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Country Politics: Madras 1880 to 1930

DAVID WASHBROOK

Introduction

THE period from the 1880s to the 1930s was one of major change in the political organization of India. Indians joined the British in the highest offices of state; government greatly increased its activity through legislation and through the trebling of taxation; elective institutions and legislatures steadily replaced the discretionary rule of bureaucrats; a nationalist movement of great size and force appeared; the means of communication—through road, rail and press—improved beyond recognition to bring together for the first time the diverse peoples of India. This was the critical epoch in the formation of the modern Indian state and many aspects of it have been the subject of historical study. Yet, paradoxically, the political history of rural India at this time has been much neglected. While we can turn to several works on national government and the Congress and to investigations of provincial political activity, we find considerably fewer on the organization of local politics and virtually none at all that deal with matters outside the principal towns. Until the rural locality has been examined, our knowledge of the political development of India must remain small, for it takes no great insight to see that most of India's wealth and population were to be found in the countryside. Whether the success of an Indian government be judged by the mid-Victorian standard of revenue or the mid-twentieth century standard of votes, it could be achieved only through rural control and support. This essay is meant as a tentative contribution to our understanding of political change in the countryside.

Its primary concern is, therefore, the peasant. Although the peasant was not the only element in rural society, his position as the main producer of wealth makes him central to any discussion. To a consider-

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able extent, the structure of power in rural India was determined by the structure of power among the peasantry.[1] However, the almost infinite variety of conditions in different parts of India threw up different types of peasant political organization. And there are almost as many different ways of attempting an analysis of them. This essay concentrates on two important aspects of peasant life—the ways in which agrarian production was organized and the ways in which peasants were related to governmental authority.

Section 1 examines a region of the Madras presidency organized for 'dry' cultivation. The area includes the Ceded districts (Kurnool, Bellary, Anantapur and Cuddapah) and most of hinterland Tamilnad (the districts of Salem, Coimbatore, Madura, Trichinopoly, Tinnevelly, and North and South Arcot).[2] It tries to show how changes in economic and administrative conditions produced a distinctive 'style' of peasant participation in politics. Section 2 analyses a region of 'wet' cultivation in Madras—the Kistna and Godaveri deltas. It attempts to demonstrate how a different set of relationships between agrarian production and the administration led to a different style of politics. Section 3 assesses the influence of these two regional polities on the supra-regional political organizations—the Congress and the provincial legislatures—of which they were part.

I

Between the great famine of 1876–78 and the depression of 1929–30, the Ceded districts and hinterland Tamilnad experienced slow but definite economic growth. Certainly there were regular rain-failures and shortages, but their effect in contracting the economy seldom lasted more than a year or two. The great famine, by contrast, had driven back cultivation in the Ceded districts to such an extent that it was twenty years before the cropped area reached its 1876 level. Between the mid-1880s and the mid-1920s, the acreage under cultivation kept pace with the growth of the population. According to the census the population of

[1] The arguments presented below are pitched at a high level of generality. Consequently, I have isolated 'the peasant' as the most useful general social category with which to investigate rural society.

[2] As the 'dry' region is categorized by a type of cultivation, it is not meant to include those parts of 'dry' districts in which 'wet' rice cultivation was to be found. In the districts of hinterland Tamilnad it thus excludes about 20 per cent of Tinnevelly, Trichinopoly and Madura where rice cultivation took place along the banks of rivers and large tanks.

these districts increased by about 30 per cent[3] while the area under ryotwari tenure—the only form of tenure for which we have information—went up by a third.[4] Admittedly, some of this new land was poor, but the area under irrigation—mostly from wells and tanks—also increased by about 25 per cent.[5] Moreover, changes in the use of land helped to raise the profitability of agriculture. Most of the land was under dry grain crops—cholum, ragi and combu—which were of little value. But as transport facilities developed, and as opportunities in world markets grew, the area under cash crops, particularly cotton and oilseeds, expanded.[6]

Together with the rewards of cash cropping, a steady rise in the price of grain helped to promote prosperity in the area. Grain prices, of course, were subject to wild fluctuations according to both the locality and the time of the year, but improved communications helped to control these fluctuations and to stabilize prices at higher levels.[7] As more was earned from the land, the share which the state took in land revenue became smaller. Although in theory the ryotwari revenue system, which covered three-quarters of Madras and nearly all of the dry districts, allowed the government to raise assessments to keep pace with prices, in practice this was never possible. Districts were resettled and prices reviewed only every thirty years and even then, as we shall see, government was not the master of its own administration. During the period under study the government at Fort St George was able to raise its assessment on dry land from an average of Rs 1.10 per acre to Rs 1.18, and on wet land from Rs 5.2 to Rs 5.8—increases of only

[3] Calculated from Dharma Kumar's estimate of population in 1886, D. Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 116 and *Census of India 1921 Madras. Volume XIII. Part II* (Madras, 1922), p. 4.

[4] *Reports on the Settlement of the Land Revenue in the Districts of the Madras Presidency for Fasli 1294 (1884–85)* (Madras, 1886), pp. 40–44; *Reports on the Settlement of the Land Revenue in the Districts of the Madras Presidency for Fasli 1330 (1920–21)* (Madras, 1922), pp. 17–20. (Hereafter this series of reports is abbreviated as *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli . . .*)

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Allowing for changes in the area covered by the statistics, between 1884–85 and 1920–21 the area under cotton grew by 40 per cent and that under ground-nut by 100 per cent. By the mid-1920s, these two crops occupied about 15 per cent of the acreage of most dry districts. *Agricultural Statistics of British India. Quinquennial series* (Calcutta, 1884–85 to 1920–21), Vol. I, 'Area under Crops'.

[7] The fluctuations remained sufficient to make it difficult to give an accurate idea of the scale of the price rise. But, roughly, dry grains were selling between 50 and 70 per cent more in the years 1910–17 than in 1880–87. During the shortages of 1918–20, prices went even higher. Calculated from 'Statements showing the prices of food grains' in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1290 (1880–81)* to *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1335 (1925–26)*.

between 7 and 12 per cent.[8] Its increased income from land revenue depended on the fact that more acres were assessed and more land became irrigated.

There is much to suggest a modest buoyancy in the agrarian economy at this time. Government censuses of cattle, ploughs and carts, however inaccurate they may have been, all indicate a steady growth in capital investment on the land.[9] Although there was no such thing as a free market in land, the evidence suggests a slow growth in land prices.[10] By the time of the First World War, the Madras government found itself under constant political pressure from rural areas to expand road and railway communications along potential trade routes.[11] Trade in agrarian produce was developing, albeit gradually and fragmentarily. Of course, this prosperity did not necessarily mean that everybody was getting richer. Indeed, many may have been getting poorer. A variety of economic, social and political factors stood between the cultivator and the fruits of his labour. Hence it is necessary to look closely at the nature of agrarian organization to see how crops were produced, who produced them and, perhaps most important of all, how they were sold.

The land in these districts was marked by the small size of the holdings and the extreme poverty of the holders. In 1900, for example, rather more than 70 per cent of all the ryotwari pattas issued by the government were for the payment of less than Rs 10 per annum in land revenue. In Coimbatore, the richest district, about 67 per cent of the holdings paid less than Rs 10; in Cuddapah, the poorest district, 77 per cent of the holdings were so rated.[12]

The amount of land represented by a Rs 10 patta was barely enough to support a family in good years, and in many years the rains failed. Even among these minute pattas, many were meant to support more than one family. In the early 1890s, Sir Frederick Nicholson, one of Madras' few agrarian experts, attempted to give an idea of how many so-called landowners held smallholdings of this type: 'their immense numbers may be judged from the fact that about 86 per cent of the

[8] Calculated from 'Statements of the Ryots' Holdings', *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1290* (*1880–1881*) to *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1335* (*1925–26*).

[9] See *Agricultural Statistics of British India*. Quinquennial Series, 1884–85 to 1920–21, 'Live-Stock'.

[10] See comments on land prices in *Reports of the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee, 1929–30* (Calcutta, 1931) 'Madras' [*RPBC*], p. 79.

[11] For example, see the district board campaigns in Ramnad, Madura and Coimbatore to get a railway to the West Coast, *Hindu*, 1 February and 17 May 1915.

[12] *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1310* (*1900–01*), pp. 71–7.

Madras ryots pay less than Rs 10 and on average Rs 4 in assessment'.[13] However, in every district—almost in every village—there were a few large pattadars whose holdings made a mockery of Sir Thomas Munro's claims that the ryotwari system created a society of equal peasant farmers. In Coimbatore and Tinnevelly there were several hundred, and in the Ceded districts several dozen, men paying more than Rs 250 per annum on a single patta. In 1900, the 7.5 per cent of pattas at the top of the revenue table paid more than 43 per cent of the land revenue.[14]

The growth of cash cropping in the dry areas produced a diversification rather than a specialization of crop patterns. Peasants seldom devoted the whole of their holdings to cotton or oilseeds but continued to sow dry grains alongside the more valuable crops. This was because they could not rely either upon the weather or upon prices. The Banking Inquiry noted how, in some 'dry' localities, ryots would grow as many as five different crops on the same land in the hope that, should some fail, the others at least might survive.[15] Equally, the prices of cotton and groundnut were fixed by international market conditions which varied from year to year but which were barely related to local conditions.[16] When the grain harvest was poor and prices were high, the peasant who had turned all his land over to cash crops could find himself in difficulties, as his income did not meet the cost of his food. Cultivators, even near markets, did not usually put more than a quarter of their land under a single cash crop;[17] and in villages more remote from the auction block, the proportion was less.

