BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA SHEET

1. CONTROL NUMBER	2. SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION (695)
PN-AAJ-633	AE30-0000-G635

3. TITLE AND SUBTITLE (240) Rural organizations in South India: the dynamics of laborer and tenant unions and farmer associations in Kerala and Tamil Nadu

4. PERSONAL AUTHORS (100)

Alexander, K. C.

5. CORPORATE AUTHORS (101)

Cornell Univ.

6. DOCUMENT DATE (110)	7. NUMBER OF PAGES (120)	8. ARC NUMBER (170)
1980	105p.	IN301.35.A376

9. REFERENCE ORGANIZATION (130)

Cornell

10. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES (500)

(In Special Series on Rural Local Organization, RLO no. 2)

11. ABSTRACT (950)

12. DESCRIPTORS (920)

India
Tamil Nadu, India
Rural sociology
Rural development
Labor relations
Tenancy
Unionization
Unionization
Farmers
Socioeconomic development
Agricultural workers
Political systems
Organizations

13. PROJECT NUMBER (150)

931113700

14. CONTRACT NO.(140)

AID/ta-BMA-8

15. CONTRACT TYPE (140)

16. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (160)

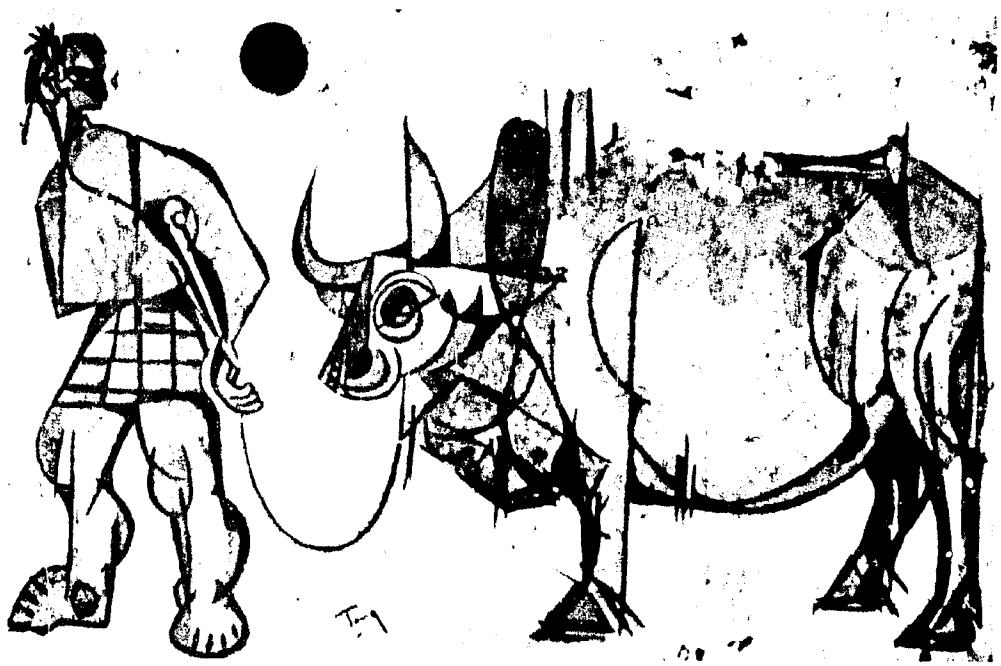
AID 590-7 (10-79)

IN
301.35
A376

PN-AAJ-633

LL UNIVERSITY

RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



Special Series on Rural Local Organization

RURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH INDIA: THE DYNAMICS OF LABORER AND TENANT UNIONS AND FARMER ASSOCIATIONS IN KERALA AND TAMIL NADU

K. C. Alexander

RLO No. 2

RURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH INDIA:

THE DYNAMICS OF LABORER AND TENANT UNIONS

AND FARMER ASSOCIATIONS IN KERALA AND TAMIL NADU

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Published by the Rural Development Committee, Center for International Studies, 170 Uris Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853. February 1980. $3.50

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preparation of this book was facilitated by a Research Associate Award of the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada, which enabled me to spend a year at the Center for International Studies, Cornell University. The intellectual atmosphere at the Center, particularly the close interaction with the memebers of the Rural Development Committee, has been a very stimulating experience and enabled me to address some of the problems related to the development of peasants organizations in India. In this task I have received intellectual and material support from different sources. Professors Milton J. Esman, Chandler Morse, Francine Frankel, Mary F. Katzenstein and Norman Uphoff have gone through the manuscript and offered many comments. Comments on specific chapters were received from Professors Robert B. Charlick, Harry Blair, Walter E. Coward Jr., and Porus Olpadwala. Mr. Sean Killeen made necessary arrangements for the smooth completion of the work. Help was received from Mr. Kris Merschrod in the statistical analysis of data. Mr Claude Freeman helped me in various ways in the preparation of the manuscript. I am indebted to all of them for their support in this work, but they are not in any way responsible for the blemishes and limitations in this work.

The burden of preparing the manuscript was considerably lightened by the secretarial assistance rendered by Debbie Van Galder and the typing assistance of Gerri Jones.

K. C. Alexander

Ithaca, New York
June 1979

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Rural organizations have been important features in the development of many agrarian societies. Of most momentous significance have been those organizations drawing together the underprivileged strata with radical political leadership aiming to transform economic, social and political relationships. More common have been organizations of the better-off strata seeking through collective action to improve or defend their status and economic well-being. The latter type may, of course, arise in response to the former, and then the stage is set for greater political conflict.

Interest in radical rural movements has been fed by the contribution such movements made to revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam and other Indonenese states, and in some Latin American states like Mexico and in an African state like Algeria. Many questions may be asked about their relevance or feasibility in a country like India, which with its 600 plus million people and its pervasive poverty, the need for economic and social improvement in overwhelming. Compared with the countries mentioned above, India has been relatively quiescent. Out of an estimated 48 million agricultural laborers and 15 million sharecroppers, only 3 million had been organized in some sort of economic or political association as of 1973.[1]

Yet against this picture of general tranquillity in India, there are some areas where peasant organizations have emerged and played a

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[1] Amar N. Seth., Survey of Peasant Organizations in India, FAO Regional Office for Asia and Far East, Bangkok, 1975 (Mimeo), p. 89.

recognizable role in social an 'itical transformation. Two of these areas are the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu (formally known as Madras State) in South India. This study describes first the origin, structure and characteristics of peasant organizations in these two South Indian states. Further, an attempt is made to understand the ecological and social characteristics that have influenced, either positively or negatively, the emergence of peasant organizations in these states. The study also assesses what impact the activities of these organizations have had on certain aspects of agrarian social structure.

There is considerable debate in the literature over how the term "peasant" should be used. Some authors like Daniel Thorner have used the term to describe the whole of rural society, irrespective of categories like landlord, tenant or agricultural laborer.[2] In this sense, it encompasses all settled agriculturalists employing a low level of technology. This perspective may be tenable to the extent that the society is not yet differentiated into identifiable classes. Then all may be considered "peasants," as differences in size of holding or even laboring status may not make much difference in wealth and power. Others have given the term "peasant" a more restricted meaning, defining it to include "tenant, sharecropper, small farmer not regularly employing hired labor, and landless laborer."[3] Such a view is more useful where class differences have evolved and it makes little sense to put all rural residents in the same category.

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[2] Daniel Thorner., "Peasantry," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1968, pp. 503-510.

[3] Organization of Peasants in Asia, Regional Experts Workshop Organized by FES, FAO and ILO at Bangkok, 1974.

The case of India poses particular problems of analysis and terminology because it includes both situations, and one may use the term "peasant" either broadly or more narrowly, depending on the situation. The author has been inclined in other writings to follow Thorner's usage. One can regard as "peasant organizations" any organization formed by peasants, and this may include labor unions, farmers associations, and community organizations interested in advancing either "class" or "production" interests of peasants. However, the present study is confined to analysis of rural organizations in their aspect of pursuing "class" interests of different sections of rural society. We will be comparing and contrasting the organizations of landless laborers, tenants, and landowning farmers (some of whom are significant employers of others' labor). Thus, the more inclusive meaning of "peasant" is less warranted here.

As used here, "peasant organizations" will encompass those forms of organization intended to advance the interests of agriculturalists owning little or no land, depending on the earnings from their labor for their and their families' survival. Where these organizations aim at transforming the economic and political structure of society, with commitment and dynamism transcending the formal manifestations of organization, we will speak of these as "movements." We find often that either to preempt or resist such efforts, better-placed agriculturalists organize themselves into associations. At one level these associations may aim to enhance productivity goals of larger cultivators, but invariably at another level they serve to protect and advance class interests. This class benefits from employment of others' labor, and no matter what one calls it -- rural capitalists, petty bourgeoisie, surplus farmers, kulaks, progressive agriculturalists

or whatever -- they are likely to come into conflict with what we are regarding as peasant organizations. The two kinds of organizations are best studied together, as they interact with and affect one another. Both sets together come under the rubric of "rural organizations" which is the category we are concerned with in total.

Because of our interest in experience with rural organization which enhances the interests of the poorer sections of society, we do give more attention to peasant organizations. Indeed, we are interested in the conditions under which peasant organizations emerge and gain some strength, and in the question why they are not more widespread in India. As a background for such inquiry, we will in the next section review the analyses of scholars who have studied peasant movements and uprising in different societies.

Some Theories of Peasant Movements

In many parts of the world, peasant movements have been initiated and led by communist workers or cadres. However, the main tradition of Marxist theory ignored the revolutionary potential of peasants, at least until the beginning of this century. Even then it did not gain much appreciation until the success of the revolution in China. Karl Marx himself believed that the peasantry could not provide the basis for formation of a class-conscious proletariat capable of overthrowing the capitalist system. He believed that "the small peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions, but without entering into manifold relations with one another...In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small peasants, and the identity of interests begets no unity, no national union, and

no political organization, they do not form a class."[4] Therefore, they present in this view no potential for revolution.

It was Lenin's concept of an alliance between the working class and the peasantry which broke with this orthodox tradition; but even then, the revolutionary potential of the peasantry was not fully recognized. The role played by the peasantry in Asian revolutions finally demolished the orthodox approach and established that, under appropriate circumstances, the peasantry can be a source and means of class transformation in agrarian societies. The problem is believed to be one of identifying these "appropriate circumstances and characteristics" and molding them into a revolutionary channel. While many practitioners have tried and are trying with varying degrees of success to direct the peasantry into a revolutionary channel, scholars have identified several characteristics of agrarian societies which facilitate or retard such movements.

In examining the background of peasant participation in revolutionary warfare in Mexico, Russia, and China, Eric Wolf[5] has pointed out that peasants are especially handicapped in evolving from passive recognition of wrongs to political action as a means of setting them right. Certain characteristics of peasants' life have stood in the way of political articulation among the peasantry: their work is almost always done alone and on their own land, they are competitors for available resources, the tyranny of work weighs heavily upon them, their control of land enables them to retreat into subsistence production, extended kinship ties and other relations provide them with a cushion against shocks of dislocation.

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[4] Karl Marx., The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, New York: International Publishers (n.d.), p. 109.

[5] Eric R. Wolf., Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

A history of exclusion from the exercise of power deprives peasants of the knowledge needed to articulate their interests with appropriate forms of action. But in spite of such factors, occasions of peasants rising in revolt and bringing about revolutionary changes are not really few.[6] In these situations, what has caused the peasants to revolt?

Wolf identified the penetration of modern capitalism into peasant communities as the main cause of peasant rebellions. Before the advent of capitalism, social equilibrium depended on a balance in which peasant surplus was transferred to rulers and minimal security for tillers was provided in return. Sharing resources within communal organizations and forging ties with powerful patrons were important mechanisms which provided stability. The penetration of capitalism cut through the bonds of custom and severed people from their accustomed social matrix, transforming them into economic actors, independent of prior social commitment to kin and neighbors. Capitalism liberated man as an economic agent, but the concrete process of liberation entailed the accumulation of human suffering, and "alienation." These difficulties were worsened by rapid population growth, leading to an acute imbalance between population and resources. This was accompanied by the collapse of traditional political authority. Thus, Wolf regards peasant movements and rebellions as an aspect of the disintegration of traditional society, created through the penetration of North Atlantic capitalism.[7]

Wolf has also examined the role of different segments of peasant society in revolutionary upheavals. He points out that during the Russian and Chinese revolutions, the middle peasantry, rather than the poor, were its

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[6] Ibid., p. 290

[7] Ibid., p. 295

promoters in rural areas. According to Wolf, the decisive factor in making a peasant rebellion possible was the relation of the peasantry to the field of power that surrounded it.[8] The poor peasants, or the landless laborers who depended on a landlord for their livelihood, had no tactical power and, therefore, were not in a position to pursue the course of rebellion unless able to rely on some external power. The rich peasant as the exercisor of local power was not interested in the rebellion. On the other hand, landowning middle peasantry or the peasantry located in a peripheral area outside the domain of landlord control, lacking power to protect their interests, were the most vulnerable to the economic changes brought by commercialism. They were also exposed to influence from a developing proletariat. It was the "attempt of middle peasantry to remain traditional which makes him revolutionary."[9]

Wolf has also pointed out that transition from peasant rebellion to revolution, from a movement aimed at the redress of wrongs to the attempted overthrow of the society, cannot be achieved by peasants alone, without outside leadership. Where the peasantry had successfully rebelled against the established order under its own banner and leadership, it was sometimes able to reshape the social structure of the countryside but could not lay hold of the state, of the cities which house the centers of control, or of the strategic nonagricultural resources of the society. "Thus a peasant rebellion which takes place in a complex society caught up in commercialization and industrialization tends to be self-limiting, and hence, anachronistic."[10]

Wolf has shed some light on the regional variation in peasant uprisings.

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[8] Ibid., p. 290.

[9] Ibid., p. 292.

[10] Ibid., p. 294.

In Tsarist Russia, the condition of the peasants differed between the black soil and the non-black soil areas. In the black soil area, mainly in the south, high soil fertility had made agriculture the principal source of living, and there was greater extraction of surplus from the serfs. But in the less fertile non-black soil of the north, serfs were encouraged to take out large parcels, and non-agricultural occupations were important. Not surprisingly, the fertile black soil region was the main center of agrarian revolt, accounting for more than half of the peasant uprisings that occured in the course of the revolution.

In China, the southern rice-growing provinces were the centers of the Taiping rebellion and subsequent upheavals, and this is where the Chinese Communist Party initially started its activities among the peasantry. But because of opposition from landlords and governmental suppression, the arena of peasant activities shifted to northern mountainous provinces where land was less productive and agrarian problems less acute, but the power of the central government weak. This indicated that geographical factors could influence peasant movements in two ways -- through the influence of soil characteristics on social structure, and through physical characteristics that influence the government's ability to wield power.

Se Hee Yoo had examined the relation between peasantry and the communist movement in Korea.[11] Both before and after the annexation of Korea by Japan, the Korean peasantry had a striking record of uprisings. At first these uprisings were centered on socioeconomic grievances, but later antiforeignism was also a factor. South Korea, where rice was the major crop, population density was high, and land prices were very high,

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[11] Se Hee Yoo., "The Communist Movement and the Peasants: The Case of Korea," in John W. Lewis, Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974.

was the center of peasant uprisings. However, in course of time, the center of peasant radicalism shifted to the north, adjacent to the USSR and China. Geographic proximity to sympathetic areas provided many advantages for communist activities. Additionally, the mountainous terrain provided not only physical sanctuary, but isolated the area from the central government. The Korean case illustrates the importance of geographical factors in peasant movements and rebellions.

Hamsa Alavi has also examined the role of different sections of peasantry in the Russian and Chinese revolutions.[12] During the Russian revolution, it was in cities and towns that the Bolsheviks first seized power. In the countryside, the agrarian population was composed of large capitalist farmers (kulaks) who had separated from traditional communes (mirs), of middle peasants, and of poor peasants. Even though the Edict of Emancipation of 1861 had set free the serfs and alloted them the land they tilled, it left the landlords a portion of the land called the "cut-off land." Generally, this was the best land in a village and its assignment to the landlords left the peasant very aggrieved. Especially middle peasants were agitated over the cut-off land, and this proved to be a source of deep and direct conflict with the landlord. The poor peasantry was composed of sharecroppers who had little land of their own and depended upon the landlords. Although the poor peasant's condition was miserable, he did not have an immediate bone of contention. Moreover, he was too dependent upon the landlord to be able to oppose him as the middle peasant could.

When the great upheavals took place during 1905-1907, it was the

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[12] Hamsa Alavi., "Peasants and Revolution," The Socialist Register, 1965, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965, pp. 241-277.

middle peasants who provided the main force for revolutionary upheavals in rural areas. The agricultural workers who had no land were not the leaders of the general agrarian movement or even of the labor strikes. Neither did they respond enthusiastically to Lenin's call for the organization of the rural proletariat. During the peasant struggles of 1917, it was again the middle peasant on the forefront--fighting against landlords for restitution of the cut-off lands and trying to bring the enterprising capitalist farmers (kulaks) back into the fold of the village commune. Such divisions and conflicts within the peasantry did not promote the formation of revolutionary peasant committees, as Lenin had urged.

