

# Rural Economic Conditions of Coimbatore District

by

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## 2. STUDY OF HOLDINGS (Condensed from the original report)

**Introduction:** The term 'holding' merely indicates ownership of agricultural land by any person. In general the greater the number of holdings, the greater is the agricultural backwardness in the sector of agriculture. We are unable to call the holdings in our country as so many farms as is the case in Western countries, because they do not constitute independent units of land areas for planned crop production as it obtains in those countries. The existence of numerous holdings, as they are found at present, is in itself, a sign of unprogressive agriculture, so far as modern standards of agricultural production are concerned. Hence for a rapid and substantial advancement in the industry of agriculture, the nature and implications of a holding as it stands to-day in our country, have to be studied and modified to that extent that each holding shall in future connote independent farming units exactly as they are found in the Western Countries, particularly in the U. S. A.

**Method of Study:** The details of holdings as they exist in 7 villages situated in the neighbourhood of the College have been gathered for analysis and study. The names of the villages visited in this connection are as follows:— Vadavalli, Komarapalayam, Goundanpalayam, Perur-Chettipalayam, Singanallur, Ganapathy and Alandurai. These villages have been selected more for the convenience of visiting them and for the facilities and confidence for enquiry which it was possible to command in these villages, compared to certain others. So far as size of holdings are concerned, similar conditions exist in all the villages in this taluk, where the system of farming and resources are similar in most respects.

**Number and Size of Holdings:** It is usual to analyse and prepare statements for giving information on size of holdings, in two ways. One is according to the amount of assessment paid on the holding and the other according to area in acres. In the first statement, showing number according to areas, the preponderance of small sized holdings may be clearly seen, holdings below 5 acres

forming 52% of the total number. These cultivate among them more than half of the area under cultivation, which means such a large area is just on the border of subsistence farming methods and do not have scope for all round improvements in the art of production. The number between 5 to 10 acres is 23% and therefore nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the total. All told, about 75% of the holdings may be considered as sub-marginal, if 10 acres under dry land farming conditions may be said to be the limit for any decent holding. This is also proved by actual enquiries. One important point has to be mentioned, in this connection and that is, even though the area may be less than 10 acres or even 5 acres, if the area is under a well commanded fully by irrigation, the economic aspect completely changes. Such an area with a well gives adequate returns to keep a moderate farming family ordinarily above want. The area actually covered by these wells is less than 25% of the total cultivated area in all the villages and therefore the low economic prosperity of the majority of the holdings can be easily judged from this position.

The average size of a holding for all the villages put together according to area works out to 5.2 acres which is about one acre above the State average. The average size does not bring out the real state of affairs because, if the area under cultivation in the village is large and the number of holdings smaller in number, the average will be higher—eventhough the majority of the holdings are less than the average. It is not safe to be guided by the average, in the matter of holdings because a small holding with a well and intensive cultivation will change the picture completely, from one of poverty to reasonable prosperity whereas a small holding under dry farming conditions will form a drag in the Agricultural economy of the village. Holdings below one acre constitute about 13% but on actual enquiries, we found that nearly 25% of this comprise of house-sites and waste spaces, which do not come under cultivation and therefore such areas are not agriculturally important.

**Number According to Amount of Assessment Paid:** The average assessment on these lands works out to nearly one rupee per acre, since the amount per acre varies from about annas eight to one rupee eleven annas or so according to the various revenue classification of soils. Hence, similar to the percentages under areas, we find that in this classification, 60% of the holdings are between 1 and 10 rupees assessment group (Statement 2). This indicates that this group includes areas under 10 acres or in other words about 70% are shown to be in this classification also as being under 10 acres. Thus

the majority of the holdings are clearly under the grouping 'sub-marginal holdings' and therefore bring about the evils attendant on small holdings and their management.

**Nature and Effects of Sub-Divisioning:** The very existence of small holdings is proof of sub-divisioning in the past. The extent of this process of sub-divisioning of holdings can be judged by the percentage increase in the number of holdings from the year of resettlement i. e. 1910 to the current year 1953. The increase has been from 2,355 holdings to 3,059 or nearly 30%. An idea of the 'intensity' of sub-divisioning can be had from statement 3, which shows the number of holdings spread in one or more survey numbers of the field in the village area. Generally holdings which cover more than one survey number may be taken to be the result of more and more sub-divisioning. It is seen that the number decreases as the survey numbers increase. The increase in the survey number has also been due to acquisition or purchase of more area of land in different survey numbers, but this has been found to be to a small extent only, on enquiries made. The sale or purchase of land in all these villages has not been a regular feature and as a matter of fact, the tendency is to hold fast to land owned by every holder in spite of rise in land values.

