CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
CHAPTER IV
PART 1
4.1. EMERGENCE OF PEASANT ORGANISATION IN VEDASENDUR AREA

4.1.1. AGRICULTURAL SCENARIO

It was pointed out already that Vedasendur taluk is known for perennial natural calamities and characterised by rainfed condition in agricultural production. Although, well irrigation is the predominant source of irrigation in this area due to consistent drought condition water level had gone down. Consequently, the peasants are pushed to the walls owing to this eco-condition of scarcity of irrigation.

The well and rainfed condition of farming in this area had affected seriously in the event of consistent failure of mansoon for the past 20 years. The worst sufferers of this agricultural conditions are the marginal, small and medium farmers. This has resulted in agricultural backwardness resulting in frequent drought. The peasants of this area in addition to their regular problem of drought and agricultural backwardness also faced a flood in 1977 due to heavy mansoon leading to the collapse of Kodaganar Dam located nearby Vedasendur. The flood had devastated the entire area and rendered untold misery to the people of this area in general and peasants in particular. The flood deposited sand on the fields of peasantry further aggravated their condition in this area. Those who were unable to clear the sand deposits on fields had to change the cropping pattern. Consequently, the fertility of the soil was affected.
As the peasants were subjected to these miseries on farm, naturally their household economy was also severely affected. This condition has led them to depend upon non-institutional sources of credit to meet their subsistence needs and farm needs. In the event of crop failures, the peasants were unable to redeem the loan borrowed from such non-institutional sources like money lenders and relatives.

The Government by this time, in the early 70s in order to rejuvenate agriculture and help peasant to undertake agricultural production had introduced Go-operative Societies and Land Development Banks with a view to helping peasantry financially their agricultural production. The affected peasantry enrolled themselves in co-operative institutions and banks and availed credit. Unfortunately, due to mismanagement in co-operative organisation led to delayed release of credit sought by peasantry. This delay further aggravated the peasants dependence on non-institutional sources for making investments at the time of commencement of season stating that the amount would be redeemed after the release of credit from the co-operative society, bank etc. The delayed release of co-operative institutional credit also made peasants to use the credit on unproductive purposes. These conditions identified with peasantry in this area had precipitated distraint proceedings by the co-operative institutions due to overdue and prolonged outstanding co-operative
credit advanced to them long back for raising crop. The frequent monsoon failure also resulted in crop failure, and a situation arose in which the peasant found no other source either to meet their subsistence or to redeem their debt.

In order to meet subsistence and to celebrate life cycle ceremonies, the peasants of this area found the traders, commission mandi owners and finances in Vedasendur and entered into deal with them thereby unconsciously falling into the trap and exploitation of these middlemen. The traders and commission mandi owners issued credit to these toiling peasantry, put conditions of marketing agricultural commodities which would be likely to raise in coming season at the price fixed at the time of release of credit to them. There was huge hiatus between the price pre-fixed at the time of issue of credit by these middlemen and prevailing price at the time of harvest. Coupled with these exploitations by the middlemen, they also extracted agricultural commodities in the name of sample at the time of marketing. Hence, agricultural reproduction became unremunerative and peasants incurred heavy loss even during times of onset of good monsoon and prospective seasons.

The registered finance companies on their part also effectively exploited peasantry who approached for finance for both agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. The Government allowed these finances
to lend money at nominal rate of interest that is Rs.1.80 per Rs.100 per month. But actually these finances by stating one or the other reason charged exorbitant rate (more than double) of interest. In addition to this the financiers also secured stamped signature on plain papers with the ulterior motive of prosecuting the peasantry in case they don't repay the amount at the accepted time. The blank sheet is used as a threat sheet if the customer changes to some other finance company and borrowed money. In the event of legal proceedings, the amount spent by the financiers in court is levied on peasant borrowers. This condition identified with peasantry in 70s in this area led them to mortgage their land and engage in non-agricultural labour works.

As this area depends on well irrigation as the major source of irrigation, electricity is needed for operating the pumpsets, during seasons. Since peasants incurred loss in agricultural reproduction due to crop failures, inadequate returns, unremunerative price, exploitation by middlemen etc., they could not remit the mounting arrears of electricity which they used in the process of cultivation. The Electricity Board also issued notices to peasants and warned them forceful measures in case they do not remit these mounting arrears.
4.1.2. INITIAL ORGANISATION OF PEASANTRY

In this area peasants known for the abject conditions presented above, initially, the Congress party which was the opposition party to the ruling DMK party, took up their cause in the form of organisation of the affected peasantry. The pioneering work was done by Chinna Samy Gounder ex-Chairman of Erode Municipality, Senapathy Gounder ex-Minister of Madras State and Swanthra party Stalwart, Muthusamy Gounder ex-M.P. Since all these politicians belonged to Gounder caste, they effectively exploited the caste identity as the people of this area also belong to the same caste which is the dominant caste here. The caste factor at the initial stages served effectively to organise the peasantry under the umbrella of peasant organisation affiliated to the Congress Party. Although caste facilitated for the initial organisation of peasantry in this area yet it could not last long. Soon the peasants of this area realised, on account of the conscientization came from Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and its leader Narayanasami Naidu, the demerits and weaknesses of being political in pursuing their problems.

At this time, the Coimbatore based Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam was gaining momentum in its organisational activities all over Tamilnadu. The Vedasendur area peasants also came under the
influence of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, which was a non-political organisation which the Vedasendur peasantry wanted to identify and pursue their problems. This time also the caste factor in addition to Gounder, Gowder, Naicker also facilitated for vehement organisation as the leader (Narayanasami Naidu) belonged to Naidu community, who is popularly known as 'Naicker' in this area and other frontline leaders belonged to Gowder Community.

Moreover, the issues highlighted to Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam also effectively touched the burning problems of peasantry like cancellation of Co-operative Credit, elimination of distraint proceedings, reduction in electricity tariff and free electricity supply, remunerative prices, crop insurance, cattle insurance, compensation to peasants who die while on farm work during night time. The landless peasant also were attracted at the initial stages as the Sangam had certain provisions like housing, distribution of essential commodities at subsidised prices in its nine point charter of demands as stated previously. Although the landless peasantry associated in the activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam at the initial stages, later the movement was predominantly took the character of a movement of landed peasantry.

As the organisation of peasantry in this area was gaining momentum under the aegis of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, side by
side under instruction from Government (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was in power by then) the Co-operative Societies started its operation of distraint proceedings against the peasantry in this area to recollect the overdue outstandings.

The peasants who were struggling even for their subsistence were severely affected by this governmental measures. The co-operative organisation promoted in this area with a cherished objective of promoting agricultural prosperity and socio-economic development of people owing to heavy overdues had left with no option except to execute the orders of the Government and initiated distraint measures in the form of japti (confiscation and attachment of property). As japti is considered as a prestige issue and amounts to social dishonour, the co-operative society expected that the peasants would come forward and repay the amount due from them. As against the expectations of co-operative society, the peasantry who were at initial organisation in this area started preparing ground for organised resistance.

By this time, the peasants of this area came to know one Rajamanickam, a communist turned leader of Vivasayigal Sangam domiciled at Vellianai in Trichy district successfully foiled the co-operative society's japti proceedings in some of the Karur villages. On hearing the successful prevention of japti by Karur village peasants under the leadership of Vellianai Rajamanickam, the
Vedasendur peasants were severely affected by successive droughts and exploitation by middlemen and about to face these distraint proceedings contacted Rajarnanickam, informed him the harassment of Government officials, particularly the co-operative society personnel in the name of japti and sought his help and intervention to foil the co-operative society's designs. Rajarnanickam assured his support and safeguard their social honour which is currently at stake in the form of japti.

The strategy adopted by Vellianai Rajarnanickam to foil japti was, peasants in lorries proceed to the place of japti and preventing the co-operative officials on their work of execution of japti decree. As assured, Rajarnanickam came down to Vedasendur villages with lorry loads of militant peasants of Karur area and proceeded to the place where japti was about to be' taken alongwith the local peasants and successfully foiled the japti attempt by co-operative society officials. Encouraged by this strategy and its success due to inaction of police etc., the Vedasendur peasants on their own had started mobilising peasantry and by collecting some amount from affected peasantry engaged lorries, taxis etc., and proceeded to the places of japti and successfully prevented japti by co-operative officials in several surrounding villages including the study villages in this area.

The operation of this strategy and successful prevention of japti went on for weeks around this area. In places like
Ottanaickanpatti, Chenankottai, Vellai Pommanampatti, Padiyur etc., the peasants went to the extent of breaking the lock and entered inside the godown where japti materials were kept and redistributed to the owners concerned with due certificate and signature to the co-operative society officials.

The peasant protest and successful resistance of this type had earned good name and image for Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam amongst the toiling peasants in particular and public in general. Consequently, the government withdrew its order of japti proceeding against peasants and other forceful methods of revenue collection and conceded to conduct farmers grievance redressal day in the Collectorate once in a month on all third Saturdays under the Chairmanship of District Collector.

By this time, owing to successful resistance peasantry brought to light certain potential and militant leaders like Nathapatti Muthusamy, Palapatti Subramaniam, Mulseel Naicker, Chandrasekaran, Pavalar Palanichamy, Captain Ponram, who took the leading role in all the resistance activities. These incidents of peasant resistance demonstrated the power of peasantry. As a result of organised resistance, the peasantry initiated measures to systematically organise themselves broadly under the fold of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and intensify their struggle against government, middlemen and other exploiters.
Again the suggestion of systematic organisation came from a political party leader namely Madanagopal the then member of Legislative Assembly. Guided by this suggestion and carried away to maintain neutral and non-political stand the peasants of Vedasendur area had decided to organise peasants under the banner of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, a non-political peasant organisation. By this time, the peasants of this area had very well demonstrated their unity, strength, power, solidarity and coordination between the dominant caste of this area, i.e., between Gounders and Naickers and amongst various other castes like Chettiyar, Reddiyar, Maniar, Sakkiliar, Parayar etc. The issues raised particularly co-operative credit, cancellation of distraint proceedings, remunerative prices, subsidy, reduced power tariff, crop insurance etc., had facilitated to maintain vertical solidarity and horizontal unity of peasant mass in this area. Because all these issues touched the burning problems of peasantry and brought peasantry on a common forum irrespective of their caste, class and creed. For the first time, in the history of Tamilnadu agriculture, such a movement of peasant unity emerged in the name of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam.

The organisational activities in Vedasendur area got further impetus when the peasants of this area participated in the bullock cart rally, an innovation and novel technique of peasants at Karur on 5-7-77 in which Narayanasami Naidu addressed. The peasants of this
area had already attracted the attention of the frontline leaders of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam through their organised resistance to the distraint proceeding of the Government. The peasants of this area who went and participated in the bullock cart rally at Karur invited the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leader and their mentor Narayanaswami Naidu to pay a visit to their area and help them to organise themselves. Narayanaswami Naidu readily accepted the invitation and visited Vedasendur area on 7-7-77. Narayanaswami Naidu addressed the peasants of Vedasendur and highlighted the crying problems of peasantry. The emotional speech delivered by Narayanaswami Naidu created awakening and exposed their deprived conditions. Moreover, Narayanaswami Naidu had indicated how the peasants subserve the dominant class either they be the rulers or middlemen who, according to Narayanaswami Naidu, are the parasites of peasantry. The speech delivered by Narayanaswami Naidu encouraged the peasants of this area to plunge into action to establish Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam branches at village level. After that, the organisational activities got boosted up and village level branches were established in all the 24 panchayats in Vedasendur Block. One such panchayat where the village level branch established was Nagampatti Panchayat having about one thousand members.

The organisation of landed and landless peasantry in the name of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam posed a great threat to the political
parties in general and DMK party which was at the help of affairs. Because of emergence of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in rural areas these political parties particularly DMK suffered a major setback in its membership base. All the major political parties like Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Congress, Communist parties were very much concerned with the gigantic growth of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam on the one hand and erosion of their membership in rural areas. Now, in order to counteract and arrest the growth of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in rural areas the government undertook once again certain distraint proceedings, this time through the Electricity Board.