In pre-revolutionary China, the peasantry was divided into three main segments. There were the landlords, who formed about one percent of the population but controlled about 60-70 percent of the land; the poor peasants who cultivated it as sharecroppers, having either no land or very little land of their own, and who formed about 60 percent of the population; and the independent peasant landlords or the middle peasants, who formed 38 percent of the population. Landless laborers formed only about two percent of the population. Here there were three important problems confronting the peasantry: ending the exploitation of landlords or at least easing the burden by reducing their share of the crop; rectifying the uneven distribution of land; and controlling the excessive demands made by warlords and tax officials upon the peasantry. The warlords were a dominant force in the countryside and there was no limit to their exactions. Despite their continued extortion no major peasant movement rose to resist them until the Revolutionary Army smashed their power. At that time, it was the middle peasants rather than the poor peasants who

raised their demands. The landlords, while exploiting the tenants to the limit, adopted a paternal attitude and even afforded them some protection against third parties such as warlords and taxmen. On the other hand, the independent small holders, the middle peasantry, stood exposed and weak, becoming the principal victim of the landlords and taxmen. Thus, the middle peasantry was the most aggrieved and became the vanguard of the revolution. The poor peasantry were mobilized only at a later stage, after the Chinese revolution opened up under the umbrella of communist power.

Alavi has pointed out that the initial inertia of the poor peasantry, their subjective revolutionary backwardness, was rooted in certain objective conditions. The poor peasant found himself and his family totally dependent upon the master for his livelihood. He was thankful to the master as a benefactor for providing him land to cultivate as tenant or a job to earn a living. He received help from his master in times of difficulty. His dependence thus created a paternalistic mystification leading to his identification with the master. But this backwardness, rooted as it was in material dependence, was susceptible to change. In a revolutionary situation, when anti-landlord and anti-rich peasant sentiment was built up, when the morale of the peasantry was raised, the peasant was ready to respond to calls to action. "But the inherent weakness in his situation renders him more open to intimidation, and setbacks can easily demoralize him. He finally and irrevocably takes the road to revolution only when he is shown <u>in practice</u> that the power of his master can be irrevocably broken and the possibility of an alternative mode of existence becomes real to him."[13] The middle peasant, on the other hand, was not

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[13] <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 274-275.

only aggrieved with the situation, but had a base to fight against his oppressors. As a result, even though he had a vested interest in the existing system, he rose against it and became the most militant section of the peasantry in the early stage of a revolution.

Within this theoretical framework of the penetration of modern capitalism into traditional societies, population growth, and the resultant social disintegration and economic difficulties, James C. Scott has analyzed the peasant upheavals in Burma and Indochina.[14] He has pointed out that peasants were subsistence-oriented and led a hand-to-mouth existence. They preferred by all means to avoid economic disasters and would not take risks to maximize their income. In the traditional sharecropping system of tenancy, the subsistence of the peasant got priority over the demands of the landowners and the government. But the commercialization of agriculture led to the emergence of fixed-rent tenancy while the growth of bureaucratic states led to heavy taxation, both of which contravened the traditional mores of the society. "The peasant's idea of justice and legitimacy is provided by the norm of reciprocity and the consequent elite obligation (that is, peasant right) to guarantee -- or at least not impinge upon -- the subsistence claims and arrangements of the peasantry. By refusing to recognize the peasantry's basic social rights and its obligation, the elite forfeited any rights it had to peasant production and in effect, dissolved the normative basis for continued deference."[15] It was when this moral order was upset by capitalistic penetration that the economic situation of the peasant became unbearable, that the water of difficulties rose over his mouth into his

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[14] James C. Scott., The Moral Economy of the Peasant, Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

[15] Ibid., pp. 188-189.

nose, that he became rebellious.

Also, examining the kinds of social structures and historical situations that produced or inhibited peasant revolutions, Barrington Moore, Jr. has ruled out views tracing the origin of such upheavals to a single factor such as economic deprivation, absence of aristocrats from rural areas, existence of large rural proletariat, or role of religion.[16] He believed that the economic privation that took place within peasants' standards of right and justice might not lead to revolution, but a sudden imposition of new standards or demands might infuriate them and lead to collective action.

Moore proposed that a peasant rebellion can be understood only in relation to the actions of the upper classes, which generally provoked it. "The most important causes of peasant revolutions have been the absence of commercial revolution in agriculture led by the landed upper classes and the concomitant survival of peasant institutions into the modern era, when they are subject to new stresses and strains."[17] Where the landed upper class has turned to production for the market in a way that enabled commercial influence to permeate rural life, peasant revolutions have been weak. Where commercialization of agriculture has not occurred and peasant society has survived, the peasantry must be closely linked to the dominant class in the countryside if revolution is to be avoided.

Peasant solidarity is a necessary condition for political action, and institutional arrangements and practices play a crucial role in forming solidarity groups. Village communes with their practice of periodic

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[16] Barrington Moore, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, p. 459.

[17] Ibid., p. 477.

redistribution of land among the members held together the Russian peasantry and spread the grievance about the cut-off lands throughout their ranks. In India, on the other hand, the existence of strong links of solidarity, like caste, tied those with very little property with the better off section of the society and thus contributed to division within the rural majority.[18]

The great agrarian bureaucracies of royal absolutism were especially vulnerable to the combination of factors favoring peasant revolutions. Their power enabled them to inhibit the growth of an independent commercial and manufacturing class, thus preventing a bourgeois revolution. Moreover, through its heavy demand for taxes, the agrarian bureaucracy created the potential of driving the peasants into alliance with elites in the towns. Or by taking over the protective and judicial functions of rural elites, royal absolutism weakened the link between the two. Moore believed that whether or not this revolutionary potential became politically effective depended on the possibility of a fusion between the grievances of peasants and those of other strata.[19]

Jeffrey Paige tried to understand agrarian revolution in relation to different cropping patterns.[20] Because of the socio-technical variation involved in the production of different crops, the means by which cultivators and non-cultivators draw their income varies in different cropping systems. Crops for which primary processing is important and continuous harvesting was possible -- such as sugar, tea, and palm oil -- lend themselves to corporate plantations; and this makes it possible to

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[18] Ibid., p. 473.

[19] Ibid., p. 476.

[20] Jeffrey M. Paige., Agrarian Revolution, New York: The Free Press, 1978.

use capital in production. Therefore, a substantial share of the income of the non-cultivator is derived from capital. Since it is possible to increase production and profit through increased use of capital, the non-cultivator could satisfy the demands of the cultivator (share-cropper, tenant or laborer) to some extent. But in the case of labor-intensive and seasonal crops like rice, the scope for the use of capital is limited. It is more advantageous to cultivate these crops in small plots through sharecroppers and tenants. Production, and thus the main source of income for both non-cultivator and cultivator, was dependent on land and labor. In this situation, where income cannot be substantially increased through the application of capital, the non-cultivating class tends to adopt an inflexible stance regarding the demands of the tillers, be they agricultural laborers, sharecroppers or tenants. This inflexibility leads to revolts. Thus in Paige's view, areas where certain crops limited income to land and labor rather than to capital, create a potential for the development of peasant revolts and revolutions.[21]

Based on his examination of successful revolutionary organizations among Asian peasants, Donald S. Zagoria has proposed a set of social, political, psychological, and technical conditions which facilitate such a development.[22] Factors such as the existence of a large class of landless and land-poor peasants in a tenancy system, heavy population pressure on land, and literacy (social conditions); awareness of the possibility of change and the assailability of the rural power structure (psychological conditions); freedom to form organizations and indulge in class activities and weakening of the strength of conservative landed elites (political

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[21] Ibid., p. 10.

[22] Donald S. Zagoria., "Asian Tenancy Systems and Communist Mobilization of Peasantry" in Lewis, Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia, "The Ecology of Peasant Communism in India," The American Political Science Review, Volume 65, No. 1 (March 1971): 144-160.

conditions); and organizational and manipulative skills for organizing peasantry (technical conditions) were the ones he emphasized. Zagoria argued that factors such as high productivity and value of land, labor-intensive crops, cheapness of labor, and heavy population pressure led to high agrarian density and resulting land hunger; a vast concentration of landless, sharecropping tenants, landless agricultural laborers and propertied proletariat owning too-small parcels of land; and an increasing trend toward proletarianization. These features provided a conducive social background for the peasantry to organize.

Zagoria stressed that the existence of these objective conditions in itself would not lead to the emergence of a radical movement, unless it was accompanied by a revolutionary consciousness on the part of the peasantry. The ideas and values institutionalized in the society may either facilitate or inhibit the development of such a revolutionary consciousness, which would provide the masses with a belief that revolution is necessary and with a perception that institutions are man-made and changeable. The poor must also be aware of the power of their numbers and must be prepared to make it difficult for rich peasants to suppress them. There should be also a revolutionary movement like the Communist Party to work as a catalytic agent for organizing and guiding the peasantry. The party and its leaders must look to the countryside to draw its strength, must have ability to join with the rural intelligentsia, and should be flexible enough to meet changing situations. Zagoria believed that only through an appropriate combination of these variables could a radical peasant movement emerge and be sustained.

In Asia there are a number of countries where peasant insurrections have failed. Malaysia is one such case. The communist movement in Malaysia was pioneered and led by Chinese immigrants and their descendents.[23] Since these were urban-based, the movement also remained primarily an urban phenomenon. And as the leadership and base of the movement remained confined to the Chinese, it failed to become a mass movement of Malaysian people. Another classical case where, despite the existence of many favorable conditions, the Communist Party could not succeed is Indonesia. Rex Mortimer[24] lists certain factors, such as the absence of parasitic landlordism, the low order of economic differentiation, and the sharp division of peasantry into hostile religious-cultural groups of animistic abangan and santri Muslims, as formidable obstacles to the revolutionary efforts of the Communist Party, which required it to adjust to the environment by way of compromise. The strategy of accommodation rather than the creation of revolutionary consciousness subsequently caused the Party to resist the attacks of the armed forces, thus leading to its disintegration.

Even though scholars have differed in the factors they emphasize in the development of peasant movements, there are certain common threads. The basic theoretical premises of Eric Wolf and James Scott are quite similar. They locate the source of peasant rebellions in the feelings of deprivation that arise among the peasantry with the disintegration of traditional socio-economic relations. They trace this change to the penetration of capitalism into agriculture and the transformation of traditional

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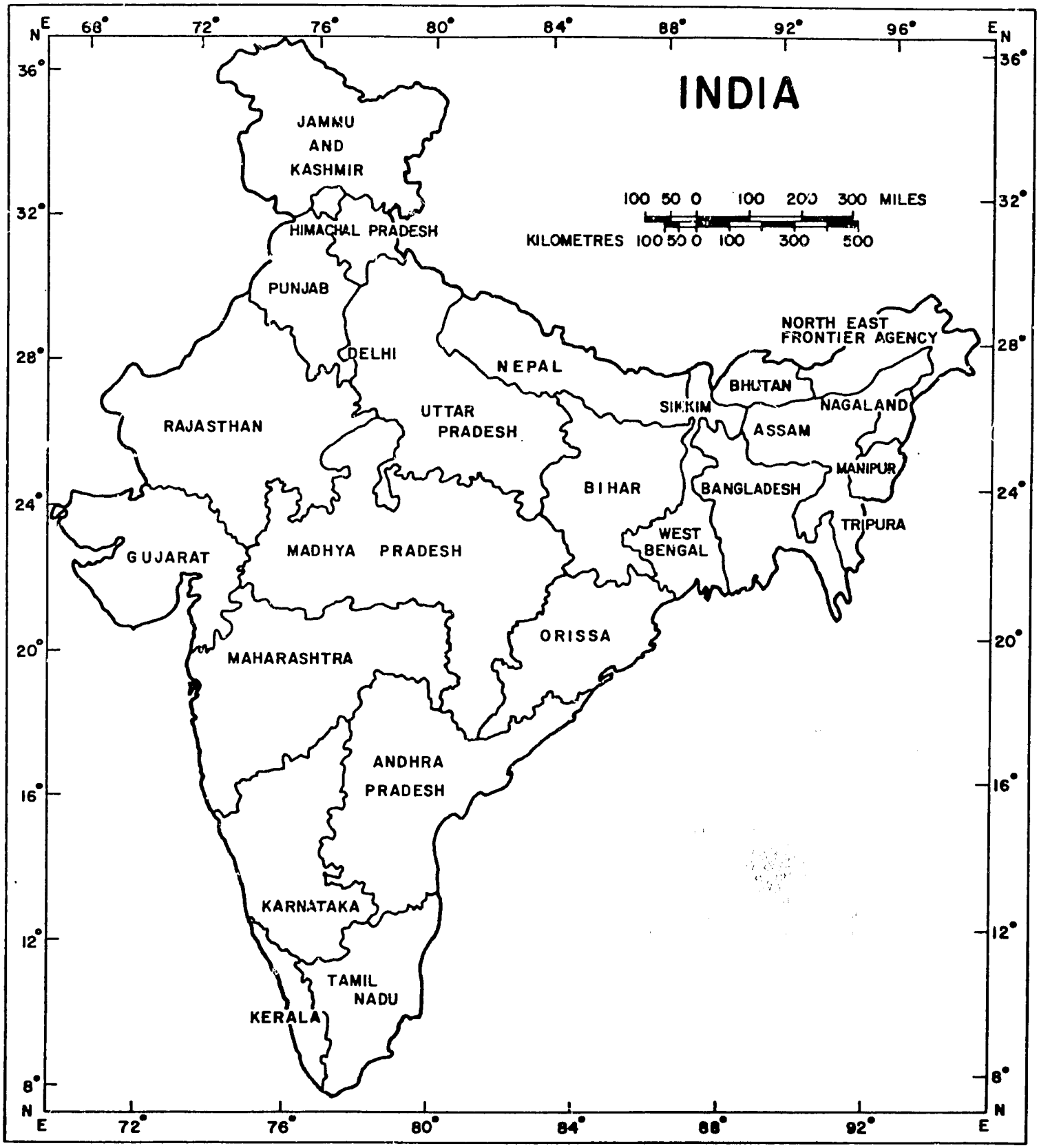
[23] Michael Stenson, "The Ethnic and Urban Bases of Communist Revolt in Malaya," in Lewis, Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia.

[24] Rex Mortimer, "Traditional Modes and Communist Movements: Change and Protest in Indonesia," in Lewis, Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia.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68° 72° 76° 80° 84° 88° 92° 96°
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patron-client relations into commercial relations. The ability of an agricultural situation, specifically the cropping pattern, to meet the competing demands of different sections is stressed by Paige. An inflexible situation caused by the inability to change productive capacities with the use of capital, leads to agrarian movements. Thus, Paige related peasant movements with the lack of modernization in agriculture. Similarly, Barrington Moore stresses the peasants' potential political mobilization, which is facilitated by the existence of certain peasant institutions. The continued existence of such solidary peasant organizations would only be possible where agriculture has not been modernized. Zagoria also emphasizes certain characteristics of social structure, such as concentration of the proletariat. But in addition, he emphasizes the role of normative orientation, and the role of organized parties and of political leaders in mobilizing the peasantry. Whereas Scott also emphasized the normative or moral basis of the peasant-landowner relation, he assumed that no change would arise in the normative orientation of the peasantry. This ignores the fact that traditional institutions perceived through a new normative framework could present an entirely negative picture, and lead to peasant upheavals.

Summarizing these points of view, the following propositions about the causes of peasant movements may be made: (1) Peasant movements are caused by the <u>deteriorating economic condition</u> of the peasantry. The commercialization of agriculture leads to a breakdown in traditional peasant-landlord relations, while an agricultural pattern that does not permit the use of capital to increase production cannot meet the competing demands of both cultivator and non-cultivator. (2) There must be some <u>scope for mobilization</u>, provided by the continuance of traditional solidary

organizations or by a geographic concentration of the rural proletariat. (3) A change in normative orientation is required in order that the peasantry perceive the traditional institutions and relations as illegitimate. Based on these theoretical considerations, we may speculate in general terms about the extent to which these forces are operating in India. A brief account of peasant movements in different parts of the country will help in this attempt.

A REVIEW OF PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

There have been a number of peasant uprisings and movements in India during the period of British rule of the country. Reviewing Indian peasant uprisings, Kathleen Gough[25] noted that for more than 200 years peasants in all the major regions have risen repeatedly against landlords, revenue agents and other bureaucrats, money-lenders, police, and military forces. During this period there have been at least 77 revolts, the smallest of which engaged at least several thousand peasants in active support or in combat. The uprisings were in response to deprivation of an unusually severe character, always economic, and often involving physical brutality or ethnic persecution. Gough noted that although revolts have been widespread, certain areas have an especially strong tradition of rebellion. Bengal has been a hotbed of revolt, both rural and urban, from the earliest days of British rule. The tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh and the State of Kerala also have long traditions of revolt. Hill regions where tribal or other minorities retained a certain amount of independence, ethnic unity, and tactical maneuverability and where terrain was suited to guerilla warfare were especially favorable

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[25] Kathleen Gough., "Peasant Uprisings," Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 9, Nos. 232-234, (Special number) (August 1974).

for peasant struggles, but they have occurred in densely populated plain regions as well. These uprisings included restorative movements, religious movements, social banditry, terrorist acts for ideas of vengence and justice, mass insurrections, and politically oriented uprisings. Under politically oriented uprisings, Gough has listed seven major uprisings of a revolutionary character. Among these were the Tebhaga movement in Bengal in 1946-47, the Telengana peasant war in former Hyderabad state (now part of Andhra Pradesh) in 1946-48, a strike by tenants and landless laborers in eastern Thanjavur in 1948, and a series of strikes and attacks on granaries and grain trucks in Kerala in 1946-48. The other three uprisings were led by the Maoist section of Communist Party in 1967: the prolonged peasant struggles involving land claims and harvest shares in Andhra Pradesh; the uprising in Naxalbari in West Bengal; and the "annihilation campaign" against landlords, moneylenders, police, and a variety of political enemies of the Party, especially in Srikakulam, Mushahari, and Debra--Gopivallabpur.

