CHAPTER VI

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The results of the present inquiry on the "Peasant Politics in Tamilnadu: A Socio-political Analysis of a Pressure Group" are summarised hereunder with inferences and conclusions.

1. The agricultural scenario in Tamilnadu revealed both prosperity and indigent conditions over a period of time. When the agricultural practices remained self-sustaining, the peasantry depended locally for carrying out agricultural production by using traditional methods. This condition of self-dependency promoted agricultural prosperity and ensured farming a remunerative exercise to peasantry. The programmes of modernisation in agriculture like High Yield Variety Programme, energisation of pumpsets, institutional credit and farm mechanisation undertaken by Government since independence particularly during sixties effected technological transformation in farming involving higher investment which in turn injected dependency of peasantry on outside village sources like traders for purchase of certain agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hiring of machinery, etc. The comparative better yield of these modern varieties and practices increased the peasants' interest to bring more area under modern methods with a view to enhance returns.
2. The decade 1970 witnessed frequent occurrence of certain natural calamities such as drought and flood shattered the hopes of peasantry and rendered havoc in the form of crop failure due to inadequate irrigation, pest attack, and other developments like inadequate supply of power to pumpsets, unremunerative prices to farm produces which affected agriculture production. In order to help the peasants who were affected by these unforeseen developments who were unable to undertake farming, the Government introduced credit institutions in rural areas to issue crop, short term and medium term loans to peasantry to keep them engaged in farming activities. Consistent occurrence of natural calamities rendered farming unremunerative. Under these circumstances, the middlemen like traders and money lenders exerted sway over peasantry who depended on them for their subsistence and farming activities.

3. In view of these developments in agriculture, the peasantry were unable to clear their debts due to institutional (co-operatives) and non-institutional (trader, money lender) sources. Coupled with these developments, the Electricity Board increased power tariff and power supply during odd hours and imposed certain restrictions in usage of power. All these measures in the process of agriculture production caused strain to peasantry. By this time, the co-operative credit institutions and Electricity Board started
certain distraint measures against peasantry like japti (confiscation of property), removal of fuse carrier in electric post with a view to realise credit over-dues and tariffs outstanding from peasantry. This action undertaken by Co-operatives and Electricity Board induced the peasantry to form an organisation under the banner of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam (Tamilnadu Agriculturists1 Association) to fight unitedly for their cause.

4. Similar agricultural scenario and condition of peasantry was very much discernible in the study cluster of villages, namely, Nagampatti and Thidiyan in Dindigul Quaid-e-Milleth (now Anna) and Madurai districts respectively where peasantry were adversely affected due to occurrence of these natural calamities, who were dependent upon monsoon for agricultural production. Though the Co-operative credit society, money lenders and finance companies provided resources to peasantry for the continued engagement of peasantry on farming activities, later exerted pressure on peasantry with higher rate of interest. The Electricity Board on its part with a view to realise the electricity bill outstanding from peasantry started punitive action upon peasantry who were already hardpressed. The distraint proceedings initiated by Co-operative credit Society and Electricity Board in Nagampatti and Thidiyan effectively served as precipitants towards formation of pressure group organisation, "Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam."
5. In addition to these precipitant factors (distraint proceedings to realise co-operative credit over due, Electricity bill outstanding, well and rainfed eco-character, frequent natural calamities, exploitation of middlemen, etc.) the caste factor i.e., Naidu, Gowder, Gounder in Nagampatti and Piramalai Kallar in Thidiyan served as impetus for initial organisation of peasantry in these two study clusters as the State and District level leaders belonged to these communities. The inference drawn here is that similarity of background of the people in study areas and leadership in the organisation facilitated for the easy and quick organisation of peasantry. Hence, the caste factor had played a positive role in peasant organisation, and militant participation subsequently in various pressure courses of action.

6. The non-political identity of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam further strengthened the organisational solidarity of peasantry who although belonged to diverse socio-economic political character were able to preserve unity within diversity in their midst to seek redressal of their economic grievances.

7. The issues and demands pursued by the peasantry were declared in the nine point charter which includes such demands as cancellation of co-operative credit, reduction in electricity tariff,
clamour for remunerative prices, irrigation facility, crop and cattle insurance, housing for agricultural labourers, etc., are beneficial to all sections of peasantry if implemented. These issues and demands practically faced by peasantry sparked spontaneous participation in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities cutting across caste, class barriers strengthened further the bond of peasant solidarity, and thereby preserved homogeneous identity with respect to pursuit of these issues which in turn ensured vertical solidarity of peasantry.