What are called 'joint pattas' most of them, have been the result of subdivisioning of holdings, and it is a redeeming feature if the members of the family in partitioning have agreed to keep the holding in a joint fashion, without actually splitting for cultivation purposes. The process by subdivisioning of holdings will continue in the same manner as previously, resulting in not only in more holdings, but also smaller units. It is time serious thought is given to this state of affairs and very early action taken to put a stop to further subdivisioning among heirs to a property, by means of suitable legislation. The struggle for existence of a small holder is clearly seen in the different ways in which attempts are made to supplement the income, since the total income from the holding even in a normal season is not adequate to make both ends meet.

**Nature and Effects of Fragmentation:** Contrary to expectations, the process of fragmentation of holdings has not gone far enough to constitute a problem to be tackled immediately. The average percentage of holdings which have fragmented areas, in all the villages put together is only 8.5 and therefore may be considered

to be very low indeed (as seen from Statement 3). This has been evidently due mainly to the good sense prevailing among the holders themselves, who as far as possible avoid fragmenting of their holdings, by their own mutual adjustments during subdivisioning or at later time. There are many instances of joint cultivation and avoidance of separation of bits in a holding. In certain other areas of the State fragmentation of holdings may be greater particularly in the wetland and intensively cultivated areas of the Deltas. In other States as in Bombay, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, fragmentation has gone on so badly that it has become a serious handicap to agricultural progress.

It is also important to work out the average fragment per holding and the average area of such fragment. It is these figures which will give us an idea of the extent to which fragmentation has been carried out. For all the villages together the average number of fragments per holding is 2.6 and the average area of each of the fragment is 5.9 acres. So far as number is concerned, (statement 4) comparatively it is not much, but the area has become small enough and any further fragmentation due to subdivisioning in future will result in smaller and smaller bits. The difficulty of working and raising crops on these bits can be clearly judged by a consideration of the distances between the fragments. They are more often situated at distances of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles. The average distance between any two may be taken to be a mile. Some are as much as 3 miles apart, located in the two extremes of the village.

**General Effects on Economics of Production:** The most important points to be discussed in such studies are the direct effects observed on the economics of production on these holdings, as a result of subdivision and fragmentation. Generally, it is easily understood how the smaller the size of a holding the greater the handicaps for improvements in production. But fortunately enquiries in these villages show that the ryots themselves are well aware of such consequences resulting in small holdings and therefore try to avoid as far as possible extreme subdivisioning which cannot be avoided among members of the family, though for a time the land is held in a joint patta, which indicates that there is a desire in the group for some sort of joint cultivation of the land.

Generally, we are apt to overlook one positive advantage in the possession of fragmented plots in different places of the villages. Soils and other physical conditions vary from one locality to another

and in the same village, as for example, lands situated near a river or stream or near a hill or forest area. Such portions situated in favourable localities are preferred and continued to be owned and cultivated for the scope for better or particular crops. The instance of groundnut crop suited to sandy loams nearer jungle areas has been pointed out. Owing to the variation in the nature of soils, different crops could be grown in the different seasons as for example the sowing of cholam is earlier in light soils and that of cotton is late in heavier soils. This is a positive advantage to owner of fragments in that he takes up sowings at different times and gets his income also in the same manner, provided of course, the fragmented plots in themselves are of a reasonable size for independent and economic handling.

**The Economic Holding:** A study of the holdings is naturally to be concluded with a discussion on the size of an economic holding. Whatever the definition that may be given to economic holding by Economists and others, the most accepted and easily understood conception will be the one that refers to the income from a holding which will keep the average family of the farmer in reasonable standards of comfort according to the locality. At any rate the income must be sufficient to keep the family above want during the whole year, if not enough to save even a little.

On enquiries of several families of farmers it is found that for a normal season and prices an area of 20 acres of dry land would be considered adequate to constitute an economic holding for a family of 4 or 5 members. If a well has been sunk and is able to supply adequate water for growing crops under irrigation, the area could be reduced to 5 under absolutely normal conditions of the season. Statement 5 gives details of expenditure and income on an economic holding suggested, and how the net income meets the requirements of the average farmers' families under conditions of simple standard of living, as obtaining in the locality and under current prices of produce.

**Scope for Consolidation of Holding:** It is now an established fact that the majority of the holdings in any village, are to be considered as small and uneconomic from the stand point of modern methods of farming. It will be ideal to have holdings which are not less than the economic holding size and also each one is a unit by itself, i. e. without fragmentation. This is an ideal which seems to be unattainable in the near future, so far as our country is concerned.

