Chapter 5

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE, LAND REFORMS AND AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Transformation Under Relatively Unaltered Agrarian Structure

The preceding chapter had looked into the agrarian structure and the nature of Land Reforms and development of capitalist production relations in Indian agriculture. When we delve into this field in the case of the two states under study we come across a very familiar unfolding of the history of the agrarian structure, peasant struggles, Land Reforms and the adoption of New Agricultural Strategy, although Kerala offers a deviation in the manner of implementation of Land Reforms. The Land Reforms in India was not of the radical nature and was rather evolutionary and retained the existing agrarian structure with minor alterations. Land Reforms itself as we have noted in the last chapter is not a Socialist demand and is part of the programme of bourgeois democratic revolution.

No state in India, for that matter not even Kerala or Bengal has implemented the kind of confiscatory, radical redistributive Land Reform without any compensation whatsoever like in the case of French Revolution or later in Communist China. The Reforms implemented in India were rather conservative dealing with the question of security of tenure, illegal evictions and only limited redistribution but with hefty compensation as we have noted. The development of capitalism in India has been promoted over such a relatively unreformed agrarian structure wherein the concentration of land remains unaltered except in a few cases like that of Kerala and Bengal.
The Telangana experience wherein at least temporarily land was confiscated from the feudal lords and distributed among the peasantry without any compensation was purely on the basis of radical mobilisation of the peasantry. However, even here with the coming to power of a bourgeois-landlord state one witnessed a reversal of these Reforms. The level of political consciousness has a direct bearing on whatever Land Reforms are undertaken and effective implementation is a function of peasant radicalism. The present chapter looks into the agrarian structure in the two states and trace the origins of peasant radicalism. The nature of demands of the peasant movement, the implementation of the Land Reforms and agricultural transformation with the development of capitalist production relations in the two states forms part of the chapter.

Social Origins of Peasant Radicalism in Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh emerged as a single entity with the amalgamation of the Andhra state formed in 1953 on separation from Madras Presidency and the Telangana region of the erstwhile Nizam's Hyderabad state on 1 November, 1956. The agrarian structure in Andhra Pradesh at the time of its formation was steeped in inequalities, with highly skewed concentration of land in the hands of a small minority of big landlords. The Hyderabad state which emerged as an offshoot of the disintegrating Moghul Empire was converted into a subsidiary feudatory of the British under the Subsidiary Alliance, the signing of which also led to the cession of Berar and the Coastal and Ceded districts of Andhra, thereby bringing them under the direct rule of the British. The two regions understandably had different experiences as far as the agrarian and land relations were concerned, given that the erstwhile Andhra state which included the Coastal districts and the Ceded districts of the Rayalseema region was directly under the British rule, while the Telangana region was under the rule of

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the vassals of British Imperialists, the Hyderabad Nizams of the Asaf Jahi dynasty who carried the medieval baggage into the 20th century.2

We have seen before the principal forms of land tenurial systems and the different forms of intermediaries that existed in the British period. The Andhra region had the Zamindari, the Ryotwari and the Inamdar systems while the Telangana region had the Jagirdari and Diwani systems wherein the Zamindars, Inamdars, Deshmukhs, Deshpandes and the Jagirdars were the intermediaries between the government and the peasantry.3 The Andhra region which had a predominantly peasant economy was replete with socio-economic inequalities and inter-regional variations. Rayalseema was more backward when compared to the Coastal districts which were endowed with better irrigational facilities and the agrarian scenario was one dominated by backwardness and feudal oppression.4

In the state of Hyderabad the total of 53 million acres was divided into the governmental land revenue system accounting for about 60 per cent of the total area (known as the Diwani or the Khalsa area), about 30 per cent under the Jagirdari system and about 10 per cent under the Sarf-e-Khas system which was the Nizam’s own direct estate.5 The condition of the peasants in the Sarf-e-Khas areas were that of bonded slaves or total serfs under the Nizam and even the limited rights that existed in the Diwani areas were denied to them. In the Jagir areas the land taxes on irrigated lands was ten times that of the amount collected in the Diwani areas. The condition in the Jagir areas was far more oppressive than that in the Diwani or the Sarf-e-Khas areas. The Deshmukhs and Deshpandes who were the collectors of taxes having access to land records occupied through illegal means thousands of acres of best fertile cultivated land and relegated the peasants cultivating these lands into the position of tenants-at-will and later, on the pretext of non-repayment of loans of agricultural

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4 P.Sundarayya, Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons, Ganashakti Printers, Calcutta, 1972, p-139.
products given at ‘fantastic usurious rates’ during the years of economic crisis or the non-payment of taxes due to bad harvests or unfair prices for the crops huge tracts of land was confiscated and placed under the legal possession of these feudal lords.6

The socio-economic history of the state especially in the Telangana region witnessed ‘unbridled feudal oppression’ which came to be accompanied by the oppressive ‘Vetti’ system of forced labour and exactions which rendered the peasantry into a position of ‘abject serfdom’ and ‘utter degradation’.7 The landlord or the Deshmukh (known in the local dialect as Dora, meaning master or lord of the village) under the Vetti system enjoyed many privileges including the ‘services of the occupational castes in return for some payment either in cash or kind’, which were however, mostly exacted by coercion free of cost. The family of the customary retainers were also forced to cultivate land and perform domestic, agricultural and official duties as an obligation to the ‘master’. Invariably it used to be the agricultural workers from the ‘untouchable’ Mala and Madiga castes on whom the obligations of the Vetti exactions fell.8 The Vetti system was an all pervasive social phenomenon which affected different classes in varying degrees. While it was the erstwhile ‘untouchable’ castes which were forced to send one man from each family to perform Vetti, they also were forced to provide the landlords free of cost the implements that they make for agricultural purposes. Similarly the other occupational castes that invariably came from the backward communities also were forced to provide their products like cloth, pots, toddy and other articles free of cost to the high caste landlords. The officials like the Deshmukhs, Maqtedars and other revenue officials also along with the landlords extracted different forms of forced labour and illegal exactions.

The special conditions and politico-economic laws that governed the peasantry under the Nizam’s rule created an unprecedented agrarian structure provoking Dhanagare to liken the agrarian social structure in Hyderabad to ‘a page from

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6 Ibid, pp-10-11.
The Jagirdari system also resulted in the concentration of landed property in certain caste groups and nearly 90 per cent of the Deshmukhs, Maqtedars and other revenue officials belonged to the high caste Reddy and Velama community. Like the Vetti system, the Bhagela system was also one wherein customary retainers tied by debt to the "masters" were drawn from the lower and untouchable castes. The debtors from these castes were forced to perform all services demanded by the landlords leading to a patron-client relationship between the landlord and the agricultural worker that became a hereditary system continuing for generations. The caste background of the Bhagela and Begar workers and the prevention of the deprived castes from access to landed property and economic resources because of their traditional caste occupation and depressed status in the Hindu caste hierarchy have denied them the opportunities for upward mobility. Tenurial and credit relations were determined by subjective factors and the lower castes were bound to the high caste creditors due to their credit obligations which only further reinforced the position of the dependant peasantry who were relegated to the position of debt slavery. The high caste landlords possessed large tracts of land; some of them like the Visnur Deshmukh in Jangaon taluk of Nalgonda district owned 40,000 acres, the Kalluru Deshmukh in Madhira taluk of Khammam district owned one lakh acres and Janareddy Pratap Reddy of Suryapet taluk in Nalgonda district owned 1.5 lakh acres of land.

The Jagirdari system came to signify the most oppressive kind of feudalism and its overthrow became a rallying point on which the peasantry was mobilised. The feudal ownership of land had resulted in poor productivity and the system of land tenure failed to provide any incentive to the tillers of the land and
hence, there was an urgent need for the radical restructuring of land relations in the Telangana region.14 The class structure in rural Telangana broadly corresponded to the structure of the caste system. There was a strong correlation between the tendency towards land concentration and membership in upper caste. The social distribution of land generally overlapped and corresponded to the prevailing caste hierarchy.15 The situation in the Andhra and Rayalseema region was only marginally better.16 If one were to look at the Andhra region, it was predominantly a peasant economy. The Circar districts or the Coastal districts were relatively better developed economically, socially and politically when compared to the Rayalseema districts which were backward in all respects with ‘a backward agriculture dominated by feudal relations and oppression’.17 The condition of the Scheduled Castes and the OBCs was one of contempt and they faced extreme forms of oppression under the high caste feudal landlords. The land question and the power and authority in the rural countryside were invariably linked to the question of caste.