The Electricity Board, which issued already notices to pumpset operators to clear arrears, was waiting for a ripe time to undertake 'Operation Disconnection' at a time when the standing crop was at flowering stage. To start with, the Electricity Board undertook power disconnection to pumpsets by removing the fuse carrier of pumpsets of those farmers who had huge arrear amount. This distraint action initiated by Electricity Board precipitated peasant militancy, as in the case of japti resistance in the form of 'Operation Connection' immediately after removal of fuse carrier by means of a hook or an iron rod. The Electricity Board officials particularly the wiremen were afraid of facing the organised resistance of peasantry in this area.
The slogan raised by peasants i.e., 'Kattai Eduthal Pattai Eduppom' (if you remove fuse carrier then we will torture you), further threatened the wiremen not to risk their lives by attempting to fuse the carrier in the electric post. In view of these threats and counter actions, the Electricity Board had to abandon its 'Operation Power Disconnection' in this area. This successful resistance to power disconnection by peasantry in this area and subsequent withdrawals of this operation by Electricity Board further cemented the organised resistance and demonstrated solidarity of peasantry and common cause issue highlighted through these actions exposed the class interest of peasants.

The general election held in 1977 brought drastic change in State power both in the State and Union Government. In the state already the DMK earned bad name from peasantry for its distrainment proceedings and lost its rural base due to organisation of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, was defeated and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), a break away group of DMK, led by M.G. Ramachandran was voted to power. At the Central level the Congress(I) Government due to its emergency excesses was wiped out and the newly formed Janatha Party under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narain captured power.
Although the AIADMK party assured certain benefits to peasantry, yet it could not pursue the assurances made during electioneering after capturing power in the State. This precipitated peasant struggle in the state in the form of various militant movements with a view to redress their grievances. As stated already, AIADMK led by M.G. Ramachandran captured power in the state by announcing series of concessions to peasantry in 1977. Although M.G. Ramachandran did project farmers' interests, the measures undertaken by him also fell short of peasants' expectations. Again, the peasants under the leadership of Narayanaswami Naidu had to pursue pressure course of action against the M.G. Ramachandran government. Unable to tolerate peasant uprising staged in the form of picketing, resistance, gherao, fast, bullock cart processions etc., Government arrested Narayanaswami Naidu under National Security Act and lodged in Palayamkottai prison. That's where the incident of Vedasendur peasantry, particularly, the Nagampatti, after the arrest of Narayanaswami Naidu occupies a prominent place in the history of peasant movement in Tamilnadu.

4.1.3. PRESSURE COURSE OF ACTION OF NAGAMPATTI PEASANTRY

The pressure tactics of peasantry in Vedasendur area in which the peasants of the study area i.e., Nagampatti Panchayat villages manifested in the form of both peaceful agitations like public meeting,
rallies, fast infront of government offices, co-operative societies, Electricity Board Offices etc., and militant activities like gherao, resistance, picketing, bullock cart rally, road roko, bundh etc. In order to expose the problems of Vedasendur peasantry who were affected owing to recurring drought, crop failure, inadequate irrigation, misery caused due to government distraint proceeding routed through co-operative society and Electricity Board, a bullock cart rally involving about 2,000 bullock darts was conducted on 7.7.77 in which Narayanaswami Naidu had delivered a spirited speech on the need to undertake pressure course of action to expose their grievances and seek redressal from government. To accomplish this task, he gave a call for no-tax campaign. The bullock cart rally held in Vedasendur for the first time virtually blocked life and thereby exposed unity, strength, solidarity, homogeneity of identity with respect to issues of peasantry.

As directed by the leader Narayanaswami Naidu, the peasants of the state wholeheartedly and spontaneously involved themselves in paying no-tax to government. Accordingly, the Vedasendur area peasantry particularly the study area, Nagampatti Panchayat villages actively involved themselves in the no-tax campaign. The no-tax campaign continued for a month. The AIADMK party which was ruling the state by then and Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran was reportedly threatened by Central Government for its inability to
collect revenue from villages and also threatened to blacklist the state on this reason.

As a result of no tax campaign the revenue collection in Vedasendur area drastically came down, owing to complete non-payment of any tax to government. In order to remove this impasse and find a way out the M.G. Ramachandran government invited Narayanaswami Naidu and other Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leaders for negotiations. In the negotiation, the leaders accepted 1+1 formula (i.e., previous arrear one month bill and current month bill) of electricity bill payment. The government on its part appointed a high power committee under the Chairmanship of Munu Adhi to go into the grievances of peasantry and suggest measures for redressal. But later, Narayanaswami Naidu and other leaders defied their own commitment accepted in the negotiation called the peasantry not to remit Electricity Board arrears through 1+1 formula. This unexpected development necessitated action against Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam by way of arresting Narayanaswami Naidu on 8.4.78.

The peasants of Vedasendur particularly the peasants of Nagampatti Panchayat village unable to tolerate the arrest and imprisonment of their leader Narayanaswami Naidu organised a Road Roko agitation and blocked the main road right from the entrance point of Vedasendur and parked their bullock carts numbering around
1000 on the road on 9.4.78. A major Kodaganaru bridge at the bullock cart blockade tactically done by peasantry on the night of arrest of Narayanaswami Naidu left buses and other modes of transport stranded and the traffic was totally obstructed for hours on the next day. It was estimated that about 10,000 people participated in road roko on this day. On information the police rushed to the spot with a view to regulate traffic by removing carts parked across the road and maintain law and order. But they could not enter into Vedasendur as the main bridge leading to Vedasendur was blocked. The district administration and police contacted the peasant leaders and requested for removal of bullock carts and clear road blockade in vain. The refusal of peasants to clear the road blockade until their leader Narayanaswami Naidu was released, led to use of force by police in the form of Lathi Charge, bursting of tear gas shells, forceful removal of bullock cart by police personnel and ultimately firing on peasantry. In the police firing on 9.4.78 six peasants died on the spot.

The firing incident in Vedasendur on peasantry further boosted the image of Narayanaswami Naidu for whose release only the bullock cart, road blockade was staged in Vedasendur. This incident also clearly demonstrated the militancy of Vedasendur peasantry and exposed peasant class interest.
To commemorate the memory of the Martyrs a Sthupi (Tomb) was erected at the entrypoint of Vedasendur nearby the Kodaganaru bridge where the firing incident took place. The Sthupi was declared open by Narayanaswami Naidu. Later, this site about 10 cents was purchased in the name of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam and a well was dug and installed pumpset. Now, the operation of pump shed installed within the premises of Sthupi was given in auction every year to mobilise money for the Sangam's organisational activities and meet other expenditures like legal proceedings particularly in the Electricity Board arrear for Belated Payment Surcharge (B.P.S.C) stay case. Later, a Mattuthavani (Bullock Sandi) and peasant mela became a regular feature on all 9th April every year.

The Vedasendur peasants overwhelming number coming from Nagampatti Panchayat, though repressed, and fell to the shots of police raised above and started picketing Government offices particularly the local Tahsildar office the very next day, i.e., 10.4.78 onwards seeking the release of Narayanaswami Naidu. The picketing of peasants went on unabated till 24.4.78, the date of release of Narayanaswami Naidu. During the fortnight long picketing here about 250 peasants were arrested. Of the 250 peasants arrested, about 50 persons belonged to Ottanagampatti, one of the study villages in this area and other 25 persons belonged to the other study villages.
like Chenankottai, Narayapuram, O.Pudur, Kunnampatti and Lavuganampatti. The arrested peasants were remanded and sent to places like, Madurai, Trichy, Cuddalore etc., for imprisonment.

Through this picketing not only the objective of seeking the release of Narayanaswami Naidu was realised but also the Vedasendur area gained importance in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam Organisation and government and thereby demonstrated its strength. Since Vedasendur was considered and recognised as a stronghold, the CID report always hinted the need for preventive arrests on such occasions when government took severe action against Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam at State level. In view of militancy manifested by Nagampatti peasants through these agitations, whenever either Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam initiated agitations or Government undertook certain drastic measures in the Vedasendur area, the Nagampatti Panchayat village peasants were taken into custody as a precautionary measure in the form of preventive arrests.

The Vedasendur area peasants due to their militant involvement in all these agitations attracted the attention of the State, earned name and established their militancy in the history of non-political peasant organisations in Tamilnadu, particularly, after the firing incident. The peasants of this area, particularly, the
Nagampatti peasants participated in almost all passive and militant agitations announced by the State leadership from time to time and strengthened its mass base amongst the suffering peasantry and cemented their solidarity in pursuing their common cause issue. The caste factor, i.e., the dominant Gowder, Gounders and Naickers supplemented and acted in favour of peasant solidarity.

In the same year 1978, a State level conference was declared to be organised in Madras. The State leadership of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam gave a call to peasants of all over State to the proposed conference. The Vedasendur area peasants including the peasants of the Nagampatti Panchayat had accepted the call and willingly engaged several lorries to proceed to Madras for attending the conference. The M.G. Ramachandran government in order to curb the mobility of peasantry from all over State to Madras issued an order banning the entry of lorries without valid permits and threatened lorry operators not to carry peasants to Madras. Consequently, the lorry operators in this area expressed their inability to hire their vehicle for peasants’ transport. This was the case all over the State. Hence, the peasants of rural area could not proceed to Madras to attend the conference. In view of this government action, the conference was deferred.

The pressure course of action continued unabated inspite of the policies of the government to suppress peasant movement in
Tamilnadu which was a potential threat to not only to the party in power as well as other opposition parties. The co-operative credit, electricity arrear, remunerative prices continued to be the issues of peasantry in this area during the year 1979. Bandhs, picketing, road blockade, gherao of Electricity Board department officials resistance continued during this year. The peasants of Nagampatti Panchayat villages overwhelmingly and whole heartedly participated in such type of militant peasant movement and subjected themselves to imprisonment (period ranging 3 days to one month in various jails like Trichy, Madurai, Cuddalore). In view of consistent agitation and peasants’ militant participation agricultural operations, by and large, in this area came to a standstill and severely affected the farm and household economy.

The Tamilnadu Bundh in 1979 further intensified the peasant struggles and witnessed firing in several places around Vedasendur like Nochiodaipatti, Pathamadai etc., in the Dindigul Quaid-e-Milleth (now Anna) district and Vagaikulam in Tirunelveli district. All these incidents consistently kept the government and peasants at loggerheads. The peasants were waiting for a ripe opportunity to teach a lesson to the government. Ultimately, the opportunity knocked the door of peasantry in the form of Parliament election in 1979. The peasants supported the DMK - Congress(I) combine and by cornering the peasant vote bank the alliance swept in the poll.
As against the 1977 Parliament election, this time in 1979 the Congress(I) once again regained power in the Union Government and subsequently dissolved the AIADMK Government in the Tamilnadu State and imposed President's rule. The peasants felt happy on seeing the removal of M.G. Ramachandran government which inflicted untold miseries and responsible for repressive action against the peasant in the State, in general and Vedasendur area in particular. The AIADMK party and its leader M.G. Ramachandran now out of political power effectively used the President's rule to generate public opinion in favour of their party, won the sympathy and assured lot of social welfare measures to the people. By this time, M.G. Ramachandran understood the mighty power of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and erosion of AIADMK base in rural areas owing to the growth of this peasant organisation. After having learnt lessons in recently held Parliament election, the AIADMK leadership understood without the support of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam it could not capture power in the State.

Consequently, feelers were sent to Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership and subsequently M.G. Ramachandran went in person to Vaiyampalayam to meet Narayanaswami Naidu in his residence and sought his organisation's support for AIADMK and assured to implement the nine point charter of Vivasayigal Sangam's demand and even incorporated these nine point charter in its election manifesto.
The Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam as it was a non-political organisation, leadership considered the request of AIADMK and passed a resolution in the executive council to adopt neutral stand in the next Assembly general election in 1980. This neutral stand adopted by the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam indirectly hinted its support to AIADMK and by mobilising rural votes in its favour AIADMK captured power in the State. The Vedasendur peasants also elected the AIADMK candidate to the Assembly in line with the expectation of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership.

As against all expectations of the peasantry, M.G. Ramachandran government after having been voted to power in 1980 determined to eliminate Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam by undertaking certain measures like 'Operation Disconnection' of power supply to pumpsets with a view to collect outstanding electricity bill, distraint proceeding like japti through co-operative society to recollect the overdue, revenue arrear collection etc., since 1980. This measure adopted by AIADMK government went against all expectations of peasantry. This time, the government skilfully and tactically handled these distraint proceedings by removing the entire transformer which fed pumpsets. The transformers were removed with the help of police in large numbers, at a time when the standing crop was at the flowering stage. The peasants who were unable to resist the police power, simply allowed the transformers
removed from their villages. By mortgaging jewels, disposing of the cattle, even vessels they cleared the electricity bill in full and got electricity restored to their pumpsets.

