



FEUDALISM AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE PULAYAS IN TRAVANCORE

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ABSTRACT:

The erstwhile state of Travancore, situated in Southern-most part of Indian peninsula. The ancient history of Travancore is the history of the larger Unit of Kerala.¹ The Travancore state covered an area of 7625 square miles stretching from Cochin to Cape Commerin, between 8^o4' and 10^o 22' north latitude and between 76^o13' and 77^o33', east longitude. Its extreme length from north to south was 174 miles.² Although this tract of land was small in size it was famous for its vast stretches of paddy fields, rich forests and mineral sands.

KEYWORDS: Pulayas, Agriculture, Forests & Minerals.

INTRODUCTION:

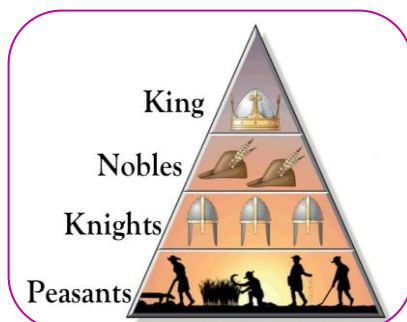
The class division which started in the early Sangam period became prominent only in the post sangam age with the development of productive factors. In the 4th Century A.D., the Aryans Culture and religion came to Travancore. Moreover the development of agriculture and corresponding works further strengthened the base of the class life in Travancore. New divisions on the basis of occupation was emerged. However those who were engaged in religious duties, agriculture, trade and administration became the upper class and those who had no property but worked in land as serfs or slaves became the lower class. It was the ascendancy of Brahmins that led to the feudalistic agrarian relations in Travancore.³

EVOLUTION OF FEUDALISM

The Kings right on the cultivated land was limited to *rajabhogam*.⁴ They used to donate cultivable lands to the Brahmins, poets, learned men for the performance of rituals and festivals associated with temples.⁵ The recipients were in course of time exempted from paying the *rajabhogam*. With the Ordinary peasants also began to transfer their lands in large members to the *devaswoms*⁶ and the *brahmaswoms*.⁷ Subsequently there formed a gradual process of Conversion of temple lands into Brahmin lands. Thus the Brahmins (upper class people) came to acquire the status of wealthy and powerful land lords or *jenmis*.⁸

Most of the people of Travancore were the lower class or agriculturists. It seems to suppose that the *jenmis* took for themselves all land nearest to their dwellings and that the distant mountainous and jungle tracts were ownerless till the states grew up and acquired proprietary rights over them. The ruling

Chiefs must have been claimed these tracts as their own along with others acquired by them and granted them to the ryots for cultivation. Generally, the lands were classified into two types on the basis of ownership. They were *jenmivaka* (jenmom lands) and *pattommvaka*. The *jenmivaks* lands belonged to the private landlords while the Government was considered the sole proprietpr of the *pattommvaka* lands. The *jenmis* created types of subordinate tenures under them from Verumpattom.⁹ The most important of such tenures was the *kanappattom* tenure.¹⁰ *Pattommvaka* lands were till 1040 M.E. (1865



A.D.) the absolute property of the Government, and the holders had till then no proprietary rights or even transferable rights of occupancy. The holders were in such cases were tenants-at-will and had no permanent interest in the properties concerned.¹²

The traditional society in Travancore was in the form of feudalism. It all began with the establishment of royal control over communal lands. Royal ownership accorded the king, the liberty to transferred to the temples. Due to the subsistence nature of the economy, all services were later rewarded with land grants and it further accelerated the process of feudalism.¹³ In course of time the number of land grants became multiplied and feudalism became an essential institution, holding enormous powers and profound influence. In the feudal Society, the land owners commanded absolute authority over their tenants. Land ownership granted them economic superiority, social tyranny, political power and ritual status. Feudal obligations and pressure of circumstance enhanced their authority over their social inferiors. Thus the society was divided and segregated into haves and have-nots. The caste, class and power positions were attributed according to their economic importance.

