CHAPTER - 3

TENSION RIDDEN PEASANTRY

Without introducing fundamental changes in the pre-colonial agrarian system, Munro introduced the ryotwari settlement in Canara. This settlement was a method of 'squeezing' the economic(1) surplus. The introduction of the colonial administration by the British, transferred the traditional economy into a colonial economy making changes in the revenue system, administrative system and judicial system. It accelerated the collapse of the traditional agrarian structure and handicrafts. The ruin of handicrafts caused the over crowding of land, which was already in a deteriorating position. Emergence of these new trends in the agrarian structure eventually led to the impoverishment and tension in the rural agrarian structure.

Both in the zamindari and ryotwari areas the large scale rural poverty developed as an impact of these settlements. In vast zamindari areas the

peasants were left to the tender mercies of the zamindars who rack-rented and compelled them to pay the illegal duties and to perform forced labour. In the ryotwari areas the government itself levied heavy land revenue. They forced the peasants to borrow money from the money lenders. Gradually, over large areas, the status of the cultivators were reduced(1) and they were turned to the status of tenants-at-will, share croppers and landless labourers on the other hand. Their lands, crops and cattle passed in to the hands of the landlords, traders, money lenders and rich peasants. The striking aspect of Indian feudalism, was that(2) the peasants attached to the soil owned by landed intermediaries suffered the increasing burden of appropriation, in the form of taxation from time to time.

Government’s high revenue demands distressed all agrarian classes especially the lower strata of the peasantry. The resulting discontent(3) was manifold. Either the peasants (actual cultivators) revolted or the land lords themselves agitated or some times all agrarian classes joined together and rebelled against the exorbitant demands of the state.

Some eminent historians have emphasised(4) the point of oppression of the peasantry by irresponsible and greedy landlords. The oppression existed before the British supremacy and was turned as a fairly established pattern of political behaviour. Such assertions(5), whether true or not, the more fundamental questions have been raised regarding the very nature of land rights

1. Bipan Chandra, India’s Struggle For Indipendance, (New Delhi, 1989), p. 50.
4. Ibid, p. 32.
5. Ibid, p.32.
and land ownership under the British because, the oppression became more severe and crucial during this period.

In South Canara District, prior to the British rule, the Vijayanagara and Bedinur governments had made changes in the traditional land revenue system and revenue assessment. Under the Mysore rulers the traditional land revenue system was ruined. The British had commercialised the agriculture and the basic feature of this was the "efficient exploitation" of the economic surplus. This became the guiding principles in the introduction of the land policy and land revenue administration of the British. For this they had made alliance with the landlord class; practically the combination of the three - the British, the landlords and the money lenders oppressed the rural population, creating tensions in the agrarian structure.

Even though, ryotwari system existed in theory, in practice various kinds of tenancies prevailed in South Canara. A group of landlord intermediaries had emerged between the government and the tenants. Thus the landed intermediaries were exploited by the government and they in turn exploited the cultivators. So the agrarian relations became highly complicated during the British period.

Prior to the British, the land revenue was realised in cash or in kind. But during the British period it was through cash only. The calculation of the market value and commutation prices of the crops had also enhanced the burden. The British introduced differential taxation. For fixing the land revenue the land was classified in to wet, garden and dry. Paddy, coconut and ragi were adopted as the standard crop for wet, garden and dry respectively.
Similarly, the British supremacy in South Canara led to the commercialisation of agriculture. This was introduced without making any change in the mode of cultivation or any improvement in production. Neither the government nor the landlord did provide the capital or any other facilities required for cultivation to the tenants. Commercial agriculture gave rise to the system of land mortgages and alienations. It also resulted in the decline of the production of food grains.

The government was quite unconcerned with the fluctuation of prices. This affected the Tenants hard thus when the price of produce fell below the commutation price, the position of the wargadar became precarious. Thus the landlords naturally shifted the burden in to the shoulders of the cultivating tenants by demanding higher rents causing over much burden.

Since 1820 the jummabundy (revenue settlement) price of crops, for example, rice, was more than the market price. Because of this, the ryots had to sell more quantity of crops to realise cash to pay the government revenue. Generally, the result was that a large number of peasants fell in arrears to the government. The land of such peasants were publicly auctioned by the government.

The coercive measures adopted by the revenue authorities always became detrimental to the interests of the peasants. The post of Potail or the village headman was hereditary and normally they belonged to a landlord family. That means the village authorities generally supported the landlords.

So perusing the village headman, a landlord could attach standing crops or harvested crops for revenue arrears and sell them in public auction. The usual practice for this sort of attachment was 'tholkettal' or tying the bunches of green leaves at one end of a stick and planting or fixing it quite familiar in many parts of the district. So a peasant was uncertain in harvesting his crops. For eviction, the landlords got assistance from the revenue authorities and police. So in order to retain the land, the peasant was forced to borrow from the money lenders and thus the peasants were trapped for ever.

When the ryot had arrears to the government, they mortgaged their land to the money lenders and borrowed loans. It was known as 'bigiadhi adavu' or living mortgage. Another kind of mortgaging prevalent in the region was called 'torradhoo' or dead mortgage. When once the ryots came under the grip of the money lenders, they could never free themselves from them till they sold their lands to the money lenders. This resulted in the sale of property and this kind of sale or transfer of property ownership became common in South Canara from the 1830's onwards.

