



E-ISSN: 2706-9117  
 P-ISSN: 2706-9109  
 Impact Factor (RJIF): 5.63  
[www.historyjournal.net](http://www.historyjournal.net)  
 IJH 2025; 7(12): 93-96  
 Received: 22-09-2025  
 Accepted: 25-10-2025

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## The implementation of land reforms in Tamil Nadu

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**DOI:** <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2025.v7.i12b.597>

### Abstract

On the eve of independence, India was facing two serious economic problems. Wide inequalities of income and mass poverty. The solution of these problems requires long run planning to remove poverty and to bring social justice. Mostly in rural areas of the population is still depending on land for livelihood and the land is most unequally distributed the first and the major step in this direction was the abolition of zamindari system. It has been observed that in India, distribution of land emerged from feudalism. This feudalism exhibited high degree of inequality of wealth and this reflects in inequality of income. Land reforms must be reviewed in light of these socio-economic realities. Moreover this important tool for social-economic change in the country. Peasants were often browbeaten and exploited by Mirasdars, rich landowners of the Madras Presidency. The mirasdars dad demmied to wages in kind and failure of north east monsoon questioned the survival and employment of the peasants. The interesting phenomenon is that the cultivators belong mostly to the Caste Hindu Sector wherein the landless, most probably all in the category of Scheduled castes and most backward classes. The Council also constituted a Committee with the Minister of Home Affairs, Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda, as Chairman and the Minister of Food and Agriculture, the Member in charge of Land Reforms in the Planning Commission, and five Chief Ministers who were Vice-Chairmen of the Zonal Councils, The present paper aims to focus in review the progress of land reforms in different States and propose measures for securing implementation.

**Keywords:** Landowners, Mirasdars, ration, paddy, cultivators, Agricultural laborers, Mayavaram Agreement, Planning Commission

### Introduction

Land reform and agrarian reforms have become synonymous, indicating that reform programs have become more comprehensive and encompass much more than the reform of land tenure or land distribution. Reform movements have recurred throughout history, as have the crises they are intended to deal with because reform has rarely dealt with the roots of the crises. Reform has served as a problem-solving mechanism and therefore has only been extensive enough to cope with the immediate crisis. Reformers have often faced hard choices: to promote and sustain private ownership with inequality or to institute public or collective ownership with equality but with restrictions on the individuals' private interests; to spread employment by supporting labor-intensive, low-productivity techniques, or to promote high productivity through capital-intensive, efficient methods; to pursue gradual "repair and maintenance" reform that is ineffective or to promote revolutionary, comprehensive, effective but disruptive reform. In capitalist reforms these contradictions have usually been resolved in favor of the favorite set of options; in socialist reforms, in favor of the second. Land tenure reform seems to have been of little significance in creating substantive economic change, although it has been important for improving the status of peasants and maintaining social and political stability.

The earliest programs of land reforms implemented with some measure of success were the abolition of these intermediaries. Madras Land Utilization Order of 1950 was passed. This order empowered the District upon the holder of any waste or arable land which had not been cultivated during the cultivation season. In 1950, Governments formed the Land Revenue Reforms Committee in the matter of undertaking reforms in the land tenure and land revenue systems prevailing in the ryotwari areas of the State. The committee submitted its report; the Governments examined the committee's report. Agriculture has been the main occupation in Tamil Nadu since ancient days. Most of the rural population in Tamil Nadu depends on agriculture and agro-based industries. Agriculture has been helping the development of the

industry by providing various raw materials such as cotton, textiles, oilseeds, and other things and is also being exported to foreign countries. Agriculture has also promoted industrial job opportunities and has produced food for industrial workers. So, the Governments have been taking all types of steps for the development of agriculture. Considering the importance of the agricultural sector, the Governments have been making efforts to strengthen it by introducing, the intensive agricultural District program, multiple cropping, dry farming, and so on. Many agencies were created to help the small farmers<sup>[1]</sup>.

Co-operative Movement was strengthened to increase the productivity of agriculture. This speaks of the great importance of the Indian economy. Agriculture depends on the natural and environmental factors like climate and the nature of soils and thus makes different areas suitable for different types of crops and plants. It played an important role in total economic development. The Implementation Committee met 9 times. The first meeting was held in December 1963 when the Committee made a general review of the situation. It decided that detailed information regarding the implementation of land reform programs and the difficulties experienced in expeditious and effective implementation should be reported to the Committee and an officer specially deputed to go around the States for this purpose. The main features of the land legislation, its state of implementation, the deficiencies in the law and its implementation, the advice given by the Implementation Committee to the State Governments, and the action taken thereon in respect of each State have been set out briefly in the following paragraphs

