

# A Study of Land Reforms in Tamil Nadu from 1947 To 1961

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## ABSTRACT:

*In recent times there has been a renewed interest in relationships between redistribution, growth, and welfare. Land reforms in developing countries are often aimed at improving the poor's access to land, although their effectiveness has often been hindered by political constraints on implementation. In this paper "A STUDY OF LAND REFORMS IN TAMIL NADU FROM 1947 TO 1961" is to highlight the land reform in Tamil Nadu. We argue that such land reforms have been associated with poverty reduction. Social relation based on greater equality emerged out. Independent India witnessed the peasant upliftment in a new phase.*

## INTORDUTION:

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. Peasants were exploited by mirasdars, rich landowners of the Madras presidency. Mirasudari's denial of wages in kind and failure of north east monsoon questioned the survival and employment of the peasants. Since the cultivators belong to the caste Hindus section were in the landless, and all in the category of (avarnas) untouchables.<sup>1</sup> The denial of wages by mirasdars, monsoons, questioned the survival of the peasants. But the peasants put pressure upon the government to enact tenancy rights, food rationing, compulsory procurement of paddy, etc., resulting widespread unrest in zamindari areas of the state. The mirasdars managed

to escape from the levy on food grains or the other and the entire burden fell on the poor peasants.<sup>2</sup> The prices of goods increased steadily. These affected the poor peasants and forced them not to have single square meal a day. Also the mirasdars enhanced the rent rate and forcibly evicted the tenants of ryotwari areas. Because of these oppressive measures peasant agitations spread in the various districts.<sup>3</sup>

On this regard both the Madras Government and the central Government enacted a number of Agrarian Acts which gave relief to the peasants. The Government thought to relieve the peasants from the cruel clutches of land holders and intermediaries who exploited the agricultural labourers and poor agriculturists by all possible means. The political parties particularly the Congress and Communist parties made a number of proposals in their election manifestoes. They paid much attention and attraction on the agriculturists by means of agricultural relief measures to get their votes. By the

discussions of the members in the Assembly and in the Council the Congress government brought out a number of acts, so as to relieve the burdens of the peasants. In 1946, when the Congress assumed power the first step in the direction of land reforms, which was the elimination of the zamindari System. Hence the Congress government gave immediate relief to the riots by passing Madras Estate Land Reduction Bill of 1947. The Act fixed the rent of the zamindari tracts to that of the ryotwari areas.<sup>4</sup> After giving temporary relief in 1947, the zamindari Abolition Bill was passed in the Madras Legislature.

In 1948 it became the law and in 1949 it eliminated the zamindaris by compensation. Also it empowered the government to take over all estates subject to the payment of reasonable compensation.<sup>5</sup> Provisions were made in this Act for the grant of ryotwari patta to the peasants of the estates after the estates were surveyed and settled on ryotwari principles. The vestige of feudalism was

wiped off with the introduction of this reform, ushering in area of contentment and self-reliance.<sup>6</sup> The exploitative intermediaries were taken over by the government and the compensation were paid.<sup>7</sup> The Congress introduced reforms to abolish zamindari system created fear in the minds of other land lords too. Tanjore known as the granary of the state, existed leasing of land. The anticipatory land reform, the relationship between the mirasdars and the tenants and the customary farm labourers or *panniyal* on the other hand became strained.

Several mirasdars refused to renew lease agreement with their usual tenants and displaced those.<sup>8</sup> It disturbed in Tanjore during 1951-1952, resulted in the displacement of tenants and dismissal of farm labourers. Further it led to agrarian crimes and disturbances. But threatened to cause law and order problem, besides fall in agricultural production. The enhancement of wages for farm labours and improvement of their condition of

their work were the demands of the farm servants which took political overturn. A meeting of both was held under the Revenue Minister Kalavenkata Rao and a settlement was made known as 'Mayavaram Agreement'. During 1952 Government promulgated the Tanjore Tenants and Panniyal Protection Ordinance employing the provisions of the Agreement.<sup>9</sup> The ordinance was replaced by the Tanjore tenants and Panniyal Protection Act of 1952.

It provides the regulation of wages payable to the peasants in Tanjore district. Also it takes remedial measures to the conciliation officer appointed under the Act.<sup>10</sup> The Act gave security of tenure for five years to the cultivating tenants and also fixed the maximum rent which they have to pay. It provides for a machinery to settle disputes between the cultivating tenants and the land owners and also between them and the pannaiyal.<sup>11</sup> After Tanjore Act, the owners of other districts also evicted their tenants with the view to

bringing the land under their personal cultivation. The provisions relating to cultivating tenants in the Act replaced with the passing of a general Act covering the whole state. In the Assembly the members emphasized to protect the tenants from unjust eviction.<sup>12</sup> So 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.