However, consolidation of holdings to whatever extent that is possible will be a positive gain in agricultural development. But one has to examine first whether there is any scope for consolidation. It has been stated that the cultivators themselves are certainly aware of the evils of extreme subdivision and also of the advantages accruing from large units of holdings which will admit of progressive improvements for increased and efficient production. One is therefore disappointed that on enquiries one has to come to the conclusion that the scope for consolidation of holdings is not much. The owner is very reluctant to part with his portion of land, owing to factors of sentiment and attachment and being content to carry on as under present circumstances without change. But this is not to say that there is absolutely no scope for any work of consolidation. Some success can be achieved by working in a planned manner, slowly and gradually with the willing co-operation of the holders themselves. It may require enough funds for initial advancement to cultivators, who may be willing to part with their lands and which amount neighbouring holder may not be in a position to advance himself. In that way where the parties are willing attempts have to be made for consolidation of such holdings which will bring about the desired result as smoothly as possible. Which agency will move in this matter will be another question. Experiences of co-operative societies for consolidation have not been favourable at all. There should be a more powerful or rather influential body, than a co-operative society, which should come into the field. It is the Government alone that is capable of achieving any tangible results and that is why probably the Uttar Pradesh Government have taken up the matter in their hands on an all State basis recently. The next best agency would be the Village Panchayat Boards when they are properly settled for working in the villages. But they will also require proper Governmental support and guidance from revenue and agricultural officers as and when they move in this matter with enthusiasm and commendable enterprise.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** 1. There is no record or register maintained by the village officers which show directly the number of subdivisions in a holding or the number of fragments. The information has to be gathered on enquiry and given from the experience and knowledge of the Karnam or other people. It may be necessary to keep proper records to show clearly these two aspects of holdings in the villages.

2. As a result of continued gradual subdivision in the past, holdings have definitely become small and uneconomic, the average size being 5.16 (dry lands). This process if allowed to continue, will result in further reduction in size. A suitable Act preventing further subdivision has to be passed as early as possible.

3. Fragmentation has not been carried out to any serious extent, as it is only about 8% of the total holdings in the villages. But this will continue to increase, if subdivision is not checked. The average number of fragments per fragmented holding is 2.6, which can be considered low enough, compared to other States.

4. Voluntary adjustments of fragments are rare, but neighbouring cultivators take on lease adjacent areas for convenience and efficiency of cultivation. This has to be fully encouraged in the interests of proper land utilisation.

5. Enlargement of holdings to the limits of economic holding size, by persuasion and encouragement could be more successful in the long run, than other schemes of orthodox methods of consolidation of holdings.

6. Distances between fragmented plots are not considered a serious handicap as the plots are within reasonable distance in the village itself and due to the variations in soils and locality conferring benefits to one over the other, the advantages of fragmentation in some cases over-weigh the supposed disadvantages in the cultivation of these plots.

7. There is no voluntary effort at consolidation of holdings and the enthusiasm for such a process is practically absent among the holders. Most are just satisfied with the existing conditions and willing to carry on as at present. But in the interest of future development of agriculture and improvement as unit farms as in the west, efforts have to be made by Government to improve the position by gradual method of consolidation.

8. The size or area of an economic holding may be fixed at 20 acres for the dry lands under normal seasonal conditions, and 5 acres for a garden having well with fairly assured supply of water. It must be noted that the area of an economic holding for the dry land will increase proportionately according to the degree of failure of the seasonal rains in any year, assuming that prices of produce do not have great fluctuations from season to season.

STATEMENT No. 1.  
Number of Holdings according to size in acres

S.No.	Village	Below one acre										Total	Total area of Holding	Average Holding
		1-3	3-5	5-10	10-15	15-25	25-50	50-100	100-250	Total				
1.	Alandurai	..	146	139	169	43	44	27	8	1	617	4027	6.52	
2.	Ganapathi	..	40	51	95	32	10	..	2	..	259	1632	6.33	
3.	Kavundampalayam	..	119	88	82	19	12	5	..	..	357	1710	4.80	
4.	Komarapalayam	..	121	80	48	14	6	..	..	..	340	1123	3.30	
5.	Perur-Chottipalayam	..	87	119	128	37	8	10	1	..	438	2450	5.70	
6.	Singanallur	..	124	64	76	24	6	11	..	..	355	2300	6.50	
7.	Vadavalli	..	232	178	190	19	12	5	..	..	693	2510	3.60	
	Total	..	439	869	717	188	88	58	11	1	3059	15782	5.16 (average)	
	Percentage	..	13	28	24	23	6	4	2	..	..	..	..	

