

Agrarian Reforms
(Evidence tendered to the Agrarian Reforms Committee)

By

K. C. RAMAKRISHNAN

Tenancy Problem.

There are various systems of land tenure in the Province - Zamindari, Inamdari, Ryotwari, Jenmi, Mulgeni, etc. - the first two of which are disappearing.

Except in Malabar and S. Canara where the Kanamdar and the Mulgeni tenants are a sort of under-ryots, standing between the ryots and the actual cultivators, we have no statutorily recognized under-ryots in the Province. In big estates of individuals or of institutions like Devasthanams, there are big lease-holders sub-leasing the land to smaller tenant-cultivators. But generally ryots deal with cultivators directly.

Rents in the case of cereal crops, paddy on wet lands and millets on dry lands, are partly determined by custom and partly by the fertility of land and water supply. Share rents, and also fixed leases in kind, vary from one-third to two-third of the gross produce and are based largely on the above considerations and partly on the contribution made by the landowners towards cost of cultivation. Share system, which is more common in the southern districts, is generally confined to poorer tenants, and depressed classes, while fixed leases are taken up by more solvent tenants. Commercial crops like sugarcane, plantain, cotton, tobacco and groundnut are leased out for fixed amounts of cash to quite solvent tenants, who can take care of themselves. They look more to rise in prices than to increase of yields for their profits. Rents of these crops are determined more by forces of supply and demand and prices ruling than by custom or by the will of the landlord.

Enhancement of rent is attempted at the time of renewal, if prices have risen at the time or have a prospect of rise. This is the reason why the term of tenancy is often as short as one year. Tenants are not keen in increasing the yield, lest it should lead to rise in rents.

Remission in rent is seldom given by any landlord completely. Abatement is common when the rains fail badly and there is no source of irrigation. It is generally followed by all renters in the whole village and is seldom an individual act. It is a common practice in such circumstances for fixed leases to be converted into *waram* or share-leases with abatements according to losses by weather or pests. Still it amounts to a serious loss to the cultivator who may not be able to recover the costs of his cultivation - even though it is a mercy that the landowner does not insist on his pound of flesh.

Co
arising in
term tena

Th
not as a s
with the
crop. On
not net-in
in the cas

A l
it may no
few big la
depend on
latitude in
income an
of the cost

This
extent of
labour reas
tenant. In
family of t
of our writ
offer enoug
ment or no
would vary
Extreme e
cotton, pla
between.

Villa
sufficiency
of soil, clim
equal ease
vegetables,

An e
the cultivat
nutritional
health and
might not b
where neces
of housing.

cultivation of the holding alone, as in most cases there is a long off-season when nothing can be done on the land. A part of the income would have to be derived from the pursuit of some occupation allied to agriculture—such as dairying, poultry-farming, bee-keeping or some other industry such as hand-spinning.

Holdings, especially on wet land or irrigated area, are badly fragmented. Consolidation of holdings would mean a great convenience to the holders of the land, though its claims are often exaggerated. Consolidation is comparatively easier to effect if land is homogenous, but enlargement up to the economic size is very difficult. But supposing this were done by carving out bits of land from big holders and adding them to sub-economic holdings, would it be possible to retain the economic holdings intact from generation to generation in the face of the operation of the law of equal inheritance among all sons? Even the reclamation of land on a large scale, for which chances are remote, or the industrialisation of the country, which would take time, cannot absorb the existing surplus labour on land. Intensity of cultivation by irrigation and otherwise may absorb a few. Meanwhile population grows.

More men might be employed, to be sure, if women labour were banned or discouraged on land—as has been the tendency in prosperous countries. But as it is, for the cultivation of a number of crops more women labour is employed than men labour on the whole, particularly in operations like weeding, transplanting and picking—operations in which the machine has made the least inroads in India.

Maximum limit to the size of holding may be prescribed in the case of mere rentiers but not such as to discourage experiments in large-scale farming by owners themselves, as has been carried on in Coimbatore District in recent years, though control over payment of wages and working conditions may be exercised by the State. It is better to encourage the purchase of additional land to round off uneconomic holdings—by means of easy loans, subsidy, advice, etc.

Co-operative Farming.

This term is variously interpreted; but it is best to confine the use of the term to joint farming carried on as a co-operative concern by agriculturists, who divide the produce according to the members' contributions in the shape of land, capital and labour—the value of which is assessed at market rates. Rights of private property are recognised and ownership is paid a dividend. Labour is paid for according to the quantity and quality of work done—not according to needs but according to services rendered. This distinguishes it from Collective Farming, which is ruled out under conditions in India.

