RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rural Urbanism in Tamil Nadu
Notes on a "Slater Village": Gangaikondan, 1916–2012

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Abstract: Gangaikondan, a village outside Tirunelveli in southern Tamil Nadu, was the subject of one of the village surveys conducted by the students of Professor Gilbert Slater from the University of Madras in 1916, and re-studied in the mid-1930s, the 1950s, and 1984, and most recently by the authors in 2008. The paper presents the findings of the most recent study and traces the story of agrarian social change in the village through the 20th century, drawing on the successive surveys. At the beginning of the century Gangaikondan was dominated by Brahman landlords; by its end the most numerous Dalit/Scheduled Caste community, the Pallars, had more land in aggregate than any other single caste, though most owned only small holdings. They were also pre-eminent in the electoral panchayat institutions of the village. The agricultural economy of the village has declined fairly steadily, and it might be described as being now "post-agrarian" in the sense that only a small minority of households depend primarily upon agriculture.

Keywords: village studies, caste relations, landlords, diversification, non-farm employment.

Prologue

The Madurai edition of *The Hindu*, on August 17, 2012, reported that the Collector in charge of Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu had given away four power weeders in a function held at the District Collectorate. "Power weeders were given to paddy farmers," the newspaper reported, "to offset the woes of labour shortage in the present scenario."

This event nicely reflects an important part of the story of economic and social change in the village of Gangaikondan, now in Tuticorin district, through the twentieth century. The village exemplifies the kind of dispersed urbanisation that

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has become characteristic of Tamil Nadu, India's most urbanised state (the state's population is now 49 per cent urban, comparable with that of China). There is a sense, indeed, in which Gangaikondan might be described as being "post-agrarian." The area within the territory of the revenue village that is under cultivation has been declining over several decades and some land owners now choose to leave their land idle. The numbers of households in the village that report themselves as depending entirely on agriculture, either through cultivation or through agricultural labour, or a combination of the two, are quite small – no more than 20 per cent at the most. There are now rather few households that can sensibly be described as those of "peasants." And if once in Gangaikondan, as has been generally the case over much of India, control of land implied also control over people and their labour power, this is no longer the case. There is indeed, as *The Hindu* reported, a "labour shortage" in agriculture. Few men are now employed in agriculture, as most of the work of land preparation, and the harvesting and threshing of paddy, is mechanised. Men find employment, on a more or less regular basis, in a diverse range of activities outside agriculture, both locally, and sometimes outside the locality and even the region. Men from one of the small hamlets of Gangaikondan have, for example, become specialists in the construction of windmills that are used in increasing numbers over southern Tamil Nadu for generating electricity. Women, on the other hand, are still employed in agriculture in quite large numbers, in transplanting and sometimes in weeding, but farmers have to go to great lengths to secure their services. Political power, too, has passed largely to the Scheduled Caste community – that of the Pallars – that once supplied labour to the Brahmans who owned most of the village lands. A kind of a social revolution has taken place in Gangaikondan, partly because of the effective functioning of the public distribution system (PDS) in this part of Tamil Nadu as in the state as a whole, and, more recently, because of the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (henceforward MGNREGA). These have relaxed the historical dependence of the labouring people upon land owners and petty capitalists.

These are the major themes of this study of a Tamil village through the twentieth century. In this paper, however, we aim to present a synoptic account of the village – a historical record to be compared with the several previous studies of Gangaikondan through the last century.

Introduction

Gangaikondan is a very large revenue village, made up by eleven quite distinct settlements, located about 16 kilometres north of the city of Tirunelveli in southern Tamil Nadu, and on the banks of the Chittar river – a tributary of the Tambraparni. The national highway from Tirunelveli to Madurai cuts across the territory of the village, and a large share of the population is settled in the tract that is framed by the river, the highway, and the main railway line from Tirunelveli. It was already aptly described as a "suburban village" in the title of a study of it undertaken by the

Agro-Economic Research Centre of the University of Madras fifty years ago (in 1958-60), and the main settlement – that may be referred to as "Gangaikondan proper" – has the appearance of a little town with a big police station, a large post office, a telephone exchange, a branch of the Canara Bank, well-equipped panchayat offices, government higher secondary and primary schools, a large and functioning primary health care centre, other government offices, STD/ISD telephone booths, grocery and other stores, repair shops, a computer centre, meals hotels and tea shops, and a constant to-and-fro of buses, taxis, and auto-rickshaws from Tirunelveli. Even in 1934 it was recorded that Gangaikondan was "reached by motor buses plying every half an hour" (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 55), so the village has long been well connected, and there has for long been a flow of people leaving and another of others coming in to stay for longer or shorter periods of time. We should emphasise, however, that the other hamlets of Gangaikondan, with the exception of the roadside settlement of Duraiyur, remain distinctly "rural," surrounded by their agricultural lands.

Gangaikondan is one of the five "Slater" villages in present-day Tamil Nadu. The first survey-based study was conducted in 1916 by P. S. Lokanathan, one of the students of Gilbert Slater, who was the first professor of economics at the University of Madras. There are several subsequent studies: by B. Natarajan, conducted in 1934 (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, pp. 55–116); by the Agro-Economic Research Centre of the University of Madras in 1958–60 (AERC 1969); and by V. B. Athreya (1985), from research done in 1983–84. Margaret Haswell, from Oxford University, undertook some research there in 1961 (Haswell 1967, pp. 40–44). These studies, with those of four other villages in Tamil Nadu first surveyed by Slater's students, for all their many limitations, constitute an unusual historical record of rural economic and social change in south India through the twentieth century – as we have explained in a paper reporting on our research in Iruvelpattu, another of the five villages (Harriss, Jeyaranjan, and Nagaraj 2010). In 2007–08, we undertook fresh surveys in both Iruvelpattu and Gangaikondan, and in this paper we report findings regarding the second of the two villages. As we pointed out in introducing our paper on Iruvelpattu, there are many problems in analysing the successive studies of the Slater villages because there is little consistency between them in terms of empirical data and coverage of different themes, and they vary a good deal in their comprehensiveness. Amongst them, Gangaikondan has posed particular problems because of its sheer size. The first and second studies, from 1916 and 1934, were based on observation, unstructured interviews, and the examination of official village records. It was not until the AERC study that a full census survey was undertaken of the village; and in 1984 Athreya and his colleagues based their report on a sample only, of about one-third of the village households. Our own study involved a full census survey of the 1,733 households of the revenue village(s) of Gangaikondan (the original single revenue village was split into two parts in 1987), carried out over many months in 2007–08. We ourselves visited the village (which we will continue to refer to in the singular) on several occasions in 2007 and 2008, and again in August 2012. Some of

the data we present here come from this most recent round of research. It included interviews with a sample of 40 individuals whom we were able to meet in the various hamlets, and of whom we asked questions about the nature, the continuity, and the level of their remuneration in the various employment activities in which they are engaged.[1]

The village appears, as Natarajan explains, "to have been originally one of those innumerable gifts made to Brahmans," probably by the king Rajendra Chola (1011–44 CE) who himself took the title "Gangaikondan" by virtue of his exploits in north India (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 55). The local account is that first Brahmans were settled by the king to serve the temple, then Konars (herdsmen) to supply milk for the gods, Pillais to keep the accounts, musicians to serve the gods, Vani Chettiars to make oil, Thevars to guard the place, and Pallars to provide labour – all in separate hamlets. What must once have been the main street of Gangaikondan proper is the Brahman street which leads up to the Perumal temple. The big, but now sadly dilapidated Kailasanatha temple, which has inscriptions going back to the ninth century (*ibid.*), lies a little to the west. There seems always to have been a Brahman "street," rather than a distinct, spatially separated *agraharam* (or area occupied by Brahmans alone), such as was typical of villages in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. It was said in 1916 that: "The Brahmans live in one street exclusively. On either side of the eastern part of the street live the Pillaimars, the Kshatriyas, the pipers, etc." (Slater 1918, p. 65). The street is now occupied by people of different castes, as well as, still, by a few Brahmans – some of them natives of Gangaikondan who have returned after careers that took them outside, and others who have come from outside. One house is occupied by a college lecturer, and another by a PWD (Public Works Department) engineer. Several lawyers live on the street. At least five cars are regularly seen parked there. One house was converted for a time into "Jack's Computer School," owned by a Christian, which had been running for three years at the time of our survey but had been closed by 2012. The school bus stood alongside the house. Another house proclaimed itself as a private school in 2007–08, offering classes from nursery up to coaching for university entrance, "from Abacus to Java," it proudly proclaimed; but in 2008 the painted sign was more faded than in 2007, and the school never really took off. It was no longer there in 2012.

