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# LAND TENURE REFORMS IN MYSORE AND CEILING ON HOLDINGS

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In this paper we confine ourselves to the tenancy reforms introduced in the Mysore State with specific reference to the provisions of ceiling on holdings and see how far the ceiling on holdings is of help in bringing distributive justice and result in equitable distribution of land and wealth.

The new Mysore State which came into existence on November 1, 1956, includes the following five areas: (1) The area comprising the present districts of Dharwar, Belgaum, Bijapur and North Kanara from the former Bombay State, (2) The area comprising the present districts of Bidar, Raichur, and Gulbarga from the former Hyderabad State, (3) The area made up of the present South Kanara District and Kollegal Taluka from the former Madras State, (4) The area which was formerly the state of Coorg, and (5) The area comprising the districts of Bangalore, Mysore, Hassan, Mandya, Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Chitaldurg, Tumkur, and Kolar of the former Mysore State.

At the time of formation of the new State, the Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act of 1948 as amended upto the end of October, 1956 was in force in the Bombay area. The Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act of 1950 as amended upto the end of October, 1956 was in force in the Hyderabad area. The Madras Cultivating Tenants Act 1956 had come into force in the Madras area in October, 1956. There was no tenancy law in the Coorg area. The Mysore Tenancy Act (1952) was in force in the Mysore area.

One of the salient points of the Bombay Act was with regard to the provision for the ceiling area. It defined the 'ceiling area' in terms of 'economic holding.' According to the Act, an economic holding would be,

- (a) 16 acres of *Jirayat* land (dry),
- (b) 8 acres of seasonally irrigated paddy or rice land,
- or
- (c) 4 acres of perennially irrigated land.

The ceiling area will be three times the economic holding. The Act laid down that no person would be able to hold in excess of this ceiling area.

The Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act largely followed the pattern of Bombay Act by introducing the concept of 'economic holding' as the

yardstick. The minimum area of land which would enable a cultivator to maintain an average family of 5 persons including himself in reasonable comforts was defined as an 'economic holding' and no person who held more than 5 times the size of the economic holding was allowed to acquire more land. On the recommendation of the Planning Commission, the Hyderabad Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, later introduced the concept of 'family holding.' Instead of 'economic holding' the unit of 'family holding' was devised as a new yardstick. The 'family holding' is "that area or extent of land which can be cultivated by a family of 5 members and which will yield a net annual income of Rs. 800." A ceiling has been put on future acquisitions of land at three times the family holding.

The Mysore Act mentioned of the permissible holding which the owner of land can maintain. This permissible area was 25 standard acres for each member of the family subject to the maximum of 100 standard acres. The Madras Act had the provision for resumption of land for personal cultivation of half the extent of land leased to the tenant provided that the extent of land held by him did not exceed  $13\frac{1}{2}$  acres of wet land or its equivalent to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres of garden land or 3 acres of dry land.

Thus there was great divergence in the objectives of the tenancy laws in force, in various integrated areas of the Mysore State. With the object of introducing uniformity in the objectives of the tenancy laws and their operation, the Government of Mysore appointed in 1957 a committee known as 'Mysore Tenancy and Agricultural Land Laws Committee.'

The Committee recommended that there should be a ceiling on holdings, which should serve the following objectives:

- (1) Meeting the widespread desire to possess land,
- (2) Reducing glaring inequalities in ownership and use of land,
- (3) Reducing inequalities in agricultural incomes, and
- (4) Enlarging the sphere of employment.

The Committee mentions that the ceiling of three family holdings suggested in the Second Five-Year Plan would be suitable for imposition in cases of future acquisitions. They further recommend that the ceiling on existing holdings under personal cultivation may be  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times the family holdings as against 3 family holdings for future acquisition. For the purpose of fixing a ceiling on holding they introduced the concept of 'basic holding' and 'family holding'. According to the Committee 'the basic holding generally indicates the minimum area needed for profitable cultivation,' 'A basic holding represents the extent of land which would give a net income of Rs. 400 per year.' (The terms 'economic holding' and 'family holding' are used to convey more or less the same meaning). A 'family holding', according to the committee, is "that extent of land which would normally provide a reasonable standard of living to an average family and also keep them more or less fully employed during agricultural season." They further stated that a 'family holding' in Mysore may be defined as "that extent of land, which would give to its owner-cultivator a net income of Rs. 1,200 *per annum*." This definition of family holding would, in their opinion, ensure an operational unit in any part of the State and at the same time would assure

the same standard of living as others. Judged by this standard, the ceiling on future acquisition would fetch a net income of Rs. 3,600. With regard to the distribution of surplus land they have recommended that it should be distributed in the following order of preference.

1. Landless agriculturists, agricultural labourers and displaced tenants having no land—not less than one basic holding each;
2. Tenants and displaced tenants with less than a basic holding, and owner-cultivators with less than a basic holding—not less than the extent required to make up a basic holding;
3. Tenants and displaced tenants with less than a family holding, owner-cultivators with less than a family holding; and
4. Other persons desiring personal cultivation.