8. The peasants, under the circumstances, dependent upon middlemen like traders, money lenders, finance companies for agricultural production were subjected to exploitation through sales of ineffective, low quality, obsolete and outdated quality of inputs, pre-fixation of price, marketing undertaking, exhorbitant rate of interest charged by moneylenders made the condition of peasantry in Nagampatti and Thidiyan from bad to worse as far as their farm and household economy were concerned. Therefore, the peasants who were subjected to this type of exploitation perceived Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam as their saviour and enroled to protect themselves from the clutches of these exploiters.

9. The Governmental distraint proceedings against peasantry routed through co-operative credit institutions and Electricity Board...
with a view to realise overdues and bills outstanding affected the honour of peasantry in rural social life. The Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam banner covered them effectively and protected their interests through organisation of affected peasantry in Nagampatti and Thidiyan cluster of villages.

10. In order to realise the nine point charter of demands the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam undertook passive (public meeting, rally, fast, memoranda, etc.,) and militant (picketing, road blockade, bandh, no-tax campaign, etc.,) pressure courses of action in which the peasantry all over the State took active part. In order to maintain law and order, the Government resorted to police action (arrests, bursting of tear gas shells, firing, etc.,) to counter the peasants' militant courses of action.

Consequently, these pressure courses of action pursued to draw attention of Government ultimately brought Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and the Government to confrontation in the State leading to conflict and its occasionally resolution through negotiations.

11. The Nagampatti peasantry responded overwhelmingly to the call of pressure course of action and involved themselves
militantly. Besides the organisation of public meetings, rallies, fasts in Vedasendur, the Nagampatti peasantry also helped to organise these meetings in the surrounding areas and played a lead role in such activities. For the purpose of self-regulation of peasantry, the Nagampatti peasants were instrumental in the organisation of 'Volunteer corps' in Vedasendur area which attracted the attention of the State and replicated later in other places with organisation of similar groups. The militant tactics of Nagampatti peasantry includes picketing infront of Government offices, bullock cart road blockade, participation in bandh which resulted in police action several times culminating in firing in Vedasendur and surrounding areas in which six peasants died in Vedasendur alone. This pressure strategy initiated and militancy by peasants in Vedasendur in general and Nagampatti in particular earned the name of 'the heart of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam' for Vedasendur.

12. The Thidiyan peasantry also demonstrated equally the aggressive participation in various courses of action which they themselves organised in Usilampatti area which brought them to the forefront in the district of Madurai. Besides organisation of public meetings, rallies in Usilampatti and surrounding areas, the Thidiyan peasantry involved themselves similarly in bandh picketing and blockade announced by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam from time to
time and subjected themselves to police action like preventive arrests, arrests, repression, imprisonment, etc.

13. The participation of peasantry in the study cluster of villages, namely, Nagampatti and Thidiyan reveal active and militant participation in various pressure courses of action announced and carried out by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. The eco-character of the study cluster of villages played a significant role in the nature of participation of members of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. The Nagampatti cluster, as it is characterised by single source of irrigation i.e., well irrigation as the predominant source which depends on monsoon, motor pumps installed in well again dependent on electricity for its operation. In the event of failure of seasonal monsoon and inadequate supply of electricity and its high tariff rates, the peasants in this eco-structure found it difficult to engage in agricultural production. The co-operative credit overdue and exploitation of middlemen like traders, money lenders and finance companies in Vedasendur further intensified their hardship and motivated them to involve themselves militantly in the pressure course of actions undertaken through Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam.

14. As the Thidiyan cluster of villages is characterised by mixed and multiple sources of irrigation, namely, well, river
channel, rain, dependency on monsoon for irrigation was equally identified for agricultural production here also. Moreover, the electricity and credit issues and subsequent threat of distraint proceedings against peasantry effectively mobilised them. Therefore, it is inferred that there has been a positive correlation between eco-character and peasant movement.

15. The pressure courses of action initiated by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and active participation by peasantry not only strengthened the organisational solidarity but also resulted in conflict between the organisation and the successive Governments led by DMK and AIADMK in the State. The Governments determined to crush the organisation which had caused erosion in their mass base, undertook repressive measures. The Nagampatti and Thidiyan peasants were the target of worst attack while they were proceeding to participate in the rallies, picketing, roadblockade, etc. These peasants were subjected to attack by police at places like Manapparai, Thuvarankurichi and Dindigul. The peasants were also taken into preventive custody and faced repression. The repression unleashed on peasantry and inaction of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal. Sangam leadership at the larger level created pessimism amongst the peasantry in the State in general and the study clusters in particular who were known for established militancy.
16. Capitalising on the inaction of peasantry and lull in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities, the Government once again initiated the distraint proceedings against peasantry with a view to realise co-operative credit overdue and outstanding electricity bill. The Government with all precaution and adequate preparation carried out the so-called 'operation loan collection' and 'operation power disconnection' all over the State.