A century ago, then, Gangaikondan was still a Brahman village in which the members of this caste community owned most of the irrigated wetland and usually operated it by leasing out to non-Brahman tenants, whilst also – some

[1] We are indebted to Kumar and Lenin, both of whom worked hard and conscientiously over many months to complete the household census in 2007–08; and to Saravanan who worked with us in the summer of 2012. We are also grateful to K. M. Manikumar for his help in making our initial contacts in Gangaikondan. John Harriss thanks Simon Pratt, now of the University of Toronto, for his painstaking work in analysing much of the quantitative data from the village census; and his former colleague at the London School of Economics, Professor C. J. Fuller, for his interest in this study.

of them – being moneylenders. The village remained so in the 1930s, though the numbers of Brahman households had by then declined. By the second half of the twentieth century Gangaikondan was a "Brahman village" no more, and it is now dominated by Thevars, who have to come to form what anthropologists describe as the "dominant caste" over much of the southern part of Tamil Nadu, and by Pallars, the principal Scheduled Caste or Dalit community of this region. Whereas, in 1916, Thevars and Pallars together made up 40 per cent or so of the households of the village, they now account for more than two-thirds – and it is the Pallars, in particular, who make up an increasing share of the village population. They are now 45 per cent of the village population, whereas in 1916 the "depressed classes," as they and other Scheduled Caste communities were then described, seem to have made up only about 30 per cent of the population. In terms of their land holdings, occupations, and levels of living, there is not nearly such a difference between the Thevars and Pallars as there is between the principal caste communities of the area of Iruvelpattu in northern Tamil Nadu, the Vanniyars and Paraiyars, that we have discussed in our work on that village. Indeed, in Gangaikondan all Pallars together own more land in aggregate than housholds of any other caste; they hold more than 50 per cent of the land owned by village households. The relatively good living conditions of the Pallars of Gangaikondan were noted already by Lokanathan in 1916 when he wrote:

> It seems that there is an increase in the population of the depressed classes and also a rise in their standard of living ... [their] dwellings ... are fairly good and they are neat considering their literacy and general progress (Slater 1918, p. 55 and p. 65).

Just as there is a history of tension and sometimes of conflict between Vanniyars and Paraiyars in Iruvelpattu, so there is such a history in the relations of Thevars and Pallars in Gangaikondan. The village was the site of violent conflict between the two communities in the mid-1990s, leading up to an incident when police opened fire, killing two men from one of the hamlets. Following this event, several leading Thevars moved their residences into the main settlement ("GK proper") – though now members of both communities seem concerned to maintain the peace. The relatively high social standing of the principal Scheduled Caste or Dalit community of Gangaikondan is particularly striking, and the Pallars have supplied at least the last three panchayat presidents from this general (not reserved) constituency.

The other major theme in the story of this old Brahman village is that of the economy. Lokanathan gives the impression that the agricultural economy of the village was quite poor in 1916, attracting a relatively low revenue assessment. He commented on the poverty of the soils and the relative dearth of irrigated land, and wrote:

> I am told that dependence solely on agriculture is not calculated to keep a family out of want. The members of the family must also engage in other pursuits which bring them some addition to the income they get from land (Slater 1918, p. 57).

Natarajan, similarly, wrote of the village in 1934 that: "Agriculture has ceased to be a business proposition" (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 116).[2] Part of the reason for this may have been that Brahman non-cultivating landlords took little interest in agriculture, and those who did derived a significant part of their income from moneylending (*ibid.*, p. 61). The subsequent evolution of agrarian production relations calls for examination in explaining the continuing decline of agriculture in Gangaikondan, where the share of households now depending on agriculture alone, as we have said, has fallen to 20 per cent or less (22 per cent of households gave agriculture or agricultural labour, or occasionally managing livestock, as the primary occupation of all those household members in the labour force, but this number falls well below 20 per cent when account is taken also of secondary occupations; very few households indeed depend entirely on agricultural labour). In part, of course, this has come about because of the pull of employment in non-agriculture, which became increasingly available with the development of quarrying locally, the establishment of cement and chemical works nearby (which had already happened by 1958), and then the establishment of textile and flour mills in the village itself (in the early 1960s). Most recently, Gangaikondan has become the site of an "Information Technology (IT) Park," a special economic zone (SEZ) with an IT focus, set up by ELCOT (Electronics Corporation of Tamilnadu Ltd). A sophisticated looking building has been constructed, though no companies had started operations there by mid-2012. Most of the estate is now under the aegis of SIPCOT (Small Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu), and the first companies to have been set up there are a tyre manufacturing unit, a soft drink bottling plant, and a unit that manufactures cement sheets. What the impact of these developments will be on the village remains to be seen – but it must be likely to see its final transformation to a suburban town. This transformation is being furthered, too, by the purchase of lands near the highway by property developers.

The Setting of the Village and Its Resources

The Chittar river flows across the northern part of the village lands, but whereas it appears from Lokanathan's account that in 1916 the river gave an assured supply of water (and that it was the principal source of drinking water), this is no longer the case. In 1916, too, and in 1934, there was a channel from an anicut on the river that supplied irrigation water directly to more than 200 acres, and then to the major tank (the Sirukulam tank) from which almost another 800 acres were irrigated; and there were two other, very small, rainfed tanks, together irrigating a further 30 acres. More recently, in the 1960s, another old rainfed tank – called the Parakrama Pandian Tank – was restored, and it supplied irrigation water for more than 500 acres. But this tank, in common with the others, has been poorly maintained and is now heavily silted. Its water storage capacity has been lost and only one of its five sluice-gates is operated.

[2] Haswell (1967, p. 44) writes: "Uncultivable eroded sandy soils predominate in this dry tract of low rainfall and irrigation potential, and recent off-farm employment opportunities have added to the difficulty experienced by landowners in finding tenants; this is reflected in the fall in rents and consequently in the price of land."

Table 1 *Cultivated land area in Gangaikondan, 1912–17 to 2010–11*

Years	Gross cultivated area (acres)	Net sown area (acres)
1912–17 (average)	4081.86	-
1927–32 (average)	4020.70	-
1946–51 (average)	4615.00	3384.00
1957–58	4516.35	3619.61
1974–79 (average)	2807.18	1944.39
1981–82	2295.83	1792.84
2010–11	1256.83	1238.22

Source: Athreya (1984, p. 68); and records of Village Administrative Officers.

The Sirukulam channel, too, though it has been cleared, rarely gets much water from the river. Natarajan reported in the 1930s that it "is cleared by the Department of Public Works only once in 4 or 5 years, after repeated and loud complaints;" he further noted that, in common with what was very widely observed in Tamil Nadu, the system of cooperative maintenance of irrigation structures by cultivators, known as *kudimaramut*, continued but was "ill-discharged," so that "the actual condition of wells, tanks, etc., is very unsatisfactory" (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 67). Nothing has changed since then, and if we may judge from the state of the Parakrama Pandian Tank, the situation has probably got worse.

Lokanathan recorded 47 wells used for irrigation purposes, three of them dry, and he wrote: "Wells do not pay the ryots in proportion to the amount of trouble and expense involved" (Slater 1918, p. 55). Natarajan's account shows that this situation had not changed by the 1930s; and the AERC study (as reported by Athreya), that it remained unchanged in 1960. Thereafter there was a modest increase in irrigation from wells, and Athreya records that there were 89 wells in 1981–82, 27 of them operated with electric pumpsets, 24 with diesel engines, and the remainder operated with bullock-drawn water lifting arrangements (the old *kavalai* of the Tamil country). This situation, too, has not changed very much over the last 25 years – though one rarely sees a *kavalai* in operation. There are now 98 wells, according to the official record, and two borewells. This part of Tamil Nadu did not see the "pumpset revolution" that had such a major impact on agriculture elsewhere in the state in the 1970s and 1980s (Farmer 1977).

