A STUDY ON ALIENATION OF PANJAMI LANDS IN TAMIL NADU

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I. INTRODUCTION
The preamble of the Indian Constitution enjoins that justice, liberty, equality and fraternity shall be secured to all citizens. Justice shall cover social, economic and political spheres. Indians are entitled to liberty in terms of freedom of thought, expression and faith. The foundation of the concept of fraternity is dignity of the individual. But all these safeguards are deliberately denied to the 170 million Dalits of India. Rural India highly depends on natural resources and land plays a crucial factor in influencing the rural economy. Land is a means for empowerment. Land is wealth and source of livelihood. Land is the major factor of agrarian reform in India. Agrarian reform aims to ensure food sovereignty. India has developed poverty alleviation programs and agrarian reform programs.

Land distribution and land ownership patterns are marked with inequality in rural India. Despite several policy attempts like enactments of the central Act, the land ceiling Act, land redemption schemes etc. to reduce inequality in land distribution and ownerships in post-independence era, the concentration of land in the hands of few and alienation of land of the poor peasants dominated the agrarian scene. These disparities in land holdings beget disparities in household income and have widened the gap between rural poor and elites. The net result is that the most vulnerable groups in agriculture i.e. the landless laborers could not gain could not gain.

The Dalits form the majority among the landless laborers in India. Land is identified as one of the main causes for atrocities on Dalits in rural India. It is universally accepted that possession of land as a permanent asset alone would be able to provide the much needed social status and economic security to the Dalits and the other vulnerable sections of the society. The Dalits of Tamil Nadu were given lands during the British regime, called the Panjami lands or the Depressed Class Land, with the condition that the lands at no cost should be alienated to non-Dalits. Violation of the same will divest the title and dispossess the ownership. In total 72,142.16 hectares of lands were given to the Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To findoutPanjami lands in the state of Tamil Nadu.
2. To analyse magnitude of the Panjami lands and the geographical area.
3. To suggest Strengthen solidarity among Dalit groups to involve in the process of retrieving Panjami lands.
III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on Secondary Data and descriptive in nature. The data collected from several Books, Articles, Magazine, Newspapers, Government Reports, Right to Information Reports, Journals, and Media both print and visual.

Scope of the Research

The scope of the research was limited to the identification of Panjami land under illegal possessions in Tamil Nadu to promote retrieval of these lands. The research is based on information available at State level regarding the government orders and procedures and on sample studies of violation of Panjami land in selected districts. The struggles of the Dalits to retrieve the Panjami land have been taken into the scope of the research.

Results and Discussion

Dalits and Land Reforms in India

In the Constitution of India Article 39 B and C under the directive principles of state policy envisage that equal distribution of ownership and control of material resources be ensured and state that operation of economic system does not result in concentration of wealth to the common detriment. These provisions are non-existent as per Dalits. The land reform policy in India envisaged bringing economic equality among different caste communities through redistribution of existing lands.

Panjami Land

Panjami land, which was given to Dalits by the British Government, are encroached by other communities. There are 1.2 million acres of Panjami lands. Out of which Dalits enjoy only 0.025% of lands. The details of the Panjami land and their current situation is elaborately dealt later in chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

Allocation and Violation with Regard to Panjami Land

The acute famine of 1876-77 resulted in an influx of the members of the depressed classes (Dalits) into the church. After the famine the missionaries, in the face of stiff resistance from the mirasidars, played a key role in establishing the land rights for the depressed classes. They highlighted the loopholes in the then existing system that denied land rights to Dalits.

They indicated the critique of the existing laws with the suggestion that in the first place, the legal recognition of mirasi rights should be wholly abolished and every facility should be given to the Dalits to own waste lands. They further argued that the cherry Nattam or the residential quarter of the depressed classes in the villages should be declared to be the exclusive property of the depressed class residents. They also wanted a law to regulate the transactions between the mirasidar and the depressed class tenant.

Allocation of Panjami Land to Dalits

After intensive lobbying, the revenue department began the process of allotting Panjami land to Dalits by issuing a Government order in 1892. The order asserted that the state had the right to appropriate wasteland in mirasi villages for public purposes without any preference to mirasidar. It also agreed that if the depressed classes were evicted from their homestead, government would provide the alternative housing sites and such cases of eviction would be taken up in the court of law by government itself. Finally, it endorsed that the government was prepared to give land to non-mirasidars when lands were freed from mirasi preferential rights purchase by the state at sales for revenue arrears.
The government stance on the assignments of waste lands to the depressed classes was strengthened by a Supreme Court judgment in 1911 which refused to support the preferential rights enjoyed by the mirasidars over the unoccupied land of the presidency. In 1918, the Board of Revenue made an enquiry into the conditions of denial of freedom among the depressed class population and consulted the collectors of various districts in the Madras presidency on the question of assigning lands to depressed classes.

In the same year, the Madras government effected Pattadars to the residents which made it possible for the landless to seek land from the government. Also the order of the government agreed with the Board of revenue that specific areas might be reserved for assignment to the depressed classes subject to the usual safeguards.

The 336 amendments gave the right to the state to resume the assigned lands in, among others, the following situations.

