big landlords) and self-governing community bodies. The *nammar* as one might validly presume was not a general meeting of all the settlers in a region. Firstly, it was a caste meeting of a dominant agricultural caste, most often of *veṅṅalas*.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, *nammar* should be the leaders of the villages, embraced by the *naḍu*, and at least substantial landholders.

We know also, as a matter of fact, that all over the kingdom there were numerous chiefs (*araiyar*, *aracu*, *vel*, *velar*, *udaiyar*), who held heritable estates and enjoyed considerable influence.

Naturally a temptation arise to fuse these two groups, because it is difficult to understand, how they may divide authority, which both of them undoubtedly had, in one and the same locality.

Burton Stein went exactly this way: he declared that *naḍus* were headed by local chiefs, that *nammar* were a collective body of the chiefs. This view is purely unfounded. The chiefs constituted an aristocratic layer of the society, possessing princely titles and long pedigrees, and the *nammars* are definitely of the lower stratum. It happens that they attribute themselves to the "forth varna", that is to the *uḍras* [ARE, A - 10, 14 of 1958/59 (SII, III, no 132, p. 426); EI, XXII, no. 34, p. 213-266]. When the chiefs and the *nammar* made joint donations, they clearly represented two distinct entities.

Some scholars admit that macro-communities in Tamilnadu sprang naturally, as a result of spontaneous activity of the populace, but they assert that the central power successfully tried to subordinate them and absorb as a part of the administrative setup. Broadly speaking, they are right, as we know the final result of the socio-political processes in the 6<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century the military-bureaucratic model of state won, and the broad communities, as well as town assemblies (*nagarams*) and trade and other corporations disappeared. But this process of subordination of popular bodies was going slowly and unsteady.

One of the methods of subordination of local communities, as many scholars believe, was the introduction of an intermediate administrative unit, *valanadu*,

<sup>2</sup>This view was substantiated by [Subbarayalu, 1995]

which included several lesser *naḍus*. First of all it is necessary to say that we have no order issued by the central power, introducing such a territorial unit. These *valanaḍus* simply appeared from some time. Secondly, introduction of them is ascribed to Rajaraja I (985-1014), but they were known much earlier, *valanaḍu* is mentioned in Pandyan inscriptions approximately at the time of Parantaka I (907-955) (EI, XXVIII, no. 17-a, 17-b, p. 86-87). Even if the introduction of *valanaḍus* was really a part of some administrative reforms taken by Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra I, it must be acknowledged a failure, because later on we hear about *valanaḍus* rarely, and at last this administrative division completely disappeared.

Many scholars see another method of spreading of state authority in foundations of brahman settlements. The scholars do not believe to donors who said that they gave land and villages to the brahmans solely for their maintenance as religious and scientific researchers and for the benefit of the donors himself and of their parents. The historians are sure that the establishment of *agraharas* had the purpose of championing the king's influence in remote areas. But the spatial distribution of *agraharas* (*brahmdeyas*) is well known: the overwhelming majority of them were located in river valleys, especially near Kavery, and main part – in Kavery delta, that is, in the center of the Chola dominion, where their authority was undisputed anyhow. And this is natural: for maintenance of tens or hundreds of unproductive population it was necessary to allot the most fertile, irrigated land. Outside the limits of these fertile zones where necessity for strengthening of royal influence was mostly acute, the number of *agraharas* was meager.

By the XIII<sup>th</sup> century the *naḍu* started to overcome itself. Connections between remote localities became ordinary phenomena; some *agraharas* embraced lands (townships) of different *naḍus*, private estates of local magnates did not coincided with the *naḍus*. *Nammars* themselves were more and more realizing that the defense of the interests of the dominant caste demanded the joining up over vast space. We shall come to this problem later on.

**The assembly in a non-brahman township** appears for the first time in an inscription of 745 c.e. from North Arcot (IP, no. 74). The *yrar* of Iṭṭattamangalam happened to be a trustee of a grant to Jaina monks and beside this they agreed to pay a fine to the king in order “to expiate the sin of destruction of Kamak-kottam”. It seems, some riot took place and the administrative center was demolished, and the *yrar* took for themselves the responsibility for this.

In 764 c.e. the same *yrar* gave orders about their land: allotted some plots for construction and maintenance of a reservoir (IP, no. 82).

In the IX<sup>th</sup>-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries *yr* played important role in economic and social life in Tamilnadu. They granted [ARE, 271 of 1950/51: 26 of 1932/33: 388, 389

of 1958/59; SII, VII, no. 842 (EI, XXIII, no. 4, p. 24)] and sold land [ARE, 88 of 1900 (SII, VII, no. 97); 274, 279 of 1909. 1910, § 29; SII, VIII, no. 324], took part in various decisions of local communities as to temple affairs, taxation matters and so on. They affirmed rates of rents from their tenants (SII, VIII, no. 251).

