

**A STUDY OF THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT
IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT**

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DECLARATION

Certified that the dissertation entitled
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CHAPTER - I

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Social and Political movements have existed throughout history which have sometimes produced the overthrow of the rule of a particular class or leaders or regimes and sometimes taken the form of minor attempts to change a piece of legislation or a law viewed as unjust and disagreeable to a particular class or section of the society. In developing countries one or the other types of movements have become a common feature and of which many have been agrarian movements. The problems of the role of the bourgeoisie, landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, the vast bulk of poor peasants and agricultural labourers in these movements have become a subject of controversy. These controversies shape the programmes, policies, strategies and tactics of the various forces engaged in the struggle to transform these societies.

In India also there have been a number of agrarian movements, both in the colonial and post-independence period. While vivid and comprehensive

accounts of agrarian movements have come to light from other developing countries, there is almost a total neglect by scholars in systematically studying the agrarian movements and struggles which have taken place and are taking place in India. Only a small group of radical social scientists and Marxists are attempting to focus their studies on peasant and agricultural labour struggles of the colonial and post-independence period.

Tamil Nadu has also witnessed several peasant and agricultural labour struggles both during the colonial and post-independence period. However, only Thanjavur district has continued to remain as a solid base for the agrarian movement in Tamil Nadu during the post-independence period. In Thanjavur district, right from the inception of the agrarian movement, the agricultural labourers have formed the solid base of the movement, the like of which has taken place only in a few places in India such as Punjab, Andhra and Kerala. The agrarian movement in Thanjavur district right from its early days had been associated with the agrarian movement in the entire country led by the All India Kisan Sabha.

Moreover the agrarian structure of Thanjavur district offers a close relationship between caste and class. The Intensive Agricultural Development Programme has also been introduced in Thanjavur district. All these factors have attracted many a scholars to study Thanjavur district. Scholars like Andre Beteille and Kathleen Gough have focussed on the changing relationship between caste and class as an aspect of the broader problem of social stratification and change. Francine Frankel has studied the impact of the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme on the various sections of the agrarian population of Thanjavur district. However, not many studies has been conducted on the agrarian movement in the district. Saraswati Menon has studied the agrarian movement in the district from 1940 to 1952 only. She has linked the movement to the existing agrarian relations of the period. She has also discussed in detail the relationship between caste and class and the role of caste in the agrarian movement. Alexander has conducted an experimental study on the Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur district after the introduction of the IADP. He also has attributed the changed perception of the relationship

between landlords and labourers, among the labourers vis-a-vis the unchanging perception of the relationship by the landlords, as a factor for the unrest. He has also concluded that more than the impact of the Green Revolution it was the organisation of the Kisan Sabha and the agricultural labour union that had led to the spurt in agrarian tension in Thanjavur district. Alexander has also given only a brief sketch of the agrarian movement in Thanjavur district while dealing exclusively with Peasant Organisations in South India. He has also clubbed together the Kisan Sabha organised by the Communist Parties and the landlords associations in the same category of farmers organisations. By doing so he has not clearly brought out clearly the contradiction and conflict that exist between the organisations. He has also not analysed in detail the impact of land reforms, the resultant changes in agrarian relations and its impact on the agrarian movement. Hence a comprehensive study focussing on the origin, growth and development of the agrarian movement in Thanjavur district would add to the existing information on the movement.

The present study of the agrarian movement in Thanjavur district focusses on the agrarian relations in the district during the period 1950-80 and the consequences of these relations on the agrarian movement. This period has been laid special emphasis because land reforms have been initiated during this period and also various significant agrarian reforms initiated by the Congress and other political parties when they were in government. The period of 1950-80 is also characterised by intermittent violent struggles of the agricultural labourers especially during the period 1964-69 and 1972-74. It is during this period a separate agricultural labour organisation emerged from the incipient struggles launched by the agricultural labourers during the pre-independence period under the banner of the Kisan Sabha. However a detailed discussion of the agrarian structure and agrarian relations that existed during the pre-independence period and also an analysis of the origin, growth and development of the Kisan Sabha as well as the struggles launched by them, has been given in order to have an understanding of the nature of the agrarian movement in the district. During

the period 1950-80 the study focusses only on the agricultural labour movement as the peasant movement in the district has almost become very weak in the district compared to the labour movement. The study will have the following objectives:

- (1) To study the origin, growth and development of an unified peasant and agricultural labour movement in the pre-independence period.
- (2) To study the origin, growth and development of agricultural labour movement distinct from the peasant movement in the district.
- (3) To study the impact of land reforms, the changes in the agrarian relations over the years, the impact of green revolution on the agrarian scene and the response of the movement towards them.
- (4) To study the role of other classes vis-a-vis the agricultural labour movement.

On the basis of a review of literature available on the agrarian movements in India in general and Thanjavur district in particular, the following tentative hypothesis have been formulated:

(1) The agricultural labourers gained their social and political consciousness by participating in the struggles launched by their class organisation viz., agricultural labour union.

(2) Apart from launching struggles to get concessions from the government in the form of legislations to meet their economic and social demands, the agricultural labour unions had to launch agitations for the implementation of these legislations so that the agricultural labourers get whatever little benefits that could accrue from these legislations.

(3) No implementation machinery will be effective unless the predominant element in it is the people who are supposed to benefit from the law.

(4) The land reforms legislations did not result in the breaking down of the land monopoly in the hands of a few big landlords in Thanjavur district.

(5) The pauperisation of the poor peasants led to the swelling of the ranks of the agricultural labourers to the emergence of an independent class of agricultural labourers and an agricultural labour union.

A proper clarification is necessary as to who should be characterised as peasants and agricultural labourer from the various categories of agrarian population in a society, to assess their role and potentiality in agrarian movements. A section of the scholars attempt to define the peasantry in a very limited sense. Teodor Shanin, representing this school of scholarship has defined that "the peasantry consists of small agricultural producers, who with the help of simple equipment and the labour of their families produce mainly for their own consumption and for the fulfilment of obligations to holders of political and economic power".¹

1. Shanin, Teodor., "Peasantry as a Political Factor", in Shanin, Tdodor (ed.), Peasants and Peasant Societies, (Peiguin, 1971), p.239.

He has further clarified that his definition "...implies a specific relation to land, the peasant family farm and the peasant village community as the basic units of social interaction, a specific occupational structure and particular influences of past history and specific patterns of development".² A massive body of literature has emerged which has assumed that peasants constitute that section of rural population constituting small scale agriculturists - mainly occupied with family subsistence and the rendering of obligations to landlords and states. Such a definition without any reference to whether they belong to Asiatic, Slave, Feudal, Capitalist or Socialist Societies does not reveal the qualitative impact of the introduction of private property in land, commercialization and expansion of market resulting in the vital process of differentiation within the agrarian population - resulting in the emergence of rich, middle and poor peasants, a massive process of pauperization and proletarianization creating a qualitatively new category of agricultural labourers which is clearly a consequence of Capitalist penetration in rural areas.

A larger definitions as adopted by Marxists and the division of agrarian population as formulated by eminent Marxists like Lenin,³ Mao-Tse Tung⁴ and those as landlords, absentee or otherwise, rich, middle, and poor peasants and the distinct class of agricultural labour gives a more productive and objectively more authentic approach to understanding the roles of the peasantry and agricultural labour in colonial and post-colonial societies. This definition clarifies more sharply the dynamics of transformation in agrarian structures in colonial and post-colonial countries. It helps to understand the capacities and potentialities of different categories of rural population which will be mobilized and the manner in which they will organise their struggles. In the present study also the broader definition of peasantry would be used and the following definitions would be used to define landlords, rich, middle and poor peasants, and agricultural labourers.

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3. For definitions of Lenin see, Lenin, V.I., "Preliminary Draft Theses on the Agrarian Question", Selected Works, vol.3, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, pp.378-388.
 4. For definitions used by Mao-tse-Tung see, Tung Mao-Tse "How to differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas", Selected Works, vol.1, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1977, pp.137-139.

- 1) Landlords: Landlords are owners of land, who do not perform manual labour in any major farm operations except for the supervision or operation of machinery and rely entirely on the labour of others either through direct hiring of labour power or indirectly with a predominance of rent-extraction.
- 2) Rich Peasants: Rich peasants are also owners of a major portion or the entire lands cultivated by them, who perform manual work in major farm operations and are therefore distinguished from the landlords, both feudal and capitalist. However their farm operations are carried out mainly with the direct hiring of labour power.
- 3) Middle Peasants: Middle peasants are those who are primarily self-employed having lands, owned or hired a major portion of land, just to employ family labour and have a subsistence living. They do not by and large hire labour power or hire their labour power to others.
- 4) Poor Peasants: Poor peasants are those who cultivate lands mainly unowned but a major part of their subsistence is obtained through hiring out of their labour power directly for wages or indirectly through leasing in land even on high rents or a combination of both.

5) Agricultural Labour: Agricultural labourers are those who do not operate any land at all and are entirely or mainly dependent on hiring his labour power for wages, in order to obtain a subsistence. Some of these labourers may own meagre plots of land which they lease out. However they also will be considered as agricultural labourers since most of their income is obtained by the selling of their labour power.

Any study of agrarian movement will essentially have to take into its analysis the changes in agrarian relations existing at the particular period time which covers the period under study as well the historical evolution of these agrarian relations in turn would be made effective only from a proper analysis of the impact of land reforms that have been initiated and the resultant changes that have taken place in the agrarian structure. Only a class analysis gives a clear picture of which class of tenants were evicted and which class of tenants continued to be in possession of the lands cultivated by them.⁵

5. For detailed discussion on the importance of Class analysis in studying land reforms, see

Hence in the present study we would be using the Marxian framework of analysis viz., Class analysis.

The study will be mostly based on secondary sources. However in places where sufficient material has not been available especially regarding the struggles of the period between 1950-1980, primary sources have been consulted. Also interviews with active participants and leaders of the movement have been resorted to arrive at an insight into the agricultural labour movements as very little published material is available on the movement.

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Utsa Patnaik., "Class Differentiation within the Peasantry: An Approach to Analysis of Indian Agriculture", in Studies in the Development of Capitalism in India, Vanguard Books Limited, Lahore, 1978, pp.259-323.

CHAPTER - II

CHAPTER - II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature on peasant agitations and peasant struggles in other countries of the Third World is available on a fairly extensive scale. The literature available on peasant struggles in India are comparatively less and most of them deal with peasant struggle of the pre-independence period. Only a few studies deal with the peasant and agricultural labour struggles that have taken place in the post-independence period. Moreover there is an absolute lack of literature on agricultural labour struggles that have taken place in the country. However, some of the observations and arguments made by the scholars have a direct bearing on the agricultural labour movement as well. Some of these arguments deal with the possibility of unity of action among the agricultural labour and the different sections of the peasantry, which has been a part of continuing debate among scholars and those involved in organising the agricultural labourers and peasants.

Jeffery M. Paige¹ has argued that the fundamental causal variable in rural class conflict is the relationship of both cultivators (viz., labourers, tenants or small farmers) and non-cultivators (viz., landlords renting out land, large farmers employing labourers or even traders) to the factors of agricultural production as indicated by their principal source of income which in turn is dependant on the different cropping patterns. According to him the most important determinant of the political economic behaviour of cultivators and non-cultivators is their relative dependence on land, capital, or labour as the primary source of income. According to him, in the case of plantation crops, production and profit could be increased by resorting to more capital investment and hence the non-cultivators could satisfy the demands of the cultivators to a certain extent. In the case of labour-intensive and seasonal crops like rice, the increase of income for both cultivators and non-cultivators become dependant on land and use of labour. Hence in

1. Paige, M. Jeffery, Agrarian Revolution, The Free Press, New York, 1978, pp.9-71 & pp. 334-376.

these areas the non-cultivating class suppresses the demands of the cultivators thereby leading to revolt. Hence the potential for peasant revolts and revolutions exist in areas where certain crops limit the primary source of income to exploitation of labour rather than capital investment. He also suggested three general conditions under which the organizational weakness of cultivators drawing their income from the land can be overcome and peasant movements created. These three general conditions were:

(1) The presence of socialist or reformist parties which weaken the political power of the landowning class thereby reducing the penalties for land seizures and other actions against the landowners and also supply organisational resources the peasants lack; (2) the presence of economic incentive for collective organization, which in the case of subsistence economies are created by increasing market participation; and (3) the disruption of peasant subsistence production.

Donald S. Zagoria² has examined the various

2. Zagoria, Donald, S., "Asian Tenancy Systems and Communist Mobilisation of the Peasantry",

conditions under which Asian peasants have formed successful revolutionary organizations. Zagoria has stressed that: (1) Social conditions, (viz., the existence of large class of landless and land poor peasants in a tenancy system, heavy population pressure on land and literacy); (2) Psychological conditions: (viz., awareness of the possibility of change and the assailability of rural power structure; (3) Political conditions, (viz., freedom to form organisations and indulge in class activities, weakening of the strength of conservative landed elites; and (4) Technical Conditions: (viz., organizational and manipulative skills for organizing peasantry) had facilitated in the formation of successful revolutionary organisations. Zagoria has argued that, factors such as high productivity, high land values, labour intensive crop, cheapness of labour and heavy population pressure lead to high agrarian density, land hunger, increase in trend towards proletarianization, and a vast concentration of landless share-cropping tenants,

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in John W. Lewis (ed.), Peasant Rebellion
And Communist Revolution in Asia (Stanford
University Press, 1974), pp.29-60.

landless agricultural labourers and propertied proletariat owning parcels of land that are too small to provide subsistence. Zagoria has argued that these features provide a conducive social structural background for peasant organisations. According to Zagoria, the existence of such a favourable objective condition in itself would not lead to the emergence of a radical movement unless it were accompanied by a revolutionary consciousness. The ideas and values institutionalized in the society may either facilitate or inhibit the development of such a revolutionary consciousness, which would provide the masses with a belief that revolution is necessary and a perception that institutions are man made and changeable. A revolutionary movement needs a catalytic agent, like the Communist Party, for organising and guiding the peasantry. According to him the Communist Party and its leaders must look to the countryside to draw its strength, must have the ability to join with rural intelligentsia and should be flexible enough to meet changing situations.

Joel Migdal³ has laid stress on the building and involvement of peasants in movements rather than the conditions leading to sudden-eruptions. According to Migdal in most traditional peasant societies, the peasants try to cut themselves as far as possible from outside world, in order to minimise risks rather than maximise possible gains. But when a crises in the village economy occurs in the context of general economic development, upsetting the balance between peasant income and expenditure, the peasants are forced to look outward. Migdal has argued that - peasant participation complex political organizations is realised in return for the material inducements that are offered to individuals or families seeking to solve their economic crises; the peasant sees politics as part of the large outside world into which he has been thrust and his political goals are limited and oriented to the administrative solution of his family's mundane problems rather than directed to policy level of politics.

3. Migdal, S. Joel., Peasants, Politics and Revolution, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977, pp. 3-29.

According to Migdal there are three prerequisites for the institutionalization of sustained peasant participation in a revolutionary movement. They are: (i) a peasantry that has been driven to increased outside participation; (ii) in an economic network full of shortcomings and injustices and (iii) an outside revolutionary leadership willing and able to invest organizational effort to build a new network of economic and political institutions to challenge the old.

Eric Wolf,⁴ after analysing six revolutions, has stated that peasants are especially handicapped in transforming their passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as a means of setting them right and are merely passive spectators of political struggles. The peasants participated in a revolution only when their conditions were exacerbated by a crisis in power and authority coupled with an ecological

4. Wolf, R. Eric., "On Peasant Rebellions", in Shanin, Teodor (Ed.), Peasants and Peasant Societies, Penguin Books, New York, 1971, pp.264-274.



crisis caused by population increase coinciding with increased commoditization of land and other resources.

Wolf has argued that poor peasants and landless labour are less likely to participate in a rebellion since they do not have sufficient resources of their own to serve them in the course of the rebellion and are completely dependent on the landlord for their livelihood. The rich peasants, as employers of labour, as money-lenders and as notables to-opted by the State enjoy local power in alliance with the external power holders. Hence they are also unlikely to embark on a course of rebellion and will lend their support to an uprising only when an external force proves capable of destroying the existing external power holders.

Wolf has argued that middle peasants are more prone to become more revolutionary since they: (1) have sufficient resources of their own to depend upon during sustained rebellion, (2) are most affected by increasing commercialization, breaking up of traditional social relations and ties with both land and the developing proletariat in urban areas.

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Hamza Alavi⁵ has also examined the role of different sections of the peasantry in the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Alavi has argued that it was the independent middle peasant, who, in Russia and China, played the most active role in the early stages of revolution; the poor peasants, both more backward and potentially more militant, were drawn in along with the middle peasants in later stages. Alavi has argued that the initial inertia of the poor peasants arose from his almost complete dependence upon his master for his livelihood and that he finally and irrevocably takes the road to revolution only when he is shown in practice that the power of his master can be irrevocably broken and the possibility of an alternative mode of existence becomes real to him. Alavi while analysing the peasant movements in India, specifically the Tebagma Movement and the Telangana Movement which took place in 1946-48, has argued that the middle peasants provided the initial impetus to the movement although it was the poor peasants who were most active throughout

5. Hamza Alavi., "Peasants and Revolution", in A.R. Desai (Ed.), Peasant Struggles in India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1979, pp.671-718.

the movements and also that the movements failed in part due to the failure to draw sustained participation of the middle peasants in the struggles.

Alavi has concluded that, the poor peasants are initially the least militant class of the peasantry. The middle peasants on the other hand are initially the most militant element of the peasantry, and they can be a powerful ally of the proletarian movement in the countryside, especially in generating the initial impetus of the peasant revolution. But when the movement in the countryside advances to a revolutionary stage, they move away from the revolutionary movement unless their fears are allayed and they are drawn into a process of cooperative endeavour.

Barrington Moore, Jr.,⁶ after examining the kinds of social structures and historical circumstances that have produced or inhibited peasant revolutions has ruled out single factor theories such as economic deprivation, absence of aristocrats from rural areas, existence of large rural proletariat or

6. Barrington Moore Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Penguin Books, New York, 1966, pp. 370-410; pp. 453-483.

the role of religion. According to Moore, even economic privation that occurs within peasants' standards of right and justice might not lead to revolution but a sudden imposition of new standards or demands might infuriate them and lead to collective action. Moore has argued that the most important causes of peasant revolutions have been the absence of commercial revolution in agriculture led by the landed upper classes and the concomittant survival of peasant institutions into the modern era, when they are subject to new stresses and strains. Moore also concluded that in contrast with China, peasant rebellions in the pre-modern period in India were relatively rare and completely ineffective and attributes the alleged weakness of Indian peasant movements to the caste system with its hierarchical divisions among villagers and to the strength of bourgeoisie leadership against the landlords and the British and the pacifying influence of Gandhi on the peasantry.

Kathleen Gough⁷ in contrast to Moore has argued that peasant revolts have in fact been common both

7. Gough, K., "Indian Peasant Uprisings", Economic and Political Weekly, vol. IX, 32-34, (Special Number), August 1974, pp. 1391-1412.

during and since the British period. She had in a recent brief survey, come across 77 revolts the smallest of which probably engaged several thousand men in active support or combat. She had also argued that the frequency of these revolts and the fact that at least 3/4 of those were solely or partly made by Hindus made her doubt that the caste system had seriously impeded peasant rebellion in times of trouble. According to her the limitations of Indian peasant revolts have sprung more from broader political forces at the level of the province and the colonial and post-colonial state than from the caste system or from peculiarities of village structure.

Dhanagare⁸ has argued that Moore found the record of the Indian peasant unimpressive because he searched for a revolutionary phenomenon that could well stand parallel to any of his three ideal types and that "Moore did not realize that given a socio-culturally plural and complex society such as India, with her institutional peculiarities,

8. Dhanagare, Peasant Movement in India, 1920-1950, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

prolonged subjugation to colonial rule and a sustained anti-imperialist freedom struggle, a full fledged revolutionary turmoil was less likely to occur."⁹ According to him Moore's conclusion was not deduced from any systematic theory but was only a reiteration of certain stereotypes of the Indian peasant and society and that his empirical generalizations are questionable. According to him, barring a brief account of the Telengana revolt, Moore has completely ignored an army of several other peasant struggles which involved a variety of complex issues and different agrarian classes during the first half of the twentieth century. Dhanagare has questioned on 'power dynamics' as the key-variable.

Kathleen Gough¹⁰ has argued that in both Kerala and Thanjavur there has been, over the past hundred years, a gradual increase in the proportions of landlords and rich peasants who

9. Ibid., p.5.

10. Gough, Kathleen., "Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India" in A.R. Desai (Ed.), Peasant Struggles in India, op.cit.

employ hired labour, and in the proportions of hired labourers to poor and middle peasants. This tendency has not declined, and may even have been stepped up, with the land reforms of the past decade. At least since the late nineteenth century, however, it has been common for both landlords and rich peasants to lease out portions of their lands to poor peasants and to have other portions cultivated by labourers. It is, moreover, common in these regions for both rich and middle peasants to lease at least part of their land from landlords.

According to Kathleen Gough, in contrast to Alavis analysis of Tebagma and Telengana movement, in Tanjore and Kerala, while poor peasants and also landless labourers were drawn into the struggle, there was still a tendency on the part of the Communists to rely on the middle peasants for local leadership. According to her the failure of the revolts of the late 1940s was due more to vacillations of policy on the part of the Communist leadership, and to the fact that only isolated sectors of India were at that time ripe for agrarian revolt, than to a 'sectarian' preference

for poor peasants and landless labourers on the part of the Communists.¹¹

Natarajan after a vivid description of the Santhal Insurrection of 1855-56, has concluded that the Santhal Insurrection resulted in the organisation of Santhal parganas as a special entity thus forcing recognition of their special status as a national minority.¹²

Natarajan has explained the reasons for the emergence of Indigo cultivators' strike of 1860.¹³

He has concluded that the Indigo cultivators strike succeeded in reasserting the peasants' right to sow the crops he chose and in forcing the Indigo planters out from Pabna, Bogarat and Barasat to Champaran and other parts of India. It also prevented the planters from passing on the losses of the ruined industry to the peasants as they did in Champaran in the early 20th century. Natarajan had also described the Maratha uprising and the socio-economic rea-

11. Ibid., pp.721-722.

12. Natarajan, L., "The Santhal Insurrection", in Desai A.R. (ed.), Peasant Struggles in India, op.cit., pp.136-47.

13. Natarajan, L., "Indigo Cultivators Strike: 1860", in Desai, A.R. (ed.), op.cit., pp.148-58.

sons underlying the uprising.¹⁴ He has concluded that the Maratha uprising forced the imperialist rulers to undertake legislation for the first time, offering some protection to the peasantry against usury and transfer of their lands resulting in the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879. According to him, while the uprisings indicated a considerable amount of planning and organisation during their course, they were on the whole spontaneous outbursts of the peasants' discontent against their exploitation. When the peasants' grievances were aggravated to unbearable proportions, due to a local famine, price decline, excessive repression, forced auction of their lands or some such factors they hit back with heroic fury. In the face of odds against them, however, they were not able to hold for long. The peasants' understanding of their opponents were immature and their ability to create, continue and widen peasant organisations was limited. The uprisings

14. Natarajan, L., "Maratha Uprisings: 1879", in Desai A.R. (ed.), op.cit., pp. 159-69.

therefore, were sporadic and spontaneous. They could not create the basis for an evergrowing organised peasant struggle which could lead to the complete realization of their aspirations.¹⁵

Ranga and Sahajanand Saraswati have given a systematic review of the agrarian revolts in India during the mid-thirties.¹⁶ They have portrayed Gandhi as a conscious strategist, utilising the peasantry for reformist pressure and as a consistent opponent of any class struggle against local exploiters having this support of the British arms, law and the police. They have hinted how after the withdrawal of Non-cooperation movement most of the subsequent militant struggles of the peasantry were launched by groups and associations not basically approved by Gandhi and his orthodox wing of leadership. They have also pointed out how the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhi kept silent and systematically eschewed the struggles of landless labourers,

15. Desai, A.R. (ed.), Peasant Struggles, op.cit., pp.172-73.

16. Ranga, N.G. and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, "Agrarian Revolts", in Desai, A.R. (ed.), Peasant Struggles in India, op.cit., pp.47-65.

tenants and others against their local exploiters. They also point out how the Indian National Congress avoided purposely, transforming the spontaneous types of class struggles against local exploiting classes into more organised, deepened and politically linked struggles with other exploited strata on a national scale, which could have made the anti-imperialist struggle more broad-based, militant and revolutionary.

Kalyan Kumar Sengupta¹⁷ has dealt with the peasant struggles that took place in Pabna in 1873 and the agrarian disturbances that took place in Eastern and Central Bengal in the 19th century.¹⁸ According to him the struggles emerged out of the conflicts between the zamindars and the various strata of tenants that came during the permanent zamindari settlement. These struggles were basically the movement of the substantial section of the tenantry, the occupancy ryots, a new class of ryots whom the local landlords were trying to

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17. Sengupta, Kalyan Kumar., "Peasant Struggles in Pabna, 1873: Its Legalistic Character" in A.R. Desai (ed.), op.cit., pp. 179-88.
18. Sengupta, Kalyan Kumar., "Agrarian Disturbances in 19th century Bengal", in A.R. Desai (ed.), op.cit., pp. 169-207.

evict in order to do away with their right of occupancy. The primary aim of the movement was to defend and consolidate the occupancy status of the ryots gained from the Act of 1859. The other sections of the peasantry - the non-occupancy ryots, the under-tenants of the occupancy ryots, the share croppers and the agricultural labourers participated in the movement against the zamindar, the common enemy. The specific problems of the large majority of the peasantry consisting of the share-croppers and the agricultural workers never came in for serious consideration at any stage of the movement. According to Sengupta the movement rarely degenerated into a jacquerie but took the form of passive legalistic resistance by fighting the landlords in the civil courts. The legalistic passive character of tenant resistance was one of the novel features of the agrarian movement at that time, according to Sengupta.

Benoy Bhusan Choudhury¹⁹ has dealt with the Agrarian Movements in Bengal and Bihar between 1919

19. Choudhury, Benoy Bhusan., "Agrarian Movement in Bengal", in A.R. Desai (ed.), op.cit., pp.337-74.

and 1939. Choudhry has given a brief account of the spread of Marxist ideas among the peasants, particularly in the Zamindari areas and how these ideas crystalized in the formation of the peasants and Workers Party during 1926-28 as an alternative to the Congress approach for developing National movement to secure freedom. He has also given the objective conditions, particularly the impact of the great economic crisis of 1929-33 extending upto 1936-37 in India, which provided a fertile ground for the spread of militant peasant movement and Marxist ideas within the movement. He has also described the transformation of the perception of the peasantry by the All India Kisan Sabha, particularly the Bihar and Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabhas, from an initial one of considering the peasantry as homogeneous to a latter understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the peasantry, resulting in shifting of the priorities of the Kisan Sabha to organize the poorer sections of the peasantry and agricultural labour. He has also described the confrontation that developed between the Kisan Sabha and the Congress provincial governments due to the hostile attitude of the Congress towards the Kisan Sabha and the Congress

government's failure in meeting the demands of the peasantry. He has also explained how the communal political parties attempted to wean away peasants from joining the Kisan Sabha.

Sukhbir Choudhry²⁰ has described the early peasant struggles that took place during 1905-1918. He has pointed out how in the initial stages the peasants influenced by Tilak, Annie Besant and others of the Home Rule movement participated in struggles ranging from refusal to contribute to war funds to agitating against the internment of their leader. He has also described the emergence of Gandhi as a leader by integrating the peasants in the struggle for freedom, by launching struggles for redressal of their grievances especially the Champaran struggle and the Kheda struggle. He has also shown how Gandhi's call for Non-Cooperation brought peasant struggles in various parts of the country viz., Rae Bareilly, Sultanpur, United Provinces, Bengal and the Moplah Revolt in Malabar. He has pointed out how peasants

20. Choudhary, Sukhbir., "Early Struggles; 1905-1918"; and "Post-War Awakening; 1919-21", in A.R. Desai (ed.), Peasant Struggles in India, op.cit., pp.221-273.

and peasant leaders got disillusioned with Gandhi when he withdrew the Non-Co-operation Movement.

The report of the committee headed by Lord Russell,²¹ who came to India to objectively assess the situation in India after the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 shows how the Congress under the guidance of Gandhi first unleashed movements and then regulated them by restricting their scope. The report shows how whenever the British showed willingness to negotiate with the Indian bourgeoisie to inaugurate some Constitutional reforms such movements were formally withdrawn. The report also reveals how the leadership was keen on adapting a policy of negotiation with the foreign rulers to secure as much as possible in the transfer and sharing of power and how the mass movements were used more and more as instruments of pressure to strengthen their bargaining position.

21. "Village Repression by British Rulers: Report of Indian League Commission in 1932", in A.R. Desai (ed.), op.cit., pp.337-74.

Sunil Sen²² has argued against scholars who have under-rated the impact of peasant movements in Indian society and politics. According to him, the peasant revolts that flared up in the Nineteenth Century brought to the fore the agrarian question that figured prominently in the programme of the Nationalist movement. The bakhasht movements in Bihar, the tebhaga and tanka struggles in Bengal, the tenant struggles in Malabar and Thanjavur, the telengana uprising revealed the revolutionary potential of the Indian peasants.

According to him, a conservative trend was developing within the Congress after the collapse of the Civil Disobedience movement. As the Congress formed ministries in the provinces in 1937, it chose to be the representative of law and order and turned its back on the peasant movement. The bakhasht movement in Bihar and the movement of the Warlis in Maharashtra had to face the opposition of the Congress; in Bengal, the Congress, which was at loggerheads with the Muslim League, did not give its blessing to the tebhaga movement and hardly

22. Sunil Sen, Peasant Movements in India, (New Delhi: K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1982).

opposed the Muslim League ministry which sought to crush this movement with wholesale violence. The alliance between the State Congress and the Communists in Telengana broke down when the programme of the expropriation of the landlords came to the fore. Even though the Congress adopted a resolution on the abolition of the Zamindari system in 1946, it continued to take the side of the landlords and the rich peasants. According to him, the rich peasants was not a contended category during the colonial period and often played the leading role in peasant movements. But with the coming of independence there was a shift in the situation. On the one hand capitalist relations were developing in agriculture and the rich peasants that had emerged as a powerful class extended their support to the Nehru government. On the other hand, the abolition of the zamindari and jagirdari systems and the tenancy legislation created illusion among the rural poor. Hence there was a decline in peasant upheaval during the Nehru era.

Sunil Sen has argued that the peasants, living in scattered villages, often rose in struggle when the situation appeared to be favourable and

that they hardly embarked on a revolution when their misery was at its most acute. Hence, according to him, the bakhast movement in Bihar received peasant support when the Congress ministry undertook tenancy legislation; the unprecedented sweep of peasant struggle in 1946-47 was preceded by a wave of strikes of the working class, the general elections of 1946 when the major political parties promised radical reforms and the formation of the interim government headed by Nehru in August 1946. The tebhaga movement received impetus from the publication of the Bargadars Bill in January 1947. The partial struggle of the peasants against forced labour and ejection in the winter of 1946 grew into a peasant revolution in Telangana when it became evident that the Nizam's rule was crumbling. There was no lack of spontaneous support of the rural poor behind the bakhast movement, the tebhaga movement and the peasant revolution in Telangana in its critical phase. According to him, the three major agrarian struggles in India, the Bakhast movement in Bihar, the Tebhaga movement in Bengal and the peasant revolution in Telangana, hardly received the active support of the working class.

Sunil Sen has argued that the rich peasant who wanted to loosen the bonds of feudal exploitation formed the leadership of the peasant revolts of the nineteenth century. According to him, in the peasant movements organized by the nationalists the landowning peasant surely played the leading role; Gandhi consistently championed the rich peasants and the landlords causes and peasant movements were invariably directed against the government. The Bhumihar peasant representing the "middle and big cultivators" played an important role initiating the peasant movement in Bihar whereas in the second wave of the Bakhas movement in Bihar in 1946-48 the low-caste tenants were ranged against the powerful landlords and had to face the opposition of the Congress. Similarly in the Bengal Kisan Sabha also the rich and middle peasants played a dominant role in the early years whereas the position radically changed when the tebhaga and tanka struggles were launched in 1946. These struggles were spearheaded by the poor peasants. Since Tebhaga was the demand of the bargadars, they remained at the forefront of the struggle; they took the crop from the field to their threshing floor; the volunteer of the Kisan Sabha were drawn mostly from

baradars and agricultural labourers. There was no Tebhaga movement in Burdwan district where the rich and the middle peasants formed the leadership of the Kisan Sabha. In Telengana, the rich and middle peasants initiated the peasant movement in its early phase. As the peasant revolution was maturing in early 1947, the poor peasants and agricultural labourers came increasingly to the fore. According to him, the rich peasants often deserted the movement when government repression was let loose on them. Once the struggle was well underway, the poor peasants and agricultural labourers became its main driving force and the brunt of repression fell on them.

According to him the Telengana and Tebhaga struggles made a deep impact on the Kisan Sabha and that it relied increasingly on the rural poor in the partial struggles during 1960s; the movement for forcible occupation of benami land, forest and government land was apparently led by the poor peasants. The tactical line of maintaining the unity of the entire peasantry was not basically changed, although the problem of winning over and

neutralising the rich peasants proved to be intractable.

Dhangare²³ has analysed some of the important peasant movements that took place between 1920 and 1950 in India, such as the Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921); the Bardoli Satyagraha (1928), the Peasant movement in Oudh (1920-22; 1930-32); the Tebhaga movement in Belgan (1946-47) and the peasant insurrection in Telengana (1946-51). He has broadly classified peasant movements into six types; viz., (1) Nativists or restorative movements and rebellions; (2) Religious or millenarian movements; (3) Social banditry; (4) Mass insurrection of peasants; (5) Terrorism, and (6) Liberal reformist agitation.

According to him the Moplah Rebellion in Malabar (1921) was at least partly, if not totally, a religious and millenarian movement; the Gandhian agrarian movements, whether in Champaran, Kheda and Bardoli or those in UP, first in 1921 and later in 1930-32 were Liberal reformist agitations that involved violation of a specific law only, as a symbolic protest, and

23. Dhangare, Peasant Movement in India, 1920-1950, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

did not question the very structure of the legitimate authority nor did they aim at any fundamental transformation in social relations; the Tebhaga and Telengana movements led by the Communists were mass insurrections which began primarily to redress the particular grievances of the peasantry. However, according to him none of the peasant movements in India conformed exclusively to a single 'ideal type' because of the complex forces that operated and peculiar historical conditions that shaped the form and substance of the peasant resistance.

According to him the principal participants in millenarian and insurrectionary movements were invariably the poor peasants (comprising of poor peasants, tenants-at-will with small holdings and share-croppers) and landless labourers. Thus, according to him, the Moplah poor peasantry (mostly varam pattandar tenants, landless agricultural labours and coolies) constituted the class-base of the rebellion in 1921; the jacqueri type of agrarian disturbances in UP in 1920-21 were largely the creation of the lower tenantry (tenants-at-will) from lower castes such as Ahirs, Kurmis, Pasis and Chamars; the

bargedars who fought for Tebhaga and the vast mass of poor tribal tenantry and landless labourers in the Telengana insurrection all belonged to the class of either poor peasants or landless labourers. Dhangare has concluded that in Gandhi's political agitations in Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli Satyagrahas and the 'no-rent' campaign in UP in 1930-32, it was the rich and middle peasants, who responded to Gandhi and adopted his ethic of non-violence as a creed and suffered repression quietly.

According to him, the middle peasants have not made an outstanding contribution to rebellions and mass insurrections and have launched reforms struggles under peripheral issues. He has argued that the middle peasants in terms of economic interests and political aspirations have been nearer rich peasants and always resorted to liberal-reformist agitational methods which explains their substantial participation in Gandhian movements in such places as Kheda and Bardoli. Satyagraha in Gujarat, Champaran in Bihar and the Oudh district in UP. In the Tebhaga movement, although some Rajbhansi middle peasants had taken a leading part in the organisation

of Kisan Sabha in Dinajpur district and some petty jotedars had also joined the bargadars in Bengal, their contribution to the total upsurge were not outstanding. In the Telengana armed struggle the middle peasants did not take the initiative or lead and on the whole their participation in the revolt was far from significant. The rich peasants who provided the initial lead, moral and material support to the insurgents turned increasingly ambivalent and sometimes even hostile to the insurrectionary struggle as the poor tribal tenantry and landless labourers began to seize surplus land. It was the poor peasants and labourers who almost exclusively sustained the Telengana revolt in its last three years.

According to Dhanagare, it had always been difficult in India to unite the rich, middle and poor peasants and landless labourers in a concerted struggle since the agrarian social structure had not been conducive to genuine class alliances. According to him many peasant struggles in India did not have a noteworthy record of alliance of agrarian classes due to weak intra-class solidarity and mutually antagonistic interests as well as the

diverse political orientations of the different classes. When an alliance did take place it either manifested itself in liberal-reformist agitation or if attempted for a revolutionary purpose, it remained largely ineffective.

According to him, the growth of commercial agriculture and transition from a consumption oriented economy to a cash or market economy in the countryside seems to be a necessary, though not sufficient precondition for the growth of peasant revolts. Commercialization of agriculture in India till 1940s was largely confined to replacement of subsistence farming more and more by production for the market and was not accompanied by modernization of agriculture i.e., transformation in the modes and therefore in the relations of production. No significant changes occurred either in the rural social structure or in the social outlook of the landed upper classes and consequently peasant social institutions and the pre-capitalist mode of production survived even when market relationships were penetrating the countryside. Thus the cash economy crept in, but not so decisively as to displace the old jajmani

type linkages and payments in kind. Both co-existed and even reinforced each other in India from the 1880s to 1940s. As a result of increasing land-alienation, lands passed out of the hands of the actual tillers into those of the non-cultivating classes who had little real interest in modernization of agriculture. Therefore, 'low-capital intensity' and 'antiquated methods' continued to characterise Indian agriculture. Consequently, the middlemen, whether money-lender, trader or local businessmen (many of them landowners themselves) and also rich peasants, made fortunes by skimming off increasingly larger shares of the produce for marketing, sometimes even by resorting to form of usury, exploitation and tyranny. The distinction between 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' in India was largely a matter of form; in practice both tended to preserve and reinforce old institutions and relations of production. Where the burden of the peasantry grew enormously as a result of this peculiar development of commercial agriculture, peasant revolts occurred. Hence the lag between development of market relations and the capitalist mode of production in the countryside seem to be conducive to peasant mobilization.