4.1.4. WOMEN PARTICIPATION AND MILITANCY

The Vedasendur area peasants, particularly, the Nagampatti Panchayat village peasants at the initial stages resisted distraint proceedings. Mention must be made here the Ottanagampatti incident. In Ottanagampatti, the Electricity Board personnel with the help of police entered into the village and instead of removing transformer disconnected the cable for about 5000 feet. The peasants later, by collecting the cable kept for wiring elsewhere on fields, reconnected with technical assistance from local wiremen overnight and operated their pumpsets and irrigated the standing crop. On hearing this information, the Electricity Board Personnel with police reinforcements rushed to the village and removed the transformer. While the transformer was being removed, the peasant women resisted the 'Operation disconnection'. The peasant women numbering around one hundred resisted alongwith other villagers in the background. The police threatened people to resort to lathi charge if they continued to resist. The villagers who were unable to see their women to undergo this humiliation of lathi charge requested women not to resist 'Operation disconnection'. This incident held at Ottanagampatti a
study village in this area, attracted the attention of the State and Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership in particular and earned name for the peasants of this village and area.

The peasant women of Vedasendur villages, particularly, those belonging to Nagampatti Panchayat villages, besides the incident of resistance at the time of removal of transformer in Ottanagampatti also proceeded to participate in picketing the Vedasendur police station after the arrest of Narayanaswami Naidu under National Security Act, to pressurise government and seek his release. The women of Vedasendur village numbering 2300 proceeded to the police station for picketing. Of the 2300 peasant women, the Nagampatti Panchayat alone contributed about five hundred. At that time, in the police station, the Sub-Inspector of Police was alone on duty as police personnel were sent to several places for maintenance of law and order. The peasant women who wanted to picket police station and subject themselves for arrest, understanding the difficulty of the Sub-Inspector of Police, who was alone in the police station, converted their agitation into a peaceful fast instead of militant picketing. This incident earned name for local Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and fame not only from the state leadership of the organisation but also from government officials and police personnel.
4.1.5. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THAMIZHAGA VIVASAYIGAL SANGAM IN VEDASENDUR AREA

The Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam here in Vedasendur with overwhelming participation by peasants of Nagampatti village participated in some other activities like dispute settlement and earned good name amongst police and the general public. Hence the local Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam unit had acted as a good Samaritan in this area by conducting Niyaya Panchayat settling various types of family feuds, transport accidents etc., and settled the matter on the spot. The general public appreciated the role of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in dispute settlement and this also reduced number of cases in the police station. The police personnel also appreciated the efforts of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in reducing their burden.

The peasants of this area, with a view to provide security to the stranded bus passengers and to maintain law and order at times of road blockade and other passive and militant activities particularly in regulating crowd in meeting organised a volunteer corps. Later, on seeing the discipline and functional effectiveness of volunteer corps, Narayanaswami Naidu appreciated and suggested to organise similar volunteer corps in other places also. Hence, the Vedasendur peasants feel proud of claiming that their area pioneered
in very many activities and earned the name of soul of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation. This claim was also supplemented by police action, whenever either government initiated stringent action against peasants or Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam initiated pressure course of action in the form of agitation against Government, police made preventive arrests in this area.

Whenever there was any public meeting around Vedasendur, conference, rally, bullock cart procession anywhere in the State, the Nagampatti village peasants alongwith their surrounding village brethren willingly associated themselves and took active part along with their volunteer corps. The volunteer corps helped the peasantry to successfully organise their meeting and other pressure course of action. Mention must be made here the active participation of this area peasants in Aruppukottai bullock cart rally. The police personnel refused permission to stage bullock cart rally there. Narayanaswami Naidu, who was also there on the previous day was very much dejected. In the preparatory public meeting held in Aruppukottai and spirited speech delivered by Vedasendur peasants got the permission for bullock cart rally. Hence, during early stages of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation here in Nagampatti Panchayat i.e., period between 1977-1980 was very strong and gained momentum and organisational strength owing to spontaneous participation by members, militancy in pressure course, discipline in
organisation, dispute settlement to provide speedy justice to the affected. But the good name and fame earned by the local Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam unit did not last long.

As stated already, the peasants through their militancy and active participation in various agitation, Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam had gradually earned bad name from government particularly from police personnel. Later, it led to a feud between government, police and even the general public. In Vedasendur at the time of Milk ban agitation, the peasants of this area earned bad name from local people. The peasants, who prevented some of the milkmen distributing milk to the people were subjected to beating by local people. This incident created a feud between peasants and general public. This had ultimately led to an agitation by peasants to shift the local bus stand from inside Vedasendur to Athumedu, a central place of Vedasendur where the rural folk used to get together. In this agitation, the government intervened and insisted peasants to contribute site nearby Athumedu for construction of Bus Stand. The peasants failed to provide site for construction of Bus Stand. This agitation although a failure to peasants, they got the order from transport authority treating Athumedu as second Bus Stand in Vedasendur.
4.1.6. DOWNFALL OF THAMIZHAGA VIVASAYIGAL SANG AM IN VEDASENDUR

Later, in the 'No-Tax' campaign the peasants of Nagampatti Panchayat villages had given a boost by way of intensively participating in it. After 48 days of no-tax, the government's revenue came down drastically. The Central Government (by then, Congress[I]), threatened to blacklist the State Government due to its failure to collect revenue. In order to avoid blacklisting of Tamilnadu, the M.G. Ramachandran government wanted a dialogue with peasant movement leaders in 1980 prior to election. But Karunanithi, the then opposition DMK leader in the Assembly, successfully averted Narayanaswami Naidu and other leaders to take part in the negotiations, stating that M.G. Ramachandran government would be dissolved in another 10 days and thereafter the DMK-Congress(I) alliance would capture power in the State and promised Narayanaswami Naidu certain beneficial measures after capturing power. Consequently, carried away by this advice tendered by Karunanidhi, Narayanaswami Naidu had cancelled the M.G. Ramachandran's negotiation meeting. This incident further aggravated the conflict between the Government and Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. After this incident, the M.G. Ramachandran government determined to crush Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in all possible ways.
As a sequel to the Government determination, the Electricity Board started operation disconnection. Co-operative Society initiated distress proceedings in the form of japti. The peasants of this area who are earnestly looking forward direction from the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam state leadership to initiate counter measures were disappointed. The government through these forcible measures and distress proceedings successfully realised the outstanding from peasants. The peasants by selling or mortgaging their properties cleared their dues in co-operative society and electricity board office. The failure of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam to protect the interests of peasants spoiled the image of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in their minds and created opinion amongs the mass base that Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam would no longer protect their interests. On the other hand, certain welfare measures undertaken by M.G. Ramachandran Government to the police in the form of provision of essential commodities at subsidised rate indirectly motivated and instigated to repress peasantry. This tendency was much visible in Trichy on the eve of a rally convened by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam to demonstrate their protest to the Koothappar issue, where the tank site was assigned to landless labour for house building with Government assistance.

The active and militant participation of members in various pressure courses of action launched by the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal
Sangam from time to time earned bad name, and created loggerheads between Government and organisation. Later on, it also led to a feud between police and Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam when Narayanaswami Naidu reportedly stated 'the women of police personnel were the wives of peasants.' The Government on the one hand was determined to crush Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam once for all and on the other hand, the police personnel were waiting for an opportunity to take revenge for the speech reportedly delivered by Narayanaswami Naidu and other leaders which spoiled the image of women in police families. The opportunity came to the Government and police when Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam announced the rally at Trichy in 1981 to highlight the Koothappar issue which saw the organisation's drift towards destruction. The Government refused permission for this rally and banned the entry of peasants into Trichy on that day. Violating the Government order, the peasants of the State in general and southern districts in particular started their journey to attend the rally. This precipitated police action on peasants who travelled by bus, train etc., to reach Trichy. The Nagampatti peasants who travelled through bus were subjected to repression by police at Manapparai on their way to Trichy. The peasants who travelled by bus or train all over Tamilnadu also faced the same fate. The members known for militancy after severe repression on them were eagerly looking forward direction from Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam
leadership to counteract government and police were disappointed again when Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam did not announce any serious agitation against government. This, according to leaders of this area, was because of lack of clarity and courageousness of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership to face governmental actions.

Encouraged by Trichy incident, the government demolished a building of peasants in Oddanchathram constructed on the Highways at a cost of Rs. 2.00 lakhs. The building was about to be declared open by Narayanaswami Naidu on the eve of Farmers Day, on July 5, 1981. The peasants of this area who contributed men, material, money for the construction of this building shocked to see this act of Government in demolishing the building by engaging bulldozers overnight. Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this matter also did not launch any serious agitation to protect the prestige and honour of the members.

The Trichy and Oddanchathram incidents clearly paved the way for the downfall of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and inaction to counter Government repressions checked peasants’ militancy in this area to a great extent. The peasants of Nagampatti villages who were eagerly looking forward retaliatory action from State leadership against Government to teach lesson were disappointed. This injected
pessimism about the future of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in their minds. This was the starting point of emergence of weakness in the organisation of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this area as well as in the State. The determined AIADMK government led by M.G. Ramachandran to crush Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam with the active support of other opposition political parties did it. The peasants in the Nagampatti Panchayat unable to bear Government's retaliation had gradually lost hope in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation. In order to safeguard the interest of the organisation and carried away by the tactics and advice by Karunanidhi, the then opposition leader in Assembly, the State leadership convened the executive meeting at Gudalur in early 1982 and took the decision of converting the non-political Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation into a political party in the name of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party (IFTP).

It is worthwhile to point out at this juncture that Karunanidhi, who was once responsible for the growth of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam during late sixties and early seventies was also now responsible for its downfall too. As has been pointed out by way of tendering advice and working tactically against the interests of the peasants, he broke the Association. Although M.G. Ramachandran was willing to do welfare to peasantry and prepared to consider the nine point charter of demands, carried away
by the advice tendered by Karunanidhi not to meet M.G. Ramachandran for negotiations on nine point charter of demands, the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership lost an opportunity to seek the benefit to the peasantry. By exploiting effectively the wavering mind of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership, Karunanidhi used the situation for his party's political benefit and assured them to do lot after capturing power in forthcoming general election in 1980. But, it did not come true after the election as the AIADMK led by M.G. Ramachandran regained power and started oppressive actions against the peasantry vehemently.

After the firing incident in Vedasendur and surrounding villages and Oddanchathram building demolition incident, the peasants of this area were eagerly awaiting direction from State leadership to engage in militant activities but due to circumstantial pressures and government threat, Narayanaswami Naidu was unable to pursue any serious agitation. Therefore, the weakness of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation and intervention of political parties in its functions started. This ultimately led to politicalisation in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation resulting in conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party.
4.1.7. DIVISION AMONG PEASANTRY AND ITS IMPACT

The ruling AIADMK Government led by M.G. Ramachandran learning lessons from past experience during 70s from Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, after capturing power in the State in 1980 general election determined to crush Vivasayigal Sangam from rural soil by initiating such distraint proceedings as operation power disconnection, japti etc., realised its objective which, in turn, affected peasantry in this area known for perennial drought conditions. Side by side, the government also initiated certain welfare measures to the peasantry who are toiling and moiling in the event of failure of monsoon, drought, credit burden, electricity tariff outstandings etc. By dividing the peasantry in terms of small farmer, big farmer on the basis of land size criterion, the government extended all privileged treatment in the form of credit cancellation/waiver of penal interest and interest to the tune of Rs.125 crore, subsidy to small farmer in their purchases of agricultural inputs, subsidy in Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), free electricity supply to small farmer and Rs.75 per horse power per mensem to pumpsets of big farmers (now free electricity for motor pumpsets for all categories of farmers). All these measures inflicted erosion in the organisation of peasantry and in their interest in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation. Thereby the mass base came from small farmer (SF), marginal farmer (MF) who are now benefited by these
governmental measures lacked interest in their participation any more in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities. But the 1 + 1 formula designed earlier for the payment of electricity arrear remained unresolved. The landless peasants who acted as the associates of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam also dissociated themselves when the government announced certain welfare measures like 50 per cent subsidy under IRDP loan, leading to their self employment, housing for Harijans, employment guarantee schemes and various other poverty alleviation schemes ensured their welfare to a great extent. Therefore, these peasants strata, small farmer, marginal farmer, middle farmer and landless agricultural labour dissociated themselves from the activities and thereby the mass base of the organisation came from these segments tremendously affected. Moreover, the benefits to these segments were announced at a time when the Association was inactive. Consequently, the credit of these welfare measures went in favour of AIADMK Government and its leader M.G. Ramachandran.