The village records, as reported by Lokanathan and Thomas, show that – according to the classification of lands for purposes of collection of land revenue – there were just a little more than 1,000 acres of *nanjai* or wetland (irrigated), and 6,000 acres and more of cultivable *punjai* or dryland (rainfed) in the village, with a further 3,500 acres of *poramboke* (uncultivable "wasteland" and commons, but with an area of official "Reserved Forest"). The village records today still show the lands as being classified as: 1,000+ acres of *nanjai* (wetland); 6,000+ acres of *punjai* (dryland); and 3,500+ acres of *poramboke*. As Table 1 shows, the areas of land actually cultivated have always been much less than these figures suggest.

The data shown in the table attest to the decline of cultivation even in the 1970s. By then, we were told, cultivation of dryland had been largely abandoned, and, as Athreya mentions was the case in 1984, many people in the village no longer thought of dryland, even though they may have held *pattas* (ownership records) for it, as being agricultural land. Now the principal value of dryland is as a source of firewood, and as the means of making charcoal for sale from the cutting of the fast-growing, invasive thorny shrub, *Prosopis juliflora*. Millets and sorghum are no longer cultivated, as they once were, on dryland. The cropping pattern is dominated by single-crop paddy; the acreage under cotton has contracted significantly (though it is probably more than the 104 acres shown in the Village Administrative Officers' record for 2010–11); a little sugarcane is sometimes cultivated (less than 2 acres in 2010–11); and brinjal, sunflower and banana on small areas, together with some coconuts and other tree crops.

The Administrative Village and Its Population

Gangaikondan is now divided into two villages for revenue purposes, but still constitutes one panchayat. It includes eleven distinct hamlets plus the "colony" of one of them, each hamlet quite distinct in its caste composition, as we go on to explain. There is now (in 2012) also a new housing colony, called Netaji Nagar, set up by a private developer, and another plot laid for further such development.

The population of the entire "village," according to our census data, was 6,884 in 2007–08, showing an increase over what was recorded in the Census of 2001 but fewer people than were recorded in the Census of 1991 (Table 2). The relatively low rate of growth of population is in line with – though from the 1960s through the 1980s higher than – the population growth rates for Tirunelveli district and for rural Tamil Nadu as a whole (Table 3). But it is still the case that the population of the village has increased by more than 50 per cent over the last 50 years.

Lokanathan noted in 1916 that the numbers of Brahmans in the village were declining (in line with what was happening elsewhere in the Tamil country, Brahmans started leaving their villages for towns in the course of the nineteenth century, in search of education and employment: see Fuller 2011). He concluded his report by saying, "There is already a large number of emigrants going out of this village in search of employment" (Slater 1916, p. 74), and he referred to those with English education (Brahmans, we may presume, for Natarajan comments on the low levels of literacy in English among others: see Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 114) as having "gone elsewhere;" to Pallars and Thevars who had gone to work on tea plantations in Ceylon (some of whom had returned with small savings); and to "six oil-mongers" who had gone to Penang to trade in oil and who had returned with considerable capital. This story of outward migration was picked up and emphasised by Natarajan, who, in 1934, referred to the significant decline in the village population after 1921. He showed in some detail how this

Table 2 *Population of Gangaikondan, 1901–2008*

Year	No. of households	Males	Females	Total
1901	660	1514	1551	3065
1911	n. a.	1675	1820	3495
1916	*663*	*n. a.*	*n. a.*	*3493*
1921	n. a.	2193	2169	4362
1931	n. a.	1879	1852	3731
1934	*569*	*n. a.*	*n. a.*	*n. a.*
1941	n. a.	1937	1953	3890
1951	998	2091	2186	4277
1958–60	*1088*	*2151*	*2257*	*4408*
1961	984	2149	2250	4399
1971	1201	2699	2659	5358
1981	1403	3110	3223	6333
1984	*1344*	*3210*	*3291*	*6501*
1991	n. a.	3851	3790	7641
2001	n. a.	3092	3183	6275
2008	*1733*	*3352*	*3532*	*6884*

Note: Data for 2011 not yet available.
n. a.: not available
Source: Census of India, various years; and village survey reports (rows in italics).

Table 3 *Inter-censal population growth rates, 1901–11 to 1991–2001* per annum

Year	Tamil Nadu (rural)	Tirunelveli (rural)	Gangaikondan
1901–11		0.42	1.32
1911–21	0.25	0.81	2.24
1921–31	0.56	0.35	–1.55
1931–41	0.92	0.88	0.42
1941–51	0.77	0.28	0.95
1951–61	0.81	0.52	0.28
1961–71	1.53	1.44	1.99
1971–81	1.23	0.73	1.69
1981–91	1.26	0.94	1.90
1991–2001	–0.52	–0.98	–1.95

Source: Computed from Census of India, various years.

decline was to be explained not so much in terms of the circular seasonal migration of Pallars and Paraiyars to tea estates in the Western Ghats – extensive though this was, involving 200 or so people during the year – as of an "exodus to towns." There had been outward migration both of educated people (mainly Brahmans) and of artisans who were "forced to seek their livelihood in towns" because of "the decline of the indigenous handicrafts of the village" (*ibid.*, p. 58) – blacksmiths, goldsmiths, weavers (handloom weaving had almost died out in the village by

this time), "oil-mongers" (Vani Chettiars), and Konar/Yadavar, Navithar, and Arunthathiyar. Natarajan noted, however, that "The exodus has been greatest among the Brahmans" (*ibid.*, p. 61) and recorded that an old Brahman had told him that "fifty years" previously the 120 Brahman households in the village had owned all but 200 acres of the wetland and almost all of the dryland of the village, as well as having extensive rights for cattle grazing in the *poramboke*. The possessions of the now 75 Brahman households had dwindled, he said, to 250 acres of wetland and about 200 acres of cultivated dryland. "This was because the Brahmans ceased to take personal interest in land. They were content with merely letting the land … on terms more or less dictated by the tenant" (*ibid.*), while their expectations in terms of living standards ("costly clothes of cotton and silk … superfine rice as the staple") had risen considerably. Natarajan went on to note:

> The increasing resort to higher, English education has been another drain for Brahman families. They were not only the first to take to it, today they are almost the one community in the village who have sought it wholesale. Although this may not fully account for their decline in numbers in the village, it is certainly the cause of the emigration of a considerable number of Brahman families and their lack of interest in land. It looks as though the Brahman thrives best in towns and the rural soil is uncongenial to his genius (*Ibid.*).

Venkatesh Athreya (author of the 1984 study) surmised, on the basis of evidence from the AERC study of the years 1958–60 and from the Census records, that emigration must have continued up to the end of the 1950s, though the village population had increased again after 1931. Then, after 1961, the population of Gangaikondan increased at rates above the average both for all of rural Tamil Nadu and for rural Tirunelveli up to 1991 (see Table 3), and Athreya found that out-migration had been replaced by or outbalanced by immigration into Gangaikondan. He showed that the 1960s and 1970s saw an expansion of the non-agricultural sector of the village – following the establishment nearby of the cement factory and chemical plant that we mentioned, a modern rice mill, and, in the village itself, the textile factory and flour mill, together with the establishment of beedi-making and quarrying, as well as "some degree of modernisation of agriculture." It appears, then, that the expansion locally of non-agricultural employment checked the earlier long-running trend of outward migration.

Between 1991 and 2001, however, the population of the village declined once more, quite sharply (at a higher rate than in rural Tamil Nadu or rural Tirunelveli), though our data for 2007–08 show an increase, again, of 10 per cent (from 6,275 in 2001 to 6,884 in 2008). There is some evidence, however, of declining employment opportunities locally (see below). While the survey data show that one-third of the households have members residing outside, and, though 40 per cent of the individuals concerned have migrated out for marriage, there clearly remains a sizeable number who have gone out for work or work-related reasons. At the same time, there still are large numbers of inward migrants.

What is now known as Gangaikondan Part 1 includes:

1. Gangaikondan proper. This is the administrative and commercial hub, the old Brahman village, and still occupied by the few remaining Brahman households together with Pillais, Thevars (who are numerically dominant), Kammalars (*achari*, or artisans), and a small numbers of others, many of them temporary migrants like the policemen who live in the village). No Pallars live in the village centre, that is, in Gangaikondan proper.
2. Vadakarai, which was originally perhaps the settlement of the Vani Chettiar oil-pressers, but now largely Thevar, though with fair numbers of "others".
3. Marakudi, also Thevar.
4. Anaithalaiyoor, mainly Pallar, some Thevars.
5. Punganoor, Pallar Christians.
6. Rajapathi, a sttlement of Konars – also called Yadhavars – and Nadars, with some "others," mostly Vannar, traditional washermen.
7. Kalaignar Colony, Thevar.
8. Duraiyur (West), Pallar.