The inequalities in the distribution of land, the concentration of vast tracts of land in few hands and the resultant problems of inefficient cultivation, absenteeism, abuse of the economic power by the high caste landlords coupled with the demand for land to the tiller set the stage for militant struggles of the peasantry and for their mobilisation around the slogan of agrarian reforms. Unlike the claim of Khusro that Land Reforms in India was ‘at best an official measure’ that emerged from the ‘minds of an intelligentsia’ that was sympathetic to the small man18, we shall see that it was actually the result of class struggle and popular mobilisation that forced the implementation of whatever semblance of Land Reforms we have had.

18 A.M.Khusro, Economic and Social Effects of Jagirdari Abolition and Land Reforms in Hyderabad, University Press, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1958, p-45.
Peasant Struggles and Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh

The peasantry in Andhra region were involved with the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle from the time of the Non-cooperation Movement onwards and district level peasant organisations were begun in Guntur, Krishna and the Godavari districts in 1923 and the Andhra Provincial Ryot Sangham was set up in 1928. Although the Madras Estate Land Act of 1908 gave the Zamindari ryots permanency of tenure and the right to sell their land, the oppressive Zamindari system rendered the provisions of the Act ineffective. This necessitated the formation of the Andhra Provincial Zamindari Ryots Association in 1929 to ensure the proper implementation of the Act and also overcome the exploitation of the Zamindars. The rural Andhra like the other regions of the state and elsewhere in the country was also debt-ridden and peasants were in debt trap, forcing the poor peasants into bondage under the moneylenders or the landlords. The Andhra Peasants’ Protection Conference held in Tenali in 1931 for the first time in India articulated the demand for a moratorium on all agricultural debts to overcome such a situation of contemptuous oppression. The peasants of the Godavari districts and Krishna organised a No-Tax Satyagraha against the enhancement of the land revenue by the Madras government by organising village level Kisan Committees under the leadership of Prof. N.G. Ranga, forcing the government to withdraw the revenue enhancement in 1934. However, differences with the approach of N.G. Ranga emerged as the Communists suggested more radical struggles and the people also lost faith in the Congress which repeatedly articulated these demands but did not take concrete steps in the direction once they came to power. The All India Kisan Sabha which was the peasant organisation of the Communist Party of India started organising the peasantry and also the agricultural workers in a big way in

20 Ibid, p-199.
21 Ibid, p-200.
22 Ibid, p-200.
the Andhra region under the leadership of P.Sundarayya and others. In 1931 they organised a 1500 mile march to Madras for awakening the peasantry and organising them against the Zamindari system. The Andhra Rashtra Ryot Sangham which was the peasant mass organisation in the region affiliated to the All India Kisan Sabha organised a similar march immediately after the Congress government came to power in the state of Madras promising radical Land Reforms in 1937, forcing the setting up of a Zamindari Enquiry Committee under the Chairmanship of T.Prakasam, the then Revenue minister.23

The Communists organised many struggles against Zamindari system and also for moratorium on agricultural debts. The growing radicalisation of the Andhra peasantry with the forcible occupation of surplus lands was sought to be quelled initially by resorting to brutal force and police firing took place at many places killing 14 people in various parts of the region. The differences with the Congress reached a flashpoint and leaders like N.G.Ranga and Pattabhi Sitaramaiah faced with the prospect of increasing influence of the Communists openly instigated raids on the Communists and disruption of their activities.24

The post-War crisis had accentuated the misery of the rural masses who reeled under conditions of poverty, unemployment, and starvation. Andhra witnessed a wave of protests wherein peasants occupied Zamindari lands, agricultural workers and farm servants struck work demanding more wages and regular hours of work, only to face repression by the Congress government.25

However, the Congress government at Madras was finally forced to pass the Madras Estate (Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari) Act to abolish the Zamindari system in 1948. This provided for the abolition of all Zamindari and Inamdari estates, Ryots were given pattas with full rights, Ryotwari revenue rates were fixed after making Survey settlements. However, the Zamindars were to be paid compensation and also get pattas for land under their own cultivation. Stiff opposition to the payment of compensation under the

23 Ibid, p-203.
25 Ibid, pp-142-143.
Communist party banner notwithstanding, the Congress took a conciliatory position towards the Zamindars and struck a compromise, retracting from its own earlier resolutions that we have seen. This defeated the purpose of the Act and although Zamindars were to be paid an estimated compensation of Rs.12 crores for the entire state of Madras, they appropriated more than Rs.18 crores in Andhra region alone, while also being able to retain large tracts of land under 'personal' cultivation.26

The peasants of the Andhra region gave ample support to the Telangana Movement and also carried out militant struggles in the Andhra region acting as a 'rear base' for the Telangana struggle. The Congress government retaliated with a reign of terror for two years using the notorious Malabar Special Police Force. The peasants and agricultural workers gained significant victories when they managed to get a hike in wages in Krishna, Guntur, Nellore, the Godavari districts and even the Rayalseema districts of Anantapur and Cuddappah. The poor peasants and agricultural workers in West Godavari, Nellore, Cuddappah and Anantapur districts occupied hundreds of acres of Banjar land (waste land) and also resisted the repression.27

The Economic Depression of 1929 like elsewhere had a debilitating influence on the Telangana peasantry, including the well-to-do cultivators who were affected badly by the fall in wholesale prices and many were forced to sell their lands at unreasonably low prices. The trend continued throughout the thirties leading to a fall in the cash incomes of the cultivators who produced for the market and the price-trends resulted in the strengthening of the role of the moneylenders and traders whose control over the indebted peasantry grew manifold.28 It was in such circumstances that the mobilisation of the rural peasantry on a large-scale into a mass movement became a reality. The Andhra Mahasabha organised in the Telangana region under the leadership of Madapati Hanumantha Rao in the year 1928 gave leadership to the anti-feudal, anti-

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129
imperialist struggle of the peasantry. The Andhra Mahasabha was then known as the Andhra Jana Sangham and took up this name in 1930.

The Mahasabha came increasingly under the influence of the Communist movement with leaders like Ravi Narayan Reddy, Baddam Yella Reddy, S.Ramanatham, D.Venkateswara Rao, Ch. Lakshmi Narasayya, A.Laksmi Narasimha Reddy and Kodanda Rami Reddy joining the Communist Party. The Seventh session of the Mahasabha held at Malkapuram in 1940 saw the Left wing emerging stronger and the eighth conference at Chilukuru had the Communist leader Ravi Narayan Reddy as its President. This ensured a radical shift in the activities of the Mahasabha which transformed itself from the tradition of merely passing resolutions to rally the peasantry on the issues of abolition of Vetti, banning of rack-renting, ban on evictions, abolition of the much despised Jagirdari system, reduction of taxes and rent and abolition of the hakke-malikana tax levied on toddy trees and resort to direct action, against feudal and imperialist elements.

From the beginning of 1944 the Mahasabha under the leadership of the Communist Party conducted many militant struggles on these issues. The result was that towards the end of the Second World War and in the post-War years along with the Tebhaga Movement in East Bengal, the Telangana Movement under the leadership of the Communist Party emerged as an outstanding example of peasant radicalism involving the mass of the poor peasantry. The Telangana Movement has been described by Hamza Alavi as being ‘in its character and political objectives’, ‘the most revolutionary movement that has yet arisen in India.’

