UNIT 18 RURAL SOCIETY: PENINSULAR INDIA

Structure

18.0 INTRODUCTION

The rural society was not uniform in nature. It differed from region to region in the specific structure of caste, organization of work and distribution of land. There were different types of habitations and settlements that influenced the nature of the rural society. There were peasant villages and non-peasant villages (brahman dominated village). There was single caste and multi-caste villages. In the Tamil region, *brahmadeyas* were Brahman dominated villages and *vellan-vagai urar* or agrarian settlements were predominantly non-brahamnical villages. Both influenced the respective characters of the rural society. (Kesavan Veluthat, 1993.). Villages were also bi-lingual or trilingual. For instance, Dewara in the tribal district of Adilabad in Andhra Pradesh has Marathi and Telugu speaking Hindus and Muslims and three separate tribal groups.

In medieval period, new villages were constantly formed. People were migrating from one place to another. Forest lands were constantly cleared and brought under cultivation and new groups were made to settle down and tribes were transformed into settled peasant groups. All these changes influenced the structure of the rural society. Even the boundaries of the villages differed ranging from natural boundaries like rivers, fields and mountains to artificial or imagined ones, based on caste or community privileges. Several villages with growing population and economic prosperity developed into towns and urban centres. For instance, in the Tamil region several temple towns like Chidambaram and Kanchipuram were originally large agrarian settlements.

All the factors, viz., social organization, size, population and occupation contributed towards the multiple natures of the rural societies. However, despite differences in the rural societies of each village, a common pattern emerges, where the rural elites were mostly priests and landed classes. Social privileges varied according to the social rank and this was related to the rights and control over land.

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18.1 STRUCTURE OF THE RURAL SOCIETY

The rural society had a stratified and complex structure. The social relations based on caste comprised of relations between brahmanas, non-brahamans and other menial castes. Generally the landed classes belonged to the upper castes. However, there were several landed classes (like Kunbis) who did not have a high caste status but were powerful in the village. The peasants belonged to the lower castes and the rural labourers, who were landless, belonged to the menial castes. Such castes are called 'dominant castes', a concept evolved by the famous anthropologist, M.N. Srinivas. According to him, "A caste is dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area, and economically and politically exercises a preponderant influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking….thus any caste can be dominant, one does not see this in case of untouchables." Though this study is based on contemporary anthropological field analysis of the Okkaligas, a 'dominant peasant caste' in Rampura village of Karnataka, it has relevance for the medieval period too. Caste groups like Reddis, Kammas were not ritually high caste, but wielded power on the basis of superior land rights and the authority to collect taxes on behalf of the state. Hence, in this manner, they were the dominant castes.

Caste relations stratified the rural society on ritual basis. Even within the peasants, there were numerous castes and sub-castes. High peasant castes like the Velalas and Thakurs rarely tilled the land themselves and hired wage labourers and sharecroppers. Within the same peasant caste also there was differentiation. One of the most significant ways in which caste influenced the rural society was evident in the settlement patterns. There were separate settlements of brahmanas, non-brahmanas and menial castes. In South India, such segregated settlements can be seen till day. Although these relations were governed by norms and values of the rural society, the state also played a significant role in shaping these relations. For instance, in the relation between the landholders and the tenant, the state evolved a complex revenue extracting mechanism that altered and influenced the agrarian relations.

Other important rural classes who were poor artisans, service castes and other occupational groups largely designated as *bara-balutas* in the Deccan and and *ayas* in South India. They belonged to the lower end of the rural hierarchy.

Despite kinship relations within the caste that contributed to caste solidarities, one should not assume that castes were self-sufficient units. They were economically or otherwise also interdependent. It was not always that the traditional structure of caste had stranglehold over the rural society. The economic relations often freed itself from the caste system. The *jajmani* system, also known as *balutedari* in Maharashtra and *ayas* in Karnataka involved a network of economic relationship and reciprocity between various castes in a hierarchical manner, between the landlords and occupational specialists breaking the myth of caste as self-sufficient unit within the village. Political and economic changes further influenced the caste equations within the rural society, when one group replaced another as the powerful landed elites. For instance, in a village called Ukkal situated in the lower Kaveri valley of the Tamil region, the brahmanas were prosperous landholders controlling the agricultural production till twelfth century. However, by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, they were selling their lands. The immediate cause was the heavy taxation imposed by the Vijayanagar rulers. But the decline of this prosperous *brahmadeya* 'should be viewed in the context of agrarian change, particularly differentiation in agrarian society during this period.' The non-brahmanas bought the land in Ukkal, thereby emerging as new local magnates of the village towards the end of Chola rule. (Noboru Karashima, 1992, p.121). Socio-religious movements with their respective ideologies based primarily on *bhakti* undermined the caste status and threw open various avenues for social mobility within the rural society and influenced the changes within the caste structure.

18.2 THE RURAL SOCIETY AND THE LARGER WORLD

The rural society had always been a part of the wider economy. Many landlords lived outside the village. The *moqasadars* and *jagirdars* had administrative functions within the village, but lived in cities and towns. Since revenue was usually collected in cash, the agricultural surplus was sold outside the village in the markets. In fact, markets provided a space for not only economic, but social interactions between various individuals of different villages. Occupational castes within the villages provided service to the village, but other occupational castes came from outside on occasions like fairs, festivals, marriages and temple worship and rendered services.

While kinship ties strengthened the caste groups within the village, they also cut across the village boundaries fostering social relations between villagers, linking members of every caste to people in other villages. In north India, marriages took place outside the village. This is called exogamy, through which 'extensive' ties were created. But in south India, marriages took place within the same village or nearby villages, with certain near relatives, like cross cousins (father's sister's daughter or son) and cross niece (sister's daughter). This is called endogamy and the ties were 'intensive', operating within a limited social space.

Since the state considered village as a revenue unit and assigned administrative duties primarily, of collecting taxes to various officers and village elites, hence a political network was constantly evolving linking the individual members of the rural society to people occupying various administrative positions within and outside the village. The role of the village community was also seen to be important in this respect.

A village at times had a ritual space like a temple or a Sufi shrine that not only attracted people of that village but also attracted devotees from other villages too. In such a common religious arena, the caste distinctions of the rural society were often blurred.

Thus the rural society of a village was not isolated and self-sufficient. The outside world of cities and politics influenced the rural life in many ways. In fact, it is difficult to separate the internal activities of the village from the external. The rural society becomes the context for meeting and interaction between various larger political, economic and social forces.

18.3 RURAL SOCIETY: DECCAN

The term used for village in medieval Deccan was *ganva*, *mauje* or *deh*. A bigger village that included a market place was called *kasbe*. The cultivable area comprising of black soil was known as *kali*. *Kali* was divided into blocks called *thal* (derived from Sanskrit word, *sthal*) or land and each *thal* was named after its original proprietor. *Thal* consisted of fields called *shet* or *set* (Sanskrit is *kshetra*) or *zamin*. The inhabited area called *pandhari* comprised of white soil that was unfit for cultivation. The *pandhari* was divided into house-sites, *gharthana* or *gharthikana*, each of which was owned by the *patil* (village headman) and his family, other village officers, peasants and village servants and artisans. When a family left the village and migrated, its land was called *gatkul* (*gat* means gone and *kul* means a lineage or a family) and the house site and the house left behind was called *gatkul gharthana* and *gatkulvada* respectively. Around the cultivable area were the meadows (*kuran*). It was meant for common village use and was called people's meadow (*lokacha kuran*).