The process of auctioning land led to the creation of one new set of wargadars, when paid a relatively higher amount of revenue to the government. This was one of the ways by which large scale transfer of property ownership took place.

Transfer of land to the hands of the merchant money lenders was

3. Ibid, p. 78.
another kind of transfer of land prevailed in South Canara. The new landlords, money lenders and administrative officials, had links with the British revenue and judicial administration. The favoured groups like landed Brahmins, Bunts and merchants and particularly Saraswat Brahmins (Konkanis) established themselves a complex layer(1) of adept and influential manipulators between the government and the administration.

Revenue sale(2) was a common practice regarding the landlord properties of in the ryotwari district. The warg or estate of a wargadar stretches in one village or many villages. Some patta consists of thousands of acres of waste or Kumari land for which also revenue was demanded by the government. The system enhanced total land revenue payable by a landholder or wargadar. The collection of land revenue was a real struggle(3) between the revenue officials on one side and the landlords and their tenants on the other, in each fasli or revenue year.

A low level(4) of demand and prices of their crops were affected by the life of the tenant of South Canara in many times. The price fluctuations, over assessment of the land revenue and the absence of liberal remissions during such periods of economic crisis added the burden of the peasants. The landlords generally did not shift the remission granted by the government to the tenants. Thus granting of remissions did not reach in the lower stratum of the agrarian structure. In order to meet the revenue demand and also the

poverty, the ryots were forced to approach the money lenders.

The economic condition of the peasantry entered into a crisis during the period of depression\(^1\). In 1931 the prices began to fall. The peasants could not pay their rent to the landlords in time. The landlords could not pay their assessment in time, the result was the considerable increasing the number of sale of lands in the area since 1931.

As per the settlement report, Fasli 1352\(^2\), the government had issued 45,762 sales notice to the defaulters of revenue in South Canara. During the Fasli 1345\(^3\) the government had granted remission of Rs. 1,68,856 and in Fasli 1346\(^4\) the remission was Rs. 2,31,599. This shows the deplorable condition of the peasantry. Many of the cultivators lost their land and new landlord class, emerged due to the revenue administration of the colonial government.

The Board of Revenue submitted its report to the government, a combined programme for survey and resettlement including several taluks of South Canara District of the pre-due for re-settlement during the five years ending Fasli\(^5\) 1344 (1934-1935). Owing to the financial stringency, the Government directed to shift the financial burden to the peasants and issued the orders for resumption of the survey and settlement which was previously postponed\(^6\).

Many vernacular News papers of that period had criticised the proposed

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5. G.O.No.1861, Dated 30th September 1930, Revenue Department.
6. G.O.No.827, Dated 15th April 1931, see also G.O.No. 2214 Dated 21st October 1931, see also G.O.No.1368 Dated 30th June 1932 - Revenue Department.
land revenue assessment of the government. The proposals of the settlement
officer had been approved by the Board of Revenue and the Government
without paying any need to the representation made by the people.
Swadesamitram\(^{(1)}\) the News paper from Madras expressed satisfaction at the
local legislative council having carried the adjournment motion moved by
A. B. Shetty to censure the Government for enhancing the land revenue as-
se ssment in South Canara District by 12½ per cent as a result of the resettle-
ment. They took strong exception to the observation made by the Hon'ble
Revenue Minister in the course of the debate on the motion that the people
of this district should reduce the standard of living in order that they may be
in a position to pay the enhanced assessment and ask why the government
themselves should not adopt a similar course and reduce the salary of their
officials in proportion of their revenue.

A. B. Shetty expressed that\(^{(2)}\) the government recognised that the people
were unable to pay even the existing rates of assessment and were giving
remission, on other hand introducing resettlement and were levying enhanced
rates of assessment. The economic conditions of the people were steadily
growing worse. The depression had reduced the ryots to a very sad plight.
Inspite of remissions, there had been large arrears in the district coercive
process had to be used for collecting their arrears. Their properties had been
sold for getting their assessment. It was also experienced in the adjournment
motion that the people were already over assessed and had been paying

\(^1\) Swadesamitram, Dated 21st January 1935, Mangalore, Report On Vernacular Papers For

\(^2\) G.O.No.637, Mis, Revenue, dated 13.3.1935.
more than they ought to pay and the government had no justification at all for enhancing the rates of assessment at a time of exceptional distress like this.

The Government realised that the condition of the District had not materially improved since the last settlement and was suffering from the effects of the economic depression. The government considered that vague statements about the 'poverty' and 'misery' prevailing the district, unsupported as they were by the reliable evidence, were valueless. The rates of assessment were determined in accordance with the usual settlement principles and were based up on the actual outturns of the lands of the district as ascertained by enquiry and experiment. In these circumstances and in the light of the facts set out by the Special Settlement Officer and the Board of Revenue, the Government was not ready to postpone the introduction of the resettlement in the district.