The spark that set afire the Telangana Agrarian Revolt was the victory of the Sangham in protecting the harvest and land of a washer-woman Ailamma, who was a worker of the Sangham from the hated Deshmukh of Jangaon, Visnur Ramachandra Reddy despite repressive measures. This victory gave confidence

32 The Andhra Mahasabha was called by the villagers affectionately as Sangham.
and courage to the people in their fight against feudal lords. The martyrdom of Doddi Komarayya, a village Sangham leader on July 4, 1946 when he was leading a procession against the repression by the Visnur Deshmukh in firing by the Zamindar’s men ‘set ablaze the pent-up fury of the Telangana peasantry’ and people rose en masse against the feudal lords.33

The Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist Party organised the peasantry and Gram Rajyams or liberated Village Soviets were set up which evolved an efficient system of land redistribution among the evicted tenants and landless agricultural workers while also successfully replacing the judicial set-up of the Nizams with Gram Samithis or village committees.34 The armed peasant resistance engulfed the entire area of Nalgonda, Khammam and Warangal districts while parts of Medak, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Mahbubnagar, and Hyderabad districts were also affected. About 4000 villages came under the control of the Communist Party which established a parallel administration which put an end to the tyranny of the landlords and Jagirdars.35 The end of the War also saw the demand for accession of Hyderabad into the Indian Union, leading to the pro-Nizam Majlis-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen organising a mercenary army called Razakars which unleashed terror in the rural areas. It was the village dalams or squads of armed guerrillas who protected the peasants from the Nizam’s repression. The repression unleashed by the Nizam and his Razakars, the feudal landlord armies and the Indian state after the police action in September 1948, led to the killing of as many as 4000 Communists and peasant militants; more than 10,000 were thrown into detention camps and jails and a much larger number were tortured and harassed in different ways. However, the Telangana Movement had to its credit an impressive record of achievements which Sundarayya has enumerated thus:

'The hated landlords—the pillars of Nizam’s autocracy in the rural areas—were driven away from their fortress-like houses-gadis and their lands were seized by the peasantry. One million acres of land was redistributed among the peasantry under the guidance of the people’s committees. All evictions were stopped and the forced labour service was abolished. The plunderous and exorbitant rates of usury were either drastically cut down or altogether forbidden. The daily wages of

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agricultural labourers were increased and a minimum wage was enforced. The oppressive forest officialdom was forced to abandon the entire forest belt and the tribals and the people living in the adjoining areas of these forests were able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. For a period of 12 to 18 months the entire administration in these areas was conducted by the village peasant committees. During the course of this struggle against the Nizam's autocracy, the people could organise and build a powerful militia comprising 10,000 village squad members and about 2,000 regular guerrilla squads, in defence of the peasantry against the armed attacks of the Razakars and the Nizam's police. Lakhs of peasants, for the first time in their life, could have their regular two meals a day. In a word, this historic peasant rebellion shook the medieval autocratic regime of the Asaf Jahi dynasty to its roots, delivering death-blows against it.36 (We have resorted to the reproduction of a longish quotation to retain the exact intent and to bring out the extent of impact of the Movement).

It is to the credit of the Telangana Movement that the agrarian question was placed on the centre-stage and Land Reforms brooked large on the agenda of the ruling classes like never before. We have noted the differences that marked the agrarian and land relations in the Telangana region and the Andhra region. This fact necessitated that different Land Reform measures had to be formulated and the two regions were also governed by different set of measures for the specific task of abolition of intermediaries and for bringing Tenancy Legislations37 The formidable question of Land Reform was sought to be addressed for the first time in Hyderabad by the Asami Shikmi Act of 1945. The Act although was extremely defective and inadequate created some tenants with permanent tenure subject to rent payment, provided fixity of tenure to all new tenants for ten years, and the power of fixing the minimum rent to the government.38 'The Madras Estates Abolition and Conversion into Ryotwari Act, 1948' was implemented with the immediate purpose of abolition of the intermediaries, while the Telangana region had a separate 'The Hyderabad(Abolition of Jagirs) Regulation Act, 1358 Fasli(1948)' with the same stated objective.39

The abolition of the intermediaries and its socio-economic consequences have been intensely debated and it has been generally accepted that the implementation of the Reforms in the Telangana region have been more effective than in Andhra region. Even with regard to Tenancy Reforms, the

performance in the Telangana region was much more effective when compared to the dismal record of the Andhra region.  

The Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act (1950) brought a large number of tenants under the ‘protected tenant category’ and its subsequent amendments provided for the regulation of rent and barred the eviction of tenants. A ‘protected tenant’ was defined as one who had been cultivating as a tenant for at least six years. The category of ‘protected tenants’ is the central feature of the Act and this feature is considered to be a novel feature of the tenancy legislation in Telangana; but the Act did not prove effective or rather did not apply to the very large class of ordinary tenants, sharecroppers, etc. The requirement in the Act that the tenants come forward to pay compensation and become landholders was impractical and the lack of financial ability to do so ensured that there was no significant change in the situation. The Act in Telangana gave essential rights to both ordinary and protected tenants. The Act was also subsequently amended to provide for compulsory ownership to the protected tenants to overcome this anomaly. The landlord had the right to resume land for personal cultivation up to three family holdings which could be anything between 4 and 60 acres depending on the type of land. The Act resulted in the actual conferment of protection to nearly 6 lakh tenants with over 75 lakh acres under their possession, constituting 33 per cent of the total cultivated area. The Act has been described by certain economists and policy makers alike as having taken the lead in Land Reforms in independent India, being progressive in nature and most comprehensive as it integrated all the measures that Land Reforms as a whole constitute namely tenancy reforms, ceiling on land holdings, consolidation of land holdings and cooperativisation of agriculture. However,
the Act largely confined itself only to tenancy reforms and the other issues were either partially dealt with in selective areas, for instance the ceiling laws were applicable only in Khammam district under the redistribution of land programme and other issues have become redundant with the passing of new legislations overruling these provisions.\textsuperscript{45} It is notable that the Act was implemented by the government not out of any commitment to Land Reforms but emerged as a strategy of the ruling classes to curtail the growth of Communism in the region.\textsuperscript{46}

The implementation and efficacy of the Act varied in the different regions of Hyderabad and the militant peasant movement in Telangana ensured a better performance of the Act in the region when compared to the regions of Marathwada and Karnataka which was relatively inactive as far as peasant movement was concerned (See Table 5.1).

\textbf{Table 5.1}

\textbf{Protected Tenancies and Evictions in Hyderabad, 1951-55}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Still Remaining</th>
<th>Purchased Land</th>
<th>Voluntary Surrender</th>
<th>Legally Evicted</th>
<th>Illegally Evicted</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diwani Area</td>
<td>61.38</td>
<td>19.69</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-Jagir Area</td>
<td>45.39</td>
<td>12.42</td>
<td>17.83</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>22.14</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)Telangana</td>
<td>55.50</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>10.61</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>13.90</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)Marathwada</td>
<td>23.80</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>51.80</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)Karnataka</td>
<td>31.34</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\begin{itemize}
\item Out of every 100 protected tenancies created in 1951, in 1954
\item Out of every 100 protected tenancies created in 1951, in 1955
\end{itemize}

Source: A.M.Khusro, \textit{Economic and social Effects of Jagirdari Abolition and Land Reforms in Hyderabad}, pp-40-42.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p-12.

\textsuperscript{46} M.Satyarayarao Rao, "Land Reforms Policy and Legislation: 1950 to 1956" in B.A.V.Sharma(Ed.), \textit{Political Economy of India: A Study of Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh}, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1980, pp-286-88. The first civilian Chief Minister of Hyderabad state, M.K.Vellodi had stated "the speedy implementation of this Act could settle all land disputes in the state and the Communists may not be able to play their game.", p-288.

\textsuperscript{47} Utsa Patnaik, \textit{The Organisational Basis of Indian Agriculture with Special Reference to the Development of Capitalist Farming (i.e. Based on Wage Labour and Following Economic Criteria for Investment) in Selected Regions in
The table shows that in 1951, in the ex-jagir areas over one-fifth (22.14%) had been illegally evicted, while 20.4 per cent had been legally evicted or surrendered the land received under pressure from the landlords. This implies that 42.54 per cent of the tenants who would otherwise fall in the ‘protected tenants’ category were thrown off their land while only 45.39 per cent remained as ‘protected tenants’. The option of purchasing land as we have noted was not very feasible and only 12.42 per cent had availed of this option. Region wise data on eviction shows that only 28 per cent in Telangana region had lost land by legal eviction, voluntary surrender or illegal evictions in 1954 and 22.5 per cent did so in 1955, while the same was as high as 74.5 per cent and 63.3 per cent in 1954 and 48.8 per cent and 65 per cent in 1954 in Marathwada and Karnataka respectively. This clearly is a result of the heightened consciousness of the peasantry in Telangana region due to the militant peasant movement which provided stiff resistance to the landlord pressure. Hence, ground level mobilisation in favour of Reforms is an important condition for the success of such measures.