18.3.1 Composition of the Rural Society

The rural society of Deccan consisted of primarily five groups:

1) The large landholders who held administrative positions in the village. They were primarily the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes*.

2) Village officers such as the headman or *patil* and *muqaddam*, accountant or *kulkarni* and so on.

3) Proprietary peasants called *mirasdars* or *thalkari* or *thalvaik*.

4) Temporary peasants called *uparis*.

5) Village servants and artisans collectively called *balutedars*.

The *patil* usually belonged to the peasant caste of Kunbis that later came to be assimilated into the Maratha caste. The accountant was generally a *brahmana* and the *balutedars* were usually menials or untouchables. The upper strata of the rural society thus comprised of the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils* and *kulkarni* collectively forming the *zamindar* class and were therefore the rural aristocracy. With large income from the land tenures they maintained large forts and a private army. There was a class of outsiders who served the village residents, but had no status within the rural society. In course of time they became an integral part of the village.

One of the important phenomenon that shaped the rural society in Deccan was the settlement of new villages by bringing land under cultivation. Several Marathi chronicles give us an account of how various lands were settled into villages and the groups involved in this process, who ultimately occupied the village. The settlement of a village called Murud in the Konkan area refers to the first settlers being the Chitpavan *brahmanas* who were granted lands by the king. The documents of Murud describe the members of the rural society. They were rural officers with social and religious duties. *Yavanas* i.e. the Muslims were provided with land on the outskirts of the village where they could build their houses and mosque. Another category of Muslims called the *Navayats* came from the West Coast and settled in the village. Occupational groups like the *sonar* (goldsmith), *gavada* (fisherman), *kumbhar* (potter), *parit* (washerman) and several others were mentioned in the Murud chronicle. Another example is of the Pune region which was a part of Shahji's (Shivaji's father) *jagir*. The region became desolate due to the famines of 1630-31 and invasions of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur. According to the Marathi chronicle, the manager of the *jagir* requested the Mavalas, i.e. a hilly tribe to kill the wild animals and robbers, cut down the forest and settle these areas for cultivation. In return for their service, they would be suitably rewarded. The chronicle states that the manager gave them a legal document ensuring their permanent settlement. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, 'The Indian Village: With Special Reference to Medieval Deccan', General Presidential Address, *Indian History Congress*, Fifty Second Session, Delhi)

In Eastern Deccan, in the region of the Kakatiyas of Warangal (AD 1000-1326) in Andhra Pradesh, the expansion of the agrarian base and transformation of the rural society involved construction of new temples. Such constructions required endowments of land to the temple for the maintenance of the priests, various temple servants and requirements for the worship of the deity. Numerous donations of land, especially the uncultivated forests, were made by the local chiefs, merchants, and the members of the royal family. For example, Mailamba, the sister of the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati was responsible for founding three villages. These lands were cleared of forest, irrigation tanks were built on them and cultivation was initiated. Several tribes who inhabited these forests became peasants and incorporated into the lower rung of the rural society. The *brahamana* functionaries of the temple as well the *brahamana* landholding class remained at the upper end of the hierarchy. The chieftains and their local lineage groups also formed a substantial part of the rural elite. Thus, the

construction of the temples, donation of land and building of irrigation tanks resulted in an increase in the rural population. The temple served as the 'social and political integrator'. It employed the peasants, artisans and pastoralist on the temple lands and for various temple activities and incorporated these different communities of the rural society within a single framework of religion. (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, *Pre-colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, OUP, Delhi. p.93-106).

18.3.2 Land and Social Hierarchy in the Rural Society

Land and landed rights were the basis on which the various sections in the rural society enjoyed privileges and acquired a certain status. It also defined the relations between the different sections in the village and established a rural hierarchy and stratification. There were six kinds of landed tenures and rights associated with them.

1) *Mirasi* **Tenure**: Originally an Arabic word, *mirasi* meant 'patrimony' or hereditary property'. Therefore, a *mirasdar* held proprietary rights on his *miras* lands. Usually *mirasdars* and their kin groups were the original settlers of the village. Even the state could not infringe upon the *mirasi* rights. In case of infringement of these rights by the village headman, the state would intervene on behalf of the *mirasdars* to stop such violations. If the *miras* holders left the village and returned after a long gap, they and their descendants could reclaim the land by paying the due compensation to the government. Their names were not removed from the village records because according to the tradition, land belonged to those who reclaimed it first and brought it under cultivation.

   The *mirasdar* peasants belonged to the Kunbi caste and were permanent residents of the village. They regularly paid land revenue to the state. Though it was not a frequent practice, they could sell their own land. This can be seen from sixteenth century onwards. In the eighteenth century, the village headmen could appropriate the wasteland of their villages as *miras* land and the village assembly could dispose off the wastelands as *miras* lands through sale or gift to the willing peasants.

   The *mirasdars* were influential members of the village community and participated in the deliberations of the "village *panchayats* and *gotsabhas* with their symbol 'plough' being affixed on all the *mahajars* (decisions) for attestation". (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.33) They were mostly the rural rich. For instance, the Reddis of Eastern Deccan lived in stone houses and their women wore gold and silver jewellery and the Maratha peasants of the Western Deccan even had one or two slaves in the eighteenth century. (*The Cambridge Economic History of India*, p.472).

2) *Upari* **Tenure**: Peasants in this case were the temporary residents of the village. They usually migrated from their native villages under duress, like famines, destruction due to wars and other calamities. Many of them were tenants on the *mirasi* and *inam* lands. Thus, *upari* tenure was a temporary one and its holder was a tenant-at-will. They also held land on lease. *Upari* peasants could become *mirasdars* on payment of a regular fee, *nazrana*, to the state.

   In the seventeenth century, the number of *upari* peasants was small. However, in the eighteenth century their population increased. This was because of the conscious policy of agrarian expansion under the Peshwas in Maharashtra. For expanding cultivation, peasants were needed. Therefore, several *upari* peasants were mobilized from other villages. Incentives in the form of privileges and concessions were promised provided they brought land under cultivation. They were allowed to build their houses on the border of the village and were exempted from house-tax and forced labour. Consequently, numerous peasant groups migrated to the Maratha region in the eighteenth century.

3) **State Lands**: was called *sarkarchi sheri*, *sherichen shet*, *khalisa jamin*. These were scattered all over in various villages in the Deccan. State lands were granted in *inam* or allowed for house-sites or were cultivated.

4) **Inam Land Tenure**: *Inam* is an Arabic word and means a 'gift'. This was not service tenure but a reward for the services rendered to the village, like religious duties, administrative duties and works of social welfare. An *inam* was created by an agreement called the *inam patra* or *karar* between the state and the individuals. *Inam* lands were held on hereditary basis by an individual or a particular institution. Village officials like *deshmukh*, *deshpande*, *patil*, *kulkarni*, village watchmen, village astrologer and several others held *inam* lands. There were also the *inams* like the *dudhabhat* (milk and rice) and *sadi-choli* (*saree* and bodice) which were given by a king or a chieftain to their daughters for their maintenance. (A.R. Kulkarni, 1992, p.32). *Vritti* (a Sanskrit word, meaning, 'means of subsistence or livelihood") was type of religious *inam* for the office of a priest. In Eastern Deccan, particularly, the Andhra region, land donated to the deity of the temple was called *devaravritti*, or the god's *vritti*. Not only the brahmanas, but also some warriors possessed the *vrittis*. Warriors used this term in connection to the land over which they had proprietary rights and could alienate, i.e. *nija-vritti* (my subsistence grant).