17. The 'operation power disconnection' in Nagampatti cluster of villages added another dimension to their organisation which brought the women in peasant households to resist the removal of transformer installed in this villages thereby exhibited their militancy at a time when their men were unable to bear repression by police any longer. This type of women militancy was normally identified with women belonging to Piramalai Kallar community. The Nagampatti peasant women belonging to Gowder, Gounder, Reddiyar through this act resembled Piramalai Kallar women. The 'operation loan collection' in Thidiyan villages exhibited the resistance of women of Piramalai Kallar community, who scared officials through their utterances in their typical local language and reported threat of beating. The officials who were scared of these threats spared Thidiyan cluster in undertaking the 'operation loan collection' and 'power disconnection'. 
18. The inaction of leadership to counteract the sufferings of peasantry after the Trichy rally and building demolition at Oddanchathram (where the local peasantry constructed a building at a cost of Rs.2 lakhs on Puramboke (public) land) incidents exposed the weakness and ineffectiveness of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, once considered as the protector of peasant interest in the State. Taking advantage of this fluid situation, the Government led by AIADMK initiated certain measures with active support of opposition parties to cause erosion in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam (which was responsible for the erosion of support base of not only the ruling party but also the opposition parties in the State). The policy of division amongst peasantry in the form of Big farmer and Small farmer effectively caused vertical split and checked the homogeneous identity of peasantry. Through the division of peasantry into Small farmers and Big farmers the Government accorded certain concessions like cancellation of co-operative credit overdue, free supply of electricity for pumpsets and fresh issue of credit for agricultural production to small farmers. The big farmers were also benefited by certain concessions like cancellation of interest and penal interest to the principal amount issued through co-operatives, power tariff rate of Rs.75 per horse power for motor pumpsets etc. The landless labourers were given the benefits of housing scheme, subsidy upto 50 per cent in Integrated Rural
Development Programme, employment schemes and other welfare measures like distribution of dhoti, saree once a year, effectively served the motive of Government in breaking the organisational solidarity of members of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam when the benefited segments of peasantry like small farmers, marginal farmers, middle farmers dissociated or showed lack of interest in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam activities during early 1980s. This condition of poor response and organisational ineffectiveness were very much visible during this period in the study cluster of villages.

19. The organisational ineffectiveness and poor response forthcoming from peasantry for the pressure course of actions undertaken by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam during early 1980s caused serious concern to its leaders at various levels. Dominated by the feeling of safeguarding the organisation, seeking support from like-minded organisations and parties to strengthen the support base in villages and thereby avoid failure of its pressure courses of action, power politics etc., the leadership convened the State executive committee meeting at Gudalur in 1982 to discuss the future of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in the State. The executive committee, after due consideration took the decision to convert the non-political Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam into a political party
with a hope to convert all village level branches of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam as the branches of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party.

20. Contrary to the expectation, the decision of conversion into political party caused further deterioration of its support base in rural areas where the erstwhile members of political party in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam who were already benefited through Government schemes lacked interest in the emerging political party and returned to their parent political party like AIADMK, DMK, Janatha, Congress(I), Communist Party, etc. Another group of peasants who opposed the decision of political party and wanted to identify themselves in non-political organisation enroled themselves in similar organisations to suit their interests. The situation in Thidiyan and Nagampatti substantiate this claim of peasantry. The Nagampatti peasantry with few exceptions joined in a non-political peasant organisation namely Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam. The Thidiyan peasantry, although 40 per cent remained in Indian Farmers and Toilers Party, the remaining joined in non-political peasant organisation, namely, Vivasayigal Viduthalai Munnani and a political party, namely. All India Forward Block. These developments after the conversion caused serious setbacks to political party of peasantry (IFTP) which was seen through poor response of peasantry
to various pressure courses of action. Consequently, the erosion in
the support base is glaring and total in well irrigation eco-structure
and partial in mixed sources irrigation structure. This act of
peasantry also exposed the commitment of peasantry for their
respective stand of membership only in non-political peasant
organisation and continuation in the parent organisation even after
conversion.