If a local chief or magnate granted taxes to a temple, he asked just an *yr* to fulfill the order [ARE, 593 of 1916. 1917: 489, 490 of 1919. 1920: 178, 180 of 1939/40. 1939/43: 85 of 1931/32 (SII, XII, no. 233, p. 146); 151 of 1904 (SII, XVII, no. 171, p. 55)]. No revenue officer in these cases was specified. In Pandya period we hear several instances when *vellalars* or *velamas* unlawfully seized and kept brahmans' land [SII, XXVIII, no. 580: Gurukkal, 1985; 161-163: Tirumalai, 1987: p.29].

Some decisions of the *yrar* looks rather curious, for instance, interdiction for villagers to store their paddy in some places [SII, XII, no. 72, p. 31 (IP, no. 170)], or construction of a tomb and organization of a festival in honor of a person, who stabbed himself as a sacrifice to the goddess Bhatari (Durga) [SII, XII, no. 106 (IP, no. 226)].

We know almost nil about composition of village assemblies of that period. Though the same can be said about other communities touched here. We can suppose that it was a general meeting of all resident members of a dominant caste. One of the *yrs* was called *myvayirattu eḷḷunuvvunar* ("three thousand seven hundred") [IP, no. 197]. This large numeral speaks only that the gathering of the *yr* was understood as a crowded one.

Members of the *yr* embodied the upper, landholding stratum of rural population. They employed other, lower strata of villagers. Sometimes, very rare, these lower people – tenants (*kyḍi*) and labourers (*kyli*) – are mentioned in inscriptions, but their role in production is not clear from casual mentioning. Evidences of communal property in land are much more convincing.

N. Karashima made an analysis of inscriptions, fixing various kinds of alienation of land during the Chola period, in two villages – brahmanical and non-brahmanical (Karashima, 1966: 150-162; Karashima, 1984: 1-15).

He came to the conclusion that in the *uudra* village communal property in land retained for a long time, whereas in the *agrahara* private property prevailed from the early period. There is no doubt as to fairness of his calculations. But his findings led to further inference. Common land could not be cultivated collectively. One receives no hints as to common household of village community members from this village as well as from other villages in any period of Indian history. So, the common property in land inevitably means that the land was cultivated not by the owners (and members of the governing body), but by other persons.

Therefore we are obliged to object another conclusion of N. Karashima, which he made without proper foundations in the sources, namely that in the *uudra* village there were no cultivators different from landholders. The materials demand just opposite conclusion.

Originally shares (*paṅgu*) in land and in all other resources of a community were in vogue in brahman townships. In the Chola and Pandya periods shares arrived in *uudra* villages as well [ARE, 237 of 1921. 1922: 230 of 1922: 37 of 1937/38].

So, the *naḍu* and the *yr* had land in their common property (it may be classified as “joint private property”) and collected some dues in their own favor. Lands and dues together constitute the community ownership, which were called *yramci* [SII, III, no. 151, p. 305; EI, XXII, no. 34, p. 250; ASI, 1903/04, p. 233-235 (SII, III, no. 205, p. 436)] and *naḍamci*. This my translation should be substantiated. *Amci* means “ownership” and “power, rule”. The two terms are understood by many as variants of local administration, as offices of a village or of a *naḍu*. But taking into consideration that these two terms were invariably used in the context of property transfer, and that in the same inscriptions we have other terms with the same root *amci*, namely *miyamci* (“upper ownership”, it means a right to collect government taxes) and *kaṇiyamci* (“hereditary ownership”, means a right of a tax-payer), I believe, that *yramci* and *naḍamci* were used that time in the sense “village ownership” and “*naḍu* ownership”.

As in the case of *naḍu* there are no foundations to affirm that *yr* was usually led by some headman, although the terms which can be understood as “head of a village” (*kiḗaz, talaivaz, yr-aḗvaz*), sometimes are met in inscriptions [ARE, 666 of 1922 (SII, XII, no. 38: IP, no. 92); EI, XI, no. 22-B (IP, no. 110); SII, XII, no. 79 (IP, no. 186)].

Our sources do not clarify interrelations between *yrar* and *nammar*. Logically the *yrar* was a body of a lower level, than the *nammar*; most probable assumption is that the latter consisted out of representatives of the former. But there are no inscriptions with some orders issued by the *nammar* and obeyed by the *yr*, or fixing an approval of the former of the actions of the latter. It happens that *nammar* and *yrar* make donations jointly [ARE, 488-515 of 1908 (Collection, 1905; Part 1: 429; IP, no. 75)], but in those cases they acted as two independent bodies.