5) *Watan* **Tenure**: Village officers, viz., the *deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*, *patils*, *kulkarni* and one of the *balutedars*, the *Mahar* community (the *Mahars* are discussed in the next section), held large *miras* and *inam* lands and were entitled to certain rights and privileges called *haklavajma*. They also received a certain amount of produce from the peasants and services of the village artisans. All these privileges along with their respective administrative positions (except probably in the case of the Mahars) were called the *watan*. The holder of a *watan* was called the *watandar*. *Watan* meant a patrimony which was not only hereditary but also saleable and transferable. *Watandars* of *pargana*, like the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* were superior to the *watandars* of the village, the *patils* and *kulkaranis*. The *watan* was valued, for it was not only a lucrative source of income, but also a symbol of social prestige. Despite acquiring political power and position in the state hierarchy, the Marathas were always keen to retain their original village *watan* which compared to the political power was permanent in nature. Several holders of temporary land tenures like *saranjam*, *jagir*, *mokasa* were always anxious to get these tenures converted to *watan* or *inam* that could remain with their family in perpetuity.

6) *Mokasa*, *Jagir Saranjam* **Tenures**: These were essentially military tenures. Though they were in principle temporary, in course of time, they became hereditary. Civil functions were often attached to these tenures. These military tenures were common in the seventeenth century in the Sultanate of the Adil Shahis of Bijapur in the north Karnataka region. They were powerful members of the Adil Shahi administration and held offices of the *vazir*, *amir* and *diwan*. In case, the *mokasadars* failed in performing their duties, they were transferred or replaced or sometimes their *mokasas* were confiscated. Like the *watandars* and the *mirasdars*, they also participated in the village councils. According to A.R.Kulkarani, "The *mokasadars* sometimes created sub-tenure to favour their relations or assistants. For instance, Shahaji who was a *mokasadar* of Pune, Supe and Shirval *parganas* under the Adil Shahis, granted a *pot-mokasa* of 36 villages of his Pune *pargana* to his son Shivaji."(A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.34) According to Satish Chandra, the *mokasa* was apropriatary right in land, whether rent free or at low quit rent or on revenue farming terms on conditions of service. (Satish Chandra, 1982, *Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village*, Delhi, p.106)

The *jagir* tenure was comparatively for a longer period than the *mokasa* tenure. The *sarjam* tenure was purely a military one. Its holders were entitled to a share in the village administration and land revenue. According to A.R. Kulkarani, the practice of granting military tenure was discontinued by Shivaji, for he feared that the *mokasadars* would become powerful at the rural level especially if they united with the sections of the rural aristocracy. (A.R.Kulkarni, p.36). Besides they also oppressed the peasantry. Satish Chandra does not agree and points out that Shivaji continued with this practice. (Satish Chandra, 1982, p.108-123) However, the *mokasa* increased during the Peshwa period, with the aim of encouraging the Maratha *sardars* (chieftains) like the Holkars, Shindes, Pawars and so on to join the military service.

In the Kakatiya kingdom of Eastern Deccan, various landed elements especially the powerful chieftains of the Andhra rural society were incorporated into the Kakatiya political network. These chiefs already possessed hereditary rights over their own plots of land and had a fixed share in the agricultural produce of the village. In lieu of their services to the Kakatiya state, they were granted additional land that was assessed at concessional rates. Such tenure was called *vritti*. These *vritti* lands were cultivated by tenant cultivators. In the post Kaktiya period, such a tenure was called *jivitamu*. Further, in order to incorporate the chiefs and warriors in to the political framework, the Kakatiya state created a new type of tenurial rights over territories called *nayankaramu*. Though better known in connection with the Vijayanagar Empire, the *nayankaramu* was a Kakatiya innovation. These were primarily revenue assignments delegated over several villages. The rights of the holders are difficult to determine. They were also obiliged to maintain troops for the State.

Thus, the rural society in Deccan was not a homogeneous unit. Agrarian hierarchy and stratification can be seen in the caste structures as well as in the various classes whose status was based on the land and landed rights. The upper sections always attempted to exploit the peasant groups and were often successful. Tensions were inbuilt within the rural society. The rise of the Marathas can be traced to the tensions primarily within the rural society. The struggle for control over land brought the bigger, middle and smaller *watandars*, *mirasis* and *uparis* in conflict with each other. Shivaji united these different sections of the rural society providing a base for a strong movement. Several peasant groups like the Kunbis, Kolis and some tribes supported Shivaji in lure of loot and a high social status. The Marathas themselves belonged to the Kunbi caste. According to Grant Duff, the Maratha Kunbis were military families who claimed a Rajput-Kshatriya status. One aspect of this movement was the united front of the Marathas and the Kunbis. By joining Shivaji, low caste peasant groups could acquire political power and rise up the social scale. Therefore, the rural society was never stagnant and had avenues for social mobility.

However, there was a scope for co-operative interaction. For instance, in Western Deccan region, the village documents record the attestation of the villagers in landed transactions. In Eastern Deccan, the inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries refer to village groups called *ashtadash-praja* making endowments of land to the temples. Literally meaning eighteen people; *ashtadash-praja* also implied eighteen castes that represented the entire village. Brahmanas, land controllers (*bhumi-prabhu*) and peasants (*kampu*) are mentioned separately as making donations. Probably they did not belong to the group of eighteen castes. According to Cynthia Talbot, "It is possible that the *ashtadash-praja* was an officially recognised local body with distinct responsibilities in reference to the Kakatiya state, for instance in the sphere of revenue." (Cynthia Talbot, 2001, p.167).Since this body of the 'village collectives' was gifting lands to the temples, it also implies that they were an important part of the temple culture and the Kakatiya state.

Neither was the village a close-knit, self-sufficient unit. Interactions with the neighbouring and distant villages took place. Land was sold to the outsiders. There

was inter-village mobility. Incase an outsider bought a land in the village, he need not live there and could visit his land in the village periodically. Similarly, though the village artisans served the village, they were not compelled to remain within the same village. Often they sold their rights to the members of their own caste and migrated elsewhere. They also worked in nearby markets, villages and urban centres to supplement their income.

The interaction of the village with urban classes also took place. Merchants invested in the land and made donations to the temples. For instance, a fourteenth century inscription in Chittapur, Metpalli taluk of Andhra region records an endowment of land to the temple for construction of a tank. The donor was one Bairi Setti, a merchant trader, who had actually purchased the field from the village brahmanas. Bairi Setti did not seem to have economically benefited. However, he was a recipient of religious merit which appeared to be important to him. Talbot (2001, p.96) and Stein (Burton Stein, 1980, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, OUP, Delhi.p.425-426) call this, "rural development entrepreneurship" as it resulted in agrarian expansion and personal gain for the entrepreneur themselves. The State also interacted with the members of the rural society. Numerous peasants were recruited as soldiers. As stated before, there were state lands in the villages, the state invited cultivators, and incorporated the powerful landed aristocracy within the political administration.

