

**RETHINKING POPULISM AND POPULIST
POLICIES IN TAMIL NADU: AN ASSESSMENT
ON NOON-MEAL AND FREE-ELECTRICITY
SCHEMES**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, **Rethinking Populism and Populist Policies in Tamil Nadu: An Assessment on Noon-Meal and Free-Electricity Schemes** submitted by **G. Dharmarajan** in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master Of Philosophy**, is his own work, and has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

We, therefore, recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Abbreviations

AIADMK- All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam

DMK- Dravida Munnetra Kazhgam

DK- Dravida Kazhgam

TNEB- Tamil Nadu Electricity Board

M.G.R.- M.G. Ramachandran

VS- Tamilaga Vyvasayigal Sangam

TNAA- Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists' Association

MIDS- Madras Institute of Development Studies

Definition

According to the National Sample Survey's 48th Round held in 1992: —

Marginal holding farmers: less than 1.01 hectares

Small holding farmers: 1.01 to 2.00 hectares

Semi-medium holding farmers: 2.01 to 4.00 hectares

Medium holding farmers: 4.01 to 10.00 hectares

Large holding farmers: larger than 10.00 hectares

Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

“Populism, understood as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values should not be dismissed as a pathological form of politics of no interest to the political theorist, for its democratic pretensions raise important issue”¹. Populism is seen as a shadow cast by democracy itself. Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society. This significant feature in turn dictates populism’s characteristic legitimating framework, political style and mood.

The populist interest and thrust is directed not just at the political level but also on economic establishments and opinion-makers. At its root, populism is a set of ideas, which has a fundamental ambivalence about politics, especially representative politics. When politics is messy and corrupting, the involvement comes only under certain extreme circumstances. In this sense, populism seeks to avoid habitual political involvement. Populism is reluctantly political in general and overcoming their reluctance, populists engage in politics when they perceive crises. The way populists are eventually political also gives expression to their ambivalence. The involvement of populism in politics has made the

¹ Margart Canovan, “Trust the people! Populism and Two Faces of Democracy”, *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. XLVII, No.1, 1999, p. 2.

phenomenon all the more interesting. And the manifestation of this phenomenon in the developing countries has encouraged many to study the features of this type of politics.

Populism has an essentially chameleonic quality which means it always takes on the hue of the environment in which it occurs. This is not as a disguise or camouflage, because populism is always partially constituted by aspects of the environment in which it finds itself.² It can also be said that populism has primary and secondary features, and that one of its primary features is that it takes on, as a matter of course, secondary features from its context. Thus populism appears not only in different places and times but also in different forms. Populism understood in this structural sense can have different contents depending on the establishment it is mobilizing against. For example, where economic policy is concerned in a country, populists in one country with a hegemonic commitment to high taxation to fund a generous welfare state may embrace an agenda of economic liberalism. While other populists are reacting against a free market hegemony by demanding protectionism and more state provision. Still others can try another variant of populism i.e., they can construct narratives, myths and symbols to mobilize the people.

Populism understood in this structural sense shows that it has many variants to try in different places and different time. Like many other states, these populist variants are also a general

² Paul Taggart, *Populism* (New Delhi: Viva Book Publications 2002) p. 4.

feature in Tamil Nadu. Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu have tried one or the other variant of populism in the State. These parties have intertwined these ideas in politics in such a manner that it becomes very difficult to understand the phenomenon in the State. But a modest attempt is made in this work to understand the different variants of populism in the State. Populist policies that are sometime called as 'paternalist populism'³, which is an important feature of Tamil Nadu politics, is the focus of this work. While we start to think of the different variants of populism, the questions that arise are: What is populism in general and how does it manifest itself in Tamil Nadu in particular? What are the features of populism in Tamil Nadu? How did populist policies of various Dravidian government work to keep the populist orientation alive? Was there any different between the orientation of populism during the earlier and later phase of the Dravidian politics in Tamil Nadu?

These questions can be answered only by an extensive study. In part, this study attempts to answer these questions but the main thrust of the study is to understand the substantive outcomes of the populist policies in Tamil Nadu. Conceptually the historical narrative of Dravidian movement depends upon the posing of two distinct categories: 'assertive populism'⁴ and

³ Referred by Narendran Subramaniam to refer the populist policies of MGR, in *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization in Tamil Nadu*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.135

⁴ John Harris, "Successful populism" *Frontline*, Vol. 17, Issue No. 5, March 4- 17, 2000, p. 45.

'paternalist populism'. The analysis would try to show how these modes of political action have intertwined in the history of Tamil politics. The meaning of 'paternalist populism' is more or less self-evident (and it is what is often identified as 'populism' in general); the late Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), the founder of the ADMK was the very archetype of such a figure-or a party or state, promising to provide for 'the people', through subsidized wage goods and protection from repressive elites. Consequently the AIADMK rule in the 1980's brought paternalism to the fore.

The experience of the AIADMK elaborated fully for the first time the paternalist features of Dravidian populism. More than the ethnic populism staged by its predecessors that had the idea of social reform, the paternal populism of AIADMK with its variety of populist mobilization struck wide currency in Tamil Nadu. It succeeded because of its paternalist appeals and the policies it pursued upon achieving power, which in turn addressed some of the expectations raised by these appeals.

But, under 'assertive populism' however, excluded groups urge to assert themselves against the discrimination, which they have faced. This was partly manifested in Tamil Nadu by agitations over the language issue and agitations to secure entitlements to education, jobs, and other opportunities. This mode of populism strikes more than paternalist populism does: but its forms of action also mean that the groups most involved are likely to be ones with some 'social capability' in Tamil Nadu, the

intermediate castes and small property owners. But paternalist populism appeals more strongly to the 'lower strata', mainly Dalits and women, who are often unable to assert their demands independently. This 'assertive populism' of the earlier politics of the State gave way to the 'paternalistic populism'. This populist orientation to politics is kept alive by the competition between the Dravidian parties with their differing constituencies, which accounts for the sustained success of populism in Tamil Nadu.

There were several policies, which were introduced by these Dravidian parties. But, we have chosen only the *Chief Minister's Noon Meal Scheme* and *Free Electricity Scheme* for the assessment. The reason for selecting these two policies in particular is that these are diametrically opposite policies which crystallized to mobilize two different social classes in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian politics especially during the AIADMK's government tried to sideline the rural elite and tried to target the poor and women through its novel *Noon-Meal Scheme* and at the same time tried convincing the rural elite through its policy of subsidized electricity which later crystallized into *Free-Electricity Scheme* in Tamil Nadu. Thus, the assessment would consider one populist scheme (as it is generally called because of the personalized factor involved in it) that had many benefits for the people i.e noon meal scheme and the other, which had more of harmful effects than the benefits in Tamil Nadu. i.e., *Free Electricity Scheme*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To understand the concept of populism and populist policies as the extension of the concept.
- To trace the variants of populism and politics of Tamil Nadu.
- To assess the out comes of *the Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Scheme* and *Free-Electricity Scheme* in Tamil Nadu.

Chapterisation

Chapter I: Introduction to the study.

Chapter II: This chapter deals with the theoretical background of the populism and populist policies in general.

Chapter III: Populism in Tamil Nadu would be brought out in this chapter.

Chapter IV: An Evaluation of *Chief Minister's Noon- Meal Scheme* would be undertaken.

Chapter V: An assessment of *Free-Electricity Scheme* would be core of the chapter.

Chapter VI: Conclusion.

Methodology

Primary sources like government reports and budget papers would be made use to furnish necessary data. This will be supplement with secondary data books, journals, newspaper and working papers.

Chapter - II

Theoretical Background of Populism and Populist Policies

Populism is a frequently used concept in studies of party-political mobilization and related fields. It has been the subject of wordy debates about meanings and related fields. As a political tradition, populism reflects the belief that the instincts and wishes of the people provide the principal legitimate guide to political action. Populist politicians therefore make a direct appeal to the people and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears, all intermediary institutions being distrusted.¹

After having given a general description about the term, the intricacies of the meaning could not be ignored because as mentioned before, populism and its theoretical discussion becomes primary to describe certain phenomena as they had operated in Tamil Nadu.

The Concept of Populism

Populism is a complex political concept. To a large extent Populism has many of the attributes of an ideology, but not all of them. At times, it has had great resonance across the world and yet at other times it has been inconsequential. It has an essential impalpability, and conceptual slipperiness. For different sets of people it veers between having great meaning and fundamental vacuousness. But our attempt here is to bring about a general

¹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies – An Introduction* (London: McMillan Press Ltd, 1968) p. 301.

agreeable definition about the concept in order to analyse the policies brought about by a government in Tamil Nadu.

Definitions of Populism

Like the emergence of populist movements themselves, attempts to capture the essence of populism have sprung up at different times and in different places, but it is very difficult to see a consistent pattern.² Most have seen populism as specific to the context in which they are focused. The more ambitious have attempted to define populism in universal terms while others have portrayed it as variegated with no essence but with varieties. Though the populism, which we are trying to study, has its own variety, we would like to first study its similarities with other varieties of populism (for e.g.: Peron's populism in Argentina) and the universal meaning of populism.

This chapter would address those studies which have explicitly attempted to generalize about populism (universalistic or variegated) or which are explicitly contextual but implicitly generalizable, to offer a survey of the meaning it tries to make.

Edward Shils gave a contextual definition of populism when he wrote in direct reaction to the McCarthyism of the United States in the 1950s. Seeing populism as multifaceted and as permeating Nazi dictatorship in Germany and Bolshevism in Russia, Shils, suggests that 'populism' exists wherever there is an ideology of

² Paul Taggart, *Populism* (New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2002), p. 10.

popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a long established differential ruling class which is believed to have a monopoly of power, property, breeding and culture.³ For Shils, the key to understanding of populism lies in relationship between elites and masses. Populism is portrayed as deeply ambivalent in its attitude towards institutions – those of the state, universities, bureaucracy, and financial institutions. Unsurprisingly, populism therefore fundamentally distrusts those monopolizing those institutions as not only corrupt but also as lacking in wisdom. Wisdom resides in the people and, in so far as political institutions identify with – not represent – the will of the people, politics is seen as legitimate.⁴

Populism is, in its political expression is usually a short-lived phenomenon. This is because its attitude towards institutions creates a set of dilemmas for it, which makes itself self-limiting. Populism contains within itself its own limits to growth. These limits are set by the problematic relationship between populism and institutions.

Political parties are key political institutions in the process of representative politics and are thus both an object of criticism and a way of mobilizing support for populists. This can create specific problems and also illustrate a fundamental institutional dilemma

³ Edward Shils, 'The Intellectuals in the Political Development of the New States', in J.H. Kartsy (ed.), *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism* (New York: Weiley Publications, 1962), pp. 100-101.

⁴ Ibid, p. 101-103.

that faces populism. Its reaction against the institutions of representative politics is an important driving force for it, and yet, for that force to go anywhere, populism invariably has to use those institutions itself. This argument on populism holds good to describe the populist trends in Tamil Nadu since the inception of Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu. Parties are an inherent part of representative politics and so populism is predisposed to distrust them, and it is forced to use them. The dilemma posed by populism for political parties emanates from the fact that much of the initial appeal of populism is based on a critique of the politics created by the dominant political parties. As populists gain in support and momentum, they attempt to build on that support by stressing how different they are, and yet the institutional logic of representative politics, in which they operate, forces them to accept and adopt the form of the political party, which they originally critiqued. Populists successfully are forced to become that which they claim to dislike. This generalization about the populism's institutional dilemmas can be made use of to understand the growth of the Dravidian movement and subsequently as the Dravidian political parties in Tamil Nadu. Further, this institutional dilemma can be useful to understand as to how the movement against Brahmanism and Congress Party got itself institutionalized to become a party (which itself was claimed to be disliked by the movement).

Populist, Charismatic and Authoritarian Leadership:

One answer to the populist institutional dilemma is to emphasize the role of leaders. In their emphasis on leadership, populists find refuge in embodying virtue in the person of their leaders rather than explicitly tracing out what virtue it is.⁵ Just as wisdom is whatever resides in the people, so in the politics of action, the right course becomes the one that is chosen by the popular leader. The fusing of personality with principle at the level of leadership is the equivalent of reading off virtue from the residents of the heartland at the level of the movement or the people. The empty heart of populism, the lack of key values, means that it is particularly liable to the politics of personality.⁶

The leadership of many populists can be seen as charismatic. From Juan Peron in Argentina, through William Aberhart in Alberta, to M.G. Ramachandran in Tamil Nadu, (popularly known as MGR) populists have been likely to rely not only on personalized leadership but also on leadership that requires a particular type of personality: a charismatic leader. Weber, famously differentiated charismatic authority from traditional and legal-rational forms.⁷ He suggested that modern society saw the rise of legal-rational authority as the form where we can trace the legitimacy of leaders through law and institutions

⁵ A.R. Willner, *The Spell Binders: Charismatic Political Leadership* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 202-03.

⁶ Paul Taggart, op. cit, p. 101.

⁷ Anthony Giddens, *Capitalist State and Social Theory: An Analysis of the writing of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 156.

and in democracy, through the consent of the governed. Charismatic authority, unlike traditional authority, which traced legitimacy through immemorial traditions, is rooted neither in structures nor in history but in the particular personal characteristics of the leaders and the qualities ascribed to them by their followers.

There are number of points of similarity between the concepts of charismatic authority and populism. Charismatic leadership has strong similarity to religious leadership and the followers of charismatic leaders respond to their leader with devotion, awe, reverence and blind faith, in short, with emotion close to religious worships. The leaders themselves will be attributed powers that are almost superhuman and which are contrasted with the ordinariness of their followers. Similarly, populism has many echoes of religious movements and is therefore likely to use a form of authority that has echoes of religion. The moral fundamentalism of populist ideas and the often quasi-religious nature of populist movements in practice mean that populism is more likely to be drawn towards charismatic leaders.

The nature of charismatic leadership is to replace or overrule institutions and the rules with the will of the charismatic leader. This feature of populism will be considered as an important adjunct of populism in Tamil Nadu. For any populists this has obvious consequences. It means that populists do not have to

construct layers of institutions. It is their rejection of institutionalization inherent in representative politics that leads populists to mobilize, and so if they can do this in a way that avoids complex institutional structures then this suits them. The simplicity of the form of charismatic leadership fits well with the populists' predisposition towards political and institutional simplicity and directness.⁸

Charismatic authority may also arise from times of distress or hardship. Populism, as it has been tried to emphasize, appears when its adherents are overcome with a sense of crisis and of moral collapse. In this sense, both populism and charismatic leadership are justified in expedient rather than in universal terms or to put it another way, unusual times call for unusual measures or actions. The appearance of individuals with, particular personal qualities at times of crisis is likely to be viewed with great relief by their potential followers as they offer an immediate solution to a situation that is on the edge of an impending disaster.

The final similarity between charismatic leadership and populism is that they are both transitory and unstable. Charismatic leadership will tend to transform itself into other forms of authority or it will perish with the individual with which it is associated. The latter is very likely, as it is extraordinarily difficult for personalized leadership to be passed on from one individual to another (as they are obviously enough, not the same

⁸ Paul Taggart, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

person). Where populism relies on charismatic leaders, it has great difficulty in sustaining itself in the long term. Even where it does not rely on charismatic leadership or leaders, it still has difficulties in sustaining itself because of its inherent distaste for the institutionalization of politics, and yet institutionalization is one of the prerequisites – for survival of any political movement.