4.1.8. CONVERSION OF THAMIZHAGA VIVASAYIGAL SANGAM INTO POLITICAL PARTY AND RESPONSE OF PEASANTRY

After Vedasendur firing incident, Trichy conference failure and repression by police on peasants, Oddanchathram building demolition, Government's determined efforts to crush Thamizhaga Vivasayigal
Sangam from rural soil in the form of operation power disconnection, japti, divide and rule policy adopted by Government in terms of small farmer and big farmer and concessional treatment accorded to small farmers and landless agricultural labourers inflicted further deterioration in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation and its movements. All these incidents in the early 80s effectively set in motion a lull period in the activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. Moreover, the loyal peasants of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam on account of inability to bear repression by police and dishonour by revenue and electricity board officials lacked interest in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities.

The emergence and subsequent domination of vested interests who were carried away by power-hungry, political parties particularly DMK, Janatha, Lok Dal, etc., advised the leadership to convert Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political organisation so that they could support and participate as an alliance partner in their pressure tactics. Moreover, the excesses committed by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, local leadership on certain local issues precipitated the conversion of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation, a non-political entity, into a political party in order to safeguard the interests of the remaining big farmers and medium farmers to some extent. Hence, the influence of vested interests, party politics, money mindedness, power-hungry,
selfishness, undemocratic attitude of State leadership, consistent failures of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities in early 80s, inability to bear police repression and Government's suppression, divide and rule policy of Government to break the vertical unity and horizontal class identity of peasantry, poor response of State leadership whenever Government used force on peasantry, were the reasons for the complete elimination of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and subsequent conversion into a political party in the name of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party in 1982.

The Vedasendur peasants in general and Nagampatti peasants in, particular once known for militant participation in all pressure courses of action did not support the idea of conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party. They wanted to remain neutral and non-political. But, this idea of continuation of non-political did not find favour amongst the leadership who already made up their mind owing to reasons presented above. The opponents of conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party organisation were expelled. The expelled leaders here include Palapatti Subramaniam, Balakrishnan, Ponram, Pavalar Palanichamy etc. The State level frontline leaders who also took the line of non-political faced the same fate of expulsion. They include Balasubramanian, the Secretary, M. Chellamuthu, General Secretary, Mayil Samy, Treasurer. Hence, after conversion there emerged
splinter groups and factions based upon caste, religion, influence of local leaders. Mayil Samy wanted to be in a non-political organisation, so that peasantry could preserve solidarity and pursue the burning issues of peasantry. Balasubramanian already suffered a severe repression from Government supported non-political stand. Chellamuthu who also took a similar stand given birth to a splinter group by organising the Vellala Gounder in the State in general and Oddanchathram, Vedasendur, Dindigul, Palladam, Karamadai, Avinashi in particular. Hence, a caste based splinter group came into being and dissociated itself from the parent organisation of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam on the eve of its conversion into a political party. Similarly, certain other leaders of non-political party organisation of peasants like Chinnaswami Gounder and Muthuswami Gounder also appreciated non-political stand. But only some of the frontline leaders known for certain vested interests stated above and carried away by the feeling of safeguarding the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam which was on the verge of collapse at that time, took this decision of conversion into a political party.

4.1.9. CONSEQUENCE OF CONVERSION OF THAMIZHAGA VIVASAYIGAL SANGAM INTO POLITICAL PARTY

The crucial State executive committee meeting which took the decision of political held at Gudalur in May 1982. The leaders
considered all aspects and implications of being political and finally took the decision. Those opposed to this decision as stated already, were expelled from the organisation. The announcement of conversion into political party in the name of IFTP came from Narayanaswami Naidu in the July 5, 1982 Farmer's Day rally held at Madras. The announcement of this decision led to dissociation from the Sangam of those active members who supported its non-political stand. While majority of the non-political supporters remained neutral a part of them returned to their parent political organisation which they identified before their enrolment into Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam like DMK, AIADMK, Congress(I), Janatha Party, Communist Parties etc. Consequently, the mass base of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/IFTP affected after the conversion. The political parties on account of the re-entry of these Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam members regained their strength in rural areas to a great extent. The caste based splinter group of Chellamuthu further deteriorated the strength of IFTP. In view of all these developments, the IFTP, by and large, remained as a limited membership and leaders dominated political party that those who owe allegiance to State level leaders and those belonged to the leaders' caste.
4.1.10. EMERGENCE OF NON-POLITICAL PEASANT ORGANISATION IN VEDASENDUR AREA

Vedasendur area, as stated already, once earned the fame of soul and the nerve centre of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, opposed to the idea of conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party organisation. Since 70s this area has been maintaining non-political identity which was the strength of the peasants of this area cutting across caste, class, creed, preserved solidarity owing to their commitment to pursue tirelessly the common issues of peasantry. The decision relating to conversion affected them to a great extent. After the announcement of the decision, the majority of the peasantry irrespective of their socio-economic background remained in non-political stand, a minority of them left the IFTP and went back to their respective political parties.

The peasants of Nagampatti Panchayat in particular and Vedasendur area in general, who supported the idea of being non-political and wanted to remain in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam gathered in the Martyrs' Memorial column (Sthupi) subsequently and decided to launch a separate Agriculturists' Association in the name of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam and registered it as a non-political peasant organisation striving to work for the welfare of the peasantry. In order to avoid any serious erosion in non-political
stand in this area, the leaders subscribed this stand undertook a tour of the entire taluk to startwith and succeeded in their efforts to keep the morale of peasants in favour of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam.

In order to perpetuate the memory of martyrs the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam had decided to observe a bullock sandy on all 9th April every year and celebrate a mela in Vedasendur to instill in the minds of peasants the supreme sacrifice committed by six peasants on 9.4.78 who fell to the gun shots of police. The proceeds of the mela, sandy and auction amount of pumpset installed in the site of the Sthupi utilised for undertaking welfare measures to the peasantry in this area who enrolled members in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam. One such measure undertaken by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam after its registration, filed a writ petition in High Court on behalf of nearly 10000' peasants of this area in the 1 + 1 formula based arrears later known as BPSC (Belated Payment Surcharge) against the Electricity Board and got a stay. In view of this writ, the Electricity Board was constrained to initiate any distraint proceedings against the peasants in this area. Besides this, the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam has also initiated steps to reunite all splinter groups of erstwhile Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and other non-political organisation like the one led by Balasubramanian, Mayilswami, Chinnaswami Gounder,
Muthuswami Gounder. According to the leaders, they are receiving encouraging response from these groups and organisations to form a common forum for pursuing the issues of peasantry.

4.1.11. THE POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF PEASANTRY - THE EXPERIENCE OF IFTP IN THE STUDY AREA

The peasants of the study area i.e., Nagampatti Panchayat were against the conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party and even against their formal enrolment in any political party. Because these were the peasants who were subjected to brutal attack and repression at the hands of successive governments particularly since their enrolment in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. Obviously, they were against political party identity and its course of action in pursuing the problems of peasantry. At the same time, a minority who owed allegiance to Narayanaswami Naidu and Sivaswami, the President and General Secretary respectively of the IFTP, on account their caste identity went behind them and some influential persons among these minority were made office bearers of IFTP in Vedasendur area for the namesake. No programme worthy of mention was undertaken by these leaders of IFTP in this area as the party had no support from peasants. In the study area once when the organisation remained as non-political entity, peasant families were identified emotionally
attached with the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and militant participation was forthcoming from these segments. Since conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party, a clear rout in the mass base has taken place in this area.

The weakness of IFTP and its loss of mass base was visible when the party fared poor and drew blank in the 1984 general election to the Tamilnadu Assembly and subsequent local body elections held in 1986. Meantime, during electioneering, on seeing erosion of mass base of IFTP the president of IFTP Narayanaswami Naidu died while staying in Kovilpatti Guest House. The death of Narayanaswami Naidu was yet another blow to the political party - IFTP and its prospects of being a viable political organisation of peasantry. Since conversion and party politics of peasantry in Tamilnadu whatever election it contested either it faced a clear rout in the form of losing its deposit or winning marginal seats in the local body election. As far as the performances of IFTP in the study area was concerned, it was a clear rout and totally lost its one time stronghold which was considered as the soul and nerve centre of peasant organisation.

The ex-members who had political party background prior to their enrolment in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in the event of fulfilment of certain demands and concession given by Government prepared to delink their association with Thamizhaga
Vivasayigal Sangam which has now become a political party. To them, continuation in IFTP would amount to dual political party interest which is not good for them for seeking certain favour from their parent political party leadership.

Moreover, certain excesses committed by local leadership on the occasion of agitation demanding shift of bus stand to Athumedu, bundh dispute settlement and association with domination of Gounder and Naidu in organisational matters led to the dissociation of members who were unable to tolerate the style of functioning of the local leaders. These ex-members remained neutral after the conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into political party. To them, neither the political party nor the non-political peasant organisation would be interested in peasants' upliftment as long as there is domination of capitalists in democracy.

4.1.12. CHANGE IN RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The peasant organisation and subsequent participation in various pressure courses of activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in Nagampatti cluster of villages resulted in certain changes in the structural and functional aspects of rural social life. Since establishment of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam the peasants in this cluster of villages brought under this fold irrespective of the
personal background of members such as caste, class, religion, political affiliation etc. The organised forum had also facilitated for the systematic conscientization of peasants which led to their militant participation in the activities of the Association. Therefore, the peasant organisation was instrumental in breaking barriers and forging unity amongst peasantry since its establishment.

The peasant women who were subordinated due to the strong influence of indigenous culture were brought to the forefront at a time when their men were sore over the repression. They took lead and participated in the activities of their organisation such as gherao, picketing, resistance to distraint measures and thereby exhibited comparable militancy with Piramalai Kallar women.

Since establishment of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in Nagampatti cluster the small and middle peasantry took lead role in organisational activities which, in turn, effected change in the traditional leadership patterns. This change in leadership pattern injected change in status of these peasants as well. The peasant organisation in this area through its manoeuvrs established its credibility amongst not only the peasantry but also the general public who recognised the peasantry here as a powerful force. The organisation of local Panchayat (Katta Panchayattu) by peasants and successful resolution of conflicts arising amongst peasants and others in this area bear testimony to this claim.
The organisation of peasantry in this cluster of villages not only acted as a powerful pressure group but also established as a force to reckon with in the State through their militancy and hectic involvement in the activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this area as well in the surrounding areas. The organisation of volunteer corps in this area for the purpose of regulation of meetings etc., brought the youth into active organisational activities.

The establishment of peasant organisation in Nagampatti cluster of villages checked peasants' earlier immobility, isolation and brought them to the wider world and instrumental in changing their outlook. All these developments and changes observed in their midst had also resulted in certain negative consequences like lack of concentration of farming, crop failure, debt burden etc., which ultimately affected the farm and household economy.
PART 2

4. Z. EMERGENCE OF PEASANT ORGANISATION IN USILAMPATTI AREA

4.2.1. AGRICULTURAL SCENARIO

Usilampatti is one of the taluks in Madurai district which is known for economic backwardness and social domination of Piramalai Kallar community. This community is traditionally popular for its militancy as it was classified as De-notified tribe during the British period. The members of this community mostly engaged themselves once in robbery, waylaying and other like activities. Besides, they also engaged, on account of this popular image in 'Kaval' (defence) activities to safeguard the life, liberty, property of the people. There was a saying in those days, when a criminal or a thief was entrusted with the task of defence of those properties, materials etc., which are prone to theft, the thief instead of stealing it safeguards and seeks reward for his act of defence. The people of other communities in order to protect their standing crops and other agricultural commodities in villages entrusted this responsibility only to members of Piramalai Kallar community, so that their materials, properties were spared by these people known for such type of notorious activities.

Besides militancy, criminal behaviour, etc., the people of Piramalai Kallar are also known for extravagance in the celebration of life cycle ceremonies first for the sake of prestige, respect, importance, social honour etc. Whenever such ceremonies take place
in their kith and kin's houses they compete with others in giving 'Seer' (gift) to the concerned people who may either be related in their maternal or paternal line or even related through marriage of their sons and daughters. Prior to 70s when agriculture was comparatively prosperous owing to regular onset of monsoon, traditional methods used in cultivation particularly prior to the introduction of Green Revolution or new strategy in agriculture, agriculture remained as a 'family farm' wherein all the members of the joint family contributed their might and produced lot and thereby met their needs. In view of family farming and other natural condition, the people in this area were leading comparatively prosperous life. Agriculture in view of local dependence in all inputs (labour, materials, methods etc.) the peasants were left with large surplus in their agricultural production. This surplus gained in agriculture was spent lavishly and extravagantly in such occasions as celebration of life cycle ceremonies in their near and dear houses.

