STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN LAND HOLDINGS
OF THANJAVUR DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

R. Rajagopalan and B. Anuradha*

During the last four decades, structural changes have taken place in the
ownership, control and operation of land. A series of land reform legislations
and to a lesser extent, the economic improvement brought about by the
various agricultural programmes have been mainly responsible for these
changes.

This paper is concerned with the structural changes in the ownership
and operational holdings and the associated reasons. Changes in tenancy
conditions are also reviewed. These are sought to be examined with the
help of data from 15 villages in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. In 1967-
68, a sample of 150 farms distributed over 15 villages of Thanjavur district
was surveyed to study farm management aspects.1 Again, after more than
17 years, the same sample was approached for a study on change in paddy
yields.2 The second survey in 1984-85 was not as exhaustive as the earlier
one of 1967-68. Even then sufficient details are available to assess the change
that has taken place in the structure of land holdings between 1967-68 and
1984-85. In 1984-85, 17 of the original sample farmers had migrated out
of their villages. So the analysis in this paper has been confined to the 133
farms for which data are available at both points of time.

As one of the first set of districts in which the package programme was
implemented, Thanjavur has succeeded in achieving higher levels of agricul-
tural production. The Tanjore Tenants and Pannaiyal Protection Act,
1952, the Madras Cultivating Tenants Protection Act, 1955 and the Madras
Cultivating Tenants (Payment of Fair Rent) Act, 1956 were some of the
legislative enactments aimed at preventing unjust evictions of tenants and
increasing the share of tenant. These should be kept in mind when looking
at the changes in the agrarian structure in Thanjavur. In the discussions
which follow, the survey of 1967-68 is referred to as the first survey and that
of 1984-85 as the second survey.

Ownership Holdings

In 1967-68, of the total sample of 133 farmers, 72 were pure owners
(operating owned land only), 36 were owner-cum-tenants (operating owned
and leased-in land) and 25 were tenants (owning no land, but operating

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*Members of the Research Staff, Agricultural Economics Research Centre, University of
Madras, Madras.

1. This refers to the farm Management Studies in Thanjavur conducted by the Agricultural
Economics Research Centre, University of Madras, 1967-70.

2. This study was conducted by the Agricultural Economics Research Centre, University of
Madras in 1984-85.
only leased-in land). In 1984-85, the same sample consisted of 110 pure owners, 19 owner-cum-tenants and four tenants.

Of the 72 pure owners in 1967-68, 63 remained as pure owners in 1984-85 also. Seven of the pure owners of the earlier survey had now become owner-cum-tenants. The remaining two losing all their lands, had been reduced to the status of tenants.

Regarding the direction and magnitude of change in owned area, of the 72 pure owners of 1967-68, in 35 cases it was static at 2.78 hectares per farm. Eight had increased their owned area from 3.29 to 4.57 hectares and for the remaining 29, the owned area had gone down to 3.57 hectares from 6.72 hectares per farm. In the case of increases, purchase of new lands was reported. The decreases in the 29 cases were accounted for in the following manner: Two had sold all their lands, ten had sold part of their lands, four lost the lands which they had leased out to other cultivators, nine lost the lands due to partition and for four it was a combination of partition as well as loss of leased-out land.

During the first survey, there were 36 owner-cum-tenants. Of these, 32 had become pure owners in 1984-85. Their average owned area had increased to 2.61 hectares from 1.12 hectare. Two still remained as owner-cum-tenants, and their average owned area had gone up to 1.33 hectare from 0.70 hectare. The remaining two had been reduced to the status of tenants, having lost all their owned land. Examining the actual increases or decreases of owned area, there were four instances of decreases. The decrease, on an average, was from 1.64 hectare to 0.61 hectare. For the remaining 32 farmers, the owned area had increased, the per holding owned area rose to 2.62 hectares from 0.98 hectare. The increases were due to acquiring leased-in lands by all the 32 farmers. In addition, two had purchased new lands.

Of the 25 tenants of the first survey, 15 were found to have become pure owners at the time of the second survey and ten had become owner-cum-tenants. So, it was an upward movement in status for all the 25 tenants of the first survey. As in the case of owner-cum-tenants, all the 25 had acquired lands which were leased in by them in 1967-68. Purchase of lands was reported in three cases. The details of the change in the structure of ownership holdings are presented in Table I. The number and average owned area of holdings in which (a) there was no change in area, (b) there were increases and (c) there were decreases are given in Table II. The same details about operational holdings are also shown in the same table and the discussion is presented in the next section. The foregoing analysis on ownership holdings indicates that the number of owners has increased but the per farm owned area had declined. All the tenants of the earlier period had improved their position. This concurs with the view of Beteille who observed that "the extent of tenancy is on the decline and the tenants who remain will probably acquire greater economic security in the future."