These crop patterns, together with the general poverty of the region, tended to limit marketing areas. In the poorest parts of the Ceded districts most ryots did not trade outside their village;[18] farther south,

[13] F. A. Nicholson, *Report regarding the possibilities of introducing Agricultural Banks into the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1895) [*RAB*], Vol. I, p. 232.

[14] *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1310 (1900–01)*, pp. 71–7. The problem of the zemindari ryot, who appears occasionally in the dry and more often in the wet region, is more difficult. However, on the basis of landholding size and rent payment, there is evidence of little real distinction between him and the government ryot. Most commentators thought that the structure of landholdings under zemindars was roughly the same as that under government and that, although zemindari rents were higher, they were collected less regularly. S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the Last Forty Years of British Administration* (Madras, 1892), p. 76; *RPBC*, pp. 7–8.

[15] *RPBC*, p. 14.

[16] *RPBC*, p. 108.

[17] See *Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee* (Madras, 1930) [*MPBC*], Vol. V. 'Reports by Investigators' for examination of 'dry' villages in Madura, Coimbatore and Bellary districts.

[18] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 230.

men bought and sold in shandies which served small circles of villages.[19] There was little scope for a fast-moving grain trade which, in other parts of India, often formed the backbone of commerce. As most villages grew most of their wants, 'the food-grain needed for local consumption is seldom shifted very far'.[20] Of course, most of the rice eaten had to come from outside, but in these areas, rice was a luxury available only to a few. All villages had some wells, usually on the land of the richer ryots, which provided sufficient irrigation to grow vegetables. Cloth was often locally produced and hand-loom weaving was an important village industry.[21] Household utensils and agricultural implements were made by village artisans. Most villagers had little use for imports.[22]

Of course, everything that was grown in the village or village circle was not consumed there: cotton and groundnut were exported from India and grain was needed in the towns. But the ordinary cultivator had nothing to do with these transactions. The government's revenue demand had to be met immediately after the harvest, and most peasants had to sell as quickly as they could to pay on time; and the usual conventions of credit required debts also to be repaid at the harvest, forcing the peasant to sell at once.[23] Further, capital was needed to transport grain by cart to the towns, and capital was in short supply. Most peasants therefore disposed of their grain immediately in the village or village shandie.

Cotton and groundnut cash crops also presented marketing difficulties. Both were sold, ultimately, to European and Indian companies which were based in the major towns. These companies usually operated through commission agents (dallals) who could combine to "dominate the market" at the expense of small, disorganized sellers.[24] In addition, cotton and groundnut fetched high prices only after they had been processed: most ryots were in no position to do this. They sold their raw produce relatively cheaply in the local shandie or even in the field.[25]

[19] *RPBC*, p. 119; *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV (London, 1928), p. 269.

[20] *RPBC*, p. 121.

[21] *Royal Commission on Agriculure in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 270.

[22] Except for cattle; and the cattle trade was highly decentralized, being carried on and financed by itinerant pedlars.

[23] Both these factors applied also to zemindari ryots. *RPBC*, p. 106; 'Report on Kurnool' pp. 4–5 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1312 (1902–3)*; *MPBC*, Vols. II–V, *in passim*.

[24] *RPBC*, p. 110.

[25] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 269. *MPBC*, Vols. II–V, *in passim*.

The Cotton Commission (1925–28) found that, in the area of the Ceded districts which it investigated, 87 per cent of the cotton crop had been sold initially in the village where it had been grown.[26] As the Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928) discovered, 'the keynote of the marketing system . . . is the predominant part played by the middleman'.[27]

The middle-man was the main beneficiary of the marketing system. In the grain trade, he could make profits either by transporting part of the crop to the towns or simply by keeping some of it where it was. As most ryots had to sell at the harvest, they glutted the grain market and drove down prices. The merchant who bought and stored made money as prices rose again during the next agricultural year.[28] In cotton and groundnut, he gained even more. Not only could he greatly enhance the value of the produce by processing it, but, if he operated on a sufficiently large scale, he could crack the hegemony of the urban dallal. The seller who guaranteed the delivery of many tons of decorticated groundnut or cotton kapas was in a strong bargaining position. Indeed, it was usual for a big rural trader to employ his own dallal to negotiate directly with the various purchasing companies.[29] If he kept the produce he had collected in a warehouse in the town, he could raise a loan on it without difficulty from urban sources, and wait for the best offer before selling it.

The middle-man played a key role in the economy of the dry areas, but it is difficult to discover who he was. In some parts of the region there were distinctly commercial groups: Komatis in the north, Devangas, Nadars, Vannigas and Tamil Muslims in the south. In localities which had been particularly stimulated by cash cropping, Marwaris and Multanis had moved in. But the absence of a thriving grain trade, and the problem of obtaining impersonal security for loans, tended to restrict their activities to the towns.[30] In the countryside,

[26] *Indian Central Cotton Commission. General Report on Eight Investigations into the Finance and Marketing of Cultivators' Cotton. 1925–28* (Bombay, n.d.), p. 21.

[27] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 268.

[28] *RPBC*, p. 106; *MPBC*, Vol. III, pp. 658, 946; 'Report on Kurnool', pp. 4–5 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1312 (1902–3)*.

[29] *RPBC*, p. 112, 123; *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 268.

[30] None of the evidence, not even the individual village surveys, attempts to distinguish exactly who was involved in rural trade. In most of the dry region this would have been difficult anyway because at every harvest urban merchants or their agents set out from the towns with empty carts and picked up what they could from whichever villages they passed through. There was little routine in this aspect of marketing. However, in some localities it is clear that these trading groups had established some-

trading connections followed closely those of debt: to most cultivators, trade and debt were two sides of the same coin. As Nicholson observed:

> Probably it would, at least for an immense number of villages and for the majority of small ryots and cultivators, be safe to say that the rural credit of this presidency is chiefly grain credit, all the poorer ryots habitually and annually borrowing from the richer ryots at the sowing season, and repaying advances at the harvest. It may also be said that the rural creditors of this presidency are, for the vast bulk of the loans ryots, not men of the Marwari class. In Tinnevelly, South Arcot, Coimbatore and other districts where the short mortgage is in vogue, from 85 p.c. to 73 p.c. even of such loans are granted by ryots; similar figures are found in loans upon simple bonds. In the Ceded Districts, such as Anantapur where mortgages are rare, there will be a few simple bonds due to men—often well-to-do landholders—outside of the village, but the bulk is due to the richer ryots within the village and nearly every seer of borrowed grain, the commonest form of loan in these districts, is due to co-ryots of the same village.[31]

Nearly forty years later, the Banking Inquiry found that this analysis still applied.[32] Since the commercial groups found it so difficult to enter the trading and moneylending business in the villages, the rural economy rested firmly in the hands of those few peasants with a surplus from their own lands.

The tiny élite of rich peasants in the dry districts were perfectly placed to dominate the village economy and to grasp a profit from any new opportunities. Their relatively large holdings and substantial crops meant that they did not need to sell grain as soon as it was harvested. They were able to invest in carts and to process their crops. From this secure base, the large landholder could launch himself across the market. His surplus enabled him to buy up cheap grain at the harvest and to advance loans to his poorer brothers. The interest on grain loans was extremely high and left very little with the debtor who had to borrow again next year.[33] It was also usual for creditors to demand the right to buy the debtor's crop at a fixed and low price as a condition of loan.[34]

thing of a more permanent relationship with the economy. Yet almost all the evidence indicates that rich ryots were heavily involved in trade and controlled most—varying in different reports between 60 and 90 per cent—of the rural credit. Allowing for the fact that, here and there, non-landowning trading groups were important, I have chosen to concentrate on the ryot-rural capitalist who was much the most typical commercial agent in the region as a whole.

[31] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 230. See also, *Statement exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India during the year 1901–02 and the nine preceding years*. *PP* 1903, Vol. XLIV, p. 354.

[32] *RPBC*, p. 79.

[33] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 232; *RPBC*, pp. 79, 106.

[34] *Ibid.*

The position of the rich ryot was greatly enhanced by the lack of alternative sources of credit in the area. Faced with the government's demand for revenue, regular rain-failure and social pressures to spend lavishly on family ceremonies, petty cultivators had to find patrons: 'they could not begin to cultivate without borrowing seed, cattle, grain for maintenance, etc.'[35] But few of their fellow villagers were likely to be able to meet their needs. A Bellary witness told the Banking Inquiry that ryots needed a minimum of twenty acres of land to begin to market their own crops.[36] This was presumably good dry land which would pay about Rs 30 per annum in revenue. In Coimbatore this qualification would have excluded about 93 per cent of the landholding population from trading and lending on their own account. In poorer districts like Cuddapah or Bellary it would have excluded 97 per cent of ryots. Not surprisingly, the most usual form of credit relationship was that between a petty cultivator and a single creditor who regularly supplied most of his wants: 'Under each rich ryot there will be a set of ordinary ryots who depend on him for money. When once a ryot goes to a particular rich ryot for money then a convention is established that the poor ryot is the client of the rich ryot.'[37]

The large landholder's local dominance was further assured by his ability to provide employment. In the 1890s, S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyangar estimated that 8 dry acres were needed to keep a family and that 75 per cent of the cultivators held less than 5 acres.[38] Obviously most ryots required extra work in order to survive. The rich ryot, who possessed more land than he could cultivate, paid labourers to till it, or leased it out on annual, unprotected, tenancies. Many nominally independent revenue payers were thus already tied to a patron as his employees and tenants.[39] Naturally, they looked to him as their principal sowcar and were in no position to refuse his overtures or deny him their crop. Borrowing, labouring and tenancy were often different aspects of the same relationship:

> The Sahukar charges his own rates of interest as the ryot can no longer bargain with him: what is worse the ryot has next to plough the lender's field

[35] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 232. [36] *MPBC*, Vol. II, p. 298.

