

Chapter – VI

CONCLUSION

Change emerged as man passed from nomadic mode of collective life to a settled life. The village settlements based on agrarian economy marked a landmark in the history of mankind, inaugurating a higher phase of social existence. In certain stages of agrarian development, due to the greater productivity of agriculture, a section of the community was spared from the necessity of participating in food production. They concentrated on secondary industrial activity with relation to agriculture. Many professionals emerged out of it. This also brought about, though slowly, a significant transition in the social organisation of humanity. The social organisation then was not formed on the basis of caste or class, but by natural setting. There was no restriction for changing one's occupation in the early agrarian society.

For protecting territorial integrity of the group, many chieftains appeared and it caused the emergence of states. Thenceforth agrarian economy came under the control of provincial kings. The kings extracted the entire surplus in the form of so many taxes under the guise of protecting the territories and the subjects. The early system of land revenue assessment and the method of collection were not uniform. The state demand was not fixed with the consent of the farming community. A section of the people received tax – free land, whereas other sections were imposed with heavy taxes, which squandered away the entire surplus. Wartime destruction and crop insecurity were common.

Tanjore, a region closely linked with agricultural activities from the immemorial past, was divided into so many occupational segments. This region

was mostly covered with vellanvagai and brahmadeya lands, most of them being tax-free. The devadana lands under the control of temples and mutts were also exempted from assessment. Agrarian activities and technology were conservative and suitable only for subsistence production. However, ownership of land provided a high status value and power. The various stages of agricultural production created segmentation of the agricultural community on class lines. A nexus between caste and class was formed and the power distribution was adjusted to suit the caste-class articulation.

The agrarian socio-economic structure of Tanjore experienced remarkable transformation as a result of the impact of British conquest and rule. After a stiff struggle with the native powers of the region, the British became the masters of the entire administration. The British policy of economic exploitation and intervention affected the closed agrarian structure of the society. In an attempt to secure an assured income, the British administrators devised various methods. The proceedings of the Board of Revenue reveal that the British administrators introduced several land tenure systems. Annual, Triennial, Quinquennial, Mirasi, Muttamfaisal, Taramfaisal, Ryotwari and Inam Settlements were the different experiments made by the revenue hungry colonial state to make it financially sound. The land revenue settlements and tax collection method created a new form of landlordism in the region. British experiments in land revenue administration succeeded a little due to the conservative technology employed in agricultural production and occurrence of frequent floods and famines. Ultimately, these conditions affected the economy

of the British. The situation compelled the government to find a temporary solution. They took precautionary measures to avoid such failures by constructing flood control units, streams and channels for improving the irrigation system. The irrigation improvement works undertaken by the British were not successful for a long time. It made life miserable for the farming community. Hence, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and the Famine Commissions were specifically asked to suggest protective measures to ensure as well as enhance the agricultural production of the region.

Finally, an effective infrastructure was found to be an urgent need. The British decided to construct a massive dam across river Cauvery and introduce a secure irrigation system. They completed the construction of Mettur Dam in 1934. The Cauvery Mettur Project (CMP) stabilized the old wetlands and extended the area under wet cultivation. It had converted the single croplands into double croplands. The entire unproductive tablelands in Orathanad, Pattukkottai and Arantangi regions were brought under insured supply of water. Tank-irrigated wetlands under precarious supply position were provided with protective irrigation.

Expansion of regulated irrigation and increasing instances of double cropping created a demand for agricultural labourers. Double cropping, practiced in several regions of this district, helped to increase food production. An exportable surplus was produced. Roadways, railways and markets provided the necessary linkage between the town and the villages, which absorbed a substantial portion of agrestic labourers. The situation favoured the

tenant and labour classes accessible to a new capital. By this time land slowly entered the market due to odd forces and it initiated the process of redistribution of land resources. However, the class of rich Zamindars or Capitalist landlords, by virtue of their wealth, continued to establish their hegemony over the life of the rural society in all spheres.

Though the British Raj abolished slavery in 1843, it failed to affect the condition of soil serfs and slaves. The extension of irrigation, expansion of area under cultivation and the intensity of cropping pattern increased labour demand for agricultural operations. To manage the situation, landlords forced the labourers to work from dawn to dusk without increasing wages. The labourers were severely punished when they demanded more wages. Since the 1920s Communist ideologies were deep rooted among the labouring masses, which induced them to demand higher wages. Hence, by the close of the British rule an atmosphere of class conflict between landlords and labourers became visible.

Since independence, revolutionary ideas held sway over the agricultural labourers of Tanjore. Tenants had their own grievances because they felt that they were being exploited by the landlords. On the question of exploitation both the tenants and the labourers of the region made a common cause. To resolve the crisis, the Congress Government introduced many Acts. The Tanjore Tenants and Pannaiyal Protection Act of 1952; The Madras Cultivating Tenants (Payment of Fair Rent) Act, 1956; The Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act of 1955; The Madras Cultivating Tenants (Payment of Fair

Rent) Act, 1956; and The Madras Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling on Land) Act, 1961 were chief among them. Subsequently many amendments were made, especially to improve the condition of tenants, pannaiyals and labourers of Tanjore.

