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TEMPLE LAND AND ADMINISTRATION IN TAMIL NADU (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THANJAVUR DISTRICT)

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ABSTRACT:

*The temples of South India have been preserved in more or less the same state in which they were originally constructed e.g. the Nataraja temple in Chidambaram, the Brahadeeswara temple in Tanjore, the Meenakshi temple in Madurai and the great temple of Rameswaram as well as the temple at Srirangam and Kanchipuram.*¹

KEYWORDS: special protection , properly administering , 'Hindu and Muhomedan Endowments.

INTRODUCTION

According to Hindu tenets, Charity is part and parcel of religion. From the very early times, religious and charitable institutions in the country came under the special protection of the ruling authority and Hindu Kings regarded themselves as specially charged with the duty of properly administering the funds of temples within their jurisdiction and the application of such funds towards the objects for which the temples were founded.

The Hindu rulers accepted the right to visit endowments of this kind to prevent and redress abuses in their management. Mr. P.R. Ganapathi Iyer in his learned treatise on 'Hindu and

Muhomedan Endowments' has referred to several historical inscriptions which bear testimony to the fact that Hindu Kings exercised supervision over temples and endowments.²

FUNCTIONS OF TEMPLES:

The temples organized festivals and patronized the arts. Temple music and dancing and temple sculpture are the traditional art forms of South India. They also patronized learning. Many of the larger temples ran traditional *Vedantic* and *Siddhantic* schools and financed secular and scientific education. The temples fed the poor and gave grants to charitable institutions. Temples were arbiters of social status in the locality.



"The right to participate in certain ceremonies and the order of precedence in certain rites and festivals were important visible expressions of the accepted hierarchy of communities and individuals in the locality. Temples were both makers and breakers of status.³ The temple also had important economic functions. It provided employment to priests who performed rituals, administrators who managed its lands and income, craftsmen who maintained its structures and others who indirectly derived employment from the activities of worship of devotees. The temples engaged persons and institutions on contracts to repair the idols and buildings,

and meet the requirements for festivals and ceremonies. Some temples built shops and market on their premises as well.

MUTTS IN TAMIL NADU:

In this early 20th century, one of the largest mutts was the *Saivite* mutt at Tiruvavaduthurai near in this early 20th century Mayiladuthurai in Thanjavur District It has large endowments in the districts of Tirunelveli (25,000 acres), Madura' (1000 acres) and Thanjavur (3000 acres).⁴

The Thiruvavaduthurai mutt at present controls 130 subordinate mutts. Another saivite mutt near Dharmapuram owns 2500 acres In Thanjavur district and another 12,500 acres elsewhere It controls twenty-seven temples⁵, The vaishnavite mutt at Nanguneri Tirunelveli district gets an annual income of Rs 60,000 from its lands and Rs. 6000 from its properties in Tirunelveli town It also owns a coffee estate and had he f accumulated new properties worth two and a quarter lakh rupees in first quarter of the 20th century It is supervising two hundred subordinate mutts, many of which also own properties.⁶

NON-BRAHMIN MUTTS:

The non-Brahmin ascetics of South India with a desire to disseminate religious knowledge and promote religious charity established mutts in districts of Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Tirunelveli. Most of these mutts like the Dharmapuram mutt, the Thiruvavaduthurai mutt, the Tirupanandal mutt and the Tiruvannamalai Kunrakudi Adhinam were devoted to the inculcation and spread of the Sava Siddhartha system of philosophy. In addition to the mutts commonly known as such, there are various Ashrams scattered throughout the country.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT OF TEMPLES BY HR & CE:

In 1817, the Control of Public Endowments was entrusted to the Board of Revenue. It was opposed by Hindus. After 1839, the supervision by the Government was withdrawn.¹⁰ In 1841, the Provincial government instructed the Board of Revenue to allow the individuals to manage the affairs and funds of the temples.