With regard to the new rates of assessment, proposed for wet and garden lands, the Government observed that the Special Settlement Officer has recommended an enhancement of 12½ per cent, in order to bring the rates more into line with the wet and garden rates in the Malabar district which were enhanced at the resettlement by 18¾ per cent. The Government accepted these proposals. The proposed enhancement was moderate and that on the facts reported the maximum increase of 18¾ per cent was justified.

1. G.O.No.637, Mis, Revenue, dated 13.3.1935, see also, Proceedings of the Board of Revenue No. 3, 16th January 1935, p. 2, 3.
2. Proceedings of the Board of Revenue No. 3, 16th January 1935, p. 3.
3. Ibid, p. 4.
Navayuga\(^{(1)}\) of Mangalore observes in an article under heading "A significant defect of the Madras Government".

when the resolution using the deduction of the land revenue to the extent of 33½ per cent came up for discussion, the government gave its customary reply. No definite assurance was given in regard to the districts famine sticken. It is deplorable that the government should still be unaware of the dire state of things in that area (South Canara District)...... In the matter of paying the government dues, that he (ryots) would part with all his belongings and over run in to debt in order to escape the humiliation of allowing his property to be brought up for auction.

The speech made by the Revenue Minister was enough to show how their representatives in the assembly were discharging their duties\(^{(2)}\). The defeat sustained by the government to prove that their land revenue policy and resettlement system were iniquitous hopes that they would realise the necessity for postponing resettlement at least in view of the condemnation of their policy by the legislative council.

The Drul Islam\(^{(3)}\) pointed out that the action of the government of enhancing the land revenue by 12½ per cent in South Canara District as a part of the resettlement was not only improper but also ludicrous. Further it remarked that it was reprehensible that the Chief Minister and his colleagues should have voted against the adjournment motion.

Navayuga\(^{(1)}\) reported under the heading 'the settlement of the past and present' that the ryots of South Canara was so weakened by the land tax that they were unable even to oppose the injustice done to them. The excessive land tax had done great harm to the development of agriculture. Thus the misfortune was deliberately brought about as the history of the land revenue system in South Canara. The origin of that misfortune was the penal assessment known as 'Shamil' which was proposed by Haider and Tipu to punish certain Poligar of the district, for their disobedience and which was later taken as normal basis for fixity of assessment. Haider Ali and Tipu introduced seven out of twelve of the gross produce as tax. Munro seeking the difficulty of enforcing so high rate, reduced it to five out of twelve of the produce. Very soon Munro could see with his own eyes the consequences of the inadequate assessment and lands were for the most part, left uncultivated. So great was the economic harm done to the people. It gave rise to deep discontent everywhere and no tax campaign (1810-11) came into being. As a result, the assessment on the productive lands was slightly reduced. Again there was no tax movements (1830-31) and this time it was put down with the aid of the troops and the highly discontented ryots were promised that the assessment would not be enhanced in future.

The permanent settlement, first brought into being in 1800, was brought after a slight alteration in 1819 and confirmed in 1831. The harm done by the land revenue system resulted in a check to agricultural progress in South Canara. This misfortune fell to South Canara's lot that rate of assessment

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which had been imposed as a penalty in order to punish disloyalty was adopted as a permanent rate. So high was the rate obtaining in South Canara and nowhere else to be found in the province. Even after 125 years the assessment which laid the ryots of South Canara prostrate had not been lowered by even a pie. For more than a century past South Canara had been paying at Rs. 2-8-1 per acre. In 1919 the average rate for the whole province of Madras reached Rs. 2-1-4 per acre. In the resettlement of 1902 the already excessive rate which was being ruthlessly collected since 1831 was further enhanced by 75 per cent thus the injustice done to South Canara had no bounds.

In a leading article summarising the observations of the various speakers at the wargadars conference protesting against the resettlement in South Canara District and the withdrawal of certain forest concessions, the Kanthirava(1) remarked that the question of obtaining redress through the law courts seems to have developed to a further stage. To what extent the principles of resettlement are at variance with the actual practices was easily seen from the fact that in theory the improvements effected by the ryots were not subject to enhanced assessment, while in practice these improvements had been burdened with increased land tax.

The enhancement of land revenue due to the resettlement in South Canara caused great grievances to the ryots. Many of them failed to pay their rent. It led to arrest and imprisonment. M. Subrahmnya Bhatt(2) who was the member of local legislative council had moved an adjournment motion to


consider the action of the government in arresting and imprisoning respectable pattadars of South Canara for non payment of land revenue. He expressed that\(^1\) it was highly barbarious to arrest and imprison the pattadars concerned for evading payment of the kists, while, there were several ways of realising the arrears to government. The arrest and imprisonment was not justifiable, even according to the present law.

In addition to this they frequently became victims of the greedy revenue officials who were hands in gloves\(^2\) with the money lenders. Generally the ryots were ignorant and illiterate. So they were exploited by signing papers. Many of the revenue officials were locals and that ensured their collaboration with local shylocks. The eminent work of this evil combination\(^3\) produced grimly familiar pattern of rural indebtedness and transfer of property.