According to the Committee there are 24.6 lakhs of holdings in the State comprising 267.8 lakh acres of land. 99.4 per cent of the holdings are below 100 acres, and these make 89.80 per cent of the extent. Nearly two-third of the holdings are below 10 acres and the total area of these holdings is just a quarter of the total extent. Holdings between 10-100 acres constitute nearly 30 per cent of the total number and the area included in them is 65 per cent of the total extent. 0.44 per cent of the holdings are in the group of 100-200 acres and comprise 5.36 per cent of the total extent. Holdings above 200 acres comprise 4.84 per cent of the extent though their number is only 0.12 per cent of the total number. The largest number of holdings is in the size group of 2.5-5 acres. Out of the total area of 267.8 lakh acres, 206.4 lakh acres are under personal cultivation. 61.4 lakh acres or 22.95 per cent of land is cultivated by tenants. They further state that “from the foregoing analysis it would be clear that the agricultural economy of the State largely approaches the ideal of peasant proprietorship. Only 28 per cent of the people working on land are landless and the owner-cultivators are more than thirteen fold the rentier class. 99.44 per cent of the holdings comprising 89.80 per cent of the area will not exceed the ceiling if it is 100 acres. The provision of tenancy law will affect only the rentier class and persons with large holdings. The total number of these is only 3.4 per cent of the total population.”<sup>1</sup>

## II

The main provisions with regard to ceiling on holdings of the Mysore Land Reforms Bill 1961, which was passed by the State Legislature after discussing the Committee's recommendations are as follows: The ‘ceiling area,’ the ‘family holding’ and the ‘basic holding’ have to be determined in terms of ‘standard acres.’<sup>2</sup> For this purpose lands have been classified into seven categories. Two standard acres will constitute a ‘basic holding,’ six standard acres a ‘family holding’ and 27 standard acres the ‘ceiling area.’ In the case of first

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1. Report of the Mysore Tenancy Agricultural Land Laws Committee, Bangalore, 1957, p. 42
  2. A standard acre is considered as equivalent to one acre of wet land or garden land possessing facilities for assured irrigation where two crops of paddy can be specifically raised.

class land, *i.e.*, wet or garden land which has irrigation facilities sufficient to grow two wet crops the extent of ceiling area will come to 27 ordinary acres.

In the case of fourth class land, *i.e.*, rainfed, wet or garden land in Malnad, the ceiling area will be 54 ordinary acres. In the case of fifth class land—dry or garden land in areas where the rainfall is more than 35"—the ceiling area will come to 108 acres. In the case of land belonging to the last category, namely the 7th class, *i.e.*, in areas where the rainfall is less than 25", the extent of ceiling area will come to 216 acres. (A major part of the area in the State receives rainfall less than 25").

According to a statement made by the Revenue Minister on the floor of the House (based on 27-standard acres as the ceiling) there would be a surplus of about 2 lakh acres available for distribution among the landless labourers and there were 21,05,076 landless labourers, 6,59,441 non-cultivating owners, 18,30,531 tenant-cultivators, and nearly 92,00,000 owner-cultivators.

The surplus land after fixing the ceiling area is proposed to be distributed as follows:

- (1) Displaced tenants having no land—not less than one basic holding each;
- (2) Landless agriculturists and agricultural labourers—not less than one basic holding each;
- (3) Tenants and displaced tenants with less than a basic holding—not less than the extent required to make up a basic holding;
- (4) Co-operative farms, a majority of whose members belong to one or more of the classes referred above—not more than the aggregate of such family holding as there are members on the co-operative farm;
- (5) Tenants and displaced tenants with less than a family holding, and owner-cultivators with less than a family holding—not more than the extent required to make up the family holding.

### III

To assess the benefits accruing from fixing the ceiling on holdings we give in Table I the data pertaining to six villages where agro-economic surveys were conducted by the post-graduate students of the college of Agriculture, Dharwar. The data pertain to:

- (1) Hulyal village which lies in the dry tract of Bijapur District, receiving an average rainfall of 20",
- (2) Yerikop, Kotur, Navalur and Kelgeri villages which fall in the transitional belt of Dharwar District receiving an average rainfall of 30", and
- (3) Hulginakatti village of Dharwar District which lies in the Malnad tract (bordering the transitional belt) receiving an average yearly rainfall of 37".

