



Involvement of Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar for the Aggrandizement of Peasants

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ABSTRACT:

All human depends on agricultural food. Agriculture is the basic source of supply of all the countries of the world. Though agriculture was the prime occupation of the majority of the residents of this vast stretch of land of natural wealth and prosperity, the farmers and peasants were forced to suffer a lot due to the distinctive types of deficiencies. Muthuramalinga Thevar felt it as his primary duty to relieve the peasants from the clutches of moneylenders, merchants and middlemen and other hardships. He had the view that land should be the property of the farmer, made arrangements for the credit for the farmers at lower rates of interest. He recommended that the government should cut off its relations with the land lords for the safety of the peasantry. His repeated calls for the abolition of the Zamindari system was for the uplift of the farmers and he was responsible for enabling the people to reflect his views in different parts of Tamil Nadu.¹¹ He insisted that the peasants must be involved in the relief activities at times of natural calamities because they themselves were in need of assistance for setting aside their economic distresses. At times of crisis such as droughts and famines the government adhere to remedial measures. The wages and salaries of the workers should be fixed at normal rates and exploitations on that line must be averted.²³ The government should adopt special procurement policies at critical situations mainly to help the farmers. He also pointed out that like trade unions there must be "Farmers Unions" to solve their problems. Thevar was able to suggest the ways and means for the uplift of the farmers. Muthuramalinga Thevar born as a member of an agriculture family contributed his mite to the upliftment of peasants by his own pragmatic approach. Thus Muthuramalinga Thevar was known for his faith on improvement of agriculture and the importance of agriculturists, he himself was a forerunner in leading the people towards a specific goal.



Key Words: Farmers, merchants, Zamindari system, Co-operative Agricultural Bank, Farmer Unions

INTRODUCTION

The Tamil country with its **kurinji, mullai, marudam, neidal** and **palai** tracts was having agriculture as a primary occupation. Agricultural activities though met with many ups and downs the role of peasantry was a commendable one forever. Under such a pretext it will be convincing to analyse the traits of Muthuramalinga Thevar in promoting agriculture and peasants.¹

Though agriculture was the prime occupation of the majority of the residents of this vast stretch of land of natural wealth and prosperity, the farmers and peasants were forced to suffer a lot due to the distinctive types of deficiencies as noted below.²

- Only low rate of price was provided for the agricultural products of the farmers.
- The farmers had to pay high rates for procuring their seeds and other requirements for the execution of the agrarian pursuits.
- The moneyed people i.e., merchants purchased agricultural produces at cheaper rates at times of harvest and hoarded them. Then at lean sessions they are sold to the farmer themselves at higher prices.
- The Government while fixing the prices exploit the farmers. The concept of uniformity will never be suitable for all farmers of different places.
- The role of middlemen such as merchants in providing developed agricultural implements, chemical manures, meddle with the agrarian pursuits. The ineradicable problem of the moneylenders too served as a cause for their backwardness.



Thevar's Primary Duty:

Muthuramalinga Thevar felt it as his primary duty to relieve the peasants from the clutches of moneylenders, merchants and middlemen and other hardships. He thought on broader perspectives such as Government aid, regulated marketing system and formation of farmer's union, etc. Along with the inculcation of co-operative endeavours. Unhesitatingly and boldly he accused the government officials, who favoured only the ruling party instead of the farmers without minding the grievances of the latter.³

As the government showed no interest towards the farmers he took up the care and stood for their cause. He even criticised and condemned the merchants who dealt with agricultural commodities to affect the farmers. Even by establishing a **Kisan Sangam** he fought for the abolition of the Zamindari system which impeded largely the progress of the peasant community.⁴ His role in the passing up of the **Madras Estate (Abolition and Conversion into Reformation Act 1948, i.e., Madras Act XXVII of 1948)** was a commendable one.⁵ By providing lands to the landless peasants he pinpointed that their involvement in them would be an encouraging one that would set aside their problems. He also stressed on the improvement of irrigation facilities for promoting agrarian pursuits for enabling the farmers to do their best to the society. As agriculture was depending on rain it became must to devote to irrigation facilities.

Efforts taken for abolishing Zamindari System:

As Muthuramalinga Thevar, was a farmer, it is no wonder that he was aware of all about the farmers. He by conducting many farmer's conferences in different parts of Tamil Nadu compelled the Government to abolish the Zamindari system on the basis of the recommendations of the Committee headed by T. Prakasham.⁶ While doing so Muthuramalinga Thevar pointed out that the taxes imposed on fallow lands should be removed along with the surcharges. So, it is evident that Muthuramalinga Thevar was



particular on avoiding the unnecessary difficulties caused to the farmers.⁷ He was happy to notice the Government's announcement that it had postponed the collection of agricultural loans from the peasants. He also pointed out that this scheme would have been more beneficial if the government established Co-operative Agricultural Banks in the rural areas. If such things were not undertaken, he mentioned that the agriculturists would be buried alive.⁸ Thus, his estimate pertaining to agriculture expose his calibre in favouring the peasants.