Gangaikondan Part 2 includes:

1. Duraiyur (East), also Pallar.
2. Aladipathi, Pallar.
3. Kottaiadi, mainly Pallar.
4. Pappankulam, entirely Nadar.
5. Aladipathi Colony.

Appendix 1 shows the numbers of households in the different hamlets by caste and by the principal occupation of the households, as reported in the household census.

What is striking – though unsurprising in a Tamil village – is that the settlement pattern of Gangaikondan as a whole shows such residential exclusivity.

The village panchayat has twelve members drawn as follows: Gangaikondan two, Vadakarai two, Anaithalaiyoor three, Duraiyur I and II together two, Rajapathi two, and Aladipatti one. Voting tends strongly, we were told, to follow caste lines. The current panchayat president is a Christian Pallar.

What might not have been expected is that there are also significant differences in the employment patterns of the major hamlets. For example, in Vadakarai the principal occupations outside agriculture are charcoal-making, tree-cutting work (for which men travel far outside the village), and work in unloading wheat from trains for the flour mill. These are not occupations carried on in nearby Anaithalaiyoor

or in Aladipathi. People in Aladipathi work in the mills and some on Southern Railways, though they say that – unlike in Anaithalaiyoor – there is nobody engaged in "government jobs." There is a particular concentration of men in the hamlet of Punganoor who work in various ways in the construction of windmills. One is a substantial contractor, owning a JCB excavator and a lorry.

As a way of finding out about the extent of village and caste organisation in the different settlements, we asked about the existence of common village funds (such as once was found in Iruvelpattu), village meetings, and the presence of local *uur* panchayats (or "village councils") outside the frame of the official system of local government, or panchayati raj, also having in view recent research showing the survival in some regions of south India of these "traditional" institutions of village governance (see Ananth Pur and Moore 2007). Some notes on our findings are as follow.

Paapankulam, as the name suggests (*paappaan* being a popular nickname for a Brahman), is on land that belonged to an absentee Brahman landlord who brought in Shanar/Nadar families to climb the many palmyra trees (see notes to Table 5 on the relationship of the names "Shanar" and "Nadar"). There are now 35 Nadar families there. Lands are said to have been gifted by the Brahman to the Nadars, but they were afraid to maintain them in the face of opposition from Thevars who acquired control of the Brahman lands. There is neither an *uur* panchayat nor a village *koottam* (meeting) here.

Rajapathy is a hamlet of Konars/Yadhavas (see note to Table 5 on these caste names) and Nadars. It includes two panchayat wards and both the representatives are Konar. The Nadars complain about being excluded as a minority in the hamlet, though they say there have not been inter-caste disputes. There is an old Nadar church, built in the early twentieth century, that was once Catholic but is now of the (Protestant) Church of South India (CSI). There is a good level of education amongst the Nadars, including some quite forceful young women graduates. There is no single *uur* panchayat here – though there used to be one. There are now separate meetings even for Hindu, CSI, and Catholic Nadars; and there is no village fund beyond what is collected for festivals. Konar men meet on the tenth of every month and they have a *naataamai* (leader or "chief") who is selected by lot. He has to organise the festivals and "work for the good of the village." It is the *naataamai* who is responsible for settlement of disputes, rather than an *uur* panchayat.

Vadakarai, on the other hand, is a multi-caste hamlet, dominated by Thevars but with Moopanars, Padaiyachis (Vanniyars), one household of Vani Chettiars (the "oil-mongers" of Lokanathan's note), Pandithars (barbers), Vannars (washermen), Velakamars (potters), Scheduled Caste Paraiyar and Arunthathiar, and two Scheduled Tribe Koravar households. The *uur* panchayat here decides on who should be the formal panchayat representatives, and also on issues that are to be raised. The leadership of the *uur* panchayat (the role of the *naataamai*) is rotated every three

years amongst the elders of the eight "*pangaalis*" – the lineages of those held to have been the original settlers amongst the Thevars of Vadakarai. The *uur* meeting or assembly (*koottam*), which takes place in the temple, involves men of other castes, excludes men of the Paraiyar, Arunthathiar, and Koravar castes. On the whole, this *uur* panchayat, and others, is concerned only with the organisation of temple festivals, though it has a role in the settlement of disputes. There is no village fund, and there is a collection for festivals.

There remain, then, some elements of the historic organisation of caste communities, but what seems not to have existed in Gangaikondan for a long time is the structure of relationships between caste communities that has been labelled by anthropologists as the "*jajmani* system" – that was observed in villages in northern Tamil Nadu (where it was called in Tamil, simply, *murai*, meaning "order") in the early 1970s. At that time customary payments were made by cultivators, sometimes on their threshing floors, of varying amounts of paddy and of produce, to members of other castes who carried out particular functions, some of them of religious importance, including the village temple priest, the Acharis (in this case, carpenters and blacksmiths), barbers, washermen, and the village functionaries from amongst the Dalit Paraiyar households (Harriss 1982). Lokanathan wrote of Gangaikondan in 1916, however, very emphatically, that:

> One chief peculiarity in this village is the utter displacement of wages in kind by wages in money. The old and time-honoured system by which the villagers used to pay every labourer and artisan in kind has totally disappeared. Even the barber and washerman get their wages in hard cash. No perquisites are given except certain presents given them on Pongal day [the principal festival amongst Tamilians] (Slater 1918, pp. 67–68).

He also noted, rather enigmatically, since the first sentence in the following passage seems contradicted by the next two, that:

> Of padiyals [attached or bonded labourers] there are none in the village. In former times many families of the depressed classes were brought as slaves by Brahmans, and even now the latter have a claim on the services of the former. Services must first be rendered to the master and then only to any other (*Ibid.*, p. 69).

It is tempting to conclude from these observations that the apparent breakdown, even by the early twentieth century, of what has been held to have been the traditional structure of social relationships in an Indian village around the dominant caste, reflects the withdrawal of the Brahmans of this village from their engagement with village affairs.

Table 4 shows the changes in the caste composition of Gangaikondan since 1916.

The most striking changes in the caste composition of Gangaikondan – as we noted earlier – are the very marked increase in the numbers and the share of the Pallars in the population of the village, and the decline in the already small numbers, a

Table 4 *Caste composition of Gangaikondan, 1916–2008*

Caste	1916		1934		1958-60		1984		2008	
	No. of households	%	No. of households	%	No. of households	%	No. of households	%	No. of households	%
Brahman	100	15.1	75	13.2	97	8.9	36	2.7	18	1.0
Pillai/Vellala	31	4.7	30	5.3	39	3.6	66	4.9	39	2.3
Thevar (Maravar)	102	15.4	105	18.5	218	20.0	297	22.1	380	22.0
Konar/Yadhavar	60	9.0	50	8.8	118	10.8	150	11.2	203	11.8
Nadar (Hindu)					47	4.3	51	3.8	73	4.2
[Shanar]	8	1.2	18	3.2						
Nadar (Christian)					8	0.7	21	1.6	23	1.3
Achari/Kammalar	18	2.7	12	2.1	44	4.0	39	2.9	51	3.0
"Oil-mongers"/Chettiar	12	1.8	8	1.4	7	0.6	18	1.3	9	0.5
Naidu	–		–		–		21	1.6	11	0.6
"Betelmen"/Moopanar	50	7.5	40	7.0	24	2.2	24	1.8	5	0.3
Navidhar/Barbers	5	0.8	3	0.5	11	1.0	15	1.1	5	0.3
Vannan/Washermen	3	0.5	2	0.4	17	1.6	15	1.1	22	1.3
Kaikolar (Weavers)	20	3.0	6	1.1	8	0.7	3	0.2	0	
Vanniyar	–		–		21	1.9	18	1.3	14	0.8
Thondaman	3	0.5	2	0.4	–		3	0.2	5	0.3
Potters	10	1.5	6	1.0	0		0		0	
Fishermen	20	3.0	20	3.5	–		–		–	
Muslim	5	0.8	5	0.9	–		3	0.2	6	0.3
Christian	0		0		0		3	0.2	17	1.0
Others	9	1.4	6	1.1	54	5.0	24	1.8	59	3.4

Scheduled Caste (SC)										
Pallar (Hindu)					224	20.6	291	21.7	489	28.3
Pallar (all)	175	26.4	161	28.3		32.2		38.0		45.1
Pallar (Christian)					126	11.6	219	16.3	290	16.8
Paraiyar	8	1.2	8	1.4	16	1.5	21	1.6	2	0.1
Aruntathiyar	14	2.1	5	0.9	9	0.8	6	0.4	5	0.3
Other "Depressed"	10	1.5	7	1.2						
Total SC %						31.8		40.0		45.5
Total no. of households	663		569		1088		1344		1726	

Notes: –: not recorded/not present

(i) "Pillai" and "Vellala" are titles used by people of the same community, "Vellala" being a title generally used by principal cultivators.