The growing pauperization\(^4\) of the cultivating class in the later half of the 19th century must also be attributed partly to the sudden growth in population. Rapid growth of population added to the pressure on the available agro-economic resources. In the absence of alternative avenues of employment more and more people were willing to lease in and every sub lease in on higher rental rates. This caused more demand for the cultivable land. The landlords and the money lenders made use of this situation for gaining more wealth. The land rent increased arbitrarily by the landlords because no tenant

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could afford to give up the land\(^{(1)}\). Similarly, money lenders could tighten their grip on the credit seeking peasantry.

The caste superiority had heightened the dominant position in the agrarian relationship. The class intermediaries (the landlord class) represented\(^{(2)}\) mainly Brahmins, Bunts or Nairs and Jains. They leased on labour for carrying out all agricultural operations. The tenants came\(^{(3)}\) from the poor, upper middle castes traditionally associated with cultivation. The labourers were largely from poor middle and low castes and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The caste superiority coupled with economic superiority had enhanced the dominant position of the higher castes on the agrarian setup. They were traditionally big landlords who owned large estates and collected over a thousand muras\(^{(4)}\) of rice as rent from a number of temporary tenants. Thus the rural power structure turned out to be caste-class configuration in shaping of agrarian inequality.

An analytical study of the ryotwari system in the region highlights\(^{(5)}\) certain basic characteristics of agrarian relations under the colonial administration. There existed big land holding families in South Canara. The institution of temples and the performances of various festivals and rituals were monopolized by the land owning families.

Through this monopoly they indirectly established a religious hollowness over the ignorant peasantry, it paved the way for strengthening the

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4. One Standard ‘Mura’ is equal to 39 kg. of rice.
exploitation. Thus caste superiority and religious beliefs served as instruments for promoting economic interests of the land holding class, who had no direct participation in agricultural production.

The faulty system\(^{(1)}\) of land revenue under the British government was responsible for placing the peasants in miserable situations. Munro who formulated the ryotwari settlement of land in South Canara expressed\(^{(2)}\) that the excessive land revenue assessment of Haider Ali and Tipu had impoverished the people. But as a part of the colonial policy Munro continued the same land revenue assessment. The British authorities themselves remarked that the over assessment and inequalities in the revenue settlement existed because of the absence of regular land survey. Over assessment had caused problems like land mortgages, rural indebtedness, transfer of property from the lands of the poor to the rich, rise of merchant money lenders and the general impoverishment of agriculture as a whole. But the general survey (completed in 1903) and the resettlement (1934-35) enhanced the burden of the peasantry. The landlords shifted the burden upon the peasantry. Thus the life of the rural peasantry became miserable.

The problem of tenancy and alienation of land through sale and mortgages continued in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus the dominant class of money lenders-traders-landlords came to occupy a commanding position in the whole system of agricultural production and distribution. The Madras Debt Conciliation Act of 1938\(^{(3)}\) had increased the sale of land as a

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better way of debt clearance. Further, the land owners sought renewal of mortgages to avoid scaling down of old debts. The consequence was that there was an increase in tenancy and sub-tenancy in the district.

Stuart\(^{(1)}\) pointed out that Mr. Comyon\(^{(2)}\), the former Collector of South Canara, considered that rather less one per cent of the ryots were in affluent circumstances. About one eighth were well-to-do, that-half were poor, but able to subsist on the produce of their lands without running in to debt and that remaining 35 per cent were very poor and trapped in debt. He also remarked that\(^{(3)}\), the last class of ryots are very poor, owing small estates, the yield of which is not sufficient for their subsistence. They habitually borrowed and were nearly always in debt, but they were only occasionally driven to the necessity of selling their lands.

The official statement reveals that 35 per cent of the ryots live in a miserable condition and they were forced to sell their land because of the colonial land revenue policy. The landless agricultural labourers were excluded from this 35 percentage who belongs to the largest sect of the population. The condition of the landless poor peasants were more pathetic.

There were four distinct agrarian classes in South Canara. They were the landlords, rich peasants, poor peasants and agricultural labourers. Generally rich landlords belonging to the Brahmins, Bunts or Nairs( Bunts are equal to Nairs in Kasaragod taluk) and Jains, retain a portion of the fertile land for personal cultivation and let out the rest on rent. The land they retain get

2. W. H. Comyon was the collector of South Canara from 24-12-1876 to 12-08-1880.
cultivated by hired labour and they merely supervise the cultivation. The second class also belong the same caste groups of the Brahmins, Bunts or Nairs and Jains. They put in self employment partially in addition to leasing-in-labour.

The Billavas, Ganigas, Devedigas, Kulalals, Nukes, Naiks, Gowdas, Patalis, Gattis, Maniyanis, etc were the poor peasants. This third class of cultivators cultivate land by themselves employing very little hired labour and managed to subsist on the limited produce of their lands.

The last class was the landless agricultural labourers belonging mainly to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, consisted of Byras, Holeyas, Naikes, Thoties, Madigas, Koragas, Bakudas, Samagaras, Kudiyas, Panas, etc. The agricultural labourers belong for the most part to the Holeya Caste\(^{(1)}\). They were two kinds-of-servants, employed by all the year round or for the greater part of it and more field labourers, temporarily engaged for some particular work. Most of them were servants bound to the land, either by custom which was almost as strong as the actual bounds of slavery\(^{(2)}\) originally indebted to the land-owner from which the labourer finds it difficult to free himself. These classes were called, respectively, Mulada Holeyas and Salada Holeyas. Mulada Holeyas\(^{(3)}\) were being old hereditary serfs attached to Muliwarg (estate) and the later labourers bound to their master's service by being in debt to them. To these labourers cash payment's were unknown\(^{(4)}\), except occasionally in the case of 'Salade Holeyas'. Where there was a nominal annual payment to be set off against interest or the debt.