[37] *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 664. See also *Report on the Famine in the Madras Presidency during 1896 and 1897* (Madras, 1898), Vol. I, p. 50.

[38] S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency*, p. 75.

[39] In the villages investigated by the Cotton Commission in Bellary district, about 35 per cent of the ryots worked the land of other ryots as well as their own. *Indian Central Cotton Commission. General Report on Eight Investigations into the Finance and Marketing of Cultivators' Cotton. 1925–28*, p. 50.

gratis and to do any other work at his bidding. The younger members of the family, the sons and brothers, are sometimes engaged as the private servants of the Sahukar without payment and in partial payment on the interest of the amount borrowed.[40]

The rich peasant ran an estate which stretched far beyond the boundaries of his own land into that nominally owned by his dependents who 'are thus in the worst cases little more than tenants of the lender who can prescribe what crops they shall grow and demand what terms he pleases'.[41]

In the Ceded districts, the bulk of the grain trade was in the hands of the richer Reddis who built their houses on top of enormous grain pits.[42] Much village trade consisted of borrowing from and returning to these pits.[43] Near Adoni, in Bellary district, the Cotton Commission found that although the scale of advances on the cotton crop was second only to that in Sind, the amount owed directly to urban creditors was only 27.3 per cent of the total.[44] Ryots and landlords were responsible for 56 per cent of the loans—far more than in any other part of India.[45] But even if the loans were not from urban merchants, they still bound the debtor and his crop to the lender.[46] In the marginally more prosperous south, members of the principal peasant castes—Gounder and other Vellalas, Reddi migrants from Andhra, and agricultural Maravars—were responsible for moving much of the grain, cotton and groundnut crop from the fields and smaller shandies to the markets. They often kept warehouses in their villages and in the towns, paid for the decortication of their groundnut, and hired dallals to act as brokers for their cotton.[47] From their positions at the centres of commerce, some of the more successful among them built up broad economic connexions. In the north, the growth of mica mining was financed by

[40] *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 699.

[41] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 232.

[42] *Appendix to the Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, being Minutes of Evidence, etc. Volume II. Madras Presidency*, p. 101, *PP*, 1899, Vol. XXXII; *Report on the Famine in the Madras Presidency during 1896 and 1897* (Madras, 1898), Vol. I, p. 48; Vol. II, p. 139.

[43] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 230.

[44] *Indian Central Cotton Committee. General Report on Eight Investigations into the Finance and Marketing of Cultivators' Cotton. 1925–28*, p. 14.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[46] *RPBC*, p. 109; *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Volume III. Evidence taken in the Madras Presidency* (London, 1927), p. 55.

[47] *RPBC*, pp. 112, 123, 108; *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 233, 268; *MPBC*, Vol. III, pp. 319, 750, 946, 972; *Indian Central Cotton Committee. General Report on Eight Investigations into the Finance and Marketing of Cultivators' Cotton 1925–28*, p. 64.

landowning Reddis;[48] where British military or railway enterprises touched the local economy, it was often wealthy peasant families who picked up the construction and supply contracts;[49] where petty industry began to appear, both in the towns and in the villages, it was often the investment of local peasants—in decortication machines, cotton presses and, by the 1930s, cotton mills—which supported it;[50] in district capitals such as Madura and Coimbatore, Gounders moved between trade and banking, and played an important part in urban and regional economic development.[51]

The wealthy and commercially mobile peasant used his profits to extend and tighten his control in the locality. He was helped by the peculiar nature of the money-market. In Madras, the usual securities for loans were moveable properties and personal knowledge of the borrower. Land might have seemed the most obvious collateral; but titles to it were complicated by the interests of the joint-family and by a revenue system in which a man seldom owned the fields he cultivated. The petty cultivator, who had little property save his miserable crop, and who was unknown outside his village circle, could raise money only in his neighbourhood. The rich ryot, however, who had crops stored both in his village and in the town, and who was known to be credit-worthy among urban financiers, had much less difficulty in obtaining credit.[52] Money borrowed in the town, where it was quite plentiful, could be lent out at a considerable profit in the village, where it was scarce. As the market opportunities in the dry areas increased, the more important and the more dominant the rich ryots became in the working of the rural economy.

[48] See biography of K. Audinarayana Reddi in Reforms (Franchise) B, March 1921, 34–99, National Archives of India, New Delhi [NAI].

[49] In North Arcot district, where there was a great deal of military and railway contracting available, the leading contractors were drawn from the locally dominant Palli caste. One of the most famous, A. Dhanakoti Mudaliar, who came from a rich landowning family, extended his contracting empire to Madras city where he was a member of the Corporation in the 1880s. Also, see biography of M. Venkatarajaghaoulu Reddiar in *Hindu*, 19 May 1919.

[50] For example, the Vellakina Gounder family, of which V. C. Vellingiri Gounder was a member, built a cotton mill in Coimbatore district in the 1930s. For examples of Land-owning families involved in urban commerce see biographical notes on K.S. Ramaswami Gounder in *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938), p. 231; on M. Vydyalinga Reddy in V. L. Sastri (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Madras Presidency and the Adjacent States* (Cocanada, 1920), p. 767.

[51] For examples, see biographical notes on G. Eswara Reddi, *ibid.*, p. 751; C. S. Ratnasabhapati Mudaliar, *ibid.*, p. 609; and for involvement with urban co-operative banks, P. S. Kumaraswami Raja in *Directory of the Madras Legislature*, p. 144; V. K. Palamsami Gounder, *ibid.*, p. 196; K. A. Nachiappa Gounder, *ibid.*, p. 176.

[52] *RPBC*, pp. 87–9.

One of the main problems the historian confronts in trying to trace the increasing power of the richer peasants is that the sources upon which he has to rely were not concerned with this question. The revenue statistics reveal something about movements in landholding but the economic power of the rich peasant did not necessarily depend upon formal ownership. Most land was worth no more than the crops and the cultivators on it. Through his manipulation of credit and trade, the rich peasant already possessed effective control over the land and he could find better ways of spending his money than idly pursuing title-deeds. Moreover, the assumption of legal possession brought with it great hazards. Titles to land in ryotwari Madras were documents of dubious value, but even to get hold of them, the money-lender had to follow a course which was fraught with danger. Court cases were expensive and lengthy; under the Usurious Loans Act, they could end in disaster for the money-lender who foreclosed. Judges could cut agreed interest rates almost at will. Most loans were unsecured by any formal document and so most money-lenders seldom went to court.[53] The actual amount of land transferred in Madras each year by legal possession, gift or will, was remarkably small.[54] Essentially, the rich peasant operated his informal economic empire through personal connexion with his debtors: the amount of land which he formally acquired in no way represented his influence.

Nonetheless, the little movement of land that we can trace, indicates an increasing stratification of landholding as larger proprietors accumulated more land and as the number of small ryots grew. Between 1886–87 and 1925–26, the proportion of total revenue paid by pattas of more than Rs 250 per annum increased from 4.2 per cent to 6.7 per cent and by pattas of less than Rs 10 from 24.3 per cent to 31.2 per cent.[55]

[53] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 230; *RPBC*, pp. 87, 173–5, 181–2.

[54] On average, about 1–1½ per cent of the cropped area per annum. Unfortunately, from 1913–14, the Madras Government ceased to keep central records of the acreage transferred but there is little reason to think that the pattern of transfers established in the 1884–1914 period altered radically before the depression. See *Agricultural Statistics of British India. Quinquennial Series.* 1884–85 to 1912–13, 'Land Transfers'.

[55] These figures cover both joint and single pattas. Although there were administrative differences between the two, it would in practice have been difficult to find any real distinctions. Most single pattas were regarded as joint-family property although legally registered only in the name of one member. The growth in the number of joint patta holders in the twentieth century was due more 'to the growing desire on the part of the people to secure documentary evidence in support of their joint interest in land' than to any change in the character of landholding itself. Hence I have put single and joint pattas together as units of possession. *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1310 (1900–01)*, p. 26. Table 1 calculated from 'Statement of the

This growth at the top and bottom ends of the patta scale was, of course, at the expense of holdings in the middle. Table 1 expresses the development in terms of the growth of revenue paid by particular classes of patta.