The structures of populist movements and parties are often highly centralized. The different experiences of the populism of

Peron⁹, Aberhart¹⁰, and Le Pen¹¹ have tended to construct around them parties placing themselves very much at the centre, in organisational and symbolic terms. This is true with the case of ADMK's rule under the leadership of MGR in Tamil Nadu. However, at times the populist leaders can be extremely intolerable of any kind of dissent. This intolerance of dissent and the populist tolerance of this intolerant is another indication of the populist rejection of politics. Populism prefers the simple solution of leadership itself over the complex process of politics to resolve problems.

Democracy and Populism

Populists seek to mobilize the electorate against established power holders and opinion-formers. On the face of it, appealing to the grassroots in this way looks like a democratic thing to do; after

⁹ Peron was populist military leader in Argentina

¹⁰ Aberhart was one of the charismatic leaders in Canada who brought the philosophy of social credit.

¹¹ Le Pen was similarly taken over this role in France.

all the referendums and popular initiatives favoured by populists are universally referred to within the literature of political science as 'direct democracy.'¹² Definitions of democracy are highly contentious, and contemporary theorists tend to shy away from talk of popular sovereignty. But it can hardly be denied that notions of popular power and popular decisions are central to democracy. Why then are populists not acknowledged as true democrats, which they say they are? How is it that they can be often seen as dangerous to democracy? Are they more dangerous indeed, in so far as they get popular support?

The most common response given to this question is that in liberal democracy, populism is dangerous because it is illiberal. On this view, what makes liberal democracy vulnerable is that the relationship between its two aspects; one is mutual necessity and a source of tension or antagonism. At the same time, as the other argument goes, populism is sometimes portrayed as almost synonymous with direct democracy. While populism has some strong association with direct democracy, but to see the two as nearly synonymous is to under play the breadth of direct democratic theory and to focus only one part of populism. Populism can be associated with direct democracy in the sense of advocating a form of politics that, as standard, uses the tools of direct democracy. Populism can also be associated with direct

¹² Margaret Canovan, "Trust the people! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy", *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 27, 1999, p. 7.

democracy, as various populist movements have found direct democratic mechanisms to be useful lightning rods for attracting attention to their goals and building up support for their movement.

Beetham, stresses that many aspects of the liberal heritage are actually fundamental to the persistence of democracy itself, among them freedom of expression and the rule of law. Nevertheless, he concedes that liberal principles also place restraints on democracy, and there is room for dispute about the precise term of the trade off between the two. Other theorists have suggested that 'populist democracy' is a version uninhibited by these liberal constraints, and given (in particular) to a crude majoritarianism that neglects or overrides the rights of the minorities.¹³

To make these arguments very clear it is noted that the use of the institutions of direct democracy does not necessary mean that direct democracy has been instituted, as they are sometimes used to supplement institutions of representative politics. Their use does not necessarily have any relationship with populism. On the other hand, the mechanism of direct democracy has been used by the populists to woo their crowd to get concurrence to their populist appeals. Though populism can be studied under liberal

¹³ R.A. Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1956) p. 46.

democracy it is not all that liberal or democratic as the 'liberal democracy' stands for.

Economic populism

This part of chapter will help to understand how the populist governments bring about policies, which are some times stated as economic populism. Here the case study of Latin America would be taken into consideration to understand the formula of economic populism in Tamil Nadu.

In Latin America, populism has meant an economic policy mix designed to mobilize political support from organized labour, the lower middle-class, and domestically oriented business. "This entails the political isolation of the rural oligarchy, foreign enterprises, and large-scale domestic industrial cities. Among the typical items in this package are budget deficits to stimulate domestic demand, nominal wage increases with price controls to effect income distribution, and exchange rate control or appreciation to cut inflation and raise wages and profits in the non-traded goods sectors"¹⁴.

The failures of those populist economic experiments are associated with both improper assumptions and the neglect of structural constraints. Neglect of the inflationary impact of the budget deficit led to rapid inflation or hyperinflation. "Neglect of international constraints led to a rapid drying up of international

¹⁴ Greskovitz Bela, "Demagogic Populism in Eastern Europe", *TELOS*, No. 103, Spring 1995, P 92.

reserves and to a quick deterioration in the trade and current account balance. Neglect of the macroeconomic constraints of large-scale income redistribution led to dramatically adverse distributive consequences. Organized labour and lower-middle-income groups, targeted as the main beneficiaries of populist redistribution, were actually much worse off after populist episode than before”¹⁵.

Why Populism?

Why then are populist economic experiments tried at all? The answer is that populist policy can lead to short term economic and political benefits. Economic populism is tempting because it does not backfire immediately. That occurs only later, when budget and current account balances deteriorates and state’s financial resources dry up. Under specific conditions, important macro-economic indicators like growth, inflation and real wages may actually improve dramatically in the short run. In other words, populist programmes may pay politically but their economic viability and their push for social mobility has to be found out to precisely gauge the benefits of any populist policies. The Latin American experience could be referred to find out the economic feasibility of the populist programme in the context of Tamil Nadu. Whether it pays politically or they really mean something for the people is a real question that begs analysis if one has to understand the intricacies of the populist programmes in Tamil

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 92.

Nadu. To make a meaningful study about the populist policies, the political economy of such programmes has to be studied.

Foundations of Populist Programmes

Modern democracy is based on the principles of adult franchise and the rule of law. Every individual who is a citizen is given a vote to choose his political representative and he/she is free to exercise his franchise without fear or favor. The system of adult franchise was introduced in India through our constitution. India of the 1950s inherited feudal vestiges originating from the institution of caste system, ownership of land and other property and, more importantly unequal educational opportunities¹⁶. All those factors were responsible for the unequal distribution of income and wealth¹⁷. The resultant social and economic inequalities created a unique feudal society in India. In other words, the social and economic structures of the society are characterised by wide inequalities. These wide inequalities also gave rise to a complex process of exploitation of one section by the other, like the landlords exploiting the landless labourers, the upper caste people exploiting the lower caste people, men exploiting women etc.

In such exploitative environment, the Constitution of India introduced democracy with equal voting power for all adult

¹⁶ See Paul Brass, *The Politics of India Since Independence* (Delhi: Cambridge university Press, 1999), p. 278

¹⁷ See Pranab Bardhan, *The Political Economy Of Development in India* (Delhi: OUP, 1990), pp. 40-53.

citizens. This was a unique event in the sense that the Indian Constitution superimposed political equality on the already existing economic and social inequalities. When this political equality was superimposed on economic and social inequalities, it sowed the seed of conflict. It was in this context that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar observed:

On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality.... We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy, which this assembly has so laboriously build up...¹⁸

The resultant conflicts were attempted to be resolved by making special provisions in the Constitution and through many amendments, creation of new institutions, government sponsored economic planning and by the contemporary strategies of populist programmes. It may be observed that populist programmes have come to be invented as a solution to the conflict of interests of different sections of the society.

Thus, populist programmes are neither good nor bad per se but will have to be judged in their right perspective of rational behaviour of political parties and voters. In fact, the very idea of government chosen by the people can itself be considered as a populist programme as compared to constitutional monarchy of

¹⁸ G. Thimmaiah, "The Political Economy of Populist Programmes", *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-March 1996, p.43.

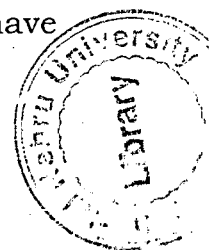
TH-11722

divine kinship. "If we leave the voters free to vote for whichever party or whoever candidate they deem appropriate, we have no right to pass judgement on voter's choice. When we concede the point that in a democracy it is perfectly fair for any political party to aim at capturing power by using any legitimate method, it would be unfair to call its election promises of proposed programmes as populist in a pejorative sense"¹⁹. To do so involves patronising value judgments. This is evident from the attempts of mass media professionals who have tried to attach a pejorative meaning to populist programmes in this country. Suddenly they have become moral trend-setters. But unfortunately, the journalists have not bothered to analyse objectively the behaviour of political parties, governments, bureaucracy and the voters. Consequently, they have failed to recognise, let alone admire, the fact that poor people have rightly become a powerful pressure group in India.

Political Economy of Indian Populist Experience

It is difficult to trace the exact origin of populist programmes in the Indian democracy. It could be said that they started since independence with the first Congress government itself. Though the government under the stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru decided to launch upon government sponsored and public sector dominated economic planning for the development of the economy, they could not ignore certain earlier commitments of the Congress party to the poorer sections of the society, like encouraging cooperatives,

¹⁹ bid. p.44.



promoting villages and cottage industries in protecting the interests of the weaker sections like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Though Mahatma Gandhi argued that we must pay more attention to rural development as a majority of the people lived in rural areas, Nehru did just the opposite. He paid more attention to industrial development through public sector enterprises and his policy was defended by most of the socialists²⁰. Even today some argue that his strategy was the appropriate one for that time, as otherwise India would have continued to remain as a Banana Republic.

But in order to satisfy hardcore Gandhians, who were in majority in the then Congress party, Nehru had to spend some money on village and cottage industries, cooperatives and the like. They are populist programmes judged in the context of big – industry oriented development strategy pursued by Nehru. But nobody called them populist programmes vis-à-vis long-term development plans of the country merely because they were all accepted by the Congress party and also advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.²¹ But then, the question arises as what is a populist programme and what is not?

Implicitly the critics of populist programmes expect that the government should spend and invest scarce funds on those long-term projects which will create assets and yield income for a long

²⁰ Paul Brass, op. cit. p. 279.

²¹ G. Timmaiah, op.cit. p. 40.

period of time to come and that income should be shared by a large number of people and not by a section as in the case of populist programmes. Thus, any responsible government should use scarce funds for building productive capacity in the economy and the fruits of such projects should be enjoyed by wider section of the people and not by small groups. In contrast, the populist programmes would only benefit particular groups and sections of the society to whom they are specifically confined by excluding others from enjoying those benefits and they are intended to attract votes for the political party which is promising these programmes. This explanation of populist programmes is taken to analyse or categorise any programme as populist. But it is very difficult to demarcate clear-cut boundary between populist programmes and long term developmental programmes. Sometimes we find that some of the long-term development programmes have degenerated into vulgar populist programmes and some of the highly criticised populist programmes have become socially beneficial to politicians and people at large. For example, indiscriminate entry of government into many economic activities, like hotels and airlines, has done more harm than good, whereas subsidised food grains distribution and noon-meal scheme has really helped the poor. In other words, populist programmes can be conceived some times as redistributive programmes in a country like India.

Populist programmes include both political and economic programmes ranging from a major programme of reservation policy

to a minor programme like *Thaali Bhagya* (free mangal sutra to newly wedded couples belonging to certain sections of the society) and *Thamizhaga Arasu Kalappu Thirumana Udhavi Thittam* (Assistance for inter-caste and inter-religious marriage).²² The political populist programmes sometimes take the shape of ideological movements like Zamindari abolition and land to the tiller. Some political populist programmes also become emotionally sensitive movements like promising to reserve major portions of the jobs for sons of the soil or demanding a separate country for a particular race (demand of Dravida Nadu by the DMK) etc.

Instead of dwelling on innumerable programmes, this work concentrates on two important populist programmes, which are economic in nature and content. With a view to provide contrasting illustrations by evaluating the beneficial as well as harmful economic effects of populist programmes, this work evaluates using the above mentioned framework a programme which has become a beneficial programme and another which has become a disastrous populist programme.

The populist programme which can be justified on economic as well as on non-economic grounds and which has benefited the poorer sections of the society is the raise *Chief Ministers Noon-meal Scheme*. In contrast, another populist programme, which has

²² See Government of Tamil Nadu, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, *Performance Budget 2002-2003*, 2002.

resulted in disastrous economic and ecological consequence, is *the Free Electricity Scheme*.

The justification for these findings and the history of populist programmes in Tamil Nadu will be focused in the ensuing chapter.

Chapter - III

Essentials of Populism in Tamil Nadu

This section of the work will attempt to present a history of populism in general and features of populism during the MGR's government in Tamil Nadu in particular. The attempt here is not to sketch a chronology of events in Dravidian politics in the state but to give a generalized picture of the ways and means in which populism manifested itself in Tamil Nadu. This study of essentials of populism will help us in getting a better understanding of the populist measures undertaken by the Dravidian parties (especially the AIADMK) and their outcomes in Tamil Nadu.

The previous chapter offers a broad framework for understanding populism in Tamil Nadu, which started with ethnic mobilization of the Dravidian parties. The usage of the word populism to denote ethnic mobilization is not to belittle the social reforms, which were brought about by these parties in the beginning. But this aims to observe the manifestation of certain features of populism right from the beginning of Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu.

The first part of this section would focus on the first variant of populism in Tamil Nadu i.e. the ethnic variant of populism. This part would precisely focus on the ethnic mobilization carried out by the Dravidian parties, which is more of a political programme or political populism when compared with the economic programme or economic populism in later phase. The second part would

examine the other variant of populism i.e. the populist and charismatic leadership in Tamil Nadu. And the final part would bring in a brief mention about the populist economic measures brought about by the Dravidian parties, especially the two programmes taken for assessment. An analysis of these two programmes would be done in the subsequent chapters.

“Populism as a whole undoubtedly intertwines with nationalism incorporating certain nationalist trends. In a sense, it constitutes a variety of numerous nationalist trends and movements, especially when a nation is equated to ‘a people’ and ‘common man’. It lays special emphasis on studying national history and culture, reassessing and, at times exaggerating the importance of traditional heritage within the system of world culture”¹. This nationalist trend of populism was the first variant to be found in Tamil Nadu.

Today the term ‘Dravidian’ usually refers to a family of languages in South India, but in first and second decades of Twentieth Century, the term—in South India atleast – had both a racial and a linguistic meaning.² It means, not simply those who spoke a Dravidian language but those who claimed to possess a common racial heritage to unite against the so-called Aryan invaders from the north, the Brahmins.

¹ V. Khorus . *Populism: Its Past, Present & Future* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990, p. 79.

² Irishik, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 275.

The work of Caldwell and Pope stimulated the Tamilians to take an interest in their own culture. A number of Tamil Associations or Sangams were established, and the most famous of which was in Madurai under the patronage of Pandi Thorai Thevar, Zamindar of Pazhavanthangal coincidental with interest in Tamil literature and language. This marked the beginning of the search into the Tamil past to disclose who was responsible for its creation and for its downfall. A logical extension of the theories first outlined by Caldwell was that Tamil culture had a separate and independent existence before the Brahmans invaded into South India. It was but a step further to the questioning of the Brahman position in modern South India being inimical to what were thought to be the real interests of the Dravidians. In the last decade of the Nineteenth Century these beliefs became a familiar topic among many of the educated non-Brahmins in to Tamil area, which was to later crystallize into 'ethnic populism' in the hands of Dravidian parties³. But with this ideology at the beginning the movement took forward the message of social reform. Thus, the emergence of national consciousness, the development of literature in the local languages and the awakened interest in the historical past were an integral part of the larger process of this 'ethnic variety of populism'

Origin of ethnic mobilization with a populist appeal:

These ideas in the early Twentieth Century became a rallying ground for a mass ethnic mobilization in the hands of the

³ Ibid, p. 282.