2. Ibid, p. 228.
The grain wages consist of rice or paddy. The daily rice payment to men, women and children vary as follows:\(^1\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>from</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1 seer</td>
<td>2 seers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2/3 seer</td>
<td>2 seers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3/8 seers</td>
<td>1 seer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the whole of South Canara, there existed a custom\(^2\) of giving clothes to these labourers by their master and its money value being estimated at 1 rupee per adult and 6 annas for a child. Even though they worked hard they were not in a position to gain the means for their livelihood. Thus there existed extreme exploitation of the landless agricultural labourers in the area.

In Malabar the forests and waste lands were not brought under assessment. But as a part of the ryotwari settlement, in South Canara the forests and waste lands were also assessed. Therefore the colonial exploitation was more intensive in South Canara than in Malabar.

As per the official records\(^3\), in South Canara the landlord never allow his tenants-in-will, larger share than one half of the gross produce, if from the share he deducted the expenses of seed, cultivation etc. The remaining quantity will be about one third for the subsistence of the tenants and his family.

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2. Ibid, p. 212.
Tenants account

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moras</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantity of seed required to sow-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lands yielding 11 fold ..................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expenses of cultivation ..................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Landlords share and sirkar rent ................. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenants’ net share ................................. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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From one mora of seed the average returns in paddy was calculated\(^1\) as 11\(\frac{1}{4}\) moras. The average payment to rice upon a mora of land was found to be 5 moras or in money 1 bahundy pagodas 6 fananms and 10 annas.

This shows that the tenant was allowed only 30% of the gross produce. If the production was decreased due to bad climate or any sort of natural calamities, he had to pay the full amount to the landlord and the government. Besides, the tenant was forced to pay many illegal extractions to the landlord. Thus, according to the official data the tenant’s share was 30% of the gross production but in practice he received only 20% and the 80% of share was taken away as a part of the exploitation by the landlord and the Sirkar.

The role played by\(^2\) the law courts under the British were also against the peasantry. As per the law, the law courts intervened in favour of the landlords to evict defaulting tenants and this led to frequent land transactions ultimately impoverishing the peasantry.

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The condition of chalageni tenants or tenants-at-will, by and large was depressing in South Canara as a whole, mainly because of the fear of eviction and atrocities. They were living entirely in the mercy of the landlord. They owed debts to the landlords, resulting in the payment of rent through borrowing money from the money lenders. They were left with practically, nothing for their survival.

The peasants were subjected to many illegal extractions commonly known as ‘Akramapirivukal’ and many other feudal levies. The tenant should get the consent of the wargadar in advance for all the important matters including the construction of his house, marriage and other functions.

The chalageni tenants besides paying a fixed rent either in kind or money has also to perform “Biti”\(^1\) (gratuitous) labour at the landlords house. This consists\(^2\) in performing gratuitous labour towards the execution of the annual monsoon repairs in the house of his land lord and also in assisting during the occasions of marriage or other ceremony of note, that take place at his landlord’s house. The tenants were forced with certain restrictions even on the tenant’s language, dress and general behaviour.

It was a customary obligation on the part of tenants of paddy cultivating areas to give priority, to the work in the farms of the landlords. Only after that they were permitted to work on the plot, they had leased in. That means they were bound to render free labour at the landlords will. The tenants had to bring their own bullocks for ploughing the field of the landlords for which the landlord never paid the tenants. Some landlords were so demanding

2. Ibid, p. 58.
if a tenant did not own any bullocks, he was required to hire them at his own cost for ploughing the landlord’s fields. On the days of free labour, the tenants were provided with midday meal and a 25 paise coin at the end of the day for a cup of black tea\(^{(1)}\). Some landlords even tried to extract all agricultural works freely form their tenants.

As Stuart\(^{(2)}\) had written, the majority of the chalagenidars lived from hand to mouth and were entirely at the mercy of the landlords. Taking all Chalageni tenants together Stuart remarked\(^{(3)}\) that 5 per cent may be said to be in good condition, while about 20 percent are obliged to contract debt on extraordinary occasions and to keep the agricultural stock and implements up to the required strength.

Even in the commercial sector, the arecanut planters preferred to lease-out their own paddy fields to tenants on chalageni terms. Generally this tenancy continued in some plots for several years.

There was also another long established custom in South Canara by which a tenant, before reaping his crop is required to bring to the landlord “Bulakanika”\(^{(4)}\) (crop present) consisting of a fowl, if the landlord was a Christian and vegetables if the landlord was a Hindu and chicken and ghee, if the landlord was a Muslim. The object of this present was to afford the landlord an early opportunity of seeking whether the rent of previous year had been paid by his tenant. If the landlord was satisfied that no balance stands against his tenant, he accepts the present and in this case the acceptance was

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3. Ibid. p. 227.
equivalent to permission to reap the crop. In case of any arrears remain to be paid, the landlord would refuse the present. In such cases the tenant must satisfy his master by some arrangement to pay off the arrears of rent of the preceding year, otherwise his crop will be liable to be seized and sold through auction\(^1\) of the court law. It was a statutory privilege, by which the demand of the landlord was satisfied.

