

DEVELOPMENT AND OUTCOMES OF KALLAR COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES DURING PRE- INDEPENDENCE - AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Though the British government was shown interest to establishing their government, when they imposed the most draconian law on the rebellious aboriginals of India, they came under severe criticism of the progressive thinkers of the entire world. Thus, in the year 1924, as a measure of reclamation of Piramalai Kallar, the British Government launched the Kallar Reclamation Schemes under which a Piramalai Kallar Reclamation Fund was also created. A 12 member committee managed the fund and these twelve members aiming at the general improvement of the community by granting loans for agricultural and other purposes and also for the general welfare of the community. The Kallar Reclamation Scheme mainly endeavored to educate the students of the Piramalai Kallar community, and at the end of 1940 itself, there were 60 schools established under Kallar Reclamation Scheme with a student strength of over 3182 (Administration Report for the year 1940, Government of Madras, 1940, p.11). Further Piramalai Kallar students were granted scholarships and stipends. These schemes were implemented by Piramalai Kallar Special Officers for Madurai, supported with man powers by pooling officers from Police, Revenue, Educational and Co-operative Departments. As a result 270, special cooperative societies for the betterment of Piramalai Kallars were established at the end of the year 1946 (MLAD, September-October, 1947, p.206).

Keywords: draconian law, progressive thinkers, Piramalai Kallar, Reclamation Scheme, cooperative societies, MLAD

The following schemes were also implemented:

1. As most of the Piramalai Kallars were less asset and less land, the government after deforesting the areas assigned the land to the Piramalai Kallars to encourage them to undertake settled cultivation. Thus, during the period between 1935 to 1939 for about 270 farmers about 648 acres of lands were assigned for cultivation (Administrative Report for the year 1939, Government of Madras, 1939, p.17 and 18).
2. As the lands were dry lands, to enable them for digging and deepening of wells for irrigation Takkavi Loans were granted to Piramalai Kallars.
3. As most of the Piramalai Kallars were also homeless, the British government also allotted house site to them.
4. Two Special Revenue Inspectors were attached to the establishment for Dark-hast and loans for Kallars up to 1938 (G.O. Ms.276, Home, dated 18 January 1939).
5. Three industrial scholarships for training the students in the Industrial Schools at Madurai were implemented.
6. The Scout Units were employed to engage the boys and girls in spinning, mat-weaving, basket making, knitting and other cottage industries.
7. To avoid people from lapsing into illiteracy and to continue education among adults, night classes were held in the Schools.
8. 'A Kallar Reclamation Employment Bureau' was started during February 1937. Through this Bureau 30 educated and 500 uneducated Kallars were provided with suitable jobs (Letter No.M.1892/37-CCCI of the District Magistrate, Madurai to the Home Secretary).

Kallar Reclamation as an organization was established by the British Government during the time of Pre-Independence, particularly for the upliftment of the depressed class in the society

called as Kallars. The depressed classes belonging to Madura, Ramnad, and Tanjore (MRT Districts) were granted loans as per the revised rules proposed by the Commissioner of Labour J.Grey Esq., O.B.E, I.C.S, to regulate the grant of loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies. This paper critically discusses the fact that whether the organization (Kallar Reclamation) uplifted the depressed class or acted like uplifting? With the source material, the G.O.No.123 L dated 16.01.1931.

As per the basic record cited above, the Kallar Cooperative Societies under the Kallar Reclamation were functioning in the Districts of Madurai, Ramnad, and Thanjavur during the first quarter of Twentieth Century. The proposal for the advancement of Long Term loans to certain Kallar Cooperative Societies in the Usilampatti area in Madurai District was enabled as per the G.O.No. 2737 Law (General), dated 8th November 1922. According to this GO, the members can pay off their debts due to the Cooperative Central Bank at Madura. At the same time, Government approved the proposal that short-term loans should be made by Government to selected Kallar societies to assist them to hold up their produce for a favorable market and to finance their cultivation operations. Eighteen months was fixed as the period for the repayment of these short-term loans. In partial modification of these orders regarding short-term loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies, Government directed in G.O.No.Mis.79, Law (General), dated 10th January 1924 that the period of repayment of Short-term loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies for the purchase of cattle and building purposes should be extended to 3 years and five years respectively. The scheme for the grant of short-term loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies was extended to Tanjore when Kallar Reclamation work was started there in 1924.