(ii) "Konar" and "Yadhavar" are also titles used by people of the same community, those described as "Shepherds" in the earlier village reports. It is possible that the title "Yadhavar" is being used more widely in India today as the idea of "Yadhavars" or "Yadavs" as an all-India community takes hold as a result of vigorous organising (see Michelutti 2008).

(iii) The Nadars, now considered a "Forward Caste," were once known as "Shanars" whose hereditary occupation was tree-climbing and toddy-tapping. In 1916 the Shanars of Gangaikondan were included by Lokanathan amongst the "depressed classes." Their circumstances and standing have evidently changed considerably since then.

(iv) It seems that those described in the early village reports as "oil-mongers" were probably Vani Chettiars; but it is not certain how many of those who have described themselves as "Chettiars" in the more recent surveys are Vani Chettiars.

(v) Acharis/Kammalars are the hereditary artisans of the Tamil country, and in the earlier village surveys included carpenters, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths.

(vi) The title "Naidu" is widely used in the Tamil country, by those of Telugu descent. Those living in Gangaikondan now, including a few families of those who use the title "Vadugar," are all inward migrants, and there seem not to have been Naidus in the village until the last thirty or forty years.

(vii) Those listed here as "Others" include, in 1916, "Pipers," "Kshatriyas," and "Brothel women" (Devadasis), and in 1934, "Pipers" and "Kshatriyas" alone. In 2008 they include prominently 14 households of Maruthuvars and a few members each of ten other communities, many of them short-term inward migrants.

Source: Data contained in successive studies of the village.

Table 5 *Land ownership by caste, 1984 and 2008*

Caste	1984			2008	
	% households	% area owned	% landless	% households	% area owned
Pallar (Hindu)	21.7	21.7	38.3	28.3	35.3
Pallar (Christian)	16.3	12.8	39.8	16.8	20.3
Thevar	22.1	24.8	39.4	22.0	19.7
Konar/Yadhavar	11.2	19.0	30.0	11.8	9.1
Pillai	4.9	4.5	68.2		
Nadar (Hindu)	3.8	3.3	66.7		
Nadar (Christian)	1.6	1.4	23.5		
All others	18.4	12.8		21.1	14.1

Source: Athreya (1985); and 2008 household census data (on which, see footnote 3).

century ago, of other Scheduled Castes. There are less marked but still appreciable increases in the numbers and shares in the population of Thevars, Konars/Yadhavars, and Nadars (though the rate of increase in their numbers has been lower latterly, so that the village as a whole has come to be even more emphatically Pallar over the last quarter century). Now these communities and the Pallars make up more than 84 per cent of the population, as compared with only 52 per cent in 1916. This of course reflects the exodus from the village of Brahmans and Pillais, who used to be the major landowners, and the taking over of much of their lands by these historically oppressed-caste communities; and the departure of a good many artisans and other specialists – though there remain significant numbers of Acharis (traditionally hereditary carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, and other craftsmen), most of whom are long-time residents of Gangaikondan (39 of the 51 households). And there are still barbers and washermen – perhaps the most essential of all the oppressed-caste ritual specialists within the caste system, with their important functions in life-cycle rituals and roles in the elimination of pollution (in the context of caste ideology) – and small numbers of members of other castes.

Agrarian Production Relations

Lokanathan said of the village in 1916 that only around 300 of the 1,000 or so acres of wetland were cultivated directly by the land owners. As he said, "this is to be explained by the fact that most of these lands belong to the Brahmans," and he went on to present data (the origins of which are unclear) showing that the numbers of non-cultivating land owners were increasing. The situation was much the same with regard to dryland, and Lokanathan described in some detail the four different types of tenancy arrangements then obtaining in the village: fixed rental, under which the costs of cultivation were borne by the tenant; a sharecropping arrangement, preferred by resident land owners who were able to supervise cultivation, under which two-thirds of the output went to the landlord; another sharecropping arrangement, under which three-quarters of the output went to the landlord, but who also supplied manure; and

what was in effect a labour contract, under which the landlord supplied all the inputs and the tenant labour for a one-eighth share of the output. Natarajan, reporting on agrarian relations in 1934, recorded the same rental arrangements, though he pointed out that cash rents were often paid for dryland cultivation. He described, however, "a slow change [that] is taking place in the relative shares of landlord and tenant," for the increasing tendency to absentee landlordism (as Brahmans were increasingly leaving the village) "is taken advantage of by the tenantry who put forth demands for a greater share than the customary one" (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 70). Tenants – who came principally from amongst the Thevars, Pallars, Shanars/Nadars, and the "Betelmen" (Moopanars), who are described as "the principal hereditary castes of people who form the bulk of the peasantry" (*ibid.*) – were also requiring more inducements by way of cash advances. Still, Natarajan reported that he was told by the cultivators whom he consulted that "there has been a great increase in the number of tenants in the last fifteen or twenty years"; that "petty holdings" of 1 to 5 acres extent had multiplied in number; and that there was "less concentration of lands in the hands of big landlords" (*ibid.*, pp. 70–71). These last claims were made on the basis of an examination of the official *patta* records (records of land ownership) for the village; we noted above Natarajan's report of the information he had from one informant about the decline of Brahman landholdings in the village.

The first census of the land holdings of the people of Gangaikondan was undertaken by the AERC in 1958–60, when it was found that there was still a considerable concentration of land ownership, with the top 5.7 per cent of households owning 10 acres and more accounting for more than 40 per cent of the total. Athreya's sample estimates from 1984 suggested quite a sharp decline in land concentration (those with 10 acres and more owning only 12.8 per cent of the total). Our own data[3] show greater concentration – the few holdings of 10 acres or more in extent accounting for 18 per cent of the total (and households owning 5 acres and more, who together make up only about 3 per cent of all households, account for 29 per cent of the total). Athreya pointed out, however, that his sample data failed to pick up twenty or more larger holdings. His enquiries came up with a list of twenty-one larger land holders, including an absentee Pillai landlord who was reported as owning 96 acres of wetland and 228 acres of dryland; ten Thevars with holdings of 30 acres or more of wetland; six Konars/Yadhavas, five with 25 acres each of wetland and one with 65; and four Pallars with between 15 and 35 acres each of wetland. We came to know that the absentee Pillai landlord still has an extensive property, though most of it now remains uncultivated; there remain several substantial Hindu Pallar land owners in Anaithalaiyoor, two of them owning around 50 acres each; at least one of the Christian Pallars in Punganur owns 20 acres; and one of the Nadars of Rajapathy

[3] We believe that our data from the household census certainly underestimate the land holdings of many households. This is usually the case with single round surveys such as this one. We do not believe, however, that there is any reason for thinking that there is any significant difference in our records for the different principal land-owning caste communities, and so we have reproduced our data for Table 6 as representing a fair comparison of land holdings between castes.

owns 33 acres, which he acquired gradually from 1973, from a Pillai landlord. The larger land owners whom we met are, however, all elderly and in several cases it is unlikely that their children will take much interest in cultivation in the future. None of these larger land owners is now very aptly described as a "landlord." They do not lease out land to tenants and no longer employ permanent labourers, though they once did, nor do they exercise control over labour or function substantially as money-lenders. We learn from the later studies of Gangaikondan that there were some new types of rental arrangements in place though the old systems of fixed and share rent were still found – and that the incidence of tenancy had declined, though no data were presented to support this point. We identified only six cases of the leasing-in of small amounts of land.