1. If the land is alienated by way of sale, gift, mortgage or lease of any kind except to other members of the depressed classes.
2. If the land ceases to be owned by the original grantee or his legal heirs or other manners of the depressed classes owing to sale by process of law or otherwise
3. If default is made in payment of Government revenues on the dates prescribed.

These conditions were imposed so that the lands assigned to the depressed classes were not alienated to the members of non-depressed classes. And the revenue department introduced changes in the rules periodically though their basic structure remained unaltered. By 1918, the government had made several land grants to the depressed classes both for cultivation and housing.

As per the labour department the extent of land assigned to the depressed classes increased to 237,000 acres by 1927-28 and to 343,000 acres by 1930-3. It seems particularly important to note that the main part of the area assigned was dry land and concentrated in some of the dry districts of the presidency. Among the Tamil districts, two districts, north and south Arcot (the Vellore, Tiruvaranamalai, Villupuram and Cuddalore districts) accounted for more than 60% of the total area assigned in Tamil Nadu. In other districts in particular in wet districts such as Thanjavur, Tiruchirapallie the percentage of assignees areas was very low, generally not exceeding 0.6% of the total Patta land even in 1930-31.

Besides the facilities extended by the colonial government to improve these lands other facilities such as loans to dig wells seemed to have not had the expected effect. The lower bureaucracy was rather not helpful in granting such loans. According to one account, the corruption was so rampant that 50 per cent of such loans went as bribes.

Violations of Panjami Land Rules

Panjami lands, called Denotified Class Land by the British (DC Land), are the rights supposed to be enjoyed by the Dalits only. They are now under the illegal possession and stronghold of non-Dalits.
### Table: Panjami Lands in Tamil Nadu as per the Government Survey (in acres)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Allotted Panjami land</th>
<th>Areas under violation of the conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
<td>3191.02</td>
<td>533.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengalpattu</td>
<td>950.52</td>
<td>661.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dindigul</td>
<td>1892.39</td>
<td>275.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharmapuri</td>
<td>9004.55</td>
<td>853.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamarajar</td>
<td>109.42 …</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North arcot</td>
<td>21316.75</td>
<td>2081.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagapatnam</td>
<td>155.62 …</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South arcot</td>
<td>987.70 ….</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>13601.95</td>
<td>703.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanjavur</td>
<td>287.17</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiruvannamalai</td>
<td>22398.31</td>
<td>5805.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villupuram</td>
<td>11102.08 …</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niligiris</td>
<td>746.33 …</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The survey regarding details of Panjami land under unlawful possession of non Dalits in 20 villages across three districts of Tamil Nadu reveals annoying pictures. In all the surveyed villages several Panjami lands are found under the unlawful possessions of Non Dalits. Several acres of Panjami land are illegally possessed by upper castes. The present study has gathered information on several cases of land struggles organised by Dalits to assert their rights related to possession of Panjami land.

**Panjami Land and Special Economic Zone**

According to Express News Service in Chennai, More than 2,000 acres of Panjami land has been handed over to special economic zones (SEZs), industrial parks and other projects, according to Dalit MannurumaiKootamconvenornNicholos. Addressing a consultation on retrieval of Panjami land by scheduled castes using data collected under the Right to Information Act on Tuesday, Nicholos said that despite dalits politicians having the political will, they have failed to win back the Panjami land.

All political manifestos talk about Panjami land but hardly has any political parties raised the issue after the elections, Nicholos said. Currently, about 45,067 people own about 1.26 lakh acres of land, according to information available through RTI. Jeeva, the director of State Institute of Rural Development said that the information provided under the Right to Information (RTI) Act is far from accurate. “Officials are giving what is in record. Interestingly, the records show it is in the name of dalits but when one goes to the field it is found that the members of other community own it. He alleged that during the updation of land records in 1954, the pattasof Panjami land were changed. He said there is need to go through the A register to verify the details on Panjami land.

Interestingly, the Panjami land came into being after British government passed a law providing land to depressed classes. “For the first 10 years those who were assigned land should not by any means sell or mortgage the land and after 10 years if they want to sell, mortgage or lease the assigned land, they can do it with only other dalit.
And Panjami land transfers that do not abide by the above mentioned conditions would not be considered as legal.

The census of 1991 revealed landlessness of dalits in Tamil Nadu. Of the dalits in Tamil Nadu, 71.7 per cent were agricultutallabourers and 17 per cent were cultivators. Dalits who constitute 19.18 per cent of the total population cultivate only 7.1 per cent of total operational holdings where as non-dalits who constitute 76 per cent of the population operate 91.7 per cent of land. Dalit activists claim that 70 per cent of Panjami land is owned by other communities.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Most Dalits are unaware of the existence of Panjami land in their village. The exact locations of the land are unknown to the people. Even if they succeed to identify and seek the help of the government to redeem the land the process is very slow and the government orders are not properly implemented. Often, the Dalits are forced to face the tragedy of violence and caste riots in their attempt to redeem the Panjami land. The government stands alley to the illegal occupiers of Panjami land.

V. REFERENCES