CHAPTER VIII

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In the Census of 1914, the extent of land is recorded under two broad categories - dry and wet. The dry lands were generally gardens in which coconut, tapioca, pepper etc., were grown and wet lands were mostly paddy fields.\(^1\) The average extent of a plot of garden land for the State as a whole was approximately 54 cents while the same for wet land was only 28 cents. The comparatively small extent of an average agriculture plot was large as a result of the partition of families.\(^2\) An interesting feature displayed by the families in higher income groups in urban areas was that they did not show any marked tendency towards the investment of their savings on lands. The wealth of landed property in the mid – income families were definitely the highest with the low-land families comparing second and then in the high land ranking third.\(^3\) The price of land together with the corresponding return was perhaps the most important of these lands. In general, land value was at its maximum in the urban area, but the return from land was not correspondingly high except in cases where the

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2. Ibid, p.2,
3. Ibid, p.25,
investments were on building. This probably explained the comparative diminution of investments on landed property in the urban areas.

The population census showed some demographic features. The density of population was highest in the low land, next in the midland and less in the high land. The cultivation in the high land was on the estate scale which was unaffordable for the average family, but only for those who had sufficient capital. Hence inspite of the low value in this region, the average family had comparatively small investment in the land here.

Among the lower income groups, the Brahmins had practically no investments in land. Among the other communities in the low income groups, the Nair ranked highest with the Muslim and the backward communities coming last. The Christians and the other Hindus were between these two. These differences gradually vanished in the higher income groups through the Ezhava, Christian and the Muslim and the back ward communites who were the tillers of the soil easily purchased small plots, from the erstwhile Nair land-lords. The facilities provided by Government for the registration of *puthuval* lands, the cultural awakening due to intense propaganda carried on by their

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4 Ibid,
5 Ibid
6 Ibid., p.26
leaders and their carving for economic independence had largely contributed to their gradual elevation from mere tillers of the soil to peasant proprietors. This was a healthy change in a predominantly agricultural country where absentee land-lordism had already caused great havoc to agriculture.

Among the lower income groups very few Brahmins were found to pay land tax. The Nairs paid the maximum land tax followed by the Christian and other Hindus. In the slightly higher income groups the Brahmins and other Hindus gradually displaced the other communities, the Nair and the Christian coming almost on an equal footing followed by Ezhava and the Muslim.

For land revenue administration, the State was divided into three divisions. The general control of the Land Revenue Department was with the Land Revenue Commissioner till the abolition of the post in 1940 and the statutory and administrative powers rested in him were taken over by the Government. Each division was composed of taluks under the charge of a Tahsildar. Each taluk was sub-divided into pakuthies, which constituted the unit of the land revenue administration. Proverthicar was in charge of each pakuthi. There were 30 taluks and

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7 Ibid,
8 Ibid, p. 27
9 TAR, 1944 – 45, p.30
222 pakuthies. All the permanent Tahsildars and village officers had been properly trained in surveying.¹⁰

In 1915, Collector Innes in his report to the Government on the working of the compensation for Tenants Improvement Act of 1900, attributed the evils of the Malabar tenancy system to insecurity to tenure, exhorbitant renewal fees, social tyranny and miscellaneous exactions.¹¹ He recommended that occupancy rights should be conferred on the actual cultivators in possession of land for over 15 years.¹² The Government did not take any necessary to enact any legislation giving, burden of rent, indebtedness, alienation from the land, and eviction, the Malabar pesantry rapidly improved. The years of depressions worsend the economic condition, and the agrarian tension exploded as the Mapilah Rebellion of 1921. The 1921 Rebellion was the most serious out-burst, the first of its magnitude, involving 4 lakhs peasants spread, over several hundred villages which shook the foundations of the socio-economic and political structure of Malabar.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.
¹³ Conrad Wood, 'Historical Background of the Mapilah Rebellion', 1836-1919, Social Scientist, vol -3, No,1 August 1974, p-34-45
The British Government, however, did not do anything immediately to solve the problem, but instead tried the Malabar Tenancy Committee (Raghavayya Committee) in 1927 to report on the disabilities of the Malabar tenants and to remedy them. On the recommendation of this committee, the Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in 1929.

This Act was mainly intended for putting some control on arbitrary evictions. It contained provisions of giving fixity of tenure of cultivating vermpattomdars subject to the payment of fair rent fixed by the Act. fixity of tenure was also conferred to fair rent fixed by the Act. Fixity of tenure was also conferred on kanamdar, kuzhikanamdars and other intermediaries by enabling them to get renewal fee fixed under by the Act, but on actual implementation, it proved to be ineffective and defective in several respects.