18.3.3 The Village Council

The village council was called *panchayat* at the village level and *gotsabha* or *majlis* at the *pargana* level. The *panchayat* not only settled disputes within the village, it was also a representative body of the village community set up by the community itself to manage its affairs. There were *jatigota*, *Dharma Sabha* and *Kula-Sabha* to deal with the matters of a particular caste, religion or a group of families. The rules of the caste were quite strict. A document dated 1693 specifies rules regarding the readmission of a converted person to his original caste. The individual was to be readmitted only after consultation with the other caste members. The Poona Shimpi (tailor) community admitted one person. This was disapproved by the Shimpis of the Saswad region on the ground that they were not consulted and that the Poona Shimpis could not alone decide on an issue affecting the entire Shimpi community. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.43).

The numbers of the members of the village council was not fixed. At the village level, the panchayat comprised of all *watandars, mirasdars* and *balutedars*. *Balutedars* also played an important part in the village council which will be discussed in the next section. At the *pargana* level, the *pargana* and village hereditary officers, state officials and the leaders of the village community concerned with a particular dispute were invited. The king did not interfere with the decisions of the village council, unless he received a complaint.

18.4 THE VILLAGE SERVANTS: DECCAN

The village servants were primarily artisans and formed an important section of the rural society in Deccan. They were called *balutedars* and their income, which was a share in the agricultural produce, was known as *balutas*. They were the counterparts of the *Kamins* of North India (Unit 17.5.6). However, compared to the *kamins*, their status was better off in the Deccan rural society. Several village documents, for instance, the *talebands* (village budgets), *thalzadas* (roll of land holdings), *jamabandis* (village rent roll), *watanpatras* (*watan* grants), *gaonkharcha* (village expenses) and so on record the participation of the *balutedars* in the decision making process of the village, especially where the disputes were concerned.

18.4.1 Composition

The term *bara* (twelve) was usually prefixed to the *balutas*. Based on their income, which was their respective share in the village produce, the twelve *balutas* were grouped into three rows called *kaas* or *oal*:

1) *Thorali Kaas*, i.e. major rows. In this category there were *sutar* (carpenter), *lohar* (blacksmith), *Mahar* and *Mang*.

2) *Madhali kaas*, i.e. the middle row. This category comprised of the *kumbhar* (potter), *chambhar* (cobbler), *parit* (washerman) and *Nhavi* (barber).

3) *Dhakti kaas*, i.e. the last row and this category included *bhat* (bard), *mulana* (servant of the mosque and the Muslim community in the village), *gurav* (temple priests) and *koli* (water carrier).

Scholars differ in their opinion regarding the occupations included in this list. However, ten occupations were often regularly included. They were, carpenter, blacksmith, potter, leatherworker, rope maker, barber, washerman, astrologer, Hindu shrine keeper and *Mahar*. In addition goldsmith, bard, masjid-keeper and bearer of burdens were also included. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210).Sometimes, village officials were also included in the class of *balutedars*. However, the number twelve is a traditional one and varied from village to village. The composition and the groupings within the *kaas* also had regional variations. For instance, in Indapur *pargana*, a village-cum town in Pune district of Maharashtra, there were fourteen *balutedars*, instead of the traditional twelve. *Chambhar* conventionally in the *thorali kaas*, i.e. the first row was in this case in the *madhali kaas*, i.e. the second row. Mang in Indapur occupied the *madhali kaas*, instead of the customary *thorali kaas*. In the *dhakti kaas*, i.e., the third row, *bhat* did not figure at all, instead, *sonar* (goldsmith), *joshi* (the village astrologer) and *ramoshi* (the village guard) were included.

Balutas as a rule belonged to different occupational castes which were of lower status. However, there were some exceptions. The astrologer, bard and the accountant were brahmanas in Maharashtra. Similarly, the occupation of a particular *baluta* caste was not the monopoly of that caste. For instance, the carpenter of a carpenter caste in some villages was engaged to do the jobs of a blacksmith and vice-versa.

There was another class of village servants called the *alutedars*, who did not enjoy the same status as the *balutedars*. According to Grant Duff, the number of *alutedars* was also twelve and they were also known as *naru*. According to Fukuzawa, the Marathi documents of the pre-British period do not refer to the term *aluta* and it appears that unlike the *balutas*, the *alutas* were found in some villages occasionally and not in all villages. They were certainly not as indispensable as the *balutas* for the rural society. Perhaps, the term *aluta* was formed 'alliteratively' with the *baluta* (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.210). Sometimes, goldsmith, bard and bearer of burdens, traditionally a part of the twelve *balutedar*, were mentioned in the twelve *aluta* category.

18.4.2 Services and Remuneration of the *Balutedars*

Various records show that the *balutas* were never employed by separate families. Rather they were servants of the village as a whole. The documents have phrases like, *ganvachi sonarki*, i.e. 'goldsmith of the village'; *dehayachen kamkaj* or *ganvachi chakri*, both meaning, 'work for the village'. While serving the village as a 'territorial group', the *baluta* also served sometimes individual villagers belonging to the village irrespective of their family affiliation.

There were two kinds of *balutas*, *watandar* or *mirasi balutas* and *upari balutas*. The nature of service of the *watandar baluta* was hereditarily fixed. Generally they enjoyed monopoly over their respective occupations. But the services of the *upari baluta* was not so. They were employed on a temporary basis either to support the

existing *balutas* or provisionally work, in case, a *watan baluta* migrated or left the village. *Upari* means a 'newcomer', 'stranger' or 'extra'. As already mentioned, sometimes the same family performed both carpentry and blacksmithery. In such a case, there was a clear distinction between one who rendered certain service as his *watan* (patrimony) and another, who did the same but as *upari*. Therefore, not all *baluta* servants held hereditary monopoly (*watandar*) over the services they rendered. Since *watandari balutas* were highly remunerative, there were often multiple claimants over the same *watandari*. The documents record numerous disputes over a single occupational *watan* amongst the claimants.

A *watan baluta* could be sold, divided or transferred by its holder. Sale of *watan* amongst the same professional caste was common. If there were only one family of a serving caste in a village, it would be treated as the servants of the entire village. But when there were several families of the same occupational caste, they served different village families. In such cases they were not treated as the servants of the families and were considered as the servant of the village. This was because the division of the occupational *watan* did not mean the creation of new *watans*. Rather it meant multiple shares in a *watan*. Therefore, there was one *baluta watan* for every occupation in the village. The division was not of the 'service sphere'. It was the division of the emoluments such as the house sites, *inam* land, cash or kind. For instance two families of carpenters were expected to divide the house or the house site, *inam* land and other perquisites meant for the carpentry *watan*. Thus, the total amount of emoluments always remained the same, despite divisions within the *watan*. In effect, the burden of the village as a whole, especially of the peasants did not increase. Although the villagers and the village as a whole was not financially affected by the sale, transfer or division of the *watan*, their 'consent' or 'permission' was required for such transactions. The documents refer to phrases like, *gotache sakshi* (confirmation by local assembly) and *gotache mahajar* (the certificate of the local assembly) for such dealings to be effective.

Fukuzawa mentions three kinds of remuneration for the *balutas*. One was the main remuneration which could be given in cash or kind, called *baluta* remuneration. Both the *watan balutas* and the *upari balutas* were entitled to this kind of remuneration as long as they offered specific services to the village. However, if they were absent from the village for a long time, they were not entitled to the *baluta*-remuneration.