According to Dhanagare, the achievements of peasant revolts in India, if viewed in their context of proximate aims, were not as unimpressive as they sometimes appear and that each of the movements analysed by him were followed by some legislative or ameliorative measure. Some legal forms, some modification in the structure of land control always followed peasant resistance. Most of these measures till 1949-50 consisted only of minor adjustments in the social arrangement of land and did not involve any drastic changes such as redistribution of economic power and privilege.

Sundarayya²⁴ has analysed the Telengana peasant movement in detail. Although the Zamindari system that existed under the Nizams rule in Telangana and the mirasdari system that exists in Thanjavur are quite different, some of the observations made by Sundarayya are applicable to peasant and agricultural labour movement in general.

24. Sundarayya, P., "Telengana Peoples' Armed Struggle, 1946-51", Social Scientist, vol.1, nos.7 to 10, February-May 1973.

Sundarayya has stated that during the course of Telengana struggle it was observed that the peasant could be moved easily on the reoccupation of his own lands which he had lost earlier than on making him to occupy the surplus lands of the landlords. According to him, the significance of land for the landless poor peasants and agricultural labourers is revealed by the fact that even after 20 years, these sections were continuing the struggle for getting the patta rights, ownership rights and title deeds for the lands they occupied during the armed struggle especially the government waste lands and the lands restored to them which they had lost before the struggle to the landlord. According to him the success of the struggle was the slogan of "land to the tiller".

According to Sundarayya, the rich peasants despite the tremendous gains they got from the united struggle against the Government and Zamindars, were reluctant to increase the daily wages of the agricultural labourers and used to resist strongly increase in wages along with capitalist landlords. Hence strikes and demonstrations of agricultural labourers became inevitable during the course of the struggle

itself, especially after the 'Police Action'. According to him, with the land received and the increase in wages, a remarkable change came about in the political consciousness and mode of living of the agricultural labourers.

According to him, the Telengana peasant struggle brought to the forefront a series of issues such as the role of the peasantry in the People's Democratic Revolution; the question of concretely analysing the classification among the peasantry and the role played in the revolution by the different strata of the peasantry; the perspective for the Indian revolution, the specific place and role of the working class and urban centres in the revolution; the precise meaning and import of the concept of working class hegemony and the part played by the Communist Party in achieving it and thereby brought to the forefront all the basic theoretical and ideological questions concerning the strategy and tactics of the Indian people's democratic revolution, which were thrown up for serious inner party debate and discussion.

According to him, the Telengana peasant struggle also compelled the unwilling hands of

the Congress leaders to embark upon various agrarian reforms, however halting, half-hearted and pitiful they were; The Bhodan movement by Vinobhave was conceived in the course of the struggle to pacify the peasantry; The struggle also made the people realise that the land problem could be solved only by a powerful organised militant mass struggle. The Telengana movement also forced the pace of States reorganisation on a linguistic basis.

Master Hari Singh²⁵ has given a descriptive account of the struggles launched by the Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha in Punjab since its inception in 1954. The Punjab Khet Mazdoor Sabha had led the struggles of the agricultural workers for better wages, land, house-sites, employment, cheap credit, availability of food and other essential commodities at fair prices, educational and medical facilities and end to social repression. According to him, the main edge of the movement has been anti-feudal, anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist and had striven to build unity of agricultural worker and other

25. Master Hari Singh, Agricultural Workers Struggles in Punjab, (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1980).

landless rural poor with toiling peasantry and industrial working class and other toiling strata. The Sabha has also lent support to genuine demands and struggles of peasantry, working class, low paid employees, students, youth and women.

A.V. Jose²⁶ has argued that the rise of trade unionism among agricultural labourers in Kerala were linked to the institutional and technological changes associated with the permeation of capitalism into traditional agriculture, which led to the differentiation of the peasantry and a sharp polarisation of class forces. He has argued that the technological changes in Kerala led to the deterioration of employment and income earning opportunities of the landless labourers and undermined the traditional landlord-labour relationships. He has also argued that apart from those objective conditions, factors such as the politicisation of the agricultural labourers and the presence of well organised industrial trade-unions played a significant role.

26. A.V. Jose, "Origins of Agricultural Trade Unionism in Kerala", Social Scientist, vol.5, no.12, July 1977, pp.24-43.

He has argued that in both Kuttanad and Palghat, since rice cultivation being the principal economic activity and demanded adequate supply of labour during peak seasons, the system of attached labour was practised. The tenancy reforms introduced in Travancore since late 19th century, led to the emergence of capitalist entrepreneurs in Kuttanad region who brought in more land under cultivation. As a result more labour was required which led to migrant labourers being employed in peak seasons in Kuttanad and the large scale employment of migrant labour initiated a transition from attached labour system to employment of casual labour. Apart from this, the transition from labour intensive to capital intensive agriculture, effected by the building of granite-walls rendering the use of labour for building bunds unnecessary and the use of oil engines and electric motors rendering the use of labour for dewatering purposes, led to the decline in employment opportunities of the agricultural labourers. Besides, the money wages declined during 1921 to 1931 and the agricultural labourers were employed on a mass scale as in factories but with much worse working conditions. The momentum that

developed in the working class movement in Alleppey district led to the organization of agricultural labourers along trade union lines in 1940.

In Malabar region tenancy reforms were introduced only in 1930s under the pressure of an organised peasant movement launched by the Malabar Karshaka Sangham. However comprehensive land reforms were sought to be implemented in Malabar only from 1957 after the formation of Communist ministry. In Palghat the completion of land reforms in the sixties altered the agrarian structure wherein a landed elite emerged displacing the erstwhile feudal landlords. Also the attached agricultural labourers were converted into permanent labourers. The introduction of New Agricultural Strategy and the mechanisation of agriculture resulted in the decrease of employment opportunities of labourers apart from attracting migrant labourers from neighbouring regions. These led to discontentment among agricultural labourers leading to their being organised in trade unions by Communist Party.

CHAPTER - III

CHAPTER - III

AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT UPTO 1952

Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu, is a predominantly delta area of Cauvery and its tributaries, lying along the coast of the Bay of Bengal and it has traditionally been a source of surplus rice in the Tamilnadu state. The district is comprised of two natural divisions, viz., the Cauvery Delta and the drier uplands in the South-Western portion of the district. The delta area comprises of Sirkali, Mayuram, Kumbakonam, Nannilam, Nagappatinam, almost all of Thiruthurai-poondi and a part of Mannargudi and Thanjavur taluks. The drier upland tracts comprises of Arantangi, Pattukottai, Southern portions of Mannargudi and Thanjavur taluks.

From the very early days efforts have been made to control the flow of water from the Cauvery for an efficient system of irrigation. The Grand Anicut, an advanced engineering construction of the Chola period provided an efficient irrigation facility to the irrigated lands of the district by preventing the waters of the river from escaping out of the district before merging into the Bay of Bengal. The

British further contributed to the irrigation system through the construction of minor irrigation works as the Cauvery and Vennar regulators in 1886. The Cauvery and Vennar regulators supported the basic engineering designed by the Cholas, and distributed the waters of the two rivers more efficiently apart from protecting the fields from being flooded. The area of 900,000 acres covered by these two regulators came to be known as old Delta of Thanjavur after two major constructions were made by the British between 1925 and 1934. During 1925 to 1934, the Mettur Reservoir was constructed near the Tamil Nadu-Mysore border over a catchment area of 16,300 miles. During the same time, the Grand Anicut canal was built newly to provide irrigation facilities for an additional area of 300,000 acres in Thanjavur. The new area, irrigated by the Grand Anicut Canal known as Cauvery-Mettur Project or CMP, is referred to as 'New Delta' in the Thanjavur district. By 1961 about 1,200,000 acres comprising of 80 per cent of the new sown area in Thanjavur district was irrigated by the CMP and the Cauvery and Vennar regulators. With about 80 per cent of the cultivated area also under paddy, almost all of the paddy crop was grown under irrigated conditions.

However, Thanjavur district has certain natural drawbacks also. The frequent delays in Southwest Monsoon coupled with fluctuations in Northeast Monsoon resulted in uncertain water situation leading to risks of losing both the Kuruval and Thaladi crops.¹ Hence a majority of the cultivators were forced to have only one long duration Samba crop. Thus in 1961 double cropping was done only in 300,000 acres out of an irrigated area of 1,200,000 acres in Thanjavur district and constituting less than 30 per cent of the lands under Paddy cultivation.

Apart from this by 1961, Thanjavur had a population density of about 900 persons per sq.mile, by supporting a population of 3,240,000 persons on 3,648 sq.miles, out of which about 80 per cent lived in rural areas. There were 941,000 cultivators and agricultural labourers dependent on a total cropped area of 1,458,000 acres for their livelihood.² The availability of land per adult worker was only 1.5 acres, one of the lowest land-man ratios in any region of India.

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1. For details see Francine R. Frankel, India's Green Revolution, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1971, pp.82-84.
 2. Expert Committee on Assessment and Evaluation, Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Department of Agriculture), Intensive Agricultural District Programme Report (1961-63), p.77.

However, more than the unfavourable agro-economic conditions, it is the socio-economic conditions of Thanjavur centering around the ownership and control of land, that had contributed to the agrarian conflicts in the district thereby resulting in a strong agricultural labour movement in the district. A proper understanding of the origin growth and development of the agricultural labour movement could be arrived at only by analysing the socio-economic transformations that have taken place in the agrarian relations in the district. The changes in the agrarian relations could be best understood by looking into how the socio-economic conditions and agrarian relations have existed and altered historically. Although a complete picture of the prevailing socio-economic conditions and agrarian relation over periods in history cannot be made certain broad generalisations have been made by various scholars working on various periods of history. An overview of this would be presented in this chapter.

In Thanjavur, the proprietary rights over land and its produce developed into a system of proprietary rights known as mirasi system. At first, in joint villages, community of rights seems to have prevailed to the fullest extent and all the lands

of the joint villages were held and cultivated in common, the produce being divided among the landowners after deducting the dues of Government and of the village officers and servants. With the evolution of proprietary rights, the entire estate, arable and waste of the villages, came to be held by groups of landlords. This form of tenure survived at the opening of the nineteenth century in the Samudayam or pasungcarai villages.

A modified form of the joint village known as arudicarei gramam was also practised in some villages, in which the arable lands were permanently distributed, but all other rights were exercised in common. Waste lands and even lands reclaimed from the waste after the original division belonged to the village community as a whole. This tenure was also termed pala-bogam in contra-distinction to ekabogam or yajamana gramas, where full proprietary rights were enjoyed by a single person who either cultivated it by means of labourers or leased it out to tenants. However, in general the landlords under the mirasi system known as mirasdars possessed a hereditary right in the soil and also a right over the entire extent of village land, arable and waste.³

3. Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1851, University of Madras, 1941, pp.29-31.

Under the Cholas, during the tenth and eleventh century A.D., the revenue system had been very elaborate wherein each village had a different system of weights and measures and very minute areas of land were assessed separately. Under the rule of Marathas during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century A.D., assessment had risen steeply leading to a uniform spirit of independence and resistance among landholders. This led to the emergence of one prominent landlord representing the other weaker mirasdars in the area - who had pooled their resources - to the State in matters of revenue collection.⁴ Over time these favoured intermediaries gained power and prestige at the cost of both the revenue collection of the State and the economic independence of the smaller mirasdars. In 1800 the Collector of Thanjavur noted that a single landowner was in a position to corner the grain market in an entire taluk.⁵

4. Baliga, B.S., Tanjore District Handbook, Government Press, Madras, 1957, p.92.

5. Thanjavur Records vol.3200, cited in Dharmakumar, Land and Caste in South India; Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge University Press, 1965.

Apart from mirasi tenure, Thanjavur also had in certain villages Zamindari system and in substantial areas inam tenures. The inam tenures were tax free tenures with right of occupancy held by individuals and institutions, which had originated in the form of land grants made by the earlier rulers. Principal among these were temple lands which were extensive in Thanjavur, particularly in its eastern taluks. Since the Chola period, the temples extended their control over time to such an extent that they could not manage their land directly. Chola inscriptions specify the share of the produce due to a rentier temple. Temples encouraged subletting which has been a distinctive aspect of Thanjavur's agrarian relations.

The mirasdars had their lands cultivated by leasing the lands out to tenants known as pykaries or by adopting the pannaiyal system wherein the pannaiyals cultivated the land. The tenants were of two categories viz., Porakudis and Ulkudis. Porakudis were essentially tenants at will and their leases usually lasted for an year. They often came from other villages and had no right of occupancy. The ulkudis, on the other hand,

were a class of tenants who had stronger roots in the soil and in the village community. They were probably residents of the village who had cultivated the same land for generations. According to the British such a tenant could be considered quasi proprietary; He "holds his land in a subordinate species of mirasi and possesses them not in absolute, but in definite property, for though he cannot transfer them (property) by sale, gift, mortgage or otherwise, yet he cannot be removed from them and they descend like Caniyatchi mirasi of the village to his posterity".⁶

There are certain instances of the ulkudi obtaining the right to mortgage the land although he could not alienate it. The creditor would claim the standing crop and only then the ulkudi could resume cultivation in the land. The practice of ulkudis mortgaging the land was prevalent in Thanjavur but was less common than in Malabar. By and large ulkudi got 5 per cent or less as share of the crop than the porakudi. The conditions of

6. Cited in Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850, op.cit., p.34.

their work were so arduous that an early collector classed them as semi-serfs. It was the ulkudi system of tenancy, primarily serving a corporate body dominated by big mirasdars in the village, that had provided a regular, almost unchangingly reproduced system of cultivation within the structure and bonds of the village community.

The tenant paid rent according to either of the two systems viz., crop-sharing or varam and fixed rent or kuthagai. At the beginning of the British rule varam or crop-sharing was more common. Traditionally the gross yield was divided in to three shares known as the melvaram, the tundu varam and the kudivaram. The king's share was known as melvaram, the owners share as tunduvaram and the tenants share as kudivaram. The tenants share varied in different parts of the district and according to the productive power of the land. In some cases it varied according to the availability of labour in the area.

The varam tenants also had to perform kudi-
maramat or village labour for maintenance of minor irrigation works for which they were paid over and

above their varam share. The porakudi was entitled to a house site but was not given any assistance in building the hut. In the uplands, however, where the big mirasdars were less common there were many more small pattadars. Here kuthagai or fixed rent system was more common. The landlord who was usually an absentee would take a fixed rent, either in grain or cash which amounted to a little less than four-fifths of the crop in ordinary harvests.

The Pannaiyal System:

The cultivation of lands that were not leased out to tenants were carried out through serfs or pannaiyals. According to the settlement report on Thanjavur in 1805, nearly all the mirasdars cultivated their land through serfs or pannaiyals, which indicate the extensive prevalence of the pannaiyal system then.⁷ However, the possibilities of origins of pannaiyal system being rooted in slavery cannot be ruled out. During the chola period instances have been recorded in Thanjavur wherein individuals have

7. Bayley and Huddleston, Papers on Mirasi Right, cited in Dharma Kumar, Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century, op.cit., p.99.

been forced to sell themselves to temples and institutions, although slaves were not central to production.⁸ Even the British announced actions against what they termed forms of slavery. In 1932, the British made the transfer of seris by sale from one district to another as a special offence. In 1843 the courts were debarred from considering cases involving the sale and transfers of slaves. In 1860 the sale or purchase of slaves were characterised as an offence. After 1918 seris could no longer be sold to cover revenue arrears. Thus it could be inferred that in general a form of bondage which had at its core elementary slavery, gave way to the later agrestic servitude the pannaiyal system.

Developments Under the British Rule:

The British acquired Thanjavur in 1799 and during the early period, the Board of Revenue showed a distinct preference for the village system of assessment.⁹ Joint villages with communal land tenures predominated in the wet lands in Thanjavur.

8. Neelakanta Sastri, The Culture and History of the Tamils, K.L. Mukhopadyay, Calcutta, 1964, p.89.

9. Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency, 1800-1850, op.cit., p.42.

In 1805 out of 5,783 villages 1,774 were jointly held; in 2,202 villages the landlords held the arable lands separately but shared the other rights; and in 1,807 villages there were individual landowners.¹⁰ The tenacity of this tendency was remarkable. Even the settlement Report on Thanjavur of 1921 recorded that there were still villages in Thanjavur where land was periodically redistributed.

From 1808 to 1822, triennial and decennial leases of villages were made. Revenue was claimed in lumpsum from the village and shares of the landowners were then distributed by the village elders. The communal nature of land control by a group of mirasdars, recognised by the British, also provided for a scale of individual rights within the system. Each mirasdars' share was clearly defined, and in the records it was often stated whether the proportion of the village wealth belonging to a mirasdar was in land or paddy. The British argued that a

10. Wallace Report on the Settlement of Thanjavur, Bayley and Hudson Papers on Mirasi Right, cited in Dharma Kumar, Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century, op.cit., p.94.

share in the joint property would be translated into a share in village assessment. Further it was held that rent could be fixed money rent, imposed jointly on the village.

This was a period of rapacious plunder of India's surplus by the British, making very high assessments on the basis of the excessively high levies of the early collectors. This period coincided with bad harvests and falling prices, and price fluctuations too were very high. The Board of Revenue noted the increasing difficulty of collecting such a high revenue.¹¹ In Thanjavur there was severe distress among the cultivators despite improvements in the irrigation system and fertile lands.

Effects of the Ryotwari System:

The failure of the village lease system due to high assessments, led to the switch over to Ryotwari system by the British administrators. The initial village settlements were made with the in-

11. Dutt, R.C., The Economic History of India: The Victorian Age, Government of India, 1976, p.52.

tention of winning the most influential body in the village - the landlords - by continuing certain features of the earlier relationship that existed between the State and the landlords, while also introducing certain new features which led to the transformation of the rural social structure. The ryotwari system led to the disappearance of the early joint villages being controlled by a group of landlords holding the lands in common and sharing the produce. The settlements were made on an individual basis and the assessments were also fixed on land as against the earlier practice of being calculated on the produce. This went against the earlier customary relations of the village community, headed by a group of landlords. The only difference between Thanjavur and other districts was that in Thanjavur the holdings were not estimated in acres and cents but in terms of share of the whole village for a long time. The right of the mirasdars over the waste land was transferred to the State gradually. Earlier the British also withdrew certain rights claimed by the mirasdars for the upkeep of temples.

Prior to the British rule, by and large it was only the landlord class that used cash in the

purchase of luxury commodities from urban commercial centres and within the village the close links between the landless labour and the handicraftsmen, the landlords and the peasantry or the village artisans were reflected solely in terms of grain. Thus while monetisation of the Indian Economy had occurred prior to the British rule the cash nexus had not yet entered the village economy.¹² Revenue payment in cash had initiated the monetisation of the village economy. A major transformation was brought about by the new comprehensive right granted to the ryot to sell, gift and mortgage the whole or any part of his land. The British had argued that this had been a feature of the earlier mirasdari system, since it would have encouraged regular cultivation, a necessity to finance tanks and water works at public expense. It is interesting however that as late as 1865 private sales of land by shares were recorded but these were quite exceptional, areas as the system of redistributing fields and with it the most traces of the old communal ownership of village land had ceased a long time before.¹³

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12. Gough, Kathleen., "Caste in a Tanjore Village", in Leach (Ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan, Cambridge University Press, 1960, p.28.
13. Madras District Gazetteers, Tanjore, Madras Government Press, 1906.

Although theoretically the ryotwari system was meant to grant pattas to the cultivator thereby avoiding intermediaries, in actual practice there were two important tendencies which militated against this. First the ryotwari system was grafted on to the earlier mirasi system. The British themselves had argued that private property had already developed within the mirasi system, noting villages where there were single mirasdars and yet the assessment being divided between the fields. The existing landlords - who rented out their fields on a share cropping tenure or who employed labour tied by extra economic bonds can in no sense be regarded as a class of cultivators. Even the Court of Directors had noted during the period of village settlements itself that, in fact already, there were a class of absentee landlords - rentiers from outside the village. Therefore the British were in essence reinforcing landlordism - although in a new form and without the mantle and content of the village community.

Secondly, the introduction of alienable rights gave rise to new elements of exploitation in the village. As a market in land developed and land was used as security for debt, it was often trans-

ferred either to the money lender or to a landlord who had extended credit to a poor ryot, often with the backing of the colonial power. But the fiction of ryot pattas being granted to the cultivator in Thanjavur was maintained. However no laws protecting the tenants were passed during the 19th century.

The growing power of the moneylender under the new structure of relation played a crucial role in the economic life of the peasantry, by squeezing the peasantry off their land. The moneylender by virtue of having advanced seeds and implements earlier bought the peasant's produce during harvest, at low prices. Besides he also mediated in the collection of rack-revenue and by these practices he increased his hold over the peasantry, finally resorting to appropriation of the land itself.

Thus, the land monopoly, which the early British colonialists noted in some form in Thanjavur at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was accentuated and transformed by the British as they were interested only in augmenting their revenue. However the inam tenures of temples, a prime source of sub-letting was relatively unaffected by the colonial rule and in fact continued parallel

to the process of encouraging the pace of sub-letting in the ryotwari areas.

Small landowners were also present in Thanjavur. The majority of the small holders in the district were concentrated in the less fertile uplands in the Southwest and were also comparatively more numerous in the western part of the district. The vast majority of tillers of the soil had only tiny plots and the amount of land that they cultivated appears to have been small, whereas the big landlords monopolised the vast fertile tracts of the cauvery delta.

The condition of the cultivators of small plots of land whether they owned their own land, or still worse, forced to rent it, was quite miserable. As market relations developed and monetisation of the rural economy increased, the small cultivators found themselves squeezed out of whatever economic opportunities existed by large landlords who had traditionally cornered the market. The burden of high revenue became quite unbearable which heightened indebtedness and the process of alienation of the land. Besides the sub-tenants in the ryotwari areas were not protected by any law.

Traditional customs and usages had to be relied upon in a situation where the large landlords were a law unto themselves. During the late ryotwari settlement period, particularly during the famine years a large number of small ryots were either driven off the land to join the ranks of the agricultural labourers or were forced to alienate their land to a money-lender or landlord, while continuing to work it.

During this period the condition of the tenants also changed considerably. The British lifted the village community's ban on outsiders (porakudis) cultivating the village lands. The ulkudis also lost their customary rights of occupancy and were gradually converted into tenants-at-will. This meant the imposition of an yearly least at the end of which rents were liable to be raised. The gradual disappearance of the ulkudis and more particularly the distinction between ulkudis and parakudis, was an important structural decay of the village community under the impact of colonialism.

During the first two decades of the Twentieth Century the tenants got a share of around 20 per cent of the gross crop. The larger landlords of the

delta area in East Thanjavur, extracted the major share of the produce under porakudi cultivation. In quite a few cases money rent was also collected, which was calculated on the basis of the productivity of the land.¹⁴ According to a revenue settlement report of 1921, despite the worsening conditions of the peasantry due to the new revenue settlements, the customary varam share of the tenants had not changed over the years. "In only two villages out of nearly 200 did I find any recent change, in one of these cases, the parakudis had combined in a strike last year and successfully increased their share from one-fifth to one-fourth".¹⁵

Before the beginning of the Twentieth century, the tenants had to provide seed and ploughing stock themselves. Ploughing and other operations were performed by the tenants themselves, although agricultural labour was employed - when more labour was required for a short span of time - for operations

14. Thanjavur District Gazetteer; Supplement to Gazetteer (1906), Madras Government Press, 1933, p.166.

15. Settlement Report Thanjavur, 1921, Government of Madras, pp.9-10, cited in Saraswati Menon, Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur, 1940-52, Part-I, Social Scientist, vol.7, no.6, January 1979, p.27.

like transplanting, weeding and reaping. However, in small tenants' farm the principal labour expended was his own family labour. Thus the brunt of cultivation expenses was borne by the tenant. This pattern of labour continued as late as 1930s. The landlord would pay the expenses for manuring, land levelling, channel clearing, government dues and the customary fees of the village servants. All other cultivation expenses were met by the share cropper or tenant. The landlords never used to make advances even for seeds. Only on some security were the tenants given loan of Rs.50 to Rs.60 by the landlord, to buy bulls for ploughing. Commodity debts were common and advances given by the landlord, if any, would be deducted on the threshing floor itself. The balance obtained by the tenant would hardly cover his subsistence living expenses. This would therefore, almost invariably form the nucleus of a permanent debt, not unlike that of the pannaiyal.¹⁶

The extensive ownership of land by mutts and temples accentuated the pace of sub-letting thereby

16. Thirumalai, S., 'Palakurichi' in Thomas and Ramakrishnan (ed.), Some South Indian Villages: A Resurvey, Madras University Economic Series, no.4, 1940.

complicating the problem of tenancy. Since renting lands from these institutions were considered as a mark of status, Brahmin mirasdars used to rent them and since they would not cultivate the lands themselves they used to sub-let it. The high incidence of sub-infeudation raised the already high rate of surplus extraction in the form of rent transferred from peasant cultivator to the non-cultivating land lord in stages.

In 1930 the Madras Banking Enquiry Committee Report noted that "The tenant commonly goes from year to year eking out a precarious living...borrowing from the landlord, being supplied by him with seed, cattle and implements. The farm servant on the other hand, may in some cases be paid a little cash as well as a fixed amount of grain. The tenant may cultivate with his own stock and implements, but there is in practice no very clear line between the two; and when the landlord is an absentee it is not always obvious whether the actual cultivator is a farm labourer or a sub-tenant".¹⁷ This clearly spells out the distressing conditions of the peasantry.

17. Cited in Dutt, R.P., India Today, Manisha, 1970, p.242.

Similar reports also expressed the distressing conditions of the landless and bonded labourer. Even in Thanjavur, where indications of wealth were reported, the reports qualified extremes of wealth and poverty. War conditions further contributed to the deterioration. B.V. Narayanaswami Naidu wrote in his report on Rural Indebtedness in 1948 about Madras that "...war time effects have been most beneficial to bigger than to medium landholders while small holders have actually suffered...the debts of the landless labourers has increased more than that of the tenants. The debt per head of the fourth class of tenants has risen by about 4 per cent, clearly showing that war years have hit relatively hard the tenants as against the registered holders. The case of the landless labourers is even worse with a rise of 45.6%".¹⁸

The Impact of the British Rule on the Pannaiyal System

Although the British took certain actions on what they called as forms of slavery, the traditional

18. Narayanaswami Naidu, B.V., "Report into Rural Indebtedness", Government of Madras, 1948, cited in Malaviya, Land Reforms in India, All India Congress Committee, 1955, p.201.

forms of bondage of the pannaiyal system endured and were only partially transformed. Thus agrestic servitude or the pannaiyal system, wherein a body of labourers in bondage supplying the labour force was typical of the agrarian relations in Thanjavur historically.

At the beginning of the present century many of the large mirasdars had their lands cultivated through the pannaiyals. The pannaiyal was often in deep, inextricable debt to the landlord and when the estate was sold, the right of the landlord over the pannaiyal (i.e. the debt) was transferred in the document. The pannaiyals lived under extremely harsh conditions despite winning certain rights such as being entitled to clean the grain spilt on the threshing floor apart from the daily rate of grain wage. He also received aid such as small presents in grain and small sums of money on occasions like marriage, death or childbirth or festivals like pongal. They were also entitled to house sites to build shacks with the help of the landlord and to miniscule backyard plots to cultivate for their own consumption. The backyard plots and huts which the landlords provided were, in essence, features of the extra-economic bondage in which the pannaiyals were trapped at birth.

In 1883 the wages of the pannaiyals were nearly three-fourth of a marakkal of grain per day.¹⁹ Women and boys were paid at half the rate. Casually employed labourers were paid one marakkal of paddy per day. Even during seasons of intensive agricultural work, the wages paid for the pannaiyals remained the same whereas the rate would almost double for the relatively free or semi free labour. However, both the types of labour were paid in kind. During the early part of the century, the wages of the pannaiyals rose marginally.²⁰ A cash wage was gradually being introduced. Vast disparities in wages not only between taluks but also between different estates contributed to the old tradition of keeping generation after generation of dependent labourers separate and submissive.

The pannaiyal had no fixed hours of work and could be employed in any activity that the landlord desired although his principal occupation was participation in agricultural operations. In olden days the maintenance of minor irrigation works was

19. Manual of Tanjore District, Madras Government Press, 1883, p.380.

20. Madras District Gazetteers, Tanjore, Madras Government Press, 1906, p.110.

customarily done through voluntary labour or kudimaramat, the provision of which was an obligation on the part of the group of mirasdars controlling the village community. Pannaiyals and share croppers were forced to do this work by the landlords. Although, in course of time, in most areas, the task became the responsibility of the government, the government ignored it to the detriment of cultivation in many districts. However, the critical dependance on irrigation forced the continuance of the traditions of Kudimaramat in Thanjavur. This notable feature, an old feature of the work pattern of the village community, survived in the labour of the pannaiyal.

System of Debt Bondage:

Another typical feature of the pannaiyal system was the system of debt bondage. According to a survey conducted by the British administrators in Thanjavur on the system of debt bondage, the landlord would advance a sum of Rs.25 or Rs.50 to an agricultural labourer towards his marriage. The labourer in return would have to bond himself for

life to the landlord.²¹ The terms of the contract would be recorded in debt bonds and very rarely will they be registered. This system of debt bondage was known as Suventhai or Pannai system. The terms of the contract would include the wife and unborn children of the labour, to work as pannaiyals to the landlord for working off the debt. The landlord would give him a house-site and a tiny plot of land known as manai kollai for his own cultivation. The labourer would be given rations for daily work on a daily or monthly or seasonal basis depending on the whim of the landlord which amounted to nearly half of the remuneration of a comparatively free labourer.

According to the survey, theoretically, the landlord had only the right of first call over the pannaiyal and that the pannaiyal had the right to work for another landlord when there was no work for him on his 'landlords' land. However there was not a single instance of a pannaiyal collecting

21. Government Order No.385, dated 13 February, 1937, Development Department, Government of Madras, cited in Saraswati Menon, 'Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District 1940-52', Part-I, Social Scientist, vol.7, no.6, January 1979.

sufficient wages to pay back the entire debt and procure his liberty. The only known and practised methods of leaving the landlord was to have the debt transferred to another landlord or alternatively to flee.

The wide prevalence of the system would be understood from the fact that the landlords maintained ledgers instead of issuing individual debt bonds in the case of families enslaved for generations. From the ledger samples it could be inferred that apart from the interest rates being normally over 70% the terms of agreement were extremely burdensome and vicious. In one case, a boy and a girl were bonded out to work for an annual wage of Rs.12/- which went directly towards settling the account with the landlord.

In the words of the Report: "The system is a vicious one, the indebted families having no chance of competing in the labour market and earning decent wages and discharging their loans. They live in huts, not their own, propagating generations destined to live in the same condition with no hope of emancipation...the big mirasdar system is too common in this district and it is these big mirasdars

that encourage the system. Each one of them has to cultivate thousands of acres every year and labour problem is a very vital problem as far as these big mirasdars are concerned..."²² Lapses on the part of labourers were meted out with harassment and vicious punishments such as the practice of being forced to drink cow-dung and corporal punishment, were "often meted out with a view to cow-down and bring around the rebellious element".²³ Thus the debt bondage system satisfied the requirements of production controlled by extensive landlordism.

Sources of Exploitation:

In terms of agrarian relations, the monopoly of the extensive tracts of land by the landlord class made the class the basic source of exploitation of the peasantry, and directly determining the oppressive living and working conditions of the peasantry. But the mainspring of the overall exploitation of the countryside was operated by British colonialism. The British not only buttressed

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

but also qualitatively transformed the parasitical landlordism which had become entrenched over the centuries. The extraction of an immense sum of revenue at an increasingly high rate by the British resulted in a double squeeze of the masses of the peasantry as this revenue demand too was passed on to the shoulders of the peasantry by the parasitic class. Even sections of the landlords, too, found themselves in opposition over the years to the excessive demands of the colonial oppressor. In a memorandum to the Madras Government in 1941, the Thanjavur Mirasdars' Association clearly dominated by the big landlords, complained that Thanjavur was the most heavily taxed areas in the world, since Indian Mirasdars paid the highest tax in the world and Thanjavur mirasdars paid the highest tax in India. Despite the Mirasdars continuous complaints and petition to the British regarding the unreasonably high assessment of the Cauvery Delta, the government continually raised the assessment every 30 years during the late period of the ryotwari assessment. The land tax was raised by 29 per cent in 1891 and 18.75 per cent in 1921. In fact, in 1922 the Madras Legislative Council even proposed that a system of permanent settlement be made in the ryotwari tracts as a solution to this problem.

Nevertheless, to the working peasantry and the labourers, particularly the bonded labourers, the immediate oppressors were the big mirasdars. It was the changes in the relationship between the large landlords on the one hand and the cultivators and labourers who worked the land, being economically and socially dependent on the landlords, on the other hand that led to the eruption of struggles of 1940s. The demand for higher wages essentially implied an attack on the unrestrained economic and social monopoly that the landlords exercised over the peasantry. The peasants holding their own lands had to face the market cornered by the landlords and those who held lands under tenancy or share cropping had to yield to the landlord a major portion of the crop they cultivated. The landless labour was, by and large, in the grip of a vicious system of extra-economic bondage, which cut off all their economic and social options at the time of birth itself. It was quite natural that the spontaneous protests, later to be organised and channelised should identify as its main enemy these landlords and clashed with them.

The agrarian relations, hitherto characterised has been done in the context of the mirasi system.

However, it would be incomplete without adding an important social qualification, viz., that of the prevalence of Brahmin landlordism which sponsored multi-caste villages, to be jointly managed by the Brahmin community in a village. Multi-caste villages expressed an essential feature of the village community in a system of self-sustaining rights and services between hereditary occupational groups.

The villages of Thanjavur would be classified into Brahmadeya villages, where lands were held exclusively by Brahmins and Non-Brahmadeya villages where lands were held by landlords belonging to other castes also. During the Chola period, initially grant of villages were made to group of Brahmins in order to maintain them. At later stages certain rulers made a deliberate attempt to restrict landownership to only Brahmin castes in such villages, where grants have been made, resulting in Brahmadeya villages. Apart from land monopoly, the incidence of landownership by Brahmins has traditionally been high in Thanjavur. In 1807, the Tanjore Committee in its report recorded that Brahmins constituted 27% of the total number of mirasdars (62,048). According to 1876-77 Jamabandhi,

out of 1,36,532 pattas the Brahmins held 37,736 although the entire Brahmin population formed only 6.42% of the total population of the district.²⁴

Apart from Brahmadeya villages which were purified of landownership, by other castes, there were villages with heterogeneous caste landownership. In such villages also there were traditionally two village assemblies viz., the Sabha formed of all the Brahmins and the Ur which was composed of other castes. The membership of both assemblies were restricted only to landowners. Only if the land-owning members of the Ur acquired high educational qualifications to match the Brahmin's debating skills, then the landlords could become members of the Sabha. In Thanjavur, the Brahmins apart from land monopoly exercised peculiar social monopoly over the lives' of the people of the villages. However, in Thanjavur, despite land monopoly and social monopoly exercised by the Brahmins, as many as nine different non-Brahmin castes are known to have owned land on a significant scale. Even more significant is the fact that due to changes over a period of time, today a majority of the largest landlords in Thanjavur are Moopanars, Vellalars and Naidus. Quite a good

24. Manual of Thanjavur District, Government of Madras, 1883, p.396.

number of the larger landlords have owned land since the Mahratta Rajas, under whom they probably served as military officers and even earlier.

The historical importance of the village assemblies cannot be over emphasised. In a community where elements of common landownership persisted, all major agricultural operations were organised and planned by the village community of landlords. In a closed stratified society, which was hierarchically organised, all major disputes and issues concerning either the village or sections of the village would be decided by the village assembly. In such a village organisation, the recognition of landownership by castes other than Brahmins must be considered important. The overall dominance of the Brahmin community and its ideological influence over the lives of others is striking. The link between ideological and economic dominance, in this context, could be brought out by a deeper analysis of the extensive ownership of land by temples in Thanjavur, especially their concentration in eastern Thanjavur where sub-infeudation is most complex and rack renting most oppressive.

During the Chola period the management of the temples were subject to the supervision of both the

State and the (Brahmin controlled) village assembly. Their existence encouraged Brahmins to set up 'Agraharam' villages, where again this caste was dominant. In the management of these temple lands, extra economic considerations specifically of caste, have determined the choice of the tenant. The tenant most commonly would be a Brahmin who in turn would sub-let the lands as he was barred from tilling the land. Historically, these managements have been known to charge extremely high rents (borne by Brahmins for the status of renting land from a temple) and vary them greatly.²⁵ The high rent burden was undoubtedly passed on to the shoulders of the cultivating tenant.

The prevalence of Brahmin landlordism has led to an over simplification of the relationship between class and castes in Tanjore, by certain scholars. Beteille has categorised Brahmins as landowners, non-Brahmins as tenants and Adi-Dravidas as agricultural labourers.²⁶ Beteille himself accepts that

25. Neela Kanta Sastri, The Culture and History of the Tamils, p.91.

26. Beteille, Andre., Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village, University of California Press, 1965, p.99.

there are Brahmins who are not landowners and, landowners who are not Brahmins. However, he has categorised Brahmins as landowners and the Non-Brahmin landowners as exceptions, thus leading to an oversimplification. Similarly he has classified the Non-Brahmins as homogeneous category of tenants. But among Non-Brahmins there are both landowners and agricultural labourers who cannot be termed as tenants. Non-Brahmins of artisan and serving castes who do not directly engage in agriculture also cannot be termed as 'tenants'. Beteille himself accepts numerous exceptions to categorising Non-Brahmins as tenants.