*Agraharas*, or *brahmadeyas* were a special type of townships. They sprang as a result of donations of villages to an individual brahman or a group of them by kings, chiefs, magnates and common people. *Agraharas* were ruled by assemblies called *sabhas* (sometimes other terms were used – *ganattar, parudai* – from Sanskrit *pariuad*, – *ganapperumakkal* and others). These donations started from



the remotest period, but the first mentioning of a collective body, administering a brahman township, dates from 755 c.e. (ARE, 72 of 1898 (SII, VI, no. 356: IP, no. 78)).

I have already discussed the role of *brahmadeyas* in South-Indian polity and expressed my view that it is usually exaggerated. Let us evaluate their interrelations with other communities.

Having received a village, that is the right to collect for themselves taxes and dues from this village, the brahmans and their *sabha* became a governing body above the *yrar*. For some time *yrar* retained functions, but gradually it was losing its significance and disappeared. The examples of a dual organization in *agraharas* are rather rare [SII, III, No. 152, p. 323-324: ARE, 92 of 1946/47, p. 23: 173 of 1940/41. 1939/43, p. 95; 123, 129 of 1914 (SII, XIII, No. 50, 51, p. 22-24)].

Soon the *sabha* affirmed itself as the only community assembly. This way two kinds of village communities sprang in Tamilnadu (and all over India) – non-brahmanical and brahmanical.

But the *sabha* remained in some dependence to *nadu*. It is true, that several *agraharas* received a status of *taniyyr* (“independent village”), thus having been withdrawn from the authority of the *nadu*. But these examples were rare<sup>3</sup> and they did only underline the fact, that multitude of other *agraharas* remained under the authority of *uudra* macro-communities. In a long run spreading of *agraharas* may destroy communities’ network, but not straightfully. Having received land from the king, *agraharikas* were interested in strengthening their power. Having possessed a great authority as scholars and nearly saints, they but by their existence were diminishing a status of local authorities (*nammar* and magnates).

A *sabha* was a general meeting of adult brahmans holding full shares in land and other perquisites. In some instances only the elder representative of a family took part in the meeting (EI, IX, no. 10, p. 90). In other cases all the brahmans, “old and young” participated in deliberations (ARE, 62 of 1898)

In any case it was a legislative body. There were so called “committees” (*variyaṃ*) as executive bodies. They had different functions; their members were elected by lots among the persons of high qualifications. It was considered necessary to make rotation every year. Not only the person but even his nearest relatives could be elected into committees only once in several years. The term *variyaṃ* arrives in inscriptions from the end of the 8th century [SII, XII, no. 69 (IP, no. 161); SII, VI, no. 354 (IP, no. 267)], but the heyday of “committees”

<sup>3</sup>In the Chola period 8 cases are known of *taniyyr agraahas*. [SII, VI, no. 57; ARE, 1916, p. 118 (EI, XXI, no. 38, p. 220-250); Stein, 1980; 152]. In the Pandya period a *taniyyr* status had some *uudra* townships as well [SII, XII, no. 190, p. 114]

falls on the X<sup>th</sup> century, when we have several inscriptions settling the rules for committees elections [ASI, 1904/05, p. 136-141 (EI, XXII, no. 149)].

Though in many cases these rules were adopted in presence of an official and, therefore, the preparing of these rules was under some state control, these rules were not uniform. The impression is that they were formed locally and were not imposed from above.

Later on the committees were met rarely [ARE, 148 of 1927, p. 83: 204 of 1938/39, p. 187: 500 of 1925. 1926].

*Agraharicas* were settling mutual obligations of themselves, of lower landholders-vellalas, and of their tenants (*kuḍi*) [SII, VI, no. 48, 50, 58 (1169 c.e.); ARE, 429, 538 of 1918. 1919, p. 97-98 (1176 c.e.); 253 of 1925; 129 of 1927: 87 of 1946/47]. They were controlling trade in the township [ARE, 321 of 1910. 1911, p. 68 (SII, III, no. 90, p. 222-223)]. They were inviting various professionals to provide themselves with services and some most necessary goods. A sort of Jajmani system was developing. From the Pallava and early Chola periods evidences of this system are scanty and scrappy (ARE, 277 of 1913. 1914). In Pandyan period evidences of the same became more wordy and definite (ARE, 67 of 1945/46: 38 of 1946/47). A relative self-sufficiency, so inherent in Indian village community in Modern times, started to develop in the XII<sup>th</sup> century. In 1113 c.e. *mahasabha* of Tribhuvali in South Arcot enumerated several professionals, viz. a priest, a shepherd, a scribe, a carpenter, and forbade for them to do their work outside the township. "Those who do the same outside the limits of the village, must be looked upon as ones made a crime against the *mahasabha* and as destroyers of the village" [ARE, 67 of 1945/46: see also 38 of 1946/47]. But it is necessary to add, that this is a unique inscription of this kind.