The second way of paying the *balutas* was small additional remunerations in cash or kind called *hakk* (rights), *lavajima* (perquisites) or *manpan* (privileges). This was given by the village as a whole, which included not only the peasants, but also village officers, merchants, and village servants. The payment was made in the form of offerings to the village shrine. There were variations from village to village regarding the amount and the kind of perquisites paid to each servant. Due to the lack of data, it is not clear whether there was any disparity in the payment of the perquisites to the *watan* holding *baluta* and the *upari baluta* of the same village. The third type of remuneration was revenue free *inam* lands. Since the *inam* land was hereditary, therefore only the *watan* holding *baluta* servant was entitled to it.

There were three different modes of payment, which corresponded to three different methods of land revenue collection by the state. Therefore, the peasants as a whole paid this kind of *baluta* remuneration while paying the land revenue. In the first method, the peasants brought the produce to a certain place in the village. Under the supervision of the headmen a certain amount of the produce was paid to the *balutas* and then a fixed proportion of the rest was collected as land revenue. In the second method, the peasant was not required to bring the produce to a specific place. Rather, fixed amount was collected from him for the payment of the *balutas* and the land revenue. The third method was to pay a certain amount of money to the *balutas* by peasants. Often the share of the individual *baluta* was decided on the basis of the negotiations between the peasant and artisan at the time of harvest.

18.4.3 Status of the *Balutedars*

As pointed out earlier, the status of the *balutedar* in the rural society of Deccan was higher in comparison to his counterpart in North India. Despite belonging to low castes, a large number of them participated in the decision making process of the village. For instance, documents from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century refer to the *balutedars* attending the *gotsabha* and endorsing the decisions by their professional symbols; the potter's symbol being the wheel, barber's was mirror, carpenter's symbol was chisel, shoe-maker's was thread and picker, goldsmith's symbol was hammer and so on. Sometimes only the concerned balutedar was invited to the council. In a boundary dispute of a village in Pune *pargana* in 1681 AD, six *mahars* were invited to a council as their profession included the measuring and fixing of the village boundary. The council was attended by the *kazis*, *deshmukhs*, *havaldars* and *patils* of eighteen villages- all of whom were rural elites and belonged to upper castes. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, pp.37-38)

Despite their low caste status, the village servants had an important place in the rural society. This can be seen in the examples of the *mahar*, *mang* and the *mulana* community. The importance of the *mahars* is evident in the kind of remuneration they received. They were paid in kind and also held *inam* lands. The *mahars* were entitled to carry all dead bodies of animals in their respective villages, but had to remove the skin of the dead animals and return them to the owners. Grant Duff sums up the duties and status of the *mahars*. According to him, the *mahar* "acts as scout, as guide, frequently as watchman he cleans travellers' horses, and is obiliged , if required to carry the travellers' baggage; he is a principal guardian of the village boundaries, and in Maharashtra, the *Mahars* are a active, useful and intelligent race of people." (Grant Duff,).In fact, the *mahars* were considered as *watandars* in the Maratha country and their *watan* continued even during the British period by special legislation. The leader of the *mahar* community was known as the *mehtar mahar* and he was entitled to one-ninth of the total *mahar watan*.

Mang is the corruption of the Sanskrit word, *matang*, meaning the most powerful person. *Matang* Rishi of Varanasi was supposed to be born in the *mang* family. The legends say that they were initially rulers of Kishkinda state situated on the banks of the river Tungabhadra and the brahmanical domination reduced them to poverty and they became nomadic tribes. The occupation of the *mangs* was to make leather ropes and leather bags. They also performed the duties of the village watchmen. Similarly, the *mulana* was found in almost all the villages even if there were no Muslims. Grant Duff writes, "the *moolang*….is the *Moolla* or Mahomedan priest…The *moolana* had charge of the mosques and peers' places,-performs the ceremony of Mahomedan marriages but is often found when there is no Mahomedan family but his own and is chiefly known to the Maharatta population as the person who kills their sheep and goats when offered as sacrifices at temples or in their fields to propitiate the deities…."

We also find that the traditional division of the balutedars into *thorali kaas*, *adhali kaas* and *dhakti kaas* was irrespective of the earnings of the *balutedars*. The earnings of the goldsmith may be more than that of a carpenter or a *mahar*, but in the hierarchy of the services to the village community, the goldsmith would always be lower than the *mahar* or the carpenter. The goldsmith usually belonged to the *dhakti kaas*, i.e. third row and the carpenter and *mahar* usually belonged to the *thorali kaas*, i.e. the first row.

18.4.4 Other Village Servants

In addition to *balutedars* or *alutedars* there were a few other village servants in the rural society of Deccan. Two most common were the priests and the forced labourers.

i)   **Priests**: Referred to as the *upadhyaya* or the *gramaupadhyaya* in the documents, the village priest served specific families by officiating in various family rituals. The service of priesthood was hereditary. Therefore, the principle which marked out their service sphere was not the village as a whole, but certain families with specific caste status. Usually the priests were *brahmanas*. Some of the *brahmana* priests served the brahmana families, while some served the families with specific caste status of 'peasant and other caste', collectively called clean *shudras*. However, the for the non-brahamana low caste families, there were non-brahmana priests. It is not clear whether their hereditary service-sphere was confined to certain castes or to certain families belonging to such castes. Families of *mirasdars* (land holding peasants) and watan *balutedars* could employ a priest on permanent basis. The *uparis* (temporary peasants) and *upari balutas* could not do so even if they spent considerable number of years in the village. They could employ priests only on ad hoc basis. According to Fukuzawa, since they served specific families, they were in 'direct clientele relationship' with these families and hence represented the 'prototype of the so-called *jajmani* system.' (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.235). A discussion of the views on *jajmani* system and the nature of relationship between the rural servants and the various families they served will be taken up in the next Section.

ii) *Vethbega* **(Forced Labour)**: This term is a compound of the Sankrit word *vishti* and the Persian word *begar* and means forced labour. This was prevalent in the rural society of Deccan and no payment was made in lieu of services rendered. Only free food was provided while the labour was being rendered. Also some cash or food grain was given, but not as wages at the market rate. Large scale construction of forts in the Maratha country due to increased military operations required constant construction, maintenance and repair. Therefore, the villagers had to provide compulsory service to the state. Other services also constituted *vethbegari*, viz., porterage, fodder cutting, miscellaneous jobs at the government offices, and stables and watchmanship. Regular forced labour was extracted from the artisan and the menial castes, especially in the eighteenth century. The movement of the labourer in this case was restricted. The exploitation of the skilled and unskilled labour as a forced one often led to the desertion of villages. The local officials appealed often to the State to discontinue *vethbegari* as it adversely affected the cultivation and other activities in the villages. A levy called *begarpatti* seems to be a charge collected by the State to meet the expenses of the forced labour. (Kulkarni, 1992, p.42).

18.4.5 Rural Servants: Debates

There has been a difference of opinion amongst administrators, thinkers and scholars about the nature of the service rendered by the rural servants in the village. According to Karl Marx, "this dozen of individuals maintained at the expense of the village community", served the village as a whole and were therefore, the 'servants of the village'. According to him, this contributed to the self-sufficiency of the village and was 'the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies.' (Karl Marx, *Capital, A Ctitique of Political Economy*, Vol.I, Chicago, 1915, pp.392-394). Baden-Powell also felt that these resident craftsmen and menials were 'not paid by the job, but are employed by the village on a fixed remuneration….' (B.H.Baden-Powell, *The Indian Village Community*, London, 1896, pp.16-17).