Kathleen Gough²⁷ uses a more useful categorisation wherein she differentiates the Non-Brahmins into several categories by class features and also brings out the qualitative distinctness of the sections of the Non-Brahmins within the caste system. Gough has classified the Non-Brahmin castes into three categories viz., (1) the Aristocratic castes; (2) tenant farmers and specialised village servants; and (3) craftsmen and traders of the town. The

27. Gough Kathleen, 'Caste in a Tanjore Village', in Edmund Leach (Ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan, 1960.

Aristocratic castes are the Non-Brahmin landowning castes like the vellalars, moopanars, kallars and naidus. The absence of monopoly over brahminical religion as expressed in exclusive right of worship have contributed to historical difference in the social organisation of these castes as opposed to the Brahmins. Beteille's crude concordance between the Brahmins and the landlord class pre-empts the possibility of studying in-depth the distinctions, the similarities and the relationship between these two sections in a historical study. However, the dominant Brahminical ideology had its impact on the other landowning castes wherein, as observed by Beteilled, some of the well to do Vellalals and Kallars have appropriated to themselves the ritual ban on tilling the land, which the Brahmins claimed as their birth right. Some of the gazetteers describe the Vellalars as more orthodox than the Brahmins in religious observances. However this cannot be explained through characterising this as a process of Sanskritization, since the monopoly in land by Caste Hindus in certain areas in Thanjavur, cannot be simply reduced to sharing power with Brahmins. The problem of explaining how caste has influenced agrarian relations involve a much deeper analysis.

Gough has clubbed together tenant farmers like Agamudaiyar and the specialised village servants into a single category due to their link with the land and their dependance on the landlord community. Although the tenants have been historically subservient to the landlord caste, the service castes did not have a subservient dependent relation with the landlord class, since these castes were given shares from the common land of the village community in order to induce them to stay in the villages. This essential bond between the village community and the servicing castes was destroyed by the British. As a result, in course of time, they joined the ranks of the landless poor or the poor peasant (often tenant). However, their distinction from the castes which composed of the class of tenants and landless labourers continued to remain in their caste practices and in their consciousness.

Similarly in the case of the third category of Non-Brahmin castes listed by Gough - the craftsmen and traders of the towns have not only been historically separated from the artisan castes in the village community but also their internal caste organisation changed with this process. Instead of being attached to the landlord community through

their rights in the village land (maniams), work in the town was soon undertaken on a corporate basis viz., guilds and according to established tradition. This led to their social and economic development as they were no longer confined to the closed system of village community. Thus these Non-Brahmin castes are disparate and can not be classified together in one category. One likelihood of continued categorisation of these disparate castes into one category of Non-Brahmins might be with a view to convey a sense of "opposition" within the caste structure between the Brahmins and the castes which comprise the Non-Brahmins. But historically they have had varied relations and response to the Brahmins, even if we classify the Brahmins together as landlords.

Social Oppression and the Caste System

The concept of 'opposition' could have real meaning only when it is used to describe the essential ideological constructs of the caste system and the scale of oppression directed by it. The land-labour relations were only expressed in the social relations between the Harijans and the Caste Hindus which only made practising untoucha-

bility as vital for the caste system thereby contributing to its rigid nature. Land-labour relations is the key to the historical role that the caste-system played by intervening - thereby retarding the process of historical development.

The most significant aspect of the social role of the Harijans is their traditional link with labour, in a society where labour was degraded and despised ritually in the extreme. The lowest rungs of the caste-hierarchy were invariably labourers working under extra-economic pressure which went on hand in hand with a very rigid system of social stratification in Thanjavur. Gough has shown how historically the Harijans have performed agricultural labour with slight changes from some form of slavery to the Pannaiyal system and to landless labour.²⁸ The Gazetteers also note that they are the great labouring caste of the land. The report on the condition of pannaiyals in Thanjavur during the late 1930s, noted that a pannaiyal was invariably of the Adi-Dravida Community.

28. Gough, Kathleen., Paper on field-work in Thanjavur in 1976 (unpublished).

These only show that the caste system was invariably bound up with relations of work in the country side and has historically been cramping society by restricting a section of the population to social and economic drudgery principally on ideological grounds.

The predominance of Harijans in performing agricultural labour has led to the static structural theory of caste system in India, wherein the two extremes of the caste system are positioned sharply in terms of ritual and social practices, and sometimes (in Beteilles' schema), in terms of economic criteria. An important fall out of the structural approach to caste would be that, historical analysis of the rise and decay of classes would be forfeited. An analysis of the dispossession of the small peasantry as a result of colonial rule and the resulting impact on the castes which comprised the small peasants, the tenants and the artisans cannot be carried out by this method of oversimplification. Only a detailed examination of the agrarian relations as a whole - in terms both caste and class which are inextricably bound up together would be of use. The traditional ban on untouchables renting land as tenants, justified

in ritual terms, strengthened the separation between the labouring caste and the land they cultivated thereby ensuring an entire labour force in bondage to the landlord. Caste-system was bred in its specific form by the developing land relations, but yet it had also its own independent evolution which made it an intrinsic element in agrarian relations, moulding it at its core.

Caste has had an economic function - in so far as it first buttressed, or even perhaps, defined a division of labour and over time, as production relations themselves developed, gave them a definite and relatively rigid social valuation. The social attitude towards labour, has become an essential feature of the form of labour. It must be firmly emphasised that the existence of caste in villages as an ordered system of stratification, need not exclude the existence of classes, as belonging to the sphere of relations of production. More importantly caste cannot be reduced to class and on the other hand we cannot artificially separate and compartmentalise the two structures. The caste system has very significantly confined and buttressed, the structure of the developing classes in India. In

Thanjavur the monopolistic landlordism had certain specific features since it was inextricably bound up with Brahmin landlordism. And comparably the extreme practice of untouchability has added important social dimensions to the characteristics of labour and the structure of production relations.

It is only when these ideologically structured differences which have developed into socially arrogated characteristics assuming overweening social proportions, which intervene in a major way in production relations, are attacked in their broadest dimensions, that the caste system can be overcome. Yet it is the essential nature of the caste system which itself constrains and holds back the spread of such mobilisation, by artificially dividing society. The rigidity of the caste system, which accounted for or propagated the opposition between all caste Hindus and the untouchables, was not merely a structural characteristic of the caste system but in real social terms a problem in the lives of the people - which the organisation of the working sections of the peasantry and landless labour had to face and resolve. The socio-ideological structures of the caste system raised an important barrier to the growth and spread of the movement.

In Thanjavur despite oppressive living conditions created by the landlords, a large proportion of the poor peasants who came from castes which identified themselves strongly with the caste-Hindus in separation from the untouchables, were inhibited from participating in the movement with more militant Harijans by the barrier of caste. Many of the other non-landlord castes expressed their protest to the landlord oppression through their caste assemblies or panchayats. In the case of artisans the assemblies would negotiate with the landlord who would then fix areas of work for different groups of artisans and of course settle disputes within the community. Brahmin landlords, according to custom could not evict a member of an artisan community without consulting the entire community. But their relative social freedom must be seen against the backdrop of their decline as a result of the dissolution of their traditional rights in the village community. They no longer have a secure clientele. The traditional rights in land or produce have become increasingly uncertain, where they have not disappeared. In one village that has been studied, the land set aside to feed this community was, in fact appropriated by one of the larger

Brahmin landlords in their village on the grounds that these castes no longer serve the village and were therefore not entitled to a free grant.²⁹

The lower caste Hindus who were, by and large, peasants directly oppressed by the landlords played a much larger role in the movement. In 1942, the participation of the lower caste people along with untouchable pannaiyals was noted with concern as a measure of the growing sweep of the movement.³⁰ Sivert Sen who later studied a village in Thanjavur in 1957-58 has brought out a case revealing the features of this problem wherein the peasant castes waited for their influential headmen's decision before participating in the activities of a newly-formed labour union. The caste assembly was still dominated by wealthier sections of the caste who had close links with the Brahmins. In this case the headmen opposed the participation in the union activities but later they had to give in due to pressure of the peasantry.³¹ These caste assemblies, in fact, primarily represented the most backward practices of caste-separation, hierarchy and above all the socially repulsive

29. Sivertsen, Dagfinn, When Caste Barriers Fall, Allen and Unwin, New York, 1963, pp 125-126.

practice of untouchability although they expressed to some extent the community of ideas and life style of the caste.

The instantaneous response of the Harijans to the call of the peasant movement and their subsequent militancy is striking. The community of action among Harijans have been explained by Beteille in terms of lesser segmentation among the Harijans and by Gough in terms of labour as their primary source of livelihood. However this community of action was essentially a result of the basic opposition between the untouchables and the landlords who have been accustomed, historically to dealing with them as a collectivity. The landlords used to punish the entire caste group for the insubordination of one individual and hence the internal caste matters were speedily settled to avoid the intervention of the landlord and collective punishment by him. In one instance, when a group of pallars serving one of the four Brahmin lineages demanded higher pay, the Brahmin lineage evicted them and replaced them with a new group of Pallars of the Tekkati (southern)

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30. Government Order No. 1693, dt. 11 Oct. 1938, Development Department, Government of Madras.
31. Sivertsen, D., When Caste Barriers Fall, op.cit., pp. 124-126.

Pallar sub-caste whom they brought from a neighbouring Brahmin village. Later in response to pleading from the untouchable community, the old group of labourers were reinstated.³² This situation of collective dependance bred unity among the untouchable labourers which was expressed in their caste assembly.

These caste assemblies, apart from expressing certain internal features of caste, have also provided the basis for collective action. The existence of a forum for regular meetings provided a useful beginning for the organisation of the Harijans. As the peasant movement grew in strength, the landlords used to dread the New Moon Day meetings of the Harijans held at night in their temple court-yards.³³ In 1942, while a new moon meeting was in progress, two watchmen of a mirasdar, whose workers had threatened to strike, were sent into the Harijan area to terrorise the women while the men were away. In the clash that followed, the two watchmen were killed and a ban on kisan activities

32. Gough, Kathleen., Rural Society in South East India, Cambridge University Press, London, 1981, p.195.

33. Government Order No.2222, Ms. dated 6 Jun.1946, Development Department, cited in Saraswati Menon, op.cit.

was subsequently promulgated.³⁴ However, these historical forms of caste organisations had to yield their basic importance to broader mass organisations of the class and caste oppressed people, worthy of the current age of revolutionary transformation. Such organisation grappled, from the forties, with the task of mobilising the rural poor on the theoretical understanding that, just as the complex and difficult caste barrier had to be overcome in the mass struggle to transform agrarian relations, it was only when landlordism the crux of the agrarian question in India was uprooted, that the curse of the caste oppression could be destroyed.

34. Ibid.

CHAPTER - IV

CHAPTER - IV

AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT: 1940-1952

During the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the oppression and worsening conditions of the peasantry was fought through individual acts of protests and sometimes revolutionary terrorism, which were spontaneous and usually directed against the immediate exploiter - the money-lender, the tax collector or the landlords' agent. During the 1930s and 1940s the struggle of the peasantry spread to wider areas which led to the need for an organised movement with clear demands. This need for an organised movement led to the formation of the all India peasant organisation viz., the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) in 1936 which sharpened and clarified the demands of the peasantry, gradually through its own experience.

During its third session at Comilla in May 1938 the AIKS made some political declarations of a fundamental nature and started its aims in fairly clear terms. "The session clearly rejected the theory of class collaboration and declared that class struggle

was the basis of the kisan movement".¹ It further noted that "the goal of the peasant movement can be nothing short of an agrarian revolution", meaning a fundamental change in the agrarian economic relationship including the existing land revenue, Zamindari and Sahukari systems, vesting ownership of land in the tillers of the soil and freeing them from all manner of exploitation. An agrarian revolution could not be completed within the framework of imperialist rule and therefore the session declared that the fundamental task of the peasants of the country required that while fighting for their class demands through their class organisation they should also fight in alliance with other sections of the people. The basic demand of the abolition of landlordism and cancellation of debt was also reiterated.² But it had not yet adopted what was later termed as political resolution defining a positive and independent political programme of the Sabha.³

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1. M.A. Rasul, A History of the All India Kisan Sabha, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1974, p.33.
 2. Ibid., pp.33-34.
 3. Ibid., p.38.

During its fourth Congress at Gaya in 1939 the AIKS declared its independent political programme through its political resolution which also summed up its experience since its inception. The resolution stated:

"the past year has witnessed a phenomenal awakening and growth of organisational strength of the kisans of India...they have also awakened to a consciousness of their positions as a class desparately trying to exist in the face of ruthless feudal-cum-imperialist exploitation...their struggle against this exploitation has risen to higher level as is witnessed by the numerous partial struggles throughout the country. This awakening and the experience of these struggles have brought a new political consciousness to them...they have also realised that partly as an hangover from the feudal past of the country and partly due to the deliberate attempts of imperialism, there is a native system of exploitation which has enslaved and impoverished them and which too must go. They have therefore come to the conclusion that the logical end of their day to day struggle must be a mighty attack on and the removal of imperialism itself and an agrarian revolution which will give them land, remove all intermediary exploiters between them and the state, free them from all burden of debt and secure to them the full enjoyment of the fruits of their labour."⁴

4. Ibid., pp.52-53.

The All India Kisan Sabha summed up its experience of the provincial governments in its political resolution in the following words:

"The past year has been a year of small reliefs for the peasantry secured to them from the provincial governments. The crying inadequacy of these reliefs, the great obstacles created by the vested interests that have to be encountered in securing them and the patent incapability of provincial autonomy to solve any of the basic agrarian problems have fully exposed the hollowness of the provincial autonomy and have strengthened the conviction of the peasants that the present slave constitution must go and be replaced by one that is framed by the people themselves."⁵

Thus as early as 1939, at a time when the Kisan Sabha was under the leadership of people professing various shades of ideological thinking and yet attached to the Congress, the kisan conference adopted an unequivocal political position which not only aimed at the achievement of complete national independence as the Congress also did, but it went further to declare that it would work for agrarian revolution and the establishment of a democratic state of the Indian people, a

5. Ibid., p.54.

state and society in which class exploitation of the peasantry as well as the working class will be put an end to.⁶ This was made clear in the Punnapara Vayalar and Telengana armed struggles. The struggle of the labouring people of Thanjavur also expressed the rising social and economic expectations of a people on the verge of freedom.

Origins of Peasant Movement in Thanjavur:

In 1920s and 1930s Thanjavur witnessed militant struggles of railway workers of Thanjavur against the shifting of railway workshop from Nagapattinam to Golden Rock in Tiruchirappally district. These were led by Nationalist leaders and independents influenced by the Russian Revolution some of whom subsequently joined the Communist Party of India.⁷ Initiatives to organise poor peasants, tenants, and agricultural labourers were made by holding meetings as early as 1938 in Nagapattinam in East Thanjavur.⁸ In May 1938 a kisan

6. Ibid., p.56.

7. Gough, Kathleen., Rural Society in South East India, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981, p.147.

8. Ibid., p.147.

conference was held in Kivalur of Nagapattinam taluk due to the efforts made by Mr. T.N. Ramachandran. T.N. Ramachandran published a pamphlet on the eve of this conference titled 'peasants unite'. The pamphlet, which carried a Red Flag with hammer and sickle in its front cover, emphasised the need for peasant organisation and the demands of the peasantry. It also emphasised the necessity of a strong peasant organisation to support the National movement.⁹ Mr. B. Srinivasa Rao, the Madras State joint secretary of the Congress Socialist Party attended the conference.¹⁰

On August 14, 1938 a meeting presided over by Sabapathy Mudaliar was held at the house of Mrs. K. Maniammal. In this meeting the Nagapattinam taluk committee of the Kisan conference was set up. Mrs. Maniammal (a member of the Congress Socialist Party), Mr. V.G. Alagusundaram (Secretary,

9. Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Theraniyil Vivasayigal, Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', Part-I (Peasants and Agricultural Labourers Movement in Thanjavur), Uzhaven Urimai, All India Kisan Sabha, June 1985, p.17. Uzhaven Urimai is a monthly journal of the Tamil Nadu State unit of the All India Kisan Sabha led by CPI(M), published from Madras.

10. Ibid., p.17.

Madras Provincial Congress Committee) and Mr. P. Kumaraswamy (Member, Madras Provincial Congress Committee) were elected as President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively.¹¹ On December 10, 1938, another conference was held, among the peasants and labourers of the Kulamangalam Zamin, under the Chairmanship of Mr.C.B. Elango. This conference was inaugurated by T.N. Ramachandran and Flag hoisting was done by Chinniah, a Congress leader of Arantangi. The conference was attended by 5,000 persons.¹² These were the first attempts to organise the peasants and agricultural labourers in Thanjavur professing different ideologies and yet attached to the Congress. However, these attempts materialised into a strong peasant and agricultural labourers' movement only in the early years of 1940s.

Apart from initial attempts to organise the peasants and agricultural labourers, spontaneous struggles of labourers also took place in 1938, wherein the landlords complained to the government regarding the troublesome attitude of

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

their labourers. In Kaliyakkudi village of Nannilam taluk a struggle took place on the estate of Ganapathy Subramenia Iyer, who owned over 660 acres of land and employed more than 100 pannaiyals paying them lower than customary wages. In March 1938 they went on a strike in a militant protest against inhuman treatment and petitioned the government. The mirasdar was forced to raise the wages still below the demanded rates. In retaliation the mirasdar, in league with other influential landlords in the neighbourhood organised musclemen from nearby villages who attacked the men and molested the women labourers for defying the traditional hierarchy on 28th April 1938. Since an influential mirasdar was actively involved in the attack, the police refused to intervene despite open violence.¹³

However, the initial centre for the formation of a rudimentary peasant organisation, under the name of share-croppers association, was Tenparai

13. Government Order No.1693 dated 11th October, 1938, Development Department, Government of Madras, cited in Saraswati Menon, "Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District", Part-III, Social Scientist, vol.7, no.10, May 1979, p.54.

village in Mannargudi taluk. In 1939 P. Venkatesan returned back to his village Radhanarasimhapuram near Thenparai after completing his jail sentence for participating in Singapore Municipal Workers' agitation in Malaya. He came into contact with R. Amirthalingam of Serangulam, who was working among peasants in Mannargudi, and discussed with him the sufferages and militant mood of the peasants of Thenparai. At the same time Chozha Pandi A.R. Ramanujam also got in touch with Amirthalingam and Venkatesan. These three persons provided leadership to the Thenparai peasants in the latter years during their initial struggle. After some painstaking efforts the Thenparai peasants and agricultural labourers, who were cultivating the lands belonging to Uthirapathy Mutt, were organised to form a Vivasayigal Sangam (Share-croppers' Association) in January 1943. A village committee was formed and Veerachamy was made Secretary of the village committee.¹⁴

14. Kannuswamy, M.P., "Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal, Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam", Part II, Uzhaven Urimai, July 1983, Madras, p.3.

However, according to K.C. Alexander the Thenparai Share-Croppers Association was formed in 1939. He also states that about 200 villagers signed their names in a register and pledged their willingness to form an association.

The Thenparai Vivasayigal Sangam (Share-croppers Association) decided to raise the demands of: (i) abolition of bonded labour (pannai adimai system); (ii) increase in wages, and (iii) increase in tenants share of the produce.¹⁵ The Thenparai Vivasayigal Sangam (Share-croppers association) sent memoranda to the District Collector and Mutt authorities stating its demands. The representatives of the Sangam also met the Mutt authorities on January 28, 1943.¹⁶ The temple authorities responded to the formation of the Vivasayigal Sangam (share-croppers association) by intimidating its members with the help of hired musclemen. However, the association continued with its demands and resorted to a strike.¹⁷ Since the Second World War was on the district officials, in order to avoid the adverse effects of strikes on agricultural production, asked the temple authorities to grant some increase in tenants share of the produce and

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15. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Unions in South India, (Monograph), National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 1978, p.24.
16. Kannuswamy, M.P., Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam, Part-II, op.cit., p.3.
17. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Unions in South India, op.cit., p.24.

wages of labourers. The temple authorities who were unwilling to comply with the demands of the labourers and share-croppers tried to break the strike by evicting the tenants and threatening to leave the fields fallow. They also attempted to get the fields ploughed by outside labour.¹⁸ However, the peasants and labourers forced the outsiders to withdraw and also cultivated the lands left fallow by the temple authorities. The peasants harvested the crops and guarded the harvested crops lying in the fields from being taken away by the temple authorities and landlords.¹⁹

During the course of the struggle the Thenparai peasants and labourers went on a procession to the Deputy Collector in March 1943. Nearly 400 males and 150 women participated in the procession. After receiving their memorandum the Collector refused to hold talks with the leaders. Thiruthuraipeondi Police Inspector once came and tried

18. Ibid., p.24.

19. Veeraiyan, G., "Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru" (Heroic History of the Peasant Movement), (Monograph in Tamil) 1981, Gorky library, Madras, pp.21-22. According to him also the Thenparai struggles took place in 1943 only.

to arrest the committee members. But the peasants and labourers surrounded the police and prevented the arresting of the committee members. The Police Inspector and other officials sensing the mood of the peasantry agreed to strive for a settlement through negotiation. Finally, the peasants and labourers forced the Collector to intervene and an agreement was reached on 15th July 1943.²⁰

During the course of the struggle, the secretary of the Thenparai Vivasayigal Sangam was evicted from his leased land and his house was burnt down. Several criminal and civil cases were foisted on the leaders by the temple authorities and landlords in collusion with the police. In fact, seven leaders were given jail sentences.²¹ The agreement that was reached on 15th July 1943 was ratified by the Deputy Collector on 25th July 1943. According to the agreement:²²

20. Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam,' Part-II, op.cit., pp.3-4.

21. Veeraiyan, G., 'Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru', op.cit., pp.21-22.

22. Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', Part-II, op.cit., pp.3-4.

1. The tenants received 5 marakkals (1 marakkal is almost equal to 4 litres) of paddy per mah (3 mahsis equal to 1 acre).
2. The tenants would get 50 per cent share of the income from the coconut trees.
3. Tenants would not be evicted and arrears of rent would be written off, and
4. The labourers dismissed from household services, numbering 10, would be reinstated.

The success of the Thenparai struggle led to a rapid spread of the struggle to other villages in the district among peasants and labourers who formed vivasayigal sangams (peasant organisations) in their villages. The legalisation of the Communist Party of India in July 1942, which was hitherto banned, enabled members of the party to function openly in organising the peasants and agricultural labourers. In fact some of the leaders like A.K. Gopalan and B. Sreenivasa Rao, who were underground had trained the party workers and interested persons including some Congressmen in organising the peasants and labourers in unions. In 1939-40 a camp was organised at Muthupettai in Tanjore district to train party workers and interested Congressmen on how to form a trade union

in a new place. 30 party workers attended the camp. Nedungadi Ramachandran was in charge of the camp. A.K. Gopalan who was then underground and working in Tamil Nadu gave the training.²⁴ Nedungadi Ramachandran guided Amirthalingham, Venkatesan and A.R. Ramanujam in leading the peasant struggles in Mannargudi taluk. Amirthalingham was at that time Secretary of the Mannargudi Taluk Vivasayigal Sangam.²⁵

The rapid spread of the struggle to several villages of different taluks of Thanjavur led to a need for a district level organisation to coordinate and direct the struggles to achieve the demands of peasants and labourers. In the same period peasants and agricultural labourers struggles under the leadership of Vivasayigal Sangam took place in other districts like Salem, Ramanathapuram, South Arcot, and North Arcot. Realising the need of the hour a State Organising Committee of the

24. Gopalan, A.K., In the Cause of the People, (Madras: Orient Longman, 1975), p.137.

25. Kannuswamy, M.P., Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam, Part-II, op.cit., p.3.

Vivasayigal Sengam was formed on 14th June 1943 with Ponnambala Gounder as state president, Mr. Buvaragan and Chockalingam Pillai as Vice-Presidents and Janab M.K.N. Meeran, Manali Kandaswamy, Dr. Annaji, Lalitha Annaji and B. Sreenivasa Rao as State Secretaries.²⁶

The State organising committee decided to hold the first conference of the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sengam (Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha) at Mannargudi in Thanjavur district. In 1944 a Reception Committee consisting of 60 members, representing village committees, was set up in Radhanarasimhapuram. When initiatives for holding the conference were started, jail sentences of 4 months for P. Venkatesan and 3 months for Veerachamy, the Secretary of the Thenparai Vivasayigal Sangam, were served based on cases that were filed against them during the Thenparai agitation. The landlords attempted to dissuade the peasants and labourers by propaganda stating that the conference would not take place as the leaders

26. Veeraiyan, G., "Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalara", op.cit., p.26.

have been arrested and jailed. They also appealed to the government to ban the holding of the conference.²⁷ However, the conference was successfully held as planned.

The conference was inaugurated by Ponnambala Gounder and flag hoisting was done by R.K. Kannan. 12,000 men and 500 women participated in the conference.²⁸ The first conference of the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam (Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha) passed 21 resolutions and resolved to set up district committees in all districts. As a follow up of this the Thanjavur district committee of the Thanjavur Vivasayigal Sangam (Kisan Sabha) was formed on 5th May, 1944 at Mannargudi. V. Periaiyya (of Arantangi) was elected as President, A.R. Ramanujam as Vice-President, K.P. Natarajan as Secretary, S. Kathiresan (of Ambalapattu) as Assistant Secretary and M.K. Vijaya-sundaram (of Peravoorani) as Treasurer of the

27. Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Tanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', Part-II, op.cit., pp.4-5.

28. Ibid., p.5. The figures were based on a report filed by a Special Correspondent of Janasakthi, Mr. Ismail Pasha, who attended the conference. According to the Hindu 10,000 participated in the Conference.

Thanjavur Vivasayigal Sangam,²⁹

The success of the Thenparai agitation led to a rapid spread of the struggle and establishment of Vivasayigal Sangams in many villages in neighbouring taluks. Not only did poor peasants (who were share croppers or tenants or those who were owning small plots of land) were attracted to the Vivasayigal Sangham but also pannaiyals and agricultural labourers were attracted in large numbers towards the Vivasayigal Sangam. The poor peasants and agricultural labourers, who witnessed that the Vivasayigal Sangam stood steady in fighting for their demands despite repression, goonda attacks, criminal and civil cases, joined the Vivasayigal Sangam in large numbers. The villagers used to approach the Vivasayigal Sangam leaders with membership fees required for 300 or 400 members and ask them for a union. They used to carry a Red Flag after paying the requisite fees and hoist the flag in their streets proclaiming that the Vivasayigal Sangam has been formed in their village.³⁰

29. Ibid., p.5.

30. The initial formation and spread of the Vivasayigal Sangams to other villages were based on personal interviews with the leaders of the Vivasayigal Sangam who were witness to this. (viz., P.S. Danushkodi and Amirthalingam).

The organised struggle from its early beginnings declared its fundamental demand as land to the tiller and the abolition of landlordism of the mirasdars, zamindars and inamdars. It also declared as its partial demands the demand for a higher share of the produce for share croppers, abolition of pannaiyal system, increase in wages of agricultural labourers including pannaiyals, cultivation rights over waste lands and removal of social oppression. This conscious organisation of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers roused a conscious attack from the landlord class but the Vivasayigal Sangam bravely withstood the repression revealing the militant potentialities of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers.

In the beginning of 1944 there was an agitation of pannaiyals in Kalappal in Mannargudi taluk under the leadership of Kalappal Kuppaswamy. After the agitation, an agreement was reached between the landlords and the striking labourers led by the Vivasayigal Sangam in Kalappal in a meeting headed by Thiru Mahadevan, the then Assistant District Superintendent of Police. The Vivasayigal Sangam

was represented by Kalappal Kuppuswamy, R. Amirthalingam and T. Rajagopal in the meeting. The landlords were represented by V.S. Thiagaraja Mudaliar, Thirukkalar Mutt, President and Karuvagudi Naidu.³¹ The terms of the agreement which was to be operative in villages surrounding Kalappal were the following:³²

1. Whipping of pannaiyals and the practice of making them drink cowdung solution would be stopped;
2. Daily wages of pannaiyals would be 2 local measures of paddy (approximately 2 litres. 2 local measures = $\frac{1}{2}$ marakkal);
3. On harvest the pannaiyals would be given three-fourth of a marakkal for every kalam of paddy harvested, (1 kalam = 12 marakkals) and a daily wage of 1 marakkal on every working day on harvest days.
4. Tenants can utilise threshing floors wherever they exist near the fields where they cultivate. (Earlier they had to bring the harvested crops to the threshing floors belonging to the landlords and do the threshing there only).

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31. Veeraiyan, G., 'Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.28 and Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Theraniyil Vivasayigal Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', part-II, Uzhaven Urimai, op.cit., p.6.
 32. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Unions in South India, op.cit., pp.25-26, and Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.28.

The success of this agitation led to a rapid spread of the Vivasayigal Sangam throughout the district. As a result once again the landlords were forced to reach another agreement in writing, in December 1944 at Mannargudi. The Mannargudi agreement was made under the auspices of the District Collector Mr. Ismail Khan and the District Superintendent of Police Mr. Vatham.³³ The terms of the agreement were as follows.³⁴

1. Pannaiyals would be given 3 litres (three-fourth of a Marakkai) instead of 2 litres of paddy;
2. Apart from the daily wages, pannaiyals would be given one-seventh of the produce from the fields in which they were engaged for cultivation;
3. Standard measures would be used for measurements of wages to the labourers and the rent to be paid by the tenant to the landlord.
4. The landlords should give rent-receipts to the tenants at the threshing itself.

The agreement which was reached on 25th December 1944 was to last only for an year and in

33. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veeravaralaru, op.cit., p.29.

34. Ibid., p.29.

May 1945, a Labour Conciliation Officer was to be appointed to prevent any disturbance.³⁵ The landlords refused to implement the agreement. The Vivasayigal Sangam was forced to launch agitations in village after village to get the agreement implemented. The landlords retaliated by resorting to terrorising through hired musclemen as well as filing numerous criminal cases. Struggles sprung up in new villages, and tenants, pannaiyals and labourers flocked to the Vivasaya Sangam office demanding vivasaya sangams for their villages. As a result meetings, processions, rallies and strikes became an everyday affair in the district.³⁶

By April 1945, the situation had become explosive confronting the popular Congress Ministry in Madras. The Congress government which was till then cautious (in its intervention), this time intervened more openly in favour of the landlords,

35. Government Order No.2222, Madras dated 6th June, 1946, Development Department, Government of Madras, cited by Saraswati Menon, Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District, 1940-50, Part-III, op.cit., p.56.

36. G. Veeraiyan, op.cit., p.30.

The government rather than considering the demands of the labourers, banned all Kisan meetings under rule 56 of the Defence of India Rules (which was then in force under the prevailing war conditions) and interned two influential leaders of the kisan movement, Manali P. Kandaswamy and Amirthalingam from the district.³⁷ However these actions could not stop the growth and vigour of the movement. On April 18, 1945, Mr. Buvarahan, Vice-President of the Tamil Nadu Provincial Kisan Sagha issued press statements demanding withdrawal of prohibitory orders in Mannargudi taluk.³⁸ Finally the District Collector was forced to issue order on April 27, 1945. The District Collector passed orders, prohibiting the use of outside labour by landlords, urged the landlords to comply with the December 1944 Mannargudi agreement and use standard measures. He also appointed a Special Tashildar to look after the interests of the peasants and labourers.³⁹

37. Saraswati Menon, Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District, 1940-50, Part-III, op.cit., p.56.

38. Kannuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal, Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', Part-II, op.cit., p.6.

39. Ibid.

In the face of the rising peasant movement, the landlords continued and increased, their import of outside labour to replace the local fighting labourers and in a new co-operative system the imported labourers would work by rotation on all big landlords estates.⁴⁰ The landlords re-activised the defunct Thanjavur District land-owning Farmers' Association, which was formed in 1920s to protest against the rise in the rates of land revenue.⁴¹ Also many new associations were formed by the landlords during this period at the taluk and village levels, which served to co-ordinate the mirasdars attack against the labourers, in a shift from traditional methods of individual repression to organised attack. Interestingly these associations also served as an umbrella cover to include mirasdars (often working peasants who rarely employed outside labour) owning small plots of land and the larger landlords pleaded in their name that any raise in wages would affect their livelihood.

40. Draft Report of the Adjudicator, Government Order No.4685, dated 23 October, 1946, Development Department, Government of Madras, cited in Saraswati Menon, op.cit., p.56.

41. K.C. Alexander, Agrarian Tension in Tanjore District, National Institute of Community Development, Hyderabad, 1975, p.39.

In Thanjavur the ban on kisan meetings and the orders of externment on the Communist leaders were lifted in October 1945 because of the impending elections in January 1946.

The lifting of the ban on kisan meetings and the refusal of the landlords to implement agreements that have been entered earlier led to an upswing in the peasant movement in 1946. This time the struggle was no longer intensive only in Mannargudi Revenue Division but spread to several taluks. One of these significant spread was in Konerirajapuram and surrounding areas. The widening of the base of the Vivasaya Sangam (Kisan Sabha) were regarded with dread by the landlords in Thanjavur and the elected Congress Ministry⁴² formed after the war. The landlords pressed the Congress Ministry to actively

42. During 1946 elections, the Congress Party's election manifesto promised agrarian reform and distribution of land to the peasantry, after paying compensation to the landlords. The Communist Party of India whose influence was comparatively small fought in select constituencies and its election manifesto demanded abolition of landlordism, distribution of land to the peasantry, cancellation of debts to moneylenders and complete independence. In the elections in Thanjavur, the Congress candidates, Vedaratnam Pillai a landlord and Thiagu Veikaran defeated the Communist candidates Maneli Kandaswamy and Kuppu Voikaran.

intervene. The Mannargudi Revenue Division Landholders' Association wrote to the Minister for Labour, Irrigation and Agriculture that, "as a result of Communist agitation, the labourers tended to become in subordinate and began to absent themselves frequently from work, which caused delay in cultivation operations resulting in poor yield from the lands for the past two years".⁴³ They also threatened that unless the government intervened strongly to halt the movement, production would register a further fall and urged the government to immediately recognise the arbitrary control exerted by them over the labourers. They wrote, "if a lessee fails to carry out his obligations of the lease agreement, mirasdars should be in a position of to change the system into one of pannai or Varam or in other words, the mirasdars should have the right to change from any of the three systems of cultivation referred to above to any other, whenever a breach of agreement on the part of the labourer necessitates it".⁴⁴

43. Government Order No.2222, op.cit.

44. Ibid.

The Congress Ministry in the beginning felt that it would be sufficient to leave the problem to be settled by the mirasdars themselves without Government intervention; "The landlords will be able to cultivate the lands with labour imported... this new experiment on co-operative lines is an experiment worth trying in the present circumstances in view of the attitude of the kisans. Ofcourse the government cannot look on with equanimity the number of cultivators thrown out of employment".⁴⁵ T.S.S. Rajan, a Congress Minister, outlined the Government's approach to the problem at a meeting of the Mannargudi Revenue Division Mirasdars Conference held at Mannargudi, in February 1946 wherein he stated the necessity for the mirasdars to settle their problems directly and to restrain the struggle to legal channels. For these purposes, a committee was constituted at the meeting to tour Mannargudi division and form new associations of Mirasdars and agriculturalists.⁴⁶

45. Government Order No.4685, op.cit.

46. The Hindu, May 25, 1946.

In an attempt to reach a legal settlement of all the differences, the Government appointed the District and Sessions Judge of West Thanjavur as Adjudicator in June 1946. In the beginning the Mirasdars even refused to negotiate at a table since they were unwilling to consider the labourers on par with them. A marginal increase over the previous wage rates were agreed upon by the landlords but they were unwilling to make any long term concessions as a result of which the agreement was restricted to the impending harvest. The operation of the agreement was also restricted to Mannargudi Revenue Division where the movement was deeply rooted. On the other hand the landlords insisted on laying down conditions of satisfactory work for the pannaiyals and penalising them for each day of absence. The agreement for the first time questioned, officially, the arbitrary changes made by landlords in the system of cultivation and suggested arbitration by a conciliation board. However the recommendations made by the Adjudicator in his draft report were never implemented. The recommendations were interesting as they reflected the strength of the movement and the type of demands that the Vivasaya Sangams

were making on the landlords.⁴⁷

The Vivasaya Sangam demanded relief to the share croppers and kuthagai (fixed rent) tenants, and incisively made a distinction between the large landlords and the small landowners, who they felt should be granted a revenue remission upto 50 per cent. Thus the Vivasaya Sangam clearly demarcated the wide sections of the peasantry for whose interests the Vivasaya Sangam was prepared to fight for in a bid to strengthen the struggle against landlordism. The adjudicators report did not concede these demands.⁴⁸

The landlords enraged by the minimal recommendations made by the Adjudicator, protested vigorously to the Congress Ministry charging that the adjudicator instead of limiting himself only to the wages of agricultural labour had raised fundamental questions of state land policy and

47. Saraswati Menon, "Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District", Part-III, Social Scientist, op.cit., p.58.

48. Ibid., p.59.

that the labourers were supposed to have been granted rights which accompanied ownership of land. They contended that the service grants must be considered the private property of the landlord and that regarding the change in the system of tenure, "the award had unjustly vested the deciding voice with the labourer".⁴⁹ The Government argued that the State could not intervene and force a settlement, on the grounds that the landlords' relationship with the tenants or labourers did not fall under the category of trade relations.⁵⁰

Emboldened by the Government's statement, the landlords unleashed terror on the labourers and tenants. Share croppers in villages in the taluks of Mayavaram, Kumbakonam and Nannilam were demanding an increased share of the produce from the traditional 20 per cent to 50 per cent. In response, the Vivasaya Sangam petitioned the Government;

49. Draft Report of the Adjudicator cited in Saraswati Menon, Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District, Part-III, op.cit., p.59.

50. Ibid.

"In many villages pannaiyals have been forcibly evicted from homesteads and are refused the wages due to them for the work done by them during the Samba harvest. In several villages the varamdars have not been given their share in the produce and the entire produce has been taken away by the mirasdars during harvest. Hence these people are made to starve. Hired goondas are let loose on the peasants in several villages..."⁵¹

Around Konerirajapuram, in 32 villages of Mayavaram, Kumbakonam and Nannilam taluks, nearly 30,000 acres of wet land with an average yield of 85,000 bags lay fallow. The Vivasaya Sangam leaders demanded emergency orders allowing the peasantry to cultivate the land, pending an early settlement of the dispute.