Communal feelings were strengthening in other ways also. Earlier there was no collective responsibility for paying taxes. Rajaraja I in 1009 c.e. issued an order to introduce mutual guarantee in brahman villages [SII, III, no. 9; Tirumalai, 1986: 64]. We can never be sure that the royal order reached its implementation. But we have a real case when a *sabha* pays taxes for defaulters [ARE, 4 of 1914].

It is well known, that in the late Mediaeval and early Modern periods the village landholding was strictly one caste's. On the contrary, in South-Indian medieval inscriptions we see no restrictions in land transfers. Land market looks as absolutely free. But in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in one inscription we met with such restriction. A *sabha* decided, that only those alienations of land are lawful, which are between the settlers of the same village, or with the brahman of the same philosophical school. This decision was confirmed by the *nammar* of 5 *nadus* (ARE, 42 of 1936/37: Karuppiah, 1996: 139-140). Perhaps this is an evidence of the growing closeness of village communities.

*Agraharas* and temples were different juridical persons, but they were closely tied. Sometimes a village was granted into *brahmadeya* and *devadana* simultaneously, i.e. the resources of it were destined for temple expenses and for feeding a group of brahmans as well. The brahmans of a *brahmadeya* might do a religious service in the temple and take care of temple interests, because it augmented their prestige. At the same time the relations between *agraharas* and temples were purely market one (EI, XI, no. 30, p. 292-298).

As *sabhas* took part in managing of temple's affairs, they often misused temple funds ([ARE, 286 of 1906 (SII, III, no. 142, p. 289-293)].

**Hindu temples** of that age also looked as a sort of a community. Theoretically, or virtually the temple property was an estate of one landlord, namely the God. He was the *Uḍaiyar* ("the owner", "the lord"), just as any other landlord. But practically it was a diversified economy under the collectivistic management.

At the head of a temple stood an assembly consisting of several bodies. They were receiving grants and donations, distributing lands and other resources among servants – from priests up to the last scavenger, - managing rents from the tenants, organizing rituals and festivals and so on.

In the beginning of the Pallava period these functions were fulfilled usually by a *sabha* or *ganapperumakkal* of a nearby *agrahara* [SII, VII, no. 524 (IP, no.146)]. Later on, from the IX<sup>th</sup> century, specific temple managing agencies arrived: *tali-uḍaiyar* [SII, XII, no. 68 (IP, no. 159)], *tirukoyil-uḍaiyar* [SII, VIII, no. 308 (IP, no.162)], *devakanmi* (*devarkanmi*, *ажварказми*) [ARE, 683 of 1909 (SII, XIII, no. 182, p. 100-101); 108, 110, 113 of 1947/48], *tanattar* (*sthanattar*) [ARE, 277 of 1910. 1911: 368 of 1911. 1912, p. 68: 501 of 1925. 1926: 60 of 1932/33 (SII, XII, no. 187, p. 111-112); 112 of 1934/35 (SII, XII, no. 226, p. 140-141); 149, 156, 161 of 1940/41. 1939/43, p. 92: 56 of 1946/47].

But they were acting under the supervision of an assembly of all worshippers of the said God, residing in the vicinity: *paṣ-maheṣvarar* in Shaivaite temples [SII, VII, no. 527 (IP, no. 194); EI, VII, no. 20- e,f,g,h] and *uṛi-vaiṇavarar* – in Vaishnavite ones [ARE, 303 of 1923. 1924: SII, III, no. 128, p. 267].

The nature of these assemblies is partially clear from their proclaimed strength: in one case 18 000 persons (EI, XX, n. 3-a, p. 52) and in another – 48 000 "took part" in the gathering. Of course, these numbers mean only that there were "many" participants.

Temples had lands on various term. A part of land was given to them to collect state taxes and dues from land-holders (*kaṇiyalar*). In these cases a temple had, as I call it, the upper property, and holders – lower property. Other lands were in the temple's immediate, lower property, and were liable to paying the taxes.

Temples maintained a huge staff of priests, musicians, floriculturists, dancers (including *devadasis*) and artisans. They aimed at self-sufficiency as much as possible, although had rather intensive ties with markets.

Temples had own treasures and documentation, were obliged to implement conditions connected with many donations (the most often a condition was to maintain one or more perpetual lamps). So the temple household might be subject to inspections by officials, local magnates and local communities.

I came across 10 inscriptions from the X<sup>th</sup> century, narrating about such inspections, 10 inscriptions from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, 3 – from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the Pandyan times, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, inspections continued [ARE, 624 of 1926 (SII, XIII, no. 86, p. 54-55); 432 of 1929 (SII, XII, no. 199, p. 120); SII, XII, no. 158, p. 89; IPS, no. 434, 435].