In the Andhra region also the abolition of intermediaries was successful but the Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Tenancy Act of 1956 could not achieve any of its major objectives, hence, necessitating amendment and Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Tenancy (Amendment) Act 1970 had to be promulgated. The Ceiling Laws were common for both the regions and although the Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act (1950) had been a forerunner in this regard, it was only the Andhra Pradesh Ceiling on Agricultural Holding Act (1961) which became applicable for the whole state. This Act laid down a ceiling ranging from 27 to 324 acres depending on the class of land. The ceiling laws were however, an abysmal failure. Although, initial estimation was that about 30 lakh acres of surplus land would be available, the reality was far removed from the expectation. Eventually, only about 7400 acres were

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Recent Years, PhD Dissertation Submitted to Faculty of Social Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford, 1971, p.63.

available and even in much smaller proportion was actually distributed to the poor.49

The ineffective nature of the Andhra Pradesh Ceiling on Agricultural Holding Act (1961) necessitated the implementation of The AP Land Reform (Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings) Act, 1973 which was an improvement in the sense that there was provision for administrative infrastructure in the form of Land Reform Tribunal for the first time and it was made compulsory for the land owning classes to file declaration regarding their land holding.50 The Land Reforms Act of 1973 stipulated that a family of five persons or less could hold no more than 10 to 18 acres of double cropped wetland, 15 to 27 acres of wetland with single cropping and dry land up to 35 to 54 acres, depending on the region in which it is located.

The abolition of the intermediaries had led to an anticipation of the ceiling laws and this had led to creation of false benami holdings. However, the absence of a commitment to such Reforms among the ruling classes ensured that there were many loopholes which went unchecked. Like in the case of Kerala where the landed interests resorted to the 'Vimochana Samaram' or the 'Liberation Struggle' against the implementation of Land Reforms, in Andhra Pradesh too the landlords encouraged the 'Jai Andhra Separatist Movement' in 1972 concentrating on setting fire to the revenue offices and burning of all records with the intention of destroying all old records and evidences to save their concealed lands.51 The landlords succeeded in circumventing the Law and retaining large tracts of land over and above the ceiling by 'resorting to false, incorrect or incomplete declarations; fraudulent transfer of land, benami transactions and collusive transactions.'52

It is estimated that by September 2000, surplus land of 5,81,568 acres were distributed among 5,34,603 beneficiaries, besides the distribution of Banjar lands to the extent of 32,93,991 acres from 1 November 1969 till the end of

1984-85 was also reported. The weaknesses of the legislations and actual implementation of the Land Reforms notwithstanding, there were certain indirect, though modest impact in altering the land relations in the rural countryside in Andhra Pradesh and in reducing the intensity of forced labour, agrestic serfdom and other forms of oppression that was rampant in the rural areas. These forms of oppression had to adapt by adopting more subtle and sophisticated forms like the Jeetha system that we shall study.

Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh are considered to have reduced large scale absentee landlordism and checking to a considerable extent the concentration of land ownership. This has been done without effective redistribution of land to the landless and without altering the essential foundations of private ownership in land. The Land Reforms in Andhra Pradesh did not facilitate improvement in access of land for the landless agricultural workers and poor peasants. Although, on paper the extent of land distributed to landless poor was perhaps the highest in the country, the erstwhile landlords from the high castes managed to retain control over land and through their hegemony has actually continued to exercise power in the rural areas. The limited land distributed was mostly dry land requiring heavy investment beyond the capacity of the poor. There has been virtually no record of rights for tenants. Oral tenancy has replaced written tenancy leading to greater insecurity as there was need for annual renewal of the leases and even rents were also far higher than the stipulated levels. The tribal lands continue to be alienated to non-tribals despite laws to prevent the same. It was under such a structure of land relations that the New Agricultural Strategy was adopted in the state.

Agricultural Transformation in Andhra Pradesh

We have already noted the importance of agriculture as a provider of food to the people and employment opportunities for a large section of the population. In Andhra Pradesh agriculture contributes a large proportion of the state's income and hence this sector assumes an important position in its development trajectory. The Andhra economy was exposed to the vagaries of the world commodity market since its integration towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was the completion of major irrigation projects and improvement in transport and communication that facilitated the response of the region to metropolitan demand. Commercialisation of agriculture in terms of export of raw materials is not new to the state. The development of irrigation facilities and the cultivation of commercial crops had been taking place since the late nineteenth century. The main commercial crops of Telangana – groundnuts, tobacco and castor seeds - were grown in Nalgonda, Mahbubnagar, Karimnagar, and Warangal districts. The acreage and produce of commercial crops also increased steadily after 1925 and commercial farming assumed an increasingly greater importance in the regional economy.\textsuperscript{56} Political independence placed the focus on overcoming the stagnation in the agricultural production and in the state the emphasis was on rationalisation of land institutions coupled with Community Development Programmes.\textsuperscript{57} The implementation of Land Reforms under pressure of the militant land struggles was expected to boost agricultural production. We have noted in the earlier section the efficacy of such Reforms. Yet although limited in its influence there has indirectly been an increase in owner cultivation of land in the state and capitalist relations of production was furthered. Andhra Pradesh which in the time of the Vijayanagara Empire was endowed with many artificial reservoirs for the purpose of irrigation saw a decline on this front in the colonial period. However, the canal irrigation was started in the early 20th century to boost agricultural production. The Coastal and Ceded districts were

also largely having a system of Ryotwari land tenure with emphasis on peasant proprietorship. The availability of assured irrigation especially in the Coastal districts turned the region into the ‘Rice-Bowl’ of Andhra Pradesh even before the advent of the ‘Green Revolution’. It was however with the electrification of different regions that the dry cultivation dependent on rain and primitive methods of irrigation was transformed into cultivation with assured supply of water throughout the year through tube-wells and canals which in turn led to the consequent adoption of the New Agricultural Strategy drastically altering the cropping pattern of the state from subsistence crops to commercial crops. The spill-over effects of the abolition of intermediaries and the initiation of tenancy and ceiling reforms accelerated the process of decline in absentee landlordism and the emergence of the rural resident land owner as the absentee landlords began to dispose off their lands fearing the implementation of tenancy reforms. Sale of land in anticipation of the ceiling laws also took place along with benami transfers to evade these laws. The sixties saw an absolute decline in the production of coarse cereals and a shift in cropping pattern. The use of High Yielding Varieties of Seeds and the New Agricultural Strategy towards the end of the sixties ‘stimulated an increase in productive forces on an unprecedented scale’. Tractorisation and improvement in irrigation with the advent of electrification and the ‘tube-well revolution’ preceded by infrastructural development drastically altered the rural agrarian scenario.58 Coastal districts shifted from dry cultivation of rice to irrigated rice cultivation and the traditional palm gur industry was replaced by sugarcane and other commercial crops like cashew and coconut. Some parts of the West Godavari district have also replaced large tracts of paddy fields with aquaculture. In Rayalseema region which is a semi-arid tropical region, there has been a shift in cropping pattern from jowar, millets, ragi and other coarse cereals to groundnut, sunflower, maize, horticulture and even rice.59 The region still

remains mainly a groundnut economy to which it has been transformed since the 1970s. Parts of the Chittoor district have also shifted to the cultivation of export-only crops like gherkin, baby corn, capsicum, potato and vegetables, with the foray of the MNCs into the rural agrarian sector. The Telangana districts have been witnessing a shift in the cropping pattern from coarse cereals and the early commercial crops like groundnut, tobacco and castor seeds to commercial crops like cotton and chilly.60 The Telangana region registered a significant increase in irrigated area with the Sri Ram Sagar Project irrigating a large part of Karimnagar also leading to an increase in the gross sown area and productivity of food grains.61 Lately the same factor has led to the shift in cropping pattern in the region in favour of cotton and chilly. The shift in cropping patterns especially in the semi-arid regions of Rayalseema has been made possible by the digging of tube-wells under the impact of electrification. However, in these regions it has been the rich alone who have been able to utilise these advancements in technology and also indiscriminately exploit the scarce water resources which is a Common Property Resource. While a resource-rich few dig up many wells and drain out water from the ever depleting water table and shift to irrigated cultivation of commercial crops, the resource-starved are deprived of any such benefit by the elite-biased strategies premised on the withdrawal of the responsibility of the state from investment in irrigation schemes. Even in terms of the regional spread of irrigation, only the four districts of Guntur, Nellore, Prakasam and Karimnagar in addition to the Godavari districts had accounted for more than 80 per cent of the increase in the net irrigated area. In recent times, the advent of neo-liberal policies has led to new contradictions in the rural Andhra Pradesh which will be analysed on the basis of our field study in the next chapter.