The Congress Ministry hoping that the landlords themselves would be able to force a settlement, refused to accept the demands of the Vivasaya Sangam. They held the view that "the impression that land belongs to the cultivators must be erased from the minds of the people".⁵² Ministers toured the district and sought to placate the peasantry with speeches, but refused to implement

51. Ibid.

52. Government Order No.4685, op.cit.

any agreement. However the Kisan Sabha had consolidated itself so strongly that by the end of 1946 the police reported: "A number of years of intensive propaganda has resulted now in a well-knit unified organization of the agricultural labourers, commonly known as the kisans under the guidance and leadership of a few Communists. Each village has its own organization".⁵³

Finally an agreement was reached, on 7th December 1946, at a conference of Mirasdars and Vivasayigal Sangam leaders, convened by the District Collector Ismail Khan.⁵⁴ Many District MLAs and Mirasdars attended the conference. The District Superintendent of Police was also present at the conference. Manali Kandaswamy represented the Vivasayigal Sangam and Samiappa Mudaliar represented the landlords. As the two parties could not come to any agreement the District Collector and the DSP gave their award. The award stated that the District Collector and the District Superintendent of Police was in favour of an

53. Government order No.6287, op.cit.

54. The Hindu, December 11, 1946.

increase of 5 per cent in the existing waram rate. However, the agreement was to be valid only for the ensuing kar and samba crops and that too applicable only in affected villages in Mannargudi and Thiruthuraipoondi taluks.⁵⁵ A significant feature was that if a tenant did not default in the payment of rent, he was to be granted the option of extending the lease for a year on the same terms.

The concessions did not meet the demands of the Vivasaya Sangam for meaningful relief and it went on to intensify the struggle. The period of 1946-47 was characterised by waves of protests in Thanjavur. In some areas tenants started removing 50 per cent of the crop from the threshing floor itself as 50 per cent was claimed to be the fair share by the Vivasayigal Sangam. Besides open and vicious discrimination against untouchables sparked off clashes. The big landlords panicked and sought police protection during harvests to get the harvest done by imported labour. In early 1947, at Alathur, a landlord's two watchmen were despatched to the untouchable area to threaten and terrorise women and

55. Ibid.

in the fight that followed both watchmen were killed.⁵⁶ The cattleshed and the barns of the mirasdar were also set on fire.⁵⁷ Kalappal Kuppu was implicated in the Alathur murder case and arrested.⁵⁸ Kalappal Kuppu later died in jail while he was undergoing trial in Alathur case.⁵⁹ In another place a police party had to fire four rounds to disperse the crowd in the fight that ensued between the police and the peasantry.⁶⁰

The Congress Party, which felt that its grip over sections, of the toiling people was loosening after the intensification of the struggle by the Vivasaya Sangam in 1946, attempted to build an organisation under the leadership of G. Narayanaswami Naidu who was Secretary of the Taluk Congress Committee, and Member of the District and Provincial Congress Committee, in Mayavaram. But even in the

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56. Saraswati Menon (Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District, 1940-1950, Part-III), op.cit., part-III, p.61, and The History of the Madras Police, Inspector General of Police, Madras, 1959, p.513.
57. The History of the Madras Police, Inspector General of Police, Madras, 1959, p.513, Centenary Celebrations Commemorative issue).
58. Kennuswamy, M.P., 'Thanjai Tharaniyil Vivasayigal, Vivasaya Thozhilalar Iyakkam', Part-II, op.cit., p.8.
59. The History of Madras Police, op.cit., p.514, and Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya...p.34.
60. The History of Madras Police, op.cit., p.514.

area where they were strong (according to Collector's reports), they were successful only among the caste Hindu peasantry while the untouchables continued to support the Communists. The Congress leadership attempted to negotiate a wage agreement with the taluk administration but the militant labourers refused to accept the landlords' interpretation of the agreement and forced Naidu to lead a strike in early 1947. Naidu to defuse the situation circulated pamphlets warning the labourers against the trespassing on landlords' fields and confiscating by force their share of the crop. The mirasdars on the otherhand, held meetings under the Chairmanship of prominent Congressmen like Nadimuthu Pillai (Member of the Constituent Assembly) and the Revenue Divisional Officer who was approached to settle the matter, sided with the landlords.⁶¹

Naidu, however, continued his agitation and the Collector approached him to consider: "On the first occasion he admitted that he had agreed to the RDO's award and promised that he would stop

61. Saraswati Menon, Responses to Class and Caste Oppression in Thanjavur District, 1940-50, Part-III, op.cit., p.61.

his agitation; but on the second occasion he informed me that though he had accepted the award, the general body to whom he had put up the same had rejected it. So he had no option but to carry out the wishes of the general body".⁶² This was typical of the mood of the peasantry and resulted in the arrest of Naidu, a Congress leader, to the dismay of the Government.⁶³

In order to cope with the rising tide of the movement, the Madras Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1947 (Madras Ordinance No.1 of 1947) was introduced in the Legislative Assembly in early 1947, which granted sweeping powers of detention to the Government. Introducing the Ordinance, the Premier, Prakasam attacked the threat of the left movement that was leading the struggles of peasants and workers in several parts of the province, viz., Telengana, Malabar, Golden Rock and Thanjavur. He observed that in Thanjavur too Communists were preventing the owners from reaping the harvest; a strong police force had to be deployed and the

62. Government Order No.5663, Ms. dated 16 November 1948, Development Department, Government of Madras, cited in Saraswati Menon, op.cit., p.61.

63. Ibid., p.61.

attitude of the Kisan Sabha was unreasonable -- "Concessions and increase in wages were taken only to the success in their strikes. They have proved more a stimulation than a settlement of their violent action."⁶⁴ He was strongly supported by Vedaratnam Pillai, the landlord who was MLA from Thanjavur: "If we waited for eight days to pass this Ordinance not one grain of rice would be left, even for the next season, for they will loot even the seeds."⁶⁵ Despite strong protests from the Communist MLAs in the Assembly, the Ordinance was passed, which included provisions for preventive detention, imposition of collective fines, and censorship, control of meetings, processions, camps, and parades, requisition of property and control of essential services.

In December 1947, the first formal district conference of the Communist Party members in Thanjavur was held. The Members realising the need of the hour and militancy of the peasantry decided to intensify the struggle.⁶⁶ The struggle of the tenants and

64. Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, (MLAD), January 30, 1947.

65. Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, 10 February 1947.

66. Cough, Kathleen., Rural Society in South East India, op.cit., p. 148.

labourers reached new heights during the harvest season of January-February 1948 which continued for six weeks. In the course these struggles about 100,000 tenants and agricultural labourers went on strike. In Nagapattinam taluk the strike was more intensive. The striking tenants and labourers only reiterated their earlier demand of 50 per cent share of the produce to the tenants and doubling of agricultural wages.⁶⁷

An American Traveller, who toured the district during the period has described the struggle.

"At the very moment when the crop was ripe the cultivators announced that it would rot in the fields if they did not receive half of everything that they harvested. The daring of this strike was almost incredible, for to the Zamindars one year's crop was just interest on an investment. To the cultivators themselves it was a whole year's food. They were literally gambling death by starvation. The entire countryside seemed to be holding its breath at the temerity which the cultivators of Tanjore had shown...⁶⁸

67. Ibid., pp.148-49.

68. Muehl, J.F., Interview with India (New York: The John Dey Company, 1950), p.267.

"The fact is, even a hundred miles south of Tanjore the repercussions of the strike were readily felt. All the village police were alerted and in uniform and almost every zamindar had hired guards. But try as I might I found it impossible to maintain my non-committal position, for the villagers were unwilling even to give me water before ascertaining that I was not from the government. They were careful never to refuse directly, but in each village I found myself frustrated and confused till I finally sought out the village headmen and explained to him that I was in sympathy with the strikers".⁶⁹

The government had blocked all traffic to Tanjore district.

"Once past the blockade the temper of the people was obviously and decisively different. Here the Zamindars, rather than making a show of force, were trying to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The whole balance of power was different. The support of the strikers was no longer tacit...Just outside of Tanjore I was stopped again. This time it was by an informal militia of Kisans, the leftist organization that had organised the strike..."⁷⁰

Most landlords succumbed to the strikers' control of their villeges, but some hired thugs to beat up the striking unionists; two such landlords

69. Ibid., p.268.

70. Ibid., p.269.

were reportedly killed. A small proportion of the strikers carried guns. Others beat off the landlords' gangs with picks and spades.⁷¹

In areas of West Thanjavur, where the Communists were not in full control, the crops were left to dry in the fields and the peasants were starving. However the mood of the peasantry could be well grasped from the remark made by a labourer to the American traveller, wherein he said:

"What have we got to lose?...None of us has any illusions about this strike; we know that at best it is only a beginning, but all our lives we have been beaten and starved, frightened and threatened and told what to do. Well now the zamindars can no longer control us...This strike! Whether we win or lose is not important. What is important is that we have struck in the first place. If for each thousand who die one zamindar is destroyed it will be the best bargain we ever got from them!"⁷²

In East Thanjavur where the Vivasayigal Sangam (Kisan Sabha) and Communists were strong, the landlords power were broken and the cultivators

71. Gough, K., Rural Society in South East India, op.cit., p.149.

72. Muehl, J.F., Interview with India, op.cit., p.282.

harvested the crop on their own behalf, in some cases paying one quarter of it as rent to the landlords. A number of landlords also fled their villages.⁷³

In the same period especially dating back from 1946 to 1948 militant peasant and workers movement were taking place all over the country. In October 1946 the peasants and workers of Punnappra Vayalar had launched a militant struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India. In Bengal the peasantry launched the Tebagha struggle from November 1946 to February 1947 and achieved their demands. In Telengana the armed revolt of the peasants, started in September 1946 to overthrow the Nizam of Hyderabad, was continuing and was confronting the Indian Army to safeguard its hard won victories over the landlords of the villages. Under these circumstances, the Communist Party of India held its second Congress in Calcutta in February-March 1948 where it decided to take a sharp 'left'-sectarian turn in its political attitude. The Congress government declared the Communist Party as unlawful on 26 March 1948 and took action against its leaders and workers in Bengal and other provinces.

73. Gough, K., Rural Society in South East India, op.cit., p. 149.

This was followed by killing, beating, torturing, herassing, arresting, imprisoning and detaining without trial of men and women who had or even were suspected to have any connexion with the illegal Communist Party. Many were shot dead even inside jails in several provinces. This situation continued for nearly four years.⁷⁴

In Thanjavur also a large force of Malabar Special Police was used to break the struggle of the peasants and labourers. Following the ban on CPI, many leaders of the Vivasaya Sangam went underground. Notable among them were K.P. Natarajan, B. Sreenivasa Rao, Manali Kandaswamy on whose arrests, rewards amounting to Rs.10,000 each were announced.⁷⁵ Kalapal Kuppuswamy who had been kept in jail as an undertrial regarding Alathur case died in jail in April 1948.⁷⁶ The death of Kuppuswamy in jail created a tense situation in Tanjore.

74. Rasul, M.A., History of the All India Kisan Sabha, op.cit., pp.150-151.

75. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.34.

76. Ibid., p.34.

In these circumstances on 13th April 1948, Mr. T.K. Sreenivasa Iyer, District Secretary of Congress, Sardar Vedarathnam Pillai, a Congress MLA and others held a public meeting at Nannaloor near Kalappal. In the public meeting they made inflammatory speeches that the peasants and labourers would meet the same fate as Kalappal, if they dared to oppose them. This led to clashes after the end of the meeting and the speakers were waylaid. Consequently, on 14th April 1948 more than 300 special Armed Police reached the village. Nearly 14 Vivasayigal Sangam leaders were arrested, brought to the cattleshed of the landlords and tortured. On hearing the news large posse of labourers from nearby villeges numbering more than 10,000 reached Nannaloor carrying red flags in their hands and demanded the release of their leaders. The police fired 14 rounds to disperse the crowd, In the firing by the police, Natesan was killed. Besides, the police foisted cases on more than 300 persons and put them in Trichy jail. The police also let loose severe repression on the villagers.⁷⁷ Manali Kandaswamy's relatives were arrested, harrassed and womenfolk of his

77. Natarajan, A., "Adakku Muraiyyai Meeri Valaranthathu Sengodi Iyakkam" (Peasant Movement Grew Despite Repression), Uzhavan Urimai, May 1983. Natarajan was one of the accused in the famous Nannaloor Conspiracy Case, who was kept for 2 years as undertrial and served jail term for 4 years in the Nanallor Conspiracy Case.

of his family were molested by the police. His house was also auctioned. Iranian, Arumugam, Sivaraman were all shot dead by the police in public. In organised sorties police and goondas of landlords destroyed Harijan hamlets. In Nedumbalam the village of Samiyappa Mudaliar one of the biggest landlords of Tanjore, an entire Harijan hamlet was demolished and the place was converted into a plantain grove.⁷⁸

In these repressive conditions when the Vivasayigal Sangam (Kisan Sabha) and the CPI were still under ban, the landlords entered into an agreement on 28th October 1948 with the rival union led by Narayanaswamy Naidu at Mayavaram.⁷⁹ The provisions of the agreement were as follows;

1. The wage rates of a pannaiyal would be one Marakkal of paddy (4 local measures) for men and one-fourth of a marakkal for women;
2. For harvesting operations pannaiyals would be paid one-seventh of the gross produce of the fields in which they worked;
3. Where casual labourers worked along with pannaiyals, the pannaiyals will get one-and-a-half measure of paddy out of every 14 measures harvested

78. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veere Varalaru, op.cit., p.36.

79. Ibid.

regardless of the wages paid to the casual labour;

4. However pannaiyals share will have a maximum limit of the yield of six and two-thirds acres (1 veli) even if he has worked in more than six-and-two-thirds acres (1 veli) of land;
5. A penalty of two marakkels of paddy would be deducted from his share for each day of his absence during harvest seasons;
6. During threshing the pannaiyal would get a daily wage of one marakkal of paddy and customary gifts of paddy (viz., collecting the grains scattered on the threshing floor, known as kalavadi).⁸⁰

Later even the ceiling of a maximum of six-and-two-thirds acres of land's produce that a pannaiyal was entitled was brought down to that of 5 acres' produce by an High Court Judgement.⁸¹

However the peasants were in a militant mood despite repression could be well understood from an incident that took place in a village in East Tanjore. In February 1949, after the arrest of the Communist leaders, police arrived one day to enquire whether

80. Alexander, K.C., Peasant Organisations in South India, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1981, pp.98-99.

81. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaye Iyakkathin Veeravarnalaru, op.cit., p.36.

Kirippur landlords had any complaints. The village headman used the occasion to call the Harijan Headman and impress on him the uselessness of further strikes. But the men of the Harijan streets, hearing the command, thought their leader would be arrested and arrived with him in large numbers. The village headman became angry and ordered them to disperse. They refused, shouting that their lives were miserable and asked that they all be taken to jail. Some climbed into the police trucks and made so much disturbance that thirty men were in fact arrested and driven a hundred miles to Tiruchirapally jail, where they stayed for several months. Then the Kirippur landlords needed men for the farming and so a deputation applied to the court and the workers were released to their former conditions of pay.⁸²

In Thanjavur, the police were still present and Vivasaya Sangam was still banned when in 1951 a new wave of tenant struggles broke out where the tenants carried off the entire produce without any payment in

82. Gough, Kathleen., "Harijans in Tanjore", in Gough, K., and Sharma, H.P., Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, (New York: Montly Review Press,), pp.239-40.

in areas where the peasant movement was strong. This was followed by large scale evictions.⁸³ These largescale evictions led to a new wave of struggle.

The Communist Party of India revised its left sectarian policy in 1951 and decided to take part in the first general elections held in 1951. Communist Party members and Vivasaya Sangam (Kisan Sabha) activists contested 12 seats in Thanjavur. Many of the leaders and activists of the Vivasaya Sangam were either in jail or were underground evading arrest. Manali P. Kandaswamy, who was underground evading arrest contested the elections. Manali Kandaswamy defeated one of the biggest landlords of Tanjore belonging to Manalur. P. Venkatesan, a tenant of Tempurai Mutt and peasant leader contesting on a CPI ticket defeated Kunniyur K.S. Sambasiva Iyer, another biggest landlord of Tanjore contesting on a Congress ticket.⁸⁴

In all the CPI won six seats out of the 12 it contested. The CPI won in Thanjavur General (18 per

83. Sen, Sunil., Peasant Movements in India, (New Delhi: K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1982), pp.159-66; and Gough, K., Rural Society in South East India, op.cit., p.150.

84. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., pp.38-39.

cent votes) Nidamangalam (54 per cent votes), Mannargudi General (50 per cent votes); Mannargudi Reserved (48 per cent votes); Nagappattinam General (46 per cent votes) and Nagapattinam Reserved (47 per cent votes). It lost in Kumbakonam (46 per cent votes); Adirampattinam (34 per cent votes); Sirkali (32 per cent votes); Nannilam General (12 per cent votes); Nannilam Reserved (14 per cent votes); and Mayuram General (7 per cent votes).⁸⁵ These significant victories achieved by the Vivasayigal Sangam and the CPI despite repression for four years reflected the fact that the Vivasayigal Sangam and the CPI had deeply entrenched itself in the hearts of the poor peasants, tenants and agricultural labourers of Thanjavur.

The formation of a Congress Ministry in the State⁸⁶ emboldened the landlords in their eviction

85. Harrison, Selig., India; the Most Dangerous Decades, (Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 184.

86. The non-Congress parties convened a conference in Madras City in February 1952 and formed a United Democratic Front. The UDF with 164 seats stated claim to form a government. However the Governor of the State dismissed the claim of the UDF on the basis that it was not a single party and invited the Congress Party which had only 152 seats to form a Government.

of tenants. Although the ban on Kisan Sabha was officially lifted only in 1953, the Vivasaya Sangam (Kisan Sabha) held an extended meeting of its State Council in October 1951 at Thanjavur openly and began to function openly thereafter, despite many of its leaders being in jail.⁸⁷ On August 1, 1952, the Vivasayigal Sangam (Kisan Sabha) conducted an "Anti-Eviction Conference" in Thiruthuraiipoondi in which nearly 60,000 tenants and labourers participated. In order to defy their evictions the tenants of 10 to 20 villages collectively tilled the land covering one village after the other in an organised fashion. This collective ploughing spread widely in Mannargudi and Thiruthuraiipoondi divisions.⁸⁸ The electoral defeat and the renewed struggles forced the government to declare the Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Ordinance on 23rd August,

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Rejagopalachari who was not a member of the Assembly was nominated to the Legislative Council and allowed to form minority ministry. Later the Congress secured majority by making Mr. Manickavel to defect and making him a Minister. The Congress got the support of Common Weal Party of Manickavel and a few other independents. James Walch, Faction and Front, Party Systems in South India (New Delhi: Young Asia Publishers, 1976), p.160 and Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., pp.40

87. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.40.

1952,⁸⁹ which was later made into an Act in November, 1952.

The Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act was significant gain of the peasants and labourers movement which granted limited relief to the worst forms of oppression of the pannaiyals, minimal security to registered tenants and also established a conciliation board. However the Act did not resolve the basic problem of land monopoly and extra-economic oppression from which the living and working conditions of the peasantry and labourers stemmed. Besides the Act contributed significantly to the process of transformation of the pannaiyals with customary rights to mere wage labourers devoid of the minimal security provided by the new Act, as the landlords began evicting the pannaiyals more vigorously on a large scale.

88. Ibid., p.41.

89. Ibid., pp.41-42.

This resulted in the transformation of the landlord-pannaiyal relationship to that of landlord-wage labourer. A large number of tenants were also evicted to join the ranks of wage labourers thereby swelling the ranks of the wage labourers. The process of transformation and the consequences of this transformation to the peasant and labour movement will be discussed in the coming chapters.

CHAPTER - V

CHAPTER - V

AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT

FROM 1950-1980

The land reforms initiated by the government has been one of the major factors which made a considerable impact on the agrarian relations in Thanjavur district during the period 1950-1980. The impact of land reforms has been a subject of controversy directly leading to difference of opinion regarding the content and direction of peasant and agricultural labour movement. An oversimplification of the controversy on the impact of land reforms would lead to the following two broad positions: (1) the land reforms have left the basic question of land concentration unresolved; allowing for regional variations a sort of semifeudal capitalism has emerged whose sweep is necessarily limited; that the struggle against landlordism continues to be the basic question on the agenda and that the broadest unit of peasant masses could be achieved in the struggle against imperialism, monopoly capital and landlordism; (2) Due to land reforms there has been a qualitative shift in the agrarian structure,

the land question has receded into the background and hence the central issue before the agricultural labour movement is the question of wages. The anti-landlord thrust of the peasant and agricultural labour movement is therefore fundamentally misconceived and even the striving for the broadest unity of the peasant masses becomes a fetter upon agrarian struggles limiting their sweep and depth.

Before analysing the actual impact of land-reforms it is essential to have a close look at the responses of the landlords towards the proposed land reforms, the concessions they were demanding and the response of the government towards these. This will give a broad outline of the likely impact the land reforms would have on the agrarian relations.

Response of the Landlords Towards Land Reforms:

The Land Revenue Reforms Committee of Madras set up in 1950 headed by Subramaniam, accepted in principle that landownership and land cultivation should coincide. It also expressed the view that one of the principles of agrarian economy should be enabling the maximum number of agriculturists to

satisfy their traditional hunger for land. The main recommendations of the Subramaniam Committee were by no means bold or comprehensive; but at least they concerned themselves with issues as peasant proprietorship, acquisition of land beyond a certain limit, ceilings on personal cultivation and restrictions on sales of land to non-cultivators.

The Tanjore District mirasdars reacted sharply to any attempt at land reforms or even a ceiling on landholdings. In November 1953 the Mirasdars conference, held at Kumbakonam, resolved that the placing of a ceiling on landownership would be fatal to the prosperity of agriculture under the ryotwari conditions mainly prevalent in the State.¹ On the inaugural day of the conference, the Chairman of the reception committee Mr. Kandaswami Moopanar, one of the biggest landlords of the district, in pleading for the absentee landlords said:

1. The Hindu, November 18, 1953.

"...absentee landlordism was a boon in disguise. The landless labourers cultivated the lands and gave him (the absentee) what they thought reasonable or fair; whereas a resident landowner by reason of his presence and supervision would like to get more from the cultivating tenant. Also there were no separate classes like landlord, tiller, cultivator and pannaiyal with conflicting interests. They went together and were not permanent classes. Landowners might become cultivators in course of time and vice-versa. Landowners income in agriculture was meagre".²

He further said that:

"...if for any reason the Tenant Act was not repealed or revised, such modifications of the defects as would suit the present condition should be made in it. If the Act were found a satisfactory solution for the needs of the times, it might be continued and there would be no necessity for further reform at all".³

A few days later the Secretary of Mirasdars Conference submitted a Memorandum opposing the ceilings to the Minister of Agriculture of Madras. The memorandum rejected the principle

2. Ibid., November 17, 1953.

3. Idem.

that landownership and land cultivation should coincide.⁴ Regarding hunger for land of the landless the mirasdars opined, "hunger for food could be easily understood, but not hunger for land. By a policy of fair wages and fair rents, the labourer or tenant could be made to occupy a better financial position than by giving him a pittance of acreage in which farming would be least remunerative".⁵ Regarding fixation of ceiling the mirasdars stated:

"...there was a fundamental misconception about the implications of policy of pinning a farmer to family unit and owner to a ceiling which might not according to the Planning Commission, more than three times the family holdings. It was,... sharing the poverty. Opportunities must be thrown open to the rural folk to develop their financial status and improve their standard of living. But to think that by giving a pigmy plot of land to them their lot could be improved was the greatest misconception. It was only those that had the staying value in agriculture - that would be asked to remain in it".⁶

Not surprisingly, the conference disapproved of the policy of seeking the opinion of foreign experts in

4. Ibid., November 23, 1953.

5. Idem.

6. Idem.

a matter like land reform. The reports of the experts on the question of land reform were ill-informed and misleading, according to the mirasdars and they cautioned the Planning Commission against accepting them.⁷

The same position was reasserted in June 1954 at an All Madras State Mirasdars' Conference held at Tiruchirapalli. There, the President alleged that "the so called land hunger of the landless had been very much exaggerated by interested persons".⁸ Mr. P.T. Rajan, an MLA who inaugurated the conference said that, "the Government were giving the mirasdars a step-motherly treatment. They should consider the welfare of the mirasdars also...They should not be merely playing second fiddle to the kisans."⁹ Another important speaker said "...mirasdars were as much workers as those of any other category and were not at all to be classified as capitalists".¹⁰ Yet another speaker said, "It was wrong to call a lessee a tiller...there was

7. Ibid., November 18, 1953.

8. Ibid., June 28, 1954.

9. The Hindu, 29 June, 1954.

10. Idem.

no necessity for any land reform. What was needed was a revision of lease rates or rather reform in lease rates and lease conditions."¹¹ A number of mirasdars spoke on the need for evolving a political party of their own to see that sweeping reforms in land tenure were not rushed through and there might be scope for considering and deciding on them at a higher level. The conference passed resolutions, urging the Government not to take any hasty steps in regard to land legislation stressing that the present time was quite inopportune for introducing any land reform and that under the existing circumstances no maximum limit on land holdings should be fixed.¹²

Response of the Government:

The Government on its part went on placating the landlords to accept some sort of land reforms in their own interest. The Minister for Land Revenue Mr. Manickavelu, while inaugurating the Mirasdar Conference in November 1953 at Kumbakonam said: "plenty

11. Idem.

12. Idem.

of opportunity would be provided to them (the landlords) to formulate their views on Government proposals. Government were not at all anxious to force the pace and launch upon legislation without reasonable cause. If anything legislation was the last step".¹³ The Minister further said that, "...he was not for eliminating the landlords...without his (mirasdars) intelligent guidance and help nothing tangible could be done. The Government was fully alive to this fact and were anxious to protect the landholders as much as the tenants and pannaiyals and give a fair deal to them all. He felt that there would not be radical change. Even if there were, he would persuade Government against any such step".¹⁴ Regarding future reforms he said that, "the crying need of the so far as the State in general was concerned was fair rent and fixity of tenure. They had come to a stage when the have nots had organised themselves".¹⁵ He pleaded with the mirasdars to

13. The Hindu, November 17, 1953.

14. Idem.

15. Idem.

accept these reforms on the plea that "they had today a Government which was following a golden mean trying to be fair and just on both sides".¹⁶ He wanted them to visualise "what changes would follow in the wake of a swing of the pendulum in the next elections".¹⁷ He further said "the peasant was very good, reliable and trustworthy person steeped in their ancient traditions...the peasantry in any country was the bulwark against violent changes and the stabilising element in keeping the equilibrium. In the large interests of the country and their own self-interest they must see that this section of the people remain contented and cheerful..."¹⁸

Even the mirasdars were well aware of the Government's support to them. The chairman of the reception committee of the Mirasdars conference himself in his speech referred to the help that Mr. C. Rajagopalachari had rendered to the cause of the mirasdars and said that Rajaji's presence

16. Idem.

17. Idem.

18. Idem.

in Government would be of immense help to them.¹⁹ Another speaker addressing the conference said that, so long the Congress ruled, the mirasdars need not have any apprehension that they would be wiped out.²⁰

In the Mirasdars Conference held at 1954, Mr. Krishnaswamy Iyengar who was presiding over the Conference said, "we wish to give our whole hearted support to the Congress...and we hope that it will not, under the guise of reform, carry through any measure which will unduly and unreasonably deprive us of our rights in land... It was our duty at the present juncture to make our representation to the Government before their minds crystallised into definite principles or schemes which might endanger our rights and create bitterness and frustration".²¹ Many speakers said, that they had been most loyal to the Government and they deserved to be treated well.²²

19. Idea.

20. Ibid., November 18, 1953.

21. The Hindu, June 28, 1954.

22. Ibid., June 29, 1954.

The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, embarrassed by the intransigence of landlords, set up a Land Reforms sub-committee charged with the task of appealing to the landowners to concede certain things with grace and in time and appealing to the tenants and labourers to come to an understanding with the owners on the basis of what was conceded.²³

Taking as its slogan "maximum justice to the tiller with minimum injustice to the owners", the Committee, headed by Mr. V. Ramamurthi made a tour of Tamil Nadu and in February 1955 came up with the following recommendations:

- (1) Lands on which the owner is not personally resident should, in general be cultivated only by tenants.
- (2) Resident owners should be the only owners permitted to have land (upto a limit) under "personal cultivation". On such lands the owner should bear all the expenses of cultivation; and the labourers cannot be paid in crop share.
- (3) Tenants should be defined according to the Bombay Tenancy Act and should include crop-sharers.

23. Ibid., February 24, 1955.

- (4) All existing tenants, including crop-sharers, should be permanently and hereditarily confirmed, upto a limit, on the lands they are currently cultivating. All crop-sharing tenancies should be converted by the end of five years into fixed rent tenancies.
- (5) The provisions in respect of pannaiyals in the Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyal (Protection) Act may be scrapped. In their place proposals more favourable to the pannaiyals should be adopted.
- (6) The hereditary debts of the pannaiyals should be cancelled.

While the Madras Government was considering the recommendations of the Ramamurthi Committee in order to present the Madras Legislature with a land reforms bill, the Thanjavur Mirasdars, holding a conference in April 1955 at Kyabakonam, gave their reactions to the recommendations of the Ramamurthi Committee.

R. Kandaswami Moopanar presiding over the conference said that the aim of the conference was not to obstruct the land reform bill on the one hand but to help Government in formulating reasonable and equitable proposals.²⁴ Then he and the successive

24. The Hindu, April 24, 1955.

speakers categorically rejected all the main recommendations of the Ramamurthi Committee. Mr. Moopanar said, "the Ramamurthi Committee had come forward with the strange doctrine of residential qualification for Pannai cultivation (personal cultivation)...In these days of quick transport and quicker communication, such a restriction was outmoded and meaningless".²⁵ He further said that, a limitation on the ownership of personal cultivation, was not a practical proposition.²⁶ The General Secretary of the Mirasdars Conference said, "the attempt to impose a residential qualification for pannai was absurd...The abolition of waram cultivation after some years and equaling it with lease was wrong. The conferment of a permanent hereditary right of cultivation was, again, introducing the Zamindari system by the backdoor...there was no point in seeking to confer hereditary rights on the tenants".²⁷ Another speaker put the mirasdars apprehensions and attitude in a nutshell by stating "the cumulative effect of these proposals of the Government

25. Idem.

26. Idem.

27. Idem.

would be to compel the mirasdars to live in villages in poverty, where formerly they lived in affluence".²⁸ Yet another speaker pleaded for the organisation of a conservative party in the country which would fight to stem the tide of land reform. The conference then proceeded to pass resolutions categorically rejecting all the main recommendations of the Ramamurthi Committee.

The landlords while opposing land reforms on the one hand, intensified much more vigorously their eviction of tenants, which they have been carrying out since 1950s, after the publications of the recommendations of the Land Reforms Sub-Committee of the TNCC. The landlords were also dividing their lands among family members and transferring land to benami names in order to evade forthcoming ceiling laws. Without proper steps having been taken to prevent evictions, the State ministers headed by Kamaraj were declaring publicly that land reforms would be promulgated in August, which served as a cue and green signal to the landlords to complete the evictions before the legislation was brought into force.²⁹

28. Idem.

29. New Age, July 3, 1955.

However, the proposed land reforms bill did not come in August 1955. The Congress government, in order to stall the legislation thereby helping the landlords to complete the division of lands and eviction of tenants, circulated a draft bill for discussion to the various groups before introducing it in the Assembly, despite having in its possession recommendations made by several committees since 1950. Finally the Madras Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling and Rent) Bill was introduced in the Madras Legislative Assembly only on 6th April 1960 which became an Act in 1961. Even then the amendments proposed by the Kisan Sabha were outrightly rejected.

The Land Ceiling Act and its Impact:

The Land ceiling Act fixed a maximum of 30 standard acres for families of not more than 15 members and the ceiling area was raised upto 60 standard acres, allowing additional 5 acres for every member of the family in excess of five. The concept of standard acre provided for families to own as much as 240 acres under the ceiling act.³⁰

30. For definition of standard acre and other details see, K.S. Sonschalam, Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu, (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Company, 1970), p.64.

Besides these liberal ceilings the Act also exempted from its purview, land owned by all religious and educational institutions, all plantations, orchards, gardens, land used exclusively for growing fuel trees, land donated under the Bhoodan movement, land used for sugar cane cultivation; and any land upto an extent of 50 acres used exclusively for grazing.³¹ Besides, the Act also provided for huge compensation, ranging from 10 to 12 times the net income derived from the lands, for the lands possessed in excess of the ceiling, when taken over by Government.

An assessment of the land redistributed will give a picture on whether concentration of land had been reduced and also whether the lands redistributed had been reduced and also whether the lands redistributed had been adequate to satisfy the land hunger of the landless. According to Sonachalem, between 1954-55 and 1965-66, the single pattas, increased from 247,355 to 443,013 the joint pattas

31. Mencher, P. Joan., Agriculture and Social Structure in Tamil Nadu, (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1978), p.113.

increased from 186,099 to 293,300 and the number of share holders increased from 619,741 to 909,154 in Thanjavur district.³² Sonachalam himself observed that, "In the districts of Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli, the striking increase in number of pattas has been mostly the result of partition of large estates as well as sales of fraction thereof in anticipation of the ceiling Acts".³³ According to Mail also "the uncertainties of the size of holdings led big landholders to panicky division of property... until towards the end of March and even in the beginning of the month before the Bill fixing up land ceiling was introduced in the legislature on April 6, there had been a hectic division of land. In Thanjavur district there was an instance where a landholder spent Rs. one lakh on stamps alone... In fact a lot of stamps had to be rushed from Madras to some of the districts where there was acute shortage and in many instances the Government knew there had been black-marketing in stamps."³⁴

32. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.177.

33. Ibid., p.22.

34. The Mail, April 12, 1960.

The impact of the land ceiling act could be assessed from an evaluation of the surplus lands above the ceiling that were acquired by the Government and distributed.

The Land Revenue Reforms Committee itself made two estimates regarding the surplus lands that would be available for distribution. According to the first estimate 25.5 lakh acres could be acquired in Tamil Nadu, if a land revenue assessment of Rs.100 is made as the ceiling. According to the second estimate, with a ceiling of a maximum assessment of Rs.250, the surplus lands, that would accrue would be 1.25 lakh acres, in Tamil Nadu.³⁵ Sonachalam himself made two estimates. According to his first estimate nearly 948,781 acres would be surplus in Tamil Nadu if holdings more than 200 acres were declared as surplus. According to his second estimate 240,068 acres of land, comprising of 151,304 wet lands and 88,964 acres of dry lands, for the whole of Tamil Nadu, and 110,683 acres of land would be surplus in Thanjavur district alone constituting nearly 50 per cent of the surplus lands in Tamil Nadu.³⁶

35. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.67.

36. Ibid., p.71.

According to Sonachalam, the number of single pattas paying more than a revenue assessment of Rs.250 were 2,982 in Thanjavur district and 5,204 in Tamil Nadu. If the pattas paying more than Rs.250 were to be attracted by the Ceiling Law then nearly 50 per cent of the pattas held above the ceiling would in Thanjavur district itself.³⁷

The Government declared in the Legislative Assembly in April 1960 that in Tamil Nadu 9,671 persons were owning more than 30 standard acres, amounting to 5,72,735 acres comprising of 3,19,613 acres of wetlands, 1,71,807 acres of dry lands. The surplus lands that were estimated were 2,82,105 acres in 1960.³⁸ However, in 1966 the Government's preliminary and revised estimates showed only a surplus of 83,324 acres and 69,345 acres respectively for Tamil Nadu. The revised estimates showed a surplus of 15,975 acres, comprising of 12,203 acres of wet land and 3,592 acres of dry land, for Thanjavur district being held by 672 landlords.³⁹

37. Ibid., p.72.

38. Idem.

39. Idem.

Again the Government declared, in the Legislative Assembly on 25th August 1968, a surplus of only 25,153 acres for Tamil Nadu and 7,430 acres for Thanjavur district.⁴⁰ Thus the extent of surplus lands available for distribution were reduced after successive estimates by the Government itself. According to Sonachalam, "...the original estimates of the surplus expected got slashed due to the delay in the legislation" and the "...threat of legislation in the air for several years enabled the large landholders to scale down their holdings through partition, sale and creation of charitable educational and other endowments".⁴¹

Even out of the declared surplus of 7,430 acres of land in Thanjavur district only 214.5 acres went into the actual possession of the deserving persons. Even in the case of leasing out the lands that were awaiting distribution only 4,385.79 acres were leased out to tenants. The tenants were unwilling to lease these lands because: (1) the lands were of inferior quality which have been either uncultivated

40. Ibid., p.82.

41. Ibid., p.92.

over a long time or never before cultivated; (2) insistence on the payment of one year's rent in advance and (3) uncertainty about the extension of the tenure beyond a year.⁴²

A brief study conducted in East Thanjavur in 1969 also reveals some concrete examples of the biggest landlords holding more than 1,000 acres of land. According to the study, Valivalam landlord owned about 1,500 acres spread over several villages in Nagapattinam taluk, besides controlling 300 acres belonging to the temple at Valivalam. He had divided his land among 20 individuals, who were his friends and relatives. He had also created a number of trusts of a benami character which included trusts for:

- (1) a polytechnic at Nagapattinam (150 acres);
- (2) High School at Valivalam (30 acres); (3) Allopathic hospital (130 acres); (4) two dairy farms (60 acres);
- (5) orphanage (30 acres); (6) Scholarship fund (40 acres); (7) Family planning programme (30 acres);
- (8) Mid-day meals scheme for elementary school children (30 acres); (9) Veterinary Hospital (10 acres) and (10) Gowshala (10 acres).⁴³

42. Ibid., p.83.

43. Iyer, S.S., Anatomy of Agrarian Conflict in East Thanjavur, Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi, 1973, p.20.