According to Athreya's interpretation of the AERC study of 1958–60, it is likely that Brahmans and Pillais still owned significant amounts of land at that time, but this was no longer the case by 1984. By that time the leading land owners, with the exception of the Pillai absentee landlord, were all from what had been the cultivating tenant caste communities – Thevars, Pallars, Nadars, and Konars (who were not specifically mentioned by Natarajan in 1934), as we see from Table 5. By 2008 the Pallars had become the major land holders.

In 2008, 13 of the 18 Brahman households of Gangaikondan were of retired people (three with secondary occupations), most of whom had come back to the village after pursuing careers outside. There were two families of priests, one family headed by an agricultural labourer, two by other labourers, and one by a man employed as an inspector in the local quarries. Of the 39 Pillai households, 27 were of people who had come into the village from outside (including two Village Administrative Officers and two policemen, all of whom expected to live in Gangaikondan only for a short time). Other Pillais were involved in diverse occupations outside agriculture; and only two of their households were cultivator households. Clearly, if it was the case 50 years ago that Brahmans and Pillais were still significant land owners in Gangaikondan, this is no longer so.

What is striking about the data that Athreya presented (reproduced in Table 6) on land ownership by caste, is how balanced land ownership appears then to have been between Pallars, Thevars, and Konars/Yadhavars (who owned, between them nearly 80 per cent of all the land owned by Gangaikondan people). Our own data for 2008 (in Table 5) and that given in Table 4 (and summarised here, in Table 6), however, show that land ownership and cultivation have become relatively less important for Thevars and Konars/Yadhavars, and more important for especially the Christian Pallars, many of whom now own small holdings.

By contrast with what obtains in many Indian villages according to so much survey data, and as is the case in Iruvelpattu where agricultural labour remains the most important occupation of the Dalit households who own little land, it is very striking

Table 6 *Agricultural households by principal castes, 2008*

Caste	No. of cultivator households	%	No. of agricultural labour households	%
Thevar	62	16.3	46	12.1
Pallar (Hindu)	146	29.9	58	11.9
Pallar (Christian)	117	40.3	21	7.2
Konar	22	10.8	52	25.6
Nadar (Hindu)	12	16.4	5	6.8
Nadar (Christian)	4	17.4	1	4.3
Brahman	0	0	1	5.5
Pillai	2	5.1	0	0
Kammalar	0	0	0	0

Notes: (i) %: % of all households in the caste group.
(ii) Many of these households are not exclusively engaged in agricultural occupations, and though they reported cultivation or agricultural labour as their primary activity in some cases non-agricultural income was clearly more important.
Source: Athreya (1985); and household census data, 2008.

that in Gangaikondan the Pallars, a Dalit community, have both acquired significant land holdings and are not disproportionately dependent upon agricultural labour for their livelihoods, by comparison with people from other communities. This recalls Lokanathan's statement, quoted earlier – enigmatic though it is – about the absence of *padiyals* (attached labourers) in the village even in 1916. In other villages at that time and still very much later in the twentieth century, as in Iruvelpattu, there were large numbers of *padiyals* amongst the principal Dalit community. That Lokanathan should have been so emphatic about there having been no *padiyals* suggests that even a century ago the Pallars of Gangaikondan were at least somewhat independent in their relations with the upper castes. Quite why and how all this happened is not firmly established, but the early setting up of Christian churches and of church schools in the village surely played a part. In 1916 there were three schools in Gangaikondan, a Local Board school set up near the Brahman street, and two schools managed by Christian missions, one Catholic and one Protestant. Lokanathan reported that none of the "depressed classes" attended the Board school whereas in the others they were "almost the sole children studying" (Slater 1918, p. 72). Whether very many children from amongst the Pallars gained much education at that time may be doubted, however, in the light of Natarajan's account from 1934, for he says that "Of the 150 families of Pallars only about ten are literate in the sense that they can write their names" (Thomas and Ramakrishnan 1940, p. 115). Still, this history of education, and of reservation of jobs in public services for members of the Scheduled Castes, must substantially account, for example, for the numbers of Pallar men whose names are recorded as donors to one of the temples in Anaithalaiyoor. These were names of men with good positions in Southern Railways, in the Tamilnadu State Electricity Board, or the police. Pallars are proud, too, of doctors, engineers, and at least one IAS officer from their community. Another factor in the relative prosperity of Gangaikondan's

Pallars is their long history of seasonal and of longer-term migration to plantations in the Western Ghats, which continues to the present. Incomes from plantation work have provided the means whereby Pallars have been able to purchase land and to construct relatively good houses (and by comparison with villages elsewhere, including Iruvelpattu, the quality of housing in Gangaikondan is remarkably good – our survey data show 72 per cent of houses as having concrete roofs, compared with 23 per cent tiled and less than 2 per cent thatched; only 35 of more than 1,700 houses do not have concrete or tiled floors).

But politics, too, has played a part, as the following history shows. In Anaithalaiyoor there lives a now elderly person, who is of the Pallar caste and is an ex-MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) of the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) (1967–76), having previously (in 1965) become panchayat president (something that was considered almost unimaginable for a Pallar at the time). His father was a *kangani* (overseer) on a tea estate and he had succeeded in buying some 10 acres of land in the village. The ex-MLA studied as far as Class 6 and claims to have started the DMK unit in the village. He led a procession through the village to the Perumal temple in 1953 to secure entry for the Pallars, in an act that was acclaimed by the senior DMK leader V. R. Nedunchezhian; and this seems to have been an important moment in the assertion of the Pallars. After this there was always conflict with Brahmans over rents. The ex-MLA has four sons: one works in the Forest Department, one looks after the lands, one has a maxi-cab, and the fourth has been the Manoor Panchayat Union Chairman for three terms (he now owns a splendid, ultra-modern house in the centre of the village that would not look out of place in a posh neighbourhood of Delhi) and is also the DMK secretary for the area. Two of the daughters-in-law are Brahmans - and, the elderly ex-MLA says, one of their fathers was a great landlord.

Work and Levels of Living

The relative (that is, compared to other parts of Tamil Nadu) equality between Pallars, Thevars, Konars/Yadhavars, and Nadars is further demonstrated in the distribution of their (reported) occupations across different categories of jobs, shown in Table 7. Labour force participation rates are higher amongst Pallars than Konars, and amongst Konars higher than amongst Thevars, mainly reflecting differences in female participation rates (23.3 per cent amongst Thevars, 28.4 per cent amongst Konars, 36.8 per cent amongst Hindu Pallars, and 35 per cent amongst Christian Pallars). There are a good many more cultivators amongst the Pallars, but no more agricultural labourers than there are amongst the other two caste communities and a rather lower share of the Pallars are engaged in general labouring work (much of it in construction). The Pallars and the Konars have relatively more people in the higher-level occupations of categories 1 to 3 (of the National Classification of Occupations) than do the Thevars, though the Pallars have rather fewer in the Sales and Services occupation. (Those in category 1 are mostly teachers, nurses, and "religious workers" – priests and pujaris; those in category 2 are mostly proprietors of small businesses, usually retail

Table 7 *Principal occupations amongst the major castes of Gangaikondan, 2008*

Occupation Category	Thevar total (%)	Konar total (%)	Pallar (Hindu) total (%)	Pallar (Christian) total (%)	All village total (%)
1 – Professional	6 (1)	7 (2.1)	23 (2.5)	21 (4.3)	83 (2.9)
2 – Administrative	1 (0.2)	6 (1.8)	9 (1.0)	1 (0.2)	22 (0.8)
3 – Clerical	14 (2.3)	7 (2.1)	17 (1.8)	9 (1.8)	69 (2.4)
4 – Sales workers	39 (6.3)	9 (2.6)	19 (2.0)	9 (1.8)	116 (4.0)
5 – Service workers	27 (4.3)	17 (5.0)	19 (2.0)	6 (1.2)	117 (4.0)
6 – Cultivators	90 (14.5)	54 (15.9)	266 (28.4)	171 (35.0)	616 (21.2)
6a – Agricultural labour	50 (8.1)	41 (12.1)	100 (10.7)	21 (4.3)	245 (8.4)
6b – Agriculture-related	62 (10.0)	18 (5.3)	7 (0.7)	2 (0.4)	95 (3.3)
7 – Production (a)	105 (16.9)	40 (11.8)	110 (11.8)	53 (10.9)	435 (15.0)
8 – Production (b)	8 (1.3)	8 (2.4)	12 (1.3)	11 (2.3)	154 (5.3)
9a – Drivers	22 (3.5)	9 (2.6)	29 (3.1)	25 (5.1)	97 (3.3)
9b – Construction	26 (4.2)	16 (4.7)	60 (6.4)	34 (7.0)	167 (5.7)
9c – General labour	141 (22.7)	92 (27.1)	181 (19.4)	78 (16.0)	579 (19.9)
Total labour force	621	340	935	488	2906
Labour force participation rate (%)	38.4	43.1	46.3	46.3	42.2

