

## KISAN MOVEMENT IN EAST THANJAVUR DISTRICT

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### Abstract

*In Tamil Nadu the Kisan Movement mainly confirmed among the agricultural labourers especially in Thanjavur district, which was one of the kisan strongholds in Tamil Nadu. In the district the agricultural lands were not equally distributed among the Kisans. The agrarian society determines on the basis of the class structure, namely landowners, who do not participate in any manual work connected with agriculture. The second the peasants participate in the agricultural activities throughout the year. Lastly agricultural labourers who mainly live on wages hiring out on their labour power.<sup>1</sup> The agrarian struggles were prevalent in the delta area viz. Thiruthuraipoondi, Mayavaram, Nagapattinam, Nannilam, Sirkali and Mannargudi. The communist party took advantage of the conditions, it first organised the share croppers who belonged middle class it was easier for them to propagate the party's ideology, among the agricultural labourers. After attaining some influence among the tenants, the Communist Party of India extended its activities among the labourers who were lower class illiterate and under traditional bondage to higher class mirasdars. The party's activities in the delta area especially in Nagapattinam, Mannargudi and Thiruthuraipoondi taluks were initiated under the leadership of A.K.Gopalan with the assistance of Manali C.Kandasamy, P.Venkatesan, R.Ramanujam and R.Amirthalingam. The agricultural labourers were provoked by the mirasdars to complain to the Government against the troublesome land-owners. An example of such struggle surfaced on the estate of Brahmin Landlord, Ganapathi Subramaniya Iyer of Kaliyakudi village in Nannilam taluk who owned over 100 velis of land. He had 100 pannaiyals working under him and paid them lower than customary wages. In March 1939 they refused to work under him and petitioned to the Government for higher wages. The labourers and share-croppers were not organised into a union at this time, and the organisation of the first Agricultural labourers union (Vivasaya Thozhilalars Sangam) was organized by some individual in 1939 at Mannargudi. The formation of the union did not reveal any specific objectives. It was an accidental one.<sup>2</sup>*

**Keywords:** agricultural labourers, landowners, Kisans, labour power, wages, Communist Party

The movement began to advance under the leadership of the communist party, the Kisan Movement was first organized in the later part of 1942 at Thenparai village, Mannargudi Taluk with an aim of demanding 33 per cent varam from the landlords. Comrade C.Kandasamy of Manali with the assistance of K.P.Natarajan, R.Amirthalingam of Serangulam were started the movement. Veerasamy of Thenparai was elected as the Secretary of the Kisan Sabha.<sup>3</sup> But to the growth of the Thanjavur

Kisan Sabha, the Tamil Nadu State Kisan Sabha was started on June 14, 1943, Thiru Ponnambala Gounder was elected as President, Papankulam.

During 1950-52, in East Thanjavur there were widespread struggles by the agricultural labourers and the tenants for permanency in employment and regulation of other aspects of their working conditions. The relationship between landlords-tenants, landlords-pannayals became strained resulting in displacement of tenants and dismissal of panniyals. An immediate action was called by the Kisan Sabha under the communist party leadership. Many struggles, were made through procession, public meetings, taluk and district wise conference. In the beginning of the year 1952 C.Kanthasamy toured throughout the district and stressed the purpose, of the organization of kisan sabha in each and every village. He spoke at a meeting at Thilagar Thidal, Thanjavur on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1952. Nearly 30,000 kisan attended the meeting on April B.Srinivasa Rao, Secretary, Tamil Nadu Kisan Sabha toured the district from April 20, an executive meeting of the District Kisan Sabha was held at Mannargudi in which B.Srinivasa Rao suggested a separate wing or organization for agricultural labourers. To abolish the pannaiyal system and for payment of fair rent, the Thanjavur district Kisan sabha conference was held at Kilpandi, Tiruthuraipoondi taluk on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1952. Many resolutions were passed in the conference. They are;

1. For the first rate Nanjai land the varam should be 55:45 of gross produce for Kisan and landowners respectively.
2. For second rate Nanjai land 6:40.
3. For third rate Nanjai land 66 ½ : 33 ½ .
4. For fourth rate Nanjai land 73:27.
5. The tenants should not be changed from their leased cultivated land.
6. Abolition of Pannaiyal system.