Undivided Bengal was an early center of peasant activities.[26] In the twenties there were a number of political mobilizations of the peasantry. Since 1936 Bengal has been a stronghold of the All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasants Organization), whose leadership in the state was mainly in communist hands. Although some petty landowners and tenants with large holdings were also among its members, the main response to its activities came from the poor peasantry. Differences in ethnic, caste, or religious background of the sharecroppers influenced their membership in Kisan Sabha.

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[26]Gene D. Overstreet., and Marshall Windmiller., Communism in India, Bombay: The Perennial Press, 1960; Sen, Sunil K., Agrarian Struggle in Bengal, 1946-47, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1972; D. N. Dhanagare., "Peasant Protest and Politics--The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, India," The Journal of Peasant Studies, Volume 3, No. 3, (April 1976): 360-375; M. A. Rasul., A History of the All-India Kisan Sabha, Calcutta National Book Agency (P) Ltd., 1974.

It was in areas where the concentration of tribal and Harijan sharecroppers was large that the Sabha had rapid growth.[27] In the early stages, the Kisan Sabha focused attention on local issues and mobilized the peasantry to resist high rates of taxes, interest, and rents. In the Bengal famine that followed the Second World War the condition of sharecroppers deteriorated, but they still were obliged to surrender half of their produce to landowners. In September 1946, the Sabha started the Tebhaga Movement, demanding that two-thirds of the produce as the share of the tenant. Dinajpur, Mymensingh, and Susang were the main centers of the movement. The strategy of the agitation was to cut crops and remove the grain to tenants' houses without paying the landowner his share. In the course of the struggle, there were a few confrontations between peasants and police, leading to the death of several peasants. The movement started to decline in the first half of 1947. The limited objective of the struggle -- namely, to achieve only an increased share of the produce -- along with the division of the peasantry along religious and ethnic lines and resultant absence of cohesion, which was particularly manifested in the unwillingness of Muslim tenants to cooperate with Hindus, stood in the way of effective mobilization of the peasantry. Dhanagare has listed a number of variables such as agrarian class structure, social change up to the mid-1940s, and economic difficulties resulting from the war and famine, as factors that facilitated mobilization.[28] However, the movement was a part of the strategy of the CPI and its agrarian arm, the Kisan Sabha, to embark on a rebellious course, as a part of its overall goal of coming into power through "liberation wars."

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[27] Dharagare, p. 367.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 375.

Approximately two decades later, another peasant revolt occurred in Bengal. This time it directly addressed the capture of political power through armed rebellion of the peasants. In March 1967, the extremist faction of CPM started a Chinese-model liberation war in the Naxalbari village, Siliguiri subdivision, of north Bengal. The movement was started with Chinese support and inspiration. In the course of the struggle, peasant committees were set up, land was redistributed, landlords were put to trial and executed. Village defense squads were established. Agricultural laborers were the leaders, but subsequently the middle and rich peasantry lent support to the movement. However, the revolution was short lived.[29]

The history of peasant activities in Bihar could be traced to the twenties.[30] Following Mahatma Gandhi's agitations in Champaran in 1917, political workers initiated activities in Bhagalpur, Purnea, and other districts where indigo was cultivated. Subsequently, with the active participation of Swami Sahajanand, Bihar became an important center of the peasant movement in India. Activities were directed to the solution of sharecroppers' problems, such as abolition of customary non-rent payments, regulation of eviction, and fixation of fair rent. These activities had repercussions throughout the state, but the main center was north Bihar. Although the movement was initially under the leadership of Indian National Congress, by the forties, it came under the leadership of the Communist Party of India. The movement was vigorous until the Zamindari Abolition

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[29] Mohan Ram., Maoism in India, Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971.

[30] M. N. Karna.,"Agrarian Tension and Violence: An Exploratory Analysis: A Case Study of Madhubani District," Journal of Social and Economic Studies, Vol. III, No. 1 (March 1975) pp. 21-36; "Agrarian Structure and Peasant Mobilization: The Bataidari Struggle in Madhubani, 1967-75," Patna University, Patna (Mimeo); N. Sengupta,, "Regional Characteristics of Peasant Movement in Bihar, 1910-1950," A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, (Mimeo); M.N. Jha., "Land Agitation and CPI: A Case Study of Barasher in Saharsa," A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna (Mimeo).

Act of 1949. With the implementation of the Act, which passed land on to the peasants, the movement lost its strength and gradually dissolved. Until the middle of the sixties, the agrarian scene remained relatively peaceful in Bihar; but since then, the Communist Party has again organized tenants in North Bihar, particularly in Madhubani district. Other political parties, particularly the Praja Socialist Party (PSP), have also been active among the peasantry. Of late, Indian National Congress has been making attempts to bring a section of peasantry under its leadership. But all in all, in spite of its long history and wide geographical coverage, the peasant movement has not succeeded in bringing about a radical change in the agrarian structure of Bihar. The movement is still centered around the problems of sharecroppers, and pays little attention to the needs of agricultural laborers, who are the most oppressed section of the peasantry and constitute about half of the agrarian population.

Peasant movements in the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) also has a long history, going back to the early twenties.[31] The conditions of the peasants during this period was one of extreme poverty and helplessness, groaning under the oppression of zamindars. The organization of peasants in Bihar, peasant activities in Gujarat, and the political awakening created by the independence movement created new awareness among the Kisans in the state. Certain religious mendicants like Baba Ramachandra taught the peasants to form village organizations to discuss and solve their grievances. By this time Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru also took note of the problems of peasantry. Such developments led to the growth of the

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[31] Govind S. Kelkar., "Kisan Unrest and Congress in Uttar Pradesh," Economic and Political Weekly, (27 December 1975): 1987-1994.

peasant movement in Uttar Pradesh. "In October 1920, the Oudh Kisan Sabha in Lucknow and the United Provinces Kisan Sabha in Allahabad were formed. Throughout rural Uttar Pradesh, there has been a considerable agitation, and serious situations arose in areas like Partapgarh, Rae Bareli, Fyzabad, Sultanpur, Bara Banki, Hardoi."[32] The agitations led to the Oudh Rent Amendment Bill (1921) granting certain marginal demands of the peasants. However, peasants continued their agitation, leading to frequent confrontation with authorities. In one such confrontation at Chari Chaura (Gorakhpur district) in February 1922, 21 policemen and rural watchmen were killed; this "outrage" led Gandhi to suspend the political agitation of civil disobedience. Thereafter, the disillusioned peasants returned to their traditional political inertia. Not until a decade later, in 1930-31, did peasant agitations again erupt in Uttar Pradesh. This time also the movement worked as a part of the independence movement, under the leadership of the Congress Party. However, since the Congress came into power in the state in 1936, there has been an alienation between the Congress and the peasant movement (Kisan Sabha), which came increasingly under the leadership of the CPI. The movement has subsequently been mainly under communist leadership but has collaborated with radical Congress workers.

The main concern and demands of the peasant movement in UP have centered around the problems of tenants, such as conferral of occupancy right on tenants, cancellation of all arrears of rent, reduction in rent and water rates, abolition of forced labor, and various non-rent extractions from tenants. The movement did not show much interest in the problems of agri-

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[32] Ibid., p. 1992.

cultural laborers till 1959 when an agricultural laborers association (Khet Mazdoor Sabha) was formed.[33] As the interests of the small farmers and the laborers were irreconcilable, laborers were organized separately. Even then, the main demands raised by the Labor Association were limited to issues such as the distribution of waste and government land, land that became surplus after the land ceiling legislation, and action against landlords and police officials oppressing Harijans. Such issues as increased wages, improved working conditions, and other demands that might have conflicted with the interests of the farmers were not pressed. The labor component of the peasant movement continues to be weak in UP.

Undivided Punjab had a strong peasant movement, which grew under the leadership of leftist parties, particularly the CPI. However, in spite of several favorable conditions like dedicated leadership and the existence of agrarian problems, the movement was drowned under the pressure of communalism and other sectarian forces that dominated the Punjab at the time of India's independence.[34]

Peasant movements have been relatively weak in western India. There are reports of efforts of tribal and agricultural labors in certain areas to form organizations and conduct struggles for protecting and advancing their interests.[35] But the peasant scene in the west has been consistently less embroiled.

In South India, there have been strong peasant movements in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala for many years. On the eve of India's indepen-

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[33] Ibid.

[34] S. M. Pandey., "Emergence of Peasant Movement in India: An Area Study." Indian Journal of Industrial Relations, Volume 7, No. 1, (July 1971): 59-104.

[35] Robert W. Dandre., "Communism and Peasant Movement in Punjab Province," Department of Political Science, Columbia University, New York, (Mimeo).

dence, the Communist Party mobilized the peasantry in Telugu-speaking areas of the then Hyderabad state, primarily as a part of the independence movement. The majority of people were Hindus under the rule of a notorious Muslim King (Nizam), who was not willing to move with the political current to accept the democratic rights of the people or join the Indian union. This enabled the mobilization of the vast majority of peasants under the leadership of the Communist Party, who received sanctuary for their activities in the neighboring Indian territory. The course of the struggle covered 2,000 villages in an area of 15,000 square miles, with a population of 4 million and a peasant army of 5,000.[36] Even though this movement was originally organized to fight the Nizam, it did not cease its operations after the occupation of Hyderabad by the Indian army, which essentially met its demands. Instead it carried on its war of liberation, this time directing its forces against the Indian government. By 1951 these activities were completely suppressed, necessitating the CPI to revise its policies.[37] According to Rajeswar Rao, the leader of the movement, there were several reasons for its failure to develop into a peasant revolution like the one that occured in China. China was economically backward with little modern communications. It was politically weak with warlords dominating provincial administrations and the Chinese Communist Party possessed a strong armed force that enabled it to head the revolution. Finally, the Soviet Union extended massive support to the Chinese communists in a number of ways. In contrast, India

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[36] G. V. S. de Silva., N. Mehta., A. Rahman., and P. Wignaraja, "Bhoomisena--A Struggle for People's Power," Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, IFDA Dossier 5; Jan Breman, "Mobilization of Landless Laborers: Halipatis of South Gujarat, "Economic and Political Weekly, (23 March 1974): 489-496

[37] Gough, p. 1405.

had a large number of industries, fairly well developed communications system, a centralized and well organized administrative system, and a strong bourgeoise party with immense popularity, which made the success of insurgency difficult.[38]

Almost two decades later, an extremist section of the Communist Party, the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), again embarked on a "Chinese path" and launched a liberation struggle in Andhra Pradesh, this time in Srikakulam district on the east coast. But the movement was also suppressed within a short period. "At present, most of the CPI (ML)'s cadres appear to have been arrested, or to have left the party, or to have been killed in action or in jails."[39]

The CPI has been making efforts to organize agricultural laborers in different parts of Andhra Pradesh and has gained some following in the coastal districts. However, it is a little curious that the Party is relatively weak in the Telengana region, where it was once an important force.

In Tamil Nadu, the main center of peasant movement is Thanjavur district. Even though the CPI has been making efforts to carve out a following in all parts of the state, some measure of success has been achieved only in East Thanjavur where it could organize sharecroppers and agricultural laborers.[40] Alexander has pointed out that the concentration of wet rice cultivation and homogeneity in the caste background of

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[38] Rajeswara C. Rao., The Historic Telengana Struggle, New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1972, p. 21; Ravi Narayan Reddy , Heroic Telengana, New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1973.

[39] Rao, p. 23.

[40] Gough, p. 1405.

agricultural laborers facilitated the formation of peasants organizations in Thanjavur. Since the thirties, agricultural laborers unions and tenants associations have carried out a number of agitations in Thanjavur, for advancing wage rates, improving working conditions, regulating tenancy, and other measures. They have led to many favorable legislative enactments.

The activities of agricultural laborers unions, tenants associations, and farmers organizations are widespread in Kerala and have drawn the attention of many scholars.[41] Peasants organizations are especially strong in Alleppy and Palghat districts, the two centers of rice cultivation in the state. Strong organizations of agricultural laborers have emerged in Palghat and Alleppy. Tenants were well organized in three districts covering British Malabar, namely, Cannanore, Kozhikode, and Palghat. Farmers organizations have emerged as a reaction to labor unions.

There have been no reports of peasant movements in the states of Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and several others, but occasional movements have been reported in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Reviewing the status of different kinds of peasants organizations in India, Seth has pointed out that the membership of all the peasant associations in India, taken together, would be slightly less than five percent of the estimated number of the rural poor. This shows how weak the organization is in rural India. Even this small membership is distributed very unevenly. Much of it is concentrated in the states of West Bengal, Punjab and Kerala. In other States, it is

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[41] K. C. Alexander., Agricultural Laborers Unions in South India, Hyderabad: National Institute of Rural Development, 1978; Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur, Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1975; "Some Characteristics of the Agrarian Social Structure of Tamil Nadu," Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 10, No. 16, (April 1975): 664-672; Andre Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974; K. G. Iyer., "Peasant Movements and Organizations in Tamil Nadu and Pondichery," (Mimeo).

distributed over small pockets such as Tanjore in Tamil Nadu. In large areas of India there is hardly any peasant association.[42]

Our examination of peasant movements in India thus reveals two things. On the one hand, it indicates the limited progress that has been achieved in organizing the peasantry even after attempts dating back almost half a century. On the other hand, the development of peasant organizations in some areas implies that organization of the peasantry, though difficult, is not impossible in India. The basic task of a study of peasant organizations in such a context is to find out the influence that different characteristics of social structure have on their development.

POTENTIAL FOR PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

India has a large mass of landless laborers, sharecroppers, and petty landowners. Of the 130 million agricultural workers in 1971, 47 million (36 percent) were agricultural laborers who earned their livelihood by selling

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[42] K. C. Alexander., Agricultural Laborers Unions in South India; "Emerging Farmer Labor Relations in Kuttanad," Economic and Political Weekly, Volume 8, No. 34 (25 August 1973): 1551-1560; "Changing Labor Cultivator Relations in Kerala," Social Action, Volume 28, No. 3, pp. 223-235; T. K. Oommen., "Agrarian Tension in a Kerala District: An Analysis," New Delhi: IJIR Reprint Series No. 15; Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations, FAO Survey on Peasant Organizations in India: The Case of Alleppy (Kerala), New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1974, (Mimeo); "Problems of Building Agrarian Organizations in Kerala," Sociologia Ruralis, Volume 16, No. 3 (1976), 177-195; P. K. B. Nayar., A Study of Peasant Organizations: Palghat District, Trivandrum, Department of Sociology, University of Kerala, 1974, (Mimeo); A. V. Jose.,"The Origin of Trade Unionism Among the Agricultural Laborers in Kerala," Trivandrum, Center for Development Studies, Working Paper No. 43, 1976 (Mimeo); P. G. K. Panikar., and Joan Mencher, "Agriculture Labor in Palghat District--Some Preliminary Findings of a Socio-Economic Enquiry," Trivandrum, Centre for Development Studies, Working Paper No. 40, 1976, (Mimeo); Joan Mencher, "Agrarian Relations in Two Rice Regions of Kerala," Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number (February 1978); 349-366; A. K. Poduval, A Brief History of Peasant Movement in Kerala (in Malayan), Trivandrum: Prabhat Book House, 1969.

their labor and who were a proletariat devoid of any property.[43] Cultivators who numbered 79 million and formed 61 percent of the workers, included those who cultivated their own land and those who tilled rented land. From the 1971 census of agricultural land holdings, it appears that about 20 percent of holdings are cultivated under tenancy.[44] On this basis, it is estimated that there might be 16 million tenants and sharecroppers.[45] Those who owned less than 0.5 hectare may be considered propertied proletariat and they numbered 23 million. These marginal farmers represented one-third of all farmers and held three percent of the land. On the other hand, 4 percent of farmers held 51 percent of the land.[46] The distribution of land was thus very unequal and created a large category of marginally propertied proletariat. To this must be added the vast mass of landless laborers constituting about one-fourth of the population. The existence of such sharp economic disparity and acute misery in which the assetless live is a sufficient condition to create a feeling of deprivation among the rural poor which can motivate them to organize and take measures for improving their conditions. Along with such favorable objective conditions for collective action by the poor, India also has freedom of organization and organized action. There has been also a leftist political party, the Indian Communist Party trying to organize the peasantry and advance their interests.

One of the questions that arise in such a context is whether poverty

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[43] Amar N. Seth., p. 89.

[44] Census of India, 1971.

[45] I. J. Naidu., All-India Report on Agricultural Census, 1970-71, Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, New Delhi, 1975.

[46] D. Bandopadhyay., "External Impediments to the Growth of Organizations of the Rural Poor in India," in Organizations of Peasants in Asia, p. 245.

and socio-economic disparity alone can generate enough discontent to motivate the peasantry to revolt. What would be the response of different sections of the peasantry to the call for organization? Would the effort to organize the peasantry be uniformly successful in different parts of the country? Are some regions more prone to upheaval than others? The fact that only a small section of the peasantry in a few pockets of the country are yet organized in spite of the existence of such favorable objective conditions, the existence of a leftist party, and the availability of sufficient freedom for political and organizational action indicates the existence of factors that powerfully counter the objective conditions. Is the potential for dissatisfaction and feelings of deprivation neutralized by fatalism and the conservative beliefs of an inegalitarian, fatalistic religion? Or, does the feeling of dissatisfaction remain unarticulated without direct efforts by a revolutionary party to organize the peasantry and fight for the redressal of their grievances? Or is it that these efforts are not able to surmount the divisive tendency of caste and unite poor peasants belonging to innumerable castes? In light of these questions it is important to find out the differential influence of different characteristics of social structure in facilitating or retarding the emergence of peasant organizations. For this purpose, we may fall back on the theories of peasant movements discussed earlier, examine their relevance in the Indian context, and formulate hypotheses about the likely influence of different characteristics. Thereby, we may discover the ways in which these characteristics influence the formation of peasants organizations.