Notes: The categories used here are taken from the National Classification of Occupations (NCO) (1968), issued by the Directorate General of Employment and Training of the Government of India. The divisions are:
1 – "Professional Technical and Related Workers"
2 – "Administrative, Executive, and Managerial Workers"
3 – "Clerical and Related Workers"
4 – "Sales Workers"
5 – "Service Workers"
6 – "Farmers, Fishermen, Hunters, Loggers, and Related Workers"
7–8–9 – "Production and Related Workers, Transport Equipment Operators, and Labourers"
We have distinguished in Division 6 between Group 61 "Cultivators", Family 630 "Agricultural Labourers" (our 6a), and all the rest of Division 6 (our 6b), which includes firewood cutters and charcoal makers, and those whose main occupation is raising livestock. In Divisions 7–8–9, we have distinguished between Groups 71–79, which include quarry work, metal processing, spinning and weaving, working with leather, food processing, and tailoring (our 7); and Groups –89, which include carpenters, stone masons, blacksmiths, machinery and electrical fitters, plumbers, and welders (our 8); and in Division 9 between Family 986 ("Tramcar and motor vehicle drivers"), which is our 9a; Groups 93 and 95 ("Painters" and "Bricklayers and Other Construction Workers"), which is our 9b; and Group 99 ("Labourers, not elsewhere classified"), which is our 9c. These groups account for all the workers in Divisions 7–8–9 in the village.
Source: Household census data, 2008.

shops; those in category 3 include, notably, bus conductors, and clerks.) The fairly high proportion of Thevars in "activities related to agriculture" reflects the numbers who make a living from cutting firewood and from making charcoal, while their lead in the first category of "production and related workers" very largely reflects the substantial numbers of Thevar women who work (at home) as *beedi* rollers. There is very little difference in the proportion of male workers from the four caste communities in this category of occupations. Others in the village are more strongly

represented in the second category of "production workers," who include those employed in the textile mills, carpenters, and electricians, who come especially from amongst the Acharis/Kammalars. In sum, there is most certainly not the gap in terms of occupations between the regionally dominant caste Thevars and Dalit Pallars in Gangaikondan that there is, very commonly according to many other village studies, between members of locally dominant caste communities and the Dalits.

Since 1984 there has been a movement, clearly, in Gangaikondan, out of agriculture and agriculture-related occupations into non-agriculture – the shares of cultivators (33.77 per cent) and of agricultural labourers (19.53 per cent) together accounted for more than half of the labour force at that time, compared with less than one-third now. The movement, however, has been into general labour rather than into what might be considered "good jobs" – being more secure – in factory work or in government service.

The small share of agricultural labour amongst the occupations of people in Gangaikondan is, of course, very striking. It is a reflection of the inter-connected factors of the decline of agriculture and of the increasing availability of non-agricultural employment. These factors are inter-connecting because the availability of alternative employment partly accounts for a labour shortage in agriculture, and this has contributed to a declining interest in cultivation (in a relatively poorly irrigated tract with indifferent soils). Declining interest in cultivation is reflected, for instance, in the remarks to us of the Pallar Christian who works as a contractor in windmill construction but who owns 20 acres of paddy lands, to the effect that the profit margin in paddy cultivation is too low to be attractive. He is now paying his sister – who formerly managed his lands – *not* to cultivate them, save for a small area for domestic consumption. Now, given that land preparation, and harvesting and threshing of paddy are mechanised, the principal operation for which significant amounts of labour are required is that of transplanting. Here women, rather than men, pluck seedlings as well as transplant them. Cultivators report, without exception, that securing labour for this operation is difficult. It is now done on a contract basis, and it is necessary for the cultivators to book well in advance with contract group leaders, and often to pay auto-rickshaw and bus charges to the workers, as well as providing snacks and tea. One cultivator joked that he is now "attached" to the labourers, rather than the relationship being the other way around.

The problem of labour shortage in agriculture certainly pre-dates the inauguration of the MGNREGA – cultivators suggest that they began to lose labour, especially to construction work, in the later 1980s, but the employment scheme has exacerbated the process. Here, in 2012, the NREGA has become, for the moment at least, a scheme for providing a social wage. We observed the NREGA in operation on one occasion when a large group, mostly of women, gathered together in the shade of a large banyan tree. Little work was done during the day, but wages were paid. The

panchayat president indeed complained that now, "Nobody works. No measurements [of the amount of digging completed] are taken," but that he is still expected to show that payments are disbursed (and not to ask questions). Were the work to be measured, he said, and payments made accordingly, NREGA would not affect the costs of agricultural labour. But as it is, the availability of some income from NREGA is said by cultivators to have driven up agricultural wages.

Wage levels now (in 2012), according to our interviews with cultivators and data from our snatch sample of 40 labour households (our sampling being opportunistic rather than statistical – we collected data from those whom we could find during our visits to the different hamlets), are generally around Rs 250 per day, going up to Rs 300 per day for men engaged in agricultural operations such as bunding, and Rs 120 to Rs 150 per day for women engaged in transplanting and weeding (these latter rates being influenced by the availability of NREGA payments of Rs 110 per day). In other daily-paid wage labour occupations carried on by men (the most important in our sample being construction work, employment in the cement and cement sheet factories, and in the quarries), the wage rates reported range between Rs 125 and Rs 300, with the modal value, however, being about Rs 250. Masons and carpenters are generally paid more than this. A permanently employed operator in the flour mill is paid Rs 6,500 per month, equivalent to Rs 260 per working day (though this man also receives some statutory benefits); a sales representative receives Rs 8,000 per month, without benefits but with expenses paid. The average daily wage paid out by the Kovilpatti Lakshmi Mills Company in its flour mill is currently Rs 250, but with benefits and bonus. As we reported in our study of Iruvelpattu, there is some evidence that historically, and very generally across different societies, the daily wage for agricultural work has been equivalent to 3 kg of cereals (here, paddy),[4] and we argued that it is only in the recent past in Iruvelpattu that this basic wage has been exceeded. With rice prices in the open market in Gangaikondan at Rs 33–40 per kg (in 2012), it is clear that generally wage levels are well above this historical floor.

Although the data from our snatch sample suggest that most men find reasonably regular employment,[5] it is possible that there is less employment available now in the local factories than was the case in 1984, according to Athreya's report. There have been lay-offs under VRS (voluntary retirement scheme) at the India Cements factory; contract labour is now employed in the South India Bottling Plant in the SIPCOT Estate and at the KL (textile and flour) mills in the village; and there has been mechanisation in the quarries which has reduced employment there. According to a shopkeeper, both men and women employees from Gangaikondan were laid off at the KL mills in 2003 or so, and replaced by young girls from outside, employed on a contract basis. They were being paid less than half of what he himself used to

[4] By way of comparison, Parthasarathi (2011), presents data showing that weavers' wages in Madras around 1800 were equivalent to about 2 kg of rice (or 3 kg of paddy).
[5] We asked about the regularity of employment in periods of high demand, and their length; and about the regularity of employment in other periods of the year.

earn. The panchayat president mentioned to us, in 2007, a recent history of labour problems that had led companies to substitute regular labour with lower-paid contract employment. Now (2012), about one-third of the 700 or so people employed in the KL mills are contract labourers brought from Bihar.