Dravidian leaders. The real impetus to the Dravidian ethnic mobilization did not come until the formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation popularly later known as Justice Party. This was an association for the political advancement of the non-Brahmin community that was formed in 1917.

The Justice Party was reorganized in 1944 under the guidance of Periyar E.V.Ramasamy Naicker as the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) or Dravidian Federation and, at its Salem Conference took a character of a highly militant mass organization. It was probably Periyar who made the term 'inam' (race) popular in public usage.⁴ Periyar at the same time refused to use the term 'Tamil' which defined Tamils as only those born in Tamil Nadu and Tamil speaking. That was not enough for him, what was needed was a definition based on something more basic and 'natural': biological race. Periyar with all this usage pushed the urge for social reform in Tamil Nadu. All his attacks on the caste-system, Brahmin domination and liberation of Sudhras were based on the usage of those categories (race and language). This conception of the race conceded by Periyar proved to be the starting point for the ethnic mobilization in Tamil Nadu, which was to be later appropriated by his acolytes but with a difference. This assertive populism proved to be successful by breaking the *status quo* in which the Brahmins dominated.

⁴ Dagmar Hellman-Rajanayagam, "Is there a Tamil race?" in Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South Asia* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 137.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK): A Compromise with the Ideology

Dravidian movement, a movement for cultural renaissance in Tamil Nadu came to a stand still from late 1960's. Dravida Nadu/Dravidasthan (demand for separate country for Dravidians) an ideology that spoke about the ancient Dravidian heritage, a society that was supposedly secular and egalitarian was dropped as an issue after 1962. Dravidasthan was shelved in favour of fluctuating prices.⁵ Moreover, after 1967 anti Brahmanism has had no platform, with Brahmins being ideologically reincorporated into Dravidian society as fellow members of the national community.

As did the idea of Dravida Nadu and anti-Brahmanism, the idea of anti-Hindi also later paled into insignificance. But this insignificance can be attributed to the changing political milieu. This phase can be said to be marking the beginning of populist phase in Tamil Nadu. Because the preceding stage though it invoked a vicarious past it took the message of reform with it. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that this is the stage on which MGR's variety grew which was devoid of any ideological footings.

One might think about the use of mentioning ethnic mobilization while talking about the populist policies in Tamil Nadu but it becomes quite necessary to talk about this ideological

⁵ Robert L Hardgrave, *The Dravidian Movement: till 1962* (Bombay: popular Prakashan, 1965), p. 74.

dilution, which led to the growth of economic populism in Tamil Nadu. Thus the difference within the Indian population that the Dravidian movement introduced was taken up by the political forces of nationalism, mainly in the Tamil speaking areas by the DK and DMK.⁶ This formed the first phase of reformist politics, which had some element of populism in Tamil Nadu. However, second phase was characterised by real populist mobilization that abandoned the core ideals of Dravida movement i.e., anti-elitism and social reform.

Populist and Charismatic leadership in Tamil Nadu

As mentioned in the previous chapters, it is the populist's institutional dilemma, which makes it necessary to emphasize the role of leaders. The leadership of many populists can be seen as charismatic be it C. N. Annadurai or MGR. In its emphasis on leadership, populism finds refuge in embodying virtue in the resource of leaders rather than explicitly tracing out what virtue it is. Charismatic leadership is legitimated by loyalty to an individual, a condition that can greatly concentrate power in a leader's hands rather than genuinely empower the ordinary people. Modern history offers many examples in which the cult of personality has combined with populist rhetoric. One such example in Tamil Nadu is MGR and his populist measures.

⁶ Thomas R. Trautmann, "Inventing history of India", in Daud Ali (ed) *Invoking the past: The uses of history in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 54.

With the declining ideological plank of DMK as mentioned before there appeared a disequilibrium in the politics of Tamil Nadu, in part, the equilibrium was achieved by MGR's ingenuity in constantly getting more for noon meals, jobs for Backward Castes and economic subsidies and in part by the attractiveness of his personal magic.⁷ Investing MGR with divinity is, in a sense an extension of the pre-existing political practice of the DMK. This deification of the heroes and the consequent statue cult of the DMK/ and the AIADMK only point out the limits of DMK style rationalism. Having ousted the god from his customary space the DMK and the AIADMK leaders constituted their own pantheon. MGR was the most successful constituent of this pantheon.

In the same manner, the subaltern followers of MGR attributed him with magical power.⁸ In the context of MGR being invested with magical powers and divinity, first these practices are well embedded in pre-existing culture idioms of subaltern classes in Tamil Nadu. Secondly, the political elite in Tamil Nadu often promoted such cultural practices. Though reverence can be attributed to the cultural idioms of subaltern classes, it was primarily encouraged by the political elite in Tamil Nadu. First and foremost, MGR's constructed divinity was repeatedly emphasized on the Silver Screen. His films are ostensibly about the oppression

⁷ David Washbrook, "Caste class and dominance in Tamil Nadu: Non-Brahminism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism", in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A Rao, (eds.), *Dominance and State power in Indian: Decline of Social order* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 260.

⁸ M.S.S. Pandian, *The Image Trap M.G. Ramchandran in Film and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1992), p. 131.

faced by the poor, with MGR of course, portrayed as one of them.⁹ By employing a carefully constructed system of *mise en scene*, these films celebrate the hero's subalternity and create an ambience that makes it possible for the audience to identify themselves with him. This divinity along with the subalternity elevated MGR both as a cinema star and politician in Tamil Nadu.

It was generally believed by the subalterns that in the situation of deprivation and despair, MGR could successfully enact his roles as a messiah offering the millennium both on and off the screen. The element of hope that MGR engendered through his movies was enhanced by such populist schemes like *the Noon-*

Meal Scheme for the school going children and other populist schemes during his government.

In short, MGR as an idea that mediates elite-mass politics has become an element of the subaltern common sense. And this assimilation was encouraged by the political elite and was arrived at and internalized with the pre-existing cultural practices of the subaltern classes. So far it shows that MGR as an idea in political mediation was so successful in that the subaltern classes chose to be a part of it. But, was this political mediation delinked from the objective material, economic situation of the subalterns? Or, was this mediation linked? In other words, did the subaltern classes

⁹ Ibid p 40

sustain a politics, which profited the elite? Or did they encourage a politics that was merely self-serving?

These questions emanate from a critical appraisal of MGR and his policies. However it seems pertinent for our discussion and merit careful scrutiny. Nonetheless, it is not out of place to mention the counterview that attributes the success of MGR to his personality. To describe this programme as populist or to use the phrase populist policies does not give any pejorative connotation as all the existing literature on this subject uses this phrase very often though some of these policies are pro-poor. At this juncture we do not intend to give any value judgments about the policies. Instead of taking myriad number of programmes into consideration at this juncture, this work will focus on the two important policies introduced by MGR. Vis-à-vis the Noon-Meal Scheme and the subsidized electricity supplied to the agriculture, which crystallized into free electricity during the later Karunanidhi's government.

These two populist programmes, which are economic in nature, have had wide implications on the economy health-status and school enrollment in Tamil Nadu. By examining these populist programmes, we would evaluate the programmes to find out whether it was beneficial or harmful for the people in the state. If at all it were beneficial, it becomes very important to find the section of population that benefited out these programmes. This analysis would help us in understanding the purpose and objectives of the

programme and the extent to which it brought about distributive justice and how it was brought about.

The Noon-Meal Scheme

The abandonment of dry laws in the face of fiscal burdens was widely unpopular, especially among the women and poorer groups in Tamil Nadu. To offset the damage to its paternalist image, the AIADMK government introduced a free lunch scheme in 1982.¹⁰ This free lunch scheme had come to replace the original subsidized rice scheme in Tamil Nadu. The presently operating *Noon-Meal Scheme* no doubt was obtained by then chief minister of Tamil Nadu MGR in July 1982. However, before this was introduced, an attempt was made by the Congress government headed by Kamaraj to provide noon meals for the poor children. At that time C. Subramanyam was the minister of Finance and Education and he introduced the noon meals scheme but not as a populist programme. But when M.G. Ramachandran introduced the Noon-Meal Scheme, the press pounced on it and branded it as a populist programme. A point to be noted here is that the scheme was not recommended by any nutritional survey or Planning Commission. It was a scheme entirely started on the personal initiative of MGR.¹¹

¹⁰ Narendran Subramanyam, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 135.

¹¹ G. Timmiah, "Subsidized Rice Scheme", Working Paper-29 (Bangalore: Institute for Social and Economic change, 1995), p. 34

The programme was basically a nutritional programme, which provided 1/3 rd of the nutritional requirements to the poor children. It was aimed to improve the health of the future adults and it met the basic needs of the children who were from the families below the poverty line. The objective of the programme at present is to provide a nutritious meal for the school children above five years of age studying in schools from Class I to Class X.

It also became a political programme as the scheme was designed in such a way to attract women of all castes by providing nutritious meals to the non-voting children. What is more, this scheme has created large number of employment opportunities estimated to be about 1,80,118 in 1985 for cooking, feeding and cleaning in 68,00 feeding centers. The persons preferred for jobs in these centers are the destitute and widowed women. Indirectly these employment opportunities act as a social security mechanism. It is claimed that children belonging to different castes sit together to eat and mingle. The claim that it has acted as a remover of all social barriers is a bit exaggerated. But what is more substantive is that the school attendance of the children has increased consistently as a result of this Noon-Meal Scheme and the UNESCO has acknowledged that this scheme has improved nutrition status of the children.

This programme made MGR more popular. The popularity for this programme was also brought about by the state controlled media. The state-controlled media indulged in such propaganda,

though infrequently. For example, the Tamil Nadu government's regional newsreel no. 258, produced by the state information department and compulsorily exhibited in all cinema houses, shows the Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran fondling a polio-afflicted child, which takes a morsel of the government's "*Nutritious Noon-Meal*". The narrator claims that the child after taking the free meal for a few days, was completely cured of affliction and was about to walk. The state government made 105 copies of the newsreel to be exhibited all over the state.¹² It could be recalled here that the *Noon-Meal Scheme* was personally identified with MGR.

In short, as MSS. Pandian says, these programmes had helped MGR as an idea that mediates elite politics to become an element of the subaltern commonsense¹³. It should be repeated again that the element of hope that MGR engendered in the popular mind was only enlarged through such schemes like the *Noon-Meal Scheme* for the school going children. But it should be made clear at this moment that we would not get into the problem of finding out whether this programme enhanced the person's image or to put it in other way we would attempt to find out whether it was exclusively framed to push the personal image of MGR high. We cannot brand a policy as populist by taking the above factors into account. For example, as mentioned before MSS.

¹² The Statesman, 31 October 1987.

¹³ M.S.S. Pandian, op. cit, p. 142.

Pandian has observed that 'Noon-Meal Scheme' had helped MGR to enhance his image among the subalterns, but the outcomes of the policy has been ignored at large.

But here this work would largely analyse the outcome of this policy to find whether it was a populist rhetoric like other populist schemes like loan waiver scheme introduced by the central government. Policies cannot be studied or objectively understood by just taking the motives behind the introduction of policy. Rather, it should be objectively understood by taking its outcome into consideration. To study the outcome of this scheme a proper framework would be set in the following chapter to understand the beneficial or the harmful effect of the policy. Whatever is said in this chapter about the programme is just an introduction and an elaborate study would be made in the subsequent chapter.

Free-Electricity Scheme

The scheme that was vehemently criticised during the MGR's rule was the subsidized electricity scheme given to agriculture sector, which crystallized very soon after the death of MGR as '*Free-Electricity Scheme*'. The root cause for the emergence of '*Free-Electricity Scheme*' lies very much in the policies of MGR's rule in Tamil Nadu. From 1979 onwards, the MGR government reduced the tariff on electricity supplied to the agricultural sector. The losses to the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board on account of this largesse had averaged at Rs. 150 crores annually during 1980-85 and have more than doubled over the period. In the same manner,

public irrigation facilities on which the government had invested large amounts of public funds were also provided to the agricultural sector at heavily subsidized rates. In all, the subsidy to the agricultural sector in the state added up to Rs. 200 crores every year, during MGR's rule and it benefited mostly the pump set owning rich farmers who had organized themselves into powerful lobby under the banner of the Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association and pursued their interest through the path of agitation politics'.¹⁴

The above-mentioned facts about the policy would bring in a preliminary understanding but the various harmful and beneficial effects of the policy would be taken up latter in the work. The presently existing *Free-Electricity Scheme* crystallized through a long agitation politics taken up by the Tamil Nadu Agriculturist Association and it has a long history, which will have mention in final part of the chapter.

Summarizing at a concrete level, how the state policy of promoting and subsidizing energized well irrigation in the dry areas of Tamil Nadu laid the foundation of the competitive populism.

In May-June of 1980 elections to the State Assembly was held. Since *Vyvasayigal Sangam* (Farmers Association) was now an active force, it was counted by all the major political parties and in a shrewd move MGR and the AIADMK promised to fulfill all their demand for which they had been fighting (no tax for electricity). In

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 22

the ensuing elections, the Vyvasayigal Sangam mentioned what was officially a neutral stance but amounted to a *defacto* support for the AIADMK. The AIADMK was returned to power in the Assembly elections of 1980 and not unexpectedly, almost immediately MGR began a crusade against the *Vyvasayigal Sangam*. In a clever maneuver he reduced the electricity rates for small formers and wrote off their dues, while arrears on loans taken out by big farmers were deferred. MGR accused the farmer movement of being the champion of the rich claiming that:

“The secret behind rich farmers call for non-repayment of credit and their demand for the blanket writing off of arrears was to see that the flow of institutional credit to small farmers was stopped so that they became dependent on the rich”¹⁵

After repeated pleas, it is reported that MGR was planning to waive the loans and surcharges as a Pongal gift to the farmers in January 1988, but he died in December the year before. Finally, all the political parties included in their election manifestos the promise of a complete waiver of BPSC if they are voted to power. The DMK went further, in its election manifesto wherein it promised that it would like to give free electricity to all the farmers, a promise that was also kept after the DMK came to power. Thus the farmers *Free-Electricity Scheme* got crystallized through the

¹⁵ *The Hindu*, 26th December 1980.

competitive politics being followed by the political parties (DMK, AIADMK) for which MGR gave a start.

During the 1970s, Tamil politics became increasingly populist and personalized, especially after the emergence of MGR on the political scene with his shrewd maneuvers, the farmers movement was lured into supporting the AIADMK in the elections of 1977 and 1980, only to find that they were being tricked. But at the same time this policy of MGR gave a start to the *Free-Electricity Scheme*, which laid the foundation of impending economic crisis.¹⁶ The unfolding features of this political setup had been characterized by S. Guhan in the following way:

With the split in DMK in 1972 and the ascendancy of AIADMK in 1977, partisan politics between the two formations has become extremely intense, leading to a situation of competitive populism. A strong illustration of this was the government announcement of free electricity to small farmers prior to the Assembly Elections in 1984 and the retaliatory campaign promise from DMK its main contender, of free electricity supply to all farmers¹⁷.

