

THE LAND OF PAZHASSI RAJA AND THE RICE CAPTURING STRUGGLE

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Malabar has an important role in the anti-colonial movement and Indian freedom struggle. The British had took pro-feudal policies which ultimately made the life of the peasants miserable. The *jenmis* worked as agents of collection of land revenue of the British and they extorted the peasants in the name of different taxes and levies. It was in connection with this, the Karshakasangam was formed in Malabar. This organization led so many peasant uprisings and agitations against the feudal landlords. The Pazhassi Nelleduppu Samram was the important chapter in the History of peasant struggles in North Malabar.

By the treaty of Sreerangapattanam Malabar was ceded to the British by Tippu Sulthan and it became the part of Madras presidency. Before the settlement, the hereditary property in Malabar was freely brought and sold. After the acquisition of Malabar the British introduced new land revenue system in this area. They abolished traditional land laws of Malabar and introduced Rytowari system in which *jenmi* was recognized as an absolute owner of the soil, which formed the basic of British land policy in Malabar. The tenants were subjected to pay the increased rent time to time and they were often subjected to eviction. The tenants had to pay rent even at the time of crop failures also. The British introduced new judicial system and abolished courts and helped *jenmis* in many ways. The mistaken policy of British which protected the privileges and interests of the landlords proved the way for the revolt and protests of peasants in many parts of Malabar. The *jenmis* had profited too much and other classes do little under the British. The cultivating class and other lower strata of the society rapidly degenerating into estates of poverty. Moreover the social and economic inequalities, superstitions, caste rigidity etc. resulted the deplorable condition of tenants. It was in this situations, the tenants began to think of an organization of protecting their rights.

The peasant's played a dominant role in the social change in Kerala. The peasant protest at the time of 1948 in Kottayam Taluk in Malabar against landlordism and private property had a significant role in it. Even India got independence in 1947 the Government neglected the demands of the freedom fighters and joined hands the upper class which disappointed the common people. After the second world war, the people was under utter starvation due to shortage of food and as per the direction of Indian National Congress, AICC

the people started to cultivate in the available waste lands. The Karshakasangam and Communist party led these activities in Malabar.

In Malabar the activities of peasant organization named Karshakasangam was started in 1935. A meeting of peasants were held at Kolachery in Taliparamba taluk under the leadership of Vishnu Bharatheeyan as President and K.A.Keraleeyan as secretary. The branches of Karshakasangam sprang up all over Malabar from 1936 to 1938¹. Many units of Karshakasangam was formed various parts of Kottayam Taluk. The tenants association sought to organize all categories of tenants, particularly the Thiyyas against enhancement of rent, illegal exactions and renewal fees. This period of tenancy agitation also witnessed the formation of caste organisations like NSS, SNDP and others. It was the formation of the caste organization of these sections of people that together with the tenancy movement laid the first basis for the rising peasant movement. So the peasant movement of this phase was based on the small *kanamdars*,² *verumpattamdars* ³ and the agricultural labourers. Though there were Nair leaders also, the bulk of the second level leadership came from Ezhava caste, who were formed a sizeable section of the actual labourers.⁴ In fact, the small peasants of North Malabar got involved in the movement not simply to ameliorate their economic condition. There were a cultural revolt, a political mobilization and a movement for economic settlement.

The peasant struggle in Malabar had passed through different phases. In the first phase, the Mappilas of South Malabar had fought the struggle alone which finally culminated in the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. In its second phase, the leadership was snatched by the Nair *Kanam*⁵ tenants, who utilized it for securing their own special interests. It is interesting to note that while the peasant struggle was originally by the *verumpattam* tenants to prevent the encroachment into the customary rights, its leadership in its second phase was spearheaded by *kanam* tenants. The agitation of this phase was not a mass movement in the full sense of the term, the overwhelming majority of the *verumpattam* tenants were kept out of its purview and the demands were mainly confined to those that concerned the *kanamdars*. The demands of the *kanamdars* were taken up by the national movement in their efforts to enlist the support of the workers and peasants into the struggle for independence.⁶ It is true that this was a mass movement in the full sense of the term, since its demands were confined to those that affect the *kanamdars*, the large mass of peasants.⁷

During this period foreign rule came to an end, but the *jenmi* system was strongly existed in Malabar. After the end of second world war the peasants and ordinary people of

¹ K.V.Babu, *Malabar Charithram Mithum Mithayayum, Sathyavum*, Kozhikode, 1997, p.48.

² The holder of Kanam tenure

³ Simple lease for an year

⁴ K.K.N.Kurup, *Malabarile Karshaka Bandangalil Oru Padanam*, Kozhikode, 1985, p.23.

⁵ A customary tenure interpreted by British courts as possessing the characteristics for both lease and mortgage.

⁶ E.M.S Namboodiripad, *Kerala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, p.10

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.118.

Malabar organized many agricultural agitations. In this period famine was widely spread in Malabar. Besides these, the exploitation of *jenmis* also created sufferings of the people. At the same time black market was also common in Malabar. The *jenmis* exploited the peasants in different ways like pattam, varam, kathyalanpanam, kuzhikkanam⁸, nuri etc. The scarcity of rice also made the situation worse. The main aim of the Pazhassi Nelleduppu Samaram was to solve the scarcity of food and not the elimination of *jenmi* system.