TABLE 1

Growth in Revenue paid by pattas 1886/87–1925/26[56]

Less than Rs 10	72.4%
10–30	24.1
30–50	19.3
50–100	4.7
100–250	7.5
250–500	137.6
500–1,000	41.5
More than Rs 1,000	138.6

If anything, the land revenue figures minimize, rather than maximize, the movement of land towards the larger proprietors. They are statistics of pattas, not pattadars, and there was nothing to stop one man from holding more than one patta. However, pattas included all the land held by a man in one revenue village, so that the multi-patta holder had his lands quite widely spread. In view of this fact, the rich ryot was infinitely more likely than the poor one to own several pattas, and the land revenue figures would not show the true position of his accumulating wealth.

The growing economic importance of the rich peasant found its reflection in social and political life. The ties of debt operated by the wealthy ryot in the village were, of course, political as well as economic:

> His power and prestige must at any cost be secured by having a large number of village people at his disposal. Consideration of his importance influence the advance of money rather than profit from usurious rates of interest.[57]

Rent-Roll' in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1296 (1886–87)* and *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1335 (1925–26)*.

[56] Calculated from *ibid.*

[57] The quotation continues '... Nevertheless, the lifelong dependence of the borrower upon the landlord and a variety of free services to be rendered to the latter during agricultural seasons are features closely associated with this system. It is not unusual that the smaller agriculturist borrowers are obliged to sell their produce to the apparently obliging landlord'. *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 1034; see also *ibid.*, p. 770.

As he often stood between starvation and his clients, he seldom had difficulty in obtaining their allegiance:

> Experience shows that this unfortunate class of ryot have not only to work in the ryot's fields for bare subsistance but what is worse they have to help in all village politics and factious quarrels and in all kinds of litigation.[58]

Increasing wealth enabled him to deepen and extend his village empire. He could also spend more lavishly on religion and ritual. Not only did this bring him more influence over priest and service groups in his village, but it heightened his social status and distinguished him more clearly from his fellows.

As the rich peasant became involved in higher forms of economic organization, he was also drawn into larger forms of social and political organization. The principal market towns drew together village élite families from the surrounding countryside and gave them the means to further their ambitions. Marriage connexions affected economic and political, as well as social, life. The towns became focal points for marriage brokerage among wealthy landowners.[59] They were members of peasant sub-castes which sprawled across an area larger than that from which they normally took their spouses. But when dominant families came to live in the same town, they began to create much wider geographical connexions.[60] This also opened the way for marriages between wealthy families in different sub-castes. Such growth of literacy as there was in this region took place among the superior peasantry. Able to read and to write, the rich peasant had a better chance of taking the opportunities afforded him in the market towns.

This examination of the dry areas of Madras emphasizes two features. In the first place, growing market opportunities helped to increase the wealth of groups already landed and rich. Through the extension of ties of debt and trade, this élite was able to extend its own economic control over its neighbourhood without any serious challenge from outside. Secondly, as rich peasants were attracted from their villages into marketing centres, they could work in larger economic and social structures. By borrowing cheap money in the towns, pursuing different kinds of economic openings in the districts, and establishing

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 699.

[59] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 233.

[60] For interesting discussions on the importance of expanding marriage ties among South Indian peasants see Carolyn M. Elliot, 'Caste and Faction Among the Dominant Caste: the Reddis and Kammas of Andhra' in R. Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1970), pp. 129–71. Also, J. Maner, 'The Evolution of Political Arenas and Units of Social Organizations: the Lingayats and Vokkaligas of Princely Mysore' (forthcoming).

distant marriage and political alliances, they were able to build a series of socially horizontal connexions which reinforced their position. Naturally, such connexions were denied to their clients in the villages. For most poorer peasants, economic connexions with the outside world took place only through the rich peasant who diverted most of the rewards to himself.

There is much to suggest that the social patterns produced by administrative development were similar. Professors Frykenberg and Mukherjee have shown that the British, in their early settlements, failed to interfere directly in the village political structures which they found.[61] None the less, the conquerors certainly exercised a considerable indirect influence over village political society. The village—as an administrative or political unit[62]—was intimately related to the institutions of government above it, and the British greatly changed the nature of those institutions. For much of the eighteenth century, Madras had been torn apart under the rule of small princes or wandering bands of warriors who had pressed heavily on the village in search of surplus wealth. By establishing peace, the British removed this threat and replaced the many authorities which had ruled Madras with one uniform but more distant authority. They relaxed the pressure which had built up on the village.[63]

However, the British, like the previous native régimes, also had to govern rural Madras, and this meant that they had to connect their administration to the village. To effect this, they relied less on naked force—such as had characterized the administration of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan—than on establishing contacts inside village society with collaborators who would do their work for them. In the later nineteenth century, as the British administration became the most powerful Madras had ever seen, the position of these collaborators inevitably became strengthened. Those who directed village administration added to their local power through their links with extra-village authority.

The principal office on which the British built their administration

[61] R. E. Frykenberg and N. Mukherjee, 'The Ryotwari System and Social Organization in the Madras Presidency' and R. E. Frykenberg, 'Village Strength in South India' in R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969), pp. 217–26; 227–47.

[62] The administrative village, of course, was not necessarily the same as the economic village or village circle we have discussed above. Nor were either necessarily the same as the 'physical' village of habitation. Village, as used in this article, is shorthand for the unit of face-to-face relations in rural society. Later, we shall be discussing the actual size and shape of this unit.

[63] See B. Stein, 'Integration of the Agrarian System of South India' in R. E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, pp. 207–12.

was that of the village headman. Certainly, the kurnam (accountant) who kept the revenue records was also, and sometimes independently, powerful. As he was usually the member of a literate family, the kurnam might also have relatives in government offices beyond the village. But in a system in which 'all influence is sought to be exercised through the Village Magistrate or headman'[64] whose post 'becomes daily of greater influence',[65] the headman was usually at the centre of village politics. Dependent on the support of established leaders, the British recruited their headmen from the principal peasant landowning castes and from families which had, or pretended to have, been recognized as headmen by previous régimes. In 1802, Fort St George confirmed them in office and guaranteed their hereditary rights.[66] This meant that it threw away its best lever on the village establishment. For three-quarters of a century, it was folk-lore at Fort St George that hereditary village officers could be dismissed if they failed to perform their duties. But in 1884 J. H. Garstin, of the Board of Revenue, studied the practical difficulties of enforcing this rule, and reported that the only offence for which a village officer could be dismissed (short of a criminal conviction) was that of being a woman.[67]

Land revenue systems have always been the most important aspects of Indian government. The system favoured by the British in most of Madras was ryotwari. Under this, the government took responsibility for measuring and assessing for revenue every field in the presidency. It spawned a vast bureaucracy, the senior officers in which were 'little more than post-boxes' passing huge quantities of paper which came to them from subordinates on to superiors.[68] The lowest officials in the pyramid were those appointed in the village—the kurnam and the headman who were responsible for collections, and for issuing notices of demand and restraint of defaulters' property. Dr R. E. Frykenberg has shown how the British locked themselves out of their own administrative system by giving too much unchecked authority to those serving low down in it.[69] Although reforms, particularly from the 1870s, checked the worst abuses at higher levels, the independence of local

[64] *Administration Report of the Madras Police for the year 1885* (Madras, 1886), [*Madras Police . . .*], p. 4.

[65] F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 312.

[66] B. B. Misra, *The Administrative History of India 1834–1947* (Oxford, 1970), p. 461.

[67] J. H. Garstin to Secretary, Revenue Department, 3 April 1884 in G.O. 787 (Revenue) dated 24 June 1884, Tamil Nad Archives [TNA].

[68] For a critique of the weaknesses of the revenue department written by senior officials inside it, see G.O. 173 (Revenue) dated 20 February 1902, TNA.

[69] R. E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District 1788–1848. A History of Local Influence and Central Authority in South India* (Oxford, 1965).

administrations remained intact in Madras Presidency until at least 1900. In 1885, for example, a Board of Revenue investigation in Tanjore, generally considered one of the better governed districts, uncovered a network of intrigue and private connexion which stretched from the Huzur Sheristidar to hundreds of village officers. The dominant office clique had used a flood in the winter of 1884 as an excuse to claim Rs 8 lakhs of remissions from Fort St George; the Board of Revenue found Rs 4 lakhs of these to be fraudulent. The investigator, H. S. Thomas, who had nearly thirty years' experience of Madras, doubted whether his findings were the result of peculiar conditions in Tanjore. He thought that the same kind of hidden organizations existed everywhere; they had been uncovered in Tanjore only because their private demands on the revenue had overstepped the bounds of common sense.[70]

Such a loosely organized revenue administration gave great power to those who connected the village to the taxation system. In 1902, Lord Ampthill, the Governor, described to his Secretary of State the operations of the annual jamabundi:

> What happens is this: All the lands on which the crops have failed have to be inspected by subordinate agency which, as you know, is very amenable to bribery in this country. The consequence is that the well-to-do ryot who can afford to bribe the village officers or revenue inspectors gets them to report that his crops are withered or totally lost, so as to entitle him to remission. . . . Again it is by no means infrequent that the remissions never reach the ryots for whom they were intended as the village officers deceive the ryots by telling them that no remissions were granted, collect the full assessment and pocket the money themselves.[71]

Within the limits of a known and relatively fixed 'tribute' to the superior government, the village revenue establishment dictated village payments. When they came to resettle the land, the British discovered that the area cultivated often bore no relation to what was in the records. Wet land was listed as dry; good quality soil as bad; and many fields were not listed at all.[72] Village officers also controlled the sale of revenue defaulters' land and saw that it went to their clients

[70] H. S. Thomas, *Report on Tanjore Remissions in Fasli 1294 (A.D. 1884–85)* (Madras, 1885).