There was no supervision during the period from 1842 to 1863 over the management of Hindu temples, through the regulation Act of 1817. This resulted in maladministration and misappropriation of temple funds. To rectify this, Act XX of 1863, came into force. Provision was made for changing over the properties to Trustees or committee of management. This Act does not specify the term and conditions of the trustees. So, after 1863, these trustees became hereditary. To plug the loopholes in the Act of 1863, a committee was appointed under the presidentship of Sir William Robinson to make a fresh Bill. Another committee was appointed in 1884 under Mr. Sullivan. Again in 1884 under Mr. Sullivan". Again in 1894, a committee under Mr. Muthuswamy was appointed. In 1898 Chenstsal Rao's Committee was appointed to revise the Bill. The Suggestions given by all these committees were not accepted by the government. In 1919, a Reform Act was passed and it was assented further as Act of 1925.

According to this Act of 1925, A Statutory Board called "The Hindu Religious Endowments Board" was created with four commissioners and a president. The Board was vested with the power of controlling and supervising the temples.

The validity of the Act of 1925 was challenged by Mutts and Trustees. The Tamil Nadu Religious Endowments Act of 1926 was passed validating and re-enacting the provision of the Act I of 1925. This Act brought all the temples under the control of Hindu Religious Endowments. The temple committees were assigned the power of exercising supervision over the temples which do not have hereditary trustees. Amendments from 1928 to 1947 were made to the primary Act II of 1927. Of these Amendments, the Act No: V 1944 abolished the temple committees. Assistant Commissioners were appointed in their places. The Act No. X of 1946 made provision for the government to audit the accounts of the temples. The Act No: V of 1947 made the provision of "Free entry" to all the members of the Hindu Community.

After the Independence of India, the government of Madras enacted the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act of 1951. Provision for supervision and auditing of temple funds were made by the Act. The temple Trustees and Mutts challenged the validity of the Act of 1951. During the years 1954, 1956 and 1959, further modifications were made. The recent modification of the Act was effected on 15th June 1971⁹. During the year 1972, the Department had been administering under its control 157 mutts, 12,038 temples and 832 specific endowments totaling 13,027 religious institutions with an estimated income of Rs. 6.75 crores. In 1973, 2162 institutions were additionally brought under the control of the department.

The revenue for the maintenance of the department is derived from the contributions and audit fees payable under section 92 of the Act by the religious institutions. In 1973 the total strength increased to more than 15,000 institutions and at present it has gone up to not less than 35,000 institutions. Presler quotes one Commissioner as saying:

*"We are dealing with faults coming from time immemorial. The problems are manifold, and they go to the very root of the administration of the temples, because without lands, or without trustees, nothing can happen to the temples... The main problems are only these: the properties of the temples, and the persons in charge of the properties."*¹⁰

Finally, the State has an independent stake in land. This constitutes the HR & CE's major challenge. Land administration is one of the hallmarks of modern India, it was pivotal in building the colonial state, and has been a major aspect of state policy. Independence Land administration serves many functions, including provision of a steady revenue to the government; stimulation agricultural productivity regulation of social relations, especially among tenants, landlords, money lenders and labourers; and monitoring of the rural political climate. The state's land policies have historically been implemented by revenue authorities, especially by the Board of Revenue and local revenue officers and the collectors.

CONTROL OF TEMPLE LANDS:

The management and control of the temple lands by the HR & CE pose several problems in Tamil Nadu. The HR & CE agrees in a general way that the way in which temple land is used should not be contrary to public policy, especially land reforms. But it is reluctant to go to the full extent of having temple land handled as though it were simply a public resource. Land, after all, is the historical foundation of temples as institutions, it poses a distinct set of problems, and needs special treatment by State authorities.