It was the view of scholars like Eric Wolf and James Scott that peasant movements are the outcome of the disintegration of traditional

societies under the impact of capitalism, which cut traditional bonds and freed patrons from their obligations to peasants without a corresponding change in the obligation of peasants to patrons. Along with the increase in population pressure, this led to deteriorating conditions that caused the tenants to rebel against the system. If we extend this finding to the Indian situation, it might be hypothesized that peasant movements are likely to emerge in areas where capitalistic agriculture had developed.

Historical analysis has also shown that in many countries, certain agricultural characteristics were more prone to prompt peasant movements. During the Russian revolution, peasant uprisings were more prominent in areas with black soil where the demand for land was great. In undivided Korea, peasant movements were more widespread in the south where rice cultivation was concentrated. In China, the center of peasant upheaval was also the southern rice-growing provinces. In India also, it was areas where rice cultivation was widespread, such as West Bengal, Bihar, Thanjavur, Alleppy, and Palghat, which were the main centers of agrarian movement. Zagoria has pointed out that factors such as high productivity and value of land, labor-intensive crops, and heavy population pressure led to vast concentration of landless, land-poor tenants, and agricultural laborers in rice-cultivating areas, providing a conducive social situation for the emergence of a peasant movement. Therefore in South India also, rice-growing districts like Thanjavur, Alleppy, and Palghat are likely to be strongholds of the peasant movement. However, in a situation where "liberation war" is an essential strategy, insurgent movements are more likely to emerge in areas with scope for such activities, such as interna-

tional borders, and forested and sparsely populated areas.

The existence of objective conditions such as extreme socioeconomic inequality and a miserable life of the poor may not lead to the emergence of peasant movement, of course, unless it is accompanied by a revolutionary consciousness. The question is all the more important for India where social inequality and the misery of the poor has been rationalized through religious beliefs. Consciousness is the outcome of internalized values; and therefore, the creation of a revolutionary consciousness among the rural proletariat means the rejection of the inegalitarian ideology and acceptance of a revolutionary ideology. Such a radical ideology can be internalized by the peasantry through various sources, such as educational institutions, mass media, and activities of radically-oriented political parties. Among various political parties, the Communist Party has been in the forefront in trying to bring about a transformation in the ideological orientation of the peasantry. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that participation in a peasant movement will be related to the peasantry's belief in radical ideology, and belief in radical ideology will be related to affiliation with radically oriented political parties.

Barrington Moore has examined at some length the possibility of a peasant revolution in India, but could not come to any prognosis. He noted that in spite of the existence of a large section of rural proletariat, widespread poverty, and lack of modernization of agriculture, there are no strong peasant upheavals. Even though rural and peasant institutions continue to be powerful in contemporary India, the solidarity of the peasantry is affected by its division on religious, caste and tribal lines. Even an anti-religious party like the Communist Party could not

hold together the Hindu and Muslim tenants in Punjab and Bengal. On the other hand, egalitarian religions like Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism, could not overcome the problem of caste and bring together persons from different castes into homogeneous congregations.[47]

Studies on the role of caste in peasant movements are few. The poor peasantry belongs to Higher Castes, Backward Castes, and Harijans -- three distinct caste groups. At the all-India level, 39 percent of agricultural laborers were Harijans, 10 percent were tribals, and 51 percent belonged to Backward and Higher Castes.[48] Since caste is an important element of loyalty, it is doubtful whether an organization of poor peasantry uniting persons of different castes, who do not have commensal (eating together) or other close social relations, could be built up. In an institutional set-up, where the paramount values are those pertaining to religion and pattern maintenance, and values pertaining to economic activities and material well-being are discounted, the poor are more likely to be motivated to act in accordance with the interests of their caste rather than class. Therefore, in order to create a comprehensive movement of the rural poor, there should be not only widespread feeling of deprivation and revolutionary consciousness, but a rejection of loyalty to caste.

Our arguments may be summed up as follows. India is primarily an agrarian society with 80 percent of the population in rural areas and 72 percent of the workforce engaged in agriculture. In India, radical change

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[47] I. J. Naidu., Also David A. Rosenberg, and Jean G. Rosenberg , Landless Peasants and Rural Poverty in Selected Asian Countries, Cornell University, Rural Development Committee, 1978.

[48] K. C. Alexander., "The Neo-Christians of Kerala," in J. Michael Mahar, ed., Untouchables in Contemporary India. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972, pp. 123-161. For the problem of the caste among different non-Hindu religions in India, see Harjinder Singh, ed., Caste Among Non-Hindus in India, New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1977.

can be achieved only through the peasantry. A set of very favorable objective conditions already exists for radical mobilization: one-quarter of the peasantry are landless laborers; and important segment is made up of poor sharecroppers and tenants; among those who till their own land, one-third are propertied proletariat with less than half a hectare of land; and more than half of the land is held by a small coterie of rural rich who form about four percent of the farmers. Along with such objective conditions there is freedom for the formation of peasant organizations and political activities.

However, people will respond to the call for organization only if some change in their normative orientation, the substitution of a radical ideology for a conservative ideology, creates a revolutionary consciousness. A change in normative orientation in the Indian context is likely to be achieved among the peasantry only through the activities of the Communist Party. However, the efforts of a revolutionary party to organize the rural poor into solidary groups like agricultural laborers unions, tenants associations, and small farmers associations is not likely to succeed uniformly in all parts of the country. The efforts to organize the peasantry are likely to succeed only among members of particular castes and in areas where such castes are numerically dominant. Uniting members of different castes in a class organization is not necessarily impossible. Caste is a social institution based on certain beliefs. If a change in these beliefs can be created, then the development of organizations uniting peasants of different castes may be achieved.

METHODOLOGY

South India offers a variety of characteristics that can be examined for their influence on the emergence of peasant organizations. These include

varying geographical characteristics like soil type, degree of irrigation, amount and distribution of rainfall, and cropping pattern; social structural characteristics like density of population, variation in caste composition, tenurial categories, and commercialization of agriculture; and political factors like different governing parties, variation in the influence of the Communist Party, and a number of peasant organizations with different levels of development. It is hoped that a study of peasants organizations in such a context would lead to the identification of some of the variables that significantly affect their development.

Data obtained through three sources have been used in the study. These are published material, accounts given by persons associated with the activities of peasants organizations, and information obtained through the interview of 898 respondents selected on a two-stage random sampling basis. Information obtained from publications and persons active in the organization has been used primarily for descriptive accounts. Some available published quantitative data was used for understanding regional variation in geographic characteristics and social structure. The data obtained through the interview were used primarily to reveal the normative orientation of the peasantry in areas where peasant organizations have emerged and developed and in areas where such a development has not occurred. The interviews were also used to determine how varying social characteristics affect membership in peasant organization. Through these interviews, information on certain aspects

of the current pattern of agrarian relations was also obtained.

The sample of 898 respondents was selected from three important rice-growing centers -- Kuttanad region in Alleppy district, in Kerala state; Thiruthuraipundi (T. Pundi) and Orathnad taluks in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu; and Mandya and Maddur taluks in Mandya district, Karnataka state. Strong peasant organizations exist in Alleppy and T. Pundi, but not in Orathnad and Mandya. At the first stage five percent of the villages was randomly selected and the entire adult population was listed. From these lists, the names of persons not connected with agriculture (directly or indirectly) were removed, and the remaining persons constituted the "population" for selection of sample. An arbitrary sample size of 250 was chosen for Mandya and Alleppy districts and 200 for Thiruthuraipundi and Orthnad taluks. The sample for each village was randomly selected in proportion to the size of the "population" in a village. The respondents were interviewed during 1973-74.

In the chapter that follows, the geographic, socioeconomic and political characteristics of the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and the district of Mandya, and the normative orientation of different sections of peasantry are briefly described. In the two subsequent chapters, agricultural laborers unions and farmers associations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala are described. The impact of the activities of these organizations is considered in the next chapter. In the final chapter, the important conclusions emerging from the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

THE BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREAS

This chapter gives a brief characterization of geographic and socio-economic differences among the study areas as well as some characteristics of the sample of respondents. A picture of the background in which peasant organizations have emerged should contribute to an understanding of the influence of geographic and social-structural factors in the development of peasant movements.

CROPPING PATTERN AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In Tamil Nadu the cropping pattern is mainly determined by the availability of water through rain and irrigation. In eastern coastal districts like Thanjavur, Chingleput, and South Arcot, with well developed irrigation facilities and some amount of rainfall, rice is the main crop. On the other hand, in the districts which lie on the interior, where rain is scarce and irrigation facilities are negligible, millets dominate the cropping pattern (Table 1). In Kerala, the relative abundance of rain in all areas has meant that the cropping pattern is mainly dependent on soil. While crops like pepper, tea, coffee, and tapioca, are cultivated in the eastern part, in the western low lying area rice is widely cultivated. As shown in Table 2, among the districts of Kerala, Palghat and Trichur have more than half of the cropped area under rice. The Kuttanad region spread over the districts of Alleppy and Kottayam is another center of rice cultivation in Kerala.

The cultivation of different crops has created different kinds of agricultural tasks, leading to the creation of certain relationships between

cropping pattern and social structure. These can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, giving select characteristics of the population of Tamil Nadu and Kerala districts obtained during the 1961 census, and in Table 3, giving some of the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents. Among the farmers, the distribution of assets is very uneven: 90 percent of the cultivating households in Kerala and 79 percent in Tamil Nadu are "propertied proletariat" owning less than a hectare of land.[1] In all parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, there is a large proportion of landless agricultural laborers. Agricultural laborers are not only devoid of assets, but also suffer from high incidence of unemployment, low wage rates, and social oppression; they are often not able to eat two square meals a day and meet daily caloric requirements. On the average an agricultural laborer's family earns only half the income of a cultivator's (farmer's) family. The extreme misery of the laborers, on the one hand, and the relative prosperity of the farmers, on the other hand, is a condition that has the potential to generate a feeling of discontent among the rural poor, to motivate them to form organizations, and to struggle for the improvement of their conditions.

The pattern of relations that has prevailed between landowners and tenants and between farmers and agricultural laborers has been very inegalitarian and contained many elements of utter humiliation and degradation of tenants and laborers. This has made the condition of the lower section of the peasantry not only one of economic misery, but of psychological and physical pain. It is literally a situation where the proletariat has nothing to lose but their chains.

While the general condition in South India was conducive to the develop-

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[1] I. J. Naidu., All-India Report on Agricultural Census, 1970-71, Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, New Delhi, 1975.

TABLE 1

Select Characteristics of the Population of Tamil Nadu, 1961

	DISTRICT	Cropped Area Under Rice	Density of Population (persons/sq. mile)	PERCENTAGE OF Harijans in Population	Workers in Population	Cultivators Among Workers	Agricultural Labourers Among Workers	Harijans Among Agricultural Labourers	Households Cultivating Only Rented Land
1.	Chingleput	75	696	28	43	35	25	61	14
2.	North Arcot	32	671	20	47	51	17	46	9
3.	South Arcot	37	724	26	46	49	29	57	8
4.	Salem	11	539	15	45	55	13	42	5
5.	Coimbatore	12	590	15	46	30	16	42	11
6.	Nilgiris	7	417	19	--	19	11	21	--
7.	Madurai	23	660	15	45	39	20	36	10
8.	Tiruchirappalli	26	579	18	49	55	16	44	9
9.	Thanjavur	78	868	23	42	36	33	62	33
10.	Ramanathapuram	34	502	15	48	53	14	35	8
11.	Tirunelveli	25	619	16	46	35	16	42	14
12.	Kanyakumari	52	1,544	4	--	21	9	5	--
13.	State		672	18	45	42	18	48	--

TABLE 2

Select Characteristics of the Population of Kerala, 1961

	DISTRICT	Cropped Area Under Rice	Density of Population (persons/sq. mile)	PERCENTAGE OF Harijans in Population	Workers in Population	Cultivators Among Workers	Agricultural Labourers Among Workers	Harijans Among Agricultural Labourers	Households Cultivating Only Rented Land
1.	Cannanore	36	813	2	35	24	17	7	78
2.	Kozhikode	30	1,018	6	31	16	14	27	75
3.	Palghat	60	896	12	39	20	32	37	79
4.	Trichur	52	1,443	10	33	17	15	33	61
5.	Ernakulam	35	1,443	9	33	21	14	33	29
6.	Kottayam	13	705	10	33	20	15	20	13
7.	Alleppy	36	258	9	34	18	19	44	12
8.	Quilon	18	1,062	12	34	31	14	53	6
9.	Trivandrum	19	2,067	9	33	21	15	31	8
10.	State	--	1,127	9	33	21	17	--	--

ment of a peasant movement, there were certain areas where conditions were especially favorable. In districts of Tamil Nadu with a large proportion of cropped area under rice, the density of population, percentage of Harijans in the population, percentage of agricultural laborers among workers, and incidence of tenancy were also greater (Table 1). These characteristics created a concentration of rural proletariat and semi-proletariat.[2] In Kerala, where there is not much specialization of crops at the district level, such a close association between cropping pattern and social structure is not evident. Nevertheless, in Palghat district with the largest proportion of cropped area under rice, the proportion of agricultural laborers among workers and proportion of Harijans in the total population are the largest in the state. Among the four sample areas, the percentage of agricultural laborers is much higher in T. Pundi and Alleppy than in Mandya and Orathnad, confirming a general trend that the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat are concentrated in rice-growing areas.

Two exceptions to this general trend are noted. In West Thanjavur, rice is the main crop, but this has not led to a concentration of proletariat as in East Thanjavur. Secondly, in the Malabar region of Kerala covering the districts of Cannanore, Kozhikode, and Palghat, tenancy exists independent of widespread cultivation of rice, and more than three-fourths of cultivating households are tenants.

Both farmers and agricultural laborers are divided into a number of castes, broadly classified as Higher, Backward and Harijan Castes. Though most of the Harijans are agricultural laborers, they still constitute only a minority among agricultural laborers, except in districts where rice is the

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[2] K. C. Alexander.,"Some Characteristics of the Agrarian Social Structure of Tamil Nadu," Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 10, No. 16 (April 1978): 664-672.

main crop, especially Thanjavur, Chingleput, and South Arcot in Tamil Nadu and Alleppy and Palghat in Kerala. This large concentration of Harijans has created an ethnic homogeneity among a large section of agricultural laborers in rice-growing areas. In areas where rice is not the main crop, not only is the proportion of landless laborers smaller, but their ethnic division is greater. Farmers are also divided into a number of castes, but generally, a major section belong to the middle castes.

COMMUNIST ACTIVITY

Since the thirties, the Communist Party of India has been active in South India, trying to win the loyalty of the poor and to bring them under its leadership. The Party tried to achieve this by building mass organizations of interest groups, which, under its control, could be used as tools of revolution. Following this strategy it made attempts to organize the peasantry mainly in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu and in Alleppy, Cannanore, Kozhikode, and Palghat districts of Kerala.

An important activity of the Communist Party among the peasantry was to try to change their conservative normative orientation and create a revolutionary consciousness. Through study classes, drama, public meetings, and other media, the Party propagandized against traditional values, such as the ideology of caste, caste discrimination, deferential attitudes to higher castes, reified attitudes toward traditional institutional patterns, and the exploitative character of traditional relations. Such propaganda was more intensive in Alleppy, although it was quite substantial in T. Pundi also. Communist activities were nominal in West Thanjavur, including Orathnad, and practically non-existent in Mandya.

TABLE 3

Select Characteristics of Respondents, Areawise

CHARACTERISTICS	WEAK ORGANIZATION		STRONG ORGANIZATION	
	Mandya	Orathnad	Thiruthuraipundi	Alleppy
1. Percentage of agricultural laborers among respondents	23	26	58	68
2. Percentage of cultivators among respondents	67	66	29	32
3. Percentage of Harijans among agricultural laborers	30	53	54	36
4. Percentage of Higher Castes among cultivators	92	0	61	94
5. Percentage of literates among agricultural laborers	8	39	42	97
6. Percentage of literates among cultivators	46	76	91	100
7. Percentage of agricultural laborers without housesite	98	59	59	6
8. Percentage of cultivators cultivating rented land	0	5	28	3
9. Average monthly unemployment of agricultural laborers (days)	0	8	9	20

TABLE 4

Percentage of Respondent with Belief in Egalitarian Ideas

Sl. No.	Statement	Mandya	Orathnad	T. Pundi	Alleppy
1*	While eating food at a village hotel, one should try, as far as possible, not to sit near a lower caste person. (Disagree)	25	74	85	98
2*	Eating of beef should be discouraged. (Agree)	2	44	42	93
3*	It is better if Harijans are not allowed to enter village temples. (Disagree)	31	58	78	98
4*	If a man is poor, it is due to his fate. (Disagree)	31	50	44	95
5*	The practice of giving food to Harijans outside house is a bad practice. (Agree)	32	47	64	90
6*	All landed property should be owned by government. (Agree)	21	43	66	91
7*	The general level of intelligence of Harijans is low. (Disagree)	40	42	53	91
8*	Only those who actually till the soil should have the right to own land. (Agree)	29	67	72	67
9*	A person is born as Harijan due to the evil Karmas done by him in his previous incarnation. (Disagree)	25	37	50	98
10*	A woman should vote for whomever her husband or other elders advises her to vote. (Disagree)	64	43	58	99
11*	Those who have some other regular occupation should not be allowed to own land. (Disagree)	42	29	47	64
12*	It will not be possible to achieve equality in our country. (Disagree)	33	54	63	53
13	It is by exploiting the poor that a section of the society has become rich. (Agree)	58	69	76	62
14*	Old cows should be slaughtered. (Agree)	8	28	47	85
15	Only a revolution can solve the economic problems of our country. (Agree)	37	45	67	42
16*	One should continue the tradition of showing respect to persons of higher castes. (Disagree)	19	43	71	94

Sl. No.	Statements	Mandya	Orathnad	T. Pundi	Alleppy
17*	The children of lower castes should not mingle freely with those of higher castes. (Disagree)	54	92	90	89
18	The constiution in our country made a mistake in granting the right to vote to all adult citizens irrespective of education qualifications. (Disagree)	85	68	94	87
19*	It is foolish on one's part to depend on god alone for the achievements of what one wants in life. (Agree)	59	51	59	99

NOTE: The responses which were considered to indicate radical ideas are given in bracket at the end of each statement.