TABLE I. CHANGES IN STRUCTURE OF OWNERSHIP HOLDINGS (NUMBER AND AREA PER FARM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenancy status in 1967-68 and 1984-85</th>
<th>Owners</th>
<th>Owner-cum-tenants</th>
<th>Tenants</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Area (ha.)</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Area (ha.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4·90 3·65</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1·12 2·61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-cum-tenants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1·15 1·04</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0·70 1·33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0·89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0·23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4·42 3·30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1·05 2·39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE II. INCREASES AND DECREASES IN OWNED AND OPERATIONAL AREA (NUMBER AND AREA PER FARM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenancy status in 1967-68 and 1984-85</th>
<th>Ownership holding</th>
<th>Operational holding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase or decrease</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owners</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-cum-tenants</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants</td>
<td>Static</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Operational Holdings

Operational holding has been taken as the area which is available for farm operations, i.e., it includes area owned together with area leased in less area leased out. The changes in the operational area are indicated in Table III. The figures show a fall in the average size of operational holding of the pure owners from 4·10 to 3·16 hectares. The operational holdings of 31 of the owners remained static, the average being 2·77 hectares. Increases were noticed in 14 cases, with the average operational area going up from 2·32 to 3·24 hectares. Purchase of new lands by seven farmers and leasing in of lands by the other seven were the reasons for the increase. For the remaining 27 owners, there were decreases in their operational area, with the
average area declining to 3.56 hectares from 6.55 hectares. The reasons for these decreases were leasing out of land (12 cases), partition (8 cases) and selling away part of owned lands (7 cases).

Coming to owner-cum-tenants, the average size of operational holding had shrunk from 2.72 hectares in 1967-68 to 2.40 hectares in 1984-85. There was no change in the operational holdings of 32 farms, with the average remaining constant at 2.48 hectares. There were four cases of increases, with the average going up to 2.08 hectares from 1.66 hectare. Two had purchased new lands and two had leased in more land. There were 11 instances of decline, the average operational area coming down to 2.37 hectares from 3.54 hectares. Sale of lands partly by two farmers and fully by one farmer, partition in one farm and leasing out of lands by three farmers were the causes for the decline. In the other four cases, who had become pure owners, only a part of the original leased-in area was acquired and hence the decline in the operational holding.

The 25 tenants of 1967-68 had increased their average size of operational area from 1.26 to 1.49 hectare. For 12 of them, the operational area remained the same, the average being 1.35 hectare. There was a single instance of decrease in the operational area from 2.32 to 1.45 hectares. In the remaining 12 cases, increases had been noticed, the per holding average going up to 1.68 hectare from 1.08 hectare. In ten cases, the increases were due to leasing in more lands and two had purchased new lands.

For the total sample of 133 farms, the average size of the operational holding had declined by 17.2 per cent from 3.19 hectares to 2.64 hectares. The decrease in the size of operational holding of pure owners was 22.9 per cent and for the owner-cum-tenants, the decrease was 11.8 per cent. On the other hand, the tenants had increased their operational holding by 17.2 per cent.
Tenancy

Tenancy has been prevalent in Thanjavur district for quite a long time. Of the three usual forms of tenancy, *viz.*, cash rent, fixed kind rent and crop sharing, cash rent system has almost disappeared. Fixed kind rent known as *kuttahai* in the district is the one widely practised. Crop sharing, or *waram* as it is called in Thanjavur is also very much on the decline.

In the sample under study, there were 61 instances of tenancy during the first survey. Compared to this, only 23 farmers had leased in lands in 1984-85. The average area under tenancy has also declined from 1.52 hectare in 1967-68 to 0.77 hectare in 1984-85. The details under the various forms of tenancy are shown in Table IV. The figures clearly illustrate the decline of tenancy system in Thanjavur district. Only fixed kind rent seems to be still holding on. Kind rent was mainly paid in paddy.

**Table IV. Incidence of Tenancy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cash rent</th>
<th>Fixed kind rent</th>
<th>Crop sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Average area (ha.)</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The actual rent paid averaged about Rs. 500 per hectare for cash rent system in 1967-68. Under crop sharing system, it was equal share of the produce for the owner and the tenant both in 1967-68 and 1984-85. The land revenue and irrigation cess were met by the owner. The tenant had to meet all the cultivation expenses. In some cases, credit was provided by the owners for meeting the cultivation expenses. A part of the by-product (paddy straw) was also given to the owner by the tenant. In the case of fixed kind rent in 1967-68 for single crop lands, the rent varied from 500 kg. to 1,500 kg. of paddy per hectare and for double crop lands, it ranged between 1,000 and 3,000 kg. of paddy per hectare. The quantity depended upon the quality of land. In 1984-85, all the lands under fixed kind rent system were double crop lands only and the rent paid per hectare varied between 2,000 and 3,700 kg. of paddy.

The proportion of rent paid to the total value of output can serve as a better indicator of the sharing of the fruits of cultivation. The frequency distribution of these percentages is shown in Table V. The figures show a marked swing in favour of the tenants. In 1967-68, 31.1 per cent paid more than half of the produce as rent. In 1984-85, no one paid above 50 per cent. Those paying exactly half of the produce had also declined to 21.7 per cent in 1984-85 as compared to 27.9 per cent in 1967-68. The percentage
of tenants paying less than half of the produce as rent had increased in 1984-85 to 78.3 from 41 in 1967-68. To sum up, the number of tenants as well as area under tenancy had declined. Cash rent had vanished and crop sharing was not much in vogue. Fixed kind rent was the most popular one. Though the actual rent paid had increased, the proportion of rent paid to total produce had decreased considerably, indicating a better bargain to the tenants. Once again, the observations of Beteille about the improved earnings and economic security of Thanjavur tenant farmers as a result of land reforms and package programme are in agreement with the findings of the present study.\(^4\)

The main changes in the land holdings, as exhibited by the sample studies, are increase in the number of owners and reduction in the size of owned and operational holdings. Tenants, though going down in number, are better placed than before.

\(^4\) Beteille: \textit{op. cit.}, p. 158.