[71] Ampthill to Hamilton, 6 August 1902, Ampthill Papers, Eur. MSS. 233/7. India Office Library [IOL].

[72] See, *Madras District Gazetteers*: W. Francis, *The Niligiris* (Madras, 1908), Vol. I, p. 281; J. F. Hall, *South Kanara* (Madras, 1938), Vol. II, p. 28; F. J. Richards, *Salem* (Madras, 1918), Vol. I, Part II, pp. 35–6; W. Francis, *Madura* (Madras, 1906), Vol. I, pp. 203–4; *Selections from the Madras Records Vol. XXII* (Madras, 1870), p. 18; 'Report on Coimbatore', pp. 2–3 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1280 (1870–71)*.

at give-away prices.[73] As late as 1929 the Banking Inquiry was told that in many places no outsider could acquire land without the permission of the village revenue establishment.[74]

Police administration also was built onto the authorities within the the village. At no time in the nineteenth century was Fort St George able to employ more than one centrally appointed policeman to every 1,500 inhabitants.[75] Keeping the peace, such as it was, rested firmly in the hands of the village headman who, by Sir William Robinson's reforms of 1863, acquired greater formal powers than ever before. He was given money to hire more kavalgars, and usually he could keep all other law-officers out of his village.[76] He was well placed to operate a rule of terror, which doubtless had always been part of his prerogative. The grim situation in Salem, described by its Superintendent of Police in 1896, was typical of the area:

> all the violent crime in the district is committed by Koravars, who act in very many cases as private Kavalgars in the villages. He considers that in very many cases these men are in the hands of the Village Magistrates, who use them as their servants and in consequence protect them, taking care when crimes occur not to mention any of their dependents in their first reports, on which the Sessions Court sets such value. The Village Magistrates, of course, obtain a considerable share of the proceeds of these looting expeditions.[77]

Headmen used the gangs under their protection to force the obeisance of subjects in their little kingdoms and to harass and plunder their enemies.[78] When the police and courts outside the village took a hand, they proved usually to be the unwitting allies of the village powers. The district police only came into the village when the headman called them, and his word was taken by the courts as that of authority.[79]

[73] *Report of the Indian Famine Commission. Appendix. Volume III. Condition of the Country nd People, PP* 1881, Vol. LXXI, Part 2, p. 416.

[74] *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 679.

[75] See *Madras Police 1878–1900*. And their 'provincial' policemen were ineffective: 'Dishonesty in investigation is, we are told, prevalent everywhere. . . .', *Statement of the Police Committee on the Administration of the District Police in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1902), p. 50.

[76] For an assessment of the workings of the reforms, see *Madras Police 1885*, pp. 1–5.

[77] *Madras Police 1896*, p. 35. For similar reports on headmen in Coimbatore, Cuddapah, Tinnevelly, Madura, Chingleput and North Arcot, see *Madras Police 1888*, App. C, pp. xxi–xxii; *ibid.*, *1895*, pp. 33, 185; *ibid.*, *1912*, p. 10.

[78] 'But many Reddis or Village Magistrates keep gangs of retainers—generally Yerikalas—who, when not committing depredations, act as bravos in paying off old scores against rivals'. Report on Cuddapah in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1314 (1904–05)*, p. 72.

[79] *Madras Police 1897*, p. 12.

In the early twentieth century, false reports and charges brought by headmen against their enemies—often headmen in neighbouring villages—became so numerous that the Madras Government began to keep two registers of crime—one 'false' and one 'true'.[80]

Headmen also possessed some powers as criminal and civil magistrates in their own right. Although these powers were little used in the later nineteenth century this does not mean that the headman's influence was on the wane.[81] His formal powers in criminal matters were extremely limited. Fifteen days in prison or a spell in the stocks were hardly awesome threats in a society where life was so cheap. Most people who appeared before the headman did so voluntarily to answer petty charges of social misdemeanour. His informal influence was far greater than the limits of his judicial power suggest. In civil matters, it was generally recognized that headmen arbitrated many more, and far more important, disputes than ever got into their ledgers.[82] Indeed, in the Ceded districts, where the Reddi was pre-eminent, the headmen did not bother to send in returns of the cases they tried.[83] In the early twentieth century, when government began to insist on records, litigation in village courts increased prodigiously.[84]

In spite of the recommendation of the Madras Torture Commission (1855) that police, magisterial and revenue functions should not lie in the same hands, the village headman possessed all three. Not only was it extremely difficult for the British to intervene in his affairs, but normal administrative procedures guaranteed that, whenever they were called in, it was to support his authority. In the later nineteenth century, as the government began to do more and more, the headman's role in government grew larger. The administration of the income tax, introduced in 1886, was attached to his revenue office;[85] the Famine

[80] For example in 1918, the police were called out in answer to 5,290 false complaints and found themselves involved in 4,160 false prosecutions. *Madras Police 1918*, pp. 18–21.

[81] In the later nineteenth century although relatively few village headmen tried civil cases, they nonetheless covered about two-thirds of the litigation in their competence. F. A. Nicholson, *RAB*, Vol. I, p. 312.

[82] *Ibid.*

[83] See *Report on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras* 1881–1925 (annual series); *Report on the Administration of Criminal Justice in the Presidency of Madras* 1881–1925 (annual series).

[84] In 1881, village munsiffs heard 47,656 civil cases; in 1910, they heard 96,597; and between 1913 and 1918, with the help of panchayats, they heard an annual average of 126,959. *Report on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras in 1881* (Madras, 1882), p. 31; *ibid.*, *1910*, p. 4; *ibid.*, *1920*, p. 3.

[85] For comments on the arbitrary nature of assessment see Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, No. 46 (Ordinary) dated 15 January 1892, TNA. Also *Report on the*

Code provided him with cheap government loans and grain to distribute, almost without supervision, in his village;[86] the development of Takavi loans permitted him to hand out—or withhold—government-backed credit for long-term loans;[87] the District Boards Act of 1884 put him on village unions with powers of local taxation and considerable administrative interference.[88] The British elaborated a vast administrative system which sought to govern entirely through him. In the last decades of the nineteenth century the village headman, in some parts of Madras, was more powerful than he had ever been before.

As the Madras government became more concerned with district administration, it demanded greater efficiency from the headman whose powers it had increased. While security and the regular payment of revenue were its main concern, the government did not enquire too closely into the affairs of the village; but when it wanted to do more, the headman's independence could prove a problem. The revenue resettlements, which began in the 1860s, showed how irrelevant policy made in the capital was to the practice of the village. On investigation the revenue system was found actually to prevent the centre from meddling too much in the localities.[89] To exercise control the British realized that they would have to change the entire system, and that they would have to put the police on a quite different footing.[90] From the 1880s the new revenue settlements cut down some of the worst abuses in the village. Village officers had now to demonstrate some competence in their work—they had to be able to read—before their sanads were recognized. Their right to issue notices of demand and restraint at will was curbed and many of the minor posts of village watchmen and servants, which had provided the headman with useful patronage, were discontinued. Between the 1860s and 1906, headmen were paid increasingly by centrally administered stipends. Districts and

Administration of the Income Tax under Act II of 1886 in the Madras Presidency for the year 1888–89 (Madras, 1890), p. 39.

[86] *Appendix to the Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, being Minutes of Evidence, etc. Volume II. Madras Presidency. PP*, 1899, Vol. XXXII, pp. 33, 165, 169; *Report on the Famine in the Madras Presidency during 1896 and 1897* (Madras, 1898), Vol. II, p. 203.

[87] Takavi loans were administered through the regular revenue machinery.

[88] Village officers were *ex-officio* members of village unions—collections of villages brought together for administrative purposes. By 1920, there were nearly 600 of these, with an average annual income of Rs 3,000. G.O. 1337 (Local and Municipal, Local) dated 13 July 1921, TNA.

[89] See J. H. Garstin, *Report on the Revision of Revenue Establishments in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1883).

[90] Radical police reform was recommended after an inquiry ordered by Lord Curzon. See *Statement of the Police Committee on the Administration of the District Police in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1902).

taluks were reduced in size, and more supervisory officials were appointed.

However, it must be doubted whether any of these reforms seriously curtailed the independence of the village officer, at least before the mid-1920s. For the Government of India cheap government and good government were synonymous. Reforms cost money, and Calcutta would not give Madras the funds necessary to launch an effective attack on the village administration.[91] In 1883 a modest request for Rs 4.6 lakhs to improve the revenue department was turned down.[92] In 1896, when approached for money to reform the police force, the Government of India only permitted an increase in expenditure sufficient to issue the existing policemen with badges and night-sticks.[93] Faced with parsimony on this scale, all the efforts of Fort St George were mere tinkerings. They could not undermine the village officer because they could not afford to replace him.

Moreover, village officers themselves exercised influence which went far beyond the bounds of their office. Exact figures of their landholding, apart from their inams, do not exist; but everybody in Madras knew that they were the richest of the rich peasants.[94] In 1921 the Government announced that it would not raise their stipends to meet inflation because their stipends formed only a very small part of their income. Few members of the Legislative Council bothered to challenge this; some carried it further and argued that senior village officers did not need to be paid at all.[95] The vital offices of government in the locality had been settled on the principal landowning families of village Madras, who, by inter-marriage, formed distinguishable élites within small territories. They were precisely the same families who were tightening their control over the local economies. The government's attempts at reform chipped at only one of their many pillars of authority. These local bosses made dangerous enemies and, during the Home Rule League-Congress agitations of 1916–22, when the nationalists tried to

[91] During our period, the Government of India took, under various headings, between 68 and 78 per cent of Madras revenues.