The government has been making such loans since 1922 but, definite rules have never been laid down as to the method of repayment of the Principal. In G.O.No Press, 3273-L., Public Works and Labour, dated 12th November 1929 Government approved, subject to certain rules and conditions, the proposal of the Commissioner of Labour for the grant of long-term loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies to enable the Kallar members to pay off their prior debts to money-lenders. This scheme for the grant of long-term loans was drawn up with special reference to the Kallars in Madura and Ramnad but, the scheme was not tried in Tanjore. The reason was not specified in the record though the Thanjavur region was also Kallar's core region. The purposes specified in the draft rules were not accepted as such, and certain purposes which were included in the by-laws of the Kallar Cooperative Societies, such as loans for ceremonial expenses, loans for educational purposes and loans for purchases and improvements of lands were omitted.

So, the Kallar Reclamation Superintendent of Madura and the Deputy Superintendent of Tanjore were consulted for this purpose by the Commissioner of Labour. In the office note of the Labour Commissioner's office, it is mentioned that Government in the case of loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies did not prescribe repayment by installments or fixed date for such installments. The reports received from the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent of Kallar Reclamation cited above tend to strengthen that impression and the matter was put in a proper basis so as either to regularize the existing practice or prescribe such other procedure as is most appropriate. In this connection, proposals were submitted by the Commissioner of Labour P.W. and L. department, D.3 5617/29, dated 19.9.30.

The Purposes for which Loans granted at that Time were as follows

1. Short term loans were granted to select Kallar Societies to assist them to hold up their produce for a favorable market and to finance their cultivation operations.
2. Loans were granted for the purchase of cattle.
3. Loans were granted for building houses.
4. Long-term loans for the repayment of prior debts.

The Purposes now Specified by the Commissioner include Besides the above

- Domestic expenses including
 - a) Purchase of Food and Clothing, etc.,
 - b) Minor repairs to houses
 - c) Medical expenses
- Payment of Kist
- Advances to petty traders for trade expenses

- Advances to artisans for implements and materials

But as per G.O.123 L dt.16.1.1931.The following orders were given:

1. Granting of Loans for the purchase of Food, Clothing, etc., shall not be allowed.
2. The rate of interest on the loans were governed by the orders in G.O.No. 680. Finance dated; 24.10.30.or by other general orders.

The Govt also approved the Commissioner's proposal to extend to the district of Tanjore the scheme of long-term loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies sanctioned in G.O.No.3273 L it. 12.11.29, but the total amount of loans granted for the three districts (Madura, Ramnad, and Tanjore) were kept within the annual limit of Rs.25000/-.

The rules for the grant of loans to Kallar Cooperative Societies in the Tanjore, Madura and Ramnad Districts from the funds of the Labour Department included:

--- Only coop societies composed mainly of Kallars were eligible for loans from Government.

--- Loans were given for the following purposes:

Class I_ (1) Cultivation Expenses Including

1. Purchase of manure for annual manuring, seed, and minor implements;
2. Wages for agricultural labor
3. Hire of plows, cattle, etc.,
4. Purchase of fodder for cattle and veterinary charges;
5. Minor repairs of cattle sheds;

(2) Domestic expenses including

(a) Minor repairs to houses; (b) Medical expenses

(3) Payment of Kists

(4) Advances to petty traders for trade expenses.

(5) Advances to artisans for implements and materials.

Class_II: Purchase of cattle and country carts.

Class III: Construction and repairs of houses, Improvement of lands subject to a maximum of Rs.150 for only one member.

Class_IV_ Repayment of Prior Debts

- The maximum period allowed for the repayment of these loans were as follows; For loans issued for purposes under class I, 18 months, for loans under class II, three years, for loans under class III, five years and loans under class IV, 20 years. The rate of interest charged on loans was 7.5% per annum, and penal interest at 10% per annum was charged in all overdue installments.
- In the case of loans for purposes under class IV, sufficient un-encumbered immovable property must be mortgaged by the applicant members in favor of the society, and the Kallar Reclamation Officer decided in each case whether the value of the property is sufficient. In no case, loans were given exceeding 25% of the net assets of each member concerned.
- The Government reserved the right to foreclose when installments of principal or interest were allowed to fall into arrears without sufficient reasons and to proceed against the properties of the defaulters to realize the whole amount with interest and costs.
- Particularly there was the need for granting LOANS FOR FOOD AND CLOTHING, and it was included in the Commissioner's draft rules but the Government at that time omitted the clause under Rule 3 (2) (a).