60 Ibid, p.5.
Social Origins of Peasant Radicalism in Kerala

Kerala as a state came into existence on 1 November 1956 after the reorganisation of states along linguistic lines by merging the Malayalam speaking regions of Malabar district and Kasargod region of South Kanara district, and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin which had been integrated to form Travancore-Cochin in 1949. The Malabar province in the north was annexed by the British after they defeated Tipu Sultan the ruler of Mysore in 1792 initially to the Bombay Presidency and later to Madras Presidency and continued to do so till the linguistic reorganisation in 1956. Travancore and Cochin were maintained as tributary states of the British Government after entering into treaties with them in 1775 and 1809 respectively.63

The Kerala society was bound by rigid caste system that enhanced social distances and followed a system of untouchability and unapproachability and the land relations differed in the area that came under the British and the Princely states respectively. The Malabar region which came directly under the British after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1792 saw the implementation of a revenue policy of the East India Company which was much more taxing on the peasantry than the revenue system under Tipu Sultan. The consideration of the British for a class of loyal retainers that we have seen earlier, espoused by William Bentinck acted as the immediate factor which led them to establish a land tenure system in Malabar similar to the Zamindari in eastern India as opposed to the Ryotwari system in Travancore region.

The landlords leased out lands on two types of tenures namely the Kanam and the Verumpattam.64 The Kanam was ‘a terminable lease for a period of twelve years’, while the Verumpattam was “a purely temporary lease for a fixed period without any occupancy right, given directly by a Janmi or a Kanakkaran.”65

63 KP.Kannan, Of Rural Proletarian Struggles: Mobilisation and Organisation of Rural Workers in South-West India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988, pp-23-24.
land was concentrated in a few hands both at the Janmam and the Kanam level and the land relations were broadly caste-based. It was the high caste Namboodiri Brahmins and Nairs who dominated the rural agrestic society while the Ezhavas and the Scheduled Castes like the Pulayas lived in a state of perpetual debt, misery and oppression. Kerala had been known to have a system of bonded labour where the untouchable castes were reduced to the position of agrestic slaves. It has been recorded by various writers including the British administrators of the time that the agrestic slaves were absolute property that could be “sold, leased or mortgaged like land itself, or like any cattle or thing.” The situation of the present day Scheduled Castes was thus worse than cattle and the condition of the Ezhavas was only marginally better.

In the Malabar region the British in consideration for the political support extended by the Brahmin Janmies in the fight against the Mysore army, conferred absolute proprietary right over the land by interpreting their Janmam rights to mean so and reduced the status of the superior Kanam tenants and the inferior Verumpattam tenants to that of tenants-at-will. The Kanam tenant known as the Kanamdar and the Verumpattam tenant known as the Verumpattamdar were thus, the two classes of tenants in Malabar. The Verumpattamdars were both under the Janmi and the Kanamdar, had no privileges and had to pay full rent unlike the Kanamdar who was under the Janmi had certain privileges and pays lesser rent. The peasantry faced the twin exploitation both by the colonial state and the feudal landlords. The government imposed revenue which was about 30 to 40 per cent of the net produce was realised using extremely coercive methods and distraint of property, wherein the property of the revenue defaulters was auctioned for the realisation of revenue. This was marked by an exorbitant increase in revenue.

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70 Cf, Dharma Kumar, Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp-87-88.
demands over and above the settlement under Tipu Sultan and the settlement of 1900 increased the revenue by Rs.1,353,890 or 77 per cent without any corresponding increase in the yield or area of cultivation. The impact of this was felt by majority of the cultivators but one could probably find in this system the origins of the Rebellion of the Muslim peasantry, who were the most acutely affected.

The new system provided for the state’s appropriation of the largest share of the produce other than recognising the Janmi as the absolute proprietor of the land. The Namboodiris were given back all the lands which they had lost to the Mysore army and made full owners of these lands with no restrictions at all in their relations with the tenants. The unbridled oppression and exploitation under the landlords was of high intensity and it was felt more intensely by the peasantry, thereby causing extreme discontent and resentment among them. The exorbitant rents which were arbitrarily increased, illegal evictions, the Melcharths (Over lease) and imposition of renewal fees were the usual methods of oppression and exploitation to which the land revenue policy and the administration acted as facilitating factors. The Janmies in Malabar having absolute ownership rights on land enjoyed a dominating presence in the social structure of the region. Land was cultivated by tenants who tilled the land at the will of the landlords. Malabar was considered to be “the most oppressive and rack-rented region on the face of the earth.”

In the Travancore region the land relations that existed prior to the Land Reforms of the 1960s was a combination of tenancy system and peasant proprietorship. The Dalits and the Ezhavas who were the actual tillers of land who constitute the present day Scheduled Castes and the OBCs were forbidden from leasing-in land and were attached to the high caste tenants and landlords

72 Ibid, p-vii-viii.
in many ways. The southern region which had been divided into many petty
principalities was united under a centralised administration during the 18th
century, thereby bringing about three fourth of land under the ownership of
the state. The state of Travancore, along with numerous Hindu temples, had
ownership rights over most of the land within the boundaries of the state. The
state owned land known as the Pandarapattom or Pandaravaka land constituted
more than 75 per cent of the total registered land in the state. The tenants in
the Pandaravaka land had to pay very high land revenue. The temple owned
land was known as Sri Pandaravaka land and there was no material difference in
the management of these lands, with the same rules of revenue recovery, land
acquisition and revenue remission being applicable to both lands.

The peasants cultivated either state-owned land paying land revenue and/or
land rented in from Janmies or local landlords. Tenants in these areas had to
face extra-economic coercion of the state and land revenue was extracted using
coercive measures. In addition to this Viruthi, a particular type of land tenure
was evolved, under which the peasants who held land were to supply the palace
and temples with many items at pre-fixed prices, generally lower than the
market prices. Some were also required to provide free labour as palanquin
bearers, etc. Many forms of exactions from the peasantry existed in the state,
causing resentment and the abolition of these illegal exactions was one of the
slogans around which the rural masses were later mobilised.

The most rigid forms of the Hindu caste system that Kerala was known to
have practised disintegrated only with the growth of capitalist relations and
rapid social change that took place at the behest of social reformers like
Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayappan and the leading figures of the
Left Movement. The Karshaka Sangham especially in Malabar successfully took
up both class and caste issues and it was the Left Movement which undertook
vigorouc campaigns against caste discrimination, the system of

78 Ibid, p-51.
unapproachability, untouchability and social pollution, called for temple entry and education for the hitherto oppressed castes. We shall see later that this has actually led to a situation in Malabar wherein the peasants and agricultural workers are not too enthusiastic about association with the caste-based organisations.