The exploitation of the peasantry by the landlord with the support of the British authority existed in several distinct forms besides rack-renting, renewal fee and constant threat of eviction.

The landlords had formulated various arbitrary and illegal extractions like Vasi\(^2\), Nuri\(^3\), Mukkal\(^4\) and Seelakkasu or Vechukannal\(^5\). Vechu Kannal included the presentation to please the landlords. Usually the landlord used false measurers which enabled them to collect rent in excess. Same way, Kazhcha was an offering made to the landlord on special occasions like birth, death and festivals and ceremonies in the landlord’s house.

The tenants had to pay 'Hasurvani'- an annual tribute of a basketful of vegetables apart from the fixed rental free labour. If a tenant had not grown the specific vegetables, then the tenants had to buy them to make the basket of Hasurvani sufficiently being to please the landlord. The basket was usually carried by a young sturdy member of the tenant’s family. A dissatisfied

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2. Vasi was a margin to makeup the deficiency in the quantum of grains through drying.
3. Nuri, litterarily means three fingers can hold. This was a large pick of paddy kept aside for every ten paras of paddy measured out.
4. Mukkal means three-fourth, this was measured through idangazhi, a measure of roughly one kilogram of paddy.
5. Vechukanal, appears with presents, an offering made to the landlord before seeing him.
landlord could easily discontinue the lease from the following year.

In most of the villages the landlords also extracted 'Vantige-varada' from their tenants. Under this system, they collected from tenants contributions for any public fund and used these to denote to a public cause just to show their concern, without any drain of their pockets. In Puttur and Sullia taluks the leased out paddy lands were generally away from the rest of the property of the landlords who seldom visited the plots. Hence the extra extractions such as unpaid 'bitti-begar' (free labour), 'hasurvane', 'vantage-varada' etc, so common prior to the land reforms in other taluks were non-existent in these taluks.

There was another description\(^1\) of Dhair tenants, whose status was never above the Dhar (slave). This class of people being very poor, feels itself compelled to seek the support of the well to do. They were so low, both in the social and monetary scales, that they possess nothing, have not even clothes to cover their nudity, nor a hut to shelter them. This class of people therefore, with a view to raise a small hut for their dwelling and there by to secure a shelter for themselves and their family against the inclemency of the wet weather and the heat in the summer were compelled to the door of the rich, under whose control they place their persons and services by becoming their drudge. Tenants voluntarily subjects himself, a certain sum of money (say Rs 20 or 30) in a lump and enters in to an agreement to the effect that he would repay this sum at anytime. It might be demanded from him and that by way of interest of this sum, he would do any service, he

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might be required to do and that he could receive only half the amount of an ordinary labour. Obviously this led to the advantage of his master.

The extracting nature of landlordism could be best understood from their excessive demands like “Janmi bhogam” (a rent demanded in addition to the false measures which enabled them to collect rent in excess). It was the duty\(^\text{1}\) of the peasants to tend the landlord’s cattle and act as night watchman in his house. Their women folk were also required to do certain domestic services. Further they claimed the best fruit, best cow and even best women of the tenants. The land lords of the region, apart from the above. Inflicted all the humiliation, ignominies and infringements on the tenants and imposed special taboos and other restraints.

In a feudalistic society all liberties of the tenants were controlled and supervised by the landlords. There should be a chair in the house of tenants meant for the landlord to sit during his visit. They should not wear clothes covering the knees and they should not wear chappals and shirt in front of the landlord. They should not use\(^\text{2}\) even an umbrella with a handle in the presence of the Janmi.

The tenants had to show respect to the landlords. Untouchability and unapproachability widely prevailed in the region. Due to this the tenant could not go near the landlord, if the landlord belonged to a superior caste. Even the approach of low caste - or polluting caste was regarded as an offence. The tenants had to answer to the landlord only by saying ‘raan’ meaning yes.

2. Ibid, p. 16.
When a Harijan, adiyan or tenant passed the pathayappura or store house of the landlord, he had to observe certain formalities. At the sight of the pathayappura he should remove his clothes from shoulder, lower his palm leaf umbrella and walk with his head bowed.

The landlord potails were the village headman who administered local justice. The pathayappuras or store house were the centers of local administration, where the Potails used to try both civil and criminal disputes. They did not follow any procedure or specific law. The decision was left completely to the interest and will of the landlord. For petty offences the usual punishment was whipping, beating, fining, confining in pathayam (a large wooden basement for grains), tying hands and pouring pickles in to the eyes, tying hands and put in sun heat and making the victim to drink cow dung water. As the legal administration of the area was vested upon the landlord nobody was daring to question the landlord's authority.