As there was no other potential source for irrigation, monsoon was the only source of irrigation by then. Hence Usilampatti taluk, by and large, characterised by rainfed agricultural condition. This being the case, number of irrigation tanks were formed to cater to the irrigation needs of the surrounding farmers. The tanks fed their lands by stagnating water during times of monsoon. Hence, failure of monsoon affected seriously the stagnation of water in these
tanks leading to non-cultivation of land. When agriculture is affected the household economy of the peasants is equally disturbed.

As the people of this area were known for militancy, criminality, extravagant character capital formation was very poor which affected seriously their investment on any income generation activities. Moreover, poor capital formation was also due to self dependency in agriculture as agricultural inputs (seeds, labour, manure, tank irrigation etc.) were also locally available.

The agricultural scenario of self dependence, local dependence family farming of peasant agriculture was seriously paralysed in this area due to the following factors:

1. Consistent failure of monsoon - irregular monsoon and untimely rain leading to crop failures, ultimately affected farm and household economy.

2. Perpetuation of drought condition rendered peasant families into untold misery - water table further deteriorated down and made farming uneconomical.

3. Introduction of modern methods in cultivation made the condition bad to worse and effectively set in motion
outside village dependence which brought into the village the gradual sway of city centered/market based economy. In view of these developments, the peasants had gradually lost their autonomy and self dependency in agricultural production.

The developments observed in this area during late sixties aggravated the condition of peasantry. Furthermore, the gradual extension of transport and communication increased rural peoples interaction with nearby city centres like Madurai and Usilampatti. Extension of electricity in these villages led to energisation of pumpset and replaced traditional bucket/mhote irrigation. Installation of electric pumpset, use of high yield variety (HYV) seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, usage of machinery in cultivation etc., which are city centered further relieved the peasants from their one time self dependence condition in agriculture and outside village dependency has been gradually increased.

What is more now is the peasants, inability to purchase these inputs and continue agricultural pursuits. With a view to help peasants and alleviate the abject condition in agriculture, the government during 70s introduced primary agricultural co-operative credit societies in rural areas and Land Mortgage Banks and offered credit for farm operations under the heads of crop loan, Short Term,
Medium Term and Long Term loans. The peasants felt jubilant in this set up of rural credit transaction and used this credit for making investments on land. But their investment on land did not bear fruits owing to perpetuation of drought condition. Hence, the peasants were unable to redeem the credit drawn from these sources in time and led to credit over dues.

The peasants of this area due to the prevailing abject condition in agriculture unable to remit the electricity dues in time. The Electricity Board in order to collect the outstanding from peasants initiated series of measures during mid 70s. To startwith, the Electricity Board issued notices to defaulters and threatened to remove the fuse carriers in the event of non-compliance and started removing fuse carriers. This action undertaken by Electricity Board buried the hope of peasants' engagement in agriculture.

The Credit Co-operative Societies and Land Development Banks also on their part in order to realise the overdues threatened to initiate distraint proceedings in the form of Japti. As these distraint proceedings, that is removal of fuse carrier to disconnect power to pumpsets by Electricity Board, Japti to realise co-operative credit overdues, decree, attachment are all considered acts which affect the social honour of the rural people. In order to safeguard their honour in rural social life, the affected had to mortgage their property (both movable and immovable) at the initial stages.
This abrupt development in the form of distraint proceedings also led to the peasants borrowing from non-institutional sources of credit like money lenders, traders, commission agents etc. In such cases, the non-institutional sources charged exorbitant rate of interest to the principal amount. Later, the traders and commission agents by taking advantage of continued dependency of peasants pre-fixed price of agricultural commodities at the time of issue of credit for making investment for raising a particular crop in a given season. This has led to fixing of unremunerative prices for the products of agriculture.

As stated already prior to these developments particularly since introduction of modern methods in cultivation and when agriculture remained as a family farm the rural cultivators were producing mainly food crops to meet their consumption and a part of surplus was also stored underground or on ground within the house. Hence, self sufficiency in peasant families and self reliance in rural areas were very much visible by then. But this condition of agricultural prosperity was seriously affected since introduction of modern methods in agriculture and deterioration in natural and geographic conditions. Consequently, the city centered money lenders, businessmen, traders, commission mandy owners started exerting their influence on farm activities in the form of lending money, making available the agricultural inputs to peasants etc. All these developments in agriculture precipitated capitalisation and commercialisation in agriculture.
The investment made by peasants on farm with the help of institutional and non-institutional sources of credit bore no fruits in view of perpetuation of drought, etc. The standing crops particularly the cash crops like cotton, groundnut and food crops like paddy, cholam, ragi were subjected to pest attack. This was mainly because of old stock and low quality of pesticides sold on credit to peasants by traders. The agricultural economy was drastically paralysed in rural areas due to these developments. By this time, the institutional and non-institutional sources started exerting pressure on the toiling peasantry to recollect the amount lent once.

Moreover, the Government order issued in mid 70s specifying levy of paddy, that is one bag of paddy should be given as levy to the government for every one bag of paddy marketed with the commission mandies. The peasants although produced paddy during; favourable seasons are very much affected by this Government order as there is a gap of Rs.70 between the usual price Rs.180 per quintal and Rs.110 under levy scheme.

In the case of employment, as agriculture was a gamble in monsoon, unemployment under employment was perennial feature in this area. The government owing to obvious and political considerations (as this constituency elect mostly candidates belonging to opposition party that is AIFB since 1952) neglected this area in
government assistance and development programme implementation. For example, inspite of the vagarious agricultural condition, the peasants of this area during good seasons abundantly produce cotton, groundnut etc. But the textile mills, ginning mills, oil mills are concentrated in Andipatti and Theni areas in this district. The entrepreneurs were also unwilling to start any major industries particularly the agro based ones utilising the locally available raw materials like cotton, groundnut etc., as they are scared by the militancy and labour problems in this area known for domination of Piramalai Kallar community.

The continued Government negligence of Usilampatti area was also felt by people when the Congress Government during Kamaraj period as Chief Minister constructed Vagai Dam which is located near Usilampatti. The water stored in Vaigai Dam was not spared for the irrigation of Usilampatti and its surrounding areas which is traditionally known as a backward pocket in this State. The scenario depicted above rendered backwardness in agriculture leading to under development. As the people of the predominant community i.e., Piramalai Kallar who were marked by illiteracy and ignorance attributed the reason for all these development as Gods wrath/fury on people with whom immorality, lack of charity, integrity, non-performance of religious festivals were identified.
During all these years since 1969 till 1977 Karunanidhi was at the helm of state affairs as Chief Minister. The people believed the Government led by Karunanidhi did not initiate any measure to alleviate their sufferings. The feeling developed by people of Piramalai Kallar community led to a feud between DMK and the Piramalai Kallar community people. Moreover, the distraint proceedings now in the year 1977 initiated by the government through the co-operative societies further earned the fury of the members of Piramalai Kallar community. The distraint proceedings initiated by Electricity Board with a view to realise the outstanding made the situation bad to worse. The debt burden of peasantry in this area further aggravated the situation.

The similar agricultural scenario was very much prevailing in the study block that is Chellampatti Union where the Piramalai Kallar community people are the dominant community. The traditional agricultural practices, self sufficiency, self reliance, family farming type subsistence food crop cultivation were very much visible in the study Panchayat villages, that is Thidiyan Panchayat prior to introduction of all modern methods of cultivation. The perpetuation of drought up to failure of monsoon, crop failure, debt burden, mounting overdue in Co-op credit institutions, outstandings in Electricity Board, unremunerative farming, low price offered, dependency on outside village institutions like money lender, trader,
commission agents further aggravated the condition of peasantry in Usilampatti Taluk, Chellampatti Block in general and the study villages in Thidiyan Panchayat in particular.

The initiation of distraint proceedings in the year 1977 and later in the Thidiyan Panchayat villages by the credit co-operative society and Electricity Board and pressure exerted by non-institutional sources of credit precipitated the need for organisation of the affected peasantry in Thidiyan Panchayat. Around this time, the peasants of this area came to know the success story of Vedasendur peasantry in their efforts to resist these distraint proceedings of co-operative societies and Electricity Board.

The leaders of Vedasendur Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam after their successful resistance of these distraint proceedings sent message through cattle herds to the leaders of Piramalai Kallar community in Usilampatti and surrounding areas. The message of Vedasendur peasantry was received by one Kannadi Ramaswami and later transmitted to Agriculturists like Chinnaiah Thevar (now general secretary of taluk IFTP) Chellarn Ochathevar, 0. Ramaswami of Ambattayampatti and Markandan of T.Uchapatti. These leaders on receiving message started the pioneering efforts to organise the peasantry with a view to resist the distraint proceedings on the lines of Vedasendur peasantry and safeguard the interest of the toiling,
moiling and the peasantry subjected to exploitation by Government and other city centered middlemen.

4.2.2. INITIAL ORGANISATION OF PEASANTRY

Impressed by the successful resistance of distraint proceedings by peasantry in Vedasendur area in order to safeguard the interests of the peasantry in Usilampatti Taluk, the leaders of Piramalai Kaliar community who received the message on the need for peasant organisation took the leading role in organisation of the affected, exploited peasantry spread in the Blocks of Usilampatti, Peraiyur and Chellampatti. As stated already, Piramalai Kaliar is the predominant community in this taluk spread over in all the three Blocks. Hence, the homogeneity of caste identity facilitated for the immediate efforts to organise the members of Piramalai Kaliar and other caste minorities under the fold of peasant organisation.

The leaders of Piramalai Kaliar community in Chellampatti Block like 0. Ramaswami Thevar of Ambattayampatti, Markandan Thevar of T. Uchapatti, Diraviyam Thevar of Nallaperumalpatti, Krishnamurthi of Thidiyan pioneered the task of dissemination of message received from Vedasendur peasantry and generated awareness among the toiling peasantry on the need for their organisation. As thei people of Thidiyan Panchayat comprising the villages Ambattayampatti,
T. Uchapatti, Nallaperumalpatti, Thidiyan, Valangakulam related to these leaders, the organisational task was carried out without any difficulty. The peasant response to the call of these leaders in Thidiyan Panchayat was spontaneous and contributed whatever they can to supplement and strengthen the organisational activities of these leaders.

The peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat were mainly organised on the following issues which were at stake and took serious proportions in rural economy and affected the peasant households.

1. Cancellation of co-operative credit
2. Reduction in the electricity tariff
3. Remunerative prices
4. Irrigation facility by Channel from Vaigai Dam.

The participation of peasantry in organisational meeting and their response to the call of the leaders was overwhelmingly spontaneous as the issues raised in this meeting were burning ones which confronted the peasantry. The ex-servicemen peasants in Thidiyan Panchayat intensively involved themselves in the organisational activities. The leaders of the peasant organisation informed the suffering peasantry by enrolling themselves in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam they need not remit or even bother the
co-operative credit overdue, not be scared of any distraint proceedings, electricity tariff outstanding etc. Consequently, the peasantry in this area spontaneously and even emotionally responded and pledged to participate in all the activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. All these organisational activities initiated by the leaders of the dominant caste ultimately resulted in the establishment of branch of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in Thidiyan Panchayat on 27 October 1977. Since then, the peasantry in this area intensified their struggle against the Government and other exploiters to realise their burning issues for which they were organised. In order to realise these issues the peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat participated in various pressure courses of action at local, regional, district and State levels.

4.3.3. PRESSURE COURSES OF ACTION OF PEASANTRY IN THIDIYAN PANCHAYAT

The peasants of this area who are mostly middle and small peasants after the establishment of the branch organisation of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in Thidiyan Panchayat in the Usilampatti taluk started the pressure course of action under the leadership of the office bearers who belonged to the predominant Piramalai Kallar community which is traditionally known for militancy, perseverance and resistance against suppression and exploitation. As
stated already, homogeneity of caste identity i.e., Piramalai Kallar community who are all related with one another, facilitated easy organisation. Similar economic condition identified with them further cemented their bond and developed their community sentiment to strive for the realisation of the issues undertaken through Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. This sentiment accelerated the process of their social solidarity and generated their caste and class consciousness. Hence, homogeneity of caste belonging and similarity of economic (class) condition developed caste and class overlap in their midst. Therefore, the Piramalai Kallar community vehemently and emotionally involved in the pressure course of action.