Max Weber in his General Economic History (1924) stated that the nature of the rural services was 'demiurgic mode of employment.' This meant that the rural servants were 'not paid for their work in detail but stood at the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest….They are essentially village serfs, receiving a share in the products or money payments.' A.R. Kulkarni (1992) feels that the rural artisans cannot be regarded as 'village serfs' for they were co-sharers in the village produce as a part of their right (*haqq*) and were actively participating in the village councils especially in the arbitrations of disputes.

In 1925, W.H. Wiser, an American Christian missionary, on the basis of his research of a north Indian village Karimpur, concluded that the village artisans served the individual families who were the respective clients of the artisans. The artisans were remunerated by these families and not by the village community. These client families were called '*jajman*' and the rights involved in such an economic interaction of services was called the *jajmani haqq*. Therefore, 'this system of interrelatedness in service within the Hindu community is called the *Hindu Jajmani system*.'(W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System*, Lucknow, 1936, pp.vii-xxi). Wiser further added that these relationships were hereditarily fixed between the *jajaman* (patron) and his servants and the latter could transfer their rights to their respective caste members.

The theory of *jajmani* system influenced the sociologists for several decades. However, Fukuzawa does not agree with this theory. According to him, Wiser did not look at village as a territorial group with social relationships. The *jajmani* system evolved during the British rule, when village system was disturbed as a result of which 'village servants were transformed into family-servants'. (Fukuzawa, 1991, p.239).As mentioned above, the *jajmani* system was applicable only for the family priests and not for the twelve *balutedars* or *alutedars*. Fukuzawa agrees with Weber on the '*demiurgic* mode of employment' and feels that since the *jajmani* system evolved during the British rule, the sociological analysis of the *jajmani* system as continuing from immemorial times lacks a historical perspective. A.R. Kulkarni feels that the *baluta* system cannot be classified as *demiurgic* or *jajmani*. The only term that explains the system is *grambhrutak* or *gramasevak* traditionally used in the literature. This implied that the *balutas* were essentially the servants of the village as a whole. (A.R.Kulkarni, 1992, p.41).

18.5 RURAL SOCIETY: SOUTH INDIA

In this Section we will discuss the rural society primarily in the Tamil region. Presently the Tamil region comprises of Tamil Nadu, southern part of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The rural society in the medieval period comprised of the corporate institutions of the *brahmandeya*, i.e. brahmana dominated village, *ur*, i.e. a non-brahmana villages, temples and guilds. An interaction between these institutions formed the basis of the rural life. They also became the mechanisms through which various political groups strengthened their economic base and extended their control in various localities of the Tamil region. Hence, the *brahmadeyas*, *urs*, temples and guilds – all institutions of the rural society – were the basis of state formation in the medieval period.

Large territories in the Tamil macro-region were called *mandalams* (also referred to as sub-regions). Three of these *mandalams* corresponded to three major kingdoms of the Tamil macro-region, viz., Pallavas with their capital Kanchipuram in Tondaimandalam, Cholas with their capital Tanjavur in Cholamandalam and Pandyas with their capital Madurai in Pandiamandalam. Both Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam were in the northern part of the Tamil region with Kaveri river valley as its core. The Pandiamandalam comprised the southern part of the Tamil region, drained by river Vaigai and Tamraparani. Each of these river valleys were the focus of dense rural settlements especially before the thirteenth century. Between Tondaimandalam and Cholamandalam was the region called Naduvil Nadu that was drained by Pennar and Vellar rivers. Between the Cholamandalam and Pandiamandalam lay the semi-arid region of Pudukkottai. The western boundary of the plain is marked by the plateau and the ranges of Eastern Ghats, parts of which lie in the upper reaches of Kaveri. This area was called Kongu Nadu or *mandalam* of the Tamil macro-region. The epigraphs and literary sources mention three types of agricultural land, viz., wet, dry and mixed. Each of them had their respective social milieu. The development of irrigation technology in the forms of tanks and canals transformed

these regions into paddy growing rural settlements that were ordered according to the Brahmanical ideology and around deity worship in the temples.

18.5.1 Rural Society and Institutions: Seventh to the Twelfth Century AD

From the seventh to the thirteenth century the regions of the Tamil macro-regions were integrated and organized through institutional means of the *brahmadeyas* and the temple. Located in the rural surroundings they had an impact in the rural society. The expansion and integration of various peasant settlements in the river valleys and the transformation of the tribal population into settled peasant communities provided a base for the emergence of new state systems. Beginning with the Pallavas of Kanci in the northern part, the Pandyas of Madurai in the south and the Cheras in the southwest, the political processes culminated with the Cholas in the Kaveri valley by the ninth century AD. The consolidation of these states depended on the integration of various local and supra-local institutions, mainly the *nadus*, *brahmadeyas* and the temples.

As a 'peasant micro-region' and an eco-type, the *nadu* had already emerged before the seventh century. From seventh century onwards, these *nadus* increased in number, representing a process of agrarian expansion based on the irrigation projects sponsored by the Pandyas and Pallavas in the wet and dry areas. Often such an expansion took place at the expense of the erstwhile tribal population, who eventually were sedentized as peasants. Palar-Cheyyar valley in the north and Vaigai-Tambraparani in the south exhibited such agrarian developments. Thus, *nadu* as a territory was a grouping of *vellanvagai* villages, i.e. the agrarian settlements. The *nattar* was the spokesman of the *nadu* locality, primarily of the *vellanvagai* villages. These villages included habitation sites, cremation ground, irrigation channels, cultivated area, and pasture lands and so on. They had residential quarters of the landholders, cultivators called *ur-nattam*, residences of artisans or *kammanas* called *kammanacceri* and that of the agricultural labourers or *paraiyas* called *paraicceri*. There was therefore, stratification in these villages, with landholders at the top of the rural hierarchy, artisans in the middle and agricultural labourers at the bottom. The landholders seem to have enjoyed parity in an economic sense with the brahmanas where the control over land was concerned. These owner-cultivators, i.e. the *kaniyudaiyar* got their lands cultivated by tenant cultivators, i.e. *ulukudi*. Both were known as vellalas. The assembly of the *nadu* was known as *ur*, dominated by the *nattars*, the powerful landed class of the rural society.

These river valleys also witnessed a proliferation of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples that restructured and integrated the rural economy and society. The *brahmadeyas* were land grants given to the brahmanas and thus were the centres of the landowning groups of brahmanas. The temples were the 'nerve centres' of these brahmanical villages. Since the *brahmadeyas* and the temples dominated by these brahmanas were the repositories of better irrigation technology and farming methods, the land granted to them became a mechanism for the extension of agriculture into unsettled areas and extraction of the surplus from various peasant groups. The assembly of the *brahmadeyas* was called the *sabha* or the *mahasabha*, which also controlled the large irrigation systems. Such irrigation systems created favourable conditions for dense population in these areas. Paddy cultivation was dependant on irrigation and was labour intensive. There was network of relations between big and small *brahmadeyas* and *brahmadeya* and non-*brahmadeya* villages, indicating the fact that the rural society was not isolated.

The conversion of the *brahmadeyas* into *tan-kurus* or *taniyurs* from the tenth century AD led to the emergence of independent revenue units (separated from the *nadus*) that had significant economic and political ramifications. *Taniyurs* acquired several villages (*pidagais* and *purams*) and craft centers. A new type of *nadu* called

the *perimalai nadu* evolved around *taniyurs*, comprising of velalas and cultivators. The *taniyurs* had distinct socio-political characteristics and introduced a hierarchy amongst the *brahmadeyas*.