EMS’s Minute of Dissent to the Committee on Malabar Tenancy Reforms

E.M.S.Namboodirippad in his “Minute of Dissent to the Kuttikrishna Menon Committee Report on Malabar Tenancy Reforms, 1937” titled The Question of Land Tenure in Malabar had nearly seven decades ago dealt with the agrarian question under the British rule. We have looked into the Minute of Dissent in the third chapter and see it as a pioneering work on the agrarian question and on the feudal system in India. Analysing the evolution of landed property and the right of private property as an economic institution, he is clear that what obtained in medieval days as far as the right to property (either of the Janmi or Kanamdar) was concerned was “a right on society which had along with it a corresponding obligation to society.”

The Janmam rights as it existed under the British was not the same as what existed earlier and under the impact of the socio-economic, political and other changes brought about by the British in Malabar was seen by him as leading to the creation of a new form of parasitic landlords. The existence of landlordism as an institution was seen as leading to the misery of the peasantry and rural masses and this situation could be changed only with the abolition of landlordism. Further he noted the deterioration of the Janmies from their erstwhile position as the “head of a social system based on feudal relationships which regulated not only economic but social, political and cultural life of man” to mere rent-receiving landlords under the British.

This situation ensured only a parasitic existence without any social contribution and despite collection of exorbitant rents, a sizeable amount of which accrues to them even after meeting the revenue demands, they performed no service to the society and there was no re-investment of such

surplus in productive activity either in agriculture or industry. Hence EMS identifies the abolition of landlordism without compensation as a pre-condition to any meaningful economic planning aimed at improving the living conditions of the peasantry. The suggestion was for confiscation without compensation all lands belonging to the Janmi above 20 acres per family, irrespective of the number of family members.\textsuperscript{82}This was suggested as the peasants would not be in a position to pay any such compensation.

Significantly EMS also recognised the need to accord legality to the homestead rights, exemption from payment of rent and protection from evictions as it was seen as an action which would release the lowest strata of society from serfdom.\textsuperscript{83}This again was a pioneering demand that also aimed at the improvement in living conditions of the hitherto untouchable castes. The Minute of Dissent hence looked into the historical evolution of landed property in Malabar, the impact of British policies, the high rents, the question of lack of capital and analysed how “the existing feudal concentration made the social base for investment in agriculture far too narrow, the way in which it restricted the internal market for industry, the way in which he scope for raising employment and raising the living standards of the people were held down.”\textsuperscript{84}The ideas expressed in the Minute have found practical application after the formation of the Communist government in 1957.

\textbf{Peasant Struggles and Land Reforms in Kerala}

Kerala historically had a tradition of peasant radicalism which may actually be a forerunner to the peasant struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed in the other regions of the country like the Santhal Rebellion of 1855-56\textsuperscript{85}, the Indigo Riots or “The Blue Mutiny”\textsuperscript{86} of 1859-62, the Peasants...
struggles in Pabna and Bogra, 1872-73 or the Deccan Riots of 1875. Even before any organised struggles mentioned above, the peasant protests in Travancore against the oppressive high caste Namboodiri officials and their illegal exactions and also against the British imperialists merits mention.

The repeated moves of petitioning to the ruler against the oppressive Jayantant Namboodiri and his feudal exactions had failed to alter the situation forcing the peasantry to organise under the leadership of Velu Thambi who although was born in an ordinary peasant family had been an official in Travancore from 1801 to 1804. He made the Kundara Proclamation which is unique in its opposition to both feudalism and Imperialism and thousands of peasants were enrolled in an army that fought the British army. The Proclamation was clear that once the British gained control over their nation by treachery, they would monopolise trade in everything including salt, increase exactions from the peasants and enforce cruel punishments to violators. The Ruler, the Naduvazhis and landlords helped the British forces and Velu Thambi committed suicide when cornered by the combined forces in 1809. The Revolt by Pazhassi Raja also ended with his defeat the same year (We shall deal with this Revolt in the section on Wayanad and Nenmeni Gram Panchayat). The Malayali Memorial Movement in 1891 was against the Diwan's feudal rule and articulated the aspirations of the local people for gaining employment which was till then monopolised by those from outside the state. The Memorial also raised the issues related to landlordism and the problems of the peasantry and collected 10,028 signatures in a Memorandum submitted to the government of the day. Although, the Velu Thambi led rebellion was put down, the Travancore rulers may have been prompted by these Movements to enact legislations to govern land relations, in the wake of this organised uprising.

The rulers of Travancore issued a Proclamation in 1820 advising the Jannies not to eject Kanamdar, followed by another Proclamation in 1867 (The Janni-

89 Ibid, p-12.
Kudiyen Proclamation) and an Act prohibiting ejectment totally in 1896.90 The state which was the largest holder of land also made attempts in Land Reforms, 'less arduous and more effective.' The Pandaravaka Pattom Proclamation of 1865, which is hailed as the 'Magna Carta of the Ryots' in Travancore, conferred titles of ownership to all the tenants of state land, made land a saleable and mortgageable commodity and created a broad-based category of peasant proprietors. However, state-owned land was much lesser in Cochin and a similar Proclamation in 1913 did not produce similar results as in Travancore.91

The longest and one of the most courageous peasant resistances to the British was in the form of the Malabar Rebellion known in common parlance as the Moplah Rebellion. The causes and character of the Rebellion has been a matter of intense debate with the question whether its basis was communal or agrarian in nature being the most contentious. The Rebellion was basically against illegal evictions, high revenue demands' illegal exactions and the granting of absolute proprietorship to the Hindu Jammies. The approach of the British rulers initially was to view it primarily as outbursts of religious fanaticism. Between 1836 and 1898 there were 45 cases in the Muslim dominated Taluks of Malabar and efforts to suppress through repressive laws like the Moplah Outrages Act was a failure.92 Matters only aggravated and in 1855 the Moplah peasants killed the English District Magistrate of Malabar.93

It was William Logan, who as Special Commissioner made the analysis that these outbreaks were a result of agrarian depression and poverty and the mistaken revenue policy.94 The recommendation of Logan also led to the Malabar Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act of 1887, later amended in 1900 as the Malabar Compensation for Tenants improvement Act (Act I of 1900) to prevent the growing practice of eviction.95

The condition of extreme exploitation that we have noted in the last section, led the Moplahs to repeatedly rise in revolt and there were many instances of the high caste Janmies being killed by Moplahs who had lost their land. They were largely “spontaneous outbursts of an exploited peasantry who had no leadership or organisation” and hence were rather easily suppressed.96 The Revolt of 1921 was a much more organised effort and was sparked off by the entry of police into the Mamburam mosque to arrest Ali Musaliar, a much respected Moulvi held in high esteem by the Moplahs. The police fired at the agitated mob that assembled at Tirurangadi on hearing the news. Soon there was outbreak of violence and army and police personnel were killed, government offices and treasuries were looted and government records were burnt. The Revolt soon spread to other parts of Malabar, particularly Ernad, Walluvanad and Ponnani Taluks. The government machinery was totally demolished and rebels through fatwas proclaimed the liberation of the country from the British and the establishment of people’s government and in a significant move that is indicative of the character of the Revolt, authorised the peasants to harvest the crops.

The rebellion even during the latter stage was not exclusively communal in character and the liberated zones treated both Hindus and Muslims equally. The victims of the fury of the Moplah peasants “were chiefly Hindu propertied class” and not the common members of the community. The Revolt which saw the use of guerrilla tactics was put down with a heavy hand by the British and thousands of peasants were killed and many were captured.97 Thus the illiterate, backward Moplahs of the Ernad and Walluvanad Taluks have the credit of having been the first to have raised their voice of protest against the oppression of the Janmi. It however, was a telling critique of the political leadership of the day that they did not realise the true potential and character of this Movement. The people of the region lost their civil liberties for over a decade and the repression and resultant bloodshed led to a temporary lull in the Movement.