A noteworthy social aspect observed in this area is that the people of Piramalai Kallar community considered and even worshipped Narayanaswami Naidu as their leader on par with their divinely leader Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar. The people of this area equated Narayanaswami Naidu with Muthuramalinga Thevar, because both of them fought for the development of oppressed and suppressed. For the first time in their history, the Piramalai Kallar community had accepted and developed emotional attachment with a *non-Piramalai Kallar leader since death of Muthuramalinga Thevar. This shows how Thamaizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam was able to preserve vertical and horizontal solidarity in striving for the development of the oppressed through the realisation of issues raised.
The peasant movement in this Block and Panchayat villages started as early as 1978 when Narayanaswami Naidu visited and addressed the peasantry. Narayanaswami Naidu exposed the problems of peasantry and generated awareness on how the peasants of this area were subjected to exploitation by Government, bureaucrats, middlemen. He emphasised the crying need to undertake series of pressure course of action to attract the attention of the Government and seek redressal of their grievances. The peasants of this area hitherto known for ignorance raised above as a result of the conscientization done by Narayanaswami Naidu and other peasant movement leaders here. Subsequently, the peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat overwhelmingly (all the adults of Piramalai Kallar families) participated in a rally held in 1979 in Usilampatti in which Narayanaswami Naidu addressed. The taluk level rally organised at Usilampatti and participated by Piramalai Kallar from all the villages exposed the strength and power of peasantry.

In his address, Narayanaswami Naidu made an appeal to the government (and threatened to initiate militant action) to revoke the Government order directing the peasantry to give one bag of paddy for every bag of paddy marketed with the commission agents/traders here. He also warned the Government and traders that the peasants would forcefully enter into the commission mandi and confiscate the bags procured from peasants on levy. This meeting was organised by
Usilampatti taluk Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam on 6th February 1979. Consequently, the Government issued the order which lifted the earlier order of levy procurement from peasantry. This was very first issue pursued by the peasantry in this area which led to success. Encouraged by the initial success of peasant movement in Usilampatti taluk in general and Thidiyan Panchayat villages in particular, the peasants of Thidiyan involved themselves in almost all activities on various issues involving the local, regional, district and state levels.

As far as the co-operative credit, electricity outstanding and related distraint proceedings are concerned the peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat villages in association with the peasants of the surrounding villages in Chellampatti Block initiated militant resistance to these Governmental measures in all the villages of this Panchayat and successfully avoided the japti proceedings of co-operative societies and removal of fuse carrier in electric post by the Electricity Board. On seeing the militancy, the co-operative society and Electricity Board officials decided not to initiate distraint activities and earn the wrath of the peasantry. Moreover, the officials of co-operative society and Electricity Board also belonged to the Piramalai Kallar community. The officials were also mild in their approach in initiating these distraint proceedings against their own community peasants. All these activities initiated through the co-operative society and Electricity Board took place during M.G. Ramachandran
regime in the State as Chief Minister. Although M.G. Ramachandran assured lot of measures beneficial to the peasantry in general but very little materialised after winning the general election held in 1977. Hence these incidents of peasant protest.

The militancy of peasantry in Thidiyan was noteworthy as they all wholeheartedly participated in these protest movements. The Electricity Board also on its part with a view to collecting the outstanding from peasants started certain measures in the form of power supply during odd hours, limited hours of supply. By resorting to this technique, the Electricity Board expected that the peasants would come forward and clear the dues. This counter measure of Electricity Board ultimately taken a life of peasant. While he was up in the electric post to check the fuse carrier and its proper order, electricity supply was resumed which resulted in his death in T. Uchapatti village. The peasants also by the same technique killed a wireman. While he was attending work on farm electric post, power connection was immediately restored from the transformer. In order to trace the culprit responsible for the death of wireman here in T. Uchapatti village, the peasants were repressed. This incident brought the peasants and Electricity Board officials at loggerheads for some time. Later, the political party leaders like Kandasamy Thevar intervened in this conflict and compromised these two parties. Such was the counteraction and militancy exhibited by the peasants of the study area.
As a result of these resistances and protests registered by the peasantry at the larger level, the Government announced concession in electricity tariff. The Electricity Board accepted to charge at the rate of 11 paise per unit upto 100 units and 12 paise per unit beyond 100 units of electricity consumption for motor pumpsets. The Government also agreed to cancel the penal interest and interest of co-operative dues, besides suspension of all distraint proceedings against peasants. The peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat considered this as a grand success for their organised resistance to Governmental measures and understood the value of organised and united action for seeking redressal of their grievances and convinced the violent action pays.

The peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat on seeing consistent success of their resistance and protest movements also moved into other nearby areas like Chinnamanur, Bodi etc., and helped the local peasants through their resistance technique successfully avoided the distraint proceedings. The involvement of Thidiyan Panchayat and Usilampatti taluk peasantry in such resistance activities in other areas expanded the broad base of their movement on the one hand and developed vertical solidarity, homogeneous identity as a class of peasant. Moreover, non-political colour of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam also cut across party lines and cemented their bond as interested and affected peasantry.
The peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat villages participated in a series of other militant course of action such as picketing with a view to expose their problematic condition and sought relief measures. During M.G. Ramachandran's regime as Chief Minister, on account of no-tax campaign call given by Narayanaswami Naidu, he subjected himself to arrest by the Government, and lodged in the Palayamkottai prison. With a view to seeking his release, the peasants of Usilampatti taluk and the peasants of the study panchayat i.e., Thidiyan undertook chain picketing (Thodar Mariyal) from 13.4.78 to 22.4.78 till the release of Narayanaswami Naidu. In Thidiyan Panchayat alone around 250 peasants were arrested and lodged in jails in Madurai and Trichy.

In order to alleviate the sufferings of peasants, the State leadership of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam gave the call of 'no-tax' campaign all over the State in 1979. On account of overwhelming participation and non-remittance of tax in any form to Government by peasantry seriously paralysed the State exchequer. The peasants of Thidiyan, who were already known for and registered militancy decided once for all not to pay any tax either land tax, house tax, etc., until the Government accept the nine point charter (see Appendix 3) of demands.

To stage the protest to the Vagaikulam firing (in which two peasants were killed) incident, the peasants of Usilampatti taluk and
the study panchayat i.e., Thidiyan village observed a complete bandh on 23.4.79. The AIADMK Government led by M.G. Ramachandran took all out efforts to break this bandh by deploying police in all vulnerable pockets to avoid untoward incidents as well as to maintain law and order. As this area is traditionally known for militancy, the leaders of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in the Thidiyan Panchayat villages were taken into preventive custody by police. The people both men and women who were spared by police on the bandh day left to Sarkaraipatti, a village on the Madurai-Usilampatti main road and started obstructing the transport particularly the buses. The peasants adopted the hit and vanish technique on plying vehicles by hiding in the thick sugarcane fields. On hearing this incident, the police rushed to the spot and they also had to undergo suffering due to hit and vanish technique of peasantry. At last, the police were successful in arresting some of the old aged people who were unable to run quickly into the sugarcane field. Those arrested were remanded and sent to Madurai prison. At the larger level, the bandh resulted in firing at many places including Nochiodaipatti, Udumalpet, Vagaikulam. To show the anguish of peasantry over this firing in different places, the peasants observed fast and picketing all over the State.

The ruling AIADMK Government kept the arrested peasants behind bars more than a fortnight after the success of bandh and
initiated legal proceedings on fake grounds. To counteract this measure of the Government, the peasants observed fast and picketing all over State on 21.5.79. The Usilampatti taluk peasantry in general and Thidiyan peasants in particular staged picketing on this date infront of the Usilampatti police station and subjected themselves to arrest. The arrested peasants were let off in the evening.

Besides these militant course of action manifested by the Thidiyan peasantry they were also second to none in their participation in passive course of action like participation in public meeting both local and regional, attending conferences and rallies organised at taluk, district and State levels. Even some of the peasants numbering five once went to Delhi and participated in a rally held on 13.9.79. The peasants of Thidiyan Panchayat participated in all these meetings, conferences and rallies at various places like Usilampatti, Madurai, Coimbatore, Salem, Vedasendur, Madras, Trichy etc., and shown their solidarity in striving for the success of the common cause issue and thereby strengthened the fraternal bond by moving out of their place of origin, for the first time in their social history.

4.2.4. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES

One of the noteworthy features of peasant movement in this area was the participation of women including that of agricultural
labour women. They were second to none in their participation in most pressure course of action. In almost all passive activities (public meetings, conferences, rallies, fast) of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, the women participation was forthcoming in considerable number. Even in the case of militant resistances like resistance to distraint-proceedings initiated by Electricity Board, Co-operative credit society, the women also participated in the study villages of Thidiyan Panchayat. Moreover, the Piramalai Kallar women were also equally strong and bold in character. Hence their militant participation in resistance activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam.

The women in the study villages, i.e., Thidiyan Panchayat, scared the Government officials, particularly those serving in co-operatives and Electricity Board by speaking in vulgar language and threatened to beat them with their broomsticks in the event of 'operation electricity disconnection' and 'japti' in their villages. In view of this threat, there was scare amongst these officials and decided not to enter into the Thidiyan villages. Such was the militancy exposed by the peasant women in the study area and successfully avoided the entry of these officials.
4.2.5. INFLUENCE OF PEASANTRY IN ELECTION

The peasant of this area felt dissatisfied with the response from Government led by AIADMK party leader M.G. Ramachandran. The Government's forceful measures, distraint proceedings, large scale arrest of peasants only earned the wrath of peasant mass and the Government owing to this approach lost its credibility in rural areas. The peasants of this area were also waiting for a ripe opportunity to teach a lesson to the Government which repressed the peasantry all these years since inception of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this area. The opportunity came in the form of general election to Parliament in 1979. The peasants effectively used this opportunity and dislodged the AIADMK party and M.G. Ramachandran from power in the State. The Usilampatti area peasantry including the Thidiyan villages voted for the opposition party candidate belonging to DMK and defeated AIADMK candidate in this constituency. The ruling party in this election was routed; subsequently, the M.G. Ramachandran ministry was dissolved and President's rule was imposed in Tamilnadu. After the dissolution of M.G.R ministry in the State, the Congress(I) DMK combine was hopeful to similar results in Assembly election and aspired to share power in 1980. Meantime, during the President's rule in the State M.G. Ramachandran went to the people in his own way and mobilised sympathy in this favour and for the AIADMK party. By this time, the political parties understood that without the support of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam which is
deeply rooted in rural areas it was not possible to capture power in the State. Of all the political party leaders, M.G. Ramachandran only effectively understood the vote Bank and of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and its influence in election personally met Narayanaswami Naidu and Dr. Sivaswamy and other frontline leaders at Vaiyampalayam and sought the support of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership in favour of AIADMK. M.G. Ramachandran assured the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leader to undertake all out measures to ensure wellbeing of peasantry and rural prosperity after being voted to power. As a token of moral commitment towards this end the AIADMK party in its election manifesto incorporated nine point charter of demands (Appendix 4). The Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam also on its part in turn, passed a resolution adopting neutral stand in the 1980 Assembly election which clearly saw AIADMK sweeping in the poll.

4.2.6. DIVISION OF PEASANTRY BY GOVERNMENT AND ITS IMPACT

As against all expectations and contradictory to the poll eve assurances, in the changed circumstance M.G. Ramachandran Government during 1980s determined to wipe out Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam from rural areas which is a potential threat not only to the ruling party but also to all opposition parties in the State. As a non-political party, Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam has caused erosion of membership strength to all political parties. In order to recover the
membership in rural areas the political parties extended support to Governmental measures to oppress Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. Taking advantage of this development, the Government initiated series of measures to realise the cherished objective of liquidating Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam from rural soil.

To start with, the Government announced certain concessions like co-operative credit waiver, cancellation of taccavi loan and penal interest, and free power supply to small farmers for pumpset operation. The other farmers were charged power tariff at the rate of Rs.75 per HP. Moreover, in the provision of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) assistance, the small farmers were given concession to the tune of 33.33 per cent as subsidy. Under special food production scheme also the small farmers were given incentives. The agricultural labourers were also given lot of concession/grants/subsidies under IRDP, increased minimum wages, housing etc. In view of this divide and rule policy pursued by the Government, the mass base comprising of small farmers, marginal farmers in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam was tremendously affected. The small farmers, marginal farmers and middle farmers who gained benefits through these Governmental measures gradually developed disinterest in their active participation in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities in the State in general.
But this is not the response of the Usilampatti taluk, Chellampatti Block and Thidiyan Panchayat peasantry. As has been pointed out in this chapter, the homogeneous, dominant caste identity, similarity of economic condition, militant caste character etc., built up solidarity on the issues pursued by peasantry in this area. The Governmental measures did not cause much division in the organisation of peasantry, though there are some instances here and there, Hence, even after this policy pursued by Government, the Thidiyan peasants were able to preserve their organisational solidarity unmindful of all Governmental divisions.