India faced severe food crisis in the 1950's and 1960's due to loss of territory caused by the partition of the country and the conservative technology employed in agricultural production. To solve the crisis, the Governments came out with programmes of extension and improvement in the existing watercourses. Various productivity-linked patronage schemes were also launched. The union Government, with the support of Ford Foundation, introduced Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP), popularly known as Green Revolution (GR). Tanjore was one among the seven districts initially selected for the implementation of IADP. While the extension of irrigation led to the expansion of agriculture quantitatively, the GR led to a qualitative change in the agrarian economy of Tanjore. GR brought with it the introduction of several new techniques in agriculture, such as application of machines, artificial manures, pesticides, weedicides and hybrid seeds. The economic system underwent a change with the introduction of these new techniques.

Extensive and intensive cultivation led to an increase in labour requirements. In spite of the fact that modernisation of agricultural practices involving large-scale application of machines, agricultural labourers were not rendered surplus. Because the agrarian economy was more intensified and a

large number of labouring masses were attracted towards secondary sectors. Institutions specializing in agriculture and finance began to establish a close link with the agrarian society. Markets, both wholesale and retail and agencies dealing with machines, fertilisers and seeds began to spring up in all important towns of Tanjore. It strengthened the position of the agricultural labourers to demand for higher wages. They justified their stand in view of the increasing production from land and shortage of labourers. Their demand for higher wages during peak season was denied by the landlords politely. Consequently, class struggle became inevitable and it led to the occurrence of labour unrest at Kilvenmani. After the incident, labour organisations became very strong and wage revisions got legal support, which improved the economic position of the labourers. Government support system in the form of wage legislations generated a situation, which enhanced their income from farm source. New non-farm job opportunities provided avenues for the labourers to improve further their economic conditions.

Material benefits made an impact on the structural equilibrium of the society. It had brought remarkable changes in the caste, class and power distribution pattern of the society. The growth of agricultural production induced the emergence of market centres and many town settlements. Increasing demands of city life, educational expenses and partition of ancestral property promoted conditions favourable for redistribution of land and wealth. Land re-distribution and resultant changes in the ownership pattern did affect the feudal structure; rights and role distribution pattern. Feudal rights and

obligations met with stiff resistance and society has marched towards a new equilibrium. The trend has weakened the caste system and made it much more fluid.

Class - consciousness had become visible in the hitherto caste conscious social system. Agrarian society of Tanjore was composed of different classes such as landlords, tenants and landless labourers. Service and servile classes were also part and parcel of the agrarian setup. Till the end of the 19th century class structure was rigid and class - consciousness among the labouring class was almost absent. Increasing instances of landownership and land transfers, irrespective of caste position, altered the existing class structure. Land transfers, emergence of new occupations and increase in market economy were the vital forces that brought forth desirable shifts in the class order. It had affected the traditional class structure and opened the door for the formation of new class order. As a result, the class system became open and class mobility left unchecked. The subsidiary occupations of agrarian sector came increasingly under the control of lower trait. All non-traditional occupations have become distributed among enterprising individuals or group of all castes. With it the class system came out of the traditional structure and lost its rigid character.

In the feudal setup that prevailed in Tanjore, landlords were empowered with the power to enforce authority and punish their subordinates. Feudal rights provided them monstrous power over the client castes. But a great deal of fundamental change is going on today among the producers themselves – the

labourers, tenants and small owners. Since landownership has been widely dispersed, economic freedom has been achieved and the traditional bases of power have been redistributed, the power structure has to be realigned. From mirasidars, power has to transcend to the subordinate classes in a stage-by-stage mode. In the first state it was from the Brahmin – Vellala owner class to Kallar Vanniyar tenant class. In the second stage power sharing was made from the tenant classes to the labouring classes. The society has come out of the caste – class and power nexus and with it the traditional hierarchy has become a misnomer. Of course, the structural base of caste, class and power still remains. But, its vitality is being constantly resisted by the newly advanced section of the erstwhile tenant and labour classes. From servitude, the society is moving towards a position of liberation.

The accrued benefits of diversification of agrarian economy affected the traditional social institutions like family, marriage, kinship, education and polity. Employment opportunities and expansion of markets transformed the old self-sufficient economy of the village, based on barter, into a market economy based on cash. Attraction of city life has created a steady drift towards cities and towns. These developments made a deep impact on joint family system. In the joint families, fissiparous tendencies surfaced, influenced by economic freedom and growing importance of materialism. As a sequence of agrarian change, land value increased and it created problems when ancestral estates have to be divided among members. Everyone is interested in getting the most valuable land for him. It has promoted conditions that favoured family

feud and litigations. Discard, disunity and feud on flimsy grounds affect the old familial bond. Infighting became more open and common and the whole edifice of joint family system has broken.

