



Agrarian Reforms in Kerala – A Forerunner to the states of Indian Sub – Continent

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Abstract

A Land system includes a variety of patterns and structures that vary from nation to nation and even region to area. The erstwhile Kerala state comprising the princely states of Cochin, Malabar and Travancore held a typical system of land possession and administration and the social setup had a prominent role on shaping the destiny of the landlords and the tillers. Three different sorts of lands were owned by cultivators in Travancore. The sarkar was intended to have complete control over certain regions, only being constrained by his own self-interest concerns. In 1865, the government of Travancore granted their tenants complete proprietary rights with a proclamation. The Restriction of Possession and Ownership of Land Bill, which was submitted with the intention of putting a cap on the ownership and possession of present and future land holdings in the state, was the last but most contentious of the seven bills. The maximum amount of land that could be allocated for a five-person household was 15 acres of double-cropped wet land, 22 1/2 acres of single-cropped wet land, 15 acres of coconut gardens, or 30 acres of property that wasn't in any of the aforementioned categories. With the additional restriction that a family's land holdings should never exceed 25 acres of coconut gardens or its equivalent in other types of land, the maximum limit was increased for each family above five members to the extent of one acre of coconut gardens or its equivalent.

Key Words : *Land, Tenure, Landlords, Tillers, Peasants*

The land provides all necessities of human life including food, clothes, shelter, and a large portion of the essential resources, that expands the area's social and economic interests. Because of this, the struggle for land ownership had a variety of effects over the course of history, leading to the growth and establishment of very varied land systems. A Land system includes a variety of patterns and structures that vary from nation to nation and even region to area. In addition to their economic importance, land systems influence societal views too. The erstwhile Kerala state comprising the princely states of Cochin, Malabar and Travancore held a typical system of land possession and administration and the social setup had a prominent role on shaping the destiny of the landlords and the tillers. According to Karl Marx, 'History is the struggle between Have's and Have-not's'. The state too witnessed the same fate for centuries due to the domination of a particular section of the society by holding the ownership of the majority of the land. But the later part of 19th century brought tremendous changes in socio – economic and political aspects of the state. The yeomen services rendered by the social reformers and the government in this regard were noteworthy. The legislations enacted by the government avoided the accumulation of land and wealth on particular points

and it made possible for the tillers to become the owner of the lands. The initiatives and the legislations of the government became a role model to the states of Indian Sub – Continent in this regard.

Farming in Travancore

Three different sorts of lands were owned by cultivators in Travancore. They included Pattomvakai, Jenmivakai, and others. While the government was thought to be the owner of the Pattomvakai lands, the Jenmivakai lands belonged to private landowners. The Pattomvakai lands were divided into the following categories: Sanchayapattom, Durghasupattom, Pandaravagaipattom, Vettazhivupattom, Adiyarapattom, Karikkurpattom, PandaravagaiViruthipattom, Pandaravagaiputuvalpattom, Nadu pattom, ViruthiNerpatipattom, Vilakkapattom. The obligation of the tenure holder to pay the entire assessment was its distinguished feature. These lands belonged to Sirkar in its entirety until 1040 M. E. (1865 A.D.), during which time the holders possessed exclusive or even transferrable rights of occupancy. The holders in these situations continued to be merely tenants-at-will and lacked a long-term stake in the relevant assets. In contrast, the jenmi in the Adiyarapattom tenures receives just 3/20 of the yield as varam in addition to paranel in kollai after receiving the adukunathu or payment on the rate of 2 chakarams per parai of land. For the cultivation of kumbapoo, no varam was then paid. The Karikkurpattom contained valleys overgrown with shrubs that were leased out for farming and waste ground interrupted by channel reeds. In these situations, the cultivator received 1/4 of the assessment while the government was responsible for 3/4 of it. In these situations, the tenants obtained complete land rights. The main difference between the PandaravagaiViruthipattom and the sirkarpattom was that the former was formerly a Viruthi for a service that was needed for a long time before it was stopped as such and brought under the pattom tenure. Another tenure was the Kudippullitantupattom, which got its name from the agreement formed on the ryots' own guarantee after the land was taken over by the Cochin state without any accounts. According to the NerottiNerpatom, the jenmi received money from the kudiyan in exchange for an interest in the conveyed property that was equivalent to the pattom. The money received, which would have to be returned, was the full worth of the property, therefore it would be redeemed, but it was rarely done. The Verumpattom involved a lease arrangement with no debt or cash payment. It can be written or oral, although the latter method—which requires stamping and registration—was chosen when the term was longer than a year. During this tenure, the tenant receives possession of the property and pays the agreed-upon annual rent to the landowner. After his mandate expired, he was required to leave the territory. Some of these tenures, which were included in the Layan (border) due to a number of historical reasons, were known by a variety of names in the Shenkottai boundary taluk, including Japti-Ayan and Znfti-Ayan. The first was given that name because it was previously under British attack, but was later returned after Travancore won the border issue. The second class consisted of territory that the British gave to the Travancore government in exchange for the Malayankulam Desman holdings.