[92] G.O. 369 (Revenue) dated 25 March 1885, TNA; India Office, Public and Judicial Department, File 251 of 1888, IOL.

[93] *Madras Police 1897*, p. 5.

[94] Some fragments of evidence on their landholdings, however, are available. For example, according to a report of 1865, the village officers of Bellary held 650,000 acres of land in the district. W. Francis, *Bellary* (Madras, 1904), Vol. 1, p. 175; or again 168 Cuddapah village officers mentioned in a resettlement operation, admitted to paying Rs 22,507 a year in land revenue between them. 'Report on Cuddapah' p. 10 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1285* (*1875–76*).

[95] Government of India, Home Judicial Files 1–2 of 1922, NAI.

link up their agitation with protests from the village élites, the British had cause for alarm.[96]

The government had many reasons for not launching a full-blooded assault on their village officers. When a government order of 1894 forced village officers to prove their literacy and to attend classes on their work, it contained a clause which permitted all those village officers and their immediate heirs who registered within two years to avoid the penalties for failure.[97] It was a generation before the order began to have any impact, and then all the government found it could do with men who failed the tests was to ask them to come back the next year.[98] The attempts to enfranchise service inams were expensive and still incomplete by the time they were stopped by the Government of India in 1906. In any case, village officers took advantage of their possession of the records to surrender as little land as possible. Their new stipends were worth far more than the fields they lost.[99] Since the government could not easily dismiss them, the control-through-payment which the British had hoped to achieve remained purely notional.[100] Some of the most glaring abuses of the revenue system were ended, but the resettlement operations did not prevent the village officers from continuing to manipulate the administration. More land was assessed for revenue, but the Madras government still knew remarkably little about who paid what. In the end, the British did little more than irritate the headman by clipping some of his perquisites and patronage; they never solved the central problems of his existence and the nature of his rule.

The headman's success in fending off attack was made clear by

[96] In 1916, Home Rule League agitators picked up the cause of indentured labourers and demanded that the Government restrict emigration to Burma and Ceylon because of the appalling conditions of service there. In fact, as the British recognized, this move was intended less to aid the labourers than to connect with the protests of landlords in several parts of Madras who feared that emigration was taking away their cheap labour supply. The government acted quickly and imposed restrictions in order to prevent the development of a serious threat to order. Home Political Deposit, March 1917, 32 and 33; April 1917, 61, NAI.

[97] G.O. 361 (Education) dated 24 May 1894, TNA.

[98] See *Hindu*, 1 August 1919.

[99] For example, in 1870, the village officers of Trichinopoly surrendered 16,304,37 acres of inam land and had to pay about Rs 10,000 p.a. assessment on it. In return, the cesses collected by government and distributed to them increased from Rs 642 p.a. to Rs 1,72,340 in 1875. 'Report on Trichinopoly', p. 10 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1280 (1870–71)*; and *ibid., for Fasli 1285 (1875–76)*, p. 68.

[100] 'The irregularities committed by these servants (which are very frequent) cannot, however, be well punished by suspension or dismissal as it has been found by experience that such a course causes great inconvenience to the public service . . .', 'Report on Cuddapah', p. 21 in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1285 (1875–76)*.

the failure of two particular reforms. In 1918, thirty-five years after it had been first suggested, the Government of Madras introduced a bill to abrogate the hereditary rights of village officers. Faced with open agitation on an unprecedented scale, Fort St George shelved the bill before its first reading.[101] The second triumph was over police reform. Between 1905 and 1907, 2,000 men were recruited as deputy-inspectors in the districts, to fill the gap between the village and the distant circle police stations.[102] Within five years, it had become apparent that this scheme was not working. The new deputy inspectors doubled the cost of the police and drove down the detection rate.[103] In many regions open war was declared between the village and the police. Once village headmen withdrew their co-operation, the problem of maintaining order became more impossible than ever.[104] By 1915, the Madras Government had to compromise, and the right to appoint the deputy inspectors was taken from the Commissioner of Police and given to committees of local notables.[105] Once again the village headmen had preserved their immunity from outside control.

The fate of the police reforms set a pattern for the future relationship between the government at Fort St George and that in the village. Instead of curbing the village administration the Madras government built upon it. Local panchayats were far more important in Madras Presidency than anywhere else in India.[106] To control the production and consumption of alcohol, the government decided in 1908 to enlist the aid of local committees.[107] When the forest conservation policy caused friction with local groups, the government made local committees responsible for carrying it out.[108] From about 1915 irrigation panchayats steadily took over the distribution of water.[109] During the 1920s village courts were encouraged to take a larger share of litigation.[110] The

[101] For discussion of the bill, see G.O. 1958 (Revenue) dated 14 August 1920, TNA. Also, Government of India, Home Judical Files 1–2 of 1922, NAI.

[102] *Madras Police 1919*, Appendix D, p. x.

[103] *Madras Police 1912*, p. 9; *ibid.*, *1915*, pp. 17–18.

[104] *Madras Police 1907*, pp. 5–6; *ibid.*, *1912*, p. 33; *ibid.*, *1914*, pp. 72–76.

[105] *Madras Police 1915*, p. 18.

[106] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Appendix*, Vol. XIV, pp. 256–8.

[107] *Report on the Administration of the Abkari Revenue in the Presidency of Fort St. George for the year 1915–16* (Madras, 1916), p. 4.

[108] Forest panchayats developed out of a report by the Forest Committee in 1913. The government hoped that they 'will go far to remove or reduce the friction of forest subordinates and the public which has been such an unsatisfactory feature of past administration'. Quoted in *Hindu*, 14 April 1915.

[109] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 256.

[110] *Report on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras*. 1920–30 (annual series).

Madras Government had to use village leaders in order to govern. By using them the government made these leaders more powerful.

The main theme of this economic and administrative analysis of the dry areas of Madras has been the growth of social stratification. Of course, Madras rural society was hierarchically organized long before the British arrived; and the British did not change the social order of that hierarchy. But the distance between the rich and the poor, between those with administrative power and those without it, was becoming greater. Further prosperity came to individuals and to families who were in a position to control the village economy and the local administration rather than to whole castes or communities. Communal organizations among dominant peasant castes were weakened.[111] In the countryside politics were marked by factionalism rather than by conflict between castes or classes. Peasant leaders, often of the same ritual rank, fought each other for land, loot and pre-eminence within a restricted locality. Their followers were socially heterogeneous and drawn together by their dependence on a common leader.

The restricted locality over which the peasant boss held sway was not limited to the village, although there were many faction fights inside villages. Most of the powers at the disposal of the peasant leader could be exported beyond the village boundary. Connexions of debt, kin and terror could embrace several villages. Since the Madras village was usually a collection of hamlets brought together for administrative convenience, village officers might have jurisdictions covering several square miles. Further, by waging war against his neighbours, a successful village leader could influence an even larger territory. A typical example of local politics in this area was the long-standing feud between Chinnarappa Reddi and Thimma Reddi in the Gooty taluk of Anantapur district. Both men were large landholders connected with village office families. They had been quarrelling for many years, but in 1904 their rivalry broke out into an open vendetta. Thimma was arrested for the murder of a young Reddi lawyer who was Chinnarappa's man. Thimma was acquitted, and extended the fight by acquiring land inside Chinnarappa's territory. Chinnarappa countered by hiring P. Kesava Pillai, a lawyer and well-known provincial politician, who had considerable influence with the local administration. Over the next few years Thimma was arraigned before the local magistracy on various charges of violence no fewer than thirty-three times and several

[111] For example, by 1907, of all the Vellala sub-castes in Trichinopoly district, 'only a few of the sub-divisions, namely the Kodikkals, Kongas and Aru-nadus, have caste panchayats'. F. R. Hemingway, *Trichinopoly* (Madras, 1907), Vol. I, p. 102.

of his hench-men were imprisoned. Chinnarappa also used Kesava Pillai's influence to block police action against himself. He drove Thimma's labourers off his land and attacked his dependents. Supporters of each man were murdered—sometimes at the rate of two or three a month—but Kesava Pillai intervened six times to prevent the Madras authorities from stationing punitive police in the district. In better days Thimma had bought a pleadership certificate from a local official. This was revoked by the courts when Kesava Pillai accused him of moneylending. Through violence, and by bending the law, Chinnarappa smashed Thimma's empire and became 'the sole monarch of forty villages', exacting tribute from his subjects and settling their disputes.[112] Police reports from other districts make it clear that there was nothing unusual in this conflict.[113] Forty villages might seem a sizeable realm, but it was simply a fraction of one revenue firka. Such battles were essentially fought out face-to-face with resources gathered from a small area. They rarely intruded into the higher levels of the administration, although individual superior police and revenue officials were sometimes called in to help one or the other of the sides.