The impact of economic development is also felt in the marriage system. In the Tanjore society of yesteryears child marriages were quite common. The relatively affluent economic condition, generated by agrarian change, created a trend change against early marriages. Government stipulation on marriageable age too has remarkably affected the new trend.

Traditional kinship ties were inimical to wealth accumulation. But, under the pressure of new economic forces those ties are gradually becoming weaker. Kinship norms are less honoured, obligations neglected and lapses in kinship role performance are becoming common. Kin participation in the life cycle rituals is not so deep as it were in the past. Services relating to puberty, marriage and other celebrations are today more free from involvement of kins. The sentimental basis of kinship is near absent today and kinship practices are more fictitious than real.

The economic consequences of agrarian change and the social freedom that it offered to the tenant and labour classes have affected the institution of education. In the closed social order that prevailed in the Tanjore region, education was a scarce resource, rights over which was reserved only to the upper trait. But with the change in the caste-class nexus and power distribution pattern, the inhibition on education has to disappear in a slow process. Agricultural servitude is waning and now they wanted to assert their rights over

scarce resources like education. Government-sponsored protective discrimination in the matter of education, missionary interest and legal protection of rights through constitution and legislation have supplemented the process and played the supportive role in having education permeating among the hitherto denied section of the society. Western education provided employment opportunities in various non-farm sectors. For them white-collar jobs are attractive, which could earn them a decent living and accord economic status and social prestige.

Western education, introduction of democratic government and universal adult suffrage and development of communication affected the traditional society and the power system attached to it. Economic freedom offered by agrarian change and supplemented by socio-economic support systems have contributed to heightening political activities in the regional political matrix. Political participation enabled the Kallars and the Vanniyars to open new avenues for social mobility. The Communists persuaded the lower strata to unite together and vote against the upper hierarchy. Competitive politics and open participation in election elevated the status. The improvement in political status promoted the possibilities for social equality. Power politics has brought significant changes in the social organisation.

Society has been traditionally interlinked with certain cultural norms, manners and sanctioned laws. Tanjore, because of its geographical advantage, developed a rich culture that is closely articulated with growth in cultivation. Naturally when the mode of production changes, it has positively affected the

regional cultural matrix. Increasing socio-economic mobility, educational progress and political power redistribution intensified changes in the existing cultural life. The changes are manifested in language, customs, values, norms, attitudes, life style, habits, recreations, religious culture and thought pattern and all those having cultural specificity. Today, cultural progress has embraced all sections of the society, irrespective of caste and class position. Society and its cultural activities are decided more on the basis of economic affluence.

The point of theoretical interest arising out of the discussion is that rapid social change cannot take place without the reallocation of resources or an increased range of economic relations. Therefore the study recommends the redistribution of income and resources to achieve economic freedom and social equality. A radical land reform programme could be an important instrument for social equality. However, our past experience shows that even a radical land reform could make little impact on the economic progress of the rural masses. Under such situations one has to depend on other additional measures designed to enhance productivity and income of small and marginal farmers and general increase in employment opportunities for the landless labourers

The people of Tanjore have been miserably affected very often due to the denial of water by the Karnataka Government. Even today the Karnataka Government is violating the agreement of 1924, and the Tamilnadu Government has always been politicizing the problem. The step-motherly attitude of the Central Government has also delayed the solving of the water-sharing dispute, which sometimes has an adverse effect on the Union

Government. So it is an urgent need that both the Union Government and riparian states should come forward to solve the problem looking beyond their political interest.

In north India, the rivers are perennial and the inter-state relations do not get strained on water-sharing issues. Whereas in south-India, the rivers are not perennial and water has become a scarce commodity, resulting in frictions in the inter-state relations. Against this background the Government of India makes occasional statements about the importance of inter-linking of rivers, which still remains as distant dream. If the Government of India takes serious and sincere steps to inter-link the rivers, it will surely pave the way for overall economic development and cordial inter-state relations. Therefore the study recommends the inter-linking of major rivers.

Seasonal failures and the incessant quarrel between the water-sharing states have induced the farmers of Tanjore to search for alternative options. They have constructed filter-points, bore-wells, tube wells, wells, etc. All these methods have been sucking the ground water as much as possible, which has its telling impact on the infiltration of seawater into the fertile fields. It has caused the area of Nagapattinam, Muthupet, Pattukottai, Vedaranyam and Thiruthuraiipoondi to become saline and led to environmental degradation. So the study recommends that the government should seriously consider this matter and regulate the digging of filter-point and bore wells to safeguard the natural fertility of the region.