S. Ambirajan, in his work examines the nature, causes and consequences of the growth of subsidies in Tamil Nadu. He says that besides statistics, there is a qualitative evidence to show that the subsidy system in Tamil Nadu is wasteful, corrupt, and regressive and counter productive and the two major political

¹⁶ Staffan Lindberg, "When the wells ran dry: the tragedy of collective action among the farmers in south India" in Stigtoft Madsen, (ed.), *State, Society and the Environment in South Asia* (Richomore: Curzon, 2001), p. 259.

¹⁷ MIDS, *Tamil Nadu Economy. Performance and Issues*, (Madras: MIDS, 1988), p. 240

parties are locked in an unhealthy equilibrium of inefficient populism¹⁸.

It is an established fact, that populism has been an essential feature of Tamil Nadu but with its unique characteristics. In the first place, the Dravidian idea has been taken up as foundation for various ideological and political positions, by parties like the DK and the DMK. It is important to recognize that these uses are not caused by the Dravidian ideas as such, which has its own logic and structure, but is historically contingent interpretations of it that have varied with time and circumstances. It should also be accepted that the same Dravidian idea has been a subject of a variety of changing constructions, and the Aryan/Brahmin idea to have been, as between upper caste and dalit interpretations.¹⁹ But in particular, it seems to be obvious that the ethnic populist mobilization of the Dravidian parties had achieved its own goal and it is the case of MGR's populism through his populist programmes.

The earlier mobilization based on the vicarious past differs a lot with the populism of 1970s and 1980s during which period it came to be called as 'competitive populism'. While the earlier attempt started as an attempt to dilute the power structure of the Brahmins and social reform movement, the later one aimed at the

¹⁸ S. Ambirajan, "State Government Subsidies: The Case of Tamil Nadu", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXI, No.13, April 3, 1999, p. 811.

¹⁹ MSS.Pandian, 'Stepping Outside History?' New Dalit Writings from Tamil Nadu in Partha Chatterjee ed. *Wages of Freedom Fifty Years of the Indian Nation State* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1998) p.292-310

re-distributive strategy devoid of any ideology. The attempt has been made here to explain different aspects of populism in Tamil Nadu, which continues even today. Populism here is not only been a reaction against power structure and an ideology for reform but an appeal to a recognized authority (the people). Populists claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people. The populist claim to speak for people is far from straight forward for the form is ambiguous and populists tend to be adept at exploiting its rhetorical possibilities. But Tamil Nadu can come under this classical description, but with certain gaps it too has its own variety of populism.

Chapter - IV

Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Scheme in Tamil Nadu: An Evaluation

'Security of access to food' is one of the major socio-economic measures towards achieving a 'hungriless society' and when this security is linked with education, the emerging picture is all the more balanced and becomes a near total priority package for children. The recent rural scenario of Tamil Nadu provides ample evidence to such a massive people oriented activity viz. with the introduction of free *Noon-Meal Programme*. The resultant interlinkage and mutual supportiveness between food and educational activity for the children in and out of schools have already been established as a base for a new order and are to be considered as novel, bold and comprehensive venture with positive goals and socially desirable output.¹

The History Of the Noon-Meal Scheme

This novel *Noon-Meal Scheme* has its own history. It is not of recent origin. The scheme was at first started by Sir P. Thiyagaraya Chettyar² one of the prominent leaders of the Justice Party. He was a member of the Madras Municipality from 1882 to 1920. As a member of the Municipality, he demanded that schools should be started in Madras. Based on his request, in 1915-1916 a few

¹ The Hindu, August 27, 1982.

² For details see Navalar Nedunchezhiyan, *Thiravida Iyakka Varaloru* (History of Dravidian Movement) (Chennai: Navalar Nedunchezhiyan Kalvi Arakkattalai, 1996) p. 107.

schools were started for the Panchamas (Depressed class) and in 1921- 22 a school was started for the fishing community in Mylapore and free education was given to them. When he was the chairman of the Madras Municipality from 1920-23, he introduced the *Noon-Meal Scheme* in Madras for students belonging to poor families. He made this facility after having witnessed that the students from poor families were suffering from poverty and they tended to go to work instead of attending school. He resolved that the Madras Municipality should provide at least one square meal a day for the school going children. In response to his request, morning tiffin was given to the school children in the Thousand Lights area. The school enrollment had gone up from 3075 to 3705³ as a result of one meal a day. Again this scheme was extended to Meer Sahibpet and Sethpet. The British Government asked the Madras Municipality to stop the scheme, as it involves a huge financial expenditure. After a gap of a short period, the British Government again granted permission to continue the scheme in 1927. This scheme had facilitated children from poor families to get admissions into schools. The British Government also extended the Noon-Meal Scheme through the Labour Department for children belonging to the poor and oppressed class families.

³ M. Thangaraj, "Impact of Noon Meal Scheme on Enrollment and Retention", *Social Welfare*, Vol. 48, No. 10, January 2002, p. 15

K.Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on 13th April 1954. He continued as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu till 1st October 1963. He realized that the children of poor families could not study well, as they suffered from poverty. Then he decided to start a Mid-day meal scheme in Tamil Nadu. He created a record in Indian History as being the first person to introduce such a welfare scheme in massive level in India. At that time C.Subramanyam was the minister of Finance and Education and he introduced the Mid-day meal scheme not as a purely government financed scheme. "He persuaded the local people to provide 40% of the cost in the form of cereals, vegetables, fuel etc and the government got milk and vegetable, butter and oil from the organisation CARE of the USA. This Mid-day meal scheme was organized in almost all schools in urban areas. But the scheme did not encourage the children of poor families to attend the schools regularly. On the contrary, it was found that they dropped out before reaching fifth standard"⁴. This scheme was discontinued after sometime and the DMK Government subsidized rice scheme became prominent. It was only in 1980's that Mid-day meal scheme was revived and reformulated when M.G. Ramachandran came to power.

This programme made MGR popular and it helped to enhance the hope among the people, which has been mentioned

⁴ G. Thimmiah, "*Subsidised Rice Scheme*" Working Paper. 29, (Bangalore: Institute for Social & Economic Change, 1995), p. 34

before. While acting as a hero in the Tamil films, most of his roles were of an image building nature, such as fighting for social justice, the protector of women's rights, redistribution of wealth etc. In fact, he acted in a movie called "Annamitta Kai" which means the hand that gives food to the poor. It was stated that the *Noon-Meal Scheme* to schoolchildren was the reflection of that movie.

MGR⁶ introduced the nutritious *Noon-Meal Scheme* on 1st July 1982. Under the old scheme, introduced by K. Kamaraj, about 20 lakhs children in standards I to VIII of elementary schools were fed for 200 days in a year; this number covered only one-third of the children enrolled in all schools. The government contribution was only 10 paise per child and provision was made for a 5 paise contribution from local bodies, which in many cases were not forthcoming⁵. But the presently existing scheme which was started by MGR provided for the provision of meals on all the 365 days in a year to the children belonging to rural areas in the age group of 2-5 (Pre School Children) and 5-9 years (Primary School Children studying in classes 1-5) free of cost.⁶ Those children belonging to poor families whose parents live below the poverty line are eligible to have noon-meals. It provides for an

5 C. Brindavan Moses, "Noon Meals Scheme", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 18, No.25, January-June 1983, p. 101

6 Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme department, Demand. No.29, Social Welfare Policy Note 1999-2000, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1999. p.28.

outright grant to schools of 45 paise per child for feeding and 3 paise per child for administrative expenses (Table No-1).

On the eve of the start of the scheme, MGR had stated, "this scheme is an outcome of my experience of extreme starvation at an age when I knew only to cry when I was hungry. But for the munificence of a woman next door who extended a bowl of rice gruel to us and saved from the cruel hand of death, we would have departed this world long ago. Such merciful women folk; having great faith in me, elected me as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. To wipe the tears of these women I have taken up this project."⁷

From September 15, 1982, this scheme was further extended to all pre-primary schools in urban areas, i.e., cities and towns all over Tamil Nadu. Children in the age group 2-3 are catered by child welfare centers or *Balwadies* where a trained '*Bala Sevika*' and helpers are in charge. In recruiting Balasevakis and helpers, preferences were given to widows and destitute women. Of the total number of beneficiaries, those belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes accounted for 17.4 lakhs⁸ (13.7 per cent). For 'above fives' part time cook and one helper to assist and clean the vessels have been appointed in each primary school. The teachers in the schools at present monitor the cooking and serving of the

⁷ See Text Speech of M.G.Ramachandran, All India Radio and Television (in Tamil), 30 June 1982.

⁸ C.Brindavan Moses, op.cit. 101.

meals, where the number of beneficiaries is more than 500, provision has been made for the appointment of one more cook⁹.

From 15th January 1983 additionally about 2 lakhs of OAP's (old age pensioners) benefit from this scheme including destitute widows, physically challenged persons and agricultural labourers. The benefit of the scheme has also been extended to ex-service pensioners who receive old age pension from the Tamil Nadu Ex-servicemen Personnel Benevolent Fund. The benefit of the scheme was extended to Ex-servicemen/their widows with effect from 1st January 1984. The scheme was also extended to cover children in the age group of 10-16 years with effect from 15th September 1984¹⁰. From June 3rd 1989 one boiled egg was given once a fortnight to each child taking the nutritious noon-meal. From June 1st 1998 one boiled egg is being supplied to each child once a week. The government have now introduced a new scheme of supply of protein rich food viz., 20 gms each of boiled potato, and whole green gram at one item per day for three days a week w.e.f 1st April 2002¹¹.

⁹ C. Gopalan, (ed.) *Combating Under Nutrition- Basic Issues and Practical Approaches*, Special Publication Series-3, (Nutrition Foundation of India, 1983) p. 420.

¹⁰ Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, Demand.No.29, Social Welfare Policy Note 1999-2000, Government of Tamil Nadu. 1999, p.29

¹¹ Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, Demand.No.43, Social Welfare Policy Note 2002-2003, Government of Tamil Nadu. 1999, p.25.

Objectives Of The Noon-Meals Scheme

1. Education: The *Noon-Meal Scheme* provides pre-school education to the children of 2-5 years of age to improve the strength of school children through enrollment and attendance.
2. Health: The aim of this scheme is to remove malnutrition and improve the health status of the children. The ultimate aim is to have children with good quality of education in the future¹².
3. Education: Since this scheme covers the whole of Tamil Nadu both in the rural and urban areas, a very large number of people are employed as *Balasevikas*, *Aayas*, cooks, noon-meal organizers etc., While recruiting, preference was given to widows and destitute. This department emerged over the years as the single largest employer as compared to other departments.
4. Social: Food supply free of cost under this scheme would encourage children of different castes to mingle with each other by inter-dining and to accept food cooked by people of low castes and it was expected that this scheme would act as a forerunner of the new social order.

¹² Performance Budget 2002-2003, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2002.

After having given the history of this novel Noon-Meal Scheme, this section of the chapter would describe the outcome of this policy to find whether it was a populist rhetoric or concrete programme though introduced as a populist measure, which brought substantial change in the life of People of Tamil Nadu. It is no mean achievement to undertake the responsibility to feed lakhs of under nourished children both school going and others, spread over the nook and corner of the state all through the years. For making an empirical study about the outcome of the programme, the question posed to assess the way in which the resources were mobilized to support this nutritional programme becomes important. With this it is also important to assess the impact of this programme on the economy of the State.

Implementation of *Noon-Meal Scheme* has been facilitated by the policy on alcohol. The lifting of prohibition on alcohol consumption in Tamil Nadu, which happened in 1981, increased the states annual excise revenue on alcohol from Rs. 8.5 Crore to Rs.107.8 Crore¹³. Policy on alcohol and that on supplementary feeding are necessarily linked with the revenue from the former balancing the expenditure on the latter. It can be said that *Noon-Meal Scheme* would have been impossible without this revenue. Narendran Subramaniam has said that the Scheme itself was a handmaiden of MGR to avert the damage to his paternalistic image

¹³ See MIDS Bulletin No. 13(2), 1983, p.308.

when he removed the dry laws in the State as noted before¹⁴. But, it cannot certainly said that the former policy is the reason for the implementation of *Noon-Meal Scheme*. In fact, prohibition was lifted shortly after the AIADMK Government was returned to power (partly on a prohibitionist ticket) in 1980 because of public opinion on alcohol was no longer so crucial politically and had in any case changed in the face of police harassment, and in the face of corruption. It may also have been lifted because implementation of the conclusion of Third Pay Commission had increased the need for revenue. Nevertheless, the social distribution of taxation on liquor and of benefits from the Noon-Meal Scheme is an interesting empirical issue.¹⁵

Initially 'Chief Minister's Nutritious Noon-Meal Programme Fund' was created and donations to it were exempted from income tax. MGR raised Rs.10 crore through 'voluntary contribution' of one day's salary from government employees, one month's salary from MLA's and MP's and collection from one show of cinema houses, organizations and associations. However, there have been rumblings from various quarters with regard to the way in which funds were raised for this scheme. For instance the Tamil Nadu Temples Protection Committee has appealed to the state government to refund the Rs.75 lakhs collected from temples for

¹⁴ See Narendran Subramaniam, *Ethnicity and Populist Mobilization in Tamil Nadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). p. 135.

¹⁵ Barbara Harriss, *Child Nutrition and Poverty in South Asia: A Study of Noon Meal Scheme in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1991) p. 24

the *Noon-Meal Scheme*. On the top of that the Tamil Nadu Government issued an order, which says donations contributed for this scheme, going to the Chief Minister's Special Fund, would be outside the purview of the Auditor General's Scrutiny¹⁶. This was a dangerous precedent because the public will not have a chance to know how the donation from the public is spent.

Another criticism levelled against the scheme is that it is inflationary because about Rs.120 crore or more would be pumped into the economy. Being a social welfare scheme it is perforce 'unproductive' in nature. Paddy and vegetable prices went up since the introduction of the scheme, thanks to bulk purchases of both vegetable prices from the wholesale market, which has benefited the paddy and vegetable wholesale merchants. But then the problem is that any social welfare programme would be called 'unproductive' and hence inflationary. So, no government can shy away from such spending. Moreover, social welfare programmes like these are re-distributive strategies to bring about distributive justice in the society. It is, therefore very unfair to criticize the programme on this count. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, no such criticism can be taken as genuine if the money spent is for social welfare to create social asset or capital for the future society.

The major impact of the *Noon-Meal Scheme* has fallen upon the public grain-distribution system and state trading. The

¹⁶ C. Brindavan Moses, op.cit. p. 101.

increase in annual demand for rice from the civil supplies corporation is 93, 000 tones for pre-school feeding centers (*Balwadis*) and 140,000 tonnes for schools. Off take under the ration system is 40,000 tonnes in normal months. So *Noon-Meal Scheme* is an expansion by 50% of the obligation for grain distribution in a normal year¹⁷.

In the beginning, as described above it was treated as a non-plan scheme, the Eighth Finance Commission took into account operation costs of Food and Civil Supplies Department and also subsidy as non-plan expenditure for working out non-plan revenue deficit of the Tamil Nadu Government¹⁸. It was not of much help. Subsequently, the MGR government approached the planning commission to treat it as a plan scheme. This request was rejected. But when MGR patched up his political difference with Indira Gandhi and subsequently with Rajiv Gandhi, the Mid-day meal scheme came to be treated as a Plan Scheme. At present, as per the latest data available (2001-02), this scheme involves an expenditure of Rs.148.24 crores in rural centers and Rs.711.98 lakhs in the urban centers¹⁹.