Punishing the tenant by using deshavirodham or enmity of all he residents was a common practice existed in some parts of South Canara. If a peasant incurred the displeasure of a landlord, he was excommunicated. The barber would deny the excommunicated person to shave. He would be prohibited from entering temples, bathing in public tanks, water from well, participating in social functions and religious ceremonies. Anybody doing any service to him or even speaking to him was either excommunicated or fined.

The children of the tenants were denied education at the command of the landlord. Even the smallest show of independence was taken as personal affront. All members of the tenant's families worked as wage labourers to
support their families. They lived in thatched houses and managed to have a
subsistence standard of living. Under the British rule the law courts interven-
ved infavour of the landlords. So eviction of defaulting tenants became
very much easy. It led to frequent land transactions and ultimately the impov-
erishment of the peasantry. Similarly the commercialization of agriculture
was one of the impact of colonial administration.

The agrarian relationship that existed between the land holders and
the tenants were not favourable for the development of agrarian economy in
the South Canara District. Neither the Government nor the landlord had done
anything for the improvement of agriculture. Because of the high land rev-
enuxe extraction many land holding families were passing through consider-
able difficulties. The landlord tried to transfer the burden up on the tenants.
Both the classes tried to maintain their holding and lease. Thus insecurity
became a common feature in the agrarian structure during this period. The
exploitative nature of tenancy of Kasaragod was very clearly brought by the
Malabar Tenancy Committee Report(1)

The tenant of Kasaragod are evicted even on flimsy grounds by force
and not through courts. Unjust and arbitrary evictions are common.
The tenants has to quit the land at the whim and caprice of the
landlord.

This condition in Kasaragod taluk was similar to that of the other parts
of the South Canara District. The early 1930’s brought greatest hardships and
miseries to the peasantry. The great depression caused the fall in prices of
agricultural production. The tenants and agricultural labourers were the im-

mediate victims of the economic depression. Same way the grievances of the actual cultivators had been further accelerated by the resettlement and reassessment of 1934-35.

The resettlement of 1934-35 had caused the enhancement of sale of land in the district. Lands of the ryots were sold for arrears of revenue due through public auction. The following table shows the proclamation of purchase of lands by the government(1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>1932 (acres)</th>
<th>1935 (acres)</th>
<th>1938 (acres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>12.34</td>
<td>130.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>20.49</td>
<td>20.62</td>
<td>148.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>85.53</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>38.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>26.17</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>130.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>57.49</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>422.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>57.09</td>
<td>20.35</td>
<td>39.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>229.99</td>
<td>48.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>37.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>24.72</td>
<td>13.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>42.63</td>
<td>81.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>32.39</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>88.58</td>
<td>35.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>307.61</td>
<td>523.68</td>
<td>1129.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that in 1932, 307.61 acres of land were sold,
but during the resettlement period it was enhanced to 523.68 acres in 1935.

With in the three years 1129.57 acres of land of the ryots were sold because of the default in the payment of land revenue. Thus many tenants lost their land due to the excessive land revenue imposed through the resettlement in the district.

The government realised that the South Canara District in common with other however, been general throughout the presidency and the result of continuing the existing districts was suffering from the economic depression. The fall in prices, rates assessment in the District of South Canara would be to perpetuate the advantage enjoyed by it at the expense of the other district of the presidency. Which have been resettled since the year in which the resettlement in the district was introduced(1).

**Distribution of the Land holdings** (Operational by sites-1995-96)

(Holding in thousands, area in thousand hectares)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification of sites</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>% of holdings</th>
<th>% of area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal below 1 hac.</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68.94</td>
<td>24.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small between 1-2 hac.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17.74</td>
<td>23.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-medium 2-4 hac.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>9.21</td>
<td>23.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium 4-10 hac.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>19.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large, above 10 hac.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>293</strong></td>
<td><strong>310</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The government and the landlords used all sorts of atrocities to collect the revenue and the tenants were threatened by the moneylenders with

eviction. Thus agrarian structure became more crucial in 1930's. Which paved for the emergence of peasant organisations or Raitha Sanghas and new sort of agrarian conflicts along with the national movement.

The report of the Madras Banking Enquiry Committee in 1930 remarked\(^1\):

we find it difficult to draw a clear line between cultivation farm servants and sub-letting. Sub-letting is rarely on a money rental. It is commonly on a sharing system, the landlord getting 40 to 60 or even 80 per cent of the yield and the tenant the rest. The tenant commonly goes on from year to year eking out a precarious living on such terms, borrowing from the landlord, being supplied by him with seed, cattle and implements. The farm servants on the other hand, uses the landlord's seed, cattle and implements gets advances in cash from time to time for petty requirements and is paid from the harvest either a lumpsum of grain or proportion of the yield. The farm servants may in some cases be paid little cash as well as a fixed amount of grain. The tenant may cultivate with his own stock and implements, but there is in practice no very clear line between the two; and when the landlord is an absentee, it is not always obvious whether the actual cultivator is a farm labourer or a sub tenant.

The rural population was indulge in the superstitions and rituals. They believed that the landlords and the tenants were the creation of the god itself and it was their fate to undergo all sorts of sufferings. Thus, the belief that as the landlord-tenant relationship was being the command of god, it could not be changed. Nobody dared to question any of the atrocities of the landlords and those who acted against the will of the landlord was punished mercilessly. The British police and Judiciary took part on the side of the landlords and the tenants.