The disposition of temple land is crucial. The manner of tackling the land ownership of temples in the light of agrarian reforms determines the future of temples, mutts and trusts in Tamil Nadu. Pressler examines the struggle between the HR & CE and the powerful Board of Revenue during the period from 1925 to 1950. This highlights the problem of controlling the temple land in Tamil Nadu.¹¹

HINDU RELIGIOUS AND CHARITABLE ENDOWMENTS AND BOARD OF REVENUE:

The conflict between the HR & CE and the Board of Revenue arises when the former tries to protect the temple's interest, and the latter tries to preserve the state's interest when the temples began to lose lands, the HRE was established.¹²

The problem of controlling temple lands- had been observed by Presler thus "The problem was especially severe with land fill inam tenure. Inam tenure is complicated and controversial, basically mainly originated as tax free grants by kings and other rulers of a parcel of land or a portion of the land's produce. Inam grants were given for many reasons, eg., to reward loyal service, to solidify political support, to endow charities, to show piety, Many inams were granted for the support of temples or of those performing rituals and other services in temples."

Further "Any land or income from land, associated either with a temple, or with a temple servant, is owned by the temple, and is owned permanently. Temple land like the temple itself, is public, without private rights attached to it, and because of this is different from ordinary inam land, and

should be administered through a distinct set of rules and regulations, and by a distinct agency, the HRE Board. ¹³"

Getting Rich with Temple Lands:

Several Temple landlords, having over 1,000 acres of wet land in the Cauvery basin with three crops a year, are without adequate funds for their maintenance. There are over 50 such 'landlords', mostly in Thanjavur and Nagapattinam districts, who have been languishing while their benami rich landlord 'tenants' have struck it rich over a span of seven decades.

According to HR & CE Department sources, the arrears to the temples from the lands and building have run to Rs. 81.29 crores as on March 31, 1994. As against the demand of Rs. 89/8 crores, the Department was able to collect only a meager amount of Rs. 8.49 crores, during the fasli Year 1402 (1992-93). ¹⁴

The arrears from the wet lands alone are as high as Rs. 68.79 crores as against the demand of Rs. 72. 31crores. The rest of the arrears are from dry lands, buildings sites and miscellaneous sources. Temples in Thanjavur and Nagapattinam districts top the arrears list are unable to pay the rent; the Government has waived the rent on many.

Since the poor tenants are unable to pay the rent, the Government has waived the rent on many occasions. But the landlord-cum-benami temple tenants are not willing to pay the rent to the temples even though there is a bumper harvest.

Mostly the lands are in the hands of politically influential tenants who use their clout whenever any action is mooted against them. There are cases where the tenants are locally powerful, against whom officials cannot even think of taking any action. Besides, the existing laws are favourable to the tenants, only making it difficult for the Department to take legal action against them. In some cases the temple administrations do not know against whom they should precede as the tenants have changed over a period of years.

As an illustration of poor rent collection from tenants, one can consider the case of the Vedaranyeswarar temple at Vedaranyam in Nagapattinam district which has the unique distinction of having the maximum landed property among the temples in the State. It has 1,822.46 acres of wet land, 4110 16 acres of dry land, and 479072 acres of rained land, spread over 45 villages¹⁵. In addition to this, the temple has many buildings and sites. The rent fixed by the authorities for this temple for 1993 is 8,000 bags of paddy per annum or its equivalent in cash, for its wet lands, Rs. 24,228 from dry lands, Rs. 23,695 from rain-fed lands, Rs 20813 from buildings and Rs. 4785 from the sites But during the year 1992 to 1993 it received only 2,500 bags of paddy from wet lands; Rs. 9,430 from dry lands, Rs. 12,527 from rain-fed areas, Rs 13, 516 from buildings and Rs. 1374 from the sites. Though the collection is one third of the demand, it helps the temple to perform regular pujas but the total arrears from the tenants would run to several lakhs of rupees.¹⁶

The efforts of the Tamil Nadu Government to collect the arrears due to the various temples in different parts of the State have not been rewarding, Out of the total arrears of nearly Rs 70 crores, only a little over Rs. 10 crores have been collected in the latter part of last year (the grand total rent arrears comes around to not less than Rs. 70 crores).