For Daily Workers

7. During cultivation period daily wages of Rs.1 and 1 marakkal paddy for men and 8 annas and 1 marakkal of paddy for women.
8. During harvest time wages for men and women should be 4 marakkals and 2 marakkals respectively.
9. Working hours should not exceed 8 hours.<sup>4</sup>

In response to the struggle, the Government of Madras passed the Thanjavur cultivating Tenant and Pannaiyal Protection Act in November, 1952 with aim of trying to regulate the relationship between the labours and the cultivators. The act exempts owners holding 6.2/3 acres (1 veli) wet or 20 acres dry land. It effects only 11070 holders who form 37 per cent of the total number of holders 44 of wet lands and 50 per cent

tenants and labourers, no tenant who held land on lease on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1951 could be evicted for a period of 5 years. Tenants evicted during the crop year from June 1951, were to be re-instated in preference to any existing tenant on the land. The landowners could resume the land at the end of 5 years by giving a year's notice. The share of the mirasdar and tenants were fixed in ratio of 60:40 out of the gross produce remaining after payment of harvest wages. The divisional revenue officer was empowered to decide any dispute between the Mirasdar and agricultural labourers. Soon after the enactment of the Act the mirasdars evicted all tenants and Pannayals by paying of some compensation. Thus the traditional pannaiyals became free labourers.<sup>5</sup> It had introduced a system of diarchy in the administration of agriculture, because the tenants were made responsible for seed, ploughing, manuring of land, etc., and the landowners for taxes, cesses, repair of irrigation work etc., thus it ousts the land owners from the natural place in the agricultural economy.

Varam increase Kuthagai decrease and Government land to landless were the next demand of the Kisan Sabha. The third conference of the district Kisan Sabha was held at Vaithinathan Koil near Thanjavur on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of June 1954. B.Srinivasa Rao inaugurated the conference. 25,000 Kisans participated in the procession and 75,000 attended the conferences. Many resolutions were passed.

- (a) 20 acres of land should be fixed as land ceiling.
- (b) 25 per cent increase of varams to tenants.
- (c) The land under the control of devasthanam should be divided and distributed to the tillers.
- (d) Manaikat to Manaikatless.

The Madras Government passed the Tamil Nadu cultivating Tenants Protection Act 1955 with the aim of protecting the tenants from the landlord's exploitation.<sup>6</sup> The act provides for production Act cultivating tenants against eviction. Payment of fair rent to tenants was the next programme of the district Kisan Sabha; Taluk wise conference were held at the Taluk headquarters. On 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1955, Nagapattinam Taluk conference was held of Sikkal. Nearly 42,000 Kisans attended the conference. Com.P.Jeevanandam spoke about the need of land reforms and payment of Fair Rent Act. The Thanjavur Pannayals Protection Act of 1952 freed many agricultural labourers. These labourers did not get any permanent employment. For their daily wages they were forced to organize separate union for them. In 1956 Thanjavur District Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam (Thanjavur District Agricultural Labour Union) was organized by the communist party, with leading CPI members as its office bearers. The first conference of the Union was held at Thiruvarur K.B.Natarajan, and S.Vadivel were elected as

President and Secretary to the Sangam respectively. These various struggle led to success of the Kisans, the Government of Tamil Nadu passed the Tamil Nadu cultivating Tenants payment of fair rent Act, 1956. The act fixing the rates of fair rent payable in respect of various classes.

- (a) In the case of wet land 40 per cent of the normal gross product or its value in money.
- (b) In the case of wet land, where the irrigation is supplemented by lifting water 35 per cent of normal gross produce or its value in money.
- (c) In the case of any other class of land 33-1, 37 of the normal gross produce or its value in money.<sup>7</sup>

After the introduction of the Act the Kisan sabha of Thanjavur district demanded the land ceiling and patta for manaiket. Accordingly in 1961 the Tamil Nadu Government passed two acts.

1. The Tamil Nadu Land Reforms (Fixing of ceiling of land) Act.
2. The Tamil Nadu Occupants of Kudiyiruppu (Protection from Eviction).

The fixation of ceiling or land or Land Act imposes a ceiling on holding of agricultural lands and provides for the acquisition of excess over such ceiling on payment of compensation. The ceiling limit fixed under this Act ranged originally from 30 to 60 standard acres depending upon the number of members in the family.<sup>8</sup> The Agricultural labourers under the leadership of the C.P.I (M) organized many struggles demanding higher and uniform wages in 1967-68 on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1967 the Kisans demanded more wages and refused to do harvest. They also objected to the employment of outside labourers for harvesting. But the landlords sought police protecting and conducted the harvest operations with the help of outside labourers. The evicted local labours attacked the outside labours in Poonthaiankudi village. This led to the death of a Harijan labourers. At last an agreement was concluded between the Mirasdar and the labourers. It was called the Mannargudi agreement of 1967 by which, the agriculture labourers got wage increase of six local measures of paddy harvesting per kalam (54 marakkal) of paddy. And it was also given half a Marakkal of paddy for everyday's harvest. It was also agreed that in the matter of employments, the outside labour should be employed only in the absence of local labourers.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude this Kisans have witnessed a phenomenal awakening and growth of organizational strength. Not only they have taken a much greater part but they have also awakened to a consciousness of their position at a class desperately feudalistic exploitation. Their class organization, therefore have multiplied and their struggle

against this exploitation has raised to a high level witnessed by the numerous partial struggle and has brought a new political consciousness to them.

### References

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