Different officials might understand the interests of the temple differently. Therefore sometimes the decisions as to distribution of payments and salaries in a temple were changed by a new official (ARE, 21, 22 of 1922).

But the control from the side of a power (through an official or any other outsider) was not absolute. In 1195 c.e. Kullotunga III tried to appoint two hereditary priests (*uṣaivacarya-k-kani*), but a Svamidevar annul this order and appointed to these posts whom he counted to be fit (ARE, 40 of 1906. 1907).

In the Pallava and the early Chola times *agraharas* played the leading role in donations, land transfers and redistribution of resources as a whole. But later on the temple became the main agent in these spheres, and *agraharas*, it seems, partially lost their significance. According to some calculations, under Rajendra I (1012-1045) 36% of inscriptions speak of *brahmadeyas*, and under Rajaraja III (1216-1260) – only 14% [Stein, 1980: 244].

Conformably with the general tendencies of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century temples in Tamilnadu were establishing contacts with the similar institutions. In 1195 c.e. *maheṣvarar* of 18 *mandalams* (“countries”) met to decide some questions [ARE, 33 of 1924, p. 106]. In 1232 c.e. *maheṣvarar* of Chidambaram temple declared that it is necessary to lay a duty on every temple servants all over Tamilnadu (ARE, 537 of 1923, p. 107)

**Self-governing institutions in cities** arrived in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century [ARE, 206 of 1939/40 (SII, I, 124: V, 540 (740 c.e., North Arcot)].

During the Pallava period we know not more than 10 *nagarams*. In Chola times their number is near to a 100. In Pandya period the general number of self-governing cities were diminishing, but they arrived at the extreme South – in Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelvely districts.

The *nagarattar*, unlike the *yyar*, *nammar* and the *sabha*, was not a one-caste organization. This council or assembly included definitely not all of the city dwellers but people of various castes: traders, brahmans and possibly artisans

[ARE, 118 of 1888 (SII, IV, no. 223: EI, XXII, no. 24, p. 146); 863 of 1917 (SII, XIII, no. 42, p. 33). See also SII, V, no. 465].

*Nagarattar* were sometimes proclaimed as the owners of the city. They had “inheritable property” on it (*nagara-k-kani*) (ARE, 264 of 1943/44).

They owned agricultural land on various conditions: as upper proprietors (receivers of taxes), and as lower proprietors (managers of agricultural production). For instance, the *nagarattar* of Mammalapuram received taxes from 50 townships [SII, I, no. 40] and at the same time had their own land which they might redistribute among the families [SII, I, p. 65-66 (1010 CE); see also ARE, 441 of 1912. 1913, p. 108]. In 1204 c.e. another *nagarattars* determined the boundaries of their fields [ARE, 386 of 1959/60].

*Nagarattar* were making donations to brahmins and temples, sometimes in a form of imposts on commodities they were trading with. As other communities, city assemblies themselves determined the rates of taxes and customs they agree to pay [ARE, 365, 367 of 1924 (SII, XIII, no. 208, 215, p. 113, 117)]. And if their proposals were not complied with, they were ready to leave their township [ARE, 375 of 1902 (SII, VII, no. 1005)]. One merchant was officially permitted to define customs on his goods except salt [ARE, 309 of 1968/69].

They acted independently or in collaboration with other communities. They might be arbiters in disputes between brahmins’ and *uyudras*’ townships (ARE, 402, 403 of 1916. 1917).

In the XIII<sup>th</sup> century contacts between cities became more developed and widespread. Rather often several cities of various locations made joint donations or came to some other decisions (ARE, 508 of 1922. 1923, p. 105).

Some inscriptions permit to argue in terms of associations of cities [ARE, 140, 490 of 1909. 1910: 125 of 1935/36]. An inscription of the XII<sup>th</sup> century from Ramanathapuram allows to suppose that all the *nagarams* of Tamilnadu maintained some contacts between themselves ([ARE, 154 of 1903 (SII, VIII, no. 442)].

**Supralocal trading corporations or guilds** arrived in the Pallava period and became numerous and socially appreciable later on.

The most important of them was Ayyavole, which received the name from the city of Aihole, situated in the territory between Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers. It was an *agrahara*, governed by *mahajanans*, who preferred to call themselves “500 *svamis*”. They turned to mercantile business, retaining their brahmin status, and spreading their activity over Karnataka, Andhra and Tamilnadu, having their bases mainly in *agraharas*. They often call themselves “five hundred from thousand directions” (*tiuuai-y-ayiratt-aizzubbuvar*) [EI, XXVIII, no. 43-a, p. 267-272].