On the issue of exploitation of the peasants all over the ryotwari region, the communist activists instigated them to agitate against the marauders. The Mirada's denial of wages in kind and the failure of the North-East Monsoon questioned the survival and employment of peasants. Moreover, the peasants put pressure upon the government to enact tenancy rights, food rationing, compulsory procurement of paddy, etc., resulting in widespread unrest in Zamindars areas of the state. The marauders managed to escape from the levy on food grains somehow or the other and the entire burden fell on the poor peasants. The prices of essential consumer goods increased steadily. These factors severely affected the poor peasants and forced them not to have a single square meal a day. In addition to this, the mirasdars enhanced the rent rate and forcibly evicted the tenants of the ryotwari areas. Given these oppressive measures peasant agitations spread in the districts of Tanjore, Ramnad, and Madurai districts.

Based on the discussions of the members in the Assembly and the Council the Congress government brought out several acts for relieving the burdens of the peasants. When Congress assumed power in 1946, the first step in the direction of land reforms was the elimination of the Zamindari System. After Independence, the Congress government gave immediate relief to the riots by passing the Madras Estate Land Reduction Bill of 1947. The Act approximately fixed the rent of the Zamindari tracks to that of the Ryotwari areas. After giving temporary relief in 1947, the Zamindari Abolition Bill was passed in the Madras Legislature in 1948 and it became the law in 1949 which eliminated the Zamindars by compensation. The Act empowered the government to take over all estates subject to the payment of reasonable compensation. Provisions were

made in this Act for the grant of Ryotwari patta to the peasants of the estates after the estates were surveyed and settled on Ryotwari principles. With the introduction of this reform, the last vestige of feudalism was wiped off ushering in the area of contentment and self-reliance in the former estates which constituted one-fifth of the entire Tamil Nadu. The exploitative intermediaries were taken over by the government and the compensation paid to them was Rs.435 crores<sup>[3]</sup>.

The land reforms introduced by Congress to abolish the Zamindari system created fear in the minds of other landlords in the Tanjore Delta region. Tanjore, the granary of the state, leasing of land was common. With the anticipatory land reform, the relationship between the Mirasdars and the tenants and the customary farm laborers or panial on the other hand became strained. Several miradors in the district refused to renew a lease agreement with their usual tenants and displaced them. Agrarian relations became disturbed in Tanjore in 1951-1952. It resulted in the displacement of tenants and dismissal of farm laborers and it ultimately culminated in agrarian crimes and disturbances. The situation threatened to cause law and order problems, besides a fall in agricultural production. The enhancement of coolly for farm labors and improvement of the condition of their work were the demands of the farm servants which took politics to overturn. A meeting of both sides was held under the Revenue Minister Kalavenkata Rao and a settlement was arrived at known as the 'Mayavaram Agreement'. The Government promulgated the Tanjore Tenants and Panniyal Protection Ordinance in 1952 employing the provisions of the Agreement. The ordinance was replaced by the Tanjore tenants and Panniyal Protection Act of 1952.<sup>4</sup> This Act provides the regulation of wages payable to the peasants in the Tanjore district and takes king remedial measures for the conciliation officer appointed under the Act. The Act gave security of tenure for five years to the cultivating tenants and also fixed the maximum rent that they should pay. The Act also provides for machinery to settle disputes between the cultivating tenants and the landowners between them and the pannaiyal.

With the passing of the Tanjore Act, the owners of other districts also evicted their tenants with the view to bringing the land under their cultivation. The provision relating to cultivating tenants in the Act were replaced with the passing of a general Act covering the whole state. The members emphasized in the Assembly to protect the tenants from unjust eviction. As a result, Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act 1955 was enacted. The Act gave protection from eviction to cultivating tenants and provided for the security of tenancy without time limit and compulsory execution of fresh lease deeds. Revenue Divisional Officer or Special Duty Collectors appointed for the purpose was component to deal the cases. The tenants were aware of several safeguards to them through legislative measures.<sup>5</sup> The forcibly evicted tenants could apply for restoration. Every cultivating tenant desirous of depositing rent could deposit the same with the Court of Revenue Divisional Officer in person or through his agent. The tenant could apply for restoration of possession if he was unjustly dispossessed. They could apply to Revenue Divisional Office for the restoration.

### **Land reforms and their implantation**

Recent land reforms legislation in the madras state was first initiated in 1938 with the appointment of prakasam committee to enquire into the conditions in the zamindari and other proprietary areas. After an interruption during the war, legislative activity gathered momentum and so far, no less than 40 measures have been passed. Leaving out minor enactments of passing interest rendered necessary by the exigencies of the situation, three major efforts at reconstituting the agrarian institutions may be listed as (i) the abolition of zamindari act of 1948 (ii) the first rent Act of 1956 and (iii) the ceiling on Land Act of 1960. It is proposed in this paper to examine the implications and assess the economic consequences of these three Acts in the reorganized madras state.