Side by side, the AIADMK Government initiated certain forceful and stringent measures to realise the Electricity tariff outstanding and to recollect the co-operative credit overdues after coming to power with thumping majority. This time the Government acted cleverly to disconnect power to pumpset in the form of removing the transformer with the help of police. Although the Government initiated these distraint measures in the strongholds of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam including Vedasendur, it spared the Usilampatti taluk, Chellampatti Union and Thidiyan Panchayat villages. This itself supplements the Government's apprehension about the militancy of the predominant Piramalai Kallar community people here. Consequently, the arrear amount due to Electricity Board and credit due to co-operative society kept on mounting from peasants' side in Thidiyan Panchayat.
4.2.7. DOWNFALL OF THAMIZHAGA VIVASAYIGAL SANGAM AND RESPONSE OF THIDIYAN PEASANTRY

The Koothappar issue (already referred in this chapter) sparked the peasantry in the State and the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam leadership gave call to peasants to participate in the Trichy rally scheduled to be held on 30-6-80 to highlight the issue and attract the attention of the Government in favour of the peasantry. Since the issue to be highlighted in the proposed rally was against the interest of the Government and the Harijan agricultural labourers, the Government banned the rally and warned the peasants not to enter into Trichy on that day. The peasant leadership unmindful of the Government ban directed the peasantry to participate in the rally. The peasants in order to participate in the rally travelled by bus, train etc., and subjected themselves to police repression in different places all over the State.

The police who were already waiting for an occasion to revenge the peasantry owing to the speech delivered by Vivasayigal Sangam leadership maligning the image of women of policemen families, effectively used the Government's green signal and manhandled the peasantry by stopping buses at different places and travelling in trains. The green towel, indicating the symbol of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam membership, facilitated for the easy identity and
whoever had green towel on that day whether peasant or general public subjected themselves to police repression.

The Thidiyan peasantry who were on the way to participate in the banned rally by bus were stopped at Thuvarankurichi and taken into the police station. The peasants were asked to form a queue in front of police station and each one while moving into the police station faced severe lathi charge by group of policemen leading to body injuries and bleeding. The next day, the peasants were let off from the police station with a severe warning and instruction to go back to their villages. The peasants of Thidiyan returned home with severe injuries as the rally owing to these incidents of police repression all over the State cancelled. The police repression was a severe blow to the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation as it was already experiencing deterioration caused the situation bad to worse. The Harijan agricultural labourers since Koothappar issue also developed aversion towards Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and supported the Government stand on this issue as they were the beneficiaries. Consequently, whatever the support Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam enjoyed from agricultural labour was also lost.

The Thidiyan village peasantry were awaiting a call from State leadership to counteract the Government repression in the form of militant movement. But the State leadership did not initiate any
serious measures after the Trichy incident. This had caused a lull in organisational activities of peasantry in this area. Taking advantage of this situation, the Government intensified its efforts to root out Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in villages by undertaking oppressive and distraint proceedings.

The Thidiyan peasantry continued to show militancy though the peasants of other area lacked interest owing to the following reasons:


2. Inability to bear consistent attempts to suppress peasantry and failure of agitation apparent since Trichy rally incident.

3. Poor economic condition of peasant families restricting their mobility to participate in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam pressure course of action.

This character of continued participation in peasant movement and pressure course of action activities announced by Thamizhaga
Vivasayigal Sangam from time to time was visible when the peasantry of the study area involved, though not militantly even after the 'Trichy Rally', 'Thuvarankurichi Police Station' incidents. The peasants of Thidiyan participated and observed a bandh on 31.12.80 to attract the attention of the Government for early solution to their problems.

Later on, seeing lack of response from Government's side on the issues raised the State leadership of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam gave the call to peasantry to observe the fast on 24.8.81 in front of State Government offices. The Usilampatti taluk took an active part in it particularly the Thidiyan peasantry. The response from the Government this time also not as expected by the peasantry. This type of militant and passive pressure course of action continued and Thidiyan peasantry took active part at a time when response from peasants of other area in organisation and agitational activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam was sluggish due to obvious reasons.

In order to inject enthusiasm and rejuvenate organisational activities as well as to realise the vow of holding a rally (which was once cancelled on account of the ban order and subsequent police repression) the State leadership of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam announced a peasant rally in Trichy on 2.1.82. As the peasants in the State were very much scared of participating in it, the
Usilampatti taluk peasantry with lead numbers from Chellampatti and Thidiyan engaged number of lorries and participated in it. This itself has shown how the Chellampatti Block peasantry actively engaged and continued their pressure politics at a time when other areas lacked interest in the pressure course of action initiated by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in the State.

As a sequel to the Trichy rally, the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam undertook certain militant pressure course of action like picketing in front of the State Government offices in the year 1982 to highlight the issues of the peasantry like co-operative credit waiver, remunerative prices, relief measures etc. In addition to these issues, the Electricity Board's B.P.S.C. (Belated Payment Surcharge) was included in the demands raised by peasants of this area. Accordingly, the Usilampatti area peasantry with the active participation by the Thidiyan peasantry picketed the Government offices and subjected themselves to arrest by police on 15th and 16th April 1982 and later let off.

4.2.8. MILITANCY OF MIDDLE PEASANTS

The social history of the Piramalai Kallar community indicated already in this chapter revealed their militant character as they were once classified as denotified tribe and engaged in many anti-
social and criminal activities. Their social character was very much
carried and manifested in all the pressure courses of action in which
they actively took a major part. As the dominant caste in
Chellampatti Block and Thidiyan Panchayat is the Piramalai Kallar
community, there was no dearth of the manifestation of militancy.

In the economic character also the peasantry in Thidiyan
villages share, by and large, equality of status in their land based
identity. The average holding of peasants in this area is about 5
acres with domination of holding of above 2.5 acres and less than 7
acres. This category of peasants only took active participation and
exhibited militancy in various pressure courses of action announced by
Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam from time to time. Hence, it could be
said that similarity of socio-economic status of peasantry in
Thidiyan villages facilitated for their effective organisation and
militant participation in pressure course of action to highlight their
issue and thereby to seek redressal from Government.

4.2.9. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF PEASANT ORGANISATION IN THIDIYAN
VILLAGES

In addition to the regular participation in various pressure
courses of action, the Thidiyan village peasant leaders since the
inception of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam branch here
constituted a village co-ordination committee for dissemination of information on issues confronting peasantry and thereby generated awareness in the villages. The committee also acted as a watchdog and regulated matters concerning the village as a whole. At times, the committee also acted as a forum of Panchayat (Katta panchayat in local language) to settle the dispute arising within and between families and ensured peaceful existence to a great extent. This is one of the major outcomes of organisation of peasantry under the aegis of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this village panchayat.

4.2.10. FACTORS IN CONVERSION OF THAMIZHA VIVASAYIGAL SANGAM INTO POLITICAL PARTY

At the larger level, due to consistent failure of pressure course of action by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam during the early years of the decade 80 caused alienation of even the active members of the organisation and ultimately resulted in their inaction. In view of these developments there was lull, due to lack of interest of members, in the activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in 1982. By this time, the State leadership of the organisation understood that the organisation was heading towards ultimate liquidation. It was also thought by being a non-political organisation the purpose of working for integrated development of peasant community could not be realised. Moreover, once Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam becomes a
political entity, it was hoped, other like minded political parties would also come to the rescue at times of crisis faced during pressure courses of action. The leaders carried away by these feelings, hopes and expectations to safeguard the organisation from a possible liquidation, convened the State executive meeting on the eve of an agitation by hill area peasants at Gudalur on May 20, 1982. The meeting after having considered all aspects of being a political party and its strength and weaknesses decided unanimously to convert the non-political Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party in the name of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party.

4.2.11. THE RESPONSE OF PEASANTRY TO POLITICAL PARTY - THE THIDIYAN EXPERIENCE

The leadership of the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam at the time of conversion expected that the branches in rural areas would fall in line with the conversion idea and change into the political party branch. But, against all expectations, the already disinterested members in the State in general by and large did not subscribe to the idea of conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party. Consequently, the already disinterested members severed their link from Vivasayigal Sangam and went back to their parent political parties which they belonged to prior to their enrolment in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in mid 70s. This
response from the members of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam clearly saw the complete elimination of peasant organisation in rural areas.

In the case of the study villages i.e., Thidiyan Panchayat in Chellampatti Block the members on account of certain local compulsions preferred to continue their membership even after conversion in the political party organisation. The solidarity of Thidiyan peasantry was very much seen when they decided to fight for the real cause of peasantry in the political organisation. Moreover, the dominant caste i.e., Piramalai Kallar community leadership in this area due to their emotional attachment and ideological commitment continued in the political party organisation also. But, at the same time other small peasants who had gained certain benefits from Government dissociated themselves from this organisation. Yet another group of members in this area numbering about 100 who were dissatisfied with the decision of political party organisation and wanted continued fight against exploiters associated themselves in another non-political organisation in this area known as Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani (Peasants' Liberation Front).

4.2.12. EMERGENCE OF NON-POLITICAL PEASANT ORGANISATION IN THIDIYAN VILLAGES

Since conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into political party (IFTP), as stated already, a marginal erosion has
taken place in the strength of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in Thidiyan Panchayat villages. These peasants who did not like Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam to convert as a political party associated themselves in a radical minded peasant organisation in this Panchayat known as Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani, a non-political organisation of peasantry engaged in generation of awareness. The activities of the Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani, include staging drama depicting the theme of exploitation of peasantry by capitalists, street plays projecting revolutionary ideas and dictatorship of peasantry, villupattu exposing the deprived condition and alienation of peasantry in national life and domination of capitalists and supremacy of rulers.

The typical way in which the theme projected seem to generate awckakening among the peasantry and suggest to undertake mass action to overthrow the supremacy of exploiters whether they are politicians, bureaucrats, traders, commission agents etc. Although people are impressed and attracted by these strategies adopted by volunteers of Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani but they are unable to engage themselves vehemently on the revolutionary path shown by them. Nevertheless, the seeds of peasant consciousness is shown in the study villages through the works of "Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani". There is overwhelming response towards Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani by the people of this panchayat. It remains to be seen their interest is converted in the form of mass action.
4.2.13. THE POLITICAL AND PRESSURE COURSES OF ACTION OF PEASANTRY

After the conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into Indian Farmers and Toilers Party, a political party of peasants, the leadership took intensive tour of villages to rejuvenate the organisational activities in the villages. At the initial stages, the leadership found favourable response to the political party idea. Later, when the by-election in Periyakulam constituency in 1982 was announced, the leaders with a view to test the pulse of the members and people in rural areas took a whirlwind tour in the entire constituency and put to test the idea of contest in the Parliament by-election. The people in the constituency overwhelmingly favoured the idea and pledged support to IFTP. Encouraged by the response forthcoming from rural areas in favour of IFTP, the executive council decided to field the President of Madurai district who was a local man in Periyakulam constituency. Moreover, Periyakulam constituency was one of the strongholds of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam.

In the Parliament by-election in Periyakulam constituency, the District President Pandiyan contested as the candidate of IFTP and against all expectations, he lost and even forfeited the deposit amount. The election defeat in Periyakulam constituency which was once prior to conversion into IFTP, was considered as a stronghold of
Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, clearly indicated the mass base lost in rural areas, weaknesses of being a political party, limitation of fund, newspaper support, vehicle etc. The maiden election entry of IFTP and miserable defeat at the hands of the ruling AIADMK candidate was considered as a death blow to the aspiration of the political party of the peasants.

The leaders and other active members of Usilampatti taluk, and the study villages i.e., Thidiyan Panchayat campaigned intensively for two reasons. First, the candidate belonged to their caste, i.e., Piramalai Kallar, second, their attachment with peasant organisation which motivated them to have their representative in the Parliament to voice their deprived condition to implement welfare measure for the depressed and affected peasantry in the State in general and Usilampatti in particular as the candidate was their kinsmen. As the peasants of the study area carried away by these sentiments worked vehemently in favour of their caste candidate contesting in the by-election.