The general development of administration, however, began to create institutions in which the resources available to engage in such petty battles could be drawn from a much wider area. Just as the economic élite found that the development of the economy enabled them not only to strengthen their local position but also to participate in new forms of economic activity, so the administrative élite were pulled out of the locality and placed in a framework in which new administrative—or political—opportunities were available. The most important of these institutions, although by no means the only ones, were the rural boards.[114]

Although the Madras Government had been forced by Ripon in 1884 into following the letter of the legislation about decentralization, it did not begin to follow its spirit until about 1909. The district

[112] The story emerged in the course of a trial which was fully reported in the *Hindu*, 20, 22, 29 and 30 June and 16 July 1925; see also P. Kesava Pillai to S. M. V. Osman, the Collector of Anatapur, 1 July 1922, and P. Kesava Pillai to C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, 14 May 1925, P. Kesava Pillai Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum, New Delhi [NMM].

[113] The dry districts in general and Coimbatore, Salem, Cuddapah and Anantapur in particular, had much the highest murder rates in the presidency. Superior police officials invariably attributed the prevalence of the crime to faction. See *Madras Police 1910*, p. 15; *ibid.*, *1918*, p. 12; *ibid.*, *1920*, p. 14.

[114] As important, and subject to the same pattern of growth, were the temple committees. See C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India (1919–1937)' (Fellowship dissertation, Queens' College, Cambridge, 1972), pp. 65–74.

boards, which sat on top of a pyramid of taluk boards and village unions, remained extensions of various government departments, whose officers ran them as part of their general duties. A. Subbarayalu Reddiar, who took over the Cuddalore taluk board in 1912, reported to his patron Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer:

> As matters have stood, with the exception of Dispensaries, Schools and Taluk Board Roads, almost the whole of the outdoor work was managed by the Revenue divisional agency. The Village Sanitation, the maintenance and opening of the village roads, the repair and construction of the drinking water wells, and ponds, the clearance of encroachments, the removal of prickly pear, etc., were all in the hands of the revenue department.[115]

The dispensaries were run by the Medical Department; the schools by the Education Department; and the taluk board roads by the Public Works Department. In the rural boards, as much as in the departments, rivals for favours jockeyed around the official and tried to divert his authority to their course. Village unions and taluk boards were mostly run by the lowest officials who were *ex-officio* members of them.[116] Elections to the district boards, which were made by taluk boards, were controlled by these officials.[117] The political bankruptcy of these early rural boards has been perfectly described by the Tamil novelist A. Madhaviah:

> In these assemblies, I first discovered what a shameful farce local self-government was. Not a few of my fellow members were almost illiterate, and altogether innocent of the English tongue in which our deliberations were conducted. They were wealthy and so they were elected. They came more for the travelling allowance they obtained for attending meetings than for the subjects discussed at those meetings, unless they happened to hold a secret brief from a contractor to get an extravagant bill passed.[118]

From about 1909, Fort St George began to implement Ripon's policies more fully. Madras district boards had never lacked funds—they were the richest in India, and some, by the 1890s, had even begun to construct their own railways[119]—but now they became enormous pools of patronage. Between 1909 and 1919, budgets of the rural boards increased by 70 per cent to a district average of 11 lakhs a year, and

[115] A. Subbarayalu Reddiar to P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, 12 April 1912. P. S. Sivaswami Iyer Papers, NAI.

[116] See article on Tindivanum taluk board in *Hindu*, 9 August 1897.

[117] Memorandum 31-4L, dated 5 February 1915, in Confidential Proceedings of the Madras Government, 1916, Volume 23, IOL.

[118] A. Madhaviah, *Thillai Govindan* (London, 1916), p. 118.

[119] The earliest district board railway was that constructed in Tanjore in 1897–98. See *Hindu*, 10 and 17 June 1896.

between 1919 and 1929 they more than doubled again.[120] At the same time their administrative competence, which had always been considerable, was increased. They controlled a large slice of primary and some secondary education, the right to license all markets in the district, to route and maintain all important roads, to grant building permission, to levy taxes and to organize religious festivals. More significantly, from 1909 the Madras Government began to withdraw its officials from these boards and to replace them with local non-officials in the executive offices. It also increased the number of elected seats.[121] The effects of these changes are not difficult to guess:

> Landlords with local influence discovered that, as presidents and members of local boards, they could wield a large amount of influence in their locality, and exercise greater power over their neighbours.[122]

It did not take local politicians long to recognize and use the potential of the district board. In 1917, for example, A. Subbarayalu Reddiar, a

120 *Total Revenue of Rural Boards*

Year	Rupees
1909–10	1, 52, 77, 794
1919–20	2, 68, 49, 522
1929–30	5, 78, 07, 952

G.O. 1702 (Local and Municipal Local) dated 12 December 1910; G.O. 1337 (Local and Municipal) dated 13 July 1922; G.O. 1568 (Local and Municipal) dated 9 April 1931, TNA.

121 *Presidents of Rural Boards*

Year	Total	Nominated Official	Nominated Non-Official	Elected
		a. District Boards		
1911–12	25	25	—	—
1922–23	25	1	14	9
1926–27	24	1	4	19
		b. Taluk Boards		
1911–12	95	73	19	3
1922–23	125	1	13	111
1926–27	129	—	14	118

Source: *Annual Report on the Working of Local Boards in Madras* for 1912, 1923, 1927.

122 M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Development of Local Boards in the Madras Presidency* (Bombay, 1939), pp. 66–7.

rich landed magnate and lawyer, moved from the president's office of the Cuddalore taluk board to the chair of the South Arcot district board, and rapidly began to build a district-wide political machine. He replaced revenue department employees with his men;[123] he demanded the right to appoint all taluk board staff, something no collector had done;[124] he stood on his rights to nominate taluk board members and presidents beneath him;[125] and he used his powers to drive out his enemies from local board seats. In particular, he was able to unseat his old rival in Cuddalore town and taluk politics, M. Razak Maracair, from the district board, on which he had sat since 1886, and fill the vacancy with his closest ally A. T. Muthukumaraswami Chetty, another rich landlord and banker.[126]

It was not only that the local self-government reforms created district arenas in which politicians could participate: the growing power of the boards and the fact that they were available to enemies meant that every man of local influence had to take part or suffer the consequences. For example, the main concern of A. K. D. Dharma Raja, a rich landlord from Rajapalayam in Ramnad district, was to run his private market. From its beginnings in 1900, he had protected it from the avaricious gaze of government by getting his brother, who was a village officer, to forget to notify his superiors of its existence. Later, however, its appearance was noticed for it was taking business away from the licensed market. Dharma Raja then contacted his tahsildar, T. S. Ramaswami Iyer, who agreed to look after its interests in the taluk board where it was licensed for a nominal sum. In 1920 the raja of Ramnad became the first non-official president of the Ramnad district board and promptly began to treat the whole district as part of his estate.[127] In particular, he tried to obtain control of all the markets in the district. Dharma Raja now found himself dragged into a district arena simply to maintain himself locally, and he sought election to the district board.[128] Dharma Raja's history was not unique: all over

[123] *Hindu*, 5 February 1918.

[124] *Ibid.*

[125] G.O. 1021 (Local and Municipal, Local) dated 8 August 1918, TNA.

[126] *Hindu*, 12 June 1918, 9 October 1920.

[127] The raja became involved with various Nattukottai Chetties, whose whole south Asian banking empire was centred on Ramnad, in a district dog-fight for control of the principal markets. G.O. 783 (Local and Municipal) dated 3 May 1922; G.O. 811 (Local and Municipal) dated 9 May 1922 TNA; *Hindu*, 31 July and 16 March 1922.

[128] G.O. 1984 (Local and Municipal) dated 7 September 1923, TNA. Dharma Raja was related to P. S. Kumaraswami Raja (see footnote 51) and their family was typical of our peasant-capitalist élite. They owned Rs 20,000 worth of land, had

Madras rural leaders were forced to take account of the new institutions. Scarcely surprisingly, the Chinnarappa Reddi vs. Thimma Reddi conflict was now drawn into a larger arena. Both became taluk board members and Chinnarappa showed who was dominant when Thimma was thrown off the board for associating with known criminals—the result, it was said, of Kesava Pillai's influence in Madras city.[129] In 1920, Chinnarappa was elected to the district board.

The district boards placed the rural élite in a broader political context. Rivals no longer fought each others' armies only with sticks: they had to shift around their districts, seeking alliances with men whose bases could be a hundred miles from their own, in order to gain control of district institutions. The need to make wider horizontal political connexions within an extending locality also fostered wider social and marriage connexions. Although the political conduct of the élite changed, there was very little alteration in the vertical structure of politics. The rural leaders, scrambling over each other to gain district office and rewards, still preserved as tight a grip as ever over their localities. Madhaviah's comment on the electoral importance of wealth applied throughout this period; and the British fully recognized the influence village officers possessed over district and provincial elections.[130] The rural board franchise was based on tax-payment, and included only a small fraction of the population.[131] Even so, many voters were dependents of the rural élite and their votes were cast long before they reached any polling booth. Most men did not have the vote, and this served not only to preserve the importance of the active élite but actually to enhance it. For if any member of this voteless majority wished to obtain anything from the district institutions, he could do so

interests in banking and a cotton ginning factory and possessed village office. See A. K. D. Venkata Raja, *A Brief Life Sketch of P. S. Kumaraswami Raja* (Rajapayaiyam, 1964).