From the above, one can surmise that the Government was not favored to implement the schemes for the future developments of the suppressed class. For example, the Government did not come forward to accept the purposes which were already included in the by-laws, such as loans for educational purposes, loans for purchases and improvements of lands and loans for ceremonial expenses. Besides, even the existing schemes of that time, i.e., the loans for food and clothing and medical expenses were also omitted by the Government in the name of Kallar Reclamation. These purposes were very needful for the development of suppressed class at that

time. So, it is clear that the Kallar Reclamation of the Government was not for the killers and it cleverly suppressed the depressed class.

Unless the conditions of these poor sections of the people are improved the state of marginalized sections like Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and other backward sections of the society will not be improved. The status of the denotified communities (DNTs) has remained worse even after 70 years of independence. The DNTs are very much neglected in the Indian society. They have suffered injustice at the hands of government polity and society.

Bourne pointed out, "Hindus take little interest in these people and particularly all that has been or being done to elevate them is the work of the missionary bodies. They were considered so unclean that they were not permitted to spit in the public way". Dadabhoy Naoroji raised the question of the elevation of the depressed classes. The DNTs have a very strong caste or tribal panchayats. The decisions about their domestic and social life are negotiated in their Kulapanchayats (Caste Councils)

Domestication of pet animals forms an integral part of their economy. Various types of animals such as bullocks, pigs, cows, sheep, and hares are trapped, hunted, sold and make use of them for their day to day life. They have been neglected by the mainstream sociology and anthropology. The research that has been undertaken on the DNTs is mainly from the social, cultural and anthropological point of view. The colonial administrators compiled several Gazetteers. Before and after 1857, a few special officers of the Raj made special studies about the wandering communities. But their task was so vast and un-widely that it was limited to the matters about the jurisdiction of the police department. There is an urgent need to redress the damages done to these communities by the colonial criminologist, administrators, and anthropologists. Several colonial officers made the confusion between castes and occupations.

They lost their prominence during the British rule. The British land settlement operations and administrative restructuring dislocated some DNTs. History has shaped their economic, social and cultural life. British rule is perhaps the darkest chapter in the colonial history of India. After the sepoys mutiny, the British Government undertook some preventive steps to maintain law and order in the country. The CTA of 1871 was enacted by the then British Government. The 1871 act was a fallacious understanding of the Indian society. The act notified certain communities as CTs. The provisions of the act were very oppressive. Every member of the notified community was compelled to register at the local police station. They cannot shift their place of residence at their will. The members of the community have to take proper permission to go outside a settlement. The penalty for breaking the rules specified was offensive. The local police rounded up the members of the community for suspicion.

To provide a settled life government opened settlements such as agricultural, industrial, penal, voluntary and reformatory 'settlements.' These 'settlements' were either placed under the control of the missionaries, philanthropic agencies or under the supervision of the government itself. The CTA of 1911 came under severe criticism in Madras presidency. The attitude of the British was very harsh towards these communities. The idea of the reformation and rehabilitation of certain communities gained popularity. Therefore, the enactment of the settlements act was passed by the government during the year 1908. The Government formed certain settlements for the DNTs.

There were four parts in the CTA of 1911. They were (1) notification, (2) Registration, (3) Restriction (4) Settlement of criminal tribes. During the year 1924 certain modifications were made to the CT Act. The colonial government formulated a pan-Indian Act. The main aim and intent modification of the act was to integrate the wandering tribes with main stream society. However, the basic tenets of the act were not changed. The provisions of the act were humiliating. The modified act became an instrument in the hands of the village level officials to harass a large number of communities.

The CTA remained enforced for many years. It failed in its purpose. The leaders and social reformers realized that the dubbing of a people like CTs was a blot on the Indian society. Nehru stated in 1936: "I am aware of this monstrous provision of criminal tribes Act which constitutes a negation of civil liberty, wide publicity should be given to its working and an attempt made to have the Act removed from the statute book." Pattabhi Sitaramayya angrily pointed out that

"Cattle that are sold and brought in the market, wild animals that are hundred out of villages, worms that are trodden under the feet are not worse treated than the criminal tribes." Thakkar Bapa remarked that:"the Criminal Tribes Act is disgracing our statute book."N.G. Ranga strongly fought for the abolition of the CT Act in Madras Presidency.He said'the CT Act was used to suppress the political workers in those days."