The Government, encouraged by the defeat of the Indian Farmers and Toilers Party and the support lost by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/IFTP initiated distrain proceedings against the agriculturists through co-operative credit societies and the Electricity Board to realise the outstanding amount from peasantry. The
peasantry could not put up strong resistance this time as they were divided and disunited. But this was not the case in the study area. This time also in the changed circumstance, owing to the unity and organised militancy, the Government could not initiate any oppressive measure to recollect the co-operative dues and outstanding due to Electricity Board from peasants of Chellampatti union in general and Thidiyan Panchayat in particular. This gesture of Government was mainly due not to confront this community known for militant character.

After the defeat in the by-election and misery experienced by peasantry the leadership of IFTP in order to mitigate the sufferings of peasantry and keep their morale in tact announced certain militant pressure course of action like picketing, road roko in 1982 and 1983. But the response to these calls was not that much as evinced prior to conversion. There were isolated incidents of militancy in the State which include the area of the present study.

In the year 1984, the general election to Parliament and State Assembly was held. This time also IFTP contested the election in about 10 places in alliance with DMK and other left parties. Prior to election, Indira Gandhi was assassinated and M.G.Jlamachandran was hospitalised in America for treatment for the paralytic attack. These two incidents according to movement's leaders, generated sympathy overwhelmingly in favour of Congress(I) and AIADMK. As a result,
the alliance led by AIADMK - Congress(I) swept in the poll. Consequently, IFTP drew a blank.

The ruling AIADMK Government in the State announced the local body election in 1986. This time the ruling party on account of the oppressive measures earned the wrath of rural people and the policies pursued by the ruling party went against the expectations of the people in the State. The voters by utilising this opportunity overwhelmingly elected the opposition DMK led alliance in the local bodies all over the State. The IFTP contested independently in Coimbatore and Kamarajar Districts. The party captured two Panchayat Unions, one each in Coimbatore and Kamarajar districts and also fared well in village panchayats. The party had demonstrated its strength at least in local body through this election. The party candidates although not contested in the name of political party elected in both the study areas in Chellampatti and Vedasendur Blocks.

Encouraged by considerable success in local body elections, the IFTP leadership intensified its pressure politics by raising the issues of free electricity to all peasants, abolition of division of peasantry in terms of small farmers and big farmers, withdrawal of B.P.S.C collection, cancellation of Co-operative credit upto Rs. 10,000/- remunerative prices, drought relief, irrigation facilities etc. In order to highlight these issues, the party announced certain peculiar agitations such as:
1. Kovanam Procession
2. Parking the bullock cart and bullocks in front of the Electricity Board.
3. Writing on Electricity Board's name board as "Interest Shop"
4. Tom Tom agitation announcing the declaration of drought affected taluks and blocks
5. Announcing cancellation of Co-operative credit upto Rs.10,000/- etc.

All these peculiar agitation tactics adopted by IFTP did attract the attention of general public and Government, but nothing materialised concretely.

In the study, Thidiyan Panchayat villages and Chellampatti Union, the peasants preserved the organisational solidarity, owing to reasons stated already, and participated in such agitation in Chellampatti and Usilampatti in front of Electricity Board office and Taluk office to attract the attention of the Government towards the issues raised. As a result of this peculiar agitations, later the Government suspended the collection of B.P.S.C. from peasantry.

In addition to these, the Thidiyan village peasantry who were severely affected by crop failure owing to white fly pest attack
cotton, paddy and goundnut staged a dharna in front of the district Collectorate seeking Rs.10,000/- per acre as compensation. A delegation led by Kandaswami, former member of Legislative Assembly, presented a memorandum to the Collector in this regard, but the Government did nothing to alleviate the sufferings of the peasantry. As stated already the pest attack in this area was mainly due to the usage of ineffective old stock pesticides sold on credit by the traders and commission mandy owners. The peasants fell victim to the cheating of these traders and lost all investments made in raising the crop. For the traders, it was the gain since they disposed of the old stock and encashed it.

Later, on seeing no response from Government towards their demands, the peasants of this area conducted a procession in June 1988 in Madurai and carried cotton stems on hand and symbolically demonstrated the pest attack. At the end, they conducted a meeting infront of the Collectorate and spoke the volume of destruction caused due to the white fly pest attack.

All these incidents of pressure politics routed through IFTP evoked partial and very limited response from its members. The leaders only played active and lead role in such activities just to safeguard their position in the party and power. This response further strengthened the statement that IFTP remained, by and large,
a leaders dominated party. Moreover, it is said that these leaders remain in the party because some State level leaders and frontline leaders in the district belonged to their caste. Hence, the caste factor played a crucial part in IFTP even after rout experienced in consecutive elections held at various levels.

4.2.14. CHANGE IN RURAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND PROBLEMS FACED BY PEASANTRY IN THIDIYAN PANCHAYAT

The change in the social structure of Thidiyan villages are very much discernible since establishment of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and subsequent conversion into IFTP in such areas as socio-cultural, economic, political etc. The militant participation and arrest of the members of the Thidiyan peasantry rendered lot of problems in their house and farm. Coupled with these man made problems, the calamity experienced by the people of this area in the form of drought further accelerated their sufferings.

4.2.14. a. Economic Aspects - Problems in Agriculture

Agricultural economy was severely affected owing to the frequent incidents of drought in lieu of failure of monsoon and consistent participation of peasants of Thidiyan, affected their direct engagement in any form of income generation in villages. The farmers who
vented in cultivation by taking certain risks of inadequate availability of water for irrigation, pest attack, etc., had to suffer to a great extent when they were unable to reap harvest due to crop failures. The developments observed in agriculture in Thidiyan villages precipitated misery of peasants.

As agriculture was severely affected, the peasants in this cluster of Thidiyan villages had no other go except to depend on external sources like money lenders, traders, and commission agents for making investment on farm during seasons and to meet the household expenditure. The peasants in this area state that anything can be postponed but not those functions attached with girls and payment of moi (gift) to families which celebrate the life cycle functions for their sons and daughters. Hence, problems in agriculture, continued failure of monsoon and crop had its impact in peasant households. This condition of peasantry led to their dependency on non-institutional sources of credit.

The continued borrowals made by peasants of this area precipitated the process of their pauperisation and proletarianisation. The peasants, who were unable to redeem the debt preferred to mortgage their land to money lenders and other capitalists just to safeguard their social honour in life.
The peasants who were indebted to the institutional and non-institutional sources of credit, their inability to redeem debt, disposed their land in possession or already mortgaged, pauperised' and proletarianised, pushed out of the village. This push of peasants set in motion their migration to nearby cities like Madurai, Usilampatti and distant places like Maharashtra in search of non-agricultural wage employment. Capitalising this development in agriculture in the Thidiyan cluster of villages, the traders, commission agents, money lenders purchased the lands of peasants who pushed themselves out of the place of origin. This has led to gradual penetration of capitalists in agriculture and their sway in rural economy.

b. Occupational Mobility

As a result of rural to urban migration occupational mobility has taken place amongst these migrants who lost all their assets in rural areas. Some of the out migrants engaged in Murukku production and Vending activities in Usilampatti, and Madurai. Those, who remained in the Thidiyan cluster by facing all hardships of unemployment engaged themselves in illicit arrack brewing and thereby invited risks in their social life in the event of police arrest and repression. Hence, the peasants' one time self-reliance, autonomy, prosperity, self-dependence, etc., are all tremendously affected owing to these developments in agriculture in their villages.
c. Socio-Cultural Aspects

In view of the prevailing precarious economic condition in the Thidiyan cluster of villages, the peasant families were unable to celebrate the life cycle ceremonies particularly those identified with girls. According to them, anything can be postponed but not the attainment of puberty and its celebration which involves heavy expenditure leading to her marriage. Again, marriage can not be delayed for long to the girls who attained puberty. The delay would even lead to gossip by other villagers. Another dimension of this delay in marriage was certain incidents of pre-marital suicide of girls in families whose parents were unable to meet dowry, jewels, vessels demanded by groom's parents. In order to relieve the parents from their agony, the daughters commit suicide. Even after marriage, the daughters were driven to parents house for getting money, jewels etc., promised to in-laws at the time of marriage. Now that agriculture was severely affected the parents were unable to keep up their promise. This has resulted in certain isolated incidents of suicide of parents as well as daughters in this area.

The economic burden experienced by parents and those who were unable to bear the pressure from non-institutional sources from where the peasants borrowed credit and invested on farm which resulted in failures committed suicide on farm itself by consuming the
pesticides purchased on credit from traders. The pathetic condition of peasants was revealed through these incidents in Thidiyan villages. It was sadly pointed out that the furious and ineffective pesticides whether it kills the pests or not, it effectively killed peasants. Even in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, the peasants, who were unable to bear debt burden and other economic hardships committed suicide during the study period. The Thidiyan incident of suicide by peasants may be sequel to similar incidents took place in other parts.

As stated already, the people of Thidiyan villages possess certain special character that is spending lavishly on occasion of celebration of life cycle ceremony during the time of agricultural prosperity. Now that agriculture was very much affected and rendered lot of misery in peasant families the people in this cluster are now unable to celebrate these life cycle ceremonies in time. This has resulted in differential social treatment to female babies as they are considered as liabilities with whom lot of expenditures are associated. Paradoxically, once during times of agricultural prosperity the peasants in this area on the eve of marriage, particularly, at the time of betrothal, the girls were offered parisam (bride price) based upon certain physical considerations. At that time, the girls were considered as assets and brought fame to families by their capacity to mobilise more parisam from grooms family. Because of agricultural backwardness, poverty, partial treatment to female sex, a stigma was
developed with female child. The parents owing to these sentiments in this cluster of villages started neglecting their under privileged female babies. This has resulted in female infanticide which is currently taking place in and around Usilampatti area.

The prevalence of precarious condition in peasant families affected their children's education. In educating the children, the parents favour the sons higher education rather than daughters who are considered liabilities. Even if they are educated, the peasants in Thidiyan cluster feel that it increases their burden of finding a suitable mate and heavy expense involved in the process, higher amount of dowry to be given to such grooms who are well employed and coming from good family background. That is why this sex partiality in social treatment.

One of the glaring and noteworthy outcomes of peasant organisation in Thidiyan cluster of villages was the contact established and rapport built up by this area peasantry with the wider world. Their enrolment in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and continuation in IFTP facilitated their outside village mobility. As a result of their organisation based mobility the peasants of this area were able to generate awareness about their own deprived condition and the type of exploitation on going in their midst since the introduction of modernisation programmes in agriculture. The peasants exposure in
organisational activities, their attendance in meeting, rallies, conferences, their participation in militant courses of pressure action like picketing, road roko, bandh etc., kindled awakening in their midst. All these developments in Thidiyan cluster of villages since organisation of peasantry facilitated for self realisation on the one hand, and its transformation in the form of militant action on the other.

d. Political Aspects

Prior to organisation of peasantry in Thidiyan cluster of villages, the people were known for certain parochialistic tendencies of casteism, domination and militancy in other areas etc. In the election held since independence, the people of this area preferred only those candidates belonged to their own caste and affiliated to Forward Block, which was once nurtured by their mentor Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar. The peasants of this area predominantly belonging to Piramalai Kallar community who exhibited this type of voting behaviour joined in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam organisation as it was non-political and did not hinder their sympathy with their traditional politics.

Moreover, the overlap of caste, class, power politics of Piramalai Kallar community was manifested since organisation of
Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in this cluster of villages. The dominant Piramalai Kallar community on account of their similarity of socio-economic status manifested their class interest owing to awareness, concerted action in the form of their militant participation and association with various pressure courses of action launched by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/IFTP from time to time. Even after conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into political party, a portion of this group once emotionally attached with All India Forward Block (AIFB) and Thevar community candidate in election shifted their stand in favour of IFTP candidate who belonged their caste which is dominant in this constituency.

The caste leadership which was once identified with upper class landlords belonging to Piramalai Kallar community since establishment of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and active participation and leadership of middle peasantry. The middle class peasantry thrown up the leadership both in caste organisation as well as in the organisation of peasantry. It was observed mostly in this area caste (social) organisation and the power structure in Thidiyan cluster have shown overlap in the direction of caste, class and power based politics. Similar nexus was continued even after the conversion of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam a non-political organisation into IFTP, a political party of peasants in the Thidiyan cluster of villages.