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landlord for the atrocities. Thus the landlords exploited the ignorance of the tenants.

Another sort of ill treatment made by the landlord was the non issue of receipt for payments. Generally the landlords did not issue the receipts to the tenants for the payment of rent. The receipt of rent was documental evidence to the tenants. This was the weapon used by the landlords to threaten the tenants to obey their orders, otherwise the tenant would be evicted. No tenant would dare to ask for receipt from the landlord, because the landlords enjoyed all such powers to over rule the tenants.

The peasant was actually in a deteriorated position. The landless peasantry who belonged to the lowest stratum led a life equal to slaves. Many of the landless labourers belonged to the polluting class and had to under go all sorts of sufferings. The tenant paid almost all his produce as rent and left a little for his subsistance. Even though certain reform movements emerged in South Canara in the last part of the 19th century, they never came forward for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Generally they believed in fate and lived without opposing the ill-treatments and inhuman behaviour of the landlords.

The dwelling places of most of the tenants and the landless labourers were in a very pitiable condition. They lived in houses or certain type of shelters built in the places of the landlords. These were insecure and unhygienic. The following table will show the dwelling areas of the people of the South Canara District.(1)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>9,18,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of houses of the better sort</td>
<td>2,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of their inhabitants</td>
<td>12,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of houses of inferior sort</td>
<td>1,81357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of inhabitants</td>
<td>9,04,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of houses</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of their inhabitants</td>
<td>1,876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that only 1.31% of the total population of the district lived in better sorts of houses. 98.48% of the total population lived in inferior sorts of houses. Considering the political and economic condition of that period we can make a conclusion that these people did not have any houses worth the name and they lived in any sort of shelter constructed without any cost.

Munro\(^{(1)}\) attributed the unsatisfactory agricultural production to the poverty of the people and to the ryots poverty and high assessment were much the same thing. The one was the cause of the other.

Poverty prevented the ryots from making the land productive and high assessment deprived him of the fruits of his labour.

The cheapness of Grain was another factor discouraging the increase of agricultural output. As Baramhal had little scope of sending out grain, every succeeding addition to the population of farmers

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who cultivated grain only, could add little or nothing to revenue, and by diminishing the price as it increased the quantity of output, proved detrimental to the whole body of cultivators. In these circumstances, any increase of grain cultivation was superfluous to agriculture.

Indebtness and eviction became the common feature of the agrarian system. This caused stagnation and deterioration of agriculture, lack of development of the existing cultivated and area of land passing out of cultivators. Transfer of land to the money lenders and speculators reflected the growth of landlordism and of the proletariat.

The two dominant features of the British rule in the agrarian relations in South Canara was the growing concentration of ownership on one hand and expansion of tenancy on the other. 1930's marked the concentration of land in the hands of the non cultivating owners. The economic depression of 1929-34 and the second world war 1939-45 had accelerated the process. The increase in land alienation was one of the adverse effects of this dual crisis in the district. The creditors used pressure on debtors to sell their land to clear off debts. The Madras Debt Conciliation Act 1936 and the Madras Agriculturist Relief Act 1938 did not make any sort of relief to the tenants. But they served only to reinforce the dominance of the creditors, traders and landlords in the rural society.

The above mentioned crisis caused economic depression and second world war resulted in the loss of confidence in banking institutions and their operations. Thus the instability of the value of currency created a turn to

invest money in immovable property which was considered as safe investment. This created demand for land resulting in high land values. So the debtors were persuaded to sell their landed property in order to clear the debts. This created important changes in the agrarian relations. New landowners, mostly from non agricultural classes purchased the lands. They did not cultivate the land themselves but preferred to lease their lands out. Thus tenancy and sub-tenancy increased in the district. This caused the emergence of a new group of absentee landlords who were interested in gaining more profit in agrarian relations. However due to the fear of drastic fall in the land values in the post war period, a drastic fall in land transactions had witnessed the period after 1943[1].

With the development of Indian nationalism, Gandhiji started agitation against untouchability and unapproachability. This resulted in Vaikam Satyagraha and Guruvayur Satyagraha in Kerala. This enabled the people of the Malabar and Kasaragod taluk to oppose the caste monopoly. In this background the old beliefs suffered great blow and created a sense of self confidence among the oppressed class to oppose the caste system, landlordism and imperialism.

It was in this situation, that the peasant movement acquired a significant growth in South Canara District. Thus 1930's and 1940's marked the development of the peasant movements in various parts of the district. The second world war gave a new turn to the movement of the peasantry. The food shortage and high prices of essential commodities and the atrocities of

the government, landlords and the money lenders were rousing the peasant movements into more and more militant form. The peasant organisation demanded protection from eviction, reduction of rent, issue of receipt for the payment of rent and also the legislation for the abolishing of landlordism.

Thus 1940's marked powerful struggles in the struggles in the agrarian structure of the district. The peasantry were mobilised under the leadership of the communists and the Karshaka Sangham to challenge the grievances caused by landlordism and imperialism. This resulted in open clashes between the peasants on one side and the government on the other. The tensions developed in the agrarian structure were termed as agrarian conflicts.