But of all forms difficult. A the world, Jews in Pal inspired by backed up t of the world respect of The report of the facto that Co-ope feasible pro and the inc suggested th cultivable la Co-operative

There cultivation c raison d'être Europe—to peasant-pro in several in

The v co-operation individual c group effort individual c Madras and of leasing of members fo societies wh though joint take it up in public park Coimbatore

Thus Can it be arg remedy is Co economics of person, but consolidation be attempte

But even Co-operative Farming is far from easy to carry on. In fact, of all forms of co-operative activity, it has been found to be the most difficult. A number of experiments have been made in different parts of the world, but nowhere has it been a conspicuous success except among Jews in Palestine, who have made a success of it in the face of difficulties, inspired by an extraordinary passion to settle down in the country and backed up the Jewish National Agency supported by the prosperous Jews of the world. Indian ryots are poles asunder from the Jews in Palestine in respect of education, industry, self-sacrifice, communal harmony, etc. The report of the Indian Delegation to Palestine makes it clear that none of the factors of success in that country is present in India and warns that Co-operative Farming in areas already cultivated would not be a feasible proposition — because of the land-laws and systems of land tenure and the individualistic attitude of the Indian farmer. The Delegation suggested the feasibility of settling landless labourers on state or other cultivable land to be reclaimed and run on the lines of the Small Holders' Co-operative Settlements in Palestine.

There is a longing not only for individual possession but individual cultivation of land, not only in this country but in all countries. This is the *raison d'être* of colonisation schemes and small holders settlements in Europe—to settle landless labourers as independent tenants and would-be peasant-proprietors allowing them to pay the cost of land and of equipment in several instalments.

The whole co-operative structure in countries most advanced in co-operation is built on the foundation of peasant-proprietorship and individual cultivation as well as possession; only it is supplemented by group effort in purchase, processing, sale, etc. This strong inclination for individual cultivation is observed in the so-called joint farming societies of Madras and Bombay. Co-operation is confined to the getting of credit and of leasing of land in common, which is sub-divided and let to tenant members for cultivation individually. Even in the newer colonisation societies where land is granted to landless labourers and ex-servicemen, though joint cultivation has been held up as an ideal, few are willing to take it up in practice. Even the little bit of common land allotted for the public park is neglected in colonisation societies of ex-servicemen in the Coimbatore district.

Thus the case for Co-operative Farming has not been established. Can it be argued that because our holdings are small and fragmented, the remedy is Co-operative Farming, carried on on a large-scale? What are the economics of such large scale farming, not conducted by one dominant person, but with the consent of so many small folk? By all means, consolidation and even enlargement of holdings up to an optimum size may be attempted. It can be done more effectively by compulsion which is

cultivation of the holding alone, as in most cases there is a long off-season when nothing can be done on the land. A part of the income would have to be derived from the pursuit of some occupation allied to agriculture—such as dairying, poultry-farming, bee-keeping or some other industry such as hand-spinning.

Holdings, especially on wet land or irrigated area, are badly fragmented. Consolidation of holdings would mean a great convenience to the holders of the land, though its claims are often exaggerated. Consolidation is comparatively easier to effect if land is homogenous, but enlargement up to the economic size is very difficult. But supposing this were done by carving out bits of land from big holders and adding them to sub-economic holdings, would it be possible to retain the economic holdings intact from generation to generation in the face of the operation of the law of equal inheritance among all sons? Even the reclamation of land on a large scale, for which chances are remote, or the industrialisation of the country, which would take time, cannot absorb the existing surplus labour on land. Intensity of cultivation by irrigation and otherwise may absorb a few. Meanwhile population grows.

More men might be employed, to be sure, if women labour were banned or discouraged on land—as has been the tendency in prosperous countries. But as it is, for the cultivation of a number of crops more women labour is employed than men labour on the whole, particularly in operations like weeding, transplanting and picking—operations in which the machine has made the least inroads in India.

Maximum limit to the size of holding may be prescribed in the case of mere rentiers but not such as to discourage experiments in large-scale farming by owners themselves, as has been carried on in Coimbatore District in recent years, though control over payment of wages and working conditions may be exercised by the State. It is better to encourage the purchase of additional land to round off uneconomic holdings—by means of easy loans, subsidy, advice, etc.

Co-operative Farming.

This term is variously interpreted; but it is best to confine the use of the term to joint farming carried on as a co-operative concern by agriculturists, who divide the produce according to the members' contributions in the shape of land, capital and labour—the value of which is assessed at market rates. Rights of private property are recognised and ownership is paid a dividend. Labour is paid for according to the quantity and quality of work done—not according to needs but according to services rendered. This distinguishes it from Collective Farming, which is ruled out under conditions in India.