The Ayyavole played the role of a unifying organization for many, sometimes up to ten different guilds [ARE, 256 of 1912. 1913, p. 36: 359 of 1904, 154 of 1903 (SII, XVII, no. 442); EI, V, p. 23: XIX, no. 4].

Puzzling to some extent are their relations to *citrameḥi-periya-nammar* (“great *nammar* of the excellent plough”), to whom we shall come a little later. One of these organizations was definitely a trading one, the other not less definitely – an agricultural one. But both of them not once operated together and had nearly the same *praṣṭasti* (eulogy), in which was said, that they have as their symbol a plough and a bag of a pedlar. The bloom of their activity falls on the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, later the number of inscriptions, mentioning the Ayyavole, become less, although they are met up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At all we have more than 150 inscriptions, depicting their actions.

There are other corporations, among which one may mention weavers (*uḷaliyar* and *kaikkolar*) [ARE, 300 of 1909. 1910, p. 98: 269, 308 of 1913. 1914 (SII, XII, no. 154, p. 82); 609 of 1919. 1920, p. 117], oil-mongers of 24 towns [ARE, 261 of 1909. 1910, p. 94], *padineḥ-bhymi vāṇiya-nagarattar* [ARE, 264 of 1942/43 (SII, VI, no. 553: EI, XXXI, p. 269-276)], or *padineḥ-viṇṇayattar* [ARE, 268 of 1943/44], *uṅkara-p-paḍi* [ARE, 285 of 1959/60: SII, III, no. 65, p. 135-136: VI, no. 363: IV, no. 223], *rathakaras* of 18 countries [ARE, 198 of 1925; 125, 522 of 1937/38: SII, VI, no. 439].

Very much probable, that the last of these terms was the other, sanscritized, name of the *kammalar* – the conglomerate of the five main artisan’s castes – of smiths, carpenters, braziers, masons and potters. They are mentioned in the same places and also pretend to represent “18 cities” or many *naḍus* [ARE, 124 of 1937/38: 201 of 1932/33, p. 70].

From the XII-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries we have several inscriptions, testifying, that merchants as an estate had a rather high status, and some groups of artisans also were in a strife for their rights. The merchant guilds established their bases on main trading ways (*eḇivurapminnam*, “towns of heroes”) [IA, XIV, p. 25; ARE, 256, 342 of 1912. 1913, p. 36, 99-100: 335, 348 of 1916: 213 of 1976/77], which had some garrisons and secured more or less safe moving over a country. Some traders received rights to use umbrellas, to walk on a carpet, to be moved in a palanquin, to have a multistoried house, to have an adorned arch, to light a lamp in a daytime, to use a drum in family festivals and to use other “five instruments” [Hall (1980), p. 147-148 ]. These were signs of a “noble” status in Indian understanding.

*Rathakaras* and *kaikkolas* achieved documentary confirmations of their “pure origin” [ARE, 479 of 1908. 1909, p. 94-95; 508 of 1922, p. 105].

The guilds and castes were managing their internal affairs independently. As public organizations they presumably might weaken the callous oppression of a state. But they sometimes became not less oppressive on their members, than the

king's collectors. In 1122 c.e. the guild of *palli* issued an inscription in which they glorify their achievements and generosity. They decided to provide a temple with rice and money. For this purpose they introduced a due in rice and money from each family of their community. This charitable, religious in essence due was collecting with extreme cruelty: collectors were acting, "grabbing utensils, breaking pots and demanding arrears" (ARE, 35 of 1913, p. 115).

Two copper-plates of 1304/05 c.e. inform us that a guild sentenced to death a member on false accusation in treason. He was executed, but later on it appeared that he was innocent. The guild admitted its mistake, gifted to the family of the victim the right of duty-free trade in compensation, and simultaneously prized its another member for his killing of two impious toll-collectors (ARE, A-10, 11 of 1919).

In the 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries there arrive two more institutions equally looking important for understanding of a social texture and puzzling. I have in mind, first, the dividing of Tamil castes into "**right-hand**" and "**left-hand**" groups (***valakkai*** and ***itakkai***) and the creation of a broad association of persons connected with agriculture, which took to themselves many functions of territorial and professional communities, *citrameṣi-periya-nammar*.

As to the first phenomenon, I shall not analyze it, and wish to limit myself with a quotation from R.Champakalakshmi: "This division has baffled all attempts at a clear definition of caste grouping" [Champakalakshmi, 1986: 51]. For me this phenomena is meaningful as an index not of division, but of consolidation of castes. Inscriptions of them invariably speak of joint decisions of "96 castes", or "98 castes" and about defense of their common rights. Sometimes "right" and "left" groups advanced together [ARE, 489 of 1912. 1913, p. 109; 34 of 1913: 229, 231, 232 of 1932/33, p. 68-69; 204 of 1949/50: 355 of 1950/51: EC, X, no. 49-a, p. 86-87].