Assessment Of the Noon-Meal Scheme

By now the history of *Noon-Meal Scheme*, the ways in which the programme was implemented and the ways in which the

¹⁷ Barbara Harris, op.cit, p.24.

¹⁸ G.Timmaiah, "The Political Economy of Populist Programmes", *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, Vol. 8, No.1, Jan-Mar, 1996,p.47.

¹⁹ Performance Budget 2002-2003, op.cit, p.2.

resources were mobilized have been studied. The programme cannot be evaluated as a whole; rather the work would make a three-stage evaluation of the programme. The first stage of evaluation would attempt to answer three important questions, namely:

- Does the program empirically fulfill its stated objective?
- Does the empirical study on the program uncover secondary or unanticipated effects that offset the program objective?
- Does the program fulfill the objectives more efficiently than alternative means available?

Here a typical verification might concern whether or not the *Noon-Meal Scheme* fulfills its goals as measured by the improvement in the nutritional status of the beneficiaries and in terms of reduction in the dropout rates from the school. The second part would examine whether or not there are some unanticipated effects that offset the programme objective and the final part would study how the *Noon-Meal Scheme* has fulfilled the objectives than other means available.

As stated before the objectives of the *Noon-Meal Scheme* are: education, health, employment and social equality. A study was conducted in 12 Feeding Centres (6 primary schools and 6 Nutrition Centres) in a village of Athoor and Reddiar Chatram Block in Dindigul Taluk of Madurai by Gandhi Gram Rural

Institute²⁰. The result of the study shows that there was a marked improvement in the after noon school attendance within a short period of six weeks of the starting of this scheme. The study also observed that this would act as a tool to reduce the social distance and as a source of employment generation. To bring out the educational impact of the *Noon-Meal Scheme* Irudaya Rajan and Jayakumar²¹ in their study in Kanyakumari District stated that *Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Scheme* definitely had an impact on attendance as observed from the school data. The report also says that the average growth rate of enrollment after the implementation of *Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Programme* clearly confirms that the enrollment has increased over the period among boys in the government-aided schools. Among the rural people, the enrollment has increased comparatively after 1982-83 academic year²². It is very difficult to come towards a definite conclusion, but impact can be clearly seen in the year following the introduction of the scheme.

Another interesting dimension in this study is the dropout rate. According to the results of the above studies the dropout rate for boys and girls has shown a sharp decline after the implementation of *Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Programme* indicating its impact on enrollment of children at schools. The dropout rate

²⁰ B.S. Nagarajan, N. Narayanasamy and R. Dhandapani, *The Noon-Meal Scheme- A Social Measure with Paediatrics Priority* (Gandhi Gram: Gandhi Gram Rural University, 1982) p. 2.

²¹ Irudaya Rajan and A. Jayakumar, "Impact of Noon-Meal Programme on Primary Education", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, October 24-31, 1992, p. 2376.

²² Ibid, p.2378

has declined much more among girls in government schools and urban schools than in all other schools as given in the appendix III.

Barbara Harriss²³ conducted a study in two villages (one prosperous and a poor village) in North Arcot District in Tamil Nadu, which shows that in the poor village 81 percent of children attended the school and 90 percent of the attendees ate the meal. In the rich village only 66 percent of the children attended the school and 62 percent of the children attendees ate the meal and of the dropouts or non-attendees, 60 percent were girls. Sen and Dreze in their work had quoted the work of Babu and Hallam which says that in some parts of India, notably Tamil Nadu and Kerala school meals and related incentives have been used with good effect to boost school attendance rates²⁴.

The second objective of the programme was to improve the nutritional and health status of the school going children. In the late 1960's USAID embarked on an extensive survey into the nutritional status of people, which seemed to indicate that on the aggregate Tamil Nadu had the lowest calories supply per capita of all the constituents states of India, the highest frequencies and intensities of poverty and "formidably problematic cultural fold behaviour"²⁵. To study how this intervention in the form of noon-meal had improved this situation it is necessary to have a look at

²³ See for details Barbara Harriss, op. cit, p. 36.

²⁴ Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 31

²⁵ Barbara Harriss, op. cit, p. 1.

meal had improved this situation it is necessary to have a look at the nutritional component of the scheme which is given in the below table.

Noon-meal Components (grams) Table No.1

Age Group	Rice	Dal	Oil	Vegetables	Cost (Rs.) of ingredient
2-4+	80	10	5	50	0.44
5-9+	100	15	5	50	0.45
OAs/Widows	200	15	7	50	0.90

Source: Times of India, December 02, 1983.

The scheme provides feeding for all the 365 days in a year. The scheme provides for the feeding of all the children in school who are below the poverty line but no child who volunteers to partake of the noon-meal would not be denied the opportunity. As shown in the above table, the scheme provides for an outright grant of 45 paise for every child as feeding charges and 5 paise for every child towards administrative expenses. Not to stop with this nutritious meal, the *Balasevikas* are also equipped to teach the children basic facts of health and hygiene. A detailed scheme for providing health cover for the pre-school children is also under operation. The scheme envisages maintenance of health cards for all the beneficiaries in the Child Welfare Center (CWC) itself. The social workers have also been trained to take and record the weight

of the children. The "Multi-purpose Health Workers" will also visit the nutritious meal centers once a fortnight²⁶.

Barbara Harriss, in her study²⁷ has noted that while a clinical examination of participants in the *Kerala Noon-Meal Scheme* and examination of controls revealed 'Marginal' benefits after 4 years. Clinical research on 3,219 children in and around Coimbatore, within the first year of *Noon-Meal Scheme*, showed a striking reduction in symptoms of disease attributable to nutritional deficiencies.

The next two objectives were ancillary one's which also needs attention, Viz., employment and social equality. This programme has generated fresh employment opportunities for 1,80,118 people in rural and urban areas in three categories, namely, nutritious meal organizers, cooks and helpers. Of the total 1,80,118 people employed, 1,58,831 are women, for every 70 to 150 pre-school children, a *balasevika* is employed at Rs.17 per month together with 2 helpers at 60 each. Per 500 children in school, a Noon-Meals Organizer (NMO) is paid Rs.150 per month. The cook receives Rs.60 per month and the helper Rs.30²⁸. This cadre had not been planned before hand. This was done by the government in response to the protests and strikes organized by schoolteachers who were initially asked to procure, prepare and distribute the

²⁶ C. Gopalan, op. cit, p. 423

²⁷ See Barbara Harriss, op. cit, p. 12

²⁸ See S. Perumalsamy, *Economic Development of TamilNadu* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd, 1990), p. 219.

meal as well as to teach²⁹. In addition there is one manager in each panchayat union and an unspecified number of senior administrators involved. Employment in this scheme is said to give preference to women, destitutes and widows. However, the necessity for the Noon-Meal Organizers and *Balasevikas* to have SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) and for the helpers to be literate in Tamil acts as a filter for the destitute and for many widows, given discrimination against girls in education.

The social objective of the scheme is that it has to make the children of different castes to mingle with each other by inter-dining and to accept food cooked by people of low castes to make the scheme act as a forerunner of the new social order is not exaggerated and overstate. The studies conducted in noon-meal centres give an encouraging result in the terms of mingling of children's belonging to various caste groups. For example, the Harriss study at Coimbatore in fact evaluates the *Noon-Meal Scheme* in very positive terms. Children belonging to all castes and communities freely eat the food cooked and served by Scheduled Caste women. With regard to pre-school children, irrespective of their caste and religion, (they) learn to move, mingle, eat play and learn together thus equipping themselves from an early age to be true citizens of India, transcending the differences and divisions: the socio-economic transformation of the under privileged is being achieved. But, there are no such examples of such behaviour in all

²⁹ C. Brindavan Moses, op. cit, p. 102

the feeding centers so it becomes difficult to generalize this result to all the centers of *Noon-Meal Scheme*.

From the above analysis of various studies made on the programme it becomes clear that the major objectives of the scheme have been fulfilled. It would not be an exaggeration if it is said that the *Noon-Meal Scheme* is one novel attempt which took education and health as its foremost objective and ended up giving more employment and strived if not wholly to create a new social order.

The only criticism mounted against the scheme's educational performance is that the Noon-meal serving primary schools get students who do not attend the school after the lunchtime. But, this criticism cannot be strengthened much farther because some exceptional cases cannot be taken into consideration to generalize about the whole scheme operating in number of feeding centers and primary schools. The scheme no doubt performed better than any other alternative available to us like the Subsidized Rice Scheme, which is in operation in states like Andhra Pradesh³⁰. The Noon-Meal Scheme in Tamil Nadu, which is also a variant of Subsidized Rice Scheme, has performed well which is evident from its positive impact on educational performance of children. The subsidized rice scheme, which became a great political programme

³⁰ G.Timmaiah, *Subsidised Rice Scheme*, Working Paper .29, (Bangalore: Institute for Social and Economic Change, 1995), p.37.

aimed at household intervention to combat hunger, which does not have any educational objective associated with it.

It should also be mentioned here that the targeted feeding scheme like the *Chief Ministers Noon-Meal Scheme* are in operation in states like Kerala and Madhya Pradesh but the review shows that their programmes are not running satisfactory. The targeted feeding scheme in operation in Kerala, which consists of a meal of 325 calories and 12-14 grams of protein, is provided in 8,926 schools to children aged 5-9 years. It is targeted for 160 days a year actually operated for between 84 and 124 days. A comparison of 1,932 participant and 1,815 non-participants showed no significant difference in growth between the two groups and was forced into conclusion that the programme had no impact³¹. The feeding scheme in Madhya Pradesh is a meal of 312-330 calories 14-19 grams of protein delivered to 10,463 schools to children aged 3 to 15. Targeted for 180 days a year it operates for 125 days on the average. The results of these schemes were also the same as the Kerala experience³².

But on several important counts the new *Noon-Meal Scheme* in Tamil Nadu is a great improvement over those programmes seen above. The calorie supplement is larger; as mentioned before it is 410 to pre-school children and 510 to schoolchildren. The age range is wide and extends to the young (if not to those at the

³¹ C. A. Soman, "The School Lunch Programme-The Kerala Experience" in Sukhate (ed.) *Newer Concept in Nutrition and their Implication for Policy* (Pune: MAAS, 1992) pp. 215-223.

³² Barbara Harriss, op.cit., p.12

critical stage for growth). The coverage over time is comprehensive and extends to all days except for national holidays. A nutritional evaluation made for UNESCO concluded that: nutritional status has improved as a result of the *Noon-Meal Scheme*³³. Therefore, it can be said that the *Noon-Meal Scheme* had a positive impact upon nutritional status and education of children compared to any other alternative scheme or other similar schemes in operation to other states.

In the second stage of evaluation, after having studied as to how the program empirically fulfilled its stated objectives, the examination would be on the situational validation of the programme i.e., the justification for introduction of the programme at a particular situation. Here, the validation would center on the following questions:

- Are the programme objectives(s) relevant to the problem situation?
- Was the Programme simply made for some political objectives, which is marked by adhocism?

While answering these questions it is important to know why many pounced on it and marked it as a populist measure? As mentioned before, the USAID's extensive survey in 1960's into the nutritional status of the people in Tamil Nadu showed that on the

³³ R. P. Devados, *The Honourable Chief Minister's Nutritious Meal Programme for Children in Tamil Nadu* (Coimbatore: Avinashilingam College of Home Science, 1983), p. 15

aggregate Tamil Nadu had the lowest calorie supply per capita of all the constituent states of India. So, this nutritional intervention by the government at both rural and urban economy was one of necessity though it was discrete creation by the political leaders. But, some critics of the programme say that it was highly personalized and visible³⁴. With respect to this programme, it has been mentioned elsewhere that it did not result from the specific 'policy advocacy' of the externally funded and technically comprehensive nutritional study, although the existence of this massive report must have contributed to recognition within the government the issue of nutrition as a 'problem'. Nor was the scheme justified in the context of estimated mal-nutrition and under-nutrition by age and sex³⁵. The scheme actually began at the personal initiative of the late Chief Minister, MGR

M.S.S. Pandian³⁶ in his work has stated that the programme was used by M.G. Ramachandran to enhance his image in the popular imagination. Some quote Periakulam By-election as the reason for the above programme. From the above arguments it seems that the situational validation for the programme was very poor³⁷. The programme was an abrupt decision of the political elite to bring in political mileage, if we take these estimates into consideration.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁵ B.S. Nagarajan and et al, op. cit, p. 4.

³⁶ M.S.S. Pandian, *The Image Trap: M G Ramachandran in Film and Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1992)

³⁷ Brindavan Moses, op.cit., 102.

Though the situational validation for the programme was poor it becomes justified by its performance and outcomes. Critics of the programme just take the personalized factor to mark it as populist rhetoric. For e.g., Pandian and Subramanian in their work made this comment just by taking the situational validation into their consideration. But an objective analysis of the programme should not make a selective interpretation of the facts. For an impartial study the outcomes of the programme should be considered as important. Though no study was made by the Tamil Nadu government before the introduction of the programme as mentioned before, a study undertaken by USAID had brought about the poor nutritional level of the people in Tamil Nadu. This fact makes the programme all the more important and the intervention, which it made at the rural and urban economy, was remarkable to increase the nutritional and educational status of the beneficiaries.

Thus, the programme was not a populist rhetoric but a concrete one which was not marked by adhocism. Analysis of the programme shows clearly that school enrollment has improved with a decrease in the drop out rates in the schools, which was the main objective of the scheme. This is a significant and a positive development. It is also worth noting at this juncture that the Committee on Agricultural Labourers³⁸ observed that the practice of employing child labour was prevalent in Tamil Nadu a few

³⁸ Government of Tamil Nadu, *Report of the Committee on Agricultural Labourers* (Chennai: Government of Tamil Nadu, 1998), p. 10

decades ago for tending cattle in medium and large farms. However such practices has become almost non-existent in recent years due to the implementation of the 'mid-day meal nutrition' scheme and improvement in school attendance. Had this scheme been marked with adhocism this would have backfired within a short time bringing in electoral loses for the party that brought in this programme. But, this scheme did not bring in any such negative effects as it happened with the DMK government, which tried bringing in many populist developmental schemes like the provision of Free Rice Scheme and the changes in electricity tariffs. These populist developmental schemes, as noted by V. Suresh³⁹ along with other changes in the components of *Noon-Meal Scheme* like the exclusion of old people and destitute women from free meals in *Noon-Meal Centers* and the reduction in quantity of 'dhal' and oil in the *Noon-Meal Centers* brought the debacle of DMK government in the 1991 assembly elections.

The last level of the analysis would look into the social vindication of the programme i.e., the basic task here is to find out how the policy goal from which the specific programme objectives were drawn addresses a valuable function for the existing societal arrangement.

- Does the policy goal have instrumental or contributive value for the society as a whole?

³⁹ V. Suresh, "The DMK Debacle; Causes and Potents", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.27, No. 42, 1992, p. 2313

- Does the policy goal result in unanticipated problems with important societal consequences?