But even of all forms of co difficult. A nur the world, but n Jews in Palestin inspired by an backed up the J of the world. In respect of edu The report of th of the factors of that Co-operative feasible proposi and the individ suggested the f cultivable land Co-operative Se

There is a cultivation of la raison d'être of Europe—to sett peasant-propriet in several instal

The whol co-operation is individual cult group effort in individual culti Madras and Bor of leasing of lan members for c societies where though joint cu take it up in pr public park is Coimbatore dist

Thus the Can it be argue remedy is Co-op economics of su person, but wi consolidation a be attempted.

But even Co-operative Farming is far from easy to carry on. In fact, of all forms of co-operative activity, it has been found to be the most difficult. A number of experiments have been made in different parts of the world, but nowhere has it been a conspicuous success except among Jews in Palestine, who have made a success of it in the face of difficulties, inspired by an extraordinary passion to settle down in the country and backed up the Jewish National Agency supported by the prosperous Jews of the world. Indian ryots are poles asunder from the Jews in Palestine in respect of education, industry, self-sacrifice, communal harmony, etc. The report of the Indian Delegation to Palestine makes it clear that none of the factors of success in that country is present in India and warns that Co-operative Farming in areas already cultivated would not be a feasible proposition — because of the land-laws and systems of land tenure and the individualistic attitude of the Indian farmer. The Delegation suggested the feasibility of settling landless labourers on state or other cultivable land to be reclaimed and run on the lines of the Small Holders' Co-operative Settlements in Palestine.

There is a longing not only for individual possession but individual cultivation of land, not only in this country but in all countries. This is the *raison d'être* of colonisation schemes and small holders settlements in Europe—to settle landless labourers as independent tenants and would-be peasant-proprietors allowing them to pay the cost of land and of equipment in several instalments.

The whole co-operative structure in countries most advanced in co-operation is built on the foundation of peasant-proprietorship and individual cultivation as well as possession; only it is supplemented by group effort in purchase, processing, sale, etc. This strong inclination for individual cultivation is observed in the so-called joint farming societies of Madras and Bombay. Co-operation is confined to the getting of credit and of leasing of land in common, which is sub-divided and let to tenant members for cultivation individually. Even in the newer colonisation societies where land is granted to landless labourers and ex-servicemen, though joint cultivation has been held up as an ideal, few are willing to take it up in practice. Even the little bit of common land allotted for the public park is neglected in colonisation societies of ex-servicemen in the Coimbatore district.

Thus the case for Co-operative Farming has not been established. Can it be argued that because our holdings are small and fragmented, the remedy is Co-operative Farming, carried on on a large-scale? What are the economies of such large scale farming, not conducted by one dominant person, but with the consent of so many small folk? By all means, consolidation and even enlargement of holdings up to an optimum size may be attempted. It can be done more effectively by compulsion which is

the method adopted by other countries rather than by co-operation, which is far too slow a method as has been proved in the Punjab and elsewhere in India. But the reconstituted holdings are better entrusted to old owner-cultivators or let on lease to competent tenants on fair rents and with fixity of tenure.

The utmost extent to which land reform could go in the conditions of this country is perhaps what is propounded by Mr. Tarlok Singh in his *Poverty and Social Change* — pooling all the small and fragmented holdings in the village, reconstituting them into compact holdings of different sizes to suit different families of cultivators, be they old owners or tenants; all these to pay fair rents to the joint village exchequer as fixed by the joint village management, on which all owners and cultivators are represented and which plans cropping schemes etc.

Co-operation and Compulsion.

As already stated, consolidation of holdings, badly fragmented, is effected better by some sound measure of compulsion than by co-operation where the consent of every one concerned is required. That is the method usually adopted outside India. Only the consent of a majority of landholders holding the greater proportion of the land in the village is required; if that is obtained, the cantankerous minority is obliged to fall in.

A similar consent of a majority is required in the constitution and working of Marketing Boards in Britain and some of the Dominions, by which the produce of even the dissentient minority will have to be sold through the Marketing Boards, representing the interests of growers, traders and consumers. It is not left to any individual to sell his produce as he pleases.

Co-operative credit may be fostered indirectly, by the courts refusing to recognise transactions of money-lenders of less than, say, a sum of Rs. 1,000/- to agriculturists, leaving only bigger agriculturists to resort to money-lenders — co-operative societies coming to the rescue of all the smaller agriculturists.