TABLE I—DISTRIBUTION OF HOLDINGS IN SIX VILLAGES OF DRY, TRANSITIONAL AND MALNAD ZONES IN BIJAPUR AND DHARWAR DISTRICTS OF NORTH MYSORE

Name of the Village	Type of Holdings	No. of Holdings	Total Area of all the Holdings in the Size-Group	Percentage to the total No. of Holdings	Percentage to Total Area
Hulyal (Average Yearly Rainfall: 20.74")	1. Below Basic Holding	187	1,290-07	82.38	47.56
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 16 acres)	35	847-23	15.42	31.24
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 48 acres)	4	247-11	1.76	9.11
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 216 acres)	1	326-39	0.44	12.09
	Total:	227	2,712-00	100.00	100.00
Yerikop (Average Yearly Rainfall: 30.91")	1. Below Basic Holding	86	255-22	75.44	38.88
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 8 acres)	24	299-00	21.05	45.56
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 24 acres)	4	102-11	3.51	15.56
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 108 acres)	—	—	—	—
	Total:	114	656-33	100.00	100.00
Kelgeri (Average Yearly Rainfall: 31")	1. Below Basic Holding	181	760-26	56.74	21.35
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 8 acres)	103	1,471-05	32.29	41.29
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 24 acres)	35	1,331-00	10.97	37.36
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 108 acres)	—	—	—	—
	Total:	319	3,562-31	100.00	100.00
Kotur (Average Yearly Rainfall: 30.32")	1. Below Basic Holding	270	1,089	75.42	38.32
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 8 acres)	73	1,201-08	20.39	42.25
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 24 acres)	15	552-35	4.19	19.43
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 108 acres)	—	—	—	—
	Total:	358	2,843-23	100.00	100.00
Navalur (Average Yearly Rainfall: 28.64")	1. Below Basic Holding	454	1,696-20	69.10	32.92
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 8 acres)	175	2,318-00	26.64	45.17
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 24 acres)	28	1,129-11	4.26	21.91
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 108 acres)	—	—	—	—
	Total:	657	5,143-31	100.00	100.00
Hulginakatti (Average Yearly Rainfall: 37.62")	1. Below Basic Holding	58	121-00	52.25	12.44
	2. Basic Holding (i.e., 4 acres)	37	322-20	33.33	33.18
	3. Family Holding (i.e., 12 acres)	15	370-00	13.51	38.07
	4. Above Ceiling Area (i.e., above 54 acres)	1	158-20	0.91	16.31
	Total:	111	972-00	100.00	100.00

The ceiling area in dry tract comes to 216 acres. It is about 108 acres in the transitional zone and 58 acres in the Malnad zone. In four villages of the transitional belt, there is no holding which falls above the ceiling area. In the dry and Malnad villages there is only one holding in each of the two villages which fall above the ceiling area. It forms only 0.44 per cent and 0.91 per cent of the total number of holdings in the villages covering an area of 12.09 and 16.31 per cent respectively of the total area, which shows that the ceilings provision affects only a very small percentage of holdings. The figures also reveal that the percentage of the 'family holding' is small. It varies from 13.51 per cent of the holdings and 38.07 per cent of the area in the Malnad village to 1.76 per cent of the holdings and 9.11 per cent of the area in the dry zone village, leaving a large percentage of the holdings below family holdings. The extent of basic holdings which are nearly one-third of the family holdings varies from 33.33 per cent of the holdings and 33.18 per cent of the area in Malnad village to 15.42 per cent of the holdings and 31.24 per cent of the area in dry zone village. Holdings falling below the basic size form the largest single group. It varies from 82.38 per cent of the holdings and 47.56 per cent of the area in the dry village to 52.25 per cent of holdings and 12.44 per cent of the area in the Malnad village. These figures reveal that the problem of small size holdings which fall under the category of 'basic' and below 'basic holding' is more acute than the problem of ceiling on holding. The figures also reveal that there are only a small per cent of the holdings which fall under the category of 'family holding' and above. Only these holdings may be considered to have sufficient income to make a reasonable standard of living.

### *Conclusions*

The ceiling on holding is no doubt needed to achieve the objective of equitable distribution. But this alone is not sufficient. The process of reducing inequalities is a two-fold one: a process of levelling up from the lowest levels as well as a process of levelling down from the top. The first aspect is more important if the agricultural economy of the country is to be strengthened. Moreover, if the country's agriculture is to be efficient, one approach is to reduce the number of people subsisting on land and resources invested in it. This takes us to the problem of palpably uneconomic holdings which fall under the category of 'basic' and below 'basic' holdings. For efficient agriculture, holdings which fall below the economic level should be discouraged. To begin with, we suggest that there should be a floor limit below which the holdings should not be allowed to be broken and this floor limit should operate at the level of 'basic holding'. The owners of holdings below this should be encouraged to seek alternative employment and should be provided with an opportunity for alternative employment. The holdings below the 'basic holdings' should be merged into 'basic holdings' so as to enable the owners of the 'basic holdings' to form 'family' holdings. Such measure alone will make efficient agriculture possible and will be of help, in introducing socialism in agriculture and achieve the objectives of equitable distribution of land and wealth. If ceiling and floor limits operate simultaneously, holdings will not be allowed to be too large to make cultivation unwieldy or too small for profitable cultivation. The holdings operating between ceiling and floor will not only give ample opportunity for gainful employment and reasonable standard of living but also make agriculture more efficient. Such measures will not only strengthen agriculture but also help in the overall economic development of the country.