



A Study of Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract:

Land Reforms have been on the nations agenda, the exclusive pressure on cultivate lands the concentration of land proprietorship, the heavy indebtedness of peasants and urgent need to increase production, modernizing methods of cultivation all these have had accumulative effects on land tenure and land reform legislation. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the land reforms undertaken by the Tamil Nadu government. Different revenue systems has been introduced, but the system of land tenure in Tamil Nadu was divided into two major categories, the *Zamindari* and *Ryotwari* tenures which was placed on a statutory basis during the British rule.

Introduction:

The *ryots* in *zamindari* villages had suffered much from the personal rule of the *zamindars*. The peasants were subjected to oppressive taxation and repressive exaction.¹ The *zamindars* remained as the elements of exploitation and caused social injustice, in order to provide security to the tiller of the soil. Congress government took the task of land reform,² though the Congress government in 1937 took efforts to abolish the system, it received a setback in 1939. When the Congress government resigned the office based on

the issue of Indian participation in the second world war, the *zamindari* abolition issue was abandoned.³

During 1946, the Congress assumed powers they stepped to eliminate the *zamindari* system. After independence, the Congress government gave immediate relief to the *ryots* by passing Madras Estate Land Reduction Bill of 1947. It fixed the rent of the *zamindari* tracks to that of the *ryotwari* areas.⁴ Then by giving temporary relief in 1947, the *zamindari* abolition bill was passed in the Madras Legislature in 1948. It became the law in 1949. The system empowered the government to take over all estates subjected to the payment of reasonable compensation.⁵ By the introduction of the reform, the last vestiges of feudalism was wiped off ushering in area of contentment and self reliance in the former estates which constituted one – fifth of the entire Tamil Nadu.⁶

Because of the law in 1949, the exploitative intermediaries were taken over by the government and the compensation paid to them was 435 crores.⁷ The reform introduced by the Congress to abolish *zamindari* system created fear in the minds of other land lords in the many regions. In Tanjore leasing of land was common. The anticipatory land reform, the relationship between the *Mirasdars* and the tenants on one hand and the tenants, the customary farm labourers or *Pannaiyai* on the other hand became strained. *Mirasdars* in several districts refused to renew lease agreement with their usual tenants and displaced them.⁸ In Tanjore the agrarian relation disturbed in 1951-1952. This led to the displacement of tenants and dismissal of farm labourers. Also it ultimately culminated in agrarian crimes and disturbances the prevailed situation threatened to cause law and order problem.



The enhancement of wages for farm labours and improvement of their work were the demands of the farm servants, which took political overturn. The government promulgated the Tanjore Tenants and *Pannaiyal* Protection Ordinance in 1952.⁹ It provides the regulation of wages payable to the *Pannaiyal* in Tanjore district and takes remedial measures by the conciliation officer appointed under the Act.¹⁰ The Act provide security of tenure for five years to the cultivating tenants and also fixed the maximum rent which they should pay.¹¹ The timely introduction of Tanjore Tenants and *Panniayal* Act in 1952 had countered peasants agitations and troubles. Till June 1955 26,000 applications under the Act were received from the tenants and orders were passed for 23,500.

To protect the tenants from unjust eviction, Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act 1955 was enacted. This gave protection from eviction to cultivating tenants and provided security of tenancy without time limit and compulsory execution of fresh lease deeds. The tenants were aware of several safeguard guaranteed to them through legislative measured.¹² The evicted tenants apply for restoration. But every cultivating tenant desirous of depositing rent, deposit the same with the court of Revenue Divisional Officer in person or through his agent.¹³ He could apply for restoration of possession if he was unjust dispossessed of and were asked to apply to revenue divisional office for the restoration. The cultivating tenants could be evicted only by the revenue court if the tenants continued to default in payment of rent, causing wilful damage or injury to lands.¹⁴

The other court had the power to enter upon any land and inspect and carry out the function entrusted upon which included the power to cut and thrash the crop on any land and



weigh or measure the produce with view to estimating the capabilities of the soil.¹⁵ The enacted Act of 1955 was amended by the Act XIV of 1956. Tahsildar and District Munsif were constituted under the Act as Rent Court and Rent Tribunal for fixing fair tribunals. The orders of the tribunals were liable to revision by the High Court.¹⁶ The State welfare was the goal of the government. Under K.Kamaraj the Congress introduced the Land Ceiling Act. In 1948 the *zamindari* system was eliminated so a measure to prevent the accumulation of land further reform was made. The government also decided to impose ceiling on agricultural holdings.¹⁷ On 2nd may 1962, The Madras Land Reform Act 1961 was published as Madras Act 58 of 1961

The ceiling was calculated in terms of standard acres. The ceiling acres for a person and for a family consisting of not more than five members were 30 standard acres. For bigger families consisting of more than five members an additional five standard acres was allowed to each member in excess of five subjected to the maximum of 60 standard acres for a family. The lands of religious trust of a public were kept outside the scope of the Act. Land in the hill areas, trust, fuel lands were exempted.¹⁸ The government estimated two lakhs of acres rendered surplus. But the big landlords escaped from the purview of the Act. Hence Large scale land adjustment came into existence. Enormous properties were registered on public trust in the name of fictitious persons. The landlords cultivated their lands through their servants. The land owners registered the land or partitioned the lands among the coparceners and relatives.¹⁹ Contrary to the expectation, the Government acquired 24, 124 acres according to the Act. In the mean time Remaining lands became a trust or *Benami* lands.²⁰ By the Tamil Nadu Land Reform Amendment Act 1970, the ceiling was reduced.



Conclusion:

As a result the Government decided that the ceiling area fixed under the Act should be reduced further to 15 standard acres with effect from 1970. By 31st October 64,071 acres were assigned to over 38.817 landless persons. But restrictions were imposed over charitable lands. These land reform gradually introduced by the Government changed the economic structure of Tamil Nadu society. Thus it was visible that because of the transformed land reform the country was impoverished into a socialist's pattern of society, which transformed the land towards prosperity.

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