Mr. V.S. Thiagaraja Mudaliar of Vedapathimangalam converted 6,000 acres of his paddy lands to sugar cane plantation and registered it in the name of Thiru Arooram Sugar Mills. Through the Sugar mills he also secured control over an additional 7,000 acres of land, situated within 30 miles range of the sugar mills and belonging to others. Apart from these he also controlled the lands of the Thiruvarur temple which itself owns more than 6,000 acres of land. Another land lord in Idumbavanam owned more than 4,000 acres of land. In Vypoor another landlord owned 230 acres of land which he had converted into a dairy-cum-piggery-cum-poultry farm. He also held about 500 acres spread in several other villages.⁴⁴

In 1967 the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) formed the State Government, which in its election manifesto had described the land reforms of the Congress Ministry as "bogus" and promised to give land to the tiller of the soil.⁴⁵ However, the DMK ministry passed an amendment to the Land Ceiling Act only in 1972. The amendment merely lowered the

44. Ibid., pp. 19-23.

45. Spratt, P., DMK in Power, Nachiketa Publications Limited, Bombay, 1970, p. 59.

ceiling limit to 15 standard acres. However it retained the exemptions provided earlier, ceiling limit being applicable to individuals instead of family. There was no provision for dealing with benami land transfers.

Although the ceiling limit was lowered, the continuation of exemptions and other loopholes in the Act resulted only in further benami transactions and evasion of ceiling laws. Thus, the implementation of the Land Ceiling Act did not result in the breaking down of concentration of lands in the hands of landlords nor did the Act undermine their hold over the other classes. However the Land Ceiling Act coupled with other laws and incentives provided by the government made some of the landlords to resort to direct cultivation, instead of leasing out to tenants.

The second aspect of the land reforms aim at the reform of the landlord-petty tenant relationship. It is essential to look into the impact of the land reforms aimed towards giving protection towards cultivating tenants in order to understand the agrarian relations as well as the process of swelling of the ranks of agricultural labourers

which was essentially a process of pauperization of the peasantry and the artisans.

The Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals protection Act and its Impact on Landlord-Tenant Relationship

The Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act passed in 1952 was the first act to be passed in the state of Tamil Nadu regarding protection of tenants and pannaiyals. This Act provided that a cultivating tenant who was in possession of any land on 1 December 1951 be entitled to possession of that land for a period of five years from the commencement of the agricultural year 1952-53. However, this did not apply to tenants who have leased land from landlords owning less than 6.66 acres of land. The act also provided that tenants be entitled to 40 per cent (or a higher proportion in case of previous arrangements) of the gross produce, after deducting all harvesting charges; that the rent be paid on the threshing floor itself in case it had to be paid in kind; and that the rent be 60 per cent less of the produce at a price prevailing in the preceeding year, if it had to be paid in cash. The Act specified that the landlord should give receipts in acknowledgement of the rent received. The Act further specified that the land-

lord should give receipts in acknowledgement of the rent received. The Act further specified that the landlord and tenant should jointly sign three copies of lease agreement and should deposit a copy of the agreement with the Tashildar, after keeping one copy each to themselves. In cases where the Mirasdar refuses to sign, the tenant could sign in all the three copies and send a copy each to the Mirasdar and Tashildar. To implement the Act Conciliation officers were appointed and Revenue Courts were established.

The Response of the Landlords Towards the Act:

The landlords felt that the Act was undermining their position and that it was biased in favour of tenants and agricultural labourers. According to them the evicted were bad tenants and unruly lot who allied with enemies of law and order, the reinstatement of whom were unacceptable. The landlords refused to advance loans for manure and seeds to the tenants on the plea that; (1) the ordinance specifies that the tenants should procure himself seeds and manures; (2) with the reduction in shares the landlords were unable to make advances; and

(3) the mood of the tenant and continued political agitation made such loans risky. However, the real reasons were to put hurdles in the cultivation of the lands by the tenants, so that they could evict the tenants on grounds of neglect and improper maintenance.⁴⁶

In the mirasdars conference held at Kumbakonam in November 1953 the landlords demanded that:

- (1) The Act should provide for certain standards of efficient cultivation like minimum degree of manuring and reasonable quantum of production. Failure to conform to those standards must be made a ground for eviction.
- (2) The provision of the Act were not properly interpreted and applied and this has led to a huge mass of conflicting decisions by Revenue Courts. Appeals should, therefore, be provided to Civil Courts or to any Central tribunal for the district consisting of men with general experience so that the conflicts and uncertainties consequent on these decisions might be set at rest.
- (3) The provisions relating to green manure and catch crops in the off season had not been acted upon by the tenants in practice. Hence the landowner should be given the right of off-season cultivation.⁴⁷

46. Ladejinsky, Wolf., "Land Reform Observations in Madras", in Louis Jr. Walinsky (Ed.), The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladjinsky; Agrarian Reform as Unfinished Business, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, pp.169-171.

47. The Hindu, November 18, 1953.

Later the landlords submitted a memorandum to the Minister for Agriculture which reiterated the demands of the mirasdar's conference.⁴⁸

The Position and Response of the Tenants Towards the Act:

Ladejinsky concluded that from two-thirds to three-fourths of the agrarian population of Thanjavur district leased or worked the lands of non-cultivating owners, under extremely onerous conditions. He also concluded that the tenants lived under extreme poverty and were forced to lease lands because the other alternatives of being a pannaiyal or a casual labourer were even worse.⁴⁹

Despite the recommendations of the Subramaniam Committee for 55% to 60% share of the produce to the tenant, the Act fixed a high rent of about 60% to the landlord. Moreover wet holdings of 6.6 acres or less and dry holdings of 20 acres or less were exempted from the purview of the Act. This provision allowed the small landlords, whose reputation

48. Ibid.

49. Ladejinsky, Wolf., "Land Reform Observations in Madras", op.cit., p. 165.

as rack-rentiers were notoriously bad either to continue the tenure practices or evict the tenants. The Act gave protection only to those evicted after 1st December 1951, whereas most of the evictions had taken place in 1949-50, when the Kisan Sabha was under ban. Even in the case of protected tenants, the Act provided only 30 days for filing application for restoration. Most of the tenants were illiterate which handicapped them in getting the survey numbers of lands from the village officers to file the application with the conciliation officer. Besides the condition of repayment of arrears of rent before restoration of lands that too at the beginning of cultivation season made it difficult for majority of tenants to get back lands. The limitation of protection to only a five-year period, created grounds for eviction after five years which served as a weapon of coercion in the hands of the landlords.⁵⁰

The tenants were not satisfied with the 60-40 division of the crop. The earlier 25% share of the

50. Ibid., p.170.

crop did not provide him enough food and he had to hire himself out for employment to make good the deficit for food expenses. With the 40% share provided by the Act he might have enough food but he may not have anything to invest in land improvement.⁵¹ Besides the cost of cultivation had also gone up as the landlords refused to advance loans, forcing them to borrow from money-lenders at exorbitant rates of interest. The tenants were demanding that if 60% share was not given to them, then at least one-third of the share should be given for both the landlord and tenant and the remaining one-third should go to the person who bears cultivation expenses.⁵²

The Tanjore Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act did not (1) restore evicted tenants; (2) provide security of tenure or prevent further eviction of tenants. Thus a large scale transformation of poor peasants who were mostly tenants, to that of wage labourers took place both before and after the enactment of this act. Only the rich peasants and a section

51. Ibid., pp. 164-167.

52. Ibid., p. 170.

middle peasants who had leased lands apart from the lands they owned to make their cultivation more viable were able to benefit out of this Act as they only had the wherewithal to carry on a legal case as well as repay the expenses incurred and arrears of rent.

The Position and Response of the Pannaiyals Towards The Act:

The Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act did not provide much relief to the pannaiyals also. The Act provided two alternative proposals regarding their wages. The first alternative merely legalised the Mayuram Agreement of 1948 wherein the pannaiyal would get 1 marakkal of paddy per day (three-fourths of a marakkal for women), plus one-seventh of the harvest from the lands worked by him/her. The second alternative specified a wage of 2 marakkals of paddy for an adult male, one marakkal of paddy for an adult female and three-fourths of a marakkal for a non-adult. The second alternative also specified that the pannaiyal would not be entitled for any kind of customary payments except half-a-marakkal of paddy out of every kalam (12 marakkals) of the gross produce if the pannaiyal

is an adult. The pannaiyal was also entitled to the customary manakollai (house sites). The Act provided for the appointment of Conciliation officers to give relief to the pannaiyals who are dismissed by the landlords and to settle all disputes arising out of the provisions of the Act. The Act also specified that an appeal against the decision could be made to a Revenue Court and that an appeal against the decision of the Revenue Court could be made only in the High Court.

The Act also laid down that the pannaiyal or the landlord may terminate the agreement by giving notice of not less than 12 months ending with the expiry of the next agricultural year or by mutual agreement, provided that, where the landlord terminates the agreement he shall be liable to pay to the pannaiyal, grain or money equivalent to six months' wages or such agreement as may be mutually agreed upon. Thus the act did not concede anything substantial to the pannaiyals except introducing an element of legality in the relationship between the pannaiyal and the landlord. Besides the pannaiyals dismissed prior to March 1, 1952 did not have any

redress under the ordinance. Most of the dismissals have taken place before this period especially during the period of repression. Even those who were dismissed after the promulgation of the Ordinance were given only a very short period of one week to apply for reinstatement.

However, the landlords were not willing to concede even these paltry concessions. In the Mirasdars' conference held at Kumbakonam in 1953 the mirasdars maintained that, "the provisions relating to the dismissal of a pannaiyal was so vague that the landlord found it very difficult to dismiss a pannaiyal even though the pannaiyal did not work".⁵³ In a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Agriculture the mirasdars said that, "In the matter of payment of wages to pannaiyals, the question whether they were entitled to customary privilege or remuneration had led to much confusion. In several places decisions of Conciliation officers one way or the other led to friction between the owner and pannaiyal. Customary privilege or remuneration was a matter strictly outside the scope of legislation...It was best that this item of remuneration

53. The Hindu, November 18, 1953.

ration was left to the will of the owner than be a subject of legislation or decision by Court".⁵⁴

Apart from opposing the legislation, the landlords also carried out their eviction of pannaiyals. They got receipts signed by pannaiyals for large sums and contended that they had given compensation to pannaiyals. They also made the illiterate pannaiyals sign agreements which stated that the pannaiyals wished to leave for paltry compensation.⁵⁵ In fact a conciliation officer had stated that "since the enactment of the ordinance he has been flooded with application for restoration".⁵⁶ Another researcher has written in his report that: "The Act of 1952 did introduce an element of legality and security in the relation between the pannaiyal and the landowner. However because this and also because it fixed the wages of the pannaiyal at a higher level and provided for the termination of the rights of the pannaiyal the period following the passage of the Act witnessed large scale transformation of the pannaiyal from a permanent agricultural labour to that of a casual wage labourer..."⁵⁷

54. Ibid., November 23, 1953.

55. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.49.

56. Ladejinsky, Wolf., "Land Reform Observations in Madras", op.cit., p.168.

57. Iyer, S.S., op.cit., p.58.

Thus a large number of pannaiyals were transformed into casual wage labourers. Even the continuing pannaiyals lost all their customary rights and were transformed into annual contract labourers. In the recent years most of the pannaiyals who are employed as pannaiyals are employed on an annual contract basis, the contract being oral contract. Even though the wages are low many of the casual labourers agree to be employed as pannaiyals on an annual oral contract since it provides security of employment.

The Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act and its Impact:

The restriction of the operation of the Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act to Thanjavur district alone led to struggles all over the state to extend it to other parts of the State. Besides the evictions carried out by landlords all over the State on the threat of land reform led to an explosive situation in the State. This forced the Government to pass the Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act in August 1955. This Act extended the provision of security of tenancy provided in the Thanjavur Tenants

and Pannaiyals Protection Act of 1952, to all parts of the State.⁵⁸ The Act which was enacted as a temporary measure for a period of one year only on an understanding that it will be replaced by a more comprehensive one. However, this Act was extended for an year, every year through successive amendments. The Act was made permanent only in 1965 through the Madras Cultivating Tenants (Continuance) Act. The first amendment to the Cultivating Tenants Protection Act, made in 1965 incorporated certain provisions to make the Act rigorous. The provision for registration of tenants and execution of the deeds was incorporated in the Act by this Amendment. The second amendment of 1958 empowered the High Court to order suo motu, or on representation from parties transfer the cases from the file of one Revenue Divisional Officer to that of another within the district.⁵⁹

"A quantitative assessment of the implementation of the Act is, however, limited by paucity of annual statistics of applications filed for eviction, restoration and resumption upto 31 December 1961...Several lacunae in Statistics exist which render

58. Alexander, K.C., Peasant Organisations in South India, op.cit., p.119.

59. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., pp.32-36.

the various sections for all the 13 or 14 years since the Act was passed. Neither in the offices at the taluk level or in the Board of Revenue have these statistics been kept safely or for ready reference readily".⁶⁰

Besides evictions had taken place much before the passing of the Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act of 1952 and the Madras Cultivating Tenants (Protection) Act of 1955.

However, Sonachalam has compiled some statistics regarding the applications filed by landlords for eviction and the applications filed by the tenants for restoration. During the period upto 1961, 360 cases have been filed by landlords for eviction of tenants, out of which 17 were allowed involving an area of 16.28 acres. All the 23 cases filed by the tenants for continuation of leases have been rejected. During a short period of three-and-half years (1964-mid 1967), 18,683 cases were filed in Tamil Nadu and 9,251 cases were filed in Thanjavur district. Out of the 9,251 cases filed in Thanjavur district, 9,061 cases have been filed by landowners.

60. Ibid., p.39.

It also amounts to 50.2 per cent of the cases filed by landlords in the whole of Tamil Nadu. Out of the 9,061 cases filed in Thanjavur, 1,271 cases were decided in favour of landlords involving an area of 2,548.68 acres. Out of the 190 cases filed by tenants in Thanjavur district only 13 cases were disposed of in favour of tenants.⁶¹ However these figures do not reflect the large scale evictions that took place in Thanjavur district, since the evictions have taken place much before the passing of the Madras cultivating Tenants Protection Act. Both Sonachalam and Ladejinsky concluded that the tenants did not get enough security from the Act.⁶² In fact according to Ladejinsky their situation became much worse after the passing of the Act.⁶³

The Madras Cultivating Tenants (Payment of Fair Rent) Act was also passed in 1956 after prolonged agitations by the Kisan Sabha. The Act fixed 40 per cent rent for wet lands, 35 per cent for dry

61. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.52.

62. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.55; Ladejinsky, Wolf., "A Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package Districts," Government of India; Planning Commission, 1963, pp.14-15.

63. Ladejinsky, Wolf., "A Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package Districts," op.cit., p.14.

lands where irrigation was supplemented by lifting water and $3\frac{3}{4}$ per cent for other classes of lands. These fair rents fixed by the Act were higher than those fixed in other States. Besides, exemptions to the operation of the Act were liberally provided. Lands used for raising sugar cane, betel vines, plain or any other crop which does not give any yield for a continuous period of two years or more from the time of cultivation, were exempted. The cultivation expenses had to be borne by the tenant. The Act also provided for Rent Courts and Rent Tribunals with power exercisable by a civil court in the trials of suits and appeals. These Rent courts and rent tribunals were empowered to determine the normal gross produce in respect of any land after due consideration of all relevant facts such as soil, irrigation and normal yield. It also said that either the tenant or the landlord can file an application to the Rent Court in regard to disputes pertaining to the rent and that if the decision of the Rent Court does not satisfy either of the parties they can appeal to the Rent Tribunal within 30 days from the date of service of the order of the Rent Court. The Act also further specified that an

application for fair rent could be made even when there is in force an agreement or decree or order of a court regarding the amount of rent.⁶⁴

The landlords made use of this provision and filed applications in Rent Courts. The Rent Courts in turn fixed as fair rents, rents which were higher sometimes than that demanded by landlords. The Courts took into account 5 years yield into account in calculating rents and did not give any concession for floods or draught in the year for which rent was in dispute. An interesting example was that of the tenants of Pichakattalai, who were cultivating lands belonging to Dharmapuram Adheenam. The tenants filed an application for reduction of rent from 9 bags of paddy per acre to 6 bags of paddy per acre. The rent court passed an order fixing a rent of 12 bags of paddy per acre.⁶⁵

In many cases the Courts directed that the rent should be paid before November 30 for Kuruvai crops and before 30 March, for Samba crops and that if the

64. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., pp.56-59.

65. Draft Report of the Special Conference of Kuthagai and Waram Tenants held in Tanjore, December 13-14, 1975, p.4.

tenants failed to pay the rents before the specified dates then the landlords can evict the tenants. The landlords made use of this provision by dragging the tenants to Rent Courts wherein the case would go on for two years or more so that by the time the Court orders are issued the tenants would not be in a position to pay two years rent in full leading to their eviction.⁶⁶ The landlords refused to issue receipts to tenants for rents received or to take possession of the rent at the threshing floor itself, as specified by the Act, so that cases would be filed in Revenue Courts for eviction on the plea of non-payment of arrears. In many cases the village record-keepers (karnams) and other officials have often reportedly sided with landlords in the landlord-tenant disputes.⁶⁷

Finally after long years, the tenants were protected from eviction on account of arrears of rent by an Ordinance in April 1966 for a period of two years and later by a Special Act since 1968. In a

66. Alexander, K.C., Peasant Organisation in South India, pp. 119-20.

67. Veeraiyan, G., op.cit., p. 52.

short period of three and a half years from 1964 to 30 June 1967, 3,673 cases have been filed in Tamil Nadu, in which, fair rents have been fixed in 1691 cases involving 3,796.94 acres of land and 1,758 tenants. 875 cases filed by tenants have been rejected involving 1,621.65 acres and 921 tenants. Only 65.9 per cent of cases were disposed in favour of tenants. In Thanjavur 3,286 cases have been filed out of 3,673 cases filed in the whole of Tamil Nadu. Fair rents have been fixed in 1,615 cases in Thanjavur involving an area of 3,657.92 acres.⁶⁸ The high percentage of cases filed in Thanjavur district in the whole of Tamil Nadu is due to the presence of an organised kisan movement in Thanjavur district. Although the Act requires the Rent Courts to maintain Diary Registers containing data regarding applications with the summary of proceedings each year, the Register have not been properly maintained.⁶⁹

"The inescapable impression is that of whole sale violation of Fair Rent Act of 1956...Everybody we talked to knows that rent paid as against the

68. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., pp.60-61.

69. Ibid., p.62.

one prescribed is in violation of the most important provisions of the Act, but one hears no loud protests from the tenants for fear of being deprived of the land altogether; officials behave as if the Act was not meant to be enforced and in the circumstances, landlords see no cause for being on the defensive.⁷⁰ Even the State Government in its cryptic reply, to enquiries made by the Central Government on Ladejinsky's Report, accepted that actual rent varied in case of oral leases from 40 per cent to 50 per cent and that in some cases it exceeded 50 per cent going upto 60 per cent.⁷¹

The first amendment in 1956, to the Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act of 1955, made provisions for the registration of tenants and execution of lease deeds.

However despite a specific reference in the amendment, the Government did make registration of tenants compulsory as late as December 1968. Sonachalam observed that the provision of execution of

70. Ladejinsky, Wolf., A Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package District, op.cit., pp.13-14.

71. Ibid., p.45.

lease deeds remained a dead letter even after ten years of enactment.⁷²

After much delay, the Government introduced the Madras Agricultural Lands Record of Tenancy Act in 1969. The Act specified that records should be maintained giving details about extent and local name, if any, of each plot of land, the address of the landowner, intermediary and the tenant cultivating it, the Survey and sub-division number. According to an administrative report of the Revenue Department tabled in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, till 30 April 1980, 6,24,457 acres of land were under the possession of 4,33,379 tenants registered under the Record of Tenancy Rights Act of 1969 in the whole of Tamil Nadu. According to an unpublished report only 15 per cent of the land was under the possession of tenants i.e. out of 150 lakhs acres of cultivable lands in Tamil Nadu nearly 22.5 lakh acres of land were under the possession of tenants and share croppers.⁷³ A com-

72. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.36.

73. Badrinath, C., "Report on the Implementation of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Lands Record of Tenancy Rights Act", Government of Tamil Nadu, 1969, cited by Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veeravaralaru, op.cit., pp.52-53.

parison of these two figures shows that the status of nearly 16.25 lakh acres of land, as to whether they have been legally or whether they are under the possession of tenants, is not made clear. Only 4 per cent of the lands, which are under the possession of tenants have been given legal protection in Tamil Nadu.⁷⁴

According to a quick survey made by the karnams in 1961, there were 3,13,673 tenants cultivating an aggregate area of 8,55,211 acres in Tamil Nadu.⁷⁵ According to an administrative report of the Revenue Department tabled in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly till April 30, 1980, 624,457 acres of land were under the possession of 433,374 tenants registered in Tamil Nadu, under the Record of Tenancy Rights Act of 1969. A comparison of these two figures shows that although the number of tenants on records had increased the land held by them had decreased by nearly 230,753 acres. However the increase in the number of tenants does not automatically lead to the

74. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., pp.52-53.

75. Sonachalam, K.S., op.cit., p.42.

the conclusion that the Record of tenancy rights Act was a success or that the tenants have been protected, since according to Badrinath Commission's unpublished report 22.5 lakh acres or 15 per cent of lands in Tamil Nadu were under the possession of tenants.

In Thanjavur according to quick survey made by karnams in 1961 there were 92,675 tenants and sub-tenants cultivating 267,914 acres.⁷⁶ The actual figures must have been more since most of the tenancies were oral. According to Records, Tenancy Rights Act 1969, till 1973, 124,293 tenants have been registered and they were in possession of 249,997 acres.⁷⁷ A comparison of these two figures also shows that the tenants have lost lands held by them. According to 1961 Census, based on 20 per cent sample survey, the percentage of those who held land from private individuals (full-tenants) for Thanjavur district was 33 per cent of the households and they were operating 28 per cent of the cultivated area. The total operated area in

76. Ibid., p.41.

77. Report of the Ninth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labourers' Union led by CPI(M), August 1973, Nagapattinam, p.59.

Thanjavur district in 1961 amounted to 1,902,777 acres according to 1961 census. Nearly 532,777.56 acres were operated by full tenants alone according to the above figures. According to Records of Tenancy Rights Act, till 1973 only 249,997 acres have been registered. A comparison of these figures shows that lands amounting to 82,780.56 acres have not been either registered or have been lost by the tenants. Apart from this part-tenants, i.e. those who held land partly from Government and partly from private individuals, constituted 19 per cent of the households and operated 27 per cent of the land cultivated in the district.⁷⁸

According to 1961 census data 18.18 per cent of the tenancy holdings in the district or 175,885 holdings, were 5 acres and above in size. It is interesting to note that under the Ceiling Act of 1961, wherein 5 acres was fixed as the ceiling size for tenancies, only 250 acres were located by the authorities as being above the ceiling.⁷⁹

78. Idem.

79. Ibid., p.34.

The Madras Public Trusts Act and its Impact:

There are numerous religious monasteries and charitable trusts which own extensive lands in Thanjavur district, apart from big landlords. According to an estimate there were 1,307 temples under the jurisdiction of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board and 111 temples not under the jurisdiction of H.R. & C.E. Board totalling 1,418 temples in Thanjavur district.⁸⁰ Altogether temple lands comprised roughly about 200,000 acres or about one-sixth of the cultivated acreage of land in 1961. In 1961, 19 famous temples were reported to own between them 44,109 acres of land and received a total annual income of more than Rs.3,240,000. Apart from these, in Thanjavur district, three large Hindu monasteries viz., Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt, Dharmapuram Adhinam and Thiruppanandal Mutt, owned between them about 7,000 acres within Thanjavur districts and several tens of thousands of acres in other districts.⁸¹

80. Ibid., p.25.

81. Kathleen Gough., Rural Society in...
op.cit., pp.36-37.

According to another estimate about 5 lakh acres were under the control of temples in Thanjavur district, out of a total cultivated area of 15 lakh acres. However it is very difficult to make any firm generalisation on the estimate in view of the fact that neither the Government records nor those of the H.R. & C.E. Board give any reliable data about the total lands controlled by the temples.⁸²

The Land Ceiling Act exempted the lands controlled by temples and other charitable trusts from its purview. "After the enactment of the ceiling legislation and consequent upon agitations during 1959-60, in 1961 the Madras Public Trusts Act was passed..."⁸³ The Madras Public Trusts (Regulation of Agricultural Land) Act of 1961 was "essentially a tenancy legislation".⁸⁴ The Act did not impose any ceiling on the extent of ownership of land by these trusts but only imposed a ceiling of 20 standard acres, on direct cultivation by the Trusts

82. Iyer, S.S., op.cit., p.28.

83. Ibid., p.39.

84. Sonachalam, K.S. op.cit., p.52.

themselves. The Act also provided for exemptions to this ceiling in respect of plantations, orchards, lands under feul trees, dairy and poultry farming, live stock breeding and forests as well as grazing ground. At the same time the Act imposed a ceiling of 5 standard acres on personal cultivation by the cultivating tenants of these Trusts. It also stressed that the lands in excess of 5 standard acres cultivated by tenants should be taken over by the Public Trust and redistribute them according to specified priorities within 90 days after taking possession of the land.⁸⁵ The Act also specified that the lands in excess of 20 standard acres under the personal cultivation of temples or trusts should be given on lease to joint co-operative tenant farming societies to be formed by the tenants of these lands. As a result of this nearly 70 Tenant farming co-operative societies were organised in Thanjavur district.⁸⁶ The impact of the Act had been clearly brought out by case studies of six tenant farming societies conducted by a research team.⁸⁷

85. Ibid., pp.52-53.

86. Ibid., pp.44-45.

87. For details see Iyer, S.S., op.cit., pp.39-48.

The research team has concluded that the temple authorities and co-operative officials had "always adopted an attitude of indifference and even active hostility to the problem faced by these societies. In all most all the cases studied, the rent charged by the temples has been on the high side, in violation of the provisions of the Fair Rent Act of 1956 and they have discriminated against them as compared to their solicitous attitude towards a few individuals of their choice, who used to cultivate these lands before the societies were formed."⁸⁸ In fact most of these lands were under the control of the landlords, who in turn were subletting these lands.

Impact of Land Reform on Landownership:

Thus from the foregoing analysis of land reform laws three main aspects of the reform laws may be distinguished: (1) Firstly, abolition of the feudal tenures such as Zamindari, inam etc., and the establishment of a uniform tenure system consisting of landowners with right to transfer, and occupiers of land without right

88. Ibid., p.47.

to transfer. This was essentially carried out through the Madras Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act in 1948. Abolition of feudal tenures did not mean doing away with landlordism or even ending land monopoly in a few hands; for the feudal landlords could keep large areas with themselves by calling personally cultivated land, evicting /it tenants in the process, and then claim full ownership right on it. The legal provisions did not aim so much at 'abolishing the intermediary', as in preserving his dominant landholding position, provided he undertook to change his form of domination, from indirect cultivation through hired labour. The crucial provision in this respect was that allowing the landlords to 'resume' land for "personal cultivation", where personal cultivation was defined to mean cultivation (a) by one's own labour or that of family members, (b) through servants payable in cash or kind wages but not in share of crop; (c) through casual hired labour under the direct supervision of the landowner or his family members. Besides huge compensation were paid with respect to land taken over from the landlords over and above the land allowed for personal cultivation.

The second aspect of the reform law was the conferring of permanent heritable rights of possession on certain categories of tenants, who had the optional right of purchase of land vested with the government. These rights however did not apply to the ordinary mass of the tenants on unrecorded, usually oral, leases who formed the majority of tenants. The categories of tenants' comprised of not only a majority of poor or middle peasants but also a thin stratum of rich peasants who owned lands in addition to the plots they rented and already cultivated, mainly with hired labour. It was this stratum which not only resisted eviction successfully, but, because they had ready cash or access to credit could purchase ownership of the areas which had vested with the government by paying a price usually a fixed multiple of land revenue. The intermediaries' land with the government went to this top stratum of the peasantry, enabling them to expand the scale of cultivation.

Tenancy legislation, by not distinguishing between the different classes within the tenants, promoted a sharp differentiation; the poorest, being

evicted and joining the ranks of landless labour, the best off tenants on the contrary, purchasing ownership and enlarging their holdings.

Thirdly, ceilings or maximum limits were placed on individual landholding. The ceiling levels were very high initially, and being on an individual basis, permitted fictitious partitioning and transfers resorted to by landlords to retain their land monopoly. The amount of land taken over by the government under the ceiling provisions has been minute; a very small proportion of this has been distributed to the landless since much of it was found to be unfit for cultivation or cultivable only after heavy capital expenditure.

The net effect of the implementation of land reform laws on the labouring poor, so far, has been to perpetuate the old, semi-feudal forms of bonded and attached labour on an increasingly more monetised basis while providing an impetus towards capitalist production for profit. The ranks of the landless were swollen by evictions of the poor peasants, to a much greater extent than they were reduced by meagre allotments of home stead land. Alongwith landlords an impetus has been provided also to the expansion of

the rich peasants who are the only beneficiaries among the peasantry, from the little land distribution that has taken place.

Census Data on Land Ownership Pattern:

The Census data on land ownership does not give a clear picture of the land ownership pattern in Thanjavur district as the categories used include both owners and tenants in the same category. Moreover the different census data are not comparable as the definition have been changed. However a broad indication of the concentration of land in Thanjavur district could be arrived at by looking at the various census data.

Ladejinsky observed in 1950 that in Thanjavur district 2.4% of the landholders with 18 acres and more owned 36.6% of the land and that in some areas of Thanjavur district the concentration of land was especially pronounced.⁸⁹ According to 1961 Census, in Thanjavur district, 45% of the area were held by 48% of total households classified as owned or held

89. Ladejinsky, Wolf., "Land Reform Observations in Madras", op.cit., p.171.

from Government; 33% of the households cultivating an area of 28% of total lands were classified as those holding lands from private persons (full tenants); 19% of the households, belonged to the category of households cultivating lands partly owned or held from government and partly held from private persons, and were cultivating 27% of the area. The census itself mentions concentration of lands in a few hands in taluks of Nagapattinam, Nannilam and Mayuram.⁹⁰

In 1960-61, about 76.32% of the cultivating households were operating only upto 5 acres and were operating only 37.44% of the total area under cultivation; 15.51% of the households were operating between 5 to 10 acres and were operating 24.5% of the area operated; 4.32% of the households were operating 10 to 15 acres of land and were operating 12.18% of the area operated; only 3.69% of the households were operating more than 15 acres of land and were operating 25.63% of the area operated.⁹¹

90. District Census Handbook, Thanjavur, vol.I, 1961, pp.240-242.

91. Ibid., p.242.

According to the 1970-71 World Agricultural Census, operational holdings operating lands upto 5 acres formed 83.3 per cent of the operational holdings but operated only 44.3 per cent of the total cultivated area. Whereas operational holdings of above 12.5 acres formed only 23.9 per cent of the total households and operated an area of 23.9 per cent of the total area cultivated. Even in the case of operational holdings upto 5 acres, only 66.4 per cent of the holdings were owned and self-operated, and they operated an area of 32.1 per cent of the total area cultivated. Nearly 16.9 percent of the upto 5 acres holdings were under tenure operation operating an area of 12.3 per cent of the total area cultivated. In the case of operational holdings above 12.5 acres only 0.4 per cent of the holdings were tenure holdings operating an area of only 3.8 per cent of the total cultivated area whereas 20.3 per cent of the holdings were owned and self-operated and operated nearly 20.1 per cent of the total area under cultivation.⁹²

92. World Agricultural Census, Tamil Nadu, 1970-71.

Thus all these subsequent figures give a broad indication of the concentration of landownership in Thanjavur district persisting despite land reforms. However Census figures does not totally reflect the reality of ownership and concentration of land one needs to conduct a separate study in detail.

Impact of Green Revolution

The Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), introduced in 1961 in Thanjavur District, also exerted considerable influence in the agrarian relations in Thanjavur district, in the sense that it exacerbated the conflicts between the agricultural labourers and the employers of agricultural labour (viz., landlords and rich-peasants) on the one hand and the conflict between landlords and tenants on the other hand, by widening the economic disparity between these agrarian classes. At the time of the introduction of the IADP itself, there were several factors which mitigated against the success of the IADP itself as well as the distribution of the benefits to the various agrarian classes. The extensive landlordism and concentration of lands in

the hands of huge landlords had resulted in a high rate of tenancy, most of which were oral. Ladejinsky concluded that Thanjavur was "...a district with one of the nations worst land tenure systems...If land tenure were a part of the criteria for selecting a package district...Thanjavur wouldn't qualify at all".⁹³ More over these tenants were paying high rentals, apart from insecure tenancy, ranging from 35% to 80% of the gross produce. Most of these tenants lived on the margin of subsistence and required rehabilitation before they could participate in the IADP.⁹⁴ The concentration of lands also resulted in a great majority of poor and middle peasants, operating uneconomic holdings and cultivate only a single crop, which handicapped them in participatin in the IADP. In 1961-62, 73% of all holdings were less than 5 acres and accounted for 36% of the total cultivated area in the district, whereas the minimum size for an economic holding in the district was 3 or 4 acres of double cropped land or 6 acres of single cropped land.⁹⁵

93. Ladejinsky, Wolf., Study of Tenurial Conditions in Package Districts, op.cit., p.15.

94. Frankel, R. Francine., India's Green Revolution, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p.88.

95. Ibid., p.86.

Hence the IADP did not make much headway till 1964 in Thanjavur district wherein double cropping was done only in 300,000 acres of land and the average yield per acre remained more or less stationery. Only after the introduction of ADT-27, a more suitable high yield variety of rice which enabled even the poor and middle peasants to participate, the IADP picked up in Thanjavur district. Even then only an additional 300,000 to 400,000 acres were brought under double cropping compared to a target of 600,000 acres of additional lands. Moreover, the ADT-27 being suitable only for Kuruvai crops, only the kuruvai crop yields registered an increase whereas the overall crop yields registered a decline as the Samba and thaladi yields declined between 1966-67 to 1967-68.⁹⁶

Even when small cultivators - comprising of poor and middle peasants - adopted the new practices the multiple handicaps under which they did so, operated to bring about a relative deterioration in their economic position. In the case of tenants, the mirasdars were annually raising the rentals citing the higher productivity rates with the introduction of the new technology. In the case of those who achieved little

96. Ibid., pp.90-93.

increase in income, the extra income generated remained sufficient only to provide for growing families, and/or increase the quantity and quality of food consumed, e.g. from one to two meals a day, or from ragi to rice, and to repay outstanding debts. Even in the case of peasants who operated 5 to 10 acres under tenancy the position was the same. Only these peasants and small landlords who owned the land and operated 5 to 10 acres there were some gains. The rich peasants and small landlords who were operating 10 to 20 acres were able to make significant economic gains. However it was only the huge landlords operating more than 30 acres, who were able to increase their income ranging from 3 to 8 times their earlier income. Only these landlords were able to purchase more lands, undertake substantial capital investment and also resort to cultivation of cash crops.⁹⁷ In East Thanjavur district the benefits of IADP had gone almost exclusively to the big landlords.⁹⁸

In striking contrast to the big gains of the big landlords, the conditions of the agricultural labourer deteriorated since, (1) the JADP generated very few

97. For details see Ibid., pp.98-104.

98. Ibid., p.107.

new opportunities for employment; (2) payments for harvesting, and even cash rates for day labour have remained stationary in the face of rising prices; and (3) the proportion of kind wages were reduced by the landlords in favour of cash payments. Many labourers were forced deeper and deeper into debts, subsisting for long periods of time only by taking loans from landlords (against promises to carry out future agricultural operations).⁹⁹

The Growth of Agricultural Labour Class:

Before proceeding for an analysis of the agricultural labour movement it is essential to have a brief look into the growth of agricultural labour class in Thanjavur district between the period 1950 to 1980.

In Thanjavur district as a whole, male labourers were already 36 per cent of the male agricultural work force in 1951. By 1971 they were 53 percent, while the agricultural work force had remained at 67 per cent of the total work force, as against 70 per cent

99. Ibid., pp.105-109.

1950. Women labourers increased correspondingly. They were 52 per cent of the total female agricultural work force in 1951, but were 85 per cent by 1971. Taking both sexes together, agricultural labourers increased from 40 per cent of the agricultural work force in 1951 to 50 per cent in 1971.¹⁰⁰ Child labour declined markedly over the 20 years period. In 1951 almost all Harijan children over age forming some 22 per cent of all children worked as agricultural labourers. In 1961, 5 per cent of Thanjavur's children under 14 were recorded as employed, no doubt mainly in agriculture.¹⁰¹ According to Kathleen Gough the decline in child labour was due to several reasons, viz., that both men and women were of late so severely unemployed that labourers do not choose to have children competing for work with adults, decrease in employments such as grazing the cattle due to the decrease in the number of cattle with the partial introduction of tractors. In spite of the marked decline in the employment of

100. Kathleen, Gough., Agricultural Labour in Thanjavur, (unpublished paper), p. 7.

101. Idem.

children, the total agricultural labour force including both main and subsidiary workers had increased dramatically. It was 263,030 or 29 per cent of the total work force in 1951 and 541,919 or 41 per cent of the total work force in 1971.¹⁰²

According to Kathleen Gough, the Harijan castes which provide the mainstay of agricultural labour, were 22 per cent of the total population in 1971 as in 1951. According to Gough, population increase accounts for only 29 per cent out of the more than 100 per cent increase registered by the total agricultural labour population and its dependents between 1951 and 1971.¹⁰³ Kathleen Gough attributes the reasons to eviction of tenants and transformation of artisans into agricultural labourers.

The census figures give a broad indication of the growth of agricultural labour population and the decrease in the proportion of tenants over the years from the table given below.

102. Ibid., p.2.

103. Ibid., p.3.

Table-I; Table Showing the Proportion of Cultivators and Agricultural Labourers in the Total Work Force in Agriculture in Thanjavur District

Year	Total workers in Rural Areas in Thanjavur	Total workers in Agriculture in Rural Areas in Thanjavur	Cultivators			Agricultural Labour		
			Actual number	As percentage of total workers in Agriculture	As percentage of total workers in the District	Actual Number	As percentage of workers in Agriculture	As percentage of workers in the District
1951	0,750,541	621,613	339,204	54.56	45.19	255,022	45.44	39.97
1961	1,158,900	907,702	478,667	52.73	41.30	429,035	47.27	37.02
1971	1,071,331	875,892	358,832	40.93	33.49	517,063	59.03	48.26

(Source: District Census Handbook for Thanjavur for 1951, 1961 and 1971)¹⁰⁴

104. For 1951 figures only the Rural Tract figures excluding the Non-city Urban tracts were taken. Cultivators include both mainly owned and mainly unowned categories. It excludes Non-cultivators in Agriculture. For 1961 and 1971 only Rural figures were taken.