Still, few daily-paid male workers reported less than 200 days of work in the year. If we assume a daily wage for a man of only Rs 200 per day and employment for 200 days, his annual income is Rs 40,000. This is equivalent (at the current open market prices for rice) to about 1,200 kg of rice, or, in an average-sized household of four, 300 kg per person. This is about 50 per cent more than is required to meet the daily minimum consumption requirement for a working adult, of around 600 grams – and so should ensure that most households have incomes above the minimum for an adequate diet. And rather few labour households have only one earner. Account must be taken, too, of the fact that the public distribution system functions in Gangaikondan, and that most households access significant quantities of rice free of charge or at low cost (even if it is sometimes of such poor quality that some people use it to feed their livestock). It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that labour households in Gangaikondan are mostly able to generate an income that keeps them above the poverty line (defined, as is conventional, in terms of income sufficient to secure an adequate intake of calories); this is in contrast with many of the households that still depend primarily upon agricultural labour in Iruvelpattu, where we estimated that 26 per cent of all households and 50 per cent of Dalit (there Paraiyar) households (Harriss *et al.* 2010) were living below such a locally defined poverty line. Other qualitative indicators of poverty, such as the quality of housing, go to confirm that the incidence of poverty in Gangaikondan is certainly less than in Iruvelpattu, and probably less than is commonly the case across rural India.[6]

Conclusion

Agriculture remains the single most important activity in Gangaikondan – but only just, and many more people are employed outside the agricultural economy than within it, in this urbanising village. The agricultural economy has been in decline for a long time, and the fillip given by what Athreya referred to as "agricultural modernisation" in the 1970s, with the introduction of mechanised groundwater irrigation and of chemical fertilizers, has been exhausted. The fact that the same paddy varieties are being cultivated now as in the early 1980s is one indicator of the decline – for, in the hey-day of the "green revolution" in Tamil Nadu, there was constant experiment going on with different varieties. Large areas of once cultivated land have fallen out of use for agriculture. In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that landed power is not in evidence, in spite of the concentration of land ownership

[6] The likely minimum income per person that we have calculated here, Rs 10,000 per annum, works out to Rs 27.40 per day. This is well above the rural poverty line of Rs 22.42 per day proposed by the Planning Commission in March 2012 – though this line is very controversial, and thought by many scholars and activists to represent a very low estimate.

holdings; and though the Thevars are described as being the dominant caste now in the wider region, they are not in Gangaikondan. Indeed the very concept of a "dominant caste" is inappropriate here. "Dominance" has usually been understood to mean command over people and their labour power, based mainly on control over land (though numbers may enter into the definition as well) and legitimated by hierarchical caste ideology. Here, following the passing of higher-caste Brahman and Pillai control of land and of the village economy, Thevars, Konars/Yadhavars, Nadars, and Pallars have all acquired land, often – it seems from several accounts given to us – on very favourable terms, because the Brahmans and Pillais had little interest in hanging on to the land. This is consistent with what Natarajan reported even from the 1930s. Latterly the Pallars have become the principal land owners, though their individual holdings are often very small. They, in common with cultivators from other caste communities, have some difficulty in securing labour for agricultural operations, which have been quite extensively mechanised. Though political power in Gangaikondan (in the sense of elected positions in panchayati raj institutions), too, has passed to them, they hardly exercise "dominance" in the way in which this term has been used in the literature. There is also very little difference between Thevars, Konars/Yadhavars, Nadars, and the now more numerous Pallars in terms of land ownership, occupations, or visible wealth. Few, if any of them can sensibly be described as being a "landlord," exercising control over labour and the produce of the village (though the Thevar former panchayat president is perhaps an exception to this general claim).

The kind of rough equality established by the Pallars of this village is very striking by comparison with what is so commonly observed in villages in northern Tamil Nadu where, as in Iruvelpattu, Dalits are still quite heavily dependent upon agricultural labour for others for their livelihoods. Of course Gangaikondan is in no sense a "representative" village, but observation suggests that the general quality of rural housing is much higher in southern Tamil Nadu than it is in the north of the state, and that the status of the Pallars of the southern districts is higher than is that of the Paraiyars of the northern districts (who still, in many villages, live in thatched houses and even huts). Why this should be so, is not at all well understood. One factor, however, may be that there was a higher incidence of upper-caste land ownership in the southern districts in the past, and that the withdrawal of most of these higher-caste people from the rural economy has left a space for the Dalits that has not been opened up for them in the north, where they compete for land and opportunity with the numerous and also lowly-ranked (though not "untouchable") Vanniyars. Another factor, as we have hinted earlier, is that Christian missions were relatively more active in the south, and contributed greatly to raising educational levels amongst Dalit Pallars.

We have suggested that Gangaikondan might be described as "post-agrarian," given the absolute decline of agriculture, the importance of non-agricultural employment, and the dissolution of the ties of dependence between land owners and both small

peasants and labourers that have characterised most of South Asian rural society historically. Even more so than was the case in Iruvelpattu, it seems to us that Bernstein's conceptualisation of "classes of labour", rather than peasant classes, is appropriate in Gangaikondan. He refers to "the fragmentation of labour" and says that:

> Classes of labour in the conditions of today's "South" have to secure their reproduction through insecure and oppressive – and typically increasingly scarce – wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure "informal sector" ("survival") activity, including farming … various and complex combinations of employment and self-employment … spread across different sites of the social division of labour (Bernstein 2004, 2010, as cited by Harriss *et al.* 2010, p. 61).

In present-day Tamil villages, however, the further very important element in the reproduction of rural households is the availability of substantial welfare provisioning by the state. In Gangaikondan, the primary health care system functions; the public distribution system works, even if the quality of the rice that is distributed is often poor (all our respondents in our sample of 40 households drew their ration, some purchased no other rice); the noon meal scheme operates; and now NREGA, even if it does not work as it should, provides some income for many. There are other programmes too, as we saw at a meeting of the statutory gram sabha on Independence Day 2012, when the panchayat president received large numbers of applications for housing benefits and benefits for those with disabilities.[7] The local state in Tamil Nadu, even more than the central Indian state, works to ensure that people's basic needs are met. The kind of dependency upon persons that has been characteristic of agrarian society has gone, and in this sense there has been a social revolution in Gangaikondan – but to an important extent it has been replaced by dependence upon the state for food, housing, and employment.

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[7] The gram sabha meeting was attended by about 100 people. It had been given an ambitious agenda of deliberation and discussion by the Divisional Revenue Officer, including discussion of the panchayat accounts. None of this happened, and the whole, fairly short meeting was taken up with the submission of applications for various state benefits, and of various demands for action on the part of the panchayat.

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Appendix Table

Appendix Table 1 *Households by caste and principal occupation for each hamlet, Gangaikondan*

Gangaikondan proper	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	1	16	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Agricultural labour households	1	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
Non-agricultural labour households	8	31	88	8	5	2	40	0	0	41	223
Dependant households	9	5	8	2	0	0	4	0	0	9	37
Total	18	37	126	13	5	2	44	0	0	50	295
Aladipatti	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	20	35	0	56
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	38	30	4	73
Dependant households	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	9
Total	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	64	71	5	144
Anaithalaioor	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	92	6	0	105
Agricultural labour households	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	36	10	1	51
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	44	0	0	0	0	88	4	3	139
Dependant households	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	13	3	0	25
Total	0	0	64	0	0	0	0	229	23	4	320

Rajapathi	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	1	0	19	8	1	0	0	0	0	29
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	52	3	1	0	0	0	1	57
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	3	105	17	13	4	1	0	33	176
Dependant households	0	1	1	14	2	2	0	0	0	5	25
Total	0	2	4	190	30	17	4	1	0	39	287
Duraiyur (I, II)	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	39	0	67
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	7	0	20
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	115	82	5	205
Dependant households	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	18	16	0	35
Total	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	174	144	5	329
Vadakarai	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	38
Agricultural labour households	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	36
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	62	0	0	0	1	3	0	38	104
Dependant households	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	19
Total	0	0	138	0	0	0	1	4	0	54	197

(Continued on next page)

Appendix Table 1 *(Continued) Households by caste and principal occupation for each hamlet, Gangaikondan*

Kalaignar Colony	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Agricultural labour households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	19	2	0	0	0	3	0	1	25
Dependant households	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	0	0	27	2	0	0	0	3	0	1	33
Kottaiadi	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	6	2	0	12
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Dependant households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	14	2	0	21
Marakudi	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Agricultural labour households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Dependant households	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	15

Pappan Kulam	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	23
Dependant households	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	0	0	0	0	35	0	0	0	0	0	35
Punganoor	Brahmin	Pillai	Thevar	Konar/ Yadhavar	Nadar Hindu	Nadar Christian	Kammalar	Pallar Hindu	Pallar Christian	Others	Totals
Cultivator households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	0	34
Agricultural labour households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Non-agricultural labour households	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	9
Dependant households	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	49	0	50

Note: This table shows only 1,726 of the 1,733 households recorded because of incomplete data for seven of them.
Source: Census listing, 2007–08.