ECONOMIC DISABILITIES

In the early years, the society in Travancore was feudal and caste-ridden. It remained the mad house of untouchability, inapproachability and unseeability. The entire Hindu society was broadly divided into two main divisions namely the *Savarnas* (High castes) and the *Avarnas* (low castes). The Nambudiris or Malayala Brahmins, The Tamil Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Nairs belonged to the high castes. The Ezhavas, the shannars, the pulayas and Parayas were grouped under low castes. All kinds of freedom and liberty were denied to the low castes and they had no right to personal safety and freedom. Thus, the caste system stipulated unlimited power to the high casts to exploit the lower castes, slave trade was practiced in Travancore, slaves were not only bought and sold, but also mortgaged like animals.

The Pulayas one of the prominent lower class people in Travancore had suffered all sorts of socio-Economic disabilities from the time immortal. According to Tamil Lexicon (1982), 'Pulam' means 'arable land' and ricefield. They were also known as cherumar or cherumakkal. They have been defined as a caste of agricultural serfs and members of an inferior caste in Malabar, who were as a rule, tillers attached to the soil.¹⁴ Traditionally they were treated as the hereditary slaves of the soil.

TYPES OF SLAVERY

In ancient times slaves were held in three kinds of tenure. The first was *jenmom* or sale where the full value of the sale was given and the property transferred to a new master who was in some measure bound by his interest to the welfare of his slaves. The second manner of transferring the labour of slaves was by *kanom* or mortgage. The properties who received a loan of money generally two thirds of the value of the slaves and small quantity of paddy to show resume his right over them existed. He might also resume his property in the slaves whenever he was pleased to repay the money borrowed without payment of interest.¹⁵ The third method of employing slaves was by letting them on pattom or rent.¹⁶ The traditional slave castes were the agricultural labourers like Parayas and Pulayas and the total number of slaves in Travancore in 1647 was 165,000.¹⁷

ULIYAM AND VIRUTHI

Uliyam and *Viruthi* represent two of the feudal systems established that undermined the vitals of freedom in the state of Travancore. *Uliyam* means labour without any remuneration and *viruthi* in a tenure that comes under the same category. Under these system, the agriculturists from the Pulaya and Paraya Communities were mercilessly oppressed under primitive rules by the village officials.¹⁸ The members of these communities were obliged to supply provisions to the palace, temples and *uttupuras* and render *Uliyam* Service during temple festivals, palace ceremonies and royal tours.

The slave were subjected to oppression and the freedom given to workers of other industries was denied to them. The Government was so adamant and proved to be very cruel in proceeding against those

who were not willing to perform *Uliyam* services. Punishments such as confinement to cages fitted with spikes, whipping, forcing to eat salt or tamarind in high quantity, chaining with trees and flogging, wearing of fire-locks and paying of fare were meted out to those who tried to escape *Uliyam* and *Viruthi* Services.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

In the feudal system of Travancore, the Pulayas were hereditary slaves who attached with the soil. They had no civic and economic rights. The socio-economic system of Travancore led to the rise of *jenmi* system. It became the exclusive privilege of the caste Hindu Brahmins and Nayers to be *jenmies*. The lower-castes or the pulayas who were given the land on lease were employed as labourer for the cultivation of the lands, could be evicted at will. Thousands of agricultural labourers became agricultural slaves attached to the soil and were brought and sold like cattles. Personal services like the *Uliyam* and the *Viruthi* also compulsory for the Pulayas.

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4. Rajabhogam was the share of the land revenue of the Kind.
5. Elankulam Kujan Pillai.P.N., Janmi Sambradayam Keralathil (mal.), kottayam, 1959, p.78.
6. Devaswoms lands belonged to the pagodas or religion institution founded and endowed by Brahmins.
7. Brahmins land were the exclusive property of Brahmins.
8. Sreedhara Menon.A., Cultural Heritage of Kerala: An introduction, Trivandrum, 1978, p.205
9. Verumpattom tenure was simple lease under which tenant was nearly a cultivator by the will of the landlord liable to be evicted by the latter at any time.
10. Kanappattam tenure is a combination of a lease and mortgage lease.
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