[129] G.O. 180 (Local and Municipal, Local) dated 27 February 1920. TNA.

[130] Between 1920 and 1930, the electorates to the Legislative Council and to the taluk boards were roughly the same. When considering action against village officers, C. Todhunter, a senior British official, thought: 'the village officers are likely to have so much influence over the electorate under the Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms that it would be easy for them to secure a mandate to elected members to oppose interference with hereditary right'. Note, 11/12/19 in G.O. 1958 (Revenue) dated 14 August 1920, TNA.

[131] No exact statistics of the rural board electorates exist. On the basis of information collected for the 1920 and 1937 Legislative Council reforms, it seems probable that, between 1920 and 1930, about 2½ per cent of the rural population could vote in rural board elections and, between 1930 and 1937, about 13 per cent. See *Madras Government Evidence to the Southborough Committee on Franchise 1918–19.* (Calcutta, 1919), Appendix 1; Government of India, Home Political, File 129 of 1937, NAI.

only by approaching somebody who was capable of influencing decisions inside them. In other words, he had to become a client.

Rural board and district politics were the preserve of small groups feeling little direct pressure from below. The dependents of the rural élite were unable to come together to constitute a separate force, or even much of an organized interest. The effects of this can be judged by the absence of organized protests against government policy and by the failure of attempts to introduce popular issues into district politics. From its creation in 1878, the forest department sought to control the use made of jungles and lands unfit for cultivation. This meant that, in areas like the Ceded districts, Coimbatore and Salem, it restricted access to land from which ryots traditionally obtained grazing for their cattle, crude fertilisers, fire-wood and various food stuffs. Relations between the forest department and the ryots under its jurisdiction were always strained. Although Legislative Councillors from the dry districts—such as P. Kesava Pillai[132]—continually pressed Fort St George to reform forest administration, and although all Congress conferences in the area tried to enlist local support by raising the forest issue, there was no organized response. The local rural élite dealt with the forest department on the ground. By bribery, threats and the occasional murder, powerful ryots came to satisfactory arrangements with forest subordinates.[133] They gained access to the forests while the poorer cultivators, who lacked 'influence', were kept out. From 1915, the development of forest panchayats put the élite even more firmly in control. Since the leaders had little to gain by raising the masses, it proved impossible to get a forest agitation moving.[134]

Attempts to get a wider political response by using the propaganda of caste were also doomed. From the 1910s to the early 1930s they seldom unbalanced the existing structure of politics. Indeed, in many ways they re-inforced the power of members of the rural élite, since caste movements were often only the public manifestations of existing connexions of kin. 'The Reddi scare' in Anantapur in 1926, for example, was really the attempt of a Chinnarappa Reddi-led faction to get rid of P. Kesava Pillai and to replace him with a Reddi lawyer.[135] Equally, the activities of the Gounders around Coimbatore in 1921 stemmed

[132] While on the Legislative Council, P. Kesava Pillai was popularly known as 'the Honourable Member for Forests and Jails'.

[133] See *Report of the Forest Committee*, (Madras, 1913), 2 vols.

[134] *Appendix to the Report of the Indian Famine Commission, 1898, being Minutes of Evidence, etc. Volume II. Madras Presidency*, p. 214, *PP*, 1899, Vol. XXXII.

[135] P. Kesava Pillai to Dr Subbarayon, 5 December 1926, P. Kesava Pillai Papers, NMM.

from V. C. Vellingiri Gounder's efforts to impose some discipline on the members of his caste in his 'territory'.[136] Such movements were never intended to broaden the context of political action or even to provide a permanent series of alliances between men of importance. Both Reddi and Gounder movements rapidly dissolved as their leaders began to fight each other and to return to profitable cross-communal alliances. The caste platform which cut across these ties quickly collapsed. In South Arcot in the early 1920s, for example, several young Padayachi lawyers and literati tried to create a communal constituency for themselves in the Padayachi-dominated taluks. They did not win the support of any patron who mattered, and, in the 1926 Legislative Council election, their two candidates were severely beaten. However, another Padayachi, who had no contact with them and who stood on 'the Brahmin' Swarajya Party ticket, with the backing of several notables—whether Padayachi or not—was returned triumphantly.[137]

The decentralization of government established the rural élite in district institutions but it also started to draw them towards the centres of provincial government. The British, but much more the native politicians who increasingly shared the responsibilities of government with them at the provincial capital, made sure that considerable powers of patronage in the rural boards remained with the local self-government department controlled from Madras. Until 1926, virtually all district board presidents, and, until 1930, a large number of the seats on the boards, were filled by nomination from the capital. In the Montagu-Chelmsford Councils, the Justice Party Ministry, in the words of its Chief Whip, 'Lived on patronage.'[138] From 1921, the chief minister was always the minister for local self-government, and he kept his ministry solvent by trading his nominations on the boards for support in the Madras Council.[139] This gave all district politicians a close interest in the affairs of the Legislative Council and, until 1937, most members were also members of rural boards.

In the dry areas, the steady involvement of a powerful rural élite in district and provincial politics began to have important consequences on the social composition of the political world. While contacts

[136] The movement developed from incidents which had led to the murder of some Gounders in a toddy shop brawl. Its most concrete form was the drive by Vellingiri Gounder and his henchmen to close down all the toddy-shops in their area. See C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India', pp. 353–4.

[137] *Ibid.*, pp. 241–2; *Hindu*, 25 November 1926.

[138] R. V. Krishna Ayyar, *In the Legislature of Those Days* (Madras, 1956), p. 45.

[139] *Indian Statutory Commission. 1930. Oral Evidence taken at Madras*, Vol. I, 5th meeting, p. 19.

with government above had remained personal and fragmentary, most important rural politicians had found it convenient to work through intermediaries. They lacked the education, the social background and the family connexions which would bring them into close touch with the top bureaucrats. Members of the Western-educated classes were, of course, only too willing to perform the function of go-between, which took them out of the debating chamber and gave them an income, social importance and attachment to a more real political system. The relationship of Kesava Pillai to Chinnarappa Reddi was similar to that of many provincial politicians to their backers before 1920. In Salem and Coimbatore districts, for example, the Tamil Brahmin lawyer B. V. Narasimha Iyer, a Legislative Councillor between 1912 and 1921, was close to many of the principal families among the Gounder gentry. In 1913, he toured the Coimbatore countryside organizing an agitation on their behalf against the Coimbatore district board which, under the control of a Coimbatore town clique, was swelling its treasury by raising rural taxes.[140] Equally, in Nellore, the Brahmin lawyer, A. S. Krishna Rao, sat on the Legislative Council continuously from 1910 to 1926 as the representative of the interests of various Reddi leaders. Indeed, so important were his local supporters that the Justice Party had to swallow its communal pride and twice re-nominate this Brahmin to the presidency of the Nellore district board.[141] In the Ceded districts, A. Kaleswara Rao noted that 'the Reddi Sirdars' controlled the elections to Legislative Council in 1920 but they did not bother to return many Reddis.[142]

However, the development of the boards meant that the rural élite could no longer leave its affairs to agents. The price of security was constant vigilance, and agents anxious to become principals might turn the new power in the boards against their backers. District board politics also brought members of the rural élite into close contact with senior government officials and gave them greater opportunities of influencing important decisions. These trends provided a further stimulus to education. Before 1920, the Legislative Council and provincial politics had been the domain, almost exclusively, of Western-educated lawyers. The era of the Montagu–Chelmsford Councils saw the rural élite move in. At the very first elections, a few of the more

[140] *Hindu*, 22 and 24 September and 1 and 7 October 1913.

[141] *The Cult of Incompetence, being an impartial enquiry into the record of the First Madras Ministry* (Madras, 1923), pp. 37–9.

[142] A. Kaleswara Rao, *Na Jivita Katha–Navya Andhramu* (Vijayawada, 1959), p. 333 (Telugu).

substantial rural magnates had been returned. Among those members representing Coimbatore was V. C. Vellingiri Gounder, who paid land revenue of Rs 2,000 in villages in Coimbatore taluk and had banking interests in the district capital. He was, of course, a prominent district and taluk board member. North Arcot elected A. Thangavelu Naicker, a member of the wealthiest ryotwari landlord family in the district. Beside A. S. Krishna Rao of Nellore, sat K. Audinarayana Reddi, whose income was said to be Rs 40,000 a year from land and from mica mining.[143] All three of these men's families had made alliances by marriage with other leading families in their district.[144]

During the 1920s and 1930s prominent peasant families increasingly took a hand in provincial politics. In Kurnool, Cuddapah and Anantapur, for example, which were deep in the territory dominated by rich Reddis, only two of the six Council members elected in 1920 actually were Reddis;[145] by 1930, all six seats were filled by their men.[146] In South Arcot in 1920, only A. Subbarayalu Reddiar, of the three men elected, might have been said to belong to the dominant peasant élite, and he, rather ahead of his brethren, was a Western-educated lawyer; by 1930, all three South Arcot members came from the élite.[147] Similar developments may be seen in North Arcot, Trichinopoly and Salem. The 1937 election, on the franchise extended by the 1935 Government of India Act, carried the process further. In South Arcot four of the five seats went to rural magnates; in Coimbatore six of the seven; in Anantapur two of three; in Cuddapah two of two; in South Arcot four of five; in Chittoor three of four.[148]

As the rural élite was drawn closer to