To deal the cases Revenue Officer or special Duty Collectors were appointed. The tenants were aware of several safeguards through the legislative measures.<sup>13</sup> They evicted that the tenants could apply for restoration. The cultivating tenant were desirous of depositing rent which could deposit the same with the Court of Revenue Divisional Officer in person or through his agent.<sup>14</sup> So the tenant could apply for restoration of possession if he was unjustly dispossessed. The cultivating tenants could be evicted only

by the Revenue Court, if the tenants continue to default in payment of rent, causing willful damage or injury to lands.<sup>15</sup> The Rent Court had the power to enter upon any land and inspect and carry out the function entrusted upon, to cut and trash the crop on any land and weigh or the produce with the view of estimating the capabilities of the soil.<sup>16</sup> The Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act 1955 was amended by the Act XIV of 1956. Simultaneously Madras Cultivating Tenants Act was enacted.

The prescribed rate of fair rent payable by tenants was at 40 percent of the gross produce for wet land or its money value. Land irrigated by lifting water, the land owners entitled to receive only 35 percent of the normal gross produce was fixed as rent payable to the owner. The produce was required to be shared at the thrashing floor.<sup>17</sup> Also land owners entitled to receive 1/5 of the straw as their share. So Tahsildar and District Munsif were constituted under the Act as Rent Court

and Rent Tribunal for fixing fair tribunals. The tribunal's orders were liable to revision by the High Court.<sup>18</sup>Saraswathy Pandurangan,<sup>19</sup>Ponnammal and Dr.Soundaram,<sup>20</sup> pressurized the Government to pass the Land Ceiling Act. The Congress government under K. Kamaraj introduced the Land Ceiling Act, though zamindari system was eliminated in 1948, they possessed private lands. As a measure to prevent the accumulation of land further reform was made. The government decided to impose ceiling on agricultural holdings.<sup>21</sup>The Madras Land Reform Act 1961 was published as Madras Act 58 of 1961 on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1962. It was calculated in terms of standard acres. One acre of wet Land was assessed at Rs.10 and above but not exceeding Rs.15 per acre, 0.8 acre would equal to one standard acre.

In the regard to the lowest category of dry land assessed below Rs.1.25 acre four acres of such land would equal to one standard acre. For bigger families

consisting of more than five subjected to the maximum of 60 standard acres for a family. The land of religious trust of a public was kept outside the scope of the Act. Land in the hill areas, trust fuel lands was exempted.<sup>22</sup>According to the Government decided that the ceiling area fixed under the Act should be reduced further. By the Tamil Nadu Land Reform Amendment Act 1970, the ceiling was reduced to 15 standard acres with effect from 1970. After lowering the limit of land ceiling 1.10 lakes acres of land were assigned to over 38,817 landless persons up to 31<sup>st</sup> October 1975.

The exemption given to sugarcane growing, grazing and dairy farms in the original Act were scrapped. Restrictions were placed to charitable lands.<sup>23</sup> thus these land reforms gradually introduced by the Government changed the economic structure of the Tamil society. Based on the drawback in the implementation of the 'Land Ceiling Act', land reform transformed the impoverished country into

a socialist pattern of society. The agricultural population was replaced by soil and sweat which transformed the land towards prosperity.<sup>23</sup> The efforts of governments relieve the burden of the agricultural community through legislation and Judiciary; solve the problems to a certain extent. A serious of land reforms Act enacted during the Congress ministry, saved the tenants and agricultural laborers in the eye of the government but their struggle for livelihood continued.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In the society their position is uplifted and they became a challenging one to a possible extent to the landlords. They became aware of the trends of the society and started to work to improve their standard of living in all the fields. The agrarian reforms brought profound changes in the socio-economic condition of the agriculturists. Thus the erstwhile zamindars lost their predominant control over land. Because of declining control

over land, they lost their superior social position. This resulted in family discords and property disputes, drastically affected their capacity for corporate action against the aspirations of the tenant-labourers. Ownership of Land became dispersed and it had saying impact on the caste, class and creed. Thus the ownership of Land became dispersed and; the productive organization came out of the structure. The increasing instances of Land, transfers and new production relations created the existing social institutions.

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