### **Zamindari abolition act**

The land tenure pattern in madras state, prior to the abolition of the zamindaris, should form a necessary background for a proper assessment. The total area of the madras state (as after reorganization) was 32.085 million acres of which 40.21 million or 12.5 per cent of area under zamindari tenure, the product of the permit and settlement of 1973. The term zamindari is but a shorthand expression and includes permanently settled areas of all categories like zamindari, jagirdari and major inam estates but excluding minor inams. There were on the whole about 90 such estates which were paying a peshkash of Rs.2,38,926 to the zamindaris. However, collected by way of rent, perhaps ten times as much, because even after the implementation of the Rent Act according to ryotwari assessment, the revenue amounted to Rs.15.98 lakhs.

Under the 1973 Act peshkash was fixed in perpetuity but not the rate of rent leviable by the zamindari. Land Cornwallis fondly hoped that this flexibility in rent collection would induce the zamindari to assume the role of pioneering agriculturists à la the British land lords like Jethro Tull and turnip town send. However a review of the zamindar's role in a century and half proved that Cornwallis' hope remained but a pious wish. The rents had been frequently raised in most of the estates, quite out of parity with ryotwari assessment in adjacent areas. The high rent bordering on rack-renting had to be curbed first before a comprehensive action could be taken. This led to the passing of the madras Estate Act in 1947.

Apart from a right to levy the rent, these zamindari exercised proprietary rights over communal forests and other lands. Lest they should dispose them off to feather their nests, the madras estates, communal forest and private lands Act was passed in the same years. Following these, came the most important of all the thorough-going madras estates Act. The occupancy tenets were transformed into peasant proprietors under ryotwari tenure paying their land revenue straight to the all government.

Under this Act, the wages payable to pannaiyals were fixed according to (i) the terms set forth in the mayuram agreement dated 28-10-1948 which specified daily wages for men and women in addition to 1/7 of gross produce for all the various agricultural operations in which the pannaiyals should engage themselves according to the needs of their masters, or (ii) the rates provided in the new Act. This legislative enactment was supplemented by negotiations by leaders of both classes and the measure should be deemed to be a success as it speedily restored peace on the pannaial front. This episode, however, led to an eruption of disputes

between landowners and their tenants. Suffice it to point out that the tenants began to be vocal against the landlord's exactions. From tanjour, this tension spread over the whole state. Once again, the Government intervened by passing immediately the madras cultivating tenants protection Act 1955 and finally the madras cultivating tenants Act 1956. The former was an emergency measure aimed at preventing unjust evictions of cultivating tenants.

### **Conclusion**

The three major measures of land reform undertaken since independence have simplified the tenure system by establishing state wide ryotwari tenure evolved a system of fair rent and fixed ceilings on landholding albeit rigid in appearance too liberal in content to yield any substantial surplus land for redistribution to the landless.

Although tedious and painstaking legislative activity has gone into the reorganization of the institutional structure the paramount objective of stepping agricultural productivity has yet to be achieved. The limits on the right of resumption for self-cultivation by owners, under the tenancy and ceilings legislation, based on the canons of social justice have contributed to fragment holdings. There is an urgent need to fix floors on holdings to prevent further atomization by both laws of inheritance and tenancy.

In madras state the average holdings per agricultural family is about 5.5 acres. But 67.5 per cent of the holdings are of less than 5 acres in size of which 66.6 per cent is dry land. Irrigation has extended only to one-third of the net sown area and yet all the river water resources have been harnessed. Without tapping underground water sources agriculture productivity in the state would tend to stay put at the present level. Tropical climate renders water the sine qua non of agriculture productivity. The fallow lands accounting for 4,138 million acres is an index and a measure of the need for water and perhaps finance and adequate supply of agricultural requisites. In the provision of these, by encouraging minor irrigation works on public and private account expanding credit facilities and supplying seeds, fertilizer, etc, in short in building up a technical and administrative infrastructure lays the future development of madras agriculture. These social measures served as the foundation for future social developments and welfare measures. Again, these measures made an indelible impression on Tamil society and they contributed substantially to raising the status of the Tamils. This has become a memorable chapter in the social history of Tamil Nadu. They have provided compensation for the expropriated land and hence left wealth and income distribution largely unaffected. They have been conditional upon peasant participation in social and political activity and cooperative organization, even though the peasant was unprepared for these activities. Moreover, the redistribution of land has rarely been fortified by protective measures that could prevent ownership and the recurrence of crises. Nevertheless, major efforts have been expended by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other international bodies and by governments to devise viable frameworks for solving agricultural and rural problems emanating from defective agrarian structures.

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