Accordingly, village level karshakasanghams were formed along Malabar around 1935. And with the formation of the all-Malabar karshkasangran in 1937, peasant organisations assumed the from of a three-tier organisation with the village karshekashagham as the smallest unit, the All Malabar karshkasngan at the apex as a co-ordinating body, and the Taluk karshakasangham, emerged as a strong peasant organisation ventilating the grievances of the agrarian classes. It fully exploited the prevailing discontent among the peasant
and their opposition to the Jenmis and the Government, while organising its activities. Massive peasant conferences at the village level, Taluk and Regional levels, processions of peasants and youth singing revolutionary songs and shouting reverberating slogans were more or less regular feature of the karshakasngham as the massive intercaste dinners for which the peasants used to carry head loads of vegetables and rice. Another feature was the staging of drums with revolutionary them, often highlighting the evils of land-lordism and explosion of pesantry.\footnote{Prakash, C. Karat, ‘The Peasant Movement in Malabar 1934-40’, Social Scientist, September 1976, pp. 36-37.}

In 1939 the Malabar Tenancy Committee known as the Kuttikrishana Menom Committee was appointed to study the tenure and effect of land tenure. Although the committee submitted its report in 1940, a legislation was proposed on the plea of the British Government pre-occupation with the Second World War. When the war ended in 1945, provential elections were held in which Congress Party got an absolute majority and formed a popular Government in Madras in 1946. However this Government did not pay sufficient attention to improve the agrarian relations, and agrarian problems remained as before. The Malabar Tenancy Committee summed up the position as in Malabar, the condition of the people is deplorable and they are sunk in
indebtedness, poverty and misery. The result has been a natural apathy and indifference, and even despondency which destroys even the desire or the will to live better. Matters are getting worse every year and the Government had to tackle the problems before it is too late for them to do anything.¹⁵

After the Indian independence, the agrarian question was taken mobilisation of the peasantry. Accordingly, the Land assignment Act 1950 was passed. This Act abolished the system of renewals of renewal fee, gave fixity of tenure to all cultivating verumpattomdars whether their holdings included wet lands or not. It also extended fixity to all customary verumpattomdars and kuzhikanamdars. The Act also provided to the simultaneous settlement of fair rents and the preparation record of rights for all holdings.

This Act conferred another important right namely, that the land-lord should pay to the cultivating tenant compensation, equivalent to one year’s net income in ease of evictions on the ground that the land is needed for bonafide self-cultivation. Taken together, the two amendment of 1951 and 1954 were the corollary of post-independence developments in the region and victory of the organised peasantry.

Thus the Land assignment Act of 1950 made fundamental changes in agriculture by introducing an Agrarian Relation Bill. The main aim of the Bill was to safeguard the interests of the tenants, putting a ceiling on land holding, re-distributed surplus land to the landless and fix fair rents. It was also promised that an Anti-Eviction Bill would be introduced to bring an immediate relief to the tenants, maintain the present *statue sque* in the tenure and make sure that the tenants would not be evicted before the Agrarian Relations Bill was passed. Therefore the Government took immediate steps to stabilize the agrarian situation, proclaiming the study of eviction preceding ordinance with in a week to protect the tenants and labours with huts on land-lord's lands from eviction until comprehensive agrarian reforms could be farmed.¹⁶

The Act granted right to the *kudikedappukars* to purchase their dwelling units and stipulated a process for clearing the accumulated arrears of rent. In addition to this, there were provisions for imposing a ceiling on land holdings and for the distribution of surplus land to agricultural labourers and poor peasants.¹⁷ The Act also sought to

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abolish land-lordism on payment of compensation by resting ownership right to tenant and kudikedappukars and by taking over the surplus land after the landless.

Fixity of tenure was conferred and a wide variety of holders of Tenancy-like rights on land. Recognising that land-lords had anticipated the reform, it was provided that all cultivating tenants "Irrespective of the deed or document held by the land-lord, could claim fixity of tenure, certain deeds of surrender executed after the ministry took power were invalidated.\(^{18}\) Fair rents were fixed for all types of lands and they were made uniform ignoring the original nature of the lease. The fixation of fair rent was to be done by the land Tribunals with in the minimum and maximum scales given in the schedule to the Act. It was clear from outset that there could be no way to escape from payment of compensation to land oweners. The constitution of India guaranteed the right to property as a fundamental right, and all State Governments were bounded by it.

The most significant provisions in the Agrarian Relations Bill was the ceiling on landholdings. The ceiling was fixed at fifteen acres of double crop wet land or it equivalent, ie, 22\(\frac{1}{2}\) acres of single

\(^{18}\) *The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957 as passed by the State Legislative Assembly, Trivandram.*
crop or 15 acres of garden land or 30 acres of dry land, for a family consisting of five members. Every additional five members could get an extra acre subject maximum of 25 acres. An un married adult could hold only half of the ceiling area. Land in excess of the above ceiling was to be surrendered to the Land Bord for which the land-lord was entitled to get compensation on the basis of a graduated scale. The compensation payable for land surrendered by the land-lords was sixty per cent of the total market value.19

Thus it can be conclude that the agrarian reform led to the gradual disappearance of feudal land-lords and the emergence of a enlarged capitalist land-lord class which is ascending. This assessment is reinforced by the conclusion reached by the study of the Indian school of social science on agrarian structure and social change. The report identified the following trends.

1. The old traditional feudal relations are fading away.

2. Capitalist farming is on the ascendancy.

3. A mixture of diluted forms of feudalists relations with developing trend of capitalist relations still predominates.

19 Ibid.
4. While capitalist land-lords make appreciable saving from cultivation, rich and middle peasants are financially in a vulnerable position.

5. The economic condition and living standard of poor peasants and agricultural labourers are precarious.

6. The implementation of Agrarian reforms Act had adversely affected the land-lords, while it actually benefited the majority of intermediaries and rich and middle peasants.