*These items were retained in the scale. The standardized item alpha of the scale is 0.88.

The continuous propaganda over three decades has changed the value orientation of the peasantry. An idea of this change can be gained from Table 4, which shows the responses given by the sample to a battery of 19 ideologically loaded statements. An ideological orientation scale was developed from these items using the Kuder-Richardson formula. This provided a reliable scale with 16 items, which are indicated with asterisks (*). The responses were scored with a value of 1 for belief in a traditional idea and a value of 2 for belief in an egalitarian idea. The mean scores obtained by the respondents from Mandya, Orathnad, T. Pundi, and Alleppy on these 16 items were 21.2, 23.9, 25.5, and 29.6. Viewed in conjunction with the pattern of responses on all 19 statements these scores indicate that the rejection of traditional ideology and acceptance of an egalitarian one on the part of the peasantry is greater in Alleppy and T. Pundi. Correlation tests indicate that the main variables that have contributed to change in ideological orientation are involvement in the activities of political parties and involvement in class organizations; though other variables like education, age, and exposure to mass media also contributed to a lesser extent.

Change in normative orientation, and the assimilation of egalitarian norms and values, provides a new framework for the oppressed and the exploited to perceive their condition, to feel dissatisfied with it, and to bring about change in the prevailing exploitative order of society. The existence of such class consciousness in some of the areas under study created among the peasantry the motivation to form class organizations like labor unions and tenants associations and to struggle for the advancement of their interests. As these activities sought to undermine the privileges and rights enjoyed by

farmers and other relatively prosperous sections of the society, these efforts by the underprivileged to restructure social relations were opposed. Farmers began to form their own organizations to defend their interests. In the following chapters, the attempts made by the different sections of the agrarian society in Tamil Nadu and Kerala -- agricultural laborers, tenants, and farmers -- to organize and promote their interests are discussed.

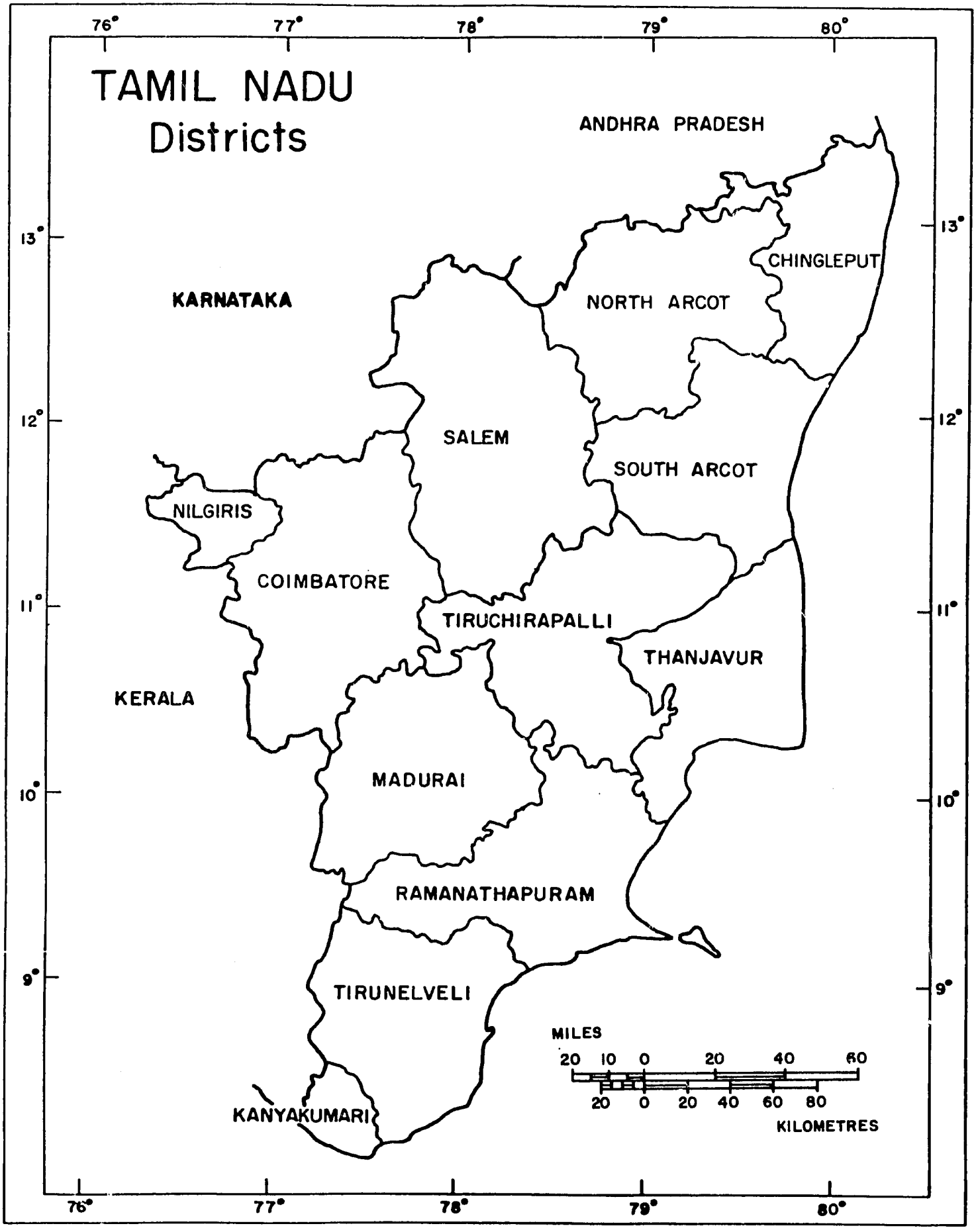
CHAPTER 3

RURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN TAMIL NADU

The peasant movements in South India are of two distinct types -- organizations of agricultural laborers and tenants and associations of farmers. The organization of laborers and tenants was initiated by the CPI, while the grouping of farmers developed as a reaction to the labor movement. The description of the origin, activities, and achievements of these movements contained in this chapter is based on information obtained through interviews with the leaders of these organizations, as very little published material exists. Tamil Nadu State was previously know as Madras and was one of the early centers of British colonial contact. After independence, agitation by the Tamil-speaking population of Madras State for special recognition of their language led to the renaming of the state.

AGRICULTURAL LABORERS AND TENANTS ORGANIZATIONS

Already in the thirties, the activities of the Indian National Congress for Independence and of parties like the South Indian Liberal Federation (Justice Party) and the Self-Respect League against the Brahmins and Caste System had created considerable social and political awakening in Tamil Nadu. The difficulties brought on by the economic depression of the thirties caused sporadic agitations addressed to large landowners and the provincial government to erupt, demanding remissions in rent and land taxes. During this period, attempts were being made to organize a communist movement in South India, and as a part of this movement communist


TAMIL NADU
Districts
ANDHRA PRADESH
KARNATAKA
KERALA
CHINGLEPUT
NORTH ARCOT
SALEM
SOUTH ARCOT
NILGIRIS
COIMBATORE
TIRUCHIRAPALLI
THANJAVUR
MADURAI
RAMANATHAPURAM
TIRUNELVELI
KANYAKUMARI
MILES
20 10 0 20 40 60
20 0 20 40 60 80
KILOMETRES
76° 77° 78° 79° 80°
13° 12° 11° 10° 9°

workers took up organizational activities among tenants and agricultural laborers in various parts of Madras Presidency, such as Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Coimbatore, and Salem. Even though organizational efforts were widespread, effective peasant organizations emerged only in East Thanjavur.

Share Croppers Movement. In East Thanjavur, the communist workers formed the first organization of tenants and agricultural laborers at Thenparai village in 1939. They agitated for abolition of serfdom (bonded labor), increase in wages, and increase in the tenant's share of the produce. Though the local landowners, particularly the authorities of two village temples in whose name most of the land was held, strongly opposed the demand and tried to suppress the organization with the help of local thugs, they did not succeed. The agitation finally led to government interference, and the temple authorities were ordered to grant moderate increases in wages and tenants' share of the produce. The incident gave a boost to organizational activities and led to the establishment of branches of the Association in many parts of East Thanjavur. As its activities grew, the Association conducted more and more agitations for higher wages for laborers and larger shares of the produce for tenants. When the landowners were not willing to accept these demands or negotiate with the Association, these agitations often had to be settled through governmental intervention.

In 1943 the name of the Association was changed from Sharecroppers Movement to Tamil Nadu Tillers Association (Tamil Nadu Vyavasayigal Sangham) and an office was established in Mannargudi. Since then the Association has agitated for the abolition of bonded labor; writing off of all outstanding arrears of debt owed by agricultural laborers; abolition of oppressive

practices like forcing laborers to drink solutions made of cow urine, cow dung, and human excreta; and the right of tenants to utilize threshing floors at places of their choice. The farmers were compelled to accept these demands, and two agreements were signed. Agitations led to similar agreements providing for increased wages, regulation of working conditions, and some mitigation of the problems of tenants.

In 1948 the Association participated in the liberation movement launched by the CPI in various parts of India and liberated a few villages in East Thanjavur for a few weeks. This led to a ban on the activities of the CPI and its frontline organizations like the Tillers Association. However, in the general election of 1952, many leaders from the CPI were elected indicating the strength of the movement in East Thanjavur. The agitations of the Tillers Association and the growing communist influence in Thanjavur led the Madras government to enact the Tanjore (Thanjavur) Tenants and Pannaiyal Protection Act in 1952, regulating tenancy, fixing fair rent, and regulating the working conditions of agricultural laborers.

Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labor Union. Achievement of secure tenancy and fixation of fair rent led to a cooling of the interests of tenants in the Tillers Association. The Party then formed a separate organization of agricultural labor called the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Laborers Union in 1956. Both tenants associations and labor unions continued to work under the leadership of the CPI and, in many places, shared leaders and physical facilities. When the CPI split and its left faction formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) in 1964, the labor union came under CPI; and the CPM formed a new organization called the Tamil Nadu Tillers Association with agricultural laborers, tenants, and small farmers as its members.

Since 1965 the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labor Union (TALU) has conducted agitations almost every year for increased wages, and these have resulted in wage agreements between laborers and farmers. In 1968 the agreement negotiated by the CPI-led Labor Union was repudiated by the CPM-led Tillers Association, which conducted agitations for a further increase in wages. In the clash that followed between farmers and laborers, one person from the farmers' side and 42 persons from laborers' side were killed. This led to the appointment of a commission to look into the problems of agricultural laborers in East Thanjavur. Upon its recommendations, the government made an upward revision of wages. Since 1972 it has become a practice to settle wage rates in East Thanjavur through negotiations between labor unions and farmers associations, often through government mediation. These have led to periodic revision of wages, regulation of working conditions, abolition of many inhumane practices, in general to all around improvement in the condition of laborers.

The CPI made attempts to organize agricultural laborers alone and in association with tenants in West Thanjavur and other parts of Tamil Nadu. However, it could not form effective organizations, and the agricultural labor movement in Tamil Nadu has remained confined to East Thanjavur.

Tamil Nadu Tillers Association. After the split, the CPM formed a joint organization of agricultural laborers, tenants and small farmers called the Tamil Nadu Tillers Association and concentrated its activities in Nagapatinam taluk of Thanjavur district. It has been making efforts to organize laborers in other parts of Tamil Nadu also, but has not met with much success.

The Association is more radical in its demands and activities than the labor union of the CPI and has resorted to violence, especially in

situations where it thought it could succeed. Its competition with the CPI union has led to rivalry and unrest in many areas.

Dravida Agricultural Laborers Association. Apart from the Communist Party, other political parties have been making endeavors to organize agricultural laborers. Since 1952 the Dravida Kazagam (DK) has been trying to form an organization of agricultural laborers and tenants as a part of its fight against Brahmin superiority. E. V. Ramasami, its leader, believed that the main problems of agricultural laborers, including their backwardness, arose from their low status in the caste hierarchy, and that the central activity of the labor union should be to remove the caste discrimination practiced by Brahmins who owned most of the land against the lower castes to which most of the agricultural laborers belonged. He advocated that the labor union should oppose the caste system along with its fight for higher wages, and regulation of tenancy. Following such a philosophy, the Association took up issues like restrictions on Harijans walking along village streets where Brahmins lived and segregation of lower castes; it conducted processions along Brahmin streets and made similar symbolic attacks against Brahmins. Because of its over-concern with caste system, the main contribution of the Association has been the social emancipation of Harijans.

Dravida Agricultural Laborers Progressive Association. The Dravida Munneta Kazagam (DMK) ruled Tamil Nadu from 1967 to 1977. Since 1971, the Party tried to organize agricultural laborers under its fold and formed the Dravida Agricultural Laborers Progressive Association in Nagapatinam taluk. The Association has only a nominal existence in Thanjavur and none in other parts of the state.

After splitting off from the DMK, the Anna Dravida Munneta Kazagam (ADMK) formed an agricultural laborers organization called the Anna Dravida

Agricultural Laborers Progressive Association in May 1973. Its activities are also in an incipient stage.

TILLERS ASSOCIATION

The enactment of tenurial legislation led to security of tenancy, fixation of fair rent, and regulation of other aspects of tenurial relations, such as the right of tenants to pay the rent either in cash or kind and the right to use threshing grounds at any place of their choice. The mitigation of their problems somewhat reduced tenants' interests in the affairs of the Tillers Association. On the other hand, the Communist Party was anxious to gain a popular holding among the semi-proletariat small farmers. This caused it to take up issues of interest to farmers, like cancelling arrears of loans owed by the farmers to cooperative societies and supplying chemical fertilizer and pesticides at subsidized prices to win their involvement in the Tillers Association. But it generally failed to attract the loyalty of the small farmers and gain a foothold among them. So in Tamil Nadu we find little organization in the middle range between tenants and laborers, on one hand, and larger farmers, on the other.

FARMERS ASSOCIATIONS

Thanjavur District Farmers Association. The activities of the CP and its frontline organizations like the Tillers Association and Labor union stimulated farmers in Thanjavur to form organizations to defend their interests. Soon after the communist insurrection at Thanjavur, the farmers formed the Thanjavur District Farmers Association. Since it was organized mainly to fight communist insurrectionary activities, the suppression of

the CPI and the establishment of peaceful conditions led to its extinction. The resurgence of communist activities in Thanjavur in 1964 stimulated the farmers to resurrect the dormant organization under the name of Paddy Producers Association. It was involved in a farmer-labor conflict in 1968 which resulted in the death of 42 agricultural laborers and their family members. This incident led to police action against its leaders and its eventual disintegration. Thereafter, a new association called the Thanjavur District Farmers Association was formed in 1973. The Association is mainly under the leadership of larger farmers belonging to non-Brahmin higher castes; but it was able to attract both large and small farmers, making it an important organized force in Thanjavur.

The Association conducts regular public meetings, conferences, processions and other activities to propagate its ideas and demands. Its propaganda was addressed to tenurial legislation, reduction on land ceilings, remission of rent, compulsory procurement of paddy from farmers, and debt relief measures for its own members. It has also mobilized farmers to meet "strikes" and similar actions sponsored by labor unions, and has believed in confronting communist violence on equal terms. The Association is anxious to build a powerful organization of farmers and has been taking the initiative to bring about some amount of cooperation among the farmers associations active in Thanjavur.

Thanjavur District Landowning Farmers Association. This association traces its history to 1925 when certain large landowners of East Thanjavur formed the Cauvery Delta Landowners Association to represent their grievances before the government. In 1968 its title was changed to Thanjavur District Landowning Farmers Association. The Association is mainly under the leader-

ship of large Brahmin farmers. When non-Brahmins acquired land, some of their leaders also tried to take leadership in the Association; and the ensuing conflict between Brahmins and non-Brahmins led to a split in 1970 in which some of the non-Brahmins organized the East Thanjavur Farmers Association. Following this, there was considerable weakening in the activities of the Thanjavur District Landowning Farmers Association, and it merged with the Thanjavur District Farmers Association in 1973.

Thanjavur District Farmers Welfare Association. This association was formed in 1926 to obtain remissions of land revenue and other levies, to get improvements in drainage and irrigation channels, and other measures. When there was conflict between landowners on the one hand and tenants and agricultural laborers on the other, the Association tried to safeguard the interests of landowners. However, the enactment of a number of tenurial laws produced disarray in the ranks of large farmers, which led to a merger in 1970 with the Thanjavur District Landowning Farmers Association and a final merger with the Thanjavur District Farmers Association in 1973.

East Thanjavur Farmers Association. This association was formed by non-Brahmin landowners after a split in Thanjavur District Landowning Farmers Association. The Association cooperated with other farmers organizations in negotiating with labor unions, holding meetings, processions, and other activities.