21. In order to keep up the morale of participating
peasantry the Indian Farmers and Toilers Party announced certain
unique pressure courses of action stated already on the issue of
cancellation of Belated Payment Surcharge levied by Electricity Board
on peasantry, free distribution of power supply, co-operative credit
cancellation to all categories of peasantry, irrigation schemes,
drought relief, etc. But the participation of peasantry in these
pressure course was comparatively at a low level. Consequent to
the poor response schisms developed in the party which is seen in
the form of split in the party based upon caste and regional
affiliation and on the issue of alliance with political parties in
elections. Accordingly, splinter groups (mainly based upon Gounder
caste spread in areas such as Vedasendur, Oddanchathram, Palladam,
Karamadai, Avinashi) led by Chellamuthu came into being and formed
in the name of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party (Chellamuthu Group)
which dissociated with the party in the same name led by Sivasamy. On seeing further deterioration, political ineffectiveness and poor performance registered in various elections, more splinter groups emerged and dissociated its link with parent party led by Sivasamy and identified as breakaway groups led by Venugopal Reddiyar and Nandagopal Naidu. All these developments pertaining to emergence of splinter groups from Indian Farmers and Toilers Party revealed only the weakness and ineffectiveness of being a political party of peasantry. The elections held in the State recently also substantiate this statement. Therefore, the decision of conversion from apolitical to political derived by the leadership at macro level and poor response to this decision by members at micro level exposed the domineering leadership at the apex level in the organisation and dissatisfied membership.

22. A comparison of organisational effectiveness of peasant organisation under study reveals strength, unity, perseverance when it remained as a non-political entity (Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam) as it had membership known for diverse characteristics which cut across caste, class, religious barriers and preserved homogeneity of its identity. The economic issues and demands undertaken by this non-political organisation ensured this horizontal unity and vertical solidarity amongst the participating peasantry and thereby revealed
the Group character of class in itself. The conversion from non-political identity to political identity in the name of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party caused erosion in its support base and even complete elimination of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/Indian Farmers and Toilers Party in rural areas. The organisational ineffectiveness of Indian Farmers and Toilers Party was revealed in poor participation of peasants in various pressure courses of action and its humiliating political performance in elections to State Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha held between 1982 and 1989. This only shows the effectiveness of the membership of peasantry in non-political organisation and their disinterest in their political transformation. Therefore, the peasant organisation is effective as long as it maintains the character of class in itself (economic issues based identity) and loses its strength when it transforms as a political organisation (class for itself) with the motive of power politics. The popular peasant organisations in India, namely, Shetkari Sanghatana (non-political), Bharatiya Kisan Union (non-political) and Karnataka Rajya Ryothu Sangha (political) substantiate this statement on the character of organisational effectiveness.

23. The establishment of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam in the study cluster of villages, namely, Nagampatti and Thidiyan mobilised peasantry who were hitherto identified belonging diverse
socio-economic political background under its fold and acted as a common parlance of the village as a whole and effected change in the social structure of village owing to their organisation. The formation of peasant organisation in village paved the way for the emergence of pressure group through their organised resistance and other methods of agitation for seeking certain favour from Government. The peasantry who were once subjected to ill treatment by their own people, exploitation by middlemen and governmental distraint proceedings are now able to feel honour because of qualitative change in their status on account of their organisational roles in Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam and later Indian Farmers and Toilers Party. In addition to this, social mobility territorial and occupational mobility had also taken place in these villages particularly in Thidiyan cluster where due to debt burden, drought, unemployment etc., the peasantry migrated to far off places in Maharashtra, Karnataka and engaged in non-agricultural pursuits while another group engaged itself in illicit brewing in the surrounding areas.

24. Participation of peasantry in the pressure courses of activities of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/Indian Farmers and Toilers Party has also resulted in certain hardships to peasant families whose members were frequently arrested which has further
aggravated the farm and household economy in the study cluster of villages known for agricultural backwardness led to increased dependency of peasantry on external sources like trader, money lender, finance companies for eking livelihood. Consequently, celebration of life cycle ceremonies, education of children, temple worship, etc., were affected very much which again caused indebtedness, debt burden, pauperisation, proletarianisation, occupational mobility and migration to other places.

25. The organisation of peasantry in villages in the name of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam/Indian Farmers and Toilers Party has also seen realisation of certain crucial demands put forward and brought certain favours for their wellbeing. The peasants got organised mainly for demands such as cancellation of co-operative credit, reduction/cancellation of outstanding electricity bill, remunerative prices for agricultural produces, etc. Among these three, the first two were very much realised. As far as the third demand was concerned, the Government gives increased support prices for various crops based upon cost of production in each season. The demand for crop insurance is being implemented rather slowly in a phased manner for various crops in different eco-structures. The landless agricultural labourers were given the benefits of housing, employment, subsidy and grants-in-aid under
special programmes under Integrated Rural Development Programme, life insurance coverage and other welfare measures such as free distribution of house site patta, dhoti, saree, etc. All these benefits drawn by peasantry were certainly due to their organisation, pressure courses of action and invaluable sacrifices like life, property, income, etc.