Supply of pure and improved seeds, for which there is a growing demand, can best be done through co-operative credit societies; but departmental supply alone is insufficient. Seed-farm societies must be developed on an adequate scale and all their surplus seeds should be delivered to co-operative credit and supply societies for sale to members. A rapid multiplication of village societies (one for a group of villages) as recommended by the All-India Planning Committee on Co-operation is essential, though the target fixed is rather ambitious.

Dual-
feasible than
pass on prod
commercial c
societies can

As for
co-operative
to grow green
supply of wa
the purpose.
nightsoil in i
the greatest
said to be co

Even
should be ma
co-operative
manures and
Palestine a
co-operation
They are al
wholesale an

It is d
Rice is the n
millets and a
a minimum
cultivation.
masses of co
The Govern
storage and
buy up local
guarded agai

Prices
by forces far
in normal tir
are not fit of
the Govern
specialities a
increased yie
state-aid ma

Dual-purpose societies, especially credit and supply, are more feasible than multi-purpose societies combining all functions. They may pass on produce for processing or sale to special societies located at commercial centres with wider jurisdiction and greater resources. Village societies cannot by themselves take up processing and sale ordinarily.

As for manures, apart from the supply of oil-cake and fertilizers by co-operative societies, pressure should be brought to bear on cultivators to grow green manure after the cereal crops, wherever possible, with free supply of water. Wherever possible, supplementary wells may be dug for the purpose. The use of cow-dung as fuel must be penalised. The use of nightsoil in inoffensive forms as manure should be encouraged. This is the greatest waste going on in India, while every scrap of such manure is said to be conserved and used in China and Japan.

Even if co-operative farming is not so easy to work, every endeavour should be made to persuade growers to deal as far as possible with co-operative societies for their requirements of credit, supply of seeds and manures and implements and for processing and sale of produce. In Palestine a great deal of importance is attached to these forms of co-operation by individual settlers as well as co-operative settlements. They are all very loyal to the *Hamashbir* which acts as a co-operative wholesale and the selling agency for certain types of produce.

Minimum Price of Agricultural Produce.

It is difficult to guarantee the prices of even one or two major crops. Rice is the most important crop in Madras and it governs the prices of millets and a few other local crops. An attempt may be made to assure a minimum price for it according to quality, based on the cost of cultivation, cost of living of producers and the purchasing power of masses of consumers, though the interests of both are not easy to reconcile. The Government should have complete control of imports of rice and its storage and be prepared to release imported rice at a minimum price and buy up local paddy at a maximum price. Buffer stocks must be carefully guarded against loss and it is better to store the same as paddy, not as rice.

Prices of commercial crops like cotton and groundnut are determined by forces far beyond the control of Government and are best left alone in normal times. Perishable articles like milk, eggs, vegetables and fruits are not fit objects for price control as no buffer stock can be built up by the Government or co-operatives. The demand is growing for these specialities and would grow faster if prices were brought down by increased yield and lower costs of production and marketing, for which state-aid may be given.

Agricultural Indebtedness.

Debt Relief Legislation in Madras and the recent rise in prices have helped the bigger agriculturists more than the smaller ones. Tenants and agricultural workers not only derived no benefit from the legislation but have been hard hit by the recent rise in prices; because what little of rise in income they got was more than neutralised by the rise in prices of goods and services they have had to purchase. A positive increase in the extent of their indebtedness has been revealed by the Economist's report on Rural Indebtedness in Madras.

Co-operative credit has not been of much avail to people without land, especially to agricultural labourers. It is only a missionary agency that can help them with credit and recover it at times when they can have a little savings as at harvest time. Perpetual vigilance and active sympathy are needed, which are not forthcoming from Panchayatdars of co-operative societies. Short-term and long term co-operative credit can help the small landholders. But it would be wise in several cases to help them sell some of their fragments of land at the present ruling prices than keep the debt on for a long period of time, when prices might fall.

'Controlled credit' through the supply of seeds, manures, implements, cattle etc., can work better, if it is stipulated that the produce raised should be sold through the lending society which will pass on the produce for sale to the nearest marketing society to which it is, or should be, affiliated. Such an arrangement would help not only landed classes but also tenants, though agricultural labourers may not benefit by it.

Minimum wages for agricultural workers.

It is a laudable aim to assure minimum wages to workers. But it is not easy to enforce payment. This has been the experience of countries which have enacted legislation, as practice lags behind law. There are long periods of unemployment on land, when labour is often prepared to work for fewer wages than prescribed by law, while in busy seasons, especially at harvest, demand for labour is in excess of supply and wages rise even when labour is not well organised. In India most farms are small and scattered, employers are petty, and labour is depressed and unorganised and therefore has little bargaining power. Just at present labour is getting more organised and vocal and making demands which petty owners of land find it difficult to concede. The agitation has succeeded more in raising the share of share-croppers than raising the wages of labourers—though this has also been achieved without effort in times of acute demand for labour.