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97 Ibid, pp-xxi-xxviii.
In 1930 the long standing demands of the Kanamdars against eviction, increase in rent and arbitrary levies by the Janmi were met with the passing of the Malabar Tenancy Act, as a concomitant of the Malabar Rebellion and Logan’s recommendations nearly a decade after the implementation of similar reforms in the states of Cochin and Travancore. This signalled the end of an epoch in the peasant movement of Kerala.\textsuperscript{98} However, the nearly five decade long movement of the Kanamdar was aimed at equality of the poor Kanamdar with the Janmi and had the slogan ‘Fixity of Tenure for the Kanamdar.’ They had strong reservations with the Verumpattamdar being equal to their status.\textsuperscript{99} Notably Logan had recommended concessions only to the Verumpattamdar and not to the Kanamdar and yet the Kanamdars emerged successful in fulfilling their demands. The Verumpattamdars were also conferred fixity of tenure and fair rent although being of an illusory nature.\textsuperscript{100} The character of the peasant movement underwent a change with the Kanamdar and the Janmi joining hands against the Verumpattamdar. The Verumpattamdars organised under the newly emerging peasant movement to break free from the misery and oppression under the joint exploitation of the Janmi and the Kanamdar.

The Great Economic Depression around this time led to fall in prices of Kerala’s staple crops like paddy, coconut and pepper and soon the Kanamdars and Janmies demanded hike in price of coconut, paddy and arecanut, called for debt relief and opposed the enhancement of land revenue.\textsuperscript{101} The period also witnessed the first general anti-landlord, anti-money-lender movement that Kerala ever had; in the form of the radical Karshaka-Tozhilali Movement in Kodungallur under the leadership of K.M.Ibrahim although it petered away as quickly as it developed.\textsuperscript{102} The Malabar region had the presence of peasant organisations even before the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha. The peasant movement raised its voice against the unjust exactions and from 1935 onwards struggled for the basic needs of the peasantry in the Chirakkal taluk.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, p-175.  
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, pp-175-183.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, pp-188-89.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, pp-189-90.
Reduction in rent and putting an end to ejections of tenants became the main slogans of the movement. The vast majority of landless agricultural workers were also mobilised. The growing rural unrest was channelised by the Socialists within the Congress and the peasants were rallied under the banner of the Malabar Peasants' Union. The Great Hunger March to Madras in 1936 under the leadership of A.K.Gopalan and Chandroth highlighted the plight of the rural masses in the wake of famine-like situation.

The Provincial elections in 1937 witnessed massive participation from the peasantry in favour of Congress and ensured their victory in all but one constituency. In 1938 December the peasants organised into the Great March along with the workers where batches marched all the way from Karivellur in north Malabar and Kanchikkode in south Malabar to Calicut and organised a joint rally. A similar march from Hosdurg Taluk in South Canara district to Mangalore had been organised a week before. These marches were held to draw the attention of the government to the grievances of the peasantry including amendment to the Malabar Tenancy Act and concluded in the First All Malabar Kisan Conference with A.K.Gopalan as the President in Calicut.

The entire state witnessed mobilisation of the peasantry and the outbreak of the Second World War and the increased miseries of a debt-ridden, rack-rented peasantry prepared the ground for organised peasant movement. The movement against the economic consequences of the War was spreading across the state and it was decided by the Chirakkal Taluk Karshaka Sangham to have a review at its meeting at Keecheri near Kannur on September 15, 1940. The District Magistrate of Malabar declared Section 144, prohibiting any assembly of people. There were many clashes with the police. The Morazha incident led to the death of an Inspector of police and two constables; one constable was killed in Mattannur village and two Sangham activists were killed at Telicherry. These incidents sparked off severe repression and the Malabar

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Special Police Force, a semi-military organisation notorious for its role at the time of the 1921 Rebellion started a reign of terror in all the villages of Chirakkal and Kottayam Taluks. This was followed up with the Janmies also launching an offensive against the peasantry.

In this context there was the Kayyoor incident wherein the Janmies resorted to evictions and harvesting of crops grown by the tenants emboldened by the happenings of September 15, 1940 and after. The Karshaka Sangham decided to protect the crops and harvest it themselves in February 1940. The Janmies resorted to intimidatory tactics using the help of the police and henchmen. On March 28, 1940 a protest march was organised by the Sangham and the protesting peasants killed a policeman who had come to make enquiries on the scene. The repression that followed had a debilitating effect on the peasant movement in the region and many leaders had to go underground. The British sentenced to death four peasant activists to death.105

This was followed by the Punnapra-Vayalar incident in 1946 wherein the peasants and workers of Alappuzha district organised demanding the end of the Travancore Princely rule and articulating the demands of the peasants, coir workers and agricultural workers, in an excellent example of class unity between peasants and workers. On 24 October 1946 four large processions were fired at by the police killing many protesters. In Punnapra, the protesters sought to snatch weapons from the police, but many were killed in police firing. Martial law was declared in the Ambalappuzha-Shertallay region. In Vayalar a camp of workers and agricultural workers set up to jointly resist police repression was surrounded by the police and fired at, killing hundreds of people whose bodies were dumped into open storage tanks which were later filled up. These incidents are known as the Punnapra-Vayalar Struggle.106

There were a series of peasant struggles in North Malabar and South Canara of which the Udinur struggle, Karivellur struggle, Kavumbayi, Koothali, etc. Information shared by C.A.Kunhiraman, one of the founding members of Karshaka Sangham in Thuruthy, neighbouring Kayyoor, who helped E.K.Nayanar to remain safely underground even as the government had proclaimed a prize for his head. Niranjana's novel Chirasmarane in Kannada also gives valuable details.107

Munayankunnu, Tillankeri and others are landmarks. Numerous activists were killed and people were put to untold suffering by the police and landlords.\textsuperscript{107} However, these movements ensured a death-blow to feudal oppression and also caste oppression in Kerala.\textsuperscript{108} The struggles continued even after independence and the Hutment Dwellers struggle of 1970-71 and the Land Grab Agitation of 1970 are significant.\textsuperscript{109} The movement by Kerala State Karshaka Tozhilali Union against conversion of paddy lands in recent years is a unique movement worth mention.

The Communist Party organised the peasants and agricultural workers and articulated their main demands and the support of the workers and the peasants ensured the formation of the first elected Communist government in Kerala under the leadership of E.M.S.Namboodirippad in 1957. The government being headed by one of the founders of the All India Kisan Sabha and consisting of many other leaders of the Peasant Movement took immediate measures to meet the aspirations of the peasantry. In a path-breaking manner it announced a set of measures in response to the demand of the peasantry for land.

Immediately after swearing in of the Ministry an order to stay all evictions was issued, this later was replaced by the Kerala Stay Eviction Proceedings Act, 1957, prior to the enactment of land legislation. Secondly, it began in right earnest the distribution of government waste lands to the landless and the land-poor. The third measure was the passing of a comprehensive Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957.\textsuperscript{110} 7.5 lakh acres of cultivable waste and other fallow lands excluding forest lands was identified and after reserving 25 per cent for future government use, all the remaining land was assigned. Significantly, out of the assignees 25 per cent land belonged to the Scheduled Castes. The maximum allotment was not to exceed 5 acres and members of the backward

\textsuperscript{107} For a brief account of all major peasant struggles, Cf. V.S.Achutanandan and T.K Ramakrishnan, \textit{Kerala: Punnapra-Vayalar and Other Struggles}, All India Kisan Sabha Publication, April 1986.
\textsuperscript{108} We shall study the Kavilelur struggle and some other incidents of peasant upsurge in the section on Kannur and Kavilelur-Peralam Gram Panchyat.
\textsuperscript{109} Op.Cit, Jose George, 1992, p-126.
communities could also lease-in up to 3 acres for a period not exceeding two years at a time from the land reserved for future governmental use. The Bill proposed fixity of tenure for all tenants, reducing rents by fixing fair rent, rights to tenants to purchase the leasehold land, ceiling on existing and future land holdings, distribution of excess land to the landless agricultural workers, permanent occupancy rights to the hutment dwellers and the association of the beneficiaries with the actual implementation of the legislation by way of the newly constituted Land Tribunals comprising of elected non-official representatives of the people and measures to prevent the evasion of tenancy laws. 111

A significant transformation in land relations was brought about by the Land Reforms in Kerala by way of the distribution of the homestead land (Kudikidappu) to the landless agricultural workers who were residing and managing these plots (Kudikidappukari). It has been observed that this step was not limited to the provision of land for housing purposes alone and commercial crops and vegetables were cultivated on these small plots of homestead land which supplemented household incomes. 112 This ensured that landless agricultural workers who mainly belonged to the Scheduled Castes who were historically denied access to land by the operation of the Hindu caste system received a residential plot with the possibility of generating some household income. This also gave the agricultural workers greater economic security and bargaining power in regard to agricultural wages. 113 We have also during the course of our Field Survey noted that unlike in Andhra Pradesh, the homestead land actually supplements household income and has emerged as an economic unit in Kerala where cash crops are cultivated, thereby bringing about a limited economic security even to the agricultural workers who hold no other substantial piece of agricultural land.

