

We understand that in the Central Farm at Coimbatore young plants pulled out from thickly sown fields dried for a couple of days and ratoon cholam in young stages have been on several occasions fed to cattle of all kinds with impunity. It is the mamool, here for cattle to eat such plants and it is their mamool not to die! Shall we be favoured with the experience of our readers on this interesting subject?

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**\*The relations between a farmer and his  
servants and their Improvements.**

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Servants are indispensable to a farmer unless his holding is so small that it can be cultivated by himself and his family. The larger the farm, the greater the number of servants required, and the more does the success of the farmer's business depend upon their willing co-operation. In this country unfortunately, owing to the backward condition of both farmers as well as servants, their mutual relations are not generally as healthy as they ought to be for a hearty co-operation in furtherance of their mutual interests. In this essay it is proposed to describe the various aspects of the relations between a farmer and his servants as they exist at present in the Madras Presidency and to suggest as far as possible means of improving them to the best advantage of both.

Servants employed by farmers are of two classes, permanent and casual. In the census reports of the Government, the terms 'farm servants' and 'field labourers' are used for the two classes respectively. Farm servants are regular employees receiving monthly salaries and sometimes other emoluments also. On every farm, a certain number of these usually about the same as the number of pairs of draught cattle owned by the farmer, are employed and whenever these cannot cope with the work, field labourers receiving daily wages are casually engaged.

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\*Munagala Prize Essay by Mr. G. Jogi Razu.

To get through the various agricultural operations in time, the farmer should be able to command the required number of servants, both permanent and casual. To be economical, the wages he has to pay should be moderate, and more than this, the servants should be efficient in their work. The interests of the farmer in connection with his servants are thus dependant upon three factors viz., their availability, wages and efficiency.

Servants entirely depend, for their livelihood, upon the earnings from their labour, and can never afford to be idle. They therefore, want regular employment. Their livelihood also depends upon the adequacy of the wages they get. Their comforts are largely based on the treatment their master accords them. Continuity of employment, adequacy of wages, and fairness of treatment are thus the factors governing the well-being of servants.

The farmer in aiming at the furtherance on his own interest, often overlooks those of the servants. The servants too, have little sense of duty and frequently fail to show sufficient regard to their master's interests. In each party seeking its own advantage or ease, a certain amount of conflict naturally arises in their relations. How to reduce this conflict to the minimum, and effect a compromise conducive to the best interest of both, is the problem. A close study of each of the factors governing the interests of each party, and a clear insight into their mutual relations in respect of each of these factors may lead us to the solution.

### **Availability of Labour.**

This is the foremost of the farmer's needs. There may be a good deal of variation in the availability of labour in the different parts of the country but there is no doubt that on the whole it has been getting scarce. In the Madras Presidency, while there was in 1901 one farm servant or field labourer available for every 3·6 acres of crops cultivated there was in 1911 only one for every 4·8 acres. The difficulty in procuring labour is most keenly felt in the large rice growing tracts like the Kistna District and in the Agricultural areas in the vicinity of cities and large towns.

The chief cause of this scarcity is the large increase in the demand for labour from all quarters. There has been a large increase in the area under cultivation. During the period of ten years 1901-1911 the area under the various crops in this Presidency increased by about 35%, while the number of farm servants and field labourers increased in the same period by only 2.5%<sup>1</sup>. At the same time the manifold activities of towns and cities, mills and other industrial concerns, the construction of buildings, roads and railways, are drawing away a large number of labourers from the rural tracts and large numbers are also emigrating to other countries.

The increase in the area cropped is, of course not only inevitable but also necessary to meet the needs of the growing population. But the tendency of the labourers to quit rural areas, owing to the availability elsewhere, of employment at all seasons of the year and on higher wages, has to be minimised by the farmer giving the same facilities and making his service equally attractive. These matters will be discussed later on in some detail but it may be noted here that however liberal farmers may be in paying their servants or however well they may treat them, all labour cannot be monopolised by them the other works being left alone. Every effort should therefore be made to economise labour by increasing the efficiency of the workmen themselves and by the use of labour-saving appliances.