The significance of the *brahmadeyas* and the temples stemmed from their brahmanical ideology that provided the social rationale for integrating diverse peasant and tribal groups through the institution of caste. For instance, the temples controlled by the brahmanas and situated in the *brahmadeyas* and the *vellan-vagai* provided a space for ritual integration to the new entrants within the *varna-jati* paradigmn. The tribal divinities were made an integral part of the brahmanical temples. The hierarchical structure of the *varnasramadharma*, i.e. the caste system was relevant in these villages, where the distribution and circulation of resources took place within the authority structure of landed rights. Besides peasants, various categories of chiefs, artisans and craftsmen were incorporated through ritual ranking within the temples. Thus, commanding an allegiance of various local groups, this institution of the *brahmadeya* generated economic activities of diverse nature that eventually became the basis of urbanization. Therefore linking peasants, local chiefs and other groups to the royalty, both *brahmadeya* and the temple were also utilized as the institutional channels of transmission and dissemination of the royal ideology in the village settlements. Naturally, then the location of the royal centres coincided with the location of the temple and *brahmadeya* centres spread over numerous rural settlements. The semantics of *koyil* acquired a new dimension with the royal patronage to the temples. Earlier used for palace, it now implied the temple as well. Hence, temple and palace became interchangeable with both representing the temporal and the sacred sphere, where obedience to the authority, i.e. the king and the god was mandatory.

The process of agrarian expansion that provided the crucial resource base to the Cholas and Pandyas brought forth the wet zone areas of the Tamil sub-regions, particularly in the Kaveri and Tamraparani valleys. The villages of these wet zone areas became the centre of king's and chiefs' authority and financial claim. By thirteenth century, five hundred and fifty *nadus* had come into existence indicating large number of agricultural settlements, majority being in the Kaveri valley of Cholamandalam. The proliferation of *brahmadeyas* and temples located in the *nadus* of these river valleys were also instrumental in extending agriculture. They implemented the royal irrigation projects and this gave them the crucial right to organize and manage the production and water resources, often with the *velala* community, i.e. the powerful non-brahamana landowners .These landowners also partook in the administration of the temples along with the brahamanas. Therefore, created at the royal initiatives, the *brahmadeyas,* and temples were often strategically situated in the non-brahmana villages to ensure their loyalty and provided the much-needed manpower for the vast irrigation projects.

One of the direct consequences of the agrarian expansion was the escalation of commercial activities that led to the growth of market centres, *nagarams* and a network between them that linked towns and villages, The spread of guild activities and trading associations, namely the Ayyayole 5000, Tamil Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar, foreign merchant organization, Anjuvannam brought forth the mercantile community with its diverse groups of traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and itinerant traders. Often the mercantile communities invested in agriculture, gifted to the temples, further strengthening the ties of integration, and inter dependence within the rural society and with the urban centres and the village. One such weaver community, the *kaikkolas* had significant links with the temples and became an important social group within the rural society. By ninth century, clusters of *brahmadeyas* and temples had developed into centres of urban growth, thus connecting villages, rural society, urban centres and royal capital, diverse population and religion within the same complex. Thus, the *nadus*, *brahmadeyas,* temples and *nagarams* with their respective assemblies, viz., *ur*, *sabha* and *nagarams* linked the villages, various peasant communities and locality chiefs to the political network of the Cholas and Pandyas.

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18.5.2   Rural Society: Thirteenth to the Eighteenth Century

By the end of the twelfth century, the clusters of agrarian settlements both in the wet and dry zones comprised of various agricultural and artisanal castes. *Brahmanas* and *Velalas* emerged as dominant, followed by the Pallas, Pariahs and Vanniyars and several others. Though hierarchically arranged within the caste structure, these groups were linked to each other with ties of economic interdependence. For instance, in the Pandya kingdom, the hilly regions with their tribal population were linked to the core area dominated by the Vellala peasant groups, due to their forest products and constant flowing streams which could be exploited for irrigation purposes. Since uncertainties were intrinsic in such an economy due to constant warfare and resource appropriation that most of these peasant groups were armed and had such military alliances with the tribes. In several places, the *kaikkolas* formed their own-armed bands and emerged as the 'merchant- warriors'.

Amidst such a diverse socio-political fabric, the temples formed the most crucial as well as stable institution within the rural society. The 'superordinate' character of the temple was evident in its complex role in strengthening the territorial sovereignty at the rural level through negotiations and transactions that culminated into a network of alliances between the various locality chiefs. Such alliances were significant in the contemporary situation where warfare, unsteady boundaries and shifting frontiers were common. This shared power structure manifested in the institution of gift giving to the deities in the temples. This ritual gifting generated a redistributive system that facilitated the disbursement of resources and political power within the rural society. The gifts to the temples in turn were recirculated in the society in the form of ritual goods, for instance the *prasadam* (food offering), stimulating economic transactions. The local chiefs also made gifts to the king or donated to the temples in the name of the king and received titles and honours that enabled them to become the members of the royal alliance network. Sometimes, these chiefs made grants to the temples situated outside their local domains and built their individual power network, connecting the two rural domains. Apart from its political ramifications, the temple further provided the 'ideological apparatus' for different sections in the South Indian rural society by bringing together the religion of various social groups. Therefore, a heterogeneous religious pantheon developed with numerous gods and goddesses and led to the celebration of temple festivals within the village. The calendar of these festivals was often linked to the agricultural calendar of sowing and harvesting.

By the twelfth century, inscriptions record the gradual marginalization of the *brahmadeyas,* their institutional capacity to integrate was exhausted. This led to the rising importance of the temples in the society in general and the agrarian settlements in particular. Though the *sabhas* continue to function and the various political powers till the eighteenth century continued to establish *brahmadeyas*. The Pandya and the Chola records of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cite several instances of the *brahmadeyas* converted into *vellan-vagai* villages and donated as *devadanam* to the temples. Either the brahmanas migrated from the Tamil country to the northern regions or converged increasingly towards the temples, further highlighting the latter's significance. This coincided with the re-emergence of the local chiefs within the agrarian localities.

In addition, with the occupation of the Kaveri delta by the Hoysalas, the migration from the Karnataka region was accelerated. Hence, an altered base of power and power structure emerged. The expansion of agriculture led to an increase in landed transactions, private and temple holdings, particularly in the non-brahmana villages. This created a hierarchical structure of the landed rights with the increasing prominence of the Vellalas as the dominant agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the lower agricultural groups, escalating the tensions within the agrarian community. The growth of urban centres and intensification of mercantile activities led to the rising importance of the *nagarams*, merchants, craftsmen and weavers, especially the kaikkolas that altered

their relationship with the *nadus.* Hence*,* the rising social importance of the various non-brahmana groups, especially within the rural society led to a movement towards a higher caste status, especially the claims of the artisans and dominant peasant caste for a respectable ritual space within the temples. This bid for social mobility in the twelfth century culminated into a "societal crisis". The conflicts that escalated this social crisis were usually between the artisans and agriculturists, sub-castes of the artisan like the *kaikkolas* and *saliyas*, hill and forest people and the different merchant groups. The existing social structure weakened and led to the crystallization of the low caste non-brahmana communities into a dual vertical division of the *Valangai* (Right hand castes) and *Idangai* (Left hand castes), within the traditional caste structure of the rural society. However, the Vellalas and the brahmanas remained outside this dual division.