The addition of Travancore from the distant British district of Tirunelveli following boundary demarcation made up the third class. Because of their British heritage, these three classes of estates continued to be treated as such in the state accounting. Similarly there were some special tenures of this kind prevailed in South Travancore. They were chiefly Sirker Dewasompattom, Ooranma Dewasom, Narasingamattampattom, MatamNadavanapattom and Irayilipattom. The peculiarity of these was the sirkar's demand for the full assessment, with the exception of the fall, when the sirkar accepted the full assessment because the state had been paying the Dewasom expenses ever since the sirkar assumed control of the institutions. In the other tenures, the sirkar received the majority of the assessment, with a portion designated for the purpose stated in the tenure names. The names merely indicate the original source of tenure which became as pattom in later times. Wet lands held under pattom tenure made up an area of around 2,000 000 acres in addition to garden and puja fields. The sirkar was regarded as the only landowner of these JenmiMerassi territory. To reclaim these regions from the sirkar, there were numerous disturbances. These tenures come with numerous important benefits as a result of their nature.

The sirkar was intended to have complete control over these regions, only being constrained by his own self-interest concerns. It appears that the sirkar was under no obligation to respect ownership. Though it wasn't frequently done, it was believed that the lands might occasionally be resumed at the sirkar's whim. Due to the fact that he was a simple renter and would not function as a proprietor, the Sirkar Pattom Lands could not be legally sold by one tenant to another. Such property lacked any security to cover the tax due. The land wouldn't naturally be put up for sale when the tax on such land had to be collected through coercion; instead, the sirkar would have to look for alternative defaulter property and, if that failed, would have to pay the demand. Most of them were state tenants who had no ownership rights over the land they farmed other than the right to cultivate it with the designated crop. The tenant was unable to borrow money using his holdings as collateral because sales and mortgages were prohibited. The only alternative left to the government was to seize the crops because the sale of the holding or the eviction of the tenant was impossible because the custom never permitted such actions in the case of buildings or other structures or other assets. The government agreed to charge interest on unpaid land revenue arrears at a rate of 12% for the first time in 1862. They needed to be given proprietary rights in order to alter the way land is used, to help tenants become more financially independent, to enhance the land, and to guarantee timely payment of the land.

In 1865, the government granted their tenants complete proprietary rights with a proclamation. The following sorts of land, whether wet, garden, or dry, and whether they were included in an ayachut account or registered since then for the benefit of the people, were irrevocably ceded by the sirkar.

Cochin

Similar groups of tenures apply to the Cochin and Travancore regions. There are some tenures, though, that have varying rights and benefits on occasion. The most common tenures in the Cochin area have been the kanom, verumpattom, and inams. The kanom term in Cochin and the kanapattam tenure in Travancore are essentially same. A kanapattom, also known as a kudiyanmortgage, is a hybrid lease and mortgage that grants the jenmi the right to rent and mortgage on that portion of the usufruct that is equal in value to the interest of the money advanced to him. The tenant living under his tenancy has the authority to cultivate or lease it. The tenant pays a predetermined rent each year, from which usufruct is subtracted to cover interest on the amount they advanced to the jenmi (kanom sum). In addition to the rent, there were various other usual and recurring expenses. Beginning in 1954, the Praja party formed a government that took office. A response sent by the Revenue Secretary reflects its perspective on the tenancy issue. The planning commission looked into how the state's land reforms were going. As promised in its response to the planning commission, the government proposed seven bills pertaining to land reforms.