The position of agricultural labourers could be understood from an analysis of their wages over the years and by looking whether their real wages have increased. It could also be understood by looking at whether they are getting living wages or not.

Table-II: Table showing the Average daily wages of Agricultural Labour for both Men and Women

Year	Men		Women	
	State	Thanjavur	State	Thanjavur
	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.
1954-55	1.18	1.24	0.69	0.87
1955-56	1.22	1.31	0.71	0.78
1956-57	1.19	1.37	0.70	0.83
1957-58	1.19	1.34	0.82	0.83
1958-59	1.24	1.37	0.83	0.95
1959-60	1.29	1.37	0.83	0.95
1960-61	1.46	1.48	0.91	1.06
1961-62	1.48	1.53	0.95	1.00
1962-63	1.51	1.82	0.96	1.07
1963-64	1.47	1.53	1.06	1.43
1964-65	1.57	2.71	1.22	1.83

Source: K.S. Sonachalam, Table 7.27, p.133.

The table presented above shows that the actual daily wage has been high in Thanjavur district compared to the State as a whole. It is also evident that the daily wage rate has risen much higher in Thanjavur district compared to that of the State as a whole. The index number of wages in Thanjavur has risen to 218.4 in 1964-65 as compared with 132.7 for the whole state, if 1954-55 wages are taken as the base. If the price index of second sort of paddy is considered as representing the rural cost of living index since the agricultural labourers by and large consume the cheapest paddy and expenditure on food forms a major portion of their expenses, then a comparison of the price index of second sort of paddy with the daily wage index would provide an indication whether their real wages have increased.

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**Table-III: Comparison of Agricultural Wages Index
with Second Sort Paddy Price Index
(1954-55 = 100)**

Year	State		Thanjavur District	
	Wages	Paddy-II price	Wages	Paddy-II sort price
	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.	Rs. Ps.
1954-55	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
1955-56	100.50	098.20	100.60	100.90
1956-57	100.10	125.10	110.20	133.60
1957-58	100.10	119.00	107.80	124.60
1958-59	100.50	160.70	110.30	139.00
1959-60	109.70	158.40	110.20	145.90
1960-61	123.00	161.70	119.50	159.30
1961-62	124.70	151.60	123.00	163.10
1962-63	127.70	141.20	146.60	142.80
1963-64	123.00	148.20	123.00	160.00
1964-65	132.70	158.20	218.40	167.00

(Source: K.S. Sonachalam, Land Reform in Tamil Nadu, p.)

The price index of paddy for the whole state has risen faster than the index for daily wages and thereby the real wages have declined. But in Thanjavur district the price index of paddy has risen to 167 whereas the daily wage index has risen to 218.4 in 1964-65. Hence the real wages have increased in the

district. However, the total days employed in a year should also be taken into account before arriving at any final conclusion. Generally it has been observed that the number of days employed in a year is much less in Thanjavur compared to the whole state. A Commission of Enquiry appointed by the Government of Tamil Nadu to enquire into the Agrarian labour problems of East Thanjavur district, after militant agitations in 1969, has analysed whether the agricultural labourers are provided living wages. The Commission concluded that the labourers were not getting living wages.¹⁰⁵

105. Pillai S. Ganapathis, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Agrarian Labour Problems of East Thanjavur District, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1969, pp.9-10.

CHAPTER-VI

CHAPTER - VIAGRICULTURAL LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THANJAVUR DISTRICTFROM 1950 to 1980

The growth and development of the agricultural labour movement in Thanjavur district has been a slow process comprising of long drawn out struggles spreading over newer areas in a rather slow manner. Also each time the wage increases obtained were very little that too after consistent struggles. Also specific struggles, with certain villages as centres of struggles each time, formed the general pattern of the agricultural labour movement in the district. Hence in the present chapter several specific struggles have been presented in detail to bring forth the issues involved in the struggles, the behaviour of the contending classes as well as the role of various state machineries and the political parties involved in the struggles. Hence the presentation of the agricultural labour movement over a period from 1950 to 1980 makes it rather lengthy.

The recommendations of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee and the Subramaniam Committee made it clear to landlords that some sort of land reforms

were going to be implemented. Moreover the increasing organisation of the tenants, pannaiyals and labourers under the banner of the (Vivasaya Sangam) (Kisan Sabha) also made the landlords to resort to eviction of tenants and pannaiyals so as to avoid any future claims by these tenants and pannaiyals in the face of legislation. These evictions were at peak during 1949-50 when the Kisan Sabha was banned and under severe repression. Despite repression, the Vivasaya Sangam carried on agitations wherever it was strong, against evictions. However, the Kisan Sabha during this period was forced to spend its energies in maintaining its organisation wherever it was strong. Only after the ban was lifted in 1951 the Kisan Sabha reorganised itself and launched agitations for the reinstatement of tenants and pannaiyals.

In July 1952 the Kisan Sabha launched agitation in several villages demanding the implementation of the Subramaniam Committee Report. In Vellur village of Arentangi taluk when similar agitation was launched the Police declared prohibitory orders and prevented the peasants from entering the fields.

The situation was the same in other areas also. In fact the situation was so explosive that even a Congress MLA, Nerayanaswamy Naidu had to issue warnings to the Congress Government to take immediate steps and also submit a memorandum with signatures of 30 Congress MLAs seeking the intervention of the Government.¹ The Communist MLAs along with United Front MLAs also submitted a petition to the government demanding immediate stoppage of evictions and a tripartite conference consisting of Government officials, landlords, the district MLAs and Kisan Sabha representatives. The petition also demanded that the government should issue a warning to the landlords that the government would not give police help if they dishonour the decisions of the Tripartite Conference. The petition also contained details of the landlords who have evicted the tenants on a large scale in Mamargudi, Thiruthuraiipoondi, Nagapattinam and Sirkali Taluks.²

The Kisan Sabha also organised protest meetings and processions in several taluks of the district.

1. Janasekthi, 15 July, 1952.

2. Ibid., 16 July, 1952.

In Mayuras, on July 13, 1952, 1,000 peasants and labourers participated in the Procession to protest against evictions and 5,000 attended the public meeting. In Mamargudi on July 20, 1952, 2,000 participated in the procession and 7,000 attended public meeting addressed by Amirthalingam and Kathamuthu. On July 21, 1952, 6,000 gathered at Periya Karuvakudi to oppose evictions. On July 27, 1952, 8,000 persons gathered at Sirkali. At Valivalam 15,000 attended the public meeting. Similarly 3,000 gathered at Kozhal, 2,000 at Kokkur and 1,000 at Manjakollai to protest against evictions.³ However, the evictions continued unabated. Thus according to Kisan Sabha reports by the end of July 1952 nearly 15,000 families have been evicted from their lands.⁴ Many more were expected to be denied continuation of cultivation by August in the beginning of the cultivation season. Under these circumstances, the Kisan Sabha organised an anti-eviction conference on August 1, 1952 in which nearly 60,000 participated.⁵ The Conference passed

3. Ibid., 31 July, 1952.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 2 August, 1952.

a number of resolutions: (1) demanding that lands belonging to temples and religious and charitable trusts under the supervision of the endowment department should be given on lease directly to the cultivators by abolishing the intermediaries and that no security should be demanded from the cultivator of those lands; (2) condemning the government's policy of refusing to give loans to waram tenants apart from providing insufficient loans to cover the entire poor peasants; (3) condemning the government for charging high taxes even after abolishing Zamindari and Inams in Pattukottai and Arantangi taluks; (4) demanding release of political prisoners, withdrawal of cases, repeal of preventive detention act, abolition of new taxes such as development taxes, bus charge and also collection of land tax surcharge only from those paying above Rs. 150 land tax.⁶ Following the conference the Kisan Sabha launched agitations in several places. Tenants, pannaiyals of 10 to 20 villages jointly started ploughing of the lands in places where they have been evicted. In villages such as Valluvakudi, Erukkur and Ramapuram, they

6. Idem.

succeeded in getting back their lands. The Kisan Sabha observed August 17, 1952 as anti-eviction day.

Due to the electoral reverses suffered in the General Elections by the Congress and the increasing agitations taking place under the banner of the Kisan Sabha the Congress Government promulgated the Tanjore Tenants and Pannaiyal Protection Act on August 23, 1952. The Kisan Sabha demanded that: (1) The ordinance should be amended so that those evicted since 1946 should be restored; (2) even landlords owning less than six-and-two-thirds acres should not be exempted from the purview of the ordinance and (3) that the tenants should be given 60 per cent share of the produce.⁷ However, the government did not concede these demands. Despite the several loopholes in the ordinance the Kisan Sabha decided to fight for the implementation of this ordinance in as many villages as possible, by launching agitations wherever it was strong and spread the agitation to newer areas by propaganda demanding implementation of the ordinance. The special tashildars appointed for the protection

7. Janasakthi, 28 October 1952.

of tenants were also not sympathetic to the tenants. In Mayuram Taluk out of the 812 cases filed by tenants till October 1952 only 14 were accepted.⁸ In Thiruthuraiipoondi taluk till October 26, 1952 out of 123 cases filed for restoration of lands to the tenant only 71 cases were in favour of tenants and the rest rejected. Out of the 184 filed by Pannaiyals for restoration only 102 restored while 82 were rejected.⁹ In fact the major activity of the Kisan Sabha from 1952 shifted to revenue courts, Tashildar offices etc., from local struggles at the fields. This situation continued upto 1958.¹⁰

The Tanjore Tenants and Pannaiyal Protection Act merely retained the wage rates prescribed in the Mayuram agreement of 1948. Even these wages the landlords refused to give in some areas and the Kisan Sabha launched agitations demanding the wages prescribed by the 1952 Act. In areas where it was strong it launched struggles for higher wages. In Nannilas one of the landlords did not implement the 1952 Act and carried out his work

8. Ibid., 30 October, 1952.

9. Ibid., 2 November, 1952.

10. Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

with imported labour. A protest meeting was organised by the Kisan Sabha. The police arrested 80 active members and leaders of the Nanniam Kisan Sabha under the pretext of law and order problem and went around the neighbouring villages threatening people not to attend the protest meeting. Despite the police attempts to dissuade the peasants and labourers from participating 20,000 attended the protest meeting wherein B. Sreenivasa Rao, the General Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha addressing the gathering demanded the release of the arrested, withdrawal of the Special Armed Police and penalisation of the landlords for defying the Act.¹¹

However, the eviction of Pannaiyals and tenants continued unabated as the landlords increasingly resorted to self-cultivation through the employment of casual labourers. In this period a majority of Tenants and Pannaiyals were converted into daily wage labourers. Thus a good number of tenants and pannaiyals who had joined the Kisan Sabha had been converted to daily wage labourers.

11. New Age, 14 March, 1954.

Thus a good number of tenants and pannaiyals who had joined the Kisan Sabha had been converted to daily wage labourers. The landlord-tenant relationship in the case of evicted tenants and the landlord-Pannaiyal relationship in the case of evicted Pannaiyals were transformed to one of landlord-wage labourer relationship. This changed relationship brought the issue of wages and employment to the forefront of the struggles that were to be launched. The emergence of the agricultural labourer as a clear-cut and separate class with their own specific demands brought forward the question of a separate organisation of the agricultural labourers.

In fact in the same period serious discussions were taking place in the All India Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party on the question of separate organisation of agricultural labourers. In the extended meeting of the Central Kisan Council held at Calcutta from 6th to 11th August 1951, the feasibility of organising agricultural labourers in independent labour unions was discussed. As opinions differed no decision was taken and only a draft resolution was decided to be circulated to

the Provincial Kisan Committees seeking their opinion.¹²

There were shades of opinions which were as follows:¹³ (1) Independent agricultural labour unions were to be formed on class basis at all levels. They can be voluntarily affiliated to the Provincial Kisan Sabha or All India Kisan Sabha and Co-ordination Committees between the Kisan Sabha and the Agricultural Labour Union should be formed at all lower levels. (2) Separate organisation of agricultural labourers is detrimental to the unity of the Kisan masses. Kisan Sabha itself should be the organisational basis for the agricultural labourers to secure reasonable wages and to remove social inequalities. (3) Poor peasants' leagues should be formed as in China, since the poor peasants and agricultural labourers suffer from common social oppression and economic privation. Main direction of the struggle should be abolition of landlordism and seeking adequate land. (4) Agricultural labourers should be organised on big estates and in villages where they

12. Rasul, M.A., A History of the All India Kisan Sabha, National Book Agency Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1974, pp.152-153.

13. Rao, N. Prasad., "Agricultural Labourers' Association", AIKS News Bulletin, vol.1, no.4, October-November 1952, pp.9-10.

constitute a good percentage of the local population. But they should be organised by the Kisan Sabha unit with the consent of the local peasants.

(5) Due to the adventurist tactics of the last 2 or 3 years in large areas peasants have been made hostile to agricultural labour and Kisan Sabhas have been ruined. So Kisan Sabhas have to be restored and reorganised first. For the present agricultural labour should not be organised separately but Kisan Sabha's should fight for their demands maintaining Kisan Unity in the village.

(6) the existing Constitution of the AIKS (Article XVII) says that "rural labourers of a locality may form themselves into a separate organisation called Primary Rural Labour Sabha. But "such primary rural labour sabhas shall be affiliated to the AIKS" and "shall be component parts of the provincial and district Kisan Sabhas under which the organisations exist".

N. Prasad Rao argued that agricultural labour unions should be organised when: (a) Class division was clear cut and agricultural labour as a separate class emerged; (b) agricultural labour had become class conscious; (c) agricultural labour had a history

of struggles of their own for their own economic demands and for their social amelioration; (d) Agricultural labour has already formed their own class or caste organisation; and (3) untouchability was strong and it was standing as a barrier for building common political, economic and social movement. He argued that in areas which were dominantly feudal and where agricultural labour had not yet developed into a distinct class and the struggles were to be directed against feudal oppression, separate agricultural labour unions need not be formed but when once the struggles reached a stage and some relief were obtained the question of agricultural labour will come forward and then separate unions would have to be formed for them, and that any other course would result in the betrayal of their interests. He further argued that: "The lessons of Andhra and Tamil Nadu must be learnt. Here the agricultural labour was the rock-like base of the movement. The magnificent victories gained in Andhra and in Thanjavur district by the Communist Party are the result of their solid support given by Agricultural labour. And this because for the last two decades we have organised agricultural labour in their unions and conducted their strike struggles for

winning their demands. To ignore this lesson will cost us the movement itself".¹⁴

In 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist Party also passed a resolution on "tasks among the peasant masses" in its meeting held on 10th to 18th April at Delhi. The resolution stated that agricultural labourers should be organised separately in independent class organisations apart from peasant organisations, because firstly they have their own separate demands of wages, hours of work, holidays etc. Secondly most of the agricultural labourers were from socially backward or even the so-called untouchable (harijan) castes and it would be more difficult to draw them and activate them in Kisan Sabhas directly along with the other caste peasants or even if success was obtained in drawing them in, it may lead to other peasants not joining the Kisan Sabha in large numbers. Thirdly, agricultural labourers would become the leading force if they are organised separately and at the same time brought into the Kisan Sabha. The resolution also stated that since the most important demand, of the agricul-

14. Idem.

tural labourers for land is also the common demand of the entire peasantry against the landlord and also because their economic tie up is with that of the peasantry, steps should be taken to evolve a co-ordinating mechanism at every level between agricultural labour organisations and Kisan Sabhas drawing both the organisations into closer and closer function wherein the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants would be playing the leading role.¹⁵

In 1954 during the Moga session of the All India Kisan Sabha when a resolution on separate organisation of agricultural labourers was moved there were again differences among the top leaders of the Kisan Sabha. When the resolution was moved a section of the delegates vigorously opposed the formation of the separate union of agricultural labourers. Abdulla Rasul moved an amendment saying that efforts should be made to affiliate the agricultural labour unions to the Kisan Sabha in all those cases where such efforts would not harm the cause of organising

15. "Central Committee Resolution on Tasks among Peasant Masses", in Sen, Mohit., (ed.), Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, vol.III, 1951-56, People's Publishing House, New Delhi.

the agricultural labourers. P. Sundarayya opposed the amendment stating that making such efforts at that time would do more harm than good. He felt that such efforts at affiliations should be made only at a stage of development of the movement when agricultural labourers themselves felt it necessary and ask for affiliation. Rasul's amendment was pressed to vote and was defeated by 115 votes against 30. Twenty remained neutral.¹⁶ The All India Kisan Sabha finally decided to organise the agricultural labour in their own unions in 1954.

Following this decision, the Thanjavur District Kisan Sabha also decided to convert itself into an agricultural labour union. The General Secretary of the AIKS in his report has said that, "In Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu, Vivassayigal Sangam (District Kisan Sabha) which was mainly an organisation of agricultural labourers has decided to transform itself into the Agricultural Labour Association and the Vivassayigal Sangam will be reorganised by drawing masses of the

16. Namboodiripad, E.M.S., "Peasants Meet at Moga, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1954, p.34.

peasants into it. This has become necessary in view of the fact that because of the predominance of the agricultural labour in the Vivasayigal Sangam, the peasants were feeling diffident to join the Sangam under the circumstances prevailing to-day".¹⁷

The decision to transform the District Kisan Sabha was taken at the Sixth Conference of the Tamil Nadu State Kisan Sabha held at Dindugul and it was decided to affiliate the Thanjavur district agricultural labour union to the State Kisan Sabha directly.¹⁸ The first conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union was held in 1956 at Thiruvarur wherein K.P. Natarajan was elected as the President and S. Vadivel as the Secretary of the District Agricultural Labour Union.¹⁹

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17. General Secretary's Report to the 13th Session of the AIKS, Dahanu, 1955, pp.53-54.
18. Interview with G. Veeraiyan, General Secretary of the Tamil Nadu State Kisan Sabha.
19. Veeraiyan, G., Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veeravaralaru, Gorky Library, Madras, 1981, p.50.

Although the agricultural labour union was made into a separate organisation, struggles of both the agricultural labour union and the Kisan Sabha were co-ordinated and launched together in order to maintain unity among poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Dagfinn Sivertsen²⁰ who had undertaken a village study during 1957-1958, has described one of these struggles that took place in Thyagasamuthiram six miles from Kumbakonam.

Under the guidance of district leaders of the Kisan Sabha and Agricultural labour union a group of young men propagated the idea of a union which would work, for higher wages for the labourer, for the protection of tenants, and for the welfare of the village in general. Particularly active were two tenants who were fighting a court case with their landlords, two landless labourers and two young members of landowning peasant families. A month before the harvest a Committee was formed, and a public meeting was organised, in

20. Sivertsen, Dagfinn., When Caste Barriers Fall, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Norway, 1963.

the street where the touchable peasants lived, and to which the untouchable labourers were invited. Pamphlets containing the programme for the meeting and carrying slogans such as fair wages for labourers, stoppage of evictions and lawful share for the cultivators were distributed in the neighbouring villages also.

Shortly before the meeting police raided the village, at the instigation of the village headman who was also an absentee landlord, on the pretext of searching for illicit liquor. The police beat up several people in order to terrorise and prevent them from attending the meeting. The villagers with the help of a district leader framed a petition demanding the dismissal of the village headman and the appointment of a resident of the village in his place.

The meeting was well attended by tenants, agricultural labourers and peasants. The district leaders who addressed the gathering dealt with the aims of the Sangam, the new land reforms and the Fair Rent Act. They urged the labourers to claim higher wages and the tenants not to pay above 40% share as rent as per the Fair Rent Act. They also

emphasised putting an end to rendering unpaid services which were traditionally unfree, abolition of hereditary appointments for village offices, dispossession of landlords of lands which they had wilfully taken possession of, establishment of a governing body which could effectively represent the interests of the villagers to the government. They emphasised that all groups viz., peasants, both landowning and tenants, and labourers should be united on an equal basis in the struggle for common interests shedding all caste differences and that the means to be used for furthering these objectives were mass petitions, strikes and social boycott. After the meeting the district organisers were guiding the developments from outside, but the actual work of building up the organisation in the village was done by the local committee itself.

The landlords of Thyagasamudram and neighbouring villeges formed their own association under the title 'Little Landowners Association' so as to include small landowners and even rentiers. They mobilised membership on caste-lines and anti-untouchable sentiments. However, the landlords association was

controlled by the big landlords who used it in their own interests and as a result all the landlords were not united.

At harvest time strike was launched demanding an increase of Rs.0.25 in the daily wages and 2 extra measures of paddy in addition to 6 measures per day for harvesting. They also gave the landlords, the option to limit the number of labourers employed per unit of harvest land. The landlords complained to the police courts that the union leaders were disturbing peace in the village. They also attempted to use outside labour which was prevented by the organised labourers. The landlords attempted to divide the striking peasants and labourers by offering higher wages only to the upper castes and denying them to untouchables. But the peasants and labourers refused to accept this and finally their demand was conceded.²¹ The sequence and pattern in this struggle in Thyagasamudram were more or less the same in all villages where struggles took place during that period and in the struggles

21. Ibid., pp.117-134.

that took place in later years. During 1958-59 the agricultural labour union launched struggles for increase in harvest wages from four to four-and-a-half or five litres of paddy per kalam of paddy harvested. The struggles were intense in the taluks of Nannilam, Nagappattinam, Thiruvarur, Thiruthuraiipoondi and Mannargudi.²²

In 1958 in Neyvilakku the residents all Harijan pannaiyals had agitated for implementation of a wage increase. The local landlord was also the trustee of the temple land in which the pannaiyals worked. Soon after the agitation, a cow belonging to the temple died. The Trust, which in fact meant the landlord, filed a case against the 4 men, who had actively participated in the agitation, on charges of killing the cow. The case was decided in favour of the 4 pannaiyals; the Trust dismissed all the 18 Pannaiyals of the village as they had all helped finance the case. An appeal to the Court under the Pannaiyal Protection Act failed. Since 1958 they were denied work

22. Interview with G. Veeraiyan

in the temple land.²³ When in 1960 when the temple was asked to form a co-operative tenant farm, the pannaiyals wanted to lease the land and to pay the deposit for membership in the cooperative. The Panchayat President who was also the agent of the landlord trustee, refused to receive it. The pannaiyals had to go to Kivalur to hand over the money to the Registrar of Co-operatives. A few days later, the money was returned and no explanation offered. The landlord formed a cooperative with all his 'ediyals' and other loyal labourers as members. Even the salt vendor of the village was made a member of the landlords co-operative society, who used to get one rupee everytime he gets loan from the cooperative society and hands it over to the landlord. A few years later the Society was dissolved, with arrears of 2,000 kalams of paddy from members. All of it had been going to the Managing trustees house. The society members lost their tenancy rights which simply meant that they continued to till the temple

23. Shivaraman, Mythily., "Thanjavur: Rumbings of Class Struggle in Tamilnadu", in Gough, Kathleen and Sharma, Hari P., (Ed.), Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973, p.258.

lands as labourers. The trustee had proved that ignorant tenants could not work the cooperative successfully. The land reverted to the temple for direct cultivation.²⁴

In Ney Vilakku the labourers had lost many a battle against the landlord but continued the struggle. There were 4 acres of poramboke land in Neyvillaku which the trustee landlord had always taken it on auction. When the pannaiyals were denied jobs in the nearby lands, most of it owned by the trustee, they decided to bid for the poramboke land. In the 1961 auction, when Iyer the agent of the landlord did not turn up, the pannaiyals got the land for Rs.125. But twenty days later a notice came, stating that there would be re-auctioning of the lands without any further explanation. On the day of the re-auction, the Iyer came with his men, who were armed, and got the lands for Rs.400. The pannaiyals pretended to retire peacefully but later when the Iyer was returning back to his house with a few men, they caught them and gave Iyer a severe beating with their slippers. A case was filed against the

24. Ibid., pp.258-259.

pannaiyals and houses of 7 of them were burnt. Iyer's men saw to it that these men did not come back to build their huts. A few fled and never returned; others continued to live under the trees for a few years after which they rebuilt their houses. They were not able to find work even as late as 1969 in the neighbouring fields and everyday had to walk to Thiruthurai-
poondi to find work. The trustee continued to harass them in many ways.²⁵

In 1959, the Second Conference of the District Agricultural labour union was held in Thanjavur. Although struggles were launched in several villages no concerted efforts were made to launch vigorous district wide struggles on specific demands of the agricultural labourers alone during the period 1959-1964. Between 1959-1961 struggles were launched mostly on the question of land reforms to mobilise public support and pressurise the Congress government to accept the amendment proposed by the Communist party MLAs to the land reform act. The Communist Party and the Kisan

25. Ibid., pp.259-260.

Sabha proposed an amendment seeking to reduce the ceiling to 15 standard acres per family instead of 30 standard acres per individual. In June-July 1960 campaign was launched in entire Tamil Nadu regarding the amendment and for nearly 15 days in every village. In August 1960 two Kisan Marches were organised one from Madurai to Madras under the leadership of Manali Kandaswamy, which passed through Madurai, Ramnad, Trichy, Thanjavur and Chingleput taluks and the other starting from Coimbatore, under the leadership of B. Sreenivasa Rao, which passed through Salem, North Arcot, Chingleput districts. The Kisan Marches took 36 days to reach Madras. In the course of the marches 2 lakh signatures were collected for the demands of the peasants. In the picketing that took place between 15 September 1961 and 29 September 1961 subsequently more than 16,000 were arrested who were given sentences ranging from 3 to 6 months rigorous imprisonment.²⁶ In 1961 the third conference of the District Agricultural Labour Union was held at Enangudi and a mass rally

26. Report of the General Secretary, 18th Session of the AIKS, Trichur, 1961; Veeraiyan, G., "Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru", op.cit., pp.54-58.

was held at Nannilam.

In 1964 the Communist Party was split into Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)). Following the split, the All India Kisan Sabha and its units all over the country were also internally split into two camps. Although officially the split in the All India Kisan Sabha at the national level came about only in 1967, almost in all state units the split had virtually taken place in 1964. In Tamil Nadu state and Thanjavur district also the split had taken place in 1964. In Thanjavur district at the time of the split there were equal membership, for both CPI and CPI(M), within the Kisan Sabha and the agricultural labour union. However a majority of leadership were with the CPI, which attempted to curb the influence of CPI(M) leaders. Eventually a split took place in both the Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Labour Union.²⁷ The leadership of the Agricultural labour union in most parts of Thanjavur remained with CPI whereas the CPM led

27. Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

agricultural labour union was stronger in Nagapattinam taluk.²⁸

According to Alexander the CPI(M) amalgamated both the Agricultural Labour Union and the Kisan Sabha under the name of Vivasaya Sangam after the split and organised both the peasants and the labourers under a single organisation. However, in their personal interviews, the leaders of the CPI(M) have denied this. According to them, they had kept their organisations separately. Only in 1964-65 when most of the District leaders were in jail being detained under DIR wherein the entire district Secretariat and 10 out of 11 district committee members were in jail, the local leaders in order to keep the organisation in tact had conducted joint struggles at local levels.²⁹ Due to the same reason the 5th conference of the Agricultural Labour Union and the 9th Conference of the District Kisan Sabha were held as a joint Confe-

28. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Unions in South India, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 1978, p.28.

29. Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

rence of the Peasants and Agricultural labourers on 29th August, 1965 in Negapattinam in which 750 delegates participated. The conference elected P.S. Dhanuskodi (detenu) and V.R. Chellaappan as President and Secretary of the District Kisan Sabha, G. Veeraiyan (detenu) and R. Ranga Babu were elected as President and Secretary of the District Agricultural Labour Union.³⁰

From 1964 the agricultural struggles intensified to new proportions and spread to newer villages. By 1964 the living conditions of agricultural labourers had deteriorated considerably. Although over the years there had been an increase in wages due to struggles launched by the labour union, their real wages had decreased due to steep rise in prices. The number of days employed annually got reduced. Moreover, more and more imported labour were being used by the landlords for harvesting. The Agricultural Labour Union led by the CPI(M) decided to launch an agitation demanding wage increase of 25 per cent, employment guarantee

30. People's Democracy, 12 August 1965; Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

to local labour and a tripartite meeting to arrive at an understanding on these issues. Struggles were launched in several villages. The notable ones were centred in Thirukaddaiyur of Mayuram taluk. On 25th of December processions were held in all taluk headquarters. On January 2, 1965 a massive procession was planned to be held on these demands. Since the 10 out of 11 district committee leaders were arrested on 31st December 1964, the procession on January 2, 1965 was converted into one demanding release of leaders. During October-November 1964 struggles were launched in Nagappattinam taluk demanding 5 litres for every kalam of paddy harvested. The landlords revived their association under the name of Paddy Producers Association mainly to counter the organised labourers. Despite the leaders being detained, many struggles were launched during 1965 and also in 1966.³¹ The agricultural labour union led by the CPI also launched struggles for higher wages in areas wherever it was strong during 1964, 1965 and 1966.³²

31. Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

32. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Union in South India, op.cit., p.28.

In June 1966 struggles were launched demanding tripartite meetings to settle the demands of 25 per cent increase in wages and employment to local labour. On September 1, 1966, 50,000 labourers participated in a one day strike on the same demands. The Congress government refused to hold a tripartite meeting. The agricultural labour unions led by CPI and CPI(M) along with DMK launched joint struggles demanding rice to be distributed in ration by the government since there was a rice scarcity in the district and a one-day hartal was observed.³³

In June 1967, by the beginning of the cultivation season, the agricultural labour unions appealed to the state government headed by the DMK to hold tripartite discussions at district level among representatives of landlords, labourers and government to fix a proper daily wage in view of the rise in prices. The DMK government came forward to hold such tripartite meetings only at taluk levels and that too only in East Thanjavur district where the movement was strong. Some agreements were reached for higher wages and the prevention of employment of outside labour to the prejudice of local labour.

33. Interview with G. Veeraiyan.

However some of the bigger landlords refused to implement the agreement and the labourers had to struggle even for their very implementation. The labourers could get the higher wages only in places where they struggled and were organised.³⁴

In October 1967 the issue of harvest wages came up. The wages prevailing at that period was 5 litres (two-and-half Madras measures) for every kalam of paddy harvested for a male worker. The agricultural labour unions sought an increase of one more litre i.e. six litres of paddy for every kalam of paddy harvested. Many smaller mirasdars conceded this demand in several places. However, the bigger landlords decided to put down the demands of the labourers. The biggest landlord of Valivalam convened a conference of landlords which was attended by 500 landlords. A similar conference was held on 2nd or 3rd of October 1967 at Mangudi. In both the conferences the landlords decided to put down the demands of the agricultural labourers. Even efforts by the Government to hold tripartite agreements were frustrated by the landlords. In big

34. People's Democracy, 22 October, 1967.

landlords villages the labourers had to resort to strike. The government also, taken in by the landlords campaign, began to speak of law and order problem. Encouraged by this the landlord offensive took a violent shape.

In Karuppur village of Mannargudi taluk Siddhi Vinayaga Mudaliar a landlord entered into an oral agreement to pay 6 litres and harvesting was carried out on 5th October. Immediately on 6th October the landlords gathered at Mangudi 4 kilometres from Karuppur, gathered a large posse of loyal labourers and came in a procession to Karuppur. They pressurised the landlord to break the agreement and with the help of the outside labour the landlords completed the harvesting for the Karuppur land lord. While returning in the evening they also cut down the flagstaffs flying the red flag of the agricultural labour union in Karuppur. While they were again attempting to bring down the flagstaff of the agricultural labour union in another village at Poonthazhangudi, the organised labourers prevented them and a clash ensued. In the police firing that followed Pakkiri an activist of Poonthazhangudi died on the spot.

Only after the police firing the government took serious note of the situation prevailing in Thanjavur district. At the instance of the Chief Minister, a tripartite meeting was called by the district collector Mr. Rangabashyam on October 8, 1967. On the same day the agricultural labour union held a total strike for one day in the taluks of Nagappattinam and Nanniam, to condemn the repression by landlords and police.³⁵ Some agreements were arrived at in the tripartite meeting held on 8th October at Mannargudi. The terms of the agreement were:³⁶

1. A wage increase of half-a-litre over the previous years wages for every kalam of paddy harvested;
2. No reduction or wage increase in areas where already 6 litres of paddy per kalam of paddy harvested were paid.
3. Outside labour can be utilised for harvesting provided local labourers are utilised.
4. Any dispute over the implementation of the wages would be referred to the Tahsildar;
5. The agreement was applicable to East Thanjavur only.

35. Peoples Democracy, 22 October, 1967; Interview with G. Veeraiyan; G. Veeraiyan, Vivassaya Ivakathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., pp.62-63.

36. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Union in South India, op.cit., p.28.

A special feature of the agreement was that it was the first agreement made by the government solely for the daily wage labourers. The earlier agreements arrived at by government during 1944, 1946 and 1948 were made for pannaityals or tenants. Some other agreement arrived at in between these periods were done at local levels between landlords and the labourers and not at the initiative of the government.

However, even after the tripartite agreement many of the landlords were refusing to implement the agreement. In Kovilpethu of Nagappattinam taluk, a landlord refused to implement the wage agreement. The tahsildar came but nothing happened. Then the struggle took several forms such as forcible harvest, Satyagraha, squatting in front of the mirasdar's house, a show of force by parading the streets in large numbers and shouting slogans. When the officials came to investigate the charge that local labour was denied work, the mirasdar justified it on the grounds of laziness and bad work. The struggle went on and the labourers managed to prevent black-legs from weakening their

bargaining strength.³⁷

The government also did not take measures to bring to book the landlords responsible for the violence on 6th October 1967 at Poonthazhangudi resulting in police-firing. Hence on 15th of December 1967, peaceful demonstrations were held before the offices of the Tahsildar and Revenue Divisional Officers in Thanjavur district demanding: (1) withdrawal of all the pending cases against the labourers of Poonthazhangudi, Valivalam and Kizhayur; (2) suspension of the Sub-Inspector who resorted to firing at Poonthazhangudi; (3) arrest of the landlords responsible for police firing at Poonthazhangudi; (4) holding of judicial enquiry on the police firing; and (5) compensation to the martyr Pakkirisamy's family.³⁸

Since the Mannargudi agreement of 1967 dealt only with harvest wages, by the beginning of the cultivation season of 1968 the agricultural labour

37. Shivaraman, Mythily., op.cit., p.249.

38. Bharathi Mohan, G., 'Press Statement', Peoples Democracy, 24 December 1967. Bharathi Mohan was at that time Secretary of the District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M) and an MLA of Tamil Nadu Legislature.

unions launched struggles for fixation of fair wages for other cultivating operations. Again a tripartite meeting was held by the District Collector Mr. Rangabashyam on June 8, 1968, at Thiruvarur. Mr. A.K. Subbaiah (MLA), M. Kathamuthu, S. Vadivelu, T. Arumugam and a few others represented the Kisan Sabha and Agricultural Labour Union led by the CPI, Mr. K.R. Gnana Sambandam (MLA), P.S. Danushkodi (MLA), K.V. Bharathi Mohan (MLA) and a few others represented the Kisan Sabha and the Agricultural Labour Union led by the CPI(M), Nagappattinam Pasha, Perakkudi Vasu and Nagalur Srinivasan represented the Dravida Kazhagam (DK), Sirkali Ethiraj and Mamargudi Rayappa represented Congress, Mannargudi Narayanaswami, Kattur Ramaiah and N. Kittapa represented the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), in the tripartite meeting. An agreement was reached according to which a male labourer would get a daily wage of 6 litres of paddy and Re.1/- cash payment or an equivalent cash wage of Rs.2.68 per day and a female labourer would get 5 litres of paddy and 25 paise cash payment or an equivalent cash wage of Rs.1.65 per day. It was agreed that landlords had the right not to employ recalcitrant,

inefficient and lazy labourers. It was also agreed that outside labour could be employed provided the landlords employed the local labourers and disputes in this regard could be referred to the tashildar.³⁹

Since the Mennargudi agreement of 1967 was only for a period of one year and the Thiruvarur agreement of 1968 dealt only with wages for cultivation operations, by September 1968 the issue of harvest wages came up. The agricultural labour unions before the harvest season demanded that wages should be uniform throughout the district and since 6 litres had already been paid as harvest wages in the previous year in several places the uniform wage should be declared as 6 litres. They wrote to the district officials to intervene in advance and convene a tripartite meeting like the one held in the previous year. Since the officials did not take any steps the unions had to resort to struggles.

In September 1968 in Puducheri village in Nagapattinam the agricultural labourers demanded

39. Uzhavu Selvam, 15 June, 1968, p.3. Uzhavu Selvam is a fortnightly published by the Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha led by CPI.

a wage increase of half a litre per kalam of paddy harvested. The landlord refused to concede the demand, brought in outside labour. On the day of the harvest, outside labour entered the fields with police protection and several striking women labourers also entered the field to harvest despite attempts by the police to prevent them. When about an acre of paddy had been harvested the police asked both the local and outside labourers to clear out of the fields. Next day early in the morning around 3 a.m. the police entered several streets, rounded up 42 women and whisked them away to the nearby police station where they were severely beaten up. Within a few hours several hundred Harijan labourers gathered in Puducheri to fight the mirasdars and the police to the finish.

In the words of Adilingam a participant in the struggle, "Several heads would have rolled on the field, blood would have flown like the Kaveri in flood, if only we had not been restrained by the higher ups. But for that instruction from our leaders, we would have put some real fear in their hearts, we could have shown them who we really are...There were 12 police vans carrying

hundreds of Madras Special Police forces, we gheraoed the vans; they couldn't move an inch without killing several of us. We carried every bit of equipment we could get hold of stick, spear, sickle, kitchen knife...twelve of their men were wounded, not a single one on our side. The Superintendent of Police planted several white flags on the ground and asked for peace. We said "we will release one van if you go and bring our women you arrested last night like cowards in the cover of darkness. Go get them". And our women were brought back in an hour's time from Kivalur station. For the first time in the history of our village, the police took orders from the labourers. It was a great day".⁴⁰

Later Police reinforcements were brought and the police stayed in Puducheri for 3 weeks wherein the labourers had to flee their homes. In their absence everything they owned were taken away by the police. The Puducheri incident was one of the series of violent incidents that took place between the labourers and the landlords supported by police.