The person namely Keraleean led the farmers march which was help to the foundation of peasant struggle in eastern part of Kottayam and Pazhassi. At that time Mattannur Madhusudanan Thangal, Ayyaloor Kannothe Thazhathuveedu, Pazhassi Krishna Mathilakam Devasam were the powerful and main landlords of Mattannur area. The peasants of the Pazhassi area, Sivapuram village, Kolari areas joined together and protested against the atrocities of the landlords. The first peasant movement in the area was taken place at Ayyaloor near Pazhassi. The landlord of Ayyaloor Kannothe Thazathuveedu namely Chathukutti Nambiar was a cruel person. K.T. Madhavan Nambiar was a member of Karshakasangam and he was also belonged to Ayyaloor Thazhathu veedu. He was unjust activities of the *jenmi* who was trying to capture the management of elementary school Kolari which was owned by Koran Gurukkal belonged to a lower community. Under severe public protest the *jenmi* was defeated in his attempt. After that then the *jenmi* tried to suppress his peasants in all ways. In 1939, the landlord prohibited the tenants from doing the *punam*⁹ cultivation. As a result a conflict was started there between landlord and peasants. During this struggle, Chathukutti Nambiar was severely injured.

On 1940 September 15th an imperialist day was celebrated under the banner of Karshakasangam of Pazhassi. By rejecting the orders of Police, a large group of farmers came to join the places like Maloor, Muzhakkunnu, Thillenkeri, Pazhassi etc. and their march was come to Pazhassi. The police tried to disperse the assembled peasants by using force and a police man was died. The leaders including three members of Sivapuram and eleven members of Ayyaloor and eighteen members of Pazhassi were arrested and accused and prosecuted in that case. A person namely, P.T. Narayanan Nambiar, who was an accused was died in jail. In that case six members were punished for life imprisonment, who were the members of Pazhassi Karshakasangam.¹⁰

The peasants of Sivapuram and Tholambra village also joined together and started agitation against the anti-tenant activities of the *jenmis*. V. Anandan was the leader of peasants of Thillenkeri, Payyam and Kottayam thaluk. Another leader of the peasants of Pazhassi was Balakrishnan Nambiar who was the organizer of PCC society which was working to solve the food scarcity problem in the area.¹¹ As the peasants were not permitted

⁸ A lease which had characteristics of kanam and kuzhikkanam

⁹ Waste land cultivation of forest region

¹⁰ E.P. Jayarajan, *Kannur Jilla Communist Party Charithram* (ed.), Kannur, 2005, pp. 50-51.

¹¹ A.N. Mukkatty, *Kannur Rashtriya Charithram*, Kannur, 2008, pp. 20-24.

cultivation in punam lands and in many other places of the *jenmis*, the people started to die due to starvation. The peasant leaders requested the landlords to distribute the food grains in the granaries on paying fair price. But the practice of the *jenmis* was to sell it in the blackmarket. In April 1948 eight bullock carts of paddy was proceeding to the Kottayam Kovilakam from Muzhakunnu Devasam. The members of Pazhassi Karshakasangam entered in the scene and stopped it under the leadership of V. Anandan tried to distribute the paddy to the poor people of Pazhassi and surrounding area. So then the Malabar special Police camp was started at Shivapuram. They started to repressive measures of this area. They raided of Ayyalloor, Pazhassi, Kanjalari and Sivapuram to catch the criminals. They searched day and night along the villagers during the raid they harmed the people, attacked the house, harass the women etc. So the Communist party ready to starting Gorilla war against the MSP. In the preparation of this struggle member of Communist party namely Kaarathan Koran was killed¹². The consequence of the rice capturing struggle at Pazhassi was unexplicable.

On 1948, a group of Congress goondas came by lorry at Pazhassi. They entered Balakrishnan's house, and dragged him out of the house in front of his parents. And was dragged him through the stones and through short cuts took him to MSP camp. While on the way MSP ordered him to say Inquilab Sindabad. Before finishing this slogan they beat on his neck rapidly. Then the goondas took him to the landlord's house. After taking rest they ordered him to stand in front of their house. Then a man named roudy captain kicked hard on his chest. After that the people of Pazhassi had never seen Balan master dead or live. This time Kaarai Paithal who gave shelter for the peasant leaders of Pazhassi Nelleduppu struggle. The police came to arrest the hiding leaders and arrested Kaarai Paithal. But could not catch them. Infuriated by this they arrested Paithal's wife, harassed her and dragged her to MSP camp. In the evening, on hearing the news Karai Paithal was shocked and he hanged himself in the tree near Ayyalloor L.P. School. Many of the leaders of Pazhassi Nelleduppu struggle took asylum at Puralimala. From there the leaders thought to making defense. But there was no unity in their activities¹³. So it was invain. V. Anandan led the protest activities under ground. He heard the news of Balakrishnan Master's death, then he came back to the village without getting fully recovered from his disease. He tried to organize the people of Pazhassi against MSP. But on the way of Pazhassi, police found him. He tried to hide a thick forest, but some of the goondas captured him under the leadership of Meeshagopalan. Then they beat him badly and tied him on a palm tree and he was shot dead by the MSP. Some of the leaders of Nelleduppu protest died in the shooting of Selam jail.

The Pazhassi Nelleduppu samaram was not completely eliminate the *jenmi* system of Pazhassi. But the struggle gave inspiration to lot of peasant agitations in future and also gave the inspiration to peasants to react against the exploitation of *jenmis*. This peasant agitation

¹² Ranajwala Magazine published by Mattannur Nagarasabha, Mattannur, 2014, pp. 52-54.

¹³ Premarajan. V. *Pazhassi Thillenkeri Payam Samarangal-Oru Avalokanam*, Kannur, 2000, p. 30

is the main reason to pass Communist ministry to pass several laws and acts against *jenmi* system.

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