- (i) The Travancore JanmiKudiyan Act's provisions were to be applied to all Kanom tenants under the Kanom Tenancy Bill, which applied to the Cochin area. This would make the Kanom tenants the owners of the lands they possessed and subject to paying JanmiKaram to the Janmies.
- (ii) The Travancore-Cochin Land Tax Bill aimed to eliminate some of the exemptions given in Travancore in relation to the application of the Land Tax Proclamation of 1946 as well as to expand the basic tax system of assessment into the Cochin area.
- (iii) The goal of the Travancore-Cochin Prevention of Expulsion of Kudikidappukars Bill was to more effectively forbid the arbitrary eviction of Cochin Kudilidappukars by combining the provisions of the Travancore Prevention of Eviction Act of 1949 and the Cochin Proclamation of 1947 into one Act.
- (iv) (iv) In accordance with the recommendations made by the Travancore - Cochin Land Policy Committee, the Travancore - Cochin Verumpattomdars Bill was created to provide some relief to specific kinds of tenants in Travancore. Additionally, it suggested setting the amounts of fair rent that they would be required to pay.
- (v) The Travancore - Cochin Compensation for Renters Improvement Bill aimed to include tenants in Travancore in the Cochin Tenancy Act of 1938's compensation provisions.

The Restriction of Possession and Ownership of Land Bill, which was submitted with the intention of putting a cap on the ownership and possession of present and future land holdings in the state, was the last but most contentious of the seven bills. The maximum amount of land that could be allocated for a five-person household was 15 acres of double-cropped wet land, 22 12 acres of single-cropped wet land, 15 acres of coconut gardens, or 30 acres of property that wasn't in any of the aforementioned categories. With the additional restriction that a family's land holdings should never exceed 25 acres of coconut gardens or its equivalent in other types of land, the maximum limit was increased for each family above five members to

the extent of one acre of coconut gardens or its equivalent. However, a crucial safeguard for the owners was included, allowing them to sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of any extra land they own prior to the end of the six-month period following the start of the Act.

Malabar

Compared to Travancore and Cochin, the Malabar system of land tenure was significantly more complicated. With a long chain of middlemen, they have grown reasingly feudalistic. The most significant interest in land in Malabar has been held by Jenmom right. In Malabar, the jenmis held complete property rights over the soil and were the sole owners of the land. They might generally be a temple property, Namboodriillam, or Nair Tharavad with exclusive rights to hundreds of acres. Except for the land it had gained by escheat, purchase, or land acquisition, the state never claimed possession of any other land in Malabar. There are many different tenures on the Jenmom land. The most significant terms were Verumpattom, Kanam, Melkanam, and Janmam. Although the majority of these can be found in the Travancore-Cochin region, there were substantial differences in the incidences and traits of each. The tenures observed in the Malabar taluks of Hosdurg and Kasargod bear no relation to those observed throughout Kerala. The Keralopathy, a fabled chronicle of Kerala, detailed the development of land tenures and claimed that the Brahmins were granted higher tenure. The agricultural serfs, known as Pulayas or Cherumans, were positioned at the bottom of the caste system.

The political thesis endorsed in Calcutta in 1948 outlined the communist party's plan for land reform. It used the catchphrase "Land to the Tiller" and a violent peasant mobilisation tactic in order to bring about an agrarian revolution. The peasants' riots in Tillengeri, Omchiyam, Korome, Munayamkunnu, and other locations in Malabar were brought on by the party's ideological influence on them, as mentioned above. The party was outlawed in 1949 as a result of these riots, and it remained outlawed until 1951.

The congress ministry in Madras viewed the issue of tenancy laws as a way to safeguard the interests of middle class landowners, low-income tenants, and middlemen. This government perspective on tenancy issues was reflected in the revisions made in 1951 and 1954. As a result, the congress party failed to pass laws following independence that would have followed the recommendations made by the planning commission and the 1949 report of the congress agrarian reforms committee.

They had the chance to move forward with land reforms in Kerala when the communist party won the election in 1957. Despite having its own ideas on land reforms, the communist party chose to execute the modest plan for land reforms put out by the Indian Planning Commission. The Kerala government liberally classified those responsible for overseeing crops as cultivators in 1957. The phrase "land to the tiller" had a significant influence on the peasant revolution. Subsequently, the legislations of the government made the landless tillers as the owners of the land.

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