The ceiling limit suggested was 15 acres of double crop land and a maximum of 30 acres of dry land compared to the ceilings as high a 160 acres or even 324 acres proposed in different Congress ruled states, including Andhra Pradesh that we have noted earlier. All the excess land was vested with the Land Boards which was to settle and distribute compensation and assign the excess land to beneficiaries and control the Land Tribunals. The Bill was presented in the Legislative Assembly which then decided to circulate it for eliciting public opinion. The entire procedure was a unique and unparalleled participatory exercise with discussions organised throughout the state in the villages wherein peasants irrespective of political affiliation participated enthusiastically to discuss various clauses of the Bill. The landlord classes set up their organisations against the Bill and led delegations to the President and the Centre even as lakhs of peasants and rural poor organised themselves in a rally which presented a memorandum to the Assembly demanding that the Bill should be passed without Amendments. The Bill was delayed and the President gave assent only once the Congress government at the centre removed all the progressive measures and diluted the actual content and intent of the Bill. The Bill was finally passed on 10 June 1959 and became the ‘foundation of agrarian reform laws’ in the state.

The government in December 1957 also fixed minimum wages of agricultural workers at a much higher level than the neighbouring states and brought an Agricultural Debt Relief Bill recognising the fact that the rural countryside was still burdened with heavy debts.

The landed interests under the leadership of the Congress, which felt threatened by such measures aimed at transforming the agrarian relations, started the ‘Vimochana Samaram’ or the ‘Liberation Struggle’ with the sole intention of scuttling the Reforms and bringing down the Communist Ministry. The Ministry was dismissed on 31 July 1959 and the new government that had come to power representing the opposition to the Act passed a watered down

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version called Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill in 1961. This was declared ultra-vires of the Indian Constitution by the Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court in 1963. Questions were raised about the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Act, especially regarding the 'fundamental nature of private property rights and the violation of the right to equality on account of discriminatory rates of compensation fixed in the land reform legislation.'

The government thus had the opportunity to further water down the provisions of the Act and passed the Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1963 which came into effect from April 1964.

The formation of the CPI (M) led coalition government under the leadership of E.M.S.Namboodirippad in 1967 once again brought the issue of Land reforms to the centre-stage. The new government introduced legislation to restore tenants evicted after April 1964 as well as to prevent all future evictions. This was followed by a comprehensive amendment to the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963, thereby restoring to a large extent the original provisions of the 1959 Bill. The Act of 1969 vested the ownership rights of all land leased out to tenants in the government from 1970 onwards, thereby depriving the owners and the tenants of the option to continue their tenurial arrangements in any form. The creation of new tenancies was also prohibited with retrospective effect from April 1964. This made tenants the de facto owners from 1970 and they were also given the option of having de jure ownership, by paying compensation in instalments to the government or by arriving at mutual settlement with the owners. The Act thus literally abolished landlordism and converted the cultivating tenants into owner cultivators.

The enforcement of the provisions for tenancy abolition was quite effectively implemented, while the provisions relating to ceilings were not equally effective. The ceiling limit was brought down to 20 acres for a family of five from the earlier 15 acres and the exemptions were confined to rubber, tea and

121 Ibid, p-50.
coffee plantations, private forests and other such non-agricultural land, and land belonging to religious, charitable and educational institutions of a public nature. However, the total surplus land identified by the Land Board and available for takeover by October 1980 was only a little over 0.11 million acres, i.e., less than 2.5 per cent of the total area of land operated in the state.\(^{122}\)

In 1972 the Kerala Agricultural Bill was introduced and passed in 1974 to improve the working conditions of agricultural workers. It created a Provident Fund with a contribution of 5 per cent of the wages of the agricultural worker and income of the land owner. This was followed up with a Programme of building over a lakh houses for the landless agricultural workers.\(^{123}\) The Land Reform programme in Kerala thus eliminated all forms of intermediaries between the tiller of the soil and the government, by abolishing all sorts of tenancies. It also ensured a homestead of one-tenth of an acre or less for every agricultural labour family and provided for a ceiling much lower than in other states and strictly implemented it.\(^{124}\) It has been acknowledged by different writers that Kerala is known to have implemented one of the most successful Land Reforms in India, leading to the transfer of large tracts of land to the actual tillers.\(^{125}\) This is the context in which Kerala embarked on the New Agricultural Strategy.

**Agricultural Transformation in Kerala**

From the latter half of nineteenth century the production relations in the Kerala countryside was drastically altered and the traditional agricultural pattern of Kerala was transformed and laid firmly on the path of commercialisation with the penetration of the rural countryside by the investment of capital both by the British and also the indigenous entrepreneurs of Kerala.\(^{126}\)

\(^{122}\) Ibid, p-51.


The penetration of capital led to the clearing of land for cultivation in a big way along with the reclamation of marshy land as we have noted in the Kuttanad region. Food crops came to be cultivated more intensively in the plains and reclaimed land even as plantation crops which comprised of the spices which Kerala was famous for and also coffee, rubber and tea in the highlands came to be organised as large enterprises. Kerala grows in addition to food crops like paddy and tapioca, garden crops like coconut, pepper, cashew and cocoa and has a huge plantation crops sector growing rubber, tea and coffee. Kerala’s agricultural sector is characterised by production of commercial crops whose demand emanates largely from the external markets; thereby linking the commodity prices and levels of livelihood of peasants to the operation of the volatile external markets. The Land Reforms implemented in Kerala in a relatively effective manner unleashed the productive forces and capitalist relations of production in agriculture were developed further.

Alappuzha and Palakkad were adopted under the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) leading to an intensification of cultivation. The state has also witnessed mechanisation and the use of the New Agricultural Strategy created opportunities for multiple cropping. The New Agricultural Strategy and the use of High Yielding Varieties of Seeds made its impact in Kerala only as late as the beginning of the 1970s and it was largely confined to paddy and in the initial phase to certain districts like Alappuzha and Palakkad. Mechanisation was initiated with mechanised pumping for well irrigation and also gradually for other operations. The process of mechanisation involving pump sets, tractors, tillers and other instruments and the New Agricultural Strategy are highly capital intensive, thereby benefiting the resource-rich initially. However, the spread of institutional credit and the facilitating role of the Panchayat, including provision for subsidies have made it...

accessible to other sections too. This has led to intensification of agricultural activity and multiple cropping also.

In recent times Kerala has been witnessing a growing trend towards commercialisation and the land growing paddy, the principal food grain, has decreased by half between 1980-81 and 1995-96. This is in spite of it being illegal to convert paddy land into house plots or plots growing commercial crops like coconut, rubber, cocoa etc. Production of tapioca, the other major food crop of the state has also shown a declining trend. The land utilisation pattern in the state in the last two to three decades reveals a trend towards putting cultivable lands to non-agricultural use and large-scale conversion of land growing food crops into plantation especially rubber plantations with the ulterior motive of circumventing the ceiling laws valid in the state. This is in spite of a law that prohibits the conversion of paddy-land for other purposes.

The latest trend has been to shift to vanilla cultivation, in the expectation of super profits. The Kerala economy has often been described as the most open economy in India with its predominately cash-crop based economy and it has been one of the earliest to respond to such cropping pattern changes as well as face the brunt of price-fluctuations. This propensity to shift to temporarily lucrative crops is something which has to be addressed in a more serious manner given the higher nature of fluctuations in such crops.

The following chapter would look into the socio-economic profile of the Gram Panchayats under study with findings from the field and will include an overview of certain institutions and the record of the two states in the performance of these institutions. It will hence involve a comparative analysis of the two states and Gram Panchayats under study.

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