26. On the whole, the pressure groups of peasantry particularly, the non-political ones, seem to act effectively as lobbyists through the political contact they had with Parliamentarians influenced in formulation of policies and planning of programmes for the promotion of their wellbeing. The non-political peasant organisations like Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam prior to conversion had effectively pursued lobbying as its strategy, through Members of Legislative Assembly and Parliament who belonged to various political parties and succeeded in its efforts in grievance redressal. This is similar to the Shetkari Sanghatana and Bharathiya Kisan Union as pressure groups of non-political character, effectively pursued lobbying as its strategy in policy change and planning of programmes bearing the welfare of peasantry. It is worth noting here that Sharad Joshi, the President of Shetkari Sanghatana was made as Chairman of Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission.
27. The peasant organisations are instrumental in the articulation of interests and exposure of the deprived conditions amongst peasantry largely known for illiteracy, ignorance and unawareness. The articulated interest is subsequently transformed in the form of pressure courses of action for the redressal of their grievances. In the process, there emerged conflict and confrontation between peasants and rulers in the State which ultimately brought the parties in conflict across table for negotiated settlement through consensus. In a plural society of our kind, conflicts are inevitable and consensus as method of solution preserves unity in diversity.

28. The implication of this inquiry of the peasant politics in Tamilnadu cover such areas of Governmental policy as division of peasantry and favour to lower echelons of agrarian hierarchy, fixation of price, insurance coverage to crops prone to pest attack, credit-marketing linkage, irrigation, etc. The Government must earnestly consider the demand of peasantry to do away with the categorisation through appointment of a High Power Committee to go into this aspect of sufferings of big farmers who felt the loss of Government concessions. The remunerative price issue needs consideration which involves all the costs of production for making farming a remunerative exercise for peasantry. As regards crop insurance and credit marketing linkage, the National Bank for
Agriculture and Rural Development could play a significant role. In order to provide irrigation, the Government must seriously consider the diversion of west flowing rivers in Kerala into Tamilnadu to irrigate thousands of acres of the study districts, namely, Dindigul Quaid-e-Milleth (now Anna) and Madurai where most parts are known for drought and agricultural backwardness due to dependence on monsoon for agricultural production.

To conclude, the most powerful organisation representing the peasants' interest was Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam. It spoke with a strong and frequently a compelling voice on price support, debt relief, crop insurance, irrigation facility, free electricity distribution for farm operations, etc. The peasant movement in Tamilnadu led by Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam was instrumental in the generation of awareness on these issues among peasantry in rural areas who were once subjected to deprivation and exploitation. The generated consciousness among peasantry was transformed in the form of pressure courses of action which brought the organisation and Government at loggerheads and also resulted in either partial or complete realisation of certain major demands such as cancellation of co-operative credit, reduction in electricity tariff, increased support price for farm produces to landed peasantry and social welfare measures to landless. To do this, every known medium of
communication with the public was used by this pressure group: newspaper releases, periodicals, leaflets, brochures, speeches and advertisements and much of this publicity was artfully contrived and skilfully inserted in the stream of daily communication. It has emphatically tried to build a broadly based support, a favourable climate of opinion which legislator and executives will be obliged to respect.

Among the modern peasant movements, the Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam, pioneered the cause of peasantry and effectively served as model for peasant movements which sprang up in different parts of our country like Shetkari Sanghatana, Bharatiya Kisan Union, Karnataka Rajya Ryothu Sangha. The transformation from non-political identity to political identity of this peasant organisation which the leaders themselves admit resulted in gradual liquidation of its support base in rural Tamilnadu and emergence of schism in political party which, in turn, led to formation of splinter groups. However, the organisation of peasantry under the banner of Thamizhaga Vivasayigal Sangam acted as a common paralance for mobilisation of peasantry, promoted unity within diversity by cutting across caste, class, religion and also instrumental in rural transformation and emerged as a force to be reckoned with.
This inquiry has also suggestions for further research on such areas as the Governmental policies versus peasant movements, organisational effectiveness of non-political and political organisations of peasantry, factors in formation of splinter groups and its political performance at the larger level.