New Acquisition of Temple Lands:

Special staff was appointed to investigate the number of institutions and their properties to bring them under the control of HR & CE in the year 1971.

According to the report of the additional staff of inspection work on religious institution (1971), it was found that the number of institutions which were found not under the control of the department as a result of investigation were 40,247 with 1, 98,920 53 acres of land The details of the reports submitted by the special staff. Special Staff submitted reports relating to 33,703 86 acres of urban lands and 2218 buildings that belong to religious institutions which are in receipt of a low rental income. They have also reported on the profitable utilization of 6,694 acres of temple lands which are lying waste.

TABLE-1
DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPLES UNDER THE CONTROL OF HR&CE MADRAS-34
(Jurisdiction by size of annual)

S. No	Asst. Commissioners Offices	Income below Rs. 2,000(per annum)	Above Rs.2000 but below Rs.10,000	Above Rs.10,000 but below Rs.1 lakh	Above Rs.lakh	Total				
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1.	1. Madras	658	2.44	254	4.44	247	11.11	62	14.25	1,221
2.	2. Kanchipuram	1,151	4.28	306	5.34	113	5.08	25	5.75	1,596
3.	3. Tiruchi	3,102	11.52	564	9.85	186	8.36	29	6.67	3,881
4.	4. Pudukottai	1,593	5.92	193	3.37	61	2.74	7	1.60	1,854
5.	5. Thanjavur	1,066	3.96	443	7.74	139	6.25	20	4.60	1,668
6.	6. Nagapattinam	1,477	5.49	346	6.04	141	6.34	31	7.13	1,995
7.	7. Kumbakonam	1,724	6.41	325	5.67	140	6.29	31	7.13	2,220
8.	8. Cuddalore	2,015	7.49	646	11.28	176	7.91	15	3.45	2,852
9.	9. Madurai	2,604	9.68	388	6.77	116	5.22	23	5.29	3,131
10.	10.Ramanathapuram	1,405	5.22	226	3.95	115	5.17	35	8.05	1,781
11.	11. Tirunelveli	2,334	8.67	367	6.41	166	7.46	39	8.97	2,906
12.	12. Nagarkoil	532	1.98	123	2.15	38	1.71	3	0.69	696
13.	13. Coimbatore	1,529	5.68	246	4.30	155	6.97	40	9.20	1,970
14.	14_ Salem	1,667	6.19	365	6.37	112	5.04	27	6.20	2,171
15.	15. Erode	1,043	3.88	346	6.04	136	6.12	31	7.13	1,556
16.	16. Dharmapuri	1,688	6.77	259	4.52	135	1.57	3	0.69	1,985
17.	17. Vellore	1,325	4.92	330	5.76	148	6.65	14	3.20	1,817
	Total	26,913	100.00	5,727	100.00	2,224	100.00	435	100.00	35,299
		(76.24)		(16_22)		(6.31)		(1.23)		

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentage to the total at the bottom of column 11 i.e 35,299

Source: Office of the Commissioner, HR & CE, Madras-34

These temples were not depending on their landed properties as their incomes from other sources were comparatively higher. But the remaining temples with an income of less than Rs. 1 lakh were depending on the Board for their maintenance and other works. But all these temples had vast properties. The total value of jewels held by the temples as estimated by the UNESCO is roughly to the tune of Rs. 10,000 Crores. If the rent and other income to the temples were collected periodically, most of them would have surplus funds.

Temple and Mutt Lands:

The particulars about the land and buildings belonging to temples and mutts in Tamil Nadu are presented in the table 1 and 2.

There are 56 mutts under the control of HR & CE, Madras. However, these mutts are practically managed and administered by hereditary trustees namely *Madathipathis*. The HR & CE Department is empowered only to audit the temples and mutts accounts which are controlled by the hereditary trustees. The number of trusts belonging to the *mutts* accounts for 17 and the number of temples belonging to the mutts are 58.