Muthuramalinga Thevar, who had the view that land should be the property of the farmer, made arrangements for the credit for the farmers at lower rates of interest. Further for him there would have been no association of any nature for the farmers.⁹ He recommended that the government should cut off its relations with the land lords for the safety of the peasantry. As per his views it also should be the duty of the government to put a stop to the migration of the farmers to the urban centres due to agrarian problems. He condemned the act of 20% of the city dwellers controlling 80% of the village population. Thus, for the sake of maintaining economic equality, Muthuramalinga Thevar fought till his end.¹⁰ His repeated calls for the abolition of the Zamindari system was for the uplift of the farmers and he was responsible for enabling the people to reflect his views in different parts of Tamil Nadu.¹¹ He insisted that the peasants must be involved in the relief activities at times of natural calamities because they themselves were in need of assistance for setting aside their economic distresses.¹² Even when Communism was not popular in Tamil Nadu during the British rule Muthuramalinga Thevar stood for the uplift of farmers and they too supported him in all his ventures.¹³ Though he had no faith over the dictatorship of the proletariat he was always a sympathiser of the welfare of those people.



Voice for Farmers:

For the farmers he raised his voice of protest against the anti farmer activities of any nature. He waged a war for the uplift of farmers. He demanded price control for the agricultural commodities and pointed out that the farmers should be provided with opportunities to get the required loan facilities. He stressed on offering grants.¹⁴ As finance was the major problem of the peasants he desired to alleviate such problems.

The duty of the Government was expected to offer permanent relief measures for them. **The Credit Relief Act** was accused by him as a farce means for playing a double role by favouring the landlords and workers.¹⁵ It is obvious that these things are not at all possible. He was critical that such an act would be beneficial only to the land lords. They, in turn with the support of Zamindars, would suppress and endanger the prospects of the agriculturists. He was specific on the fact that at times of harvest they procure at a cheaper rate and after hoarding them they sell those commodities at a higher rate at times of need.¹⁶

Thus, the farmers were avoided from getting profit and such exploitations caused their economic backwardness. At times of droughts and storms top priority should be rendered to relieve the difficulties of the farmers. He insisted to dig number of wells in the villages as famine relief measures. Even while attesting that he had mentioned that if farmers were employed in digging wells, instead of utilising the services of army, the farmers would be the beneficiaries. He also pointed out that the expenditure also could be minimised on that line.¹⁷ So, he was keen on the attainment of maximum benefits by minimum expenditure.

He accused that the officials appointed for fixing for prices for sugarcane, chillies, cotton, etc. fix the price at a lower rate due to the influence of landlords and merchants. The merchants too caused great havocs to the farmers and the government maintained silence without minding the above things was his other complaint. The



reduction in the feminine relief activities too jeopardise the economy of the farmers.¹⁸ The government should reduce the prices of the food products and the fiscal politics of the government should also be modified according to the need of the hour. In that respect he was specific that the fallow lands should be exempted from land taxes. The tanks and other irrigation facilities must be maintained intact. Unless irrigation facilities are provided agriculture would be at stake.¹⁹ By his practical wisdom as a farmer he was able to analyse things appropriately.

By doing so the total number of cultivable lands could be enhanced for the benefits of all. By that they may be allowed to lead an independent life without depending on anybody for their economic pursuits. This would be a great relief for the ryots. Since, Harijans are good cultivators they must be provided with facilities for the execution of the agrarian pursuits.²⁰ For that they must be made to be land owners or possessors of lands.

Thus, he favoured joint responsibility in agrarian activities.

The peasants would work for their own food. But, one who functioned as a coolie in the land of a landlord could never be a farmer. His economic position would also be unappreciable one. The government should see the worker as a real farmer for providing all facilities for his uplift. Their sufferings due to lack of money and other distresses should be removed. **The Loan Relief Act, The Agricultural Loan Postponement Act** were not at all beneficial for the farmers.²¹ He pointed out that the farmers had surrendered themselves to the moneylenders due to the non-availability such assistances.²² So, he pointed out that the plans of the government never reached the farmers. Only if the farmers are allowed to act freely without any difficulty agricultural yield could be promoted.



Need of Farmer Unions:

At times of crisis such as droughts and famines the government adhere to remedial measures. The revenue officials employed should visit the spots and estimate the situations exactly then and there directly. Tanks should be desilted and renovated. Under famine relief work scheme sufficient food should be provided for the workers. Wells should be dug in large numbers. The wages and salaries of the workers should be fixed at normal rates and exploitations on that line must be averted.²³ The government should adopt special procurement policies at critical situations mainly to help the farmers. He also pointed out that like trade unions there must be “**Farmers Unions**” to solve their problems. No barren or fallow lands should be taxed. Improper canons of taxation on the part of the government should be rectified.²⁴ By adopting straight forward and honest policies the government should save them.