Isolated inscriptions mentioning *citrameṣi-periya-nammar* appear in the end of 11<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 12<sup>th</sup> centuries [ARE, 178, 183, 188 of 1973/74]. In the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> and in the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries their inscriptions become rather often. Later on they disappeared. They issued their inscriptions quite independently of any authority and very often did not mention even the name of a contemporary king; therefore troubles arose in dating of these inscriptions.

As they were *nammars* of an "excellent plough", called themselves "the sons of the earth" (*pymiputtirar*), worshipped the Goddess of Earth (*Bhumidevi*), they looks as "peasants", in any case agriculturists. But at the same time they consisted "of [all] four castes" and their symbols were a plough, and a bag of a pedlar. As was said earlier, they acted jointly with mercantile guilds. Their *prauṣṭi* spoke of their power, as if they ruled the country [ARE, 117 of 1900 (SII, VII, no, 129); 189 of 1938/39, p. 82: SII, V, no. 496: VIII, no. 291, 442].

For our purpose it is important to stress, that this was one of indications of strengthening ties between various localities and guilds (castes) in efforts to establish a social order with equilibrium of state and communities.

**The problem of subordination of all these communities to the central power** serves a matter of discussion, because inscriptional evidences are discrepant. From one side, there are many titles and denominations of posts, mentioned in inscriptions, which may presume a far flung network of bureaucracy. Indian historians as a rule see “an official” in every title holder met in inscriptions.

The enumeration of various “officials” is especially rich in so called address formula by which a king informed all the concerned persons about a donation. This formula, used by many dynasties, mainly in Northern India and the Deccan, creates an impression that we receive in this list of titles and posts a full enumeration of the real royal bureaucracy. I have already written that these lists reproduce not a real hierarchy of posts, but an “administrative myth”, a predominant notion of what the state arrangement should be (Alayev, 1985).

In early Pallava inscriptions, issued in Andhra, kings addressed to various officials: *ayuktaka*, *naiyoka*, *rajavallabha*, *mahamatr-adhyakua*, *rajapuruuua* [IP, no. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 45, 53]. But since the Pallavas penetrated into Tamilnadu and consolidated their power there, they sharply changed the formulae of inscriptions and stopped addressing the “officials”. Of course, that fact could not be interpreted in the sense, that the Pallavas had the bureaucratic system earlier, and afterwards refused to maintain it. Much more probable that earlier they followed an administrative myth, borrowed from Northern India, and later on started to base their formulae more on Tamil realities.

In the Chola period we have another dichotomy, which needs explanation. From one side, we have several thousand inscriptions fixing movement of land – sales and purchases, grants and endowments. And in almost all of them no procedure for juridical confirmation of the deed was provided for and the area of land in question was indicated extremely loosely – in round numbers (10 *velis*, 1000 *kuḥis* and so on). Remember also, that practical allotment of land was made not by any officer of revenue or land measurement departments, but by the *nammar*, i.e. by the heads of local people. We met also with straight instructions that no need of registration of alienation of land in any office was necessary [SII, III, no. 171, p. 154-155 (1090 c.e.)].

From the other side, there are literally a dozen of inscriptions, in which the state bureaucracy looks as overwhelmingly big,<sup>4</sup> and another dozen, where each plot of

<sup>4</sup>These are two inscriptions by Madhurantaka Chola of 956 c.e. [SII, III, no. 151, p. 312] and of 963 c.e. [ARE, 286 of 1906; SII, III, no.142, p. 289-293]; so called Large Leiden Plates by Rajaraja I of 1005 c.e. [EI, XXII, p. 213-268]; plates by Rajendra I of 1053 c.e. [ASI, 1903/04, p. 233-235; SII, III, no. 265, p. 426-439]; by Virarajendra of 1069 c.e. [ARE, 1916, p. 118; EI, XXI, no. 38, p. 220-250]



land is measured with unnecessary and unpractical precision (up to several square centimeters). These are the famous Rajaraja I grants to the “Imperial” temple in Tanjavur (SII, III, no. 4, 5, 529) and some others. The inscription by Rajadhiraja I of 1053 c.e. looks especially artificial and reduce the problem to the level of insanity. In it we are told that the document of land grant goes through 70 officials during 52 days before being implemented in the place [Srinivas, 1985; 89-105].

In spite of these very detailed presentations of bureaucratic mechanism, N.Karashima one of the best experts in Chola inscriptions, lamented on poorness of evidences on the Chola administrative system (Karashima, 1984: XXI).