Any scheme which are characterised as populist are most of the time introduced as redistributive measures but, most of them are either short term or they most of the time work in a opposite direction which do not give intended results. In Latin America, as discussed before, populism means an economic policy to mobilize political support from organized labour, the lower-middle class by redistributing the benefits. But because of the schemes implemented, organized labour and lower-middle-income groups, targeted as the main beneficiaries of redistribution, were actually much worse off after populist episode than before⁴⁰. Contrary to this example, the noon-meal helped in providing redistribution in the economy proving to be a great re-distributive strategy. The programme, added to all its positive effects on the younger generation also proved to be instrumental to bring about distributive justice, which is a important societal value. Justice, which is accepted by all the societies in the modern time as a universal principle has been served by this scheme. According to Rawls⁴¹, justice is achieved when or if 'the proper distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation' is achieved. Though, Rawls is particularly interested in applying his conception

⁴⁰ Bela Greskovits, "Demagogic Populism in Eastern Europe", *TELOS*, No. 103, Spring, 1995, p. 94.

⁴¹ H. Michael Lessnoff, *Political Philosophers of the Twentieth Century* (U.K.: Black Well Publishers, 1999) p. 230.

of justice to a society, which has achieved a reasonable level of wealth, this conception of justice holds good to Indian society also. If one accepts this principle of justice the programme no doubt solves the problem of justice in the society. The programme stands in consonance with the Rawlsian second principle of justice, which gives preference to the socially and economically disadvantaged. At the same time, the programme as a useful intervention to lessen the scourge of poverty did not bring about unanticipated problems, which would have had wide repercussion on the society. This societal acceptance to the programme can be confirmed through its successful running till date and the wide acceptance given by the members of the society.

Thus, '*the Noon-Meal Scheme*' which was introduced to enhance political gains and personalized power, also turned out to be a novel scheme, which improved the nutritional and educational status of children in Tamil Nadu. As the description of populist schemes shows, these policy programmes would only benefit particular groups and sections of the society to whom they are specifically intended for by excluding others from enjoying those benefits and they are intended to attract votes for the political party which is promising these programmes. If this description of populist programme is compared with the *Noon-Meal Scheme* it looks to be a populist short-term measure in the beginning but it is pro-poor which has societal validation and it is a long-term effort to make universal education as a possible goal with other auxiliary

goals. In this sense, this is a concrete attempt by the M.G. Ramachandran's Government to usher in a new society, if one does not take the personalized- political factor involved in it into account.

Chapter - V

Subsidies And Competitive Populism In Tamil Nadu – A Case Of Free-Electricity Scheme

It has been already mentioned that the *Free-Electricity Scheme* emerged as a populist measure which crystallized after a decade long struggle between the two Dravidian parties the DMK and the AIADMK to woo the farmers lobby in Tamil Nadu. As described in chapter-III, the root cause for the emergence of *Free-Electricity Scheme* lies very much in the policies of MGR's rule in Tamil Nadu. This *Free-Electricity Scheme* emerged through the competitive populism of DMK and ADMK as mentioned in the preceding chapter. However, in this chapter, the emergence of competitive populism in Tamil Nadu's political scene and the subsequent crystallization of populist measures like the *Free-Electricity Scheme* is dealt with. The second part of this chapter would study the outcome and the societal implication of the scheme.

Why does the political leadership choose just the peasantry as its "preferential group"? Are there reasons that can be attributed to it? The peasantry constitutes the most numerous and the most oppressed class in any developing society. Further, it is regarded by populism as a guardian of traditional culture.¹ This is the reason why most of the populist intelligentsia identify themselves with the peasants. This general feature of populism suits well with the description of populism in Tamil Nadu. However, how this variety of

¹ V. Khoros, "*Populism: Its Past, Presence, Present and Future*", (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1984), p. 69.

populism had its history in the State. It was through the strong farmers movement in Tamil Nadu, which led to the crystallization of such populist measures.

Farmers Movement in Tamil Nadu (1970-80s):

Mobilization and Effects:

“Unlike other parts of India, it was not the Green Revolution, which sparked off a new farmer’s movement in India. It was the ‘pump set revolution’ in the state of Tamil Nadu, which brought about such a movement. This ‘revolution’ happened in the dry areas of Tamil Nadu, beginning in Coimbatore District”.² In Tamil Nadu the pioneering farmer’s movement in the early 1970s mobilized farmers and peasants in dry areas of the state, who rely mainly on well irrigation for the cultivation of their land. This mobilization was due to the importance of wells in agriculture, which became an important source of irrigation in Tamil Nadu. Like elsewhere, in the Deccan cultivation was based upon a sustainable use of ground water available in a particular area, recharged periodically from rainfalls. The basic predicament is that wells, unlike other sources have become the leading mode of irrigation in Tamil Nadu. An important difference between surface (river and tank) irrigation and wells is that while the former are public sources in terms of ownership, maintenance and development wells are largely privately owned and operated, although the underground acquires on

² Staffan Lindberg, “When the wells ran dry: The tragedy of collective action among the farmers in South India” in Stig Toft Madsen (ed.), *State, Society and the Environment in South Asia* (Richimore: Curzon Publication, 1993), p 267

which they draw are part of the commons.³ This contradiction has sharpened with the tremendous growth of well irrigation in Tamil Nadu after independence. Large areas are electrified, institutional loans were extended to farmers through banks and common to construct or depend wells and purchase electric pump set.

With all these developments, the farmer's movement in Tamil Nadu was not mass based which sprang out of a small regional organisation, 'The northern Coimbatore Taluk Farmer's Association' formed in 1966 by farmers in two panchayat unions north of Coimbatore, is an area with a long tradition of commercial cropping and one highly dependent on well irrigation. The issue for this new farmer's movement from the beginning was the demand for the subsidised electricity.

The real impetus for the farmer's movement came in the spring of 1970 when it started to address the price of electricity and the repayment of Government loans. The immediate reason was the sudden hike in the electricity tariff, which affected a large number of farmers.⁴ In March 1970 the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board decided to increase the electricity tariff from 8 NP to 10 NP per unit of power delivered to the farmers⁵. This was the state of affairs in the post-1970 period.

³ S. Guhan, *Irrigation in Tamil Nadu: A Survey*, Working Paper (Madras: MIDS, 1984), p. 44

⁴ Ibid p 270

⁵ MIDS, *Tamil Nadu Economy: Performance and Issues* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p 246

The factors mainly responsible for the cost increases have been the increased share of thermal generation in the system; the high dependence on purchasing power and price increases that have occurred in it; administered price hikes imposed by the centre on coal, oil and freight, and increases in material and wage costs. "In 1971-85, the pooled cost of generation and purchase went up by about seven times on account of these factors. Despite coal consumption per Kwh generated in the TNEB's thermal plants being about 10 percent lower than the all India average (1985-86) the cost of per Kwh was about 50 percent higher, principally because of the freight cost which currently accounts for about 60 percent of the landed cost of coal. On the other hand, till the end of 1970-85, the thermal was unsatisfactory and line losses have continued to be high. So were wage costs, despite the fact that some effort has been made in recent years to contain and gradually reduce the staff strength. In these circumstances, tariff increases have had to be almost relied upon to meet increased costs; but tariff revisions undertaken by the board have not been satisfactory".⁶

The above-mentioned factors were the reasons for the deterioration of finances of TNEB in post 1970s. But to consistently maintain the surpluses of pre 1970s, this increase of 25% increase in the tariff was made by the Tamil Nadu Government. But this 25% increase in tariff met with strong opposition from the farmers in the dry areas of Coimbatore, which is one of the leading districts in terms

⁶ Ibid, p. 246

of the number of installation of new wells and electric pump sets since independence, second only to North Arcot District. The farmers in Coimbatore quickly formed an action committee and organized one-day hunger strike on 11 March in the towns of Coimbatore, Tirupur and Avinashi, involving around 15,000 farmers. The farmers who gathered decided not to pay the electricity bill at this new higher rate and to resist disconnection of electricity for not having paid the bills. They also demanded the deferral of loan collection from institutional sources.

With these developments on progress, the State Government struck down heavily by arresting hundreds of farmers active in the movement. The solution to the problem came a month later, after the release of several leaders of the association. There were renewed negotiations resulting in the reduction of the electricity tariff to 9 NP per unit. In the history of the farmers' movement this agitation caused the one-paisa agitation, since that was the result of the struggle.

Nearly the same scenario was repeated in 1972, but the impact of the movement was felt in several districts of the state. The State Government, led by M. Karunanidhi announced an increase in the electricity tariff from 9 to 12 NP i.e., a 33 percent hike. Again, the Coimbatore farmers responded with strong resistance. In March they published a Twelve-point Charter asking for a reduction in the electricity and variety of other demands. According to Nadkarni, the demands were as follows "remission of cooperative, Government and

private loans incurred by farmers, extension of new credit under a new credit policy, fixation of agricultural prices on the basis of cost of production and input prices etc.⁷

This time the movement was joined by opposition parties like the Congress (O) and the Communist Party of India, and all-party group under the leadership of M.N. Kumaraswamy, a Congress MLA. A variety of protests were staged and many leaders were arrested. Following this a bullock cart invasion was staged which made a strong impression on the Government and led to the release of arrested leaders and renewed talks, again without any results. Under the leadership of Narayanaswami Naidu, the leader of the farmers' movement a new all-party group was formed. Now the protests soon spread to several other districts including Tirunelveli, North Arcot and Ramanathapuram and State wide bandh was called on 5th July 1972, which attracted large number of following. After this showdown, from 13-16 July representatives of the farmers and the political parties, led by Naidu held new talks with the State Government, which ended with an agreement on most points in the charter. The electricity tariff was reduced by 1-11 paise. All the arrested persons were released and all registered court cases against farmers were withdrawn.

The protests of 1972 were a great success for the Coimbatore farmers' movement, which led to that formation of *Tamilaga Vyvasayigal Sangam* (VS), the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Association

⁷ M.V. Nadkarni, *Farmers Movement in India* (New Delhi: Allied Publications Private Limited, 1987), pp.65-66.

(TNAA), with Naidu as its president who became very popular at that time. During the state of Emergency of 1975-79, the DMK Government under Karunanidhi was dismissed in 1976 and under the Governor's rule the electricity tariff was again raised, this time from 11 to 16 NP per unit and forfeitures i.e., public auction of property of farmers who had not paid their electricity bills and co-operative dues were also announced.

But the scenario changed with the coming of Janata Party to power in the parliamentary elections. As soon as the emergency ended, the *Tamilaga Vyvasayigal Sangam* brought out a Nine point Charter of demands, again asking for a reduction in the electricity tariffs. 'Electricity is to be supplied free of cost for agriculture and electricity tariff for lift irrigation would be equal to the water rate levied in river irrigation.'⁸ This struggle, which started after emergency, was to continue till the end of the 1980s. These forceful demands of the farmers' movement at this time appeared for the state assembly elections. After assuming office, MGR, who gave some vague promises to look into the farmers' grievances, seemed deaf to the demands of the farmers. Farmer's properties, who refused to pay up their dues, were sold in auctions. This marked the beginning of intense struggle on the part of the VS. Different methods of agitation were used like no tax campaign, hunger strike, picketing of Government offices and likewise. Again the Government came down with its repressive force again and the talks with the Government did not give much for the

⁸ Staffan Lindberg, op. cit, p.273.

farmers, i.e. the talks resulted in 2 NP reduction in the electricity transit agitation continued, however, since the other demands were not met.

With the sudden collapse of the Janata Government at the centre, electoral alliances underwent a sea change during the new Lok Sabha, elections of January 1980. In May 1977, the Congress (I) and the AIADMK broke their previous alliance, and this time because of MGR's refusal to admit Mrs Gandhi as candidate to the Thanjavur bye-election and his general unreliability.⁹

Instead, in an extraordinary change of heart, the Congress (I) now allied itself with the DMK the same party whose Chief Minister and leaders it had demised and tried for corruption and incompetence in 1976, and whose members were imprisoned. The DMK in its turn now considered the emergency to have been an aberration and embraced Mrs. Gandhi, whom it had called 'a Hitler in women's garb' less than three years earlier¹⁰. The Congress (I) – DMK Front won 37 out of 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu with AIADMK and allies gaining only two seats. Subsequently the AIADMK state Government was dismissed by the Central Government. This in turn brought in a temporarily lull in the farmers movement but, the VS was satisfied with the removal of the AIADMK from power.

⁹ Kathleen Gough, *Rural Change in Southeast India – 1950s to 1980s* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), p 167

¹⁰ Ibid p.167

In the state assembly elections of May 1980, the AIADMK's platform focused on a Ten-point Plan to uplift the poor¹¹. But the AIADMK's platform had to reconcile with the VS, because it was strong force by now and it counted a lot for all the political parties contesting the election. With a clever manoeuvre AIADMK and MGR again promoted to fulfil all the demands of *Vyvasayigal Sangam*, and the latter officially maintained a neutral standard and offered support for the AIADMK. The AIADMK returned to power in the election and almost immediately MGR began a crusade against the *Vyvasayigal Sangam*. In a clever manoeuvre he reduced the electricity rates for small farmers and wrote off all their dues and loans, while arrears on loans taken out by the big farmers were deferred¹². As stated in chapter III, MGR accused the farmers' movement of being the champion of rich. Not to stop with this the State Government launched its famous operation disconnections to collect loans and dues from the farmers, failing which electricity will be disconnected and property auctioned. Again it came down heavily on the farmers' movements by making forfeitures and numerous over assets. The effect of this made the farmers pay their dues for availing themselves of some Government concessions. Finally, the farmers made a solution by entering into an agreement with the State Electricity Board. According to one plus one formula the farmers accepted to pay their dues. This move of the farmers led to the split inside the

¹¹ Ibid p 162

¹² Nadkarni, op. cit, p. 65.

movement, which led to the formation of Farmers and Toiler's Party in 20-22 May 1982.

The strength of the new party was soon to be tested by the Periakulam By- election for the Lok Sabha seat in Sep 1982. The party could secure only a less number of votes with a straight contest being between the two 'Dravidian' political parties, the AIADMK and the DMK. The AIADMK won the seat with its famous populist programme: *Noon-Meal Scheme* for all children and to restore benefits for old pensioners and destitutes.¹³ In 1984, again the Farmers and Toiler's Party contested the assembly elections with a large number of candidates but the results were again very poor. The reason for the failure of the Party could not be exactly understood, however, it can be said that the mobilization proved to be very difficult after this episode. This difficulty was further enhanced by the AIADMK's decision to provide free electricity to small farmers who owned less than 5 acres of dry land or less than 2.5 acres of wet land¹⁴. This policy naturally weakened the movement, since a large part of it's following consisted of small farmers' owning less than 5 acres of dry land.

The mid 1980s proved to be a tough period for the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB). Apart from the inadequacy of over all tariff realization, the tariff structure was not efficient in its economic rationale. It does not promote the economic use of energy amongst the consumer or in the system as a whole. Nor does it reflect the true cost

¹³ Brindavan C. Moses, "Noon Meal Schemes", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 18, January-June 1983, pp. 101-103

¹⁴ Staffan Lindberg, op. cit, p. 277.

of supply (average or marginal) to different categories of consumers, and it is inequitable. Domestic low-tension industrial and agricultural consumers were charged below cost, while the high-tension industrial and commercial consumers were charged above the cost to subsidize the other categories. Successive tariff revisions have accounted the disparate treatment of these two broad groups of consumers. "Between 1961-62 and 1983-84, the average tariff for all categories increased by 5.4 times while it went up by 8.4 times for industry, 6.2 times for commercial, 2.2 times for domestic and 1.9 times for agricultural consumers".¹⁵

To compensate this financial distress, the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board pressed for the late payment surcharge. This policy of the Tamil Nadu Government kept the various factions of farmer's movement alive. Members during this period resisted in protest and petitioned the MGR Government to issue a Government stay order in view of the 1981 agreement. After repeated pleas it is reported that MGR was planning to waive the surcharges as a Pongal gift to the farmers in January 1988, but he died in December 1987 a month before.