STATEMENT No. 2.  
Number of holdings according to amount of Land Revenue paid

S.No.	Village	During Resettlement 1010										Total		
		Below Re. 1					During 1953							
		1-10	10-30	30-50	50-100	100-250	Total	Below Re. 1	1-10	10-30	30-50	50-100	100-250	Total
1.	Alandurai	..	14	305	83	10	2	..	440	70	13	4	..	617
2.	Ganapathi	..	26	55	100	22	5	2	93	123	15	2	1	259
3.	Kavundampalayam	..	10	190	59	7	5	1	259	71	7	1	..	357
4.	Komarapalayam	..	32	51	110	55	37	11	72	134	56	35	11	340
5.	Perur-Chottipalayam	..	21	268	44	1	..	..	328	43	7	1	..	438
6.	Singanallur	..	40	185	57	10	9	7	202	78	26	14	6	353
7.	Vadavalli	..	68	358	88	5	2	..	409	67	3	..	..	693
	Total	..	211	1412	541	110	60	21	1893	586	127	57	18	3050
	Percentage	..	9	60	23	4.5	2.5	1	62	19	4	2	..	..



STATEMENT No. 3.  
Distribution of fragments in Holdings

S. No.	Village	Fragments.							Total area.	Average size of fragments	Total No. of hold-ings in the village	% of frag-mented holdings	No. of fragments per holdings		
		2	3	4	5	6	7	Total							
1.	Alandurai	..	30	17	5	2	1	1	194	1746.81	9.00	76	617	12	2.5
2.	Ganapathi	..	20	5	..	..	..	..	55	368.76	6.70	25	259	9	2.2
3.	Kavundampalayam	..	25	7	1	1	..	..	80	413.39	5.17	34	357	9.5	2.4
4.	Komarapalayam	..	8	4	4	6	3	..	92	184.35	2.12	25	340	7	3.7
5.	Perur-Chettipalayam	..	19	1	1	2	..	..	55	449.27	8.17	23	438	5	2.4
6.	Singanallur	..	15	4	3	1	..	..	59	335.75	5.88	23	355	6.5	2.6
7.	Vadavalli	..	39	11	4	1	1	1	145	579.39	3.58	57	693	8	2.6
	Total	..	680	..	..	..	..	..	680	4018	..	263	3059	8.5 (average)	2.6 (average)

STATEMENT No. 4.  
Areas of fragmented holdings according to sizes for all villages

	Acre crops						
	0-5	5-15	15-25	25-50	50 and above		
Total area of fragmented holdings in each group	..	151	1205	776	1140	748	4018 (acres)
Number of fragments	..	98	309	126	110	37	680
Average area per fragment	..	1.54	3.91	6.16	10.37	20.22	263
Total number of fragments	..	..	..	..	..	..	5.9 acres
Average area per fragment for all the group	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

## STATEMENT No. 5.

Size of an Economic Holding - Coimbatore Taluk - from Expenditure and Income Statement for one year (Based on prices prevailing in September 1954 and under Normal Seasonal Conditions.)

Dry Land (Rainfed) 20 Acres		Garden Land (with well) 5 acres	
Crops - Cholam Mixed with Pulses		Cholam	2 Acres
Expenditure :		Ragi	" "
- Cost of Cultivation for 20 Acres at Rs. 75/- per acre		Cambodia Cotton	4 "
Land Revenue at Rs. 1-8-0 per acre	Rs. 1,500/-	Vegetables etc.	3 "
Interest and other charges	30/-		
	50/-		
	Rs. 1,580/-		
Receipts :			Area of Well, yard etc., 1/2 Acre
60 Salagais Cholam grain at Rs. 25/- per Salagai	Rs. 1,500/-		
Value of Straw 40 Cartloads @ Rs. 15/- per cartload	600/-		
Value of Pulses at Rs. 20/- per acre	400/-		
	Rs. 2,500/-		
Net Income	Rs. 2,500/- - Rs. 1,580/- = Rs. 920/-		
Expenditure :			
- Cost of Cultivation :—			
Cholam	Rs. 270/-		
Ragi	270/-		
Cotton	900/-		
Vegetables etc.	50/-		
Land Revenue @ Rs. 2/- per acre	10/-		
Interest & other charges	100/-		
	Rs. 1,600/-		
Receipts :			
Cotton 16 Cothis @ Rs. 115/-	Rs. 1,840/-		
Cholam 12 Salagai @ Rs. 20/-	240/-		
Ragi 12 Salagai @ Rs. 20/-	240/-		
Vegetables etc	50/-		
Value of Straw-Cholam	100/-		
Value of Straw-Ragi	50/-		
	Rs. 2,580/-		
Net Income	Rs. 2,580/- - Rs. 1,600/- = Rs. 980/-		

Note:— Net income of about Rs. 950/- per annum is assumed to be sufficient for a family of 3 adults and 2 children under ordinary rural conditions of living.