Enumerations of taxes which are met in several inscriptions show that there was no state-wise system of taxation [Karashima, 1984: 69-93, 105-128]. Rates of taxes, mentioned in some inscriptions, are so different, that up to now no one of the researchers produced any definite notion of the dimensions of taxation. Land measures, length of a measuring pole, rate of money exchange were subjected to change by will of local magnates, so no uniform system of revenue collection could exist.

65 texts (out of 4000 published Chola inscriptions) speak of classifying of taxable lands according to some of their qualifications in 20 and odd categories (*taram*) which received numbers. First, we can not presume that this enumeration was introduced all over the Chola dominion [Subbarayalu, 1977: 341-346]. Second, it is clear from inscriptions, that even in one and the same village a part of land was classified, and another was not [SII, XXIII, p. 375]. Third, this classification was always in the process of change. Plots of land were transferring from one *taram* to another without visible reason [ARE, 186 of 1917: 11, 176, 178, 188, 198 of 1919; 239 of 1922: SII, IV, no. 508: XIX, no. 378: XXIII, no. 303]

At last, inscriptions convey contradictory data about connection of the rate of taxes and the number of the *taram*. In some cases one may understand, that the numeration went from better sorts of land down to worse, and in other cases – in opposite way<sup>5</sup>.

One can receive an impression that each locality (and each village?) had their own system of classification of land. More than this, R. Tirumalai came to the conclusion, that “No exact ratio could (be) really established between the classification and assessment” (Tirumalai, 1987: 103).

Under the Pandyas assessment “according *tarams*” are met even more rarely [ARE, 303, 304 of 1960/61: SII, V, no. 413, 414].

Not once rates of taxes were determined not by central government officials and not by local magnates, but by social organizations, i.e. by representatives of

<sup>5</sup>Compare [ARE, 262 of 1913] and [SII, XXIV, no. 57]

tax-payers themselves. For instance, by *yr* [ARE, 8 of 1946/47 (993 CE); 593 of 1916. 1917] and by *naḍu* [ARE, 147, 150 of 1935/36: see also 591 of 1908].

One of *yrs* decided that they “would not pay any additional taxes except for the temple and the king. If anybody would pay them, he would be expelled and would be considered below dogs and pigs” [ARE, 282 of 1943/44]. One of *naḍus* in Pandya period declared: “We shall not fulfill any arbitrary orders of king’s officials” [ARE, 282 of 1943/44].

All communities had their own defense forces. Mercantile caravans were accompanied by armed personnel; villages were armed to a man. “Stones of heroes”, remained from those times, mention names of persons perished in defense of a village or cattle of the village. Among them headmen and watchmen were mentioned, but also agriculturists, artisans, washermen and others [ARE, 411 of 1912].

Village assemblies could receive the right of defense of an *agrahara* or a city and of corresponding payment for this (ARE, 65, 166, 173 of 1927).

Maintenance of law and order was a responsibility of local social organizations. There was no state police. A state had no monopoly to use violence.

In this connection it is very important, that a state did not pretend that it was the source of justice and the sole distributor of punishments. Even in cases of capital crimes they were scrutinized in local customary courts [ARE, 64 of 1900 (SII, VII, no. 68); 77, 372 of 1906: 279 of 1927: A-10, 11 of 1919 IPS, no. 176: Santhalingam, 1999; 97], and fines by convicts were paid not to the state, but to a temple [ARE, 301 of 1923. 1924: 194 of 1927/28 (SII, XII, no. 224, p. 138); IPS, no. 156].

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In South India, at least in Tamilnadu, in VI-XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries sprang up a very peculiar, may be a unique, socio-political structure. A state existed in a situation of strong communities and other social organizations, acting mainly independently of central power. This structure should not be analyzed in terms of confrontation between centralizing and decentralizing forces. From one side, nothing juridical could restrict a central power to interfere into local or corporative life, to redistribute land, to abolish any proprietary right. From the other side, there existed wide spheres where a state influence was really absent.

Equally this situation cannot be understood as a survival of a primordial order or as a stage of development from a primitive to a state society. The notorious “Indian village community”, “a little republic”, did not exist “from the times immemorial”. At least one of them sprang up literally before our eyes. In 1232 c.e. 7 persons (not relatives) bought a village, and after 3 years they appeared as the *yr* – full-fledged village assembly [ARE, 136, 137 of 1923]. Many (I believe,

that all of) communities had rather late origin and in the considered ages were strengthening and not diminishing their social roles. Simultaneously a state became stronger and bureaucratic machinery became more complex. Feudal features of the social order also were developing (I in this paper did not pay them proper attention). So the perspectives of the society were various. In Vijayanagara period the bureaucratic-feudal model won. This is outside the topic of present paper.

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