It can be seen from Table 4.4 that the undivided Thanjavur district accounts for nearly 44% of all temple tenants in the State. Kumbakonam division alone accounts for 60% of wet lands of all mutts in the state as per official records. These official Estimates of mutt lands are gross underestimates. Eight big mutts alone are reported to hold lands to the tune of 2.5 lakh acres, and three of the biggest among them - Dharmapuram, Thiruvaduthurai and Tiruppanandal mutts - are together reported to have around 1.2 lakh acres. All three are located in Thanjavur district. Clearly, Thanjavur occupies a preeminent position in terms of concentration of temple and mutt lands.

Compared with West Thanjavur district, East Thanjavur district has more concentration of temples and mutts lands. Some of the most important temples owning large area lands in the East Thanjavur district is given as follows:

The total area of temple lands both in the West and East Thanjavur district is given in tables - 3 and 4. The number of institutions belonging to temples in various God's names, coming under the control of HR & CE Department.

**TABLE-2
THE PARTICULARS ABOUT THE LAND AND BUILDINGS BELONGING TO TEMPLES AND MUTTS
IN TAMIL NADU (1987)**

Asst. Commissioners Offices	Buildings	Tenants of the buildings	Tenants of the House Sites	Tenants of the Temple	Mutts	Nanja l Acre Cent	Punjai Acre Cent	Urban Land s Acre	Buil dings
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Madras	2,137	3,936	9,578	2,322	1	2.67	-	19.98	4
Kanchipuram	843	990	3,929	5,764	12	3.858.04	706.60		
Tiruchirapalii	1,586	1,408	3,748	14,765	2	19.60	0.26	-	47
Pudukottai	318	365	12,104	6,259	1	68.96	162.17	-	-
Thanjavur	1,129	1,304	4,778	7,947	-	-	-	-	-
Nagapattinam	1,824	931	11,633	16,088	-	-	-	-	-
Kumbakonam	977	1,952	26,730	19,784	10	12,765.24	20,310.53	-	211
Cuddalore	986	897	3,164	7,714	6	630.87	863.45	-	45
Madurai	1,166	2,286	931	3,116	1	143.90	1,259.8	-	85

							8		
Ramanathapuram	2,693	2,685	3,276	5,793	4	835.98	924.04	-	32
Tirunelveli	1,134	2,045	987	6,585	6	2,709.18	10,950.14	-	155
Nagarkoil	135	97	75	682	3	161.73	33.82	-	5
Coimbatore	1,377	1,017	418	759	5	16.32	213.82	-	-
Erode	585	548	584	1,463	1	40.50	566.02	-	-
Salem	1,068	747	360	898	1	-	7.38	-	-
Dharmapuri	315	205	362	2,339	-	-	-	-	-
Vellore 1,317	1,216	1,563	4,129	3	29.06	41.22	-	-	-
Total	20,590	22,629	84,220	1,06,507	56	21,282.05	36,039.33	19.98	593
		Acre -Cent		Acre-Cent		Ground Sq.ft			
Temple Lands:			Mutt Lands:						
Wet Lands 1,86,942.51	43.06	Wet Lands 21,282.05		37.13	Temple Urban Lands				
22,232		Dry Lands 36,039.33		62.87	Mutt Urban Lands				
Dry Lands 2,28,391.55	52.61	Rain-fed lands 18,761.90		04.33					
360									
Total:	4,34.095.96	100.00	Total:	57,321.38	100.00	Total:	22,592		