He did not acknowledge and approve the collection of taxes and surcharges for the uncultivated lands from the farmers. The government should realise that the poor farmers are the backbone of the society. If the farmers were allowed to suffer one should note that the government too had to suffer. The government’s false statements about the welfare of the farmers should be stopped.²⁵ Much importance must be given to the responsibilities of the government in safeguarding the sorrowful measures of the farmers.

Suggestions for the Promotion of Farmers:

As a pragmatist, Muthuramalinga Thevar, was able to suggest the ways and means for the uplift of the farmers. Only by offering enough wages for the agricultural labourers, the production could be enhanced and that would enrich agrarian economy. Further he was of the view that the government should never expect a high income to the state from the farmers. Efforts should be taken by the government to execute land reform activities to solve the problems of farmers and to achieve proper yield. The farmers



should be prevented from selling and transfer of their landed possessions to others due to financial problems.²⁶ The government take efforts in cultivating the areas of lands left uncultivated. Due to financial constrains the farmers too found it a strenuous task to purchase things required for agrarian pursuits.

These problems too aggravated the difficulties of the farmers. The land lords escape from the critical situations simply by leaving the farmers in the lurch and the government also reached the state of inertia. The lack of co-ordination and joint endeavour among the different sectors, agriculturists were allowed to suffer and starve.²⁷ Thus, the multifarious problems of the cultivators were analysed by him in a detailed manner and due to his own ways he suggested solutions for them.

He utilised his membership in the Legislative Assembly to expose the condition of the farmers and land lords in Tamil Nadu. The **Inam Land Abolitions Act** was passed by his efforts and that relieved the poor people from the horrors of Zamindars.²⁸ At all levels he dedicated himself for the uplift of the peasant community by his own practical approaches with all earnestness and sincerities.

Muthuramalinga Thevar was a **Patta** holder of the Ramanathapuram **Jameen** and he was an eminent farmer. His **Jamin Vivasayigal Sangam** assisted him in dealing with the problems of farmers. By conducting a number of Peasant's Conferences he fought for their welfare.²⁹ The Rajapalayam Conference of 1952 was a notable one. Leaders like N.G. Ranga, E.M.S. Nambudripad, A.K. Gopalan, P. Ramamurthi, P. Jeevanantham participated in it and expressed their leftist view points. At Ramanathapuram with the support of the extremists of the Congress Muthuramalinga Thevar arranged an agricultural conference.³⁰ In that conference Muthuramalinga Thevar with all critical analysis highlighted the problems of the farmers. He strongly recommended the abolition of the Zamindari system. This was a boon for Tamil Nadu to know about the agrarian principles of Muthuramalinga Thevar.³¹ Anti Zamindari



slogans, written in the walls and also published in the form of pamphlets and handbills also became familiar. As an impact and influence of such measures the Congress party in its election manifesto included the abolition of Zamindari system. To deal with the issues of the farmers a committee was constituted under the chairmanship of T. Prakasam.³² This pioneering endeavour was due to Thevar's own view points.

Before and after 1947 he was able to notice the downtroddenness and weaknesses of the farmers. 85% of the farmers were unable to get all the requirements of life. They were affected by price hike, unemployment and lack of facilities for agriculture. The concept of increased production was also a nightmare. The stocks of food grains and other essential commodities were not upto the target.³³ Such things prevented the people to meet out the needs of having stomach full of food and maintenance of their own social standard.

Everyone should be provided with the opportunity for carrying out independent agricultural activities to the tune of 25 acres. Joint farming system should be implemented. Land ceiling should be fixed for the landlords who enjoyed exorbitant earnings by their lands.³⁴ Agricultural loans borrowed already should be withdrawn. The prices of agrarian as well as industrial products must be fixed with a thorough application of the different economic principles in a practical and practicable way. The broker's role in agrarian activities should be removed.³⁵ All the above facts reveal that Muthuramalinga Thevar was so specific in promoting the farmers by eliminating their distresses and grievances.

Muthuramalinga Thevar born as a member of an agriculture family contributed his mite to the upliftment of peasants by his own pragmatic approach. In that sense it is also worth to remember that he was the lone leader who raised his voice in favour of the peasants. He left no stones unturned for placing the peasants at the highest pedestal. During the first Tamil New Year's day i.e., on the first day of **Chittirai**.



Muthuramalinga Thevar himself used to plough the land by himself. This was celebrated as a festival on that day. Thus Muthuramalinga Thevar was known for his faith over traditions and he himself was a forerunner in leading the people towards a specific goal.

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