Tamil Nadu State Farmers Association. This association was formed in Coimbatore by large farmers belonging to higher castes and affiliated with Swatantra Party. The main objective of the Association is to advance the interests of large farmers by achieving reduction in the rates of agricultural income tax, reduction in electricity rate used for agricultural operations,

better terms of trade for agricultural products, etc. The leadership of the Association is mainly in the hands of non-Brahmin higher castes. Its activities are concentrated in Coimbatore, but it has regional affiliates in Thanjavur and Madurai districts.

Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association. Another farmers organization active in Coimbatore, this association is mainly under the leadership of middle caste farmers. Its concern is also to advance the interests of large farmers by obtaining agricultural inputs at concessional rates and better prices for agricultural products. Since 1972 it has conducted a series of agitations for obtaining various concessions from the government, which often involved actions like clashes with police and blockades of roads. These agitations made the government accede to some of its demands and led to its growth in districts surrounding Coimbatore.

The Communist Party has also tried to form an organization of small farmers and tenants, but it could not gain a hold among this section of the population. While the enactment of reformative tenurial laws mitigated the problems of tenants, the petty farmers were indifferent to the communist-sponsored Tillers Association. On the other hand, the policy of the Party and the agricultural laborers unions to strike indiscriminatively against small and large farmers pushed the small farmers to the side of the large farmers and facilitated the development of farmers organizations. This, in turn, created serious impediments to the activities of the labor unions and the Communist Party, as well as limiting the potential base for their activities.

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES

Respondents in our survey were asked about their membership in any of the above organizations. None of the respondents from Orathnad said they were members of farmers, tenants, or laborers organizations. In T. Pundi, among the 58 cultivators, eight were members of farmers associations; and among 27 laborer-cultivators, only one was a member of a tenants association.

Among the 115 laborer-respondents from T. Pundi, 59 were members of labor unions and 16 were sympathizers. Among these 75, 69 were members and sympathizers of the union under the CPI and 8 were members and sympathizers of the association under the CPM. It was noted that even in T. Pundi, union membership was limited to landless agricultural laborers; the semi-proletariat category of laborer-cultivators did not join the union. Among the landless laborers, union membership was limited to Harijans, with those belonging to backward and higher castes not joining. The inability of the union to win the loyalty of laborer cultivators and laborers belonging to backward and higher castes has limited its constituency to a narrow section of the society. Essentially, labor is organized only in areas where Harijan agricultural laborers constitute an important section of the society.

CHAPTER 4

RURAL ORGANIZATIONS IN KERALA

As in Tamil Nadu, rural organizations in Kerala are of two distinct kinds; movements of laborers and tenants, and associations of farmers. The broad pattern of development in Kerala is similar to the development in Tamil Nadu, although the organizations in Kerala have greater maturity.

AGRICULTURAL LABORERS UNIONS

It was in the thirties that agricultural laborers and tenants were first organized in Kerala. This was a period of many important social and political developments in the state. Modern education had spread among backward castes and Harijans; newspapers and magazines had appeared; contact with other parts of India and the world had become widespread. Such factors exposed the population of Kerala to new values and ideology, creating new hopes and aspirations. But in a situation where human behavior and relations were framed by the caste system, living in accordance with one's aspirations and achievements was not possible. This led the leaders of the depressed castes to form caste organizations and conduct struggles for the abolition of restrictive practices. Political parties were organized in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, and the Indian National Congress in Malabar came under the leadership of leftists like E. M. S. Namboodiripad and A. K. Gopalan. They tried to form a communist base in Kerala, first by working covertly through the Congress, and then openly. As a part of their strategy of organizing frontline organizations, communist workers began organizational efforts among the agricultural laborers and

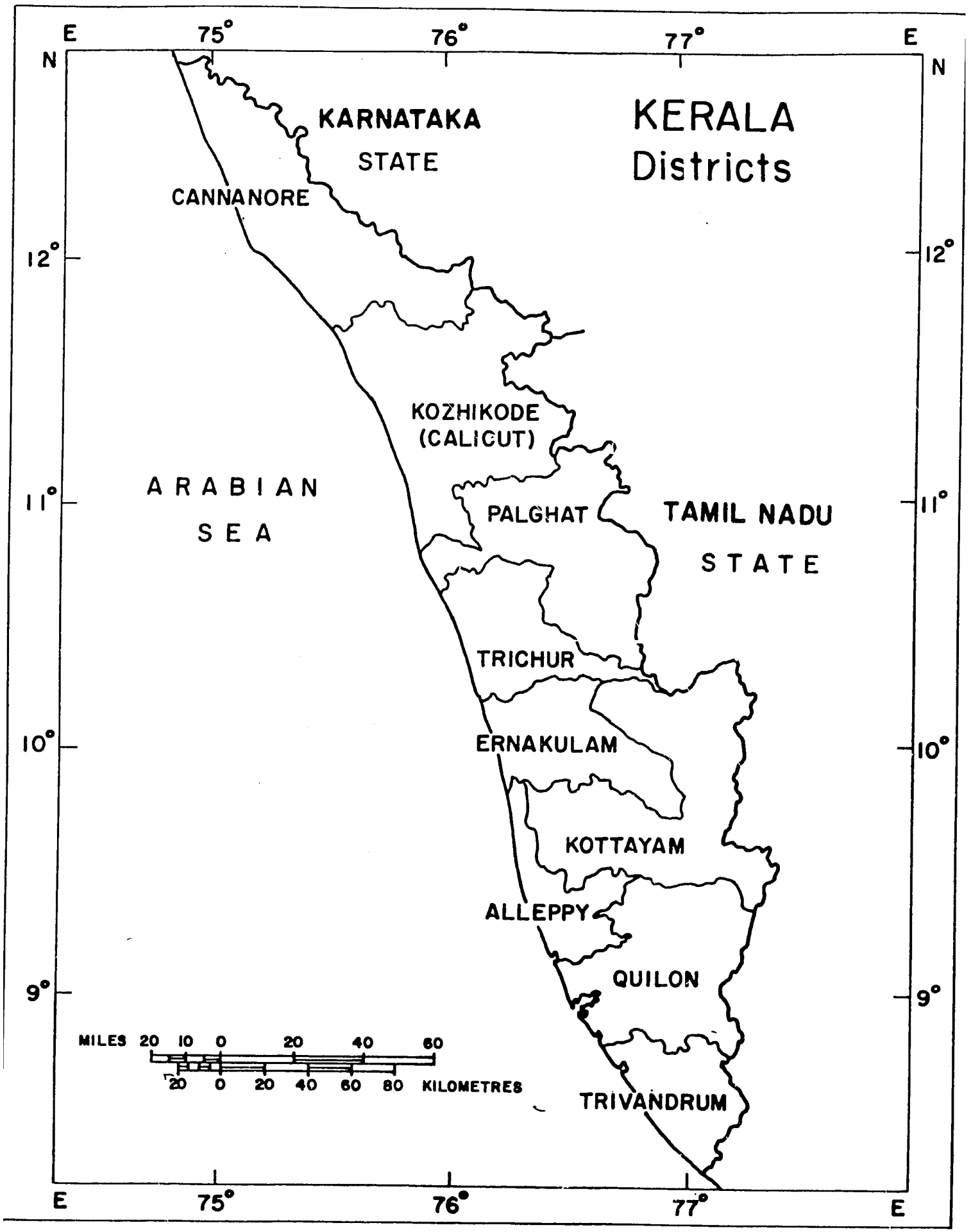
tenants in different parts of the state.

Travancore Agricultural Labor Union. By the thirties a strong labor movement emerged among the industrial laborers of Alleppy under CPI leadership. From this base, communists attempted to organize agricultural laborers in the surrounding villages. The difficult socio-economic situation created by the Second World War and the activities of caste organizations for the removal of oppressive social practices stimulated agricultural laborers to respond to union activities, and in October 1939 the first agricultural labor union was formed at Pallathuruthy near Alleppy. Subsequently, Party workers visited various parts of the surrounding Kuttanad area and organized agricultural laborers.

In the early stage, the activities of the labor union were aimed at indoctrinating rural laborers with radical communist ideology and creating the motivation to bring about change in the traditional pattern of labor-cultivator relations. Public meetings, study classes, literature, drama, poetry, and other forms of art were used to disseminate the new ideology. It was through such concerted action that a radical change in the normative orientation of the peasantry was achieved in Alleppy.

While radical ideology provided the normative basis for changing the traditional farmer-laborer relationships, many struggles were necessary for its actual realization. In 1941 the Union agitated for the first time over the issues of fixing the period of work, providing a rest interval at noon, and using standard measures for issuing wages. Cultivators responded to the agitation by beating the laborers, evicting them from their place of residence, and pursuing other forms of harassment.

During 1946-48, the Labor Union participated in the insurrectionary


KERALA
Districts
KARNATAKA
STATE
CANNANORE
KOZHIKODE
(CALICUT)
PALGHAT
TAMIL NADU
STATE
ARABIAN
SEA
TRICHUR
ERNAKULAM
KOTTAYAM
ALLEPPY
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TRIVANDRUM
MILES 20 10 0 20 40 60
20 0 20 40 60 80 KILOMETRES
75°
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activites launched by the CPI at Punnapra and Vayalar in Alleppy. This led to its suppression and to a ban on its activities until 1952.

Since 1952 the Union conducted agitations regularly for increased wages and reduced working hours. In 1952, through organized struggle, the wage of women was increased from 2½ measures (Idangazies) to 3 measures of paddy per day. In 1953 the Union forced farmers to agree to use standard measures for wages, to reduce working hours in reclaimed fields (Kayal) away from village settlements to seven hours and in other areas to eight hours, and to allow half-an-hour's rest at noon. In 1954 the Union agitated for implementation of land reforms and settlement of landless agricultural laborers. In 1955 an agitation was conducted for payment of maintenance wages (theerpu) on every alternate day instead of every third day of harvesting.

The influence of the CPI gained over the rural poor through the activities of the labor union and tillers association contributed to its success in the general election of 1957, when it came to power in Kerala. With the favorable political environment created by a communist government, the union expanded its activities to many parts of Kuttanad and surrounding areas. Demanding an increase in the wage for harvesting from one-eleventh of the produce to one-tenth, the Union organized strikes in areas dominated by small farmers and gained these wages. In 1958 strikes were conducted for reducing the working period from eight to six hours and increasing wage rates. Through agitations the Union achieved by 1977 a wage of Rs. 8 per day for male workers and one-fifth of the harvested grain as wage for harvesting -- probably the highest wage rate for agricultural laborers in the whole of India. The period of work in many areas has been reduced to

six hours.

Another nucleus of agricultural laborers unions in Kerala is Palghat district, where agricultural laborers had been members of the Tillers Association formed in 1939. With the liquidation of tenancy, the problems of the tenants were solved. The leaders of the CPM, under whom the tenants were organized, tried to persuade them to increase wages voluntarily and to regulate working hours according to the standards set by the government, but to no avail. This pressure, along with the decision of the CPM to form a statewide organization of agricultural laborers led to the formation of the Kerala State Agricultural Laborers Union in 1968 and the establishment of its branches in all parts of Kerala. In Palghat, a branch of the Union was established in 1968. It conducted agitations for higher wages, regulated work periods, and the abolition of oppressive social practices like treating laborers as degraded untouchables. These activities led to rapid growth, and Palghat became the largest center of the Union in Kerala.

After 1968, the Kerala State Agricultural Labor Union organized branches and conducted agitations against untouchability and other degrading practices and for increased wages and regulated working hours in different parts of Kerala. It established local organizations with moderate strength. District-wide membership in the Union is given in Table 5.

Since 1970, the Union has conducted agitations demanding the enactment of a social security scheme for agricultural laborers, which led to the enactment of the Kerala Agricultural Laborers Act in 1975 providing for regularity of employment, regulation of employment conditions, provision of a contributory provident fund, and a procedure for the settlement of

disputes. While labor leaders hailed the act as the "Magna Carta" of agricultural laborers, farmers perceived it as a black law.

Kerala State Agricultural Laborers Federation. After the split of the CP in 1964, the agricultural laborers unions in various parts of Kerala came under the leadership of the CPM. This led the CPI to form an organization of agricultural laborers called the Kerala State Agricultural Laborers Federation. It has some following in Alleppy and Palghat.

The National Agricultural Laborers Union. This union was organized by the Indian National Congress. It is in an incipient stage with little following and activity.

Kuttanad Agricultural Labor Union. The Union was organized by the Revolutionary Socialist Party in a few villages in Kuttanad. Its membership is limited to about 400 persons.

Farmers and Agricultural Laborers Association. Sponsored by Jan Sangh as a combined organization of farmers and agricultural laborers, the Association has some following in Palghat.

Kuttanad Ploughmen's Union. The ploughmen generally belong to impoverished families of higher castes and possess some assets in the form of a pair of bullock or often a little land, which separated them from ordinary agricultural laborers. In responding to their needs, the CPM formed a seperate organization to defend their interests. The activities of the ploughmen's union prevented the introduction of tractors into Kuttanad and was able to increase the wage for ploughing.

Kuttanad Pumping Motordrivers Union. This union was formed by motor drivers employed in connection with agricultural operations. Since most of them belonged to higher castes and their problems also were different from those

TABLE 5: Membership of Kerala State Agricultural Labor Union, by District

District	YEARS 1970	1971	1973
Cannanore	2,703	2,000	5,000
Kozhikode	5,000	7,250	14,000
Palghat	11,000	10,000	42,000
Trichur	--	7,000	7,200
Ernakulam	2,085	3,000	6,000
Kottyam	3,000	3,000	12,000
Iddukki	--	--	--
Alleppy	17,400	20,500	35,000
Quilon	200	1,000	2,000
Malapuram	2,000	1,000	4,000
Trivandrum	800	3,000	6,000
	44,188	57,750	133,200

Source: Membership figures from 1970 and 1971 are from The Report Submitted to the Kerala State Agricultural Labor Union, and those for 1973 are from The Report Submitted to the Third Annual Conference of the Kerala State Agricultural Labor Union.

of ordinary laborers, they formed a separate organization.

Kuttanad Headload Workers Union. This was formed by headload workers, who generally belonged to higher castes.

TENANTS ASSOCIATIONS

Malabar Tillers Association. In Malabar more than three-fourths of the cultivating households were tenants. Their social and economic problems led communist workers to organize them and to work for their emancipation. In 1935 communists working through the Congress Socialist Party organized the tenants in Kolacherry village, Taliparambu taluk, and advocated abolition of non-rent extractions and receipts for payment of rent. In course of time, similar associations were formed in many parts of Malabar; and to unite such loyal organizations, the Malabar Tillers Association was formed in 1937. The Association demanded security of the rights of tenants and hutment dwellers, establishment of fair rent, abolition of non-rent extractions, achievement of higher wages for agricultural laborers, and abolition of customary practices treating laborers as degraded beings. Since its inception the Association has adopted a policy of violent agitations, often leading to clashes with the police, criminal proceedings and the death to some of its workers. Through the activities of the Association, the CPI became a mass organization in Malabar.

Since the forties attempts were also made to organize tenants associations in Cochin and Travancore, but without success.

Kerala Tillers Association. In 1956 Kerala State was formed by joining Malabar district of Madras state to Travancore-Cochin state. Following this, the tillers associations working in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore

areas were amalgamated and a statewide organization called the Kerala Tillers Association was formed.

The influence of the Tillers Association and the Labor Union substantially helped the CPI come to power in Kerala in 1957. Consequently, the Tillers Association demanded that tenancy be abolished and that tenants be made the owners of land they tilled. This led to the enactment of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Act in 1959, conforming to the demands of the Association. Even though the act was subsequently struck down by the Kerala High Court, the power of the Tillers Association enabled tenants to keep possession of their land and eventually become owners after the Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act of 1969. The act also provided that landless persons living on other people's land become the owners of a small area of land surrounding their huts. Further, it substantially reduced the size of land that could be held by a family. The enactment of these measures reduced the power of rural gentry, on the one hand, and improved the conditions of tenants and agricultural laborers on the other, and thus made conditions favorable for the emergence of egalitarian social relations in the countryside.

The transformation of the tenants into landowners affected the class character of the Tillers Association so the CPM tried to use it to champion the cause of small farmers -- raising demands that farmers owning less than five acres of land be exempted from the purview of the "levy system," that a moratorium be declared on all loans owed to cooperative societies and government agencies, that chemical fertilizers and pesticides be distributed at subsidized rates, etc. But these demands did not enthuse the small farmers. Furthermore, the aggressive activities conducted by the CPM

through its labor union for higher wages and reduced working hours alienated the small farmers in areas like Palghat where they were still affiliated with the Party. This led small farmers to form their own organizations to fight against communist activities.

FARMERS ASSOCIATIONS

All-Kuttanad Farmers Association. The aggressive activities launched by the agricultural labor union in various parts of Kuttanad in 1957 aroused the formation of a number of ad hoc associations to carry on agricultural tasks like harvesting when agricultural laborers abstained from work. The apprehensions of the farmers about the labor union and the CPI led them to give formal structure to these associations so that farmers could be mobilized when the situation demanded it. Thus a number of farmers associations were formed in different parts of Kuttanad during 1958-59; and to unite them, the All-Kuttanad Farmers Association was formed in 1963. The farmers were organized through their own efforts, without the help of any outside agencies; but the Association developed indirect linkages with the Kerala Congress, the most conservative party in Kerala, and it emerged as an important organized force to defend the interests of farmers in general and Kuttanad farmers in particular.