40. Shivaraman, Mythily., op.cit., pp.246-247.

The Thanjavur District Mirasdars held a conference on 20th October 1968 wherein they passed a resolution which praised the government for providing police protection for the harvest and demanded more police protection for harvesting in all villages of Thanjavur district. The Inspector General of Tamil Nadu Police in a Press conference held on 4th November at Trichy said that labour trouble existed in Thanjavur district and police protection would be given to landlords for completing the Kuruvai harvest. He also further stated that the police were aware even three months earlier that clashes would take place in the district and that 12 police stations have been equipped with telephone and wireless facilities apart from increasing the police strength. Mr. Nedunchezian a prominent minister of the DMK government after holding consultations with officials regarding the situation in East Thanjavur villages stated that sufficient protection would be given for harvesting and that law and order would be maintained. Thanjavur District Collector while speaking at the East Thanjavur Development Council meeting said that most of the mirasdars were paying according to the Mannargudi

agreement and that it was the agricultural labourers who demand higher wages. He stated that when some mirasdars refuse to give higher wages the labourers, instead of bringing the dispute to the revenue officials, take the law in to their own hands and create trouble. He further stated that if both landlords and labourers agree then tripartite conference could be held.⁴¹

Thus the landlords, police, ministers and officials maintained that the Mennargudi agreement was still in force and that the labourers were repudiating the agreement. The landlords went a step further and stated that during the Thiruverur agreement made for cultivating season an unwritten agreement was reached that no wage increase would be done for harvesting in the oncoming harvest period. Thus the government, police and officials were planning to deal with the issue as a law and order problem and put down the labour struggle with the help of police. They were unwilling to compel the landlords who refused to come for a tripartite

41. Kathamuthu, M., "Illatha Oppanthamum Pollatha Akkramum", Uzhavu Selvan, 15 November, 1968, pp.3-4.

meeting.

The landlords encouraged by the favourable attitude of the government stepped up their violence. They converted the wage issue into a confrontation between harijan labourers and non-harijans. Apart from this they also resorted to attack agricultural labour leaders. In October 1968 at Irinjur, Chinnapillai an agricultural labour leader was abducted by the landlords in the night and murdered. In the same month at Kekkarai, near Thiruvarur, Ramachandran an agricultural labour leader was murdered at Kekkarai in the presence of police. On the 15th of November a meeting was held to condemn the police repression in Thanjavur district. Sikkil Packiriswamy an agricultural labour union leader and Sikkil branch secretary of CPI(M) was returning to his village after addressing the meeting. In Sikkil bus stand he was assaulted and murdered.⁴² In Adamengalam at the instance of landlords, the police raped 4 harijan women. In Avarani village clashes

42. Radharajan, V., Venmani, Paattalikal Veliyeedu, Madras, 1978, pp. 14-15; Interview with G. Veeraiyan. Kekkarai Ramachandran had earlier resigned from the Congress, joined the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) and extended the agricultural labour movement to surrounding villages in the north-east of Thiruvarur.

occurred between harijan women and police. The landlords encouraged by the favourable attitude of the police and the government, not only refused to give higher wages but also refused to give employment to local labour unless they resigned from the Agricultural Labour Union led by the CPI(M). The President of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union wrote a letter to Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu Government in November 1968, regarding the murderous attacks launched by the landlords and the compliance of the police in escalating the violence. Not surprisingly the Secretariat acknowledged the receipt of the letter only in January 1969.⁴³

The agricultural labourers organised under the banner of the union declared that they would not be cowed down by violence and repression and threatened to launch agitation unless a tripartite meeting was held and a wage agreement was reached. On 15th November 1968, representatives of several parties met at Mannargudi wherein Mennai P. Narayanaswamy, Nagai Kalyana Sundaram, Sikkal Ambalavanan, Mettupa-

43. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

layam Shammugam (all from DMK), M. Kathamuthu, A.V. Ramaswamy, A.K. Subbiah (MLA), A.M. Gopu, S. Murugaiyan, V. Kuppaswamy (all from CPI), and K.R. Nadimuthu (Praja Socialist Party), participated. K.R. Gnanasembandam and K. Bharathimohan both CPI(M) MLAs had requested the meeting to be held on 21st November 1968 so that they could also participate. The meeting decided to send a delegation, consisting of Mannai Narayanaswamy, K.R. Nadimuthu, A.V. Ramaswamy, A.M. Gopu, S.S. Pasha and representative from CPI(M), to meet the district collector on 17th November 1968 and request him to convene a tripartite conference to settle the issue peacefully. The meeting also decided to hold another meeting on 21st November 1968 in order to facilitate the participation of CPI(M) leaders.⁴⁴

In the all party meeting held on 21st November 1968, Mannargudi Mannai P. Narayanaswamy, Mr. Meenakshi Sundaram (both from DMK), M. Kathamuthu, A.V. Ramaswamy, S. Vadivel, T. Sivanesan, T. Arumugam, R. Murugaiyya (all from CPI), K.R. Gnanasembandam (MLA), K. Bharati Mohan (MLA), A. Natarajan, G. Veeraiyan (all from

44. Uzhavu Selvam, 15 November, 1968, p.4.

CPI(M)) and S.S. Pasha (Dravida Vivaseya Thozhilalar Sangam) participated. After reviewing the outcome of the meeting with the District Collector on 17th November by the delegation, the meeting decided the following steps to be undertaken:

- (1) In order to bring peace in the agrarian front in Thanjavur district, the meeting demanded the Tamil Nadu Government and the Thanjavur district collector to convene urgently a tripartite conference.
- (2) To hold similar all party meetings in all taluks of Thanjavur district and arrive at a negotiated peaceful settlement.
- (3) To hold all party public meeting to explain the situation prevailing in Nagapattinam and Nannilam taluks.

The meeting also passed a condolence resolution regarding the gruesome murder of Pakkiriswamy at Sikkil. The meeting was presided over by Mannai P. Narayanaswamy.⁴⁶

46. Uzhavu Selvam, 1 December, 1968, p.5.

On 16th December 1968 the agricultural labour unions organised demonstrations in all taluk headquarters, demanding immediate convening of tripartite conference, 6 litre wages, stopping of police intervention in wage disputes, stoppage of false cases by police. Nearly 75,000 participated all over the district. In Thiruthurai Poondi alone nearly 25,000 men and 7,000 women participated.⁴⁷

The landlord repression and violence found its classic expression in Kilvenmani where 42 harijans were burnt alive in a hut on December 25, 1968. In the first week of December 1968, musclemen sent by Irinjur Gopalakrishna Naidu, the President of Paddy Producers Association, came to Venmani and threatened Muthuswamy a tea shop owner and an activist of the agricultural labour union. They demanded that the villagers should pay Rs.250/- to Irinjur Gopala Krishna Naidu, and that dire consequences would follow if they failed to comply. Rs.250 was the fine demanded by the landlord from the labourers for refusing to join the Paddy

47. Ibid., 1 January, 1969, p.9.

Producers Association and for going on a one day strike in solidarity with the Central Government employees. Muthuswamy and others immediately reported the matter to the Panchayat President Govindarajulu Naidu. The Panchayat President also said that they should either pay Rs.250 or hoist the flag of Paddy Producers Association in the village and that if they failed to do so the landlord and his men might assault them. Muthuswamy and others called the village people and explained the matter. The agricultural labourers unanimously decided that they will not hoist any other flag except the red flag of the Agricultural Labour Union. The local Kisan Sabha President wrote a letter to the Chief Minister on 8th December 1968 explaining the threats and demanding protection but there was no action on the part of the Government.⁴⁸

On December 25, 1968 around 6 p.m. Muthuswamy was forcibly kidnapped by the musclemen of Gopalakrishna Naidu and was confined in a room in the house of Ramenujam a landlord. On hearing the

48. Radharajan, V., op.cit., pp.18-19.

news the harijan labourers gathered in large numbers, went to the mirasdar's house and got him released. On their way back they were attacked by the landlords' hirelings with stones and sticks. The labourers retaliated and reported the matter to the Police orally. About 9.00 p.m. a lorry drove towards Venmani. The agricultural labourer and their leaders disappeared into the fields thinking that the police was coming to arrest them. A large number of hirelings led by Gopalakrishna Naidu surrounded the Cheri (hamlet) and began their attack. A few shots were fired into the Cheri. They smashed the electric bulbs, carried torch lights with them and began setting fire to the huts. They also attacked some men who had remained in the cheri. Nearly 13 were wounded. One of the landlords men was also killed. Nearly 16 huts out of the 25 were gutted down in the fire. In one of the huts 42 persons (20 women, 19 children and 5 men), who had huddled together to escape the attack, were burnt alive.⁴⁹

49. Ibid., pp.20-23. Also see New Age, 5 Jan. 1969. According to the landlords, the raid was only a retaliation to the murder of a loyal labourer. Interestingly Dinamani a local newspaper speculated that the labourers themselves had set fire to their houses in order to defame the landlords.

On December 27, 1968 there were spontaneous rallies condemning the brutal murder in almost all towns of Tamil Nadu. In Mannargudi 20,000 participated, 10,000 at Thithuraiipoondi and 5,000 at Pattukkottai. Later in Venmani 106 persons were arrested of which 72 were landlords and their hirelings and 34 were labourers.⁵⁰

In the cases that followed the Venmani murders the Nagapattinam sessions Judge convicted 7 persons, viz., Gopalakrishnan Naidu, the President of the Paddy Producers' Association, Govindarajulu Naidu, MKS Naidu, Krishna Pillai and a few others for 10 years rigorous imprisonment for the murder of 42 persons. In the case of murder of the landlords hireling during the same incident, the Sessions Judge convicted Gopal, President of the Kilvenmani Agricultural Labourers' Union to imprisonment for life, another for 5 years and 6 others for 2 years.

The Madras High Court refused to give bail to the agricultural labour union activists who were convicted by the Sessions Judge but gave bail to

50. New Age, 5 January, 1969.

all the 7 landlords. The High Court also delivered verdicts in which all the 7 landlords were acquitted whereas all the agricultural labour union activists were convicted. Later due to continuous agitations and pressure, the State Government appealed to the Supreme Court which ordered the re-arrest of Gopala Krishna Naidu and his associates. The Supreme Court gave 7 years rigorous imprisonment to Gopala Krishna Naidu and lesser sentences to others.⁵¹

Only after the gruesome murder at Kilvenmani, the Government appointed an one man commission of enquiry to enquiry into the agrarian problems of six taluks of East Thanjavur alone, since the struggles were intense only there. Ganapathiya Pillai a retired judge was appointed to the Commission of Enquiry. The District Collector also convened a Tripartite Conference on January 16, 1969 at Tanjore. M. Kathamuthu, A.K. Subbalaah.(MLA), A.V. Ramaswamy, A.M. Gopu and a few others represented the agricultural labour union led by CPI. K.R. Gnanasambandam (MLA), K. Bharathimohan (MLA), P.S. Dhanuskodi (MLA)

51. Peoples Democracy, 7 March, 1976; Radharajan, V., op.cit., pp.26-29.

and a few others represented the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M). S.S. Pasha, Vasu and Mani represented Dravida Kazhagam, K.P.S. Mani (MLA) represented Republican Party, and A.R. Marimuthu (MLA) represented Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). The district collector after holding talks with the labour leaders, district MLAs and the representatives of the landlords declared the following decisions:⁵²

1. The existing wages would be increased from 4, $4\frac{1}{2}$, 5 and $5\frac{1}{2}$ litres to $4\frac{1}{2}$, 5, $5\frac{1}{2}$ and five-and-three-fourths litres of paddy per kalam respectively, i.e. an increase of half-a-litre per kalam of paddy.
2. Wherever the existing wages were 6 litres of paddy per kalam of paddy harvested, the wages would remain the same and should not be reduced.
3. These wages would remain either for 3 years or until any orders passed by Government based on the recommendations of the One Man Commission of Enquiry, whichever is earlier.
4. Imported labour should be employed only after local labour was employed.
5. Conciliation Committees comprising of two representatives of landlords, two representatives of agricultural labourers and headed by a tashildar would be formed in every firka. Any disputes would be referred to these conciliation committees.

52. Uzhavu Selvam, 1 February 1969, p.6.

But the landlords were still intransigent. In the tripartite meetings held on January 16, 1969 after the Collector announced his decision, they told the district collector that they would give their consent after consulting their association. On January 19, 1969 they convened a mirasdars conference at Mannargudi wherein they rejected the collectors award. They also decided to postpone the harvest till January 29, 1969 as a mark of protest. Several speakers also made provocative speeches wherein they talked of countering the agricultural labourers with violence. Near Koradacheri area they also threatened the labourers that several 'Venmani incidents' would be repeated. However the agricultural labour unions held massive demonstrations in all taluk headquarters on January 26, 1969 demanding the implementation of the Collector's award.⁵³

The Ganapathia Pillai Commission of enquiry submitted its report on May 28, 1969 to the Government. The Committee reported that inspite of the Thiruvarur agreement wages in many parts of East Thanjavur area

53. Ibid., p.2.

continued to be low and below the agreed level.⁵⁴ The Commission concluded that the agricultural labourers in East Thanjavur district were not getting living wages and that even a person holding only 5 acres was in a position to pay higher wages even after allowing for an interest of 5 per cent in the value of his land and profits over his cultivation expenses.⁵⁵ The Commission also found that by and large small landholders owning less than five acres do not normally employ hired labour except on occasions like harvest and transplantation.⁵⁶

The Commission recommended an working hour of 8 hours for men and 7 hours for women and also the following wages:⁵⁷

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54. Pillai S. Ganapathia, Report of the Commission Enquiry on the Agrarian Labour Problems of East Thanjavur District, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1969, p.12.
55. Ibid., p.12.
56. Ibid., p.13.
57. Idem.

1. Ploughing, levelling the land, trimming bund, plucking seedlings and wages for all other works during cultivation season	.. Rs.3.00 (for men)
2. Ploughing where the bullocks and ploughs are owned by the labourer himself	.. Rs.5.25 (for men)
3. Transplantation and weeding	.. Rs.1.30 (for women)
4. Wages for all other works during cultivation season	.. Rs.1.80 (for women)
5. Off season work	.. Rs.2.50 (for men) Rs.1.80 (for women)

The Commission recommended a harvest wage of 6 litres for every kalam of paddy harvested and that the harvest wages should be calculated from the gross yield before paying the kalavady to barbers, carpenters, washerwomen and pannaiyals.⁵⁸

Regarding pannaiyals, the Commission recommended that, the pannaiyal protection Act should be suitably amended to increase the wages to 2½ marakkals (10 litres) for men and 1½ marakkals (6 litres) for women which had not been revised since the Mayuram agreement of 1948. The Commission stated that the landlords resorted to annual contracts with labourers

58. Ibid., p.14. Kalavady is customary wages given in kind for services rendered.

by agreeing to pay standard wage throughout the year plus an annual bonus of 15 to 16 kalams of paddy, in order to circumvent the Pannaiyal Protection Act. Hence the Commission recommended that the Pannaiyal Protection Act should be suitably amended to provide for compulsory registration of such annual contracts. The Commission also recommended appointment of labour officers and establishment of labour courts.⁵⁹

However, the Commission did not concede some of the demands made by the agricultural labour union such as total ban on use of outside labour, refusal to give police protection for harvest in agrarian disputes, compensation for death or injury caused during work and unemployment relief during seasons of unemployment.

During May and June the agricultural labour union led by the CPI(M) launched campaigns demanding the immediate release of the Ganapathia Pillai Commission Report.⁶⁰ However, the government released

59. Ibid., pp. 16-18.

60. New Age, 27 July, 1969.

the Report only on July 15, 1969. The Chief Minister while releasing the report, promising to bring a legislation but refused to commit himself on behalf of the government for taking special steps to provide higher wages during the cultivation season itself and ensuring employment to local labour.⁶¹

In June the agricultural labour union led by CPI conducted its regional conferences, wherein resolutions were passed demanding cultivation wages of 8 litres of paddy and cash of Rs.1.25 for men, 6 litres of paddy and cash of 50 paise for women, and distribution of government waste lands, and dry lands to the agricultural labourers. 129 Delegates, out of which 110 were men 19 were women, attended the Muthupettai regional conference held on June 12, 1969. Nearly 5,000 attended the public meeting. 234 delegates, comprising of 214 males and 20 females, participated in the regional conference held on June 14 at Thiruthuraiipoondi. Nearly 10,000 attended the public meeting on that day. 166 delegates, comprising of 154 men and 12 women, attended the regional confere-

61. Kathamuthu, M., and Gopu, A.M., "Press Release", Uzhavu Selvam, 1 August, 1969, p.8.

rence held at Mannargudi on June 18, 1969. 186 delegates including 38 women participated in the regional conference held on June 23 at Kottur. Nearly 10,000 attended the public meeting held there. In the regional conference held at Kumbakonam on June 28, 125 delegates including 15 women participated.⁶²

On June 25, 1969 demonstrations were held in several towns and petitions were submitted to the local officials. The petitions demanded the government to issue ordinance for giving employment to local labour and daily wages of 8 litres of paddy and cash of Rs.1.25 per men, and 6 litres of paddy and cash 50 paise for women. More than 10,000 persons at Mannargudi, 8,000 at Thiruthuraiipoondi, 300 at Mayaveram, 400 at Sirkali and 500 at Nagapattinam participated in the demonstration.⁶³

Many of the landlords rejected the government guidelines in apportioning cash and kind components

62. Uzhavu Selvam, 15 July, 1969, pp.5-6.

63. Ibid., 1 July, 1969.

of daily wages; compared to an upper limit of one fourth the total amount permitted as payment in cash under the 1968 award, landlords commonly gave one-half the daily wage in cash. At the same time, the East Thanjavur Mirasdars Association, meeting in early June, took a hard line on the implementation of outside workers, threatening to leave their fields fallow during the kuruvai season unless the government assured the security of the landlords. In a further effort to limit their dependence on local farm workers, the largest landlords began to purchase tractors with the aim of reducing the requirement for hired labour during the sowing season. This affected the local labourers' employment opportunities.⁶⁴

The number of tractors increased from 21 in 1951 to 48 in 1956, to 185 in 1961, to 444 in 1966 and to 1045 in 1974 whereas in the whole state the corresponding figures were 327, 822, 934, 2,160 and 7,107 respectively. In 1966, 20 per cent of the tractors in the whole state were in Thanjavur

64. Frankel R. Francine, India's Green Revolution, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p.117.

district alone and in 1974 it formed 15 per cent in the whole of the state.⁶⁵

The agricultural labour unions led by CPI and CPI(M) held a meeting on July 11, 1969 to have joint agitations. The agricultural labour union led by the CPI insisted only on wage increase and not on an anti-tractor agitation while the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) insisted on an anti-tractor agitation apart from wage increase. Hence the labour unions could not arrive at an understanding to have joint agitations. The labour unions had to carry on independent struggles.⁶⁶

The agricultural labour union led by CPI carried out picketing at 13 centres from 16th July to 21st July, 1969. The main demands were 10 per cent increase in daily wages for cultivating operations as recommended by Ganapathia Pillai Commission, Employment Guarantee to local labourers, increase

65. Kurien, C.T., Dynamics of Rural Transformation - A Study of Tamil Nadu: 1950-1975, Orient Longmans Ltd., Madras, 1981.

66. New Age, 27 July, 1969.

in harvest wages and an ordinance covering all these demands. 4,090 persons were arrested in the whole of Thanjavur district for picketing from 16th July to 21st July 1969.⁶⁷

Anti-Tractor Agitation

The agricultural labour union led by the CPI(M) conducted anti-tractor agitations in several places in June and July. The agricultural labour union carried out picketing only in big landlords' lands. The union stated that they were not opposed to the use of government tractors, panchayat union tractors and also tractors that could be used by small landholders.⁶⁸ Thus the union made it clear that it was only against big landlords using tractors who were attempting to deny employment to the organised labourers. It was also an attempt to neutralise rich and middle peasants from opposing the agitation. Nearly 300 labourers and union leaders were arrested in the struggle.⁶⁹

67. Uzhavu Selvam, 1 August, 1969, p.20.

68. New Age, 27 July 1969.

69. Frankel R. Francine, op.cit., p.117.

The landlords with the help of police not only attempted to crush the struggle but also crush the agricultural labour union as well. In Kovilpathu, where a wage struggle had already taken place in 1967, the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) organised an anti-tractor agitation in September 1969.⁷⁰ Only 5 men from Kovilpathu were asked to join the struggle. On the day of the demonstration, the landlord who normally used a tractor or two in that village, had hired about 10 tractors which were lined up in the field. Even before the demonstrators approached the field, the police arrested them. During this period all the labourers of the harijan street in Kovilpathu were denied work for about 3 weeks whereas only 5 had participated in the agitation.

During this period of unemployment one night around 3 a.m. more than 50 policemen entered the harijan street and severely beat up the men. 33 men were arrested by the police and taken in a semi-conscious state. Ayyakkannu, a pannaiyal, who had returned a few days earlier after spending

70. Shivaraman, Mythily., op.cit., p.249.

two months in hospital was left in an unconscious state by the police. The arrested labourers were booked on charges of trespass in a nearby village. On their release on bail, they had to walk to Thiruvarur, miles away, several times a week to appear before the court. Every labourer had to spend nearly Rs.200 cash. For some period the labourers managed to get employment in far away villages but the mirasdar's harassment continued. When they were away the whole day, their cattle were stolen and occasionally even their children were taken to police station. Since the labourers could not afford the luxury of boycotting the mirasdar for ever, they approached him for work. The mirasdar said: "Throw away the red flag before coming here. I want that flag removed from that cheri. I should never see you again carrying that flag and parading the street".⁷¹ The labourers were made to sign a declaration that they had quit the agricultural labour union; they would not attend the ammevasai (new moon) meetings of the Union; they would have nothing to do with the CPI(M). Only after that the labourers got their employment back.⁷²

71. Ibid., p.250.

72. Idem.

Only in September 1969 the Tamil Nadu Government passed the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labourers Fair Wages Act. The Act provided for wages recommended by the Ganapathia Pillai Commission of enquiry but restricted the operation of the Act only to the six taluks of East Thanjavur alone, where the struggles were intense. The wages fixed by the Act were to be in operation for 3 years.

After the enactment of this Act, the agricultural labour unions attempted to build unions in newer villages to get the wages prescribed by the Act. They also attempted to extend the struggles to West Thanjavur also where the influence of the unions were relatively weaker. The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) in 1971 succeeded in launching struggles for harvest wages of 6 litres in Papanasem taluk of West Thanjavur and Melapalayur area in Nannilam taluk. In order to extend the struggles to Thanjavur and Kumbakonam taluks the labour union conducted a demonstration in front of the District Collector's Office. However, due to a struggle launched during the cultivation season of 1971 by the union, against the landlord's

attempt to pay the wages in cash only, the labourers of Vadagandam village were denied employment for the whole year.

Extension of Labour Movement in West Thanjavur District:

During the kuruvai harvest of 1971, the agricultural labour union led by the CPI(M) launched struggles in Thirucherali area of Kumbakonam taluk. The landlords brought the police to counter the agitation. Because the struggle was launched for the first time in those areas there was a certain amount of fear and apprehension among the labourers. Finally, the daily wages for harvest was increased by 4 litres per day. Again during the kuruvai harvest of 1972 struggle was launched demanding 6 litres of paddy per kalam of paddy harvested. Again an agreement was reached wherein the daily wages for harvest were increased by another 4 litres. The landlords were willing to increase the daily wages but refused to give share of the harvest as wages, as was prevalent in East Thanjavur. Again during the Samba harvest struggles were launched, with Keeramur as the centre, demanding harvest wages of 6 litres of paddy per kalam. After a prolonged struggle, agreement was reached wherein the landlords agreed to give 5/2

litres of paddy per kalam of paddy harvested. Keeranur agreement was the first agreement in Kumbakonam taluk wherein the landlords agreed to give share of the produce as harvest wages instead of a daily wage. The keeranur agreement helped in spreading the agricultural labour unions in Kumbakonam taluk. Following the Keeranur agreement struggles were launched in Paruthicheri and Annanthirucheri villages wherein the labourers got $5\frac{1}{2}$ litres of paddy per kalam of paddy as harvest wages.⁷³

On July 9, 1972, the agricultural labour union led by the CPI(M) held a special conference of agricultural labourers for Thanjavur taluk alone at Thirukkattupalli, in order to extend the labour movement in the taluk. The conference decided to launch an agitation for higher wages with Kandamangalam as the base. Following the struggle an agreement was reached in the presence of Tashildar wherein the wages were raised from Rs.2.50 to Rs.3.50 for men and from Rs.1.50 to Rs.2.75 for women. Later on, the wage

73. Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union Led by CPI(M), Nagappattinam, August 1973, pp.23-24.

agreement arrived at Kandamangalam formed the basis of a wage agreement arrived at a tripartite conference for the whole of West Thanjavur. Following the Kandamangalam Wage Agreement, struggles took place at Punganur, Budaloor, Kovilpathu, Nachiar-patti, Kodarempatti, Kangeyampatti, Vilvarayan-patti, and Varagur villages of Thanjavur taluk.⁷⁴ Again in 1973 struggles were launched in Mullikudi and Marneri villages.

Wage Struggles in East Tanjore District:

Since the Fair Wages Act of 1969 was coming to an end on August 3, 1972, the agricultural labour unions demanded an ordinance fixing higher wages for the entire district. The wages demanded were 7 litres of paddy and Rs.2/- cash wages for men during the cultivation season and 6 litres of paddy and one rupee cash for women. Struggles were started in several villages from July 25, onwards. Arrests of labourers started from July 28 onwards. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu promised another enquiry commission but just before the act was to lapse on

74. Ibid., pp.22-23.

August 1, 1972 hurriedly got the act extended through a governor's ordinance without any revision. The agricultural labour unions led by both CPI and CPI(M) launched an indefinite strike from August 4, 1972. On August 4, 1972 a token strike condemning the ordinance was launched wherein 2 lakh workers struck work in the entire district. The agricultural labour unions announced that they would not allow the implementation of the ordinance at any cost. They started indefinite strikes in villages where agreements were not reached with landlords for higher wages and also resorted to picketing the fields wherever imported labour was sought to be used. Agreements were reached in many villages. In places where picketing was done the police arrested the labourers - 447 in Nagapattinam taluk; 139 in Nannilam taluk; 163 in Thiruthurai-poondi taluk; 14 in Mannargudi taluk; 13 in Mayuram taluk-were arrested respectively totalling 856 persons. All 856 were kept in Trichy central jail.⁷⁵

75. On August 4, the entire harijan labourers including women of Kothangudi village were arrested by the police and were taken to Thiruthurai-poondi. Later only the women were released.

On August 9, the agricultural labour unions submitted a petition also to the District Collector which stated that the unions will not accept the ordinance without a wage revision and requested him to take necessary steps. Finally on August 13, 1972, a tripartite meeting was held at Thanjavur which was presided over by the District Collector K.A. Nambiar and the agriculture minister Mannai Narayanaswamy was also present. An agreement was reached wherein it was agreed upon that only those landlords who were giving full payment in cash will have to pay 70 paise extra for men and 20 paise for women every day. However, those paying both in cash and kind will give the same as before. A significant aspect of the struggle was that for the first time the District Collector gave an award for wages covering the entire West Thanjavur district. The award specified the wages of Rs.3.50 for men and Rs.2.25 for women which was decided on the basis of an earlier agreement arrived at in Kandamangalam. Regarding harvest wages it was agreed that the existing rate of 6 litres of paddy for every kalam of paddy harvested during that harvest period and that a wage commission would be appointed which would give its recommendations before the next harvest period. The collector also

agreed to unconditionally withdraw all cases against the 856 labourers languishing in jail and release them.⁷⁶ Immediately after the tripartite agreement the unions launched struggles in villages where the landlords were refusing to implement the agreement. Thus in Veepathangudi village of Nannilam taluk the landlords under the leadership of one Kuppuswamy Pillai refused to implement the agreement wages and denied employment to local labour. When the matter was referred to the tashildar, the landlords refused to oblige to the tashildar also. Finally the agricultural labour union gathered a large posse of labourers and prevented the imported labour from cultivating. The landlords then threatened to leave the fields fallow in order to deny employment to local labour. The labour union leaders G. Veeraiyan, P.S. Danushkodi and M. Natagajan went on a hunger strike from September 16, 1972 in front of Kuppuswamy Pillai's house. Every day labourers began to come in procession from all parts of Nagapattinam taluk to Veppathangudi village. The officials began arresting of the labourers. Finally on

76. Ibid., pp.71-72.

September 18, 1972 Kuppuswamy Pillai signed an agreement accepting the Thanjavur wage agreement and giving employment to local labour. The officials also agreed to withdraw all cases unconditionally. Only then the hunger strike was withdrawn.⁷⁷

A struggle was launched at Vedaranyam sub-taluk area towards the end of 1972 since no wage agreement or act had ever been implemented by the landlords in that area. The union launched a struggle with Ayakkaranpulam as the centre. After prolonged struggle an agreement was reached wherein the landlords raised the daily wages from 6 litres of paddy to 12 litres of paddy for men and from 4 litres of paddy to 6 litres of paddy for women. This agreement led not only to the spread of the union in Vedaranyam area but also resulted in the tobacco cultivating peasants of that area to organise themselves into an union. A similar struggle took place at Karimangalam also.⁷⁸

77. Ibid., pp.25-26.

78. Ibid., pp.24-25.

In December 1972 the government appointed a committee headed by Karthikeyan to go into the revision of wages for agricultural labourers in Tamil Nadu as a whole. However East Thanjavur was excluded from the purview of the committee on the plea that wages were already high in those areas. Moreover no one was nominated from the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M). When the committee visited Thanjavur, the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) boycotted the committee. However, later the union replied to a questionnaire, sent by the committee to the district union, along with a protest note.⁷⁹ The agricultural labour union led by CPI was represented in the Committee itself by A.K. Subbaish a prominent state level leader of the Union. The State leadership of the agricultural labour union led by CPI prepared a memorandum demanding daily wages of Rs.5 for men and Rs.3 for women in irrigated areas, and Rs.4 for men and Rs.2.50 for women in dryland areas. The memorandum also demanded a daily wage of Rs.7 for ploughing with cattle owned by the laborer himself and an increase of 25 per cent for harvest wages.

79. Ibid., p.27.

When the Committee visited Thanjavur, the union submitted mass memoranda preceeded by demonstrations of agricultural labourers.⁸⁰ However, the Karthikeyan Committee unanimously recommended only a daily-wage of Rs.3 for men and Rs.1.75 for women for all operations except harvest. It also made a category of non-adult and recommended a minimum wage of Rs.1.25. For ploughing with bullocks and ploughs owned by the labourer himself it recommended Rs.5.50. For harvesting it recommended Rs.3225 from men and Rs.2.25 for women. These were less than the wages accepted in the tripartite agreement reached for West Thanjavur in Thanjavur on August 13, 1972.⁸¹

A.K. Subbaiah, the State leader of the agricultural labour union led by CPI signed in the Committee reports, which had even rejected the recommendations of the National Labour Commission regarding wages as well as the memoranda submitted

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80. General Secretary's Report, Third Conference of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, Maduranthagam, June 1974, pp.12-13.
81. Karthikeyan, V., Report of the Committee for Revision of Minimum Wages for Agricultural Workers, (Tamil Nadu; Government of Tamil Nadu, 1973), p.39.

by the union, without giving an alternative minority report or registering any protest. After the publication of the report a press release was given by the state secretary of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI censuring it. Pamphlets were also printed and distributed in several districts regarding this.⁸²

Again a tripartite conference was presided over by the District Collector K.A. Nambiar on July 1, 1973. The agricultural labour unions at the outset demanded that wages should be fixed for the entire district and not for East Thanjavur alone. The collector agreed to the demand and assured that he would hold another tripartite conference shortly for West Thanjavur. In the tripartite discussions held on July 1, 1973 the landlords agreed to give only a wage increase of 25 paise. They also refused to raise the harvest wages and demanded that wage increase should not be demanded by the unions till the next wage commission. The agricultural labour unions led by CPI agreed to the demands whereas the

82. General Secretary's Report, Third Conference of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, June 1974, p.13.

union led by CPI(M) refused to agree to the demands and staged a walk out.⁸³

Following the walkout, the agricultural labour union launched struggles for higher wages. The significance of the struggles were that till then struggles, arrests and cases used to precede tripartite conferences where as in that year struggles, arrests and cases followed the tripartite conference. Agreements were reached in many villages wherein harvest wages for women were raised from 5 litres to 6 litres of paddy. In these struggles more than 700 were arrested. In Thevoor when a general body meeting was taking place, the Union was holding its Nineth District Conference. Immediately after the conference a delegation met the agriculture minister regarding the release of the arrested but with no results. Only by carrying out court cases the Union secured the release of the arrested. Thevoor labourers were detained in Trichy jail for 72 days and the rest were detained for more than 60 days. The court cases went on for ten months. The labourers not only lost employment opportunities

83. Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.29.

during harvest time for two months but also had to go courts frequently.⁸⁴

Finally in 1974 another tripartite conference was held at Thanjavur and presided over by the District Collector Mr. Ramadoss. In that conference an agreement was reached wherein the wages were 6 litres of paddy and a cash of Rs.2.75 or Rs.6.00 in cash for men, and 5 litres of paddy and cash of Rs.1.50 or Rs.4.00 in cash for women. It was also agreed that harvest wages would remain the same. The government also appointed V. Kathikeyan as one man Commission to go into the question of wages in East Thanjavur district. Later the Commission recommended the same wages as was agreed upon in the tripartite conference held in Thanjavur on February 22, 1974. Sreenivasan Commission of Enquiry was appointed to go into revision of wages in Tamil Nadu including West Thanjavur and excluding East Thanjavur. The Commission recommended a daily wage of Rs.5 for men and Rs.2.75 for women. The government accepted the recommendations of both the Commission

84. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), Thiruvarur, August, 1978, pp.10-11; Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp.29-30.

and incorporated in the Minimum Wages Act through an amendment in 1975.⁸⁵

By the beginning of the cultivation season in 1978, both the agricultural labour unions demanded a tripartite conference to decide a wage increase since the wages have not been increased for 4 years after the 1974 agreement. The district collector convened a tripartite conference on June 28, 1978 at Thanjavur. The agricultural labour union led by CPI demanded 6 litres of paddy along with a cash of Rs.4 or a full cash payment of Rs.7.30 for men, and 5 litres of paddy alongwith a cash of Rs.2.50 or a full cash payment of Rs.5.30 for women. It did not demand any rise in harvest wages. The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) demanded an equal wage of Rs.8 for both men and women and a harvest wage of one-seventh of the produce. However the tripartite conference failed because the landlords refused to concede any wage increase. Immediately on July 3, 1978 both the agricultural labour unions jointly launched agitations at 12 centres, in front of the offices of the Revenue Divisional Officers,

85. G. Veeraiyan, Vivasaya Iyakkathin Veera Varalaru, op.cit., p.68.

demanding the intervention of the State government. Nearly 21,064 persons participated in the demonstration. The government appointed Mr. Ramachander, IAS as one man Commission to enquire into the wages.⁸⁶

The agricultural labour unions demanded that despite the Commission, wage increase should be given for the on going cultivation season. Both the agricultural labour union held talks to carry out joint actions regarding the wage issue. The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) suggested that the demand of debt-relief to poor peasants should be included in the proposed one day token strike as a mark of solidarity with the poor peasants and to delineate themselves from the ongoing peasant agitation led by landlords and rich peasants. However, the agricultural labour union led by CPI refused to include this demand since it had already given its support to the ongoing agitation. Hence the talks for joint action failed. However, they finally agreed to hold a token strike on the same day but each with their own set of demands. Hence on August 16, 1976 a token strike was carried out

86. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District, Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, Kumbakonam, 1981, p.5.

in the whole of Thanjavur district wherein 7 lakh labourers struck work. On the same day the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) Government declared an interim wage rise of 50 paise for East Thanjavur.⁸⁷

The Ramachander Commission visited Mayuram, Thiruvarur and Thiruthuraiipoondi on 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1971 respectively. In all these places both the agricultural labour unions mobilised people to present themselves before the Commission with their wage demands. They also demanded uniform wages throughout Thanjavur district. The labour union led by CPI demanded daily wages of 6 litres of paddy along with a cash payment of Rs.4 for men and 5 litres of paddy along with a cash payment of Rs.2.50 for cultivating operations and a harvest wage of one-eighth of the produce.⁸⁸ The labour union led by CPI(M) demanded equal wage of 8 litres of paddy along with a cash payment of Rs.3.50 or a full cash payment of Rs.8 for both men and women for cultivating operations. It demanded a harvest wage of

87. Ibid., pp.5-6.

88. Ibid., p.6.

one-seventh of the produce.⁸⁹ On February 25, 1979, based on the recommendations of the Ramachander Commission, the Tamil Nadu Government announced the following wages.⁹⁰

- (a) For cultivating operations from June to September a daily wage of 7 litres of paddy along with a cash payment of Rs.2.80 or a full cash payment of Rs.7.20 for men; for women a daily wage of 6 litres of paddy along with a cash of Rs.1.80 or a full cash payment of Rs.5.60; Non-adults would get 4 litres and Rs.1.50 in cash or Rs.4.00.
- (b) During the off-season period of October to May for other works, for operations done by men the wage would be Rs.6.60 per day, and for operations done by women the wage would be Rs.5.00 per day; non-adults would be paid Rs.3.60 during this period.
- (c) Harvest wages would be 6 litres of paddy for every kalam of paddy harvested or one-ninth of the produce.

The agricultural labour unions opposed different wages for different seasons and demanded uniform wages throughout the year. Finally on November 5, 1979 the government announced uniform wages throughout the year. However 14 landlords obtained a

89. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), Nannilam, 1981, p.7.

90. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, Kumbakonam, 1981, p.6.

court stay order against the operations of the wage-raise. Both the labour unions launched struggles in all taluks in East Thanjavur and secured wage rise as announced by the government from the very same landlords who had obtained the court-stay order.⁹¹

Similarly after prolonged agitations the Tamil Nadu government appointed a three member commission headed by K. Diraviyam in September, 1978 to enquire into the wages in West Thanjavur district and the whole of Tamil Nadu. Both the unions demanded uniform wages throughout the district and submitted petitions to the Commission apart from giving evidence before the Commission. The government delayed the publication of the Diraviyam Commission Report. Only after struggles launched by both the unions including a state-wide agitation on July 30, 1979, the government accepted the recommendations and passed the fair wages act on September 15, 1979. The wages announced by the act were a daily wage of Rs.7.00 for men and Rs.5.00 for women for

91. Ibid., p.7.

cultivating operations and a harvest wage of one-eighth of the produce or Rs.7.00 daily wage. The agricultural labour union led by CPI launched struggles for the implementation of the act in Thanjavur, Thiruvaiyaru, Papanasam, Valengaiman and Orathanad regions.⁹² The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched struggles in Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Pattukkottai, Papanasam and Orathanad regions.⁹³ On November 26, 1979 district-wide demonstration was held in front of the district collector's office by the union led by CPI in which 1,500 participated. After these struggles strict orders were passed by the government to the officials to implement the Act.

The Tamil Nadu government passed orders on September 5, 1980 under the Fair Wages Act which raised the cash wages by 60 paise for East Thanjavur district alone. Both the unions launched struggles in villages where the Fair Wages Act was not implemented. Apart from that both the union jointly held

92. Idem.

93. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.8.

processions, demonstrations and public meetings on July 12, 1980 at Thiruvarur and on July 20, 1980 at Thanjavur demanding implementation of the Act throughout the district in all villages. At Thiruvarur 4,000 participated in the demonstration and procession, and 10,000 attended the public meeting.⁹⁴ At Tanjore 3,000 participated in the procession and public meeting. In both these demonstrations, other political parties such as AIADMK, Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and Gandhi Kamaraj National Congress (GKNC) also participated.

Thus the agricultural labour unions led by both CPI and CPI(M) have launched several struggles over the years which resulted in several wage agreements despite the unwillingness of the landlords and the government to increase the wages every time.

During the period 1976-1980 the agricultural labour unions led by CPI launched struggles in several villages for higher wages. Some of the important struggles launched were the following.⁹⁵

94. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, p.3.

95. Ibid., pp.11-12.

1. Thiruvarur Taluk: Thiruvaiyaru township, Avikkarai and Vilangudi.
2. Thanjavur taluk: Thanjavur township, Nidar Alangudi, Kondsamvattam Thidal, Edakkudi, Kavalur.
3. Kumbakonam: Kaaval koodam, Aathikulam, Innambur and Sunderaperumal koil.
4. Papanasam Taluk: Poondi, Alathur, and Ghandhavenam.
5. Valangimen area: Kottaiyur, Serigalathur, Ammapettai and Saliangalam.
6. Nidamangalam area: Arichapuram and Kalecheri.
7. Thiruvarur taluk: Kivalur area and Nimeli.
8. Nannilam Taluk: Selvapuram, Neikkuppam, Thirukkennapuram.
9. Muthupettai: Ediyar and Udaiyai region.
10. Kotturdivision: Peruvaidaimaruthur, Puthagaram.
11. Sirkali: Perumthottam area.
12. Periakottai near Madukkur and Kallimedu in Thalaignayar area.

During the period 1973 to 1978 the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched the following wage struggles at the local level in the following places.⁹⁶

96. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp. 13-15.

1. In Nadukkaveri village of Thanjavur division it launched struggles and in a tripartite conference held at Thanjavur secured a wage increase from Rs.4.00 to Rs.5.50 for men and from Rs.2.50 to Rs.4.00 for women.
2. In Budaloor it secured a wage increase for women from Rs.3.75 to Rs.3.85.
3. In Valengaiman of Papanasam division it secured a wage increase from Rs.3.00 and Rs.3.50 to Rs.5.50 for labourers who were till then with I.K and DMK.
4. It secured wage increases in Saranatham, Vedambur and Devanancheri.
5. In Akkur of Mayuram taluk it launched struggle for 83 days and secured wage increase.
6. In several villages in Nannilam taluk it secured wage increase of 50 paise and raised the wages to Rs.6.50 for men and Rs.4.50 for women.
7. In Nagapattinam taluk in several villages it secured a wage of Rs.7.00 for men and Rs.5.00 for women by a wage raise Re.1/-.

Between 1978 and 1980 the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched the following struggles at local level.⁹⁷

97. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp.13-15.

1. It launched struggles for employment of local labour at Vepathangudi wherein 135 persons including 10 women were arrested. Finally the local labour was employed.
2. It launched struggles in several villages of Mayuram, Tanjore and Thiruvaiyaru divisions.
3. In Thiruthuraipoondi it launched agitations for the transfer of kisan tashildar who was favouring landlords in not implementing the minimum wages act and succeeded.

Struggles for Land:

The agricultural labour unions led by CPI and CPI(M) conducted struggles for government waste lands benami lands and surplus land held by landlords in violation of the land ceiling act.

Struggles Launched by the Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M) for Tenancy Rights to Temple and Trust Lands as well as for Surplus Lands Acquired Under the Ceiling Act

(1) Struggles Launched Between 1971-1973:⁹⁸

(a) In Kallapuliur village of Kumbakonam taluk, the Manali Educational Trust had 33 acres and 78 cent of land under the cultivation of Manali

98. Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp.30-36.

Ramakrishna Mudaliar. The labour union secured the cultivation of these lands for 35 labourers. However, some influential DMK persons got their names published in the Gazette as the tenants of the trust lands by petitioning to the official-in-charge of registering the tenants. The matter was taken to court and for two years the lands were left fallow. By the various steps taken by the union including meeting of the agriculture minister, the court gave the orders in favour of the original tenants.

(b) In Nannilam Taluk, the entire lands of the Thirukkottaram temple were under the cultivation of a single tenant. The Union launched struggle demanding that these lands should be distributed to landless labour for cultivation. Finally through an agreement with the temple executive and the tenant, the union secured 34 acres of land for 17 landless labourers.

(c) In 1972 in Thirunattiathangudi of Mannargudi taluk, the union launched struggle demanding 42 acres of the temple lands for cultivation by the landless labourers. Nearly 59 persons were

arrested for attempting to cultivate the lands. The union won the criminal case also. Finally, the union secured the lands through an agreement with the temple authorities and had made all the landless labour of the village cultivate the lands collectively.

(d) In Parapanur of Nageppatinam taluk the union launched struggles and secured 30 acres of land belonging to Thirukkannapuram temple for 22 landless labourers.

(e) In Valivalam the union launched a prolonged struggle. The landlord of Valivalam, who had created several trusts to circumvent the ceiling act, had also got 272 acres of his trust lands registered under the cultivation of 45 benami cultivators, whereas he was cultivating the lands. Due to some differences with the landlord some of the DMK Ministers, with the help of Sarvodaya activists, attempted to make 9 of 45 benami cultivators to stake claim for the lands. Having failed in this attempt, the Sarvodaya activists in consultation with the officials made 300 persons living in the surrounding villages to petition the officials for registering them as

tenants claiming that they had been cultivating the lands. The union led by CPI(M) declared that it would cultivate the lands with landless labourers of the Valivalam village since both the landlord and Sarvodaya were attempting to get the lands under benami tenancy. The landlord immediately entered into an agreement with the union wherein he agreed to give 2 acres for each of the original benami cultivators of the village, $1\frac{3}{4}$ acres for each pannaiyal apart from a compensation of Rs. 150 and 1 acre each for the daily labourers. Thus, the landlord agreed to give 240 acres for 211 persons. On hearing this the Sarvodaya and DMK opposed the move. The officials declared prohibiting stay orders presenting any one from entering the fields. 45 persons including the Secretary of the District Kisan Sabha led by CPI(M) V.K. Muthuswamy and N. Vadivel, Valivalam branch secretary of CPI(M) were arrested for violating the prohibitory orders and entering the fields. The union also got a stay order from the High Court against the prohibitory orders and started the cultivating operations. Finally, an agreement was reached at the initiative of the district collector. One acre was given to each of the 20 members of Sarvodaya and 2 acres each for the 9

benami cultivators who had joined Sarvodaya. Thus the union agreed to give 38 acres for 29 persons from Sarvodaya. The union also secured an additional 38 acres from the landlord in compensation for the lands given to Sarvodaya. Moreover 24 pennaiyals got a compensation of Rs.150 each for the first time from the Valivalam landlord.

(f) Struggles were launched for surplus lands under ceiling act in Madapuram, Veppathangudi, Meenambanallur, Adamangalam and Kizhayur.

Struggles Launched Between 1973-1978:⁹⁹

(a) In Neikkuppai the Union led by CPI(M) launched an unsuccessful struggle for distribution of surplus land acquired under the ceiling act to landless labourers. However, the lands were registered under benami cultivators.

(b) Struggles were launched in Agaramathur for benami trust lands and succeeded partially.

99. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Tanjore District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp.17-19.

(c) In Kulikkarai struggles were launched by attempting forcible cultivation of waste lands under the illegal possession of the landlord.

(d) In Vilamal village an unsuccessful struggle for 2 months was launched to get temple lands that were under benami cultivation wherein all the labourers of the village were arrested.

(e) In Namachivayapuram the union enabled 60 landless labourers to purchase lands sold by the Valivalam landlord. They also secured the cultivation of 50 acres of land to 90 labourers when the seed farm of the village was dissolved.

(f) Struggles for benami lands were carried out in Thirukkuvalai, Meenambanallur, and Karappidagai.

(g) In Mannargudi taluk the union secured lands for 60 persons in Karruppur which were kept under benami possession and for 16 persons in Sothiriyam village.

(h) In Ezhugundan and Pullamangalam the union secured the cultivation of Mosque lands for the local labourers.

Struggles launched Between 1978-1981:¹⁰⁰

(a) The agricultural labour union by launching struggles for benami lands secured 11 acres in Mannargudi, 153 acres in Nagappattinam, 10 acres in Thiruthuraipoondi, 15 acres in Nannilem, and 15 acres in Vedaranyam.

(b) The Union by launching struggles for surplus lands secured lands for 65 persons in Kodavasal and 52 persons in Mayuram.

Struggles launched by the Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI for Government Waste Lands, Surplus Lands, Temple and Trust Lands:

(a) As part of its nation wide programme the Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI conducted land occupation struggle in Thanjavur district on August 15, 1970. On that day the labourers led by the leaders marched to 9 big farm lands and planted red flags. On August 14, itself, the police carried out preventive arrests in Tanjavur.

100. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.15.

At Thiruthuraipoondi 10,000 participated defying the police and prohibitory orders. At Vedapathimangalam N.K. Krishnan led 35 volunteers and planted the red flag. At Valivalem two batches planted red flags at Desikar's farm outwitting the police. The enraged police made a mild lathi charge. A third batch was prevented from planting the red flag and arrested. Police arrested volunteers from 6 more farms, those of Nedumbalam Mudaliar, Poondi Vandayar, Ukkadai Thevar, Umayalpathi, Kummiyur and Sreenivasa Iyengar. On August 15, more than 1,800 were arrested in Thanjavur district.¹⁰¹ The arrested were detained in Vellore central jail till their release on September 1, 1970.

(b) In Muthupettai area 200 persons ploughed 237 acres of swamp waste lands in Chattirakadu village. All of them were arrested and later released under the efforts of the Members of the Legislative Assembly belonging to CPI.¹⁰²

101. Parakkal, Paurly V., "Despite DMK Repression Tremendous Success in Tamil Nadu", New Age, 23 August, 1980.

102. General Secretary's Report, Second Conference of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, Mannargudi, 1972, p.3.

(c) In Manali village at Thiruthurai Poondi taluk wage struggle against a big landlord transformed into an agitation for benami lands.

(d) At Jambavanodi, Kandiakkadu agitation for rights over forest lands were launched.

(e) At Kallimedu of Talainayiru agitation for waste lands was carried out.

Apart from these struggles the agricultural labour unions led by CPI and CPI(M) have also continuously launched struggles against caste repression and for conferment of house-sites for labourers.

Solidarity Struggles on Demands of Other Sections of Society:

In 1972 the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched struggles in support of the demands of the District Kisan Sabha, which demanded writing off of rent arrears of poor tenants and withdrawal of court cases pending against them, in order to express the solidarity of the labourers with the poor peasants. In the first week of January 1972, the union carried out hunger strike in front of the

revenue courts. Next it also carried out agitations in the fields. In Thevoor it helped the tenants to complete the harvesting of their crops despite the attempts by the temple authorities to prevent the harvesting. In Uthirangudi it gathered a large posse of labourers and there by prevented the eviction of tenants by officials even after a revenue court order. Finally the government wrote off all revenue arrears from tenants till 1970.¹⁰³

The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) had launched struggles for the demands of small landlords on demands such as procurement of paddy at rates fixed by the government, proper irrigation facilities, proper drainage facilities, adequate supply of fertilisers and water during periods of scarcity and fair price for sugar cane and ground nut.

In June 1972 when the landlords and rich peasants launched agitations in the name of peasants the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched

103. Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp. 10-11.

an agitation on the demands of reduction of electricity charges for those owning lands upto 5 acres, debt relief for those holding land upto 10 acres, fair prices for agricultural produce and judicial enquiry for those who died in the police firing on July 12, 1972. In the entire district it launched demonstrations at 10 places and public meetings at 6 places. Again on July 10, 1972 as a second stage it conducted one day hunger strike at 8 places in which 545 persons including 10 women participated. From August 20, 1972, for three days it carried on picketing at 6 Revenue Divisional Headquarters wherein 290 persons were arrested.¹⁰⁴

In 1971 the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) gave support to the silk-weavers agitation for a wage-commission. In March 1972 the agricultural labour union went on a one day token strike demanding the reopening of the Coimbatore Cotton Mills, employment to the unemployed labourers and compensation to the mill workers. Similarly it launched demonstrations

104. Ibid., pp.12-14.

in support of Simson Workers' strike in 1972, Primary School Teachers' Strike in 1972, and Graduate Teachers Strike during 1972.

In 1974 the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) launched struggles in support of the Railway Workers' Strike, by carrying out one day token strike and demonstration at 10 places. One person died in picketing of trains run by blacklegs. Similarly it conducted demonstrations in support of the Nagapattinam Rolling Mill Workers' Strike. The agricultural labour union participated in the procession held by the Kisan Sabha on January 27, 1979 and March 9, 1979. It also participated in the agitation launched by the Kisan Sabha on May 22, 1979 demanding the dissolving of the Vedapathimangalam State Farm.

The agricultural labour union led by CPI had also launched several struggles to express solidarity with struggles of other sections of society. In June 1972 it participated in the peasant agitations that took place in Tamil Nadu. On October 13, 1978

105. Ibid., pp.14-17.

it participated in one day bandh condemning the high handedness of the government in dealing with the strike of T.I. Cycle Workers in Madras. It also participated in the picketing agitation carried out to protest against the anti-people policies of the State and Central Government from August 7, 1978 to August 17, 1978. The union also participated in the picketing carried on by the Kisan Sabha from September 1, 1980 to September 3, 1980 demanding adequate procurement price for paddy in front of Central and State Government offices, wherein more than 1,000 were arrested. On October 6, 1980 it participated in the hunger strike against bus fare hike in the State wherein 500 participated.

Membership and Organization of the Agricultural Labour Unions:

The Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union ever since its formation in 1956 was directly affiliated to the Tamil Nadu State Kisan Sabha only. Even after the split in the Communist Party and the agricultural labour union, the respective agricultural labour unions led by CPI and CPI(M) were affiliated to their respective State Kisan Sabhas. In

1968, the CPI formed an All India organisation of agricultural labour unions known as Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union, which held its first conference at Moga in 1968. Following the conference a meeting of the Tamil Nadu State representatives was held on December 22, 1969 wherein a State unit of the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union was sought to be established and an organising committee was formed. The meeting also decided to affiliate the various district agricultural labour unions directly to the State unit of the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union. Following this decision, the Tanjore district agricultural labour union was affiliated in 1969 to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union.¹⁰⁶

The agricultural labour union led by the CPI had a membership of 32,229 in 1968 at the time of Moga conference of the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union.¹⁰⁷

106. Report of the General Secretary, First Conference of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI, Chidambaram, 1970, p.5.

107. General Secretary's Report, Second Conference of the Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union, Mannargudi 1972, p.28.

In 1973 it had a membership of 45,000.¹⁰⁸ In 1981 the union reportedly had a membership of 60,000.¹⁰⁹ In 1973, the District Agricultural Labour Union had under its fold 33 regional unions, parallel to the 33 Panchayat unions in the district. Under these regional unions were the village level unions. A minimum membership of 50 was required to form a village union. Every such village union had a president, Secretary and a small committee. Meetings of the union were held on new-moon nights wherein discussions on the programmes and activities of the organisation were held. Some inter-personal quarrels among the members were also settled at these meetings.

Covering about 20 village unions was the next higher level of organisation (Block Agricultural Labourers Union). The block level union co-ordinated the activities of the village unions within its area. The activities of the various block level unions were coordinated by the District agricultural labour union with the help of district committee. The

108. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Unions in South India, op.cit., p.50.

109. Interview with M. Kathamuthu.

office bearers and district committee members were elected at every district conference, to which delegates from every village union, at the rate of one delegate for every 100 members, attended. The district committee in turn sent delegates to the Tamil Nadu State Conference at the rate of one delegate for 500 members.¹¹⁰ In the Fourth State Conference held at Cuddalore during 8-9 May 1976, 80 delegates from Thanjavur attended the conference. Hence in 1976 the membership of the Thanjavur District Agricultural labour union would have been 40,000 in 1976. In 1980 the union had only 27 regional unions and in the regional conferences 2,546 delegates participated in all including 256 women.¹¹¹ The Tenth Conference report mentions the non-functioning of taluk committee, regional committee and village level committees.

The Tanjore District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M) were affiliated to the Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha directly until 1981. In 1981 the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labour Union was formed and the

110. Alexander, K.C., Peasant Organisations in South India, op.cit., pp.106-107.

111. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by the CPI, p.13.

Tanjore District Agricultural Labour Union was affiliated to it. The Union had a membership of 20,000 in 1964 and 34,000 in 1967.¹¹² The union had a membership of 34,800 in 1970; 33,061 in 1971 and 38,435 in 1972.¹¹³ The membership of the union increased from 38,310 in 1973 to 43,044 in 1974.¹¹⁴ The membership declined to 35,793 in 1975 and further down to 29,190 in 1976.¹¹⁵ These two years the membership declined as the union leaders were virtually underground since it was suppressed during Emergency. Again in 1977 the membership shot upto 39,868.¹¹⁶ The membership of the union was 56,838 in 1978, 57,803 in 1979 and 57,682 in 1980.¹¹⁷

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112. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Union in South India, op.cit., p.31.
113. Secretary's Report, Ninth District Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.58.
114. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.27.
115. Ibid., p.115.
116. Idem.
117. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), pp.16-17.

In the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M), the village unions constituted of a minimum of 50 members. The village unions had every month a one meeting. Every year a taluk conference was held wherein office bearers at the taluk level and a taluk committee were elected. At the time of Nineth Conference out of the 12 taluks except in two taluks, viz., Arantangi and Pattukkottai, the union had a strong base. In all these ten taluks regional conferences were held. However, the taluk committees were not functioning effectively. Hence regional committees were also formed. There were 47 regional committees in Nagapattinam taluk; 27 in Nannilam taluk, 14 in Mayavaram taluk, 19 in Thiruthuraipoondi taluk, 14 in Papanasam taluk, and 7 in Kumbakonam taluk totalling 128 regional committees in the district.¹¹⁸ The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) had 8 taluk committees in 1973, 10 in 1978 and 17 in 1981. However the conference reports mention the ineffective functioning of taluk committees, which functioned

118. Secretary's Report, Nineth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.58.

as appendages of the district committee and also the non-functioning of regional and village level committees. The membership at each taluk from 1971 to 1981 of the agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) is given in the appendix.

The agricultural labour union led by CPI(M) had between August 1, 1973 to August 10, 1978 an income of Rs.1,03,792.02 out of which fund collection amounted to Rs.80,202.72 and membership subscription for 5 years amounted to Rs.18,619.90. Out of this Rs.70,760.00 was spent on family assistance given to full time activists of the union.¹¹⁹ Between August 20, 1978 and May 20, 1981, the union had an income of Rs.1,10,438.48 of which Rs.1,00,829.35 were by way of donation and subscription.¹²⁰

Organization of Agricultural Labourers by other Political Parties:

Other political parties like Dravida Kazhagam (DK), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), All India

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119. Secretary's Report, Tenth Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), p.28.
120. Secretary's Report, Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M), op.cit., p.

Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), and Congress have also organised agricultural labourers in their own unions or under Kisan Sabhas. But most of these organising were done when they were in government in order to have a base among agricultural labourers as well as secure votes.

Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam:

The Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam was formed in 1952 following the decision of the Dravida Kazhagam to organise agricultural labourers. The Dravida kazhagam considered that the main problems of agricultural labourers arose not from their economic backwardness but from their lower caste status and therefore, the attention of a labour union should be towards removing caste discrimination practised by the Mirasadars most of whom were brahmins. In Thanjavur the Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam was first organised at Nagammalar Pedipagam, Nagapattinam taluk, in 1952. The membership of the union was open to all non-Brahmins above 10 years. The leadership of the union claimed a membership of 40,000 in 1973, but however, scholars have expressed doubt

about the membership figures.¹²¹ The union seldom took initiative to start agitations for enhancing wages.

Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Munnetra Sangam:

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam which came to lead the State Government in 1967, attempted to organise the agricultural labourers from 1970 onwards and formed the Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Munnetra Sangam in 1971. A branch of this union was started at Agarakadambagnur in Nagapattinam. In 1973 the union claimed a membership of 4,000 in Thanjavur district.¹²² As a policy the union was opposed to labourers resorting to strikes to achieve their demands as such since it considered that strikes affected adversely agricultural production. It favoured settlement of disputes through negotiations. This policy was followed since DMK had formed the government then. However, ironically the DMK government instituted tripartite negotiations only after bitter struggles led by the agricultural labour unions led by the communist parties.¹²³

121. Alexander, K.C., Agricultural Labourers Union in South India, op.cit., p.32.

122. Idem.

123. Ibid., p.33.

Anna Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Munnetra
Kazhagam:

After the split of the DMK into DMK and AIADMK, the AIADMK formed the Anna Dravida Vivasaya Thozhilalar Munnetra Kazhagam in May 1973.¹²⁴ However, the policies pursued by this union were also the same as its parent body.

124. Idem.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER - VIICONCLUSIONThe Changes in Agrarian Relations During the Pre-Independence Period

The Ryotwari system, introduced by the British merely reinforced landlordism since it was grafted on to the mirasi system wherein private property rights and absentee landlordism had already developed. The introduction of alienable rights over land lead to the development of a market in land, thereby leading to alienation of land held by poor ryots as the revenue assessment increased to higher levels. The lands held by poor peasants were transferred to landlords and money-lenders in return for the debts. Thus monopoly over land was accentuated by the Ryotwari system. Moreover by the process of alienation of land, a large mass of peasants who held lands of their own were transformed into landless tenants or still worse into landless labourers.

During the British period, the tenants who had permanent rights over cultivation of the lands were gradually converted into tenants-at-will with no rights over land by the lifting of the ban on

outside labour (porakudi) cultivating the lands. The share of the tenants remained unchanged despite the worsening conditions of the tenants aggravated by the increasing revenue assessments which were passed on to the shoulders of the tenants by the landlords. As a result the tenants were invariably in debt either to the landlord or money-lender. In a majority of cases the landlord himself was the money-lender. The conversion of revenue payment in kind to revenue payment in cash initiated the monetisation of the village economy wherein the transactions within the village were till then only in terms of grain.

Although the British put an end to what they termed as forms of slavery, wherein they put an end to buying and selling of pannaiyals or transfer of pannaiyal along with land from one landlord to another, the traditional forms of bondage of the pannaiyal system endured and was only partially transformed. Thus the pannaiyal system wherein a body of labourers in bondage supplying the labour was typical of the agrarian relations in Thanjavur.

In the pre-independence period the landlord class was the basic source of exploitation of the peasantry in the countryside, although the British provided the mainspring of exploitation of the labouring peasants. The landlord class directly determined the oppressive living and working conditions of the peasantry. Hence to the working peasantry and particularly the pannaiyals the immediate oppressors were the big mirasdars.

The increased monetisation of the village economy, the increased production for market, the deterioration of the living conditions of the peasants and pannaiyals, the changes in the relationship between the large landlords on the one hand and the cultivators and labourers who worked on the ~~other~~ hand and the entry of outside revolutionary leadership such as the Communist Party willing to invest organisational efforts all these contributed to the emergence of a strong peasant and agricultural labour movement in Thanjavur district in the 1940s. Thus in Thanjavur district during the 1940s, the three pre-requisites cited by Migdal for the institutionalization of a sustained peasant participation in

a revolutionary movement such as: (1) a peasantry that has been driven to increased outside participation, (2) an economic network full of shortcomings and injustices, and (3) an outside revolutionary leadership willing and able to invest organisational effort to build a new network of economic and political institutions to challenge the old, existed.

The Impact of Land Reforms on Agrarian Relations:

The Madras Estates (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act enacted in 1948 and which came into force in 1951 in Thanjavur involving 20% of the lands in Thanjavur under Zamindari and inamdari tenures, also did not result in doing away with landlordism or even ending land monopoly in a few hands. The legal provisions did not aim so much at abolishing the intermediary, as in preserving his dominant position, provided he undertook to change his form of domination, from indirect cultivation through tenants to direct cultivation through hired labour. Under the Act the landlords were allowed to keep large areas with themselves by calling it personally cultivated lands (Pannai), evicting the tenants in the process and then claim full ownership right on it.

The implementation of the land ceiling laws also did not break down the concentration of lands in the hands of small section of landlords. The ceiling levels were very high initially and being on an individual basis permitted fictitious partitioning and transfers resorted to by landlords to retain their land monopoly. The exemptions provided for retention of land monopoly. At best a section of the landlords who were leasing out lands to tenants were made to resort to direct cultivation with the help of pannaiyals on wage labourers. The extent of land taken over by the government under the ceiling provisions had been very little and only a very small proportion of this has been distributed to the landless. Thus the ceiling laws also did not satisfy the land hunger of the landless peasants and labourers.

The Thanjavur Tenants and Pannaiyals Protection Act, which was passed only after a prolonged struggle of the peasants and agricultural labourers mainly to pacify the struggling masses, did not provide security to a vast majority of tenants who were evicted prior to December 1, 1950 and pannaiyals

who were evicted prior to March 1, 1952, when their organisation was under ban and heavy repression had been let loose on these sections by the government in the name of maintaining law and order and also by the landlords. Even those who were given protection under the Act were also evicted in large numbers because of the complicated and elaborate procedures given under 2, 3 and 4 of section 12 of the Act which had to be completed within a short period of one week by the illiterate tenants and pannaiyals, and the unfavourable attitude of village karnams and tashildars. Thus the Act did give protection to a majority of tenants and pannaiyals.

The other land reform laws aimed at providing security of tenure did not provide security to a vast majority of tenants, who constituted the majority of poor peasants, since they were having oral leases which were not given protection under the law. Even in the case of those poor peasants who had written leases and given protection, a majority were converted into oral tenants or shifted from larger holdings to smaller holdings. Only a minority of middle peasants and rich peasants, who had hired lands to augment to lands hold by them, were able to

secure benefits from these laws since they only were in a position to withstand a prolonged legal battle and repay arrears of rent. Only a section of these rich peasants were able to purchase ownership rights by being able to pay the compensation.

The Fair Rent Act, also did not benefit a majority of tenants who were on oral leases, apart from fixing higher rents which were higher than those recommended by the Land Revenue Reforms Committee itself. Even in the case of latter increases, the rents were not reduced to the levels demanded by the organised peasant movement. However a majority of tenants were unable to secure the fair rents prescribed by the law because of the presence of a vast army of landless ever willing to cultivate lands at lower rates on oral leases. Even in the case of those who were able to get higher shares, the increase in incomes were off set by the increase in cost of cultivation. Moreover legal redressals took a long period which a majority of tenants could not afford.

The Fair Wages Acts and various other measures taken by the Government from time to time also fixed wages lower than that demanded by the organised

agricultural labour movement, despite the findings of government commissions themselves that the labourers were not getting living wages.

The experience of land reforms that have been initiated and the struggles that have preceded these reform measures draws the conclusion that even half hearted land reform measures were undertaken only under pressure from the organised struggles of the oppressed classes.

The Revenue Courts, did not provide relief to the tenants as the officials in many cases sided with landlords. Even in the case of denial of fair wages, the establishment of conciliation officers or special tashildars did not provide much relief as these officials were more in favour of landlords. It is also a fact that in many villages of Thanjavur itself the wages continue to be below the minimum wages prescribed. All these facts draws the conclusion that no implementation machinery will be effective unless the predominant element in it is the people who are supposed to benefit from the law.

Thus during the post-independence period a large number of peasants and pannaiyals were trans-

formed into mere wage-labourers. On the other hand the landlords preserved their land monopoly and a section of them were transformed into capitalist landlords by the impetus provided by the programmes such as IALP. The net effect of the land reforms on the labouring poor, so far, has been to perpetuate the old semi-feudal forms of bonded and attached labour on an increasingly monetised basis.

The anti-landlord thrust of the Movement:

The organised struggles, launched under the initiative and leadership of the Kisan Sabha (Vivasaya Sangam), from its early beginnings declared its fundamental demand as 'Land to the tiller' and the abolition of the parasitic class of landlords. However struggles were launched only on the partial demands of the peasants and agricultural labourers viz., higher share of the produce for tenants, abolition of pannaiyal system, increase in wages of agricultural labourers and pannaiyals, cultivation rights over waste lands and removal of social oppression. This conscious organisation of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers roused a conscious

attack from the landlord class, which was reflected in the violent incidents that took place during the struggles of 1946, 1948-50, 1964 and 1972.

The Emergence of an Independent Organisation of the
of the Agricultural Labour;

The swelling of the ranks of the agricultural labour, by the transformation of tenants and pannaiyals to mere wage-labourers, led to the predominance of a distinct class of wage labourers in Thanjavur district, which in turn brought forward the issue of wages and employment to the forefront of the agrarian movement. The agricultural labourers had also gained certain amount of political consciousness by their participation in the earlier struggles. Within the Kisan Sabha, the adventurist actions taken during the period of militant struggles had also made a good number of peasants to leave the Kisan Sabha. Also a large number of erstwhile peasants and pannaiyals had become agricultural labourers. Thus within the Kisan Sabha a majority of members were agricultural labourers and out of these a majority were harijans. This also made the peasants belonging to other castes feel diffi-

cult to join the Kisan Sabha. More over frictions arose between labourers and peasants during discussions. A combination of all these factors prompted the leaders of the Kisan Sabha to form an independent organisation for agricultural labourers.

Despite the formation of an independent organisation of agricultural labour not many struggles were conducted in Thanjavur district on the separate demands of the agricultural labour till 1964. This was more due to ambiguity on the part of the leadership regarding launching of struggles for the agricultural labour as well as the inner struggles that took place both within the Kisan Sabha and the Communist Party at the national level.

The Repression by landlords leading to intensified struggles during 1964-69

The description of the struggles that took place in Kovilpathu and Kilvenmani point to the fact that the root of the problem was the determined efforts of the landlords to put down the emergence of the new, fearless, politically aware

agricultural labourer and his militantly organised union. It was not just the meagre wage rise which the landlords were attempting to suppress or the struggles were not one of clashes between local labour and imported labour as was made out to be by the officials and the press at that time.

The agricultural labour movement and the role of other sections of peasantry

In Thanjavur, despite oppressive living conditions created by the landlords, a large proportion of the poor peasants who came from castes which identified strongly with caste Hindus in separation from untouchables were inhibited from participating in the movement with the more militant harijans by the barrier of caste. Thus in many cases, the denial of employment to the militant harijan labourers had been successfully carried out by the landlords with the employment of caste-Hindu labourers by mobilising them on caste-lines. They were also able to mobilise the caste-hindu labourers on the promises of giving land for cultivation. Moreover the demand for higher harvest wages affected to a certain extent the relationship between

rich and middle peasants on the one hand and the agricultural labour on the other hand, as they also employed the agricultural labour for harvesting since harvesting had to be carried out in a short period of time. This helped the landlords to mobilise them against the labourers. Moreover these rich peasants and middle peasants were also able to mobilise the poor peasants linked to them with caste-ties in favour of the landlords. This brings forward the conclusion that the agricultural labor movement in order to make significant advances has to build unity among these sections, by supporting their demands.

The agricultural labour unions by and large have waged only wage struggles and have not made serious efforts to launch struggles for distribution of the lands of the landlords, which will not only satisfy the landhunger of the landless and raise their consciousness but will also bring the poor peasants closer to the agricultural labour movement.

The struggles launched by the agricultural labour unions in solidarity with the Kisan Sabha

agitations on the demands of poor and middle peasants were aimed at gaining sympathy of these sections for their struggles and build closer unity among them in the struggle against the oppressing classes. The exemption of tractors used by the small land holders during the anti-tractor agitation was also an attempt to win the support of these sections.

The membership of the agricultural labour unions have also grown over the years. However their strength compared to the growth of agricultural labour class indicates stagnation. The main reasons for this relative stagnation has been because of lack of growth in West Thanjavur district, and the failure to get the support of caste-Hindu labourers and other sections of the peasantry. The barrier of caste has played an important role in this too.

The organised struggles have raised the political awareness and consciousness of the labourers. These struggles have transformed the agricultural labour into a class for itself. The actual wages have also gone up during these years several fold

compared to the stagnation in wages for decades, during the period before the agricultural labourers were organised. However the increase in wages have been offset by reduction in the period of employment and the rise in prices of commodities. Thus the living conditions of the agricultural labourers have not changed considerably. However the success of the movement has to be judged by considering the fact that in the absence of the movement, the wages would have been much lower than what they are getting as is the case in villages in Thanjavur itself where they are not organised and in other parts of Tamil Nadu as well.

Finally it is a fact that only the Communist Parties have organised the agricultural labourers in their own class organisation, mobilised them along class lines and have succeeded in giving class consciousness to them. Other political parties viz., the Congress, DMK and AIADMK have mobilised agricultural labourers only to gain a secure vote bank for their electoral victories and have also used these organisations to legitimise their agrarian policies favouring the landlords when they were in the Government. This is substantiated by the fact that they did not initiate

even negotiations between landlords and agricultural labourers when they were in government unless vigorous struggles demanding negotiation took place. They always considered these struggles as a law and order problem. The DK supported struggle against Brahmin landlords but in cases of struggles against non-brahmin landlords, it supported the landlords as against the struggling agricultural labours. In many a struggles they participated only in negotiations and not in actual struggles. Even when they participated in negotiations, they demanded and agreed to lower wages than those demanded by the agricultural labour union led by Communist parties.

The differences that exist between the Communist Parties regarding the assessment of the impact of land reforms and the class alliances that were to be achieved and aimed at, were also reflected in the activities of the agricultural labour unions led by these parties. Sometimes these differences led to these unions to oppose each other as well. In recent years attempts have been made to bring both these unions closer to each other and launch joint struggles.

At the micro-level one cannot find differences between the functioning of these unions in terms of issues raised, since both were launching only wage struggles. Only on broader issues such as attitude towards other political parties, their government and policies differences persisted. These differences could be perceived only by the different slogans raised by these unions during their struggles, as well as some of the token struggles such as one day strike, demonstrations, launched by them.

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APPENDIX - I

Table showing the Membership figures at the Taluk Level of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union Led by CPI(M) - 1970-80.

Sl. No.	Name of the Taluk	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
1.	Nagappatinam	18,478	14,974	16,424	15,384	18,761	17,155	14,374	16,563	13,143	13,310	12,156
2.	Nannilam	05,619	06,569	08,282	09,034	10,172	07,539	05,918	07,975	10,252	09,857	03,795
3.	Thiruvarur	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	09,653	09,390	09,614
4.	Thiruthurai- poondi	01,636	02,928	03,491	03,150	03,963	03,008	02,991	08,368	09,331	09,147	07,360
5.	Mayuram	03,120	03,538	04,545	04,694	05,380	03,485	02,517	03,033	06,020	06,299	07,305
6.	Mannarkudi	03,980	03,686	03,185	03,084	02,758	02,446	02,399	02,849	03,619	03,802	04,061
7.	Thanjavur	00,647	---	01,006	01,294	01,269	01,301	00,522	00,251	01,592	02,281	01,294
8.	Pattukottai	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	00,902	01,306	01,184
9.	Kumbakonam	00,421	---	00,395	00,474	00,411	00,339	00,213	00,181	00,889	00,649	00,565
10.	Papanasam	00,899	01,081	01,116	01,012	00,330	00,520	00,256	00,553	00,697	00,616	00,605
11.	Sirkazi	---	00,187	00,208	---	---	---	---	---	00,571	00,543	00,402
12.	Karaikkal	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	00,169	00,289	00,214
13.	Orathanadu	---	00,098	00,106	00,184	---	---	---	00,095	---	00,186	00,073
14.	Peravoorani	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	00,218	00,253
15.	Vedaranyam	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	02,785
16.	Kudavasal	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	04,694
17.	Thiruvaiyaru	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	01,312

Source: Secretary's Reports, Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Conference of the Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union led by CPI(M) in 1973, 1978 and 1981 respectively.

- Note :**
1. Thiruvarur had become a separate taluk only by 1977. The figures for Thiruvarur for the earlier years had been included in Nagapattinam Taluk of which it was a part.
 2. No separate figures for Sirkhazhi were available for the period 1974-77 since it had been clubbed together with Mayuram.
 3. Thiruvaiyaru, Thirunageswaram and Vedaranyam taluks were formed as separate taluks after 1978. Similarly, the sub-taluks of Kodavasal, Valangiman, Poraiyur and Nidamangalam have also been raised to full fledged taluks after 1978. Hence the separate figures are available only from 1978.
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