Source: Commissioner Office, HR & CE (Administration Section). Madras. -34

TABLE-3
TEMPLES WITH AND WITHOUT LANDS

S. No	Asst. Commissioners Offices	Total Temples	Listed Institutions	Temples with Lands	Temples without lands	Wet (Acre-Cent)	Dry (Acre-Cent)	Rain (Acre-Cent)	Urban Lands (in Sq.ft.)
1.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2.	Madras	1,196	234	1,103	93	2,849.31	1,326.47	167.99	10,901.0087
3.	Kanchipuram	1,593	113	1,552	41	8,546.02	8,165.81	269.49	
4.	Tiruchirappalli	3,876	173	3,798	78	8,210.91	28,432.72	608.81	
5.	Pudukottai	1,846	52	1,798	48	6,731.94	17,760.86	299.70	
6.	Thanjavur	1,666	120	1,611	55	13,329.89	7,298.79	632.39	
7.	Nagapattinam	1,989	137	1,917	72	25,614.93	13,971.67	7,023.07	4,930.1945
8.	Kumbakonam	2,218	149	2,178	40	45,080.59	33,146.68	565.43	978.1207
9.	Cuddalore	2,827	121	2,755	72	8,660.91	12,886.66	471.78	1,658.1863
10.	Madurai	3,106	104	3,015	91	5,207.93	16,230.15	597.81	650.1076

11.	Ramanathapuram	1,774	110	1,695	79	10,298.28	10,542.77	373.42	2,521.1162
12.	Tirunelveli	2,899	138	2,812	87	42,832.08	24,452.94	3,631.72	
13.	Nagercoil	691	52	680	11	1,566.98	682.14	23.13	
14.	Coimbatore	1,957	146	1,879	78	980.52	12,141.76	2,113.14	
15.	Erode	1,551	107	1,487	64	1,010.91	11,114.24	1,785.32	116.1033
16.	Salem	2,163	114	2,114	49	1,280.24	11,047.62	0.29	474.1924
17.	Dharmapuri	1,983	27	1,885	98	925.60	13,586.39	24.76	
18.	Vellore	1,815	125	1,765	50	3,821.45	5,604.35	243.63	
	Total:	35,150	2,022	34,044	1,106	1,86,942.51	2,28,410.02	18,843.88	22,229.0297

Source: Commissioner Office, HR & CE, Madras - 34.

Note : Table 4.3 presents the total number of institutions 35,299 but the figures in this table 4.5 are taken from the 1987. This is older than the figures presented in the table 4.3. So there is discrepancy in the total number institutions controlled by the HR & CE.

TABLE - 4
TOTAL AREA OF TEMPLE LANDS IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT (WET S) (1992)

Sl. No.	Name of Taluk	Wet Land (Acre-Cent)	of Wet Land	Dry Land (Acre-Cent)		Rainfed Land (Acre-Cent)	Total (Acre-Cent)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1.	Thanjavur	1,367.63	7.26	270.12	---	1,637.75	1.10
2.	Thiruvaiyaru	713.86	3.80	386.54	23.84	1,124.34	0.75
3.	Papanasam'	1,385.27	7.36	424.55	9.19	1,819.01	1.21
4.	Mannargudi	3,557.18	18.88	952.53	183.41	4,590.02	3.05
5.	Orathanadu	171.48	0.92	546.57	---	718.05	0.48
6.	Pattukkottai	396.78	2.12	363.11	9.81	769.70	0.51
7.	Peravurani	84.34	0.45	315.07	---	399.41	0.26
8.	Kumbakonam	2,162.96	11.50	1,255.27	39.90	3,458.13	2.30
9.	Thiruidamarudur	3,427.70	18.21	1,405.20	0.46	4,833.45	3.22
10.	Tiruthuraiipoondi	3,599.57	19.12	3,689.46	240.68	7,529.71	5.01
11.	Vedaranyam	1,953.86	10.38	250.52	10,122.29	1,23,326.67	82.11
	Total	18,817.63	100.00	9,858.94	10,629.58	1,50,206.24	100.00

*Includes Valangaiman.

** Includes Needamangalam

The above stated Taluks are coming under the purview of Deputy Commissioner, Office, HR & CE.Thanjavur

Source: Deputy Commissioner Office, HR&CE Thanjavur.