A minor cause—yet a serious one—for the scarcity of labour is the growth of indolence, among both farmers and servants. Some farmers—who were hitherto cultivating their fields, themselves, now get all the work done by servants, owing to laziness or false ideas of dignity. The demand for labour is thus increased, the more so, because the servant owing to his indifference scarcely turns out as much work as the master himself can do in a given time. Some men of the servant class also have now acquired lands for themselves and are no more available as coolies even when they have no work on their own holdings. In some cases indolence has even gone further. Mr. Keatinge, Director of Agriculture, Bombay, writing about labour scar-

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<sup>1</sup> These figures were calculated from the Census reports and agricultural statistics published by the government in (1901—11).

city in that Presidency thus describes a custom which is said to prevail in some parts. "In the Thana District" he writes "a man who wishes to engage a daily labourer goes to the hut of a 'warb' or Kalkari and asks the man's wife whether they have sufficient 'nagli' (Elencine coracana--their ordinary food) for the day. If she says 'yes' he passes on to the next hut\*." This trait of character, so well illustrated above, is no peculiar to the people of that one district in the western Presidency, but can be observed every where in Southern India to a smaller or greater extent. In the interests of both farmers as well as servants this growth of indolence has to be strongly discouraged, the chief means for this being education—not only mere teaching to read and write but real education which creates a love for labour and earnestness in work.

### **Continuous Employment.**

This is the first requirement of servants. The casual labourer in the rural tracts finds great difficulty in securing employment in seasons of agricultural inactivity. In the case of complete failure of rains even permanent servants are very often thrown out of employment the farmer himself finding no means of supporting his family and livestock. Even granting that there is no lack of employment for the labourer there is some advantage both to the employer and to the employee in their mutual relations as master and servant continuing for a sufficiently long period. By long association their interests become to a great extent interwoven; mutual confidence is established; the master can largely rely upon his servant for the proper execution of work; and the servant can count upon his master's help in all contingencies of life. In employing servants the farmer should bear in mind this aspect of his relation with his servants, and as far as possible offer them uninterrupted employment. To be able to do so the farmer should frame his cropping scheme in such a way that the work will be distributed as evenly as possible throughout the year. The more efficiently he is able to do this the less is the chance of his men being idle at any time or of his requiring a large number of extra labourers at a time when they are not available. The creation of irrigation

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\*Agricultural Journal of India Vol. X P. 276.

facilities and the inclusion into the scheme of cultivation of a fair proportion of garden crops will to a great extent enable the farmer to give continuous employment to his servants.

Even in the employment of daily labourers, especially in the transplanting and the harvest seasons, the farmer should see that once a set of men or women are employed, their services are not discontinued till the operation is completed.

### Wages.

The question of wages may be discussed from both the farmer's and servants' stand point at the same time. The farmer wishes to get labour cheap and thus secure a greater margin of profit. The servant is poor and will have to starve if he does not secure adequate wages. No doubt, wages have somewhat risen of late, but the prices of foodstuffs too have risen correspondingly or even more. The servant is not therefore any the better for the rise in wages; nor is the farmer any the worse for it, as he now gets a higher money value for his produce. In securing servants the farmer has now to compete with other industries which attract large numbers by offering higher wages than what the farmer has been accustomed to give. Unless he too offers as much as others do, he cannot get a sufficient number of servants and his work will suffer. Farmers in other countries and even in some parts of this country, the Chenab Canal colonies for instance pay much higher wages than in this Presidency, and yet obtain good profits by increasing the efficiency. In fact, it is more the inefficiency of the servants here, that swells the labour bill, than the rate of wages.

In considering the adequacy, of wages the terms on which agricultural labourers are usually employed and the manner of payment have to be taken into account. In this Presidency there are two principal systems of service in vogue, the cash payment system and the grain payment system.

The cash system is simple though rarer of the two. It is usually adopted when no grain crops are produced on the farm. Absentee

landlords and gentlemen farmers prefer this system as they find it difficult to control the emoluments which the servants receive under the latter system, details of which will be referred to presently. In the cash system the servant receives a monthly pay Rs. 5 to 7. His working hours are from day break to sunset with intervals for breakfast and midday meal. Besides petty festival presents the servant usually receives nothing in addition to his pay.