Palghat Farmers Association. The formation of a separate agricultural labor union under the CPM and the agitations it conducted, stimulated farmers who had been CPM sympathizers and members of the Tillers Associations to form an organization called the Palghat Farmers Association in 1971 to defend their interests. It grew rapidly, and by 1974 it had organized about 100 branches and emerged as a strong anti-communist force in Palghat.

Kerala Farmers Federation. In 1972 the Kerala government introduced the Kerala Agricultural Laborers Bill conferring many privileges upon agricultural laborers and placing burdens upon farmers. Since it seriously affected the interests of farmers, the All-Kuttanad Farmers Association and Palghat Farmers Association jointly organized a number of demonstrations and other acts of protest. These had some effect, and government exempted farmers owning less than a hectare from the provision of the bill. However, the introduction of the bill and other measures adopted by the government brought home to farmers that unless they worked as an organized pressure group capable of exercising influence at political level, their very existence was in danger. Under the circumstances, the leaders of the Kuttanad Farmers Association and the Palghat Farmers Association joined together and formed a statewide organization called the Kerala Farmers Federation to work as an independent organization articulating the interests of farmers. Even though the Federation is under the leadership of farmers and not affiliated to any political party, it has forged informal links with Kerala Congress and emerged as a formidable political force. During the 1977 general election, a number of its leaders were elected to the state legislative assembly, and its president was inducted into the state cabinet. By exercising pressure, it thwarted the implementation of the Kerala Agricultural Laborers Act in 1975.

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Among the 79 cultivator respondents in the sample from Alleppy, 38 were members and 9 were sympathizers of the farmers associations.

Among the 171 labor respondents in the sample from Alleppy, 110

were union members and 36 were sympathizers. Of these 146, 108 were members and sympathizers of the CPM union. Analysis of the caste background of the union members indicates that the majority of the laborers belonging to higher castes, more than three-fourths of those belonging to backward castes, and more than 90 percent of Harijan laborers were union members. The finding that separate unions were formed for special groups like ploughmen and headload workers, who belong to higher castes, indicates the continued influence of caste in the formation of unions. However, the fact that a majority of higher caste laborers became union members also suggests that the divisive influence of caste could be overcome and laborers belonging to higher and lower castes could be united in the union.

But the peasantry in Kerala is still divided into opposing political camps, with agricultural laborers primarily under the leadership of the Communist Party and small and large farmers under the leadership of strong anti-communist organizations. Even though small farmers form a major section of the peasantry, the anti-farmer activities pursued by the Communist Party through labor unions have made them its bitter opponents. This has considerably narrowed the base of the Communist Party in Kerala; and its influence has eroded, particularly in areas like Palghat where, earlier, it was the most popular political party. The emergence of farmers organizations primarily as a reaction to communist activities defeated the strategy of the Party to form an alliance between rural proletariat and small farmers. Farmers associations have proved to be a powerful force limiting the scope for growth of communist activities among the peasantry.

CHAPTER 5

CHANGES IN AGRARIAN RELATIONS

The activities of tillers associations and labor unions led to changes in tenurial, farmer-laborer and traditional service relations. As will be seen in this chapter, activities also led to polarization of the peasantry into antagonistic political camps.

TENURIAL RELATIONS

Reform of tenurial relations was an important objective of tillers associations in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The activities of the association in Kerala led to the enactment of the most radical agrarian legislation in India. It liquidated tenancy and conferred proprietory rights on tenants, transforming them into landowners. As more than three-fourths of the cultivating households in the northern districts of Kerala were tenants, liquidation of tenancy led to a radical reorganization of social relations and ended the power of landlords in social life. In addition, poor landless families who did not own even a house-site and lived on other people's land were given the right to a parcel of land around their huts. The vast mass of landless persons, who formed about one-third of the population, were thus provided with at least a place to erect a hut which greatly reduced their dependence on local farmers. Third, the maximum extent of land that could be held by a single family was substantially reduced, further limiting the power of the rural gentry. By trimming the power and resources of the landed elite on the one hand and promoting the status of the weak on the other, these legislative

acts provided a material basis for the emergence of egalitarian relations among different sections of the rural community in Kerala.

In contrast, the transformation in tenurial relations in Tamil Nadu has been limited. There has been reformation of tenancy, but not its liquidation; rents have been reduced and security of tenants rights has been established. Land ceiling legislation has been enacted, but large landowners were able to keep their land through certain loopholes. There has been no legislation to benefit the large mass of landless persons, a major portion of whom are Harijan agricultural laborers living on other people's land.

FARMER-LABORER RELATIONS

There is considerable variation in the pattern of farmer-laborer relations in areas where peasants are organized and where they are not organized. In Mandya district of Karnataka state, Coimbatore, Salem, South Arcot, and most other parts of Tamil Nadu where laborers are not organized, working hours are unregulated; and laborers must address farmers with honorific titles and exhibit various signs of respect (removing head coverings, standing in a bent posture) in the presence of farmers. Untouchability is strictly observed. Harijans are discriminated against in village tea shops. Punishing laborers by beating them and imposing other forms of corporal punishment is not uncommon. Disputes between laborers and cultivators, if they occur, are generally settled by traditional village leaders and other local institutions dominated by farmers.

Farmer-laborer relations have undergone substantial change in Kerala. The working conditions of agricultural laborers have been regulated; the

observance of untouchability and other oppressive social practices has mostly disappeared. The deferential structure wherein laborers were expected to show various symbols of respect to farmers has disappeared.

In order to draw a comparative picture of farmer-laborer relations prevailing in areas where laborers are organized and areas where they are not, responses were sought to a set of 25 statements touching upon patron-client relations, intercaste relations, and working conditions of agricultural laborers. The responses show that in Mandya and Orathnad, relations between farmers and laborers continue to be very inegalitarian. The patron-client relation and resultant dependency of laborers on farmers continues to be strong. Compared to this general picture of stagnation, some change has occurred in T. Pundi. But change of a fundamental nature has occurred only in Alleppy (Kerala,) where patron-client relations, the practice of untouchability, and deferential tokens in behavior have almost completely disppeared. This has changed the entire color of farmer-laborer relations in Kerala, making them more egalitarian, as seen in Table 6.

JAJAMANI RELATIONS

Jajamani relations, which link different sections of the village community through the exchange of goods and services, are an important feature of rural social structure. At the heart of the jajamani system is the relation between farmers and certain servicing castes -- particularly barbers, washermen, carpenters, and blacksmiths. Among these, the services of the barber and washerman have both utilitarian and ritual importance. A ritual hair-cutting or shaving was a necessary component of important ceremonies like funerals and marriages. Similarly, a wash-

erman not only cleaned clothes, but made them ritually pure. Only by wearing clothes washed by the washerman could the ritual impurity of a woman (caused by menses or childbirth) be removed. These services were rendered at the patron's house by the same person on a more or less continuous basis for which payments were made in kind usually at the time of harvesting.

To evaluate the nature of jajamani relations in different areas, information was collected on the length of service, place of service, mode of payment, and time of payment to the village barber, washerman, carpenter and blacksmith. Receiving continuous service from the same person for at least nine years, receiving service at one's own house and making payment in kind at the time of harvest were considered indicators of the continuation of jajamani relations. In Table 7 the percentage of farmer respondents who maintained jajamani relations with the four servicing castes is shown. These data show that among the four areas, jajamani relations have nearly disappeared in Alleppy and have diminished in T. Pundi. The least change has occured in Orathnad and Mandya. Second, among the four elements of jajamani relations that were examined, the magnitude of change has been greatest in regard to the two primarily utilitarian services (carpenters and blacksmiths), and less with respect to the ritually oriented services.

POLITICAL POLARIZATION

Agricultural laborers and tenants in South India were not only socially oppressed and economically exploited, but were deprived of any share of political power in the village community. The absence of political consciousness, belief in the reified character of institutional structures, and fatalistic attitude toward life and reality prevented

the peasantry from participating in political activities. In Mandya, where peasants have not been organized there still is little participation of peasants in political activities. On the other hand, in T. Pundi, Alleppy, Palghat, and other areas where peasants are organized, the activities of tenants associations and labor unions have transformed this non-politicized section into a politically articulate group, imbued them with a revolutionary consciousness and led them to engage in collective action to advance their class interests.

The politicization of the peasantry has been a major achievement of the activities of peasant organizations. This has not always worked to the success of the sponsors of peasant organizations though. Liquidation of tenancy in Kerala and its regulation in Tamil Nadu through security of tenancy and fixation of fair rent has dampened the interest of tenants in organizational activities. The agitations that the CP conducted through the Agricultural Labor Union for higher wages and improved working conditions of agricultural laborers adversely affected the interests of both large and petty farmers -- alienating the petty farmers from the Party and pushing them to the side of the large farmers.

As a result, the activities of labor unions stimulated farmers to form their own organizations to defend their interests. Thus, the farmers in Alleppy formed the All-Kuttanad Farmers Association; in Palghat they formed the Palghat Farmers Association. The aggressive activities of the laborer union and pro-labor policy of the state government led the two organizations to form a statewide Kerala Farmers Federation. In Tamil Nadu also, the activities of labor unions alienated the petty farmers from the Communist Party and pushed them into the camp of large farmers. In both areas, this

Table 6: INDICATORS OF TRANSFORMATION OF FARMER-LABORER RELATIONS AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS PRACTICING EGALITARIAN RELATIONS.

STATEMENTS	Mandya (N=248)	Orathnad (N=200)	T. Pundi (N=200)	Alleppy (N=250)
PATRON-CLIENT RELATION				
1.* Do laborers receive gifts from farmers on festive occasions? (No)	59	54	69	93
2.* Do laborers present gifts to farmers on ceremonial occasions like marriage? (No)	90	60	90	95
3.* Do laborers render free service to farmers on some ceremonial occasions? (No)	39	58	76	79
4.* Do you think that the laborer would be concerned if his master becomes seriously ill? (No)	74	63	75	99
5. Do farmers in the past take as much care in the welfare of their laborers as they took for their own family members? (No)	6	59	63	60
6. Do farmers render help to laborers at serious sickness? (No)	23	68	74	68
7. Do farmers render help to laborers for children's education? (No)	51	93	83	92
8. Do farmers render help to laborers for building house? (No)				
INTER-CASTE RELATION				
9.* Would a farmer and laborer eat together at a village teashop? (Yes)	33	30	88	99
10.* Would a farmer enter the house of a laborer for some ceremony at the latter's house? (Yes)	23	12	19	70
11. Are the laborers allowed to enter a farmer's house? (Yes)	40	9	28	85
12. Is the laborer required to wash the vessel after eating? (No)	17	1	27	19
13.* Is the laborer given food outside at a farmer's house? (No)	22	6	17	91

STATEMENTS	Mandya	Orathnad	T. Pundi	Alleppy
14.* Do laborers address farmers respectfully? (No)	7	4	11	85
15.* Do laborers show some sign of respect when they meet farmers? (No)	46	20	57	94
16.* Do farmers address laborers in third person? (No)	87	52	87	99
17.* Do farmers use degrading words while talking to laborers? (No)	86	57	92	97
WORKING CONDITIONS				
18. Is there a fixed time of work for laborers? (Yes)	94	36	53	99
19.* Are the hours of work carefully observed? (Yes)	63	24	33	96
20.* Does the laborer get extra pay for doing work more than the fixed hours? (Yes)	73	63	83	100
21. Is the wage rate decided by farmers alone? (Farmer, laborer and public authority jointly decide wage rates)	75	53	57	97
22.* Where is the labourer paid wage? (place of work)	48	9	36	90
23.* When is the laborer generally paid the wage? (immediately after work)	99	85	90	97
24. Do farmers victimize laborers for participating in union activities? (No)	100	97	92	94
25.* Do farmers in this place prefer for employment laborers with a particular ideology? (No)	99	51	54	93

Table 7: PERCENTAGE OF CULTIVATORS MAINTAINING JAJAMANI RELATIONS

ITEMS	Mandya (N=168)	Orathnad (N=131)	T. Pundi (N=58)	Alleppy (N=79)
BARBER'S SERVICE				
Length of service (more than 9 years)	60	85	57	--
Place of servicing (patron's house)	49	43	57	52
Mode of payment of wage (kind)	63	87	59	8
Time of Payment of wage (Harvesting time)	64	87	59	9
WASHERMAN'S SERVICE				
Length of service (more than 9 years)	62	93	59	--
Place of servicing (patron's house)	69	93	74	44
Mode of payment of wage (kind)	64	95	65	7
Time of payment of wage (harvesting)	64	98	67	7
CARPENTER'S SERVICE				
Length of service (more than 9 years)	48	92	24	--
Place of servicing (patron's house)	31	25	17	--
Mode of payment of wage (kind)	51	95	24	--
Time of payment of wage (harvesting)	51	95	24	--
BLACKSMITH'S SERVICE				
Length of servicing (more than 9 years)	48	89	22	--
Place of servicing (patron's house)	30	24	16	16
Mode of payment of wage (kind)	52	93	22	--
Time of payment of wage (harvesting)	51	94	22	--

has served to restrict the base of the Party to agricultural laborers and has prevented the forging of an alliance between the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat. This division into petty landowners and landless agricultural laborers was thus widened by the activities of the labor unions, and the poor peasantry have been broken into two hostile sections. The Party has reached a turning point: whether its activities on the agrarian front will lead to self defeat or to the expansion of its base in rural areas will depend on how it solves this dilemma.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing chapters the background for the development of peasant organizations, their activities and achievements, and their impact on social structure were seen. These findings can now be discussed in reference to the hypothesis about the relative influence of different factors on the development of peasant organizations.

Based upon the different views proposed by scholars, it was hypothesized that peasant movements are caused by commercialization of agriculture and subsequent deterioration in the economic condition of the peasantry, by the cultivation of crops in which income could not be increased through the application of capital, by a concentration of rural proletariat in rice-cultivating areas, by the continuation of peasant institutions with their scope for mobilization, and by a change in the normative orientation of the peasantry, which leads to their perception of traditional institutions as illegitimate. It was argued that the division of the peasantry into farmers and agricultural laborers and their further division into different castes would adversely affect the development of organizations embracing all sections of the peasantry and would limit development to areas where caste and occupational homogeneity exists among a large section of the peasantry.

In Kerala, Tamil Nadu and other parts of South India, attempts to organize peasantry have been made by the Communist Party of India. Through labor unions and tenants associations, radical ideas were propagated among the peasantry, motivating them to work for the improvement of their

conditions. The activities of these organizations led to periodic increase in the wage of laborers, regulation of their working condition, and regulation of tenancy in Tamil Nadu and its abolition in Kerala.

After achieving a mitigation of the problems of tenants, the party tried to champion the cause of small farmers, but, this section of the peasantry was not attracted to it. On the other hand, the aggressive activities of agricultural labor unions under communist leadership, conducted against small and large farmers, pushed the farmers including the small ones, away from the Party to the opposite camp added to the development of the farmers organizations fighting against the communists.

There are varying degrees of development found among peasants organizations in different parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Even though the Communist Party attempted to organize agricultural laborers and tenants in almost all parts of Tamil Nadu, these efforts were most successful in East Thanjavur. The Party has also achieved some measure of success in organizing the laborers and tenants in South Arcot and in rice-growing parts of Tiruchirappalli. But in districts like Salem, Coimbatore, North Arcot, and Madurai, even after prolonged work, only nominal organizations have developed. In Kerala, the main centers of organized agricultural labor are Alleppy and Palghat districts. Malabar area became a stronghold of tenants associations. In spite of the efforts of the Party, only a small portion of agricultural laborers are unionized in other parts of the state.

This pattern supports our hypothesis that rice cultivation leads to a concentration of rural proletariat, which offers greater potential for the development of peasant organizations. In the districts of Thanjavur, Chingleput and South Arcot, in Tamil Nadu which have widespread rice culti-

vation, the proportion of agricultural laborers and tenants is larger than in other districts. Moreover, the majority of agricultural laborers in these areas are Harijans, creating ethnic homogeneity in the caste background of a significant section of the laborers. On the other hand, in districts like Salem, Coimbatore, North Arcot, where rice is not widely cultivated, the percentage of tenants and agricultural laborers in the population is low. In Kerala, the districts of Alleppy and Palghat, where rice is the main crop, have a larger proportion of agricultural laborers and Harijans than other districts.

There are some exceptions to this general relation. In Malabar area, covering the districts of Cannanore, Kozhikode, and Palghat, both rice and other crops are cultivated. Here a powerful peasant organization has developed, primarily embracing tenants, who constituted more than three-fourths of the cultivating households. This indicates that peasants organizations may develop in areas where a concentration of rural proletariat exists, independent of the cultivation of rice. The second exception is the absence of a strong organization in West Thanjavur and South Arcot, where rice is the principal crop and where the Communist Party did make an effort to organize the peasantry. In this connection it might be noted that even though rice is the principal crop in South Arcot, its cultivation is not as wide (37 percent of cropped area) as in Thanjavur (78 percent of cropped area). Second, the percentage of cultivators among workers is considerably higher in South Arcot (49 percent) than in Thanjavur (36 percent), while the percentage of agricultural laborers in South Arcot (29 percent) is less than in Thanjavur (33 percent). Finally, the percentage of households cultivating rented

land was only 8 percent in South Arcot, as opposed to 33 percent in Thanjavur. All this indicates that even though there is a large mass of rural proletariat in South Arcot, it is not as broad a category as in Thanjavur. Apart from these differences, in the social structure, it might also be noted that the Communist Party only initiated organizational efforts in South Arcot in the 1950s, by which time they already had a powerful grass-roots movement in Thanjavur. And because of the absence of an adequate number of capable Party workers in South Arcot, the activities of the Party among the laborers are weaker there than in Thanjavur. Thus, the weakness of the peasant movement in South Arcot seems to be the outcome of a less intensive effort by the Party to organize the proletariat in a less congenial social situation.