The Indian Government a Committee to study the usefulness of the Act under the chairmanship of Mr. Vepa Ramesam, ICS. The Committee recommended making all the DNT colonies as free villages and distributing house sites to the occupants. The committee also recommended distribution of land to all those bonafide inhabitants. Since 1976 all the DNT colonies were considered as free village communities."

The CT Act virtually targeted the individuals, families, and communities. The police department still molded in the colonial mindset The police department is still following the same old practices of the colonial era. This is the major and practical implication of the CTA. The police department still does not accept the fact that a whole community cannot be viewed as CTs. Whenever a crime takes place, they roundup all the male members of the community in the vicinity and applies brutal methods to extract information. Their women, children and old people are not spared. The problem is complicated because, unfortunately, some members of these communities are still involved in petty offenses like pick pocketing, chain snatching, rafu, cattle lifting, stealing clothes from the shops, etc., some of them are engaged in illicit brewing and selling of liquor."

This is a social work issue. It throws many challenges before the professional social workers. Two approaches are needed in this connection. On the one hand, it is important to change the mindset of the people in general, the police and upper caste people in particular. The members of the DNC needs to be persuaded to shun their age-old occupations. They need to be oriented, brain stormed and trained that these are not the best options for a disadvantaged community. Unfortunately, the social workers did not sufficiently recognize this aspect of reformation. This challenge of the development of DNTs has not been sufficiently taken up by the social workers and Non- Governmental Organisations. However, thousands of social workers, the DNTs being the mobile and transient group of people have always remained at the periphery of rural and urban areas. Therefore, they do not receive proper attention. The departments of tribal welfare, social work institutions need to pay proper attention to this important issue. The NGOs involved in the rehabilitation work of these communities have to make more sincere efforts on a wider front."

The welfare schemes for DNTs were undertaken by the concerned states as part of their state sector programmes in the first five-year plan, in the second five-year plan funds were sanctioned by the government for education and economic development. During the third five year plan, a plan provision of Rs.375.00 lakhs was made for this purpose. An estimated expenditure of Rs.55.36 lakhs was incurred during the year 1962-63. Special steps were initiated in the fourth plan for a close study of the problems of DNTs. However, from the fifth five-year plan onwards no separate provisions were made under central and state-sponsored programmes for the development of DNTs.

The utterances of the Government on the welfare measures are making much noise emanating from empty vessels. Policy formulation and its execution most often fall apart. There is a lot of injustice being done to the DNTs communities in the distribution of land and house sites. Their repeated memorandums to government officials are of no significance. In the sphere of employment to they are facing serious problems. In the social and economic front, the DNTs are facing the challenges of stigma and harassment."

The DNTs are the most subjugated sections of the Indian Society. They are the victims of historical dislocations, unconventional occupations, colonial legacy and social stigma. In social history their case is unique. The cultural singularity of a set of communities proved a bane for mere existence. The emergence of modern, secular institutions including democracy, the judiciary has not been beneficial to them. This is a mismatch between tradition and modernity. Social justice, equality, citizenship rights are still not known to many of these communities. The modern process of development has failed to include them in its orbit. The DNTs continued to remain poor, marginalized and powerless. Unfortunately, they do not have representatives to

present their cases in the parliament and state legislative Assemblies. Their cases have not been sufficiently attended by democratic polity and civil society. For these very reasons, there is a need to make concrete and concerted efforts towards their development."

Provisions of constitutional safeguards to some of the most vulnerable communities like Nakkalas, Dommaras, Nirshikaris, Yanadis, Mandalas, Paulas etc., have to be ensured. They should be covered under the prevention of Atrocities Act 1989. Strict scrutiny of caste certificates of DNTs and penalization of bogus caste certificate holders must be implemented. Sensitization of the police force by information dissemination, in-service training, setting up of special cells in collaboration with NGOs for legal aid and counseling, especially the women and youth will go a long way for their development. Facilitation of low-income housing projects in small towns and cities by granting land plots to DNTs is very much essential. Technical and English medium schools may be established, and all these schools should be provided with necessary infrastructural facilities.

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