



LAND ASSIGNMENT ACT OF 1950 IN TRAVANCORE – A STUDY

Dr. P. Justin Paul

Assistant Professor , Dept. of History , Govt. Arts College, Kumbakonam.

ABSTRACT :

Peasants existed as an important section of society throughout the ancient period of Travancore history. Since land became the main source of income for the rulers, there witnessed an immense increase in the burden of taxation on the peasantry. Some facilities and rules were provided by the rulers for the upliftment of agriculturists. The multifarious benefits of the reforms introduced by the rulers which enabled the agriculturists in their social change.



KEYWORDS : Ryots, Tenant, Land Lords, Agrarian Bill, Land Tribunals, Lease.

INTRODUCTION

Travancore was a land where people of diverse fashions and political beliefs had been able to forge a common ethos and find a common identity, yet the region comes into the limelight only in the 9th century A.D. There are indisputable evidences found in history, works and inscriptions to prove that Travancore was known to people of other parts of India and abroad even from time immemorial. Most of the people of Travancore were agriculturists or ryots.¹

It seems reasonable to suppose that the Jenmis² took for themselves all land nearest to their dwellings. The ruling chiefs must have then claimed these tracts as their own along with others acquired by them and granted them to the ryots for cultivation.

In the census of 1914, the extent of land is recorded under two broad categories dry and wet.³ The dry lands were generally gardens in which coconut, tapioca, pepper, etc. were grown and wet land were mostly paddy fields. The price of land together with the corresponding return was perhaps the most important of these lands. The density of population was highest in the high land. In spite of the low value in this region, the average family had comparatively small investment in the land here.⁴

The facilities provided by Government for the registration of the lands, the cultural awakening due to intense propaganda carried on by their leaders and their carving for economic independence had largely contributed to their gradual elevation from mere tillers of the soil to peasant proprietors. This was a healthy change in a predominantly agricultural country where land lordism had already caused great havoc to agriculture. Among the lower income groups very few Brahmins were found to pay land tax. The Nairs paid the maximum land tax followed by the Christian and other Hindus.

In 1915, collector Innes in his report to the Government on the working of the compensation for Tenants Improvement Act of 1900. attributed the evils of the Malabar tenancy system to insecurity to tenure, exorbitant renewal fees, social tyranny and miscellaneous exactions.⁵ The years of depressions worsened the economic condition and the agrarian tension exploded as the Mapilah Rebellion of 1921. The British Government however did not do anything immediately to solve the problem, but instead tried the Malabar Tenancy Committee in 1927 to report on the disabilities of the Malabar tenants and to remedy them. On the recommendations of this committee, the Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in 1929. This Act was mainly intended for putting some control

on arbitrary evictions.⁶ Another feature was the staging of drums with revolutionary them, often highlighting the evils of land lordism and exploitation of peasantry.

In 1939 the Malabar Tenancy committee known as the kuttikrishna Menon committee was appointed to study the tenure and effect of land tenure.⁷ The Malabar Tenancy Committee summed up the position as in Malabar, the condition of the people is deplorable and they are sunk in indebtedness, poverty and misery. Matters are getting worse every year and the Government had to tackle the problems before, it is too late for them to do anything.

After the Indian independence the agrarian question was taken to the mobilisation of the peasantry. Accordingly, the Land Assignment Act 1950 was passed. This act abolished the system of renewals of renewal fee and gave fixity of tenure to all cultivating lands. This act also provided to the simultaneous settlement of fair rent and the preparation of record of rights for all holdings.⁸ This act conferred another important right namely that the land – lord should pay to the cultivating tenant compensation equivalent to one year's net income in ease of eviction on the ground that the land is needed for bonafide self-cultivation.

Thus the Land Assignment Act of 1950 made fundamental changes in agriculture by introducing an Agrarian Relation Bill.⁹ The main aim of the Bill was to safeguard the interests of the tenants, putting a willing on land holding, re-distributed surplus land to the landless and fix fair rents. It was also promised that an Anti-Eviction Bill would be introduced to bring an immediate relief to the tenants, maintain the present status quo in the tenure and make sure that the tenants would not be evicted before the Agrarian Relations Bill was passed. The Act also sought to abolish land-lordism on payment of compensation by roosting ownership right to tenant and by taking over the surplus land after the landless.¹⁰

Fair rents were fixed for all types of lands and they were made uniform ignoring the original nature of the lease. The fixation of fair rent was to be done by the land Tribunals with in the minimum and maximum scales given in the schedule to the Act. It was clear from outset that there could be no way to escape from payment of compensation to land owners.¹¹ The constitution of India guaranteed the right to property as a fundamental right and all State Governments were bounded by it. Thus the Land Assignment Act 1950 hepled to improve the plight of the indignant and the landless agriculturists of Travancore.

REFERENCE

1. A.Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, 1970. P160.
2. Jenmi – Land – lord who holds in absolute free hold and not liable normally to payment of tax to Government.
3. V.Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.111, Trivandrum 1999, P.115.
4. A.N.Thampi, *Economic Survery*, Trivandrum P.12.
5. *Government of Kerala, Report of the Land Reform Survey of Kerala, 1966-67*, Trivandrum, P.24
6. *Government of Madras, Report of the Malabar Tenancy, Committee, 1927-28*, Madras 1929 Chapter -21, Para 42.
7. Conrad Wood, *'Historical Background of the Mapilah Rebellion, 1836 – 1919*, Social Scientist, Vol -3, No.1 August 1974, P-34-45.
8. Prakash, C.Karat, *'The Peasant Movement in Malabar 1934-40'*, Social Scientist, September 1976, PP.36-37.
9. Kerala state Legislative Assembly, *Public Opinion on the Kerela Agrarian Relation Bill 1957*, Trivandrum, 1957.
10. H.O Malavya, *Kerala, A Report to the Nation, New Delhi*, 1959, PP.94-97.
11. *The Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957 as passed by the State Legislative Assembly*, Trivandrum.



Dr. P. Justin Paul

Assistant Professor , Dept. of History , Govt. Arts College, Kumbakonam.