The absence of a strong peasant movement in West Thanjavur deserves explanation also. Significant differences exist in the concentration of rural proletariat in East Thanjavur and West Thanjavur. In East Thanjavur, the percentage of agricultural laborers (20 percent) in the population is higher than in West Thanjavur (14 percent) while that of cultivators is less in East Thanjavur (14 percent) than in West Thanjavur (24 percent). The percentage of Harijans in the population is also higher in East Thanjavur (33 percent) than in the West (21 percent). This difference in the variation of rural proletariat between the two regions is also reflected in the percentage of cultivators, labor-cultivators, and laborers among the respondents from T. Pundi (East Thanjavur) and Orathnad (West Thanjavur). Among the 200 T. Pundi respondents, 29 percent were cultivators, 13 percent were labor-cultivators and 58 percent laborers. Among an equal number of respondents from Orathnad, 66 percent were cul-

tivators, 9 percent labor-cultivators, and 25 percent laborers. The concentration of rural proletariat that exists in East Thanjavur, is just not paralleled in West Thanjavur. Therefore, the base on which peasant organizations could develop in West Thanjavur is not as strong as the base provided in East Thanjavur. The fact that labor unions and tenants associations developed independent of rice cultivation in areas with a concentration of rural proletariat, and did not develop in predominantly rice-cultivating areas without a concentration of rural proletariat suggests that the concentration of rural proletariat is a critical factor. It was the absence of this factor in areas like Coimbatore, Salem, North Arcot, Trivandrum, and Kottayam that led to the failure of Communist attempts to organize the peasantry in these areas.

Another thesis relating geographic variation to the development of peasant organizations that can be examined from our data is the role of the penetration of capitalism, commercialization of agriculture, and resultant disintegration of social relations, leading to a decisive deterioration in the condition of the peasantry. In Tamil Nadu, districts like Coimbatore, Salem, and North Arcot have cultivation of commercial crops and in these districts, neither agricultural laborers nor tenants have been organized. In Kerala, commercial crops are cultivated in the eastern part of the state, particularly in the districts of Kottayam, and Cannanore. In these areas agricultural laborers either are not organized or are only nominally organized. On the other hand, it was primarily in rice-growing areas, and indeed in relation to activities involved in rice cultivation, that agricultural laborers and tenants have been organized. Since rice is a subsistence crop, the thesis that commercialization of

agriculture, disintegration of traditional social structure, and resulting deterioration in the conditions of the peasantry leads to the development of peasant movements is not found to be true in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. On the contrary, it was noted that an important objective of labor unions and tenants associations was to work against the traditional bondage that perpetuated the exploitation of the poor. Efforts were made to free the poor from the fetters of traditional relations such as the patron-client relation, jajamani relations, and bonded labor system.

The theory that the inability of a cropping system to meet the competing demands of farmers and laborers leads to the development of peasant movements may also be considered in relation to their differential development in differnt parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In these states, all of the crops are seasonal and are cultivated primarily for domestic consumption. The application of capital in their production is limited, leaving land and labor as the main source of income. Efforts to increase productivity have been limited to rice, so only rice cultivation provided some possibility for meeting the competing needs of farmers and laborers. Today, wage rates for agricultural laborers are higher in the rice-cultivating areas, and it was due to increases in the productivity of rice that farmers were able to accept the laborers' periodic demands for increased wages and improved working conditions. Such flexibility did not exist in other areas. In terms of this theory, the potential for the development of peasant movements, while it existed in all areas, would be greater in non-rice growing areas. But empirically, the peasant movement in Tamil Nadu and Kerala is concentrated in rice-growing centers, with little success in other areas. Thus, the thesis does not hold in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

It has been argued by some that a miserable objective condition in itself would lead to the development of peasant organization. The condition of agricultural laborers is the most miserable in Mandya. Most of them did not even own a house-site, received very low wages, were not able to consume two square meals a day, and were treated as untouchables. But there have been no endeavors, nor even a concern on their part to change the pattern of relations which placed them in such a situation. And even though the CP attempted to organize agricultural laborers in all parts of Tamil Nadu, outside of East Thanjavur not even Harijan agricultural laborers responded to organizational efforts. Even in areas like South Arcot, where agricultural laborers exist in large numbers, no strong labor movement has emerged. In fact, the absence of a peasant movement worth its name in most parts of India, in a situation where the distribution of assets has been very unequal and the poor live in abject poverty and are the victims of many oppressive social practices, is the best disproof of the argument that a difficult objective situation in itself will lead to the development of a radical peasant movement.

In addition to favorable objective conditions, it has been proposed that there should be a transformation in the conservative normative orientation of the peasantry so they would be imbued with a motivation to restructure the oppressive social relations. In this connection it is noteworthy that in Mandya and Orathnad, where laborers are not organized, there has been little change in the conservative normative orientation of the peasantry. In T. Pundi, where laborers and tenants are moderately well organized, there has been a recognizable amount of change. In Alleppy where laborers have been effectively organized, there has been a more or

less complete transformation in the value orientation of the peasantry. Modern and egalitarian values have replaced conservative values, ideas and norms. With this transformation, traditional practices such as being addressed with degrading words became insufferable to agricultural laborers in Kerala; and it led them to agitate against such practices. In the absence of such egalitarian beliefs, laborers in Mandya and most parts of Tamil Nadu have remained unconcerned by the many humiliating practices like not being served inside village tea shops, or being served in coconut shells and earthen dishes. In the absence of a replacement of the traditional normative orientation by egalitarian values and norms and the creation of a class consciousness, agricultural laborers and other sections of the peasantry have not been able to shed their false consciousness, to perceive the exploitative character of social relations. In other words, an inegalitarian social structure by itself would not stimulate the peasantry to embark upon measures for the redress of their grievances.

The question this raises is how such a change in normative orientation has occurred in the peasantry in Alleppy and T. Pundi, but not in other areas. One view holds that a miserable objective situation in itself generates a feeling of dissatisfaction and an urge to change. On the other hand, it has been proposed that changes in normative orientation have to be created through propaganda and associated activities by a radical party. We have seen that the extremely miserable condition of agricultural laborers in Mandya, Orathnad and other parts of Tamil Nadu did not change the conservative normative orientation of the peasantry nor create in them an urge to bring about change. On the other hand,

there was some amount of change in the normative orientation of T. Pundi peasantry and almost complete change of the traditional norms and values on the part of Alleppy peasantry. It was the propaganda and other activities of the CP through labor unions and tenants associations which brought about a change in the normative orientation of the peasantry.

However, the failure of communist propaganda to take root in areas like Coimbatore, Salem, and Madurai even after prolonged activity of the Party compared to its success in East Thanyavur and Alleppy indicates that attempts to create a radical consciousness is likely to be more successful in areas where there is a concentration of the proletariat.

It was also hypothesized that effective mobilization of poor peasantry is dependent upon the development of solidary organizations and that the division of the peasantry on caste and occupational bases would impede the development of such organizations. Since the poor, particularly the agricultural laborers, belong to higher, backward and Harijan castes, the development of labor unions would involve uniting laborers of these different castes and integrating them into a cohesive, solidary organization. It was noted that even though the CP has been active in T. Pundi and other parts of East Thanjavur for almost four decades, trying to organize agricultural laborers, so far it has been able to win the support only of Harijan agricultural laborers.

Agricultural laborers belonging to backward and higher castes neither joined the union nor became sympathetic to the Communist Party. The divisive force of caste thus prevented the proletariat from uniting. This restricted the social base of the labor unions and tillers associations to Harijans and, therefore, to areas where Harijans form a major

section of laborers and tenants. Thus, in T. Pundi, while the greater proportion of Harijans among agricultural laborers in East Thanjavur provided a wide base for the organization of laborers, the smallness of their numbers in other areas has limited the base for such development.

In Alleppy, agricultural laborers are also divided into Harijan, backward, and higher castes. As we have found, a majority of higher caste laborers and more than three-fourths of backward caste laborers were members of labor unions, apparently indicating that it has become possible for the CP to unite laborers across the caste boundaries. It should be considered that breaking through the caste barrier was facilitated by transformation of the traditional norms and values that sanctioned caste distinctions and discrimination and by the creation of a radical consciousness emphasizing the unity of the laboring class. Therefore, even though caste can be a powerful barrier to the development of labor unions and other peasant organizations, it is possible to overcome the divisive force of caste provided there is a transformation in traditional normative orientation.

In Alleppy, the CP could unite laborers belonging to different castes into a solidary organization to some extent, but the institution of caste manifested its influence in certain ways. First, the percentage of union laborers from Harijans, backward, and higher castes is inversely related to the status of the caste in the social hierarchy. Second, the influence of caste has led laborers belonging to higher castes and working in specific agricultural tasks to form separate labor unions. The continued manifestation of caste in the formation of class organizations, even where a great amount of change has occurred in normative orientation

and where communist influence has been intensive and pervasive for the past three decades, reflects the tenacity and flexibility of the institution of caste. The evidence from Alleppy, on the one hand, suggests the possibility of overcoming the divisive influence of caste, but also indicates the strength and vitality of the caste system.

The divisive force of caste has also operated in the formation of farmers organizations. In Thanjavur, Brahmin farmers formed the Thanjavur Landowning Farmers Association; non-Brahmin higher castes formed the Thanjavur District Farmers Association; and the middle castes formed the East Thanjavur Farmers Association. In Coimbatore, non-Brahmin higher castes formed the Tamil Nadu Farmers Association and middle caste farmers formed the Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association. In Kerala, farmers also belong to different castes, but the dominance of Christians in Kuttanad area made the mobilization of farmers easier. In Palghat, a large section of farmers belong to the Izhava caste, thus providing some degree of ethnic cohesion. Even though the farmers remain divided in their leadership, the very powerful and direct threat from the labor union and the CPM has led the Kerala farmers to ignore their caste differences and join together.

The poor peasantry was also divided into two groups of laborers and of small farmers who employed them. The strategy of the CP envisaged the creation of a unity of interest among agricultural laborers and poor farmers by organizing them, even if separately, under its leadership and in the process winning loyalty of the majority of the rural population that would enable it to come to political power in an electoral democracy. Guided by such a strategy, both the CPM and CPI tried to organize the small farmers, but they did not respond. It was

the organization of agricultural laborers by the CPI and CPM and their agitations against the interests of both small and large farmers which led both small and large farmers to join together and form their own organizations to fight communist activities on the agrarian front. In Kerala, the first such organization of farmers was formed at Alleppy, the very area where the agricultural labor movement had its origin.

Farmers organized in direct response to the aggressive activities pursued by labor unions for achieving higher wages and reduced working hours. Since farmers were educated and politically articulate, leaders emerged from with their ranks, and they formed organizations without the support of outside agencies. Uniting the various anti-communist farmers organizations, the All-Kuttanad Farmers Association was formed in 1963. The continued threat from communist activities led to its growth, and the Association emerged as a powerful organization championing the cause of farmers by facing the challenges posed by the Communist Party.

In Palghat, most of the cultivating households were tenants who became petty landowners after the enactment of tenurial legislations and continued to be loyal to CPM. But they were alienated from the Party after labor unions were organized in 1968 and formed the Palghat Farmers Association in 1971. The leadership of this association also emerged from the ranks of the farmers, and it became an important rallying point of small farmers and an important anti-communist center in Palghat. The continued threat to the interest of farmers from the labor unions, communist parties and pro-labor policies of the state government brought the leaders of All-Kuttanad Farmers Association and the Palghat Farmers

Association together, and they jointly organized the statewide Kerala Farmers Federation in 1973. Since then it has forged informal links with Kerala Congress, the most conservative party in Kerala, and emerged as a powerful organized anti-Communist force.

In Tamil Nadu, the Communist strategy also envisaged the creation of an alliance between the laborers and the petty farmers. It tried to advocate the interests of small farmers and bring them under the Tillers Association, thus forging a unity of interest between landless agricultural laborers and small farmers. However, the small farmers did not respond to the efforts of the CPI and CPM to form farmers organizations, and the influence of the Communist Party was limited mainly to agricultural laborers. As in Kerala, the union policy of conducting agitations indiscriminately against small and large farmers pushed the small farmers in Thanjavur to the side of the large farmers and led them to form their own organizations to fight against communist activities. Soon after the communist "liberation struggle" of 1948, the farmers organized to fight insurrectionary activities. In 1964 when the CPM started aggressive activities, the farmers again organized themselves under the Thanjavur Paddy Producers Association, subsequently reorganized into the Thanjavur District Farmers Association. The influence of caste led the Brahmin farmers to form the Thanjavur Landowning Farmers Association and the middle castes to form the East Thanjavur Farmers Association. Though divided, these organizations cooperated to some extent due to the increasing threat from the activities of the CP on the labor front. Moreover, as the bulk of the farmers belonged to middle castes, the social distance dividing them was not as wide as among laborers, and this made

their mobilization easier.

Thus, in addition to caste, the division of the poor peasantry into landless laborers and petty farmer employers stands as a powerful barrier to the development of solidary organizations of rural poor. The fact that even marginal farmers who have tiny holdings and still make part of their livelihood by selling their labor have not been willing to join the communist movement indicates the importance of even marginal holdings in the ascription of status in Indian society which has reinforced the unwillingness of those with some assets to forge an alliance with the assetless laborers. This stands, to some extent, in contradiction to the Russian and Chinese experience wherein the middle peasantry was in the vanguard of revolutionary activities. The alienation of the middle peasantry in Kerala and Tamil Nadu from the Communist Party has been a powerful barrier to the expansion of communist, and thus revolutionary activities.

To sum up, in India there is a large mass of rural proletariat, living in miserable conditions and suffering many indignities, concentrated in certain areas. With India's relative freedom for political and organizational activities, the Communist Party has had the opportunity to organize the peasantry, particularly agricultural laborers, tenants, and small farmers, and to advance the party's and peasant's interests. However, the Party could not build up organizations covering all sections of the peasantry and all regions. As the prevailing conservative ideology legitimized the inegalitarian and oppressive social structure, there was little motivation for change on the part of its victims.

The division of poor peasantry into different castes and occupational

groups with conflicting interests has hindered the development of a comprehensive organization covering all sections of the poor and limiting them to associations of agricultural laborers, particularly Harijans, in areas where they formed a major section of the population. But the process of mobilizing the laborers, in turn, adversely affected the interests of small farmers and led farmers to form their own organizations opposing communist activities. Thus, the poor have been divided into hostile groups and, at least for the time being, there is only limited scope for the development of solidary organizations embracing all sections of the rural poor.

We have seen that the mobilization of the poorer strata in Kerala and Tamil Nadu States in their own organizations has contributed to their substantial economic and social improvement. Even when opposed by organizations of the better-off sectors, those owning land and other property, conditions of work and renumerations have been improved, and the social degradation of low caste status has been mitigated. This has been achieved by organizations which were in their conception, politically-motivated. The tenant and laborer unions were for the most part organized by communist cadres seeking to expand their electoral base. Indeed, it may be asked, the extent to which these really represented organizations <u>of</u> the rural poor or only <u>for</u> the rural poor. One can ask also what are the implications of this for anti-poverty strategies of development?

It is clear from their structure and operation that these organizations of the rural poor in South India have not been participatory, voluntary associations in the tradition of liberal democracy. They have, rather, been conflict organizations in which class solidarity is emphasized. There has been little idea that these should be debating societies or casual

forums. Confronting the power of landowning employers is serious business, risking one's livelihood, one's family security and even sometimes one's life. There has been little disagreement among participating tenants and laborers. They have sought any improvements possible under an oppressive social and employment regimen. Which improvements would be best, which should come first, even how to pursue them, have not been pressing questions, as a substantial number of the lower strata have joined in the conflict organizations, accepting the leadership and tactics offered to them.

Does this make the organizations non-participatory, or in what sense are they participatory? Certainly they are top-down organizations in the classic sense that all decisions about tactics and goals are made by central leadership. Indeed, as Marxist organizations, they function according to Lenin's articulated principle of "democratic centralism." In principle, this allows for debate and discussion on matters not yet decided by the organization's leadership, but once it has spoken, all members are obligated to accept and pursue those decisions single-mindedly. In practice, given the low levels of literacy and self-confidence of tenants and laborers, there does not appear even to be much participation in deliberations about policy and action among the members. The top leadership is in complete command as a rule.

At the same time, the development of strong conflict organizations promoting tenant or laborer interest over now several decades has been possible only because of the response and steadfastness of impoverished peasants. If they have not mapped strategy and debated tactics, they have assented to the plans and have been willing to make sacrifices and run risks in the anticipation of improving their lot thereby. This is not

a commanding type of participation but it is a deliberate and often courageous form. To use the analytical framework proposed by Cohen and Uphoff, if not participation in decision making there has been participation in implementation of improvement strategies and participation in the benefits derived therefrom.[1] While the first kind of participation is often most valued by academics and actors, we should not gainsay the importance of the latter two kinds, because the willingness of tenants and laborers to withhold their labor, to go hungry, to be insulted, to risk assault for the sake of better working conditions and income has changed status relations and economic opportunities for many of the poorest of the poor. Experience with rural local organizations in South India, then, helps to expand our universe of knowledge and to show possibilities for progress where elsewhere in India and the Third World little has been achieved for such persons.

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[1] John M. Cohen, Arthur A. Goldsmith., and Norman T. Uphoff., Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Participation: A State of the Art Paper, Rural Development Committee, (Ithaca: Center for International Studies), 1979.