'Forced labour'—as found in Padiyal system in Tamil districts—has lost much of its rigour in recent times on account of facilities of

communicatio
plantations.
protection off
perquisites of

The al
Ryotwari sys
The system o
from defects.

(i)
than take a sh
with referenc
millet on dry
cost of cultiva
imposed accor
crops year aft

(ii)
long period of
The tax must
professional i
amount of tax
variability of
difficulty of es
to be done for
Revenue depa

(iii)
commercial cr
case of lands
effected by the
charged at all
exemption fro
period of 30 ye

(iv)
might vary wi
trees, which n

(v)
per cent of net
and costs of cu
to take into
for commutati

communication, and opportunities for employment in new industries and plantations. If still the system continues, it is due to the modicum of protection offered to such labour in the slack season and the totality of perquisites of all kinds available.

Taxes on Land and Agricultural Incomes.

The abolition of the Zemindari system and its conversion into Ryotwari system will bring about uniformity in the system of taxing land. The system of land revenue assessment in the ryotwari areas is not free from defects. The following reforms are suggested :—

(i) It is certainly more correct to levy a tax on the net income than take a share of the gross produce. But this must be done not only with reference to 'Standard crops' — paddy on irrigated land and some millet on dry land — but the yield of commercial crops, their value, their cost of cultivation and net income derived should be estimated and the tax imposed according to the area under cultivation and the prices of such crops year after year.

(ii) There need be no one rate of tax payable all through a long period of 30 years during which there may be booms and depressions. The tax must vary according to net income as in the case of industrial and professional incomes. Fear of discontent at frequent changes in the amount of tax payable need no longer be entertained; the equity of the variability of tax according to income will be appreciated. There is the difficulty of estimating cost of cultivation. But rough costing will have to be done for more than one season with the help of the Agricultural and Revenue departments.

(iii) The rate of land revenue on dry land is low in the case of commercial crops like cotton and groundnut; it is ridiculously low in the case of lands under well irrigation, where the result of improvement effected by the land owner in the shape of wells, embankment, etc., is not charged at all for all time. It will be no bar to improvement if the exemption from taxation of the effects of improvement is restricted to a period of 30 years or 40 years (as is done in the Punjab).

(iv) The rate of tax on gardens or topes on dry or garden land might vary with the annual rental value of the different kinds of fruit trees, which now pay a low rate.

(v) The basic tax on land might be a flat rate and not exceed 12½ per cent of net income taking into account the ruling prices of produce and costs of cultivation. In these days of quick changes it is meaningless to take into account prices of previous twenty non-famine years for commutation.

(vi) There is no need to exempt small holdings from taxation as the basic tax of 2 annas in the rupee of net-income will not be felt oppressive. The tendency to split up holdings on inheritance should be checked.

(vii) Cesses for local bodies may be super-imposed at a rate not exceeding $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on the basic-tax i.e. two annas in the rupee). Tangible returns in the shape of local services should convince the tax-payers of the justice of this additional levy.

(viii) A graduated income tax may be imposed — in addition to basic tax and cesses—on all agricultural net-incomes exceeding Rs. 3,000. If due account is taken of the investment on land and permanent improvements, and a fair return expected on such investment in arriving at net incomes, then the tax will not be felt oppressive.



Compost from Bagasse. Yoshi Iwata and Toe Shiang Wu, pp. 119—26. Bagasse was treated for two weeks with lime and water, mixed with either ammonium sulphate solution or animal excrement as bacteria nutriment and piled. The piles were turned several times in a period of 170 days, by which time the material was sufficiently decomposed. **NOTE:—** This suggests a way for avoiding the nuisance of large quantities of cane trash left out on the fields after harvest, and a means of maintaining the humus content of the soil. Let someone invent an efficient method for picking up the trash and removing it to a convenient nearby location for composting. The artificial manure thus produced could be returned to the field between the cane rows and incorporated with the soil during ordinary cultivation. The operation will cost something but thorough experiments and engineering cultivations might show a profit. (Sugar Vol. 43, No. 7, July 1948, p. 59).

The a
to a fourteen
night of 31s
budding agri
expected to

Nelli
were comfo
received us
Research S
various iter
After this,
and the sug
were visite

On 3
to visit the
young cam
and finally
town from

Adu
house in th
round the
regarding
in the Pre
station bu
place on
morning,
arrival we
Road. M
in his Gu
Grapevine
cultivation
glowing t
himself at
his sons p
attended
always be
visited a