Soon after the death of MGR, Jayalalitha emerged as the new leader of AIADMK but soon the President rule was imposed. During this period many attempts were made to improve the finances of TNEB by the state Government. This gave the farmers a new chance to act. Representations were made to the State Governor, to high-level teams visiting the State and finally to the Prime Minister of India himself.

¹⁵ MIDS, op. cit, p. 247.

But all these attempts went in vain. Finally, before the assembly election in January 1989, all the opposition parties took up the cause of Indian farmers and Toiler's party. The DMK went further in its election manifesto and promised to give free electricity to all farmers; the promise that was also kept after the DMK came to power.

Thus the Tamil Nadu Government, especially under the leadership of MGR, handled the farmer's movement with a mixture of repression, negotiation and political manipulation. This in the end led them to give free electricity and did not rectify the past mistakes precisely because of the political situation existing during that period, especially after 1967. The promises made by the two regional parties viz. the DMK and AIADMK led to the situation of competitive populism in Tamil Nadu. But the parties continued with the mistakes done by the other and did not try to undo the mistakes of the other.

This feature of the political set up has been characterized by S. Guhan and others in the following ways "...with the split in the DMK in 1972 and the ascendancy of the AIADMK in 1977, partisan politics between the two formations has become extremely intense, leading to a situation of competitive populism. The ruling party has had to improve upon subsidies and welfare programs initiated by its predecessor in power. Subsequently its main opposition, with latter using, or being used, by various pressure groups, farmers, Government employees, teachers, traders, bus and cinema operators, the urban middle class etc to advance claims and concessions from

time to time. In this competitive and insecure environment, the political time horizon has shrunk at each stage to the on coming election. All over India, populism has been in command, but perhaps more so in Tamil Nadu because of the history and the inter-play of its three party politics".¹⁶The institutional dilemma faced by the populists is one important reason for this kind of competitive populism to crop up in Tamil Nadu. Decline of rational bureaucracy under the successive DMK and AIADMK is a typical example on account of this institutional dilemma. This dilemma had in turn created a favorable political structure for the kind of pressure generated by the farmer's movement. The success of this farmers' movement had devastating repercussions on the ecology and economy of the state.

The next part of the Chapter would take up the negative outcome of this policy on to ecology and economy of Tamil Nadu. But the final part of the Chapter would get into the general motive behind implementing such a policy' and the class basis of the beneficiaries and the societal validation of the policy.

Declining Ecology – A Parable about Tamil Nadu

In 1968, Garret Hardin proposed a particularly influential model to explain why communities may over-export shared environmental resources even where they know that they are doing so and are aware that it is against their long-term interests¹⁷. This is known as the tragedy of the commons. It is useful to introduce and explore this

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 333-334.

¹⁷ Garret Hardin, "The Tragedy of Commons", *Science*, Vol. 162, 1968, p. 1243.

notion because environmental has become an important issue which draws our attention. It illuminates a way in which environmental problems may be generated and indicates some potential responses. It also helps to introduce some of the particular challenges of tackling environmental problems. The 'tragedy of the commons', in this case is that the over-exploitation of groundwater by electrified well irrigation has led to the hydro-ecological imbalance in Tamil Nadu. The British policy towards well irrigation was liberal¹⁸. But it was since independence that a rapid exploitation of groundwater has occurred directly as the result of Government programmes and promotional policies; principally rural electrification and a highly subsidised agricultural power tariff, medium term credit for the digging of wells and purchase of pump set, a well subsidies to a limited extent.¹⁹

Table 1: Growth in Ground Water Irrigation

Year	No. of wells (in lakhs)	Net area irrigated (lakh acres)	No. of electrical
1951-52	6.34*	12.45*	5000**
1961-62	9.87	14.95	1,00,000**
1970-71	11.86	19.38	5,65,000
1978/79	16.33	26.72	8,41,000

* Excluding wells in Kanyakumari district

** Estimated

Source: The statistical Atlas of the Madras state referred in S. Guhan, "Irrigation in Tamil Nadu" (1984, p.46).

¹⁸ S. Guhan, op.cit, p.44

¹⁹ Ibid, p.44 - 45.

From the above table there is a clear indication that there has been a rapid growth in the groundwater utilisation. There can be no doubt that groundwater utilisation has literally changed the landscape of irrigation in Tamil Nadu. In the early 1960s when the potential for further growth in surface irrigation had very nearly been exhausted, thousands of wells and electric pump sets have made a notable contribution. This development had helped in increasing output coupled with a higher intensity of cropping, and in the cultivation of remunerative crops. In the process, agriculture based on well irrigation had provided more employment to agricultural labour. Pump sets had led to non-agricultural rural employment for pump operators, mechanics and maintenance personnel. It had spurred the growth of pump manufacturing and repair units. These contributions to output/employment and income have been significant and many-sided.²⁰

These good effects of 'pump set revolution' in Tamil Nadu cannot be denied. The private exploitation by numerous individual farmers of underground had however taken place in a unplanned and unregulated manner. The over all argument here is that the subsidy of private use of scarce common property resources is a perilous policy followed by the Tamil Nadu Government. The policy which enhances the over exploitation by the private uses from the aquifers is no doubt a populist policy brought about by the competitive populism of the two Dravidian parties as seen before. According to Tamil Nadu economy

²⁰ Ibid p. 47

performance and issues, "by 1985, more than a million pump set had been connected with power, the largest number in any state and accounting for about 20 percent of energized pump sets in the country. Pump set electrification, which peaked in 1965-75, has however, deaccelerated since then owing to constraints related to the availability of both power and groundwater. The large agricultural load in Tamil Nadu had not been without its social and economic costs. It has led to over exploitation of ground water, stimulated by highly subsidized tariffs, resulting in a progressive lowering of the water table, particularly in the districts of Coimbatore, Periyar, Salem and North in which pump sets are concentrated".²¹

Madduma Bandara in her study on North Arcot District has showed how as in many other areas of India, and the extraction of groundwater has played a prominent part in bringing the Green Revolution to the North Arcot District. So the demands on groundwater resources represent an important effect of recent agrarian changes.²² This study, however, makes an attempt to assess some of the important hydrological consequences of recent developments, which in turn have implications in North Arcot. To quote Bandara again: "there were thus tremendous demands on sub-surface water resources created by post-independence agricultural expansion in the district. It has throughout been a story of the

²¹ MIDS, op. cit, p. 245.

²² C. M. Madduma Bandara, "Hydrological Consequences of Agrarian Change" in B.H. Farmer (ed.), *Green Revolution? Technology and Change in Rice Growing Areas of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 323.

opening and deepening of more and more wells, which have increasingly been fitted with mechanized pump sets. Thus, the rapid changes in groundwater exploitation have taken place since Farmer (1956) wrote on this theme two decades ago. The main reason appears to be an inadequate official awareness and appreciation of the magnitude of the problem that are likely to be created by extracting sub-surface water on such a large scale".²³

Though this study on ground water exploitation was undertaken well before the crystallization of subsidized electricity and *Free-Electricity Scheme*, it very well highlights the forthcoming hydrological consequences of sub-surface water exploitation of ground water and high environmental consequences. This perilous policy due to the inadequate official awareness of the future environmental crisis, which is awaiting to show its effects one other consequence of this policy is that, it has restrained the commercial transition in ground water.²⁴

Commercial transaction in ground water has been the topic of political focus at least over the past one decade. By and large, the studies which have probed into this issue convey two important points: firstly, the emergence of trading in ground water has widened the scope to access to this precious resources across different section of the agricultural population, thereby contributing to the total agricultural production and secondly, although the ground water

²³ Ibid p 327

²⁴ S. Janakarajan, Trading in Ground Water: A Source of Power and Accumulation, MIDS Working Paper No. 123, pp. 1-5.

market has been functioning in an informal manner and although no precise estimates are available, the value of transaction involved in the trade is no smaller than any other organized agrarian markets in a given village economy. However, the steady decline of the groundwater table poses a severe constraint on the effective functioning of the market."²⁵

Athreya, Goran Dforedit and Staffan Lindberg have investigated the well irrigation system in the area around river Kaveri. According to their study, there are thorough indications that too much water is drawn in the area through the well irrigation. The official survey of ground water resources indicates that in the Manaparai Panchayat the extraction of groundwater is twice as high as the annual recharge, making for a substantial overdraft.²⁶ The group, which studied other villages, says that it may be true for Manaparai alone, but so far they have not seen the signs of any crisis. When the same group revisited these villages in 1985 the farmers did not complain of water scarcity. However, they did complain of a sinking water table, consequently drying many shallow wells. This study shows that, though there is no acute crisis at present, there might be one, if the expansion continues unstopped i.e. on the initiative of individual farmers, without any overall plan for the utilization of ground water resources. Thus this

²⁵ Ibid, p. 1.

²⁶ Venkatesh Athreya, Goran Djurfeld and Staffan Lindberg, *Barriers Broken. Production Relations and Agrarian Change in Tamil Nadu* (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1990), p. 69.

argument shows that the policy of free electricity has brought this acute environmental crisis.

Fiscal Politics in Tamil Nadu

The above analysis and critique of state policy of free electricity has been in terms of the environmental consequences brought about the policy. But, the present section of the Chapter make some comments on the negative consequences of the limitations brought about by the politics of subsidies on the performance of TNEB. This part of the chapter will also bring to the light the fiscal politics as it has unfolded in Tamil Nadu during this period (i.e., 1972-89).

During 1972-89, which is the period of this analysis, Tamil Nadu has been successively governed by two political parties, viz., DMK (upto 1977) and the AIADMK (mid-1977 onwards) except for two interludes of President's rule (early 1976-mid 1977 and part of 1980). Under all these dispensations, what can be referred to, as the 'agriculturists' lobby has been consistently successful in perpetuating or obtaining low taxes, highly concessional power tariff, subsidies on agricultural inputs, loan write-off and in edging up paddy procurement prices. But, the main of the study here is to find out the ill effects of subsidies, which ended up as Free-Electricity Scheme on the finances of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board.

The subject of subsidies has become highly controversial in recent years, while superficially 'subsidy' appears simple enough, any analysis of its philosophy, politics, economics and measurement

bristles with difficulties. It is agreed that spending on public or collective goods that are made available to all and indeed to one could be excluded from receiving benefit from them. Both equity and efficiency considerations required state intervention.²⁷ While the former aims at re-distributing wealth and income to bring about an equitable society, the latter relates to the head for preventing distortions that emerge as a result of externalities. The concern here is to discuss the subject of equity and efficiency which policies claim that they bring about.

The question here is that, how efficient was the policy of State Government's Free-Electricity Scheme? And, did the policy bring about equity? In the preceding part the present study had discussed in detail as to how the agricultural tariff enjoyed a favorable treatment from State Government, which led to the declining position of finance in Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB). Agriculture tariffs in Tamil Nadu are amongst the lowest in the country while the industrial tariffs are among the highest. The supply of electricity is totally free for small farmers in Tamil Nadu, while the tariff for larger farmers is heavily subsidized, so the policy of free electricity benefits the rich farmers. The agricultural tariff has been the single most important factor responsible for the poor financial performance of the TNEB.²⁸

²⁷ S. Ambirajan, "State Government Subsidies. The case of Tamil Nadu", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 13, 1999, p. 811.

²⁸ Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), *Tamil Nadu Economy: Performance and Issues* (New Delhi: Oxford & IBI Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1988), p. 247.

The financial position of TNEB got worsened further with the announcement of free electricity for all. The Electricity (Supply) Act (as amended in 1985) stipulates that Electricity Boards should “earn a return of at least 3 percent on net fixed assets after meeting depreciation and interest charges. In the TNEB this ratio was around one percent on an average in the 1960s, and dropped to -2.8 percent in the 1970s. During 1980-85 there was a gross worsening to -21.7 percent (annual average)”.²⁹

It has been already viewed as to how the financial performance of EB has deteriorated since 1970. Ever since 1980-81, there has been a sharp worsening of financial position. Consequently the gross income was not adequate even to meet working expenses and Government subsidies were needed to cover operational deficits, as well as interest payments and depreciation provisions in full. By the end of 1979-80, “total subsidies received from Government were Rs. 181 crores and accumulated interest arrears were about Rs. 50 crores. During 1980-85 such subsidies totalled to Rs. 867 crores and interest arrears to Government had accumulated to Rs. 278 crores by the end of 1984-85.”³⁰

The reasons for the EB plunging so deeply into the red have to do with several factors relating to costs, efficiency and tariff policy. Tariff revisions to the EB have been inadequate vis-à-vis cost trends and successive revisions have maintained or accentuated subsidies to

²⁹ Ibid, p.246

³⁰ Ibid, p.313

different categories of consumers. "Relative to other states, industrial and commercial tariffs in Tamil Nadu are relatively high, domestic tariffs are about the average, and the agricultural tariff is very low. The subsidy for agriculture has a particularly serious impact on the TNEB's revenues because agricultural power consumption in Tamil Nadu, of around 27 percent of total sales, is of a substantial proportion."³¹ The extent of the loss, due to the differential value between the cost in supplying a unit of electricity of the pumpset and the sales realisation is very significant in absolute magnitude and in relation to the overall losses of the EB. Seeing all this there is no doubt that the Tamil Nadu Government's intervention in this regard is very inefficient and financially unsound.

Equity is another consideration, which is more important while analyzing the policy of subsidies. The question of subsidies in India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular raises many issues. Theoretical justifications of subsidies mention equity as an important consideration. In addition, the Constitution of India lies down that Governments should provide certain services at low or no cost. But in order for these objectives to be realized through subsidies, the requirement is an honest system of administration, which seems to be an impossibility. Any study of subsidies, as they actually exist by the necessity should take into account the political economy of their structure and functioning. The question, which seems important to answer are: Who would power over the public resources through these

³¹ Ibid, p.313

subsidies? How do they utilise the power? And for whom? are the relevant questions. It is also necessary to raise the question of how effectively the subsidies are able to achieve the stated objectives. "There is ample qualitative evidence to show that the subsidy system in Tamil Nadu is wasteful, corrupt, regressive and counter productive."³²

If equity has to be established the policy should try to bring about redistribution among the masses. But this policy did not bring about this stated objective. In 1990, two major changes were effected in electricity tariff as studied before. First and most important decision was that the granting of free supply of electricity to pump set owners. The target group identified for this munificence was clear enough; the rich and middle farmers and big landlords and those involved in capitalist agriculture.³³ The significance of this decision was not lost on the other sections, which anticipated similar concessions. To quote Suresh "Much to the surprise of the small and marginal farmers who not only did not own pump set but also had to purchase water (on either a share basis - if Paddy, on a 3:1 share basis, or for money at prices ranging from Rs. 12-25 per hour) the removal of electricity tariffs did not result in any benefit. On the contrary, in late 1990 the Government increased the installation charges for new domestic connections and from Rs. 650 to Rs. 1, 250 for three-phase connection. The disappointment and disaffection

³² S. Ambirajan, *op. cit.*, p. 818.