Temples as landed magnates:

Thiyagaraja Swamy Thirukoil in Tiruvarur owns 7000 acres in 147 villages. Out of this, 2000 acres were acquired by the Government in 1955 under the Estates Abolition Act. The Government of Tamil Nadu gave Rs. 85,000 as compensation and Rs.62, 000 as annual grant.

According to S.S.lyer, as per the management of the temple, no tenant of the temple lands was cultivating more than 5 acres of land as per the ceiling Act of 1961. In a number of villages under the control of the Temple, Tenants' co-operative societies had been set up to manage the temple lands. It was reported that the societies collected the fair rent under the Fair Rent Act of 1956. But it was found that generally the rent charged by the temple ranged between 360 kgs and 450 kgs of paddy per acre

per fasli, while the fair-rent would range only between 240 kgs and 300 kgs. S.S. Iyer had come to this conclusion after a study of the Tenants' Co-operative Farmers Societies (TCFS) in Musakhulam, Katarankontan and Kurvirameswaram. For instance, the president of the society himself in Katarankontan had been given about 30 acres in lease, a clear violation of the law and contrary to the information supplied by the temple authorities.¹⁸

The Thiagarajaswamy temple at Thirukuvalai owns in the village 950 acres of wet land and 100 acres of topes and gardens and about 1000 acres of wet and dry land in other villages. It is obvious that a large number of landlords in the villages have been in control of these lands through *benami* leases.

The Kashyalingaswami temple in Kilvelur owns 920 acres of wet land out of which 450 acres are held by 200 tenants. These tenants are claiming ownership of these lands under the provisions of the Rent Reduction Act of 1949, by which those who were tenants since 1933 were to be given proprietary rights in land. 250 acres have been allotted to Tenants Farming Societies with a total membership of 100 persons and 100 acres are under the self-cultivation of the temple. But a large area remains with the temple which is in formally controlled by big land owners.¹⁹

The Singaravelu Swami Temple at Sikkal, a famous shrine owns 1200 acres of wet land and 1200 acres of coconut gardens. While 500 acres of wet land and 1000 acres of coconut gardens are under the self management of the temple, 700 acres of wet land has been given on lease to about 170 tenants. A series of violent incidents took place in 1967-68 in Sikkal in connection with the agitation of agricultural labourers for higher wages. The temple management in collaboration with the police authorities in alleged to have suppressed and harassed the agricultural labourers. As a special case, this temple has been permitted to hold 300 acres of land under self-cultivation while under the Trusts Act of 1961; 20 acres were fixed as the ceiling for self-cultivation. Vedaranya temple in Tiruthuraiipoondi taluk, along with 16 small temples in the villages under its control owns 13,051 acres in 43 villages. These lands have been leased out to 2000 tenants. The temple also gets an annual compensation of Rs.30,000 for its salt pans taken over by the government. It also has jewellery worth Rs.1,41,751. Two Tenant Farming Societies have been organized to manage some of the temple lands. Even though the temple authorities declare that no tenant had more than 5 acres, it was discovered by S.S. Iyer²⁰ in his field study that the agent of the temple who was entrusted with the collection of rent from the temple tenants of the village Kunnalur who own nearly 1550 acres of land, and of which the temple agent controls 50 acres on his own accord.

CONCLUSION

The failure of Land Reforms is cause to the loop hole of the acts and completely used by the law makers such politicians, religious groups and administrators under the banner of temple, mutts and trusts, who brought the reforms and also spoiled this. If the ruling parties both centre and state are really interested in the execution of the major objective, yet to be availed time (consequently raising the wealth of the some people and becoming poor of the most of the people) viz, equity and productivity of agrarian reforms as land to the tiller, the only way to open to them is the acquisition of surplus lands held by the religious institutions and redistribute it to the land less agricultural labourers.

END NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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