In this altered social environment within the village localities, undoubtedly temples forged links amongst chiefs, merchants and the newly emergent groups. The popular religion of the Saivas and Vaisnava community responded to this social change by providing a broad social base with ideological sanction, which would accommodate the diverse ethnic groups. Attempts were made to provide them a ritual place within the respective temples.

From thirteenth century onwards, the core riverine areas of Kaveri, Pennar, Tamraparani and Krsna-Godavari with numerous agricultural settlements and important trading centres became the focus for competitive resource appropriation, particularly amongst those social groups who were located in areas of narrow resource base. One of the most important political developments that influenced the social composition of the rural societies in South India was the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the fourteenth century with its capital Hampi in Karnataka. This initiated a chain of political processes that integrated the peninsular region south of river Krsna by bringing together the three cultural zones of Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka.

The most important factor underlying these political processes was the phenomenon of migration. From the end of the twelfth century, Kannada and Telugu peasant groups migrated from areas of marginal resource base to the wet riverine regions, 'receiving new traditions and religious symbols from the valley culture and leaving their own marks on the society of rice-belt.' Changing political boundaries, ever mounting military requirements of the kingdoms, especially of the Vijayanagar Empire and the expansion of the agricultural frontier contributed to the increasing migration of the Telugu warrior class to the river valleys and peripheral areas of potential development. Referred to as the *nayakas,* they impinged upon the pre-existing local power groups and their respective spheres of control and emerged as the major benefactors of the temples in the rural settlements. Migration also brought into prominence a new class of itinerant merchants and traders to the villages, several of whom gradually settled down and emerged as powerful landowners. The inscriptional references to the Kaikkola, Vaniya, Sikku Vaniya Vyapari, Mayilatti, Kanmala, and Komatti traders, Pattanulkar (silk weavers) from Saurashtra point to the development of a brisk trade and increased craft production which found a thriving market in the rural and urban areas.

Apart from the groups mentioned above, peasant communities and agricultural specialists like Shanars (tank-diggers) formed one of the significant migratory groups that modified the pre-existing regional population. New irrigation technology and forms of production were introduced that 'established new domains for competition over territorial control.' Consequently, the migratory processes integrated the dry upland areas and the river valleys of Kaveri and Tamraparani. By fifteenth century, agrarian expansion not only took place in the wet areas, but also in the dry zones through artificial irrigation technology, especially the tank and well irrigation. The corporate and individual efforts of the migrants and investment in labour and capital facilitated the implementation of

the new technology particularly in the black soil region. In these dry upland zones, the agriculturists came into conflict with the hunters and pastoralists that often led to the incorporation of the latter into the agricultural community. These changes provided the context for the emergence of a warrior peasant class, both economically and politically powerful and primarily non-brahamana and Telugu in composition. The settlement of the migratory Telugu or the Vaduga groups in the central Deccan and the Tamil wet regions often displaced the older Tamil peasants and landholders; especially brahmanas already settled there and created a new class of landed magnates with new groups of artisans and merchants. Further, some of the locally entrenched Vellala landed communities emerged as big landowners with titles like *nadudaiyan* or *nadalvan.* Largely, the local and the migrant landed community paid regular tribute to the Telugu commanders of the Vijayanagar army and allied themselves to the local chieftains. In this context, the Reddis, Velalas, Gavundas, and Manradis further enhanced their position as the dominant peasantry and acquired armed power. Further, new network of relations were forged between the dry upland zones and the wetland agricultural community. Thus, the whole of peninsular India witnessed a concerted warrior-peasant effort that culminated into a new regional order, with the coercive power of the new warrior kings.

Each agricultural zone, dry, mixed and wet had a distinct social and material milieu. Kinship networks organized into specific caste groups were important for striking alliances and exchange networks, over the control of agricultural production. The Chola period *nattars,* mainly the Vellalas tied to each other by kinship transformed themselves due to changes in the land holding system and influx of the migrants. Thus, a multi community composition of the agriculturists emerged who related the local rural society to the political authorities. There were diverse agricultural communities and building of sub-regional agrarian domains around important towns in developing agricultural zones. The medieval configurations of the *nadus* vanished, replaced by a set of sub-regions defined as hinterlands of towns along routes of transport and communication.

By fourteenth century, new changes took place with the influence of the *nayakas* as a military class. The old elites confined to the wet zones depended for their protection on these *nayakas*. Over a period, these *nayakas* became influential, as they were 'protectors, patrons, and arbiters, whose power rested first on military might, and more essential in the long run-on their resourcefulness in their transactions with the existing dominant elites in temples and local assemblies.' The *nayakas* were more successful in bringing together the wet rice areas and the unsettled migrants together. They also encouraged commercial activities and often employed merchants and moneylenders in the rural administration.

Against this backdrop of migration of various social groups and the growing power of the martial communities in both wet and dry areas, the worship of the warrior goddesses became popular. This period registered a dramatic increase in the Amman shrines, which had become new cult centres for the various rural elites and peasant and artisan communities within the rural society. These cult centres were associated with the particular lineage god and then with the brahmanical temples in the villages. Hence, a large pantheon was created comprising of the local warrior gods, goddesses and the brahmanical divinity of Siva and Visnu. This represented a vast cross section of the society that was linked through temple rituals in a hierarchical manner. Further, the non-brahmanical *Vellala* village priest also participated in the ritual activities of the large temples along with the *brahmana* priests. In this way, the brahmanical temples were linked through a priestly network with the village deities. The religious scenario became more complex as the some of the migratory groups carried their own gods and goddesses from outside the Tamil region into the new regions, and 'constructed a new temple, thereby creating a cross- section of worshippers beyond the locality and developing a network of intra-regional devotion and pilgrimage.'

The political as well as the economic aspects converged in the temples, which became the mechanism for generating agricultural developments and a network of linkages with the help of the powerful sectarian leaders based in these institutions. The numerous endowments made by the diverse social groups generated resources that were managed and invested by the temples for tank irrigation. Hence, areas of limited agricultural opportunities transformed into that of high yielding mixed agriculture of food and cash crops with a flourishing trade. Such developments continued even in the eighteenth century.

18.6 SUMMARY

This Unit highlights various themes that have been researched on the rural society of Deccan and South India. The rural society in Deccan comprised of hierarchical land rights that influenced the nature of agrarian stratification. The village artisan class usually called *balutedars* also played an important role not only in the economy but also in various matters of the village. This can be seen in the documents that refer to their participation in the deliberations of the village council. The rural society of South India was a complex network of corporate institutions like the *brahmadeya* (with their assembly *sabha*), *nadu* (with their assembly *ur*), and the temples that integrated various social groups within the village as well as the localities and larger political kingdoms. However, this process of integration was influenced by several factors of ecology, migration and control of the corporate institutions by powerful political group. The aim of the Unit is to show that the villages and the rural society were not self-sufficient isolated units, neither were their internal structure homogeneous and stagnant.

18.7 EXERCISES

1) Discuss briefly the composition of the *balutedars.* Analyse the types of services performed by them and the pattern of remuneration.

2) Critically examine the position of village servants in the rural society.

3) Analyse briefly the structure of rural society in South India during 7-12th centuries.

4) Analyse the role of the corporate institutions in the integration of various social groups of the rural society in South India.

5) How did migration in the 14th century influence the rural society?

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