³³ MSS. Pandian, *The Image Trap: MG Ramachandran in Film & Politic* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992), p. 22.

caused by this decision was skillfully manipulated by the opposition AIADMK to highlight the nature of DMK rule.”³⁴

But at the same time it should not be forgotten at this juncture that this perilous policy was in fact the handiwork of AIADMK Government of MGR, which first announced the free electricity for small farmers and heavy subsidy for the rich. But this did not reach the small farmers because their situation become more precarious after this policy as mentioned before. To quote MSS. Pandian, “If MGR’s rule thrived on taxing the poor, it benefited the rich, especially the landed rural rich, through public spending. A case in point is the subsidized electricity supplied to the agriculture sector.”³⁵ The idea here is not against subsidies, the issue is linked to the larger one of whether, and to what extent and in what manner agriculture or poorer farmers in underdeveloped areas should be subsidized. Regardless of the position that can be taken on this set of questions, the rationale of indirect subsidies for these purposes via free electricity is open to question. If subsidies are justified it seems best that they are direct, visible and quantified so that discriminatory benefits can be provided in an explicitly equitable manner. The criticism of free electricity in Tamil Nadu is that they not only transfer social costs into private benefits but in the process make no distinctions, based on social criteria, as between large and small farmer and between developed

³⁴ V. Suresh, 'The DMK Debacle: Cause and Potent', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.27, No. 42, 1992, p. 2315

³⁵ *ibid*, p.2315

and backward areas. Thus, by not guaranteeing redistribution, the societal validation of policy has become very weak.

The extensive use of power for irrigation, which has been enhanced by this *Free-Electricity Scheme*, as many other ramifications. It has rendered the real cost of cultivation (i.e. private cost plus the value of the subsidy for well irrigated crops unfavorable, vis-à-vis costs under surface irrigation in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. The added costs of irrigation has become a factor in the demand for higher output prices amongst farmers using wells, particularly in areas around Coimbatore, Periyar, Salem and North Arcot where wells were deep and cash crops were extensively grown. There is also increasing evidence as mentioned before that groundwater irrigation has tended to worsen inequalities in the agrarian structure. In the hands of large farmers with sizable holdings, pump sets have become valuable surplus - generating asset, which have served to further increase the economic power. By the free electricity for all, the farmers have only strengthened this *status quo* because; less affluent farmers who have ventured into pump sets have become increasingly indebted having had to borrow not only for the initial investment but also for periodic repair and maintenance.

As in most other parts of India, the crucial factor in understanding the rural economy of Tamil Nadu is the highly skewed distribution of the ownership and operational holdings of land. While the majority of rural households both own and operate land, the

ownership of land is heavily concentrated in the hands of a small minority.³⁶ "The top 1.0 percent of the rural households claim, according to the latest available information over 15.0 percent of land, the top 5.0 percent, about 43.0 percent of land and the top 10.0 percent almost 60.0 percent. In contrast, 17.0 percent of the rural households do not own any land at all, and in this matter Tamil Nadu tops the list among the states in the country. And the share of land of the bottom 60.0 percent (including the land less) as low as 4.40 percent. It would appear that over time there has been a slight improvement in the distributional pattern with the share of the top group getting reduced and that of the bottom groups getting increased. However, a more detailed examination indicates that the improvement registered by the lowest groups is not statistically significant, whereas those owning between 15 acres and 50 acres (i.e., larger land owners excluding those owning above 50 acres) have improved their position significantly."³⁷

This being the structure of the rural economy in Tamil Nadu, the policy has strengthened the position of rural elite than the poor farmers. John Harriss has brought about the position of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in the place called Randam. He has noted that the poor peasants and at times middle peasants too, rely on big farmers of Randam as brokers; and the introduction of new agricultural technology has been instrumental in increasing their

³⁶ C.T. Kurien, *Dynamics of Rural Development, A study of TN : 1950-75* (Madras : Orient Longman Ltd, 1981), p. 109.

³⁷ Ibid, p.109

dependence in this respect.³⁸ The implementation of policy like the *Free-Electricity Scheme* would definitely increase the dependency of the poor on the rich. Pump set irrigation as a new agricultural technology has enhanced dependency, which was worsened by policies benefiting the rich farmers.

Thus, the policy of free electricity was not justified on any of the above grounds. While alienating the rural elite in some ways, the regional parties at the same time ventured to appease them in others. The fiscal reflection of this process is the enlargement and extension of subsidized economic and welfare services of which the *Chief Ministers Noon-Meal scheme* and the Free supply of electricity to small farmers are the most striking examples.

38 John Harris, *Capitalism and Peasant Farming : Agrarian structure and ideology in Northern Tamil Nadu* (Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1982), p.66

Chapter - VI

Conclusion

The current standard of living levels in India are very low. Production is insufficient even for satisfying the minimum essential needs of the population, a large leeway has to be made before the services and amenities required for the healthy living can be brought within the reach of any significant proportion of population. Policies are introduced by the central government to meet this crisis situation in an underdeveloped country like India. Likewise, the state governments also make policies to meet this needy situation. Many policies were made by the Government of Tamil Nadu at different times to supplement and promote the development projects. This study is an outcome of the interest to understand the nature and outcome of those policies.

The efforts of the Dravidian parties over the past 40 years have met with substantial success. The efforts were mixture of reformist ideas, personality cult, people oriented policies and some times populist policies. Populist policies as is the case with other states, had a major role to play in the politics of Tamil Nadu. These ideas cannot be derided because the present day politics is filled with such policies, which means a lot for the people who vote for parties that promise for such policies. But, these policies are hardly ever analyzed to understand the harmful or beneficial effort of its implementation. Rather scholars insist on branding the

policy as populist or a people oriented policy without studying it properly. Sometimes political parties introduce policies, which are made to meet the political exigencies, but these policies can also be a concrete measure in the long run. Contrary, to this some policies that are framed to meet a political exigency (called populist when it is introduced during the needy situation) die out also as a populist policy.

Politicians and political parties get the popular mandate using policies as a plank to contest elections. If we respect the popular mandate of the people given to this promises we should not term these policies as populist as this would go against the democratic principle. To question the people's mandate is to doubt the democratic principle itself. So, policies cannot be characterised as populist if they are introduced to meet electoral challenges rather the outcomes has to be analyzed to find out whether it is indeed a populist policy or a people oriented popular policy.

Though there are number of policies introduced by the Dravidian parties, it is the comparison of *Noon-Meal Scheme* and the *Free-Electricity Scheme* which draws attention because of their diametrically opposite qualities. Moreover those two policies got crystallized during the same decade in Tamil Nadu. The two Dravidian parties used these policies at different times to serve their electoral interest.

The outcome clearly shows that these two policies, ended up reaching different objectives, which are not necessarily similar.

The *Chief Ministers Noon-Meal Scheme* though, it was introduced as a way to gather votes from the people and sometimes termed as populist by many ended up giving concrete results in Tamil Nadu. On the contrary, the *Free-Electricity Scheme* still remains a populist measure to woo a particular section of the society, which goes against the idea of 'socialist pattern of society', guaranteed by the Constitution. The task before an under-developed country is not merely to get better results within the framework of economic and social institutions but to mould and refashion these so that they contribute effectively to the realization of wider and deep social values.

These values or basic objectives, which can be summed up in the phrase 'socialist pattern of society'. "Essentially this means that the basic criterion for determining the lines of advance must not be private profit but social gain, and that the pattern of development and the structure of socio-economic relations should be so planned that they result not only in appreciable increase in national income and employment but also in greater equality in incomes and wealth. Major decisions regarding production, distribution in consumption and investment-and in fact all significant socio-economic benefits of economic development must accrue more and more to the relatively less privileged classes of society, and there should be a progressive reduction of the concentration of incomes, wealth and economic power. The problem is to create a milieu in which the small man who has so

far had little opportunity of perceiving and participating in the immense possibilities of growth through organized effort is enabled to put in his best in the interests of a higher standard of life for himself and increased prosperity for the country"¹.

But all the policies made by the democratically elected governments do not adhere to this basic value enshrined in our Constitution, one such example, is the *Free-Electricity Scheme* in Tamil Nadu. According to the findings, this policy has a negative effect on the people of the state. The policy does not have any social purpose. Instead of making the poor-small farmers accrue the benefits, the policy of free electricity has benefited the big land holding farmers who are rich. The small farmers are put to the mercy of these rich farmers, thus reinforcing their dependence on the latter. It is no doubt a populist measure brought out by the two Dravidian parties to satisfy a few elite lot. Moreover, the *Free-Electricity Scheme* has also resulted in the degradation of the environment by way of indiscriminate extraction of ground water resources.

Contrary to this, the *Chief Minister Noon-Meal Scheme* tried adhering to this basic social value. It emerged as a redistributive strategy, which had wide implications. Economic development can in fact be seen in terms of opportunities that the individuals in the societies enjoy. The opportunities will have to lead them to possess

¹ Second Five Year Plan Document cited in C.T. Kurien, *Alternative in Development: Planning, Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1977) p.89

capabilities, as 'capability' refers to the alternative combination of functions from which a person can choose. Thus, the very notion of capability is essentially one of freedom--the ranges of option a person has in deciding what kind of a life to lead. The success of the development programme cannot be judged merely in terms of their effects on incomes and outputs, and must, at a basic level, focus should be on the lives that people can lead. Thus the policies should be judged on their capability to eradicate this 'capability deprivation'.²

Education and health enhances this capability, which is an important contributing factor. The Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Scheme was an attempt to promote these two factors. From this study it is seen that these two factors were the primary objective of this policy and it has fulfilled its stated objective. The *Chief Minister's Noon-Meal Scheme* as an intervention in the society has improved the nutritional and education status of the students. Moreover, it is targeted towards the poor as a redistributive strategy. The programme has strong societal validation, which brought with it some auxiliary benefits like employment. The overall picture, which evolves after the study, is that it is a concrete measure to enhance the capabilities of the people in Tamil Nadu.

² Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic development and Social Opportunity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.12

Thus, there are always programmes, which start as a populist scheme but end up as a concrete initiative. On the contrary, there are programmes, which gets implemented as populist schemes and die out as a populist rhetoric. The *Noon-Meal Scheme* and *Free-Electricity Scheme* are the two good examples for these two types of programme in Tamil Nadu.

Appendix - I

Financial Performance of Tamil Nadu Electricity Board

Year	Gross Revenue	Current Expenditure	Operating Surplus	Interest	Depreciation	Surplus
1989-90	1068.79	1302.80	-234.01	207.03	80.00	-521.04
1990-91	1447.86	1537.33	-89.47	226.96	94.05	-410.48
1991-92	1677.01	1496.91	180.10	168.45	108.79	-97.14
1992-93	2118.24	1961.18	157.06	270.49	118.53	-231.96
1993-94	2634.35	2500.10	134.25	300.3	135.1	-301.56
1994-95	3508.29	2996.28	512.01	340.5	173.82	-2.31
1995-96	4128.27	3604.50	523.77	379.81	220.69	-76.74
1996-97	4490.49	4009.62	480.87	422.27	315.11	-256.51

Source: Tamil Nadu Electricity Board Statistics at Glance 1989-97

Appendix - II

School Enrolment in Tamil Nadu by Age Groups (percentage)

Year	6-11			11-14			14-16			16-18		
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
76-77	100.30	81.70	91.70	67.30	41.00	54.4	44.9	23.10	34.10	-	-	-
79-80	103.21	85.87	94.64	73.6	45.44	59.68	50.20	26.40	38.44	-	-	-
80-81	103.3	86.97	95.22	75.73	46.79	61.42	-	-	-	-	-	-
81-82	102.29	87.65	94.76	78.18	50.60	64.55	52.26	30.17	41.36	-	-	-
82-83	103.52	88.71	96.20	80.04	51.69	66.03	54.60	30.26	42.57	-	-	-
84-85	105.53	91.64	98.66	85.92	58.21	72.18	59.69	34.93	47.45	23.19	15.90	-
85-86	106.91	92.94	100.00	89.74	62.38	76.21	62.50	38.48	50.64	-	-	-
87-88	107.85	93.92	100.96	96.42	69.78	83.26	67.07	42.23	54.79	25.73	19.13	19.59
88-89	107.79	94.07	101.01	98.77	72.53	85.80	68.65	43.34	56.14	27.35	19.93	23.68
91-92	107.68	94.56	101.20	104.52	80.75	92.78	73.37	48.60	61.13	31.5	22.87	27.23
92-93	106.75	94.41	106.67	105.45	83.29	94.53	74.86	50.52	62.83	32.88	23.92	28.46
93-94	106.44	94.49	100.55	106.55	85.51	96.18	76.27	52.33	64.44	34.21	24.97	29.64
94-95	106.18	94.57	100.46	107.6	87.48	97.69	77.60	53.96	65.92	36.12	26.02	31.13
96-97	95.39	92.88	94.16	103.35	92.16	97.88	80.15	57.17	68.80	40.03	28.26	34.21
97-98	95.02	93.35	94.2	103.37	93.31	98.45	80.78	57.84	69.45	41.19	28.71	35.02
99-00	98.50	94.43	96.51	90.20	87.79	89.03	65.61	61.28	63.49	31.03	29.48	30.25

Sources: 1) Policy Note on Demand No.17, Education (Various Years)

2) Assembly Debates of Tamil Nadu (Various Years)

Appendix - III

Drop out Rate in Tamil Nadu (percentage)

Year	Up to Primary Stage			Up to Middle Stage			Up to High School Stage		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
84-45	21.34	25.28	23.14	53.93	64.51	58.86	72.95	80.81	76.55
85-86	20.13	25.2	22.48	51.47	62.23	56.45	72.03	79.71	75.53
86-87	19.86	25.06	22.29	47.66	57.82	52.38	71.41	78.59	74.68
87-88	19.44	24.45	21.78	44.08	53.14	48.22	69.72	77.32	73.24
88-89	19.17	24.01	21.42	41.33	51.35	45.97	66.75	76.45	71.26
89-90	18.78	23.64	21.05	40.87	50.65	45.43	66.11	73.85	69.64
90-91	18.27	22.68	20.32	40.17	49.43	44.48	64.91	72.38	68.32
91-92	17.71	21.16	19.31	37.48	46.5	41.67	64.45	71.93	67.94
92-93	17.11	19.62	18.27	34.75	43.54	38.85	63.65	71.02	67.08
93-94	16.39	18.35	17.30	32.16	41.20	36.85	62.98	69.85	66.17
94-95	15.58	17.65	16.54	30.75	39.36	34.74	61.46	69.15	65.05
95-96	14.88	16.97	15.85	28.60	37.11	32.54	60.14	68.20	63.87
96-97	14.05	16.2	15.06	26.38	34.78	30.27	58.63	67.05	62.53
97-98	13.99	16.18	15.05	25.94	34.64	29.99	57.04	65.74	61.06
98-99	12.98	16.15	14.52	36.85	33.37	35.23	57.72	58.35	58.01
99-00	12.93	16.07	14.41	36.03	34.74	35.43	57.97	57.85	57.92

Sources: 1) Policy Note on Demand No.17, Education (Various Years)

2) Assembly Debates of Tamil Nadu (Various Years)

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