The grain payment system is very widely prevalent in the Madras Presidency. It somewhat varies in detail in different parts but the main features are the payment of a small monthly wage in kind and an extra allowance of grain in the harvest season. In the Godavari District, for instance, 20 to 30 kunchams of paddy or other grain is the usual monthly wage. This may be worth 3 to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  rupees the grain given being usually of an inferior sort. The quality of grain allowed to each servant on the thrashing floor usually amounts to about a putty (80 kunchams) including light grains, sweepings and may be worth Rs. 12 to 15. Besides this and the monthly pay each servant receives a small quantity of grain at the sowing time and a bundle or two of sheaves at the time of harvest. For the pongal festival a cloth is usually presented. In some places it is usual to provide the servant with a pair of country shoes and a blanket annually. The whole value of the grain and other emoluments including the monthly wage may thus amount to Rs. 60 to Rs. 75 per annum or Rs. 5 to 6 per mensem.

In some parts it is the practice to give a ball of ragi food or rice conjee to the servants at midday to prevent them from going home at that time, the monthly wages being at the same time cut down slightly.

In the cash payment system the servant usually receives a little more per mensem than the value of the average monthly emoluments in the grain system, but there is no real advantage in this, for, in buying everything from the petty dealer in the village, he does not usually get his money's worth. In the grain payment system though the stuff he receives is inferior, its quantity is larger and keeps the

family well above starvation. With the earnings of his wife he can buy the other requisites.

In the cash system the servants have little interest naturally in the welfare of the crops, for, their emoluments do not depend upon the yield. In the grain system, the emoluments servants get on the thrashing floors are to some extent proportionate to the yield. Servants under this system are therefore inclined to be more efficient than under the cash system. The farmer has in the grain system a stronger hold on the servants and the latter will have no tendency to run away in the middle of cultivating season as cash paid servants often do, lest they should lose their emoluments in the harvest season.

The grain payment system, as now adopted is not however without defects. The chief one is that the emoluments which the servants are allowed are not definitely measured out but only judged by the eye. However liberal the farmer may be, the servants will still grumble. An inexperienced gentlemen-farmer or his easy-going agent may be deceived by the clamour of the servants or the overcautious farmer may deprive the poor servants of their legitimate long-expected reward. This defect however can be easily rectified by fixing the remuneration to a certain per centage of the total yield, and measuring it out, instead of leaving the matter to the judgment of the eye. If the monthly wage is fixed at 60 madras measures of paddy (worth about Rs. 4) and an area of about five acres is cultivated with paddy for each servant employed, a yield of about 5000 madras measures may be expected (a portion of the land being supposed to bear a second crop) and 8 to 10 per cent. of this is a fair proportion that may be given to the servants at the thrashing time.

Another evil attendant on the grain payment system at present, is that the farmer considering the poor monthly wages he pays usually overlooks the pilfering of fuel and other petty things as mammols and this tendency easily extends to grain and other produce. Once this is allowed to establish itself it is difficult to check it however keen the farmer may then be. He should therefore be strict in this matter, raising the wages if necessary.

With the modification and precautions suggested above the grain payment system is perhaps better than the cash payment system under the present conditions both the farmer and the servant benefitting thereby.

Casual labour is nowadays usually paid for in cash though in many places payment in kind is still in vogue. The latter is more difficult to manage, occupying a good deal of time. It is usual in some places to feed casual labourers also with ragi or kanji at midday so as to prevent them from going home. The wages are then slightly reduced to meet a portion of the cost of feeding. This method if carefully managed is advantageous to both the farmer and the servants, but the feeding is generally difficult to manage satisfactorily. In some places it is usual for the coolies to get their midday meal from their houses, one out of every ten coolies being allowed to go home for this purpose about an hour before the mealtime. This system deserves encouragement.

#### **Efficiency.**

This is the next factor that may be considered. It is an admitted fact that the Indian labourer is far less efficient than those of other civilised countries. The efficiency of a labourer depends chiefly on his physical strength. But the people in Southern India are not generally of such good physique as those of Northern India and many other countries. The nature of the climate may be one of the causes for this, but the economic conditions, habits and social customs of the people have also a good deal to answer for this. Among the labourers a large number cannot, in certain seasons, afford to have two full meals a day. There is no scope for a consideration of the quality at all. The majority have to fare on with very scanty clothing and have to deny themselves most other comforts. Living, as they do, in poor dirty dwellings they are very liable to disease, and have little access to medical aid. Drunkenness is another great evil with the labouring classes, and is responsible for a good deal of their misery. Apart from the evil effects it has on the constitution of the man who drinks, it draws itself a good lot of the family earnings which could have been utilised for good clothing.



The inevitable rise in wages that has been going on, may in due course tend to keep the labourer above starvation but the improvement of his dwellings, medical aid, and the like are matters which call for the efforts of the Government and other administrative bodies. The well-to-do farmer can also render some assistance to his servants in these respects. This aspect will again be referred to the later on.

Another factor which tends to enhance efficiency is intelligence. An intelligent man can easily learn work and do it more thoroughly and quickly than one with the same amount of physical strength but who is dull. An intelligent man can be put to any new work when occasion requires it, this not being easy in the case of a dull man.

An intelligent servant can easily grasp his master's instructions and carry them out. He can also think for himself and attempt to understand the why and the wherefore of what he does. An intelligent man is more amenable to reason and so long as the master himself is reasonable can be controlled more easily than a dull man. The dull servant, through his ignorance may occasionally bring in loss to the farmer by his thoughtless and wasteful work.

Though intelligence is to a large extent a natural gift, yet there is much room for cultivating it. The farmer should take every opportunity of explaining to his servants the rationale of every operation he asks them to do, and thus sharpen their intellect gradually. The question of their education will be referred to in another part of this essay.

However energetic or intelligent a servant may be he does not naturally put all his energies into the work unless he is sufficiently interested in it. Human nature is such and the farmer if he wishes to increase his servants' efficiency should devise means of grafting on their interests to his own. The adoption of the grain wages system and the fixing of the emoluments to be given at the harvest time to a certain percentage of the total yield, as already suggested, are good incentives to sincere and efficient work. Works for which casual labour has to be employed should as far as practicable be let on con-

tract as it is invariably cheaper to do so. But care should be taken that no work in which the loss of efficiency cannot be guarded against, is thus given on contract.

Proper control is another essential to efficiency. The average Indian labourer is lacking in a high sense of duty and for this reason requires an unduly large amount of supervision. Though under the present conditions work has to be extracted from servants by strict supervision alone, the real remedy to the evil is to create in them by proper education, a high moral sense of duty. The object of control should be not to create fear in the servants and thus goad them on to work, but to merely observe and point out any mistakes they may commit. More work can be extracted by creating interest in the work, and love for the master, by the hopes given and the kind treatment accorded, than by constant goading.

The most practical way of inducing servants to work efficiently is for the farmer himself to work with his servants and to lead them. The great efficiency of the ordinary ryot compared with that of the gentleman-farmer is largely due to the ryot adopting this method. The gentleman-farmer is averse to working with his servants and however much of scientific knowledge he may possess, he is seriously handicapped in the actual turning out of the work, the advantage of his improved method being counteracted by the extra cost involved in getting the work done. In England or America we are told even farmers worth several thousands of pounds will not hesitate to work with their servants. It is this respect for physical labour that is greatly wanting in the educated classes of India. If by reforming education on proper lines aversion to physical labour is minimised and intelligent men take to it, the efficiency of labour can easily be doubled or trebled.

#### **Fair treatment.**

Besides paying adequate wages in return for the labour of his servants, the farmer owes them a further duty viz., fair treatment. This includes everything he can do to add to their comforts and general improvement—material and moral. Labourers being generally

pariahs or low caste sudras, are generally looked upon as mere beasts of burden and given no opportunities to improve their status. There have been of late some attempt at the "elevation of the depressed classes" but farmers are not directly connected with the movement. Being however in direct touch with their servants they ought to take a more active part.

First, the farmer should learn to be more gentle and kind to his servants than he is wont to do, in his daily dealings with them. He should allow for their ordinary weaknesses and should not be too severe over trifling faults. In case of illness or other difficulties he should do his best to enable them to get over the same. Petty sums of money that they may require, under difficult circumstances may be given as donations. If a large sum is required it may be lent on favourable terms. Farmers generally give loans to their servants either when or after they enter services but not infrequently these loans are made means of making the servants more or less slaves. A loan is usually given on a pronote being executed and the amount is expected to be recouped by instalments during successive harvest seasons from the emoluments due to the servant. In many cases, however, the debt is left over to stand so long as the servant continues to serve, the pronote being renewed every three years. The higher the amount lent the lower are the wages usually fixed, and the farmer does not press his servant to repay his dues for he would probably have made up the amount given as loan by the savings in the wages within the first one or two years. The debt continues and the poor servant however dissatisfied he may be with his master cannot leave his services until he finds another who is willing to pay up his whole debt. Interest is not usually claimed if the servant pays up the loan while in service but when he wishes to leave service for better wages it is strictly claimed. Loans like these are of little help to the servants. They should be given with a free heart and their early repayment should be encouraged.

To impress some morals on his servants the farmer may gather them round at nights and narrate short stories or anecdotes. The daily or occasional reading out and explaining to them of the contents

of a newspaper will keep their interest alive. The writer himself adopted this method in one place and found it highly useful in bringing round the most incorrigible of servants.

Farmers may co-operate in opening schools for the education of their servants' children. Examples of schools so opened by farmers for their own sons are known, but to these the sons of servants especially if they are pariahs have no access. For the benefit of grown up boys and young men who have to work on the fields in the day time, night schools may be opened.

It is also the duty of the farmer to see that his servants are provided with healthy quarters. But as the average Indian farmer himself lives in dirty ill-built houses much may not be expected of him in this direction. Some good may however, result if every farmer induces his servants, as far as possible to live on his farm instead of in a common paracheri. The form of huts too may be improved without much extra cost. Each farmer may instruct his servants to keep the surroundings of their huts clean and see that they do so. Rich farmers may construct pucca quarters for their servants on approved modern lines. The Government may encourage this by the granting of loans for the purpose. Money may also be obtained at a reasonable rate of interest on the co-operative basis.

The farmer should also do something to enable his servants to save a portion of his income for the future. We hear of compulsory insurance, old age pensions and the like in European countries, but there are no such arrangements in India. Here, farmers of status may start on behalf of their servants a sort of provident fund to be paid back with interest and an additional bonus depending upon the length of service. One may ask if servants in India can, after providing themselves and their family with food and clothing spare anything to contribute to such fund. If they give up drinking and do not waste money unnecessarily on ceremonials, there is no doubt that some at least will be able to do so. In rare instances servants may also be encouraged to buy small pieces of land with their savings, supplemented by their masters' donations. In an instance a pariah

labourer during his long service of over 25 years was by the encouragement and help of his kind master able to become an owner of about three acres of land. In spite of this rise in his status the servant continued to serve his master more faithfully than ever, cultivating his master's land as well as his own. It is such healthy co-operation in increasing each other's prosperity that is a desideratum in this country, and that has to be brought into existence.

### Conclusion.

In the foregoing pages several suggestions have been made for the improvement of the relation between a farmer and his servants. The initiative in giving effect to them is in almost all cases, to be taken by the farmer. The average Indian farmer, as already stated, is himself in a very backward condition and unless his condition is first improved there is little scope for his attempting to improve his servants. Both the farmers and servants therefore are at present largely dependent upon the Government, Zamindars and other rich Mirasdars of whom farmers hold their lands and it is the duty of those to do the needful. I cannot better conclude this essay than by quoting a few words of Lord Selbourne, President of the Board of Agriculture in England, which every one interested in the improvement of agriculture in this country may remember.

“We want to see the agricultural labourer assured of a good wage, a good house and a good garden. More than that we want to see him assured of the prospect of becoming a cultivator himself and eventually an owner. We want in fact an agricultural ladder which will enable a man to rise on the land just as he can rise in any other walk of life. Then we want the farmer to be other than a man who chooses farming because he likes its outdoor life and the sport that is in it. We want all the brains that we can get into agriculture as well as capital. We want men to go into farming. Not because it is a pleasant healthy life but because they can make money out of it. Lastly, we want land-owning to be regarded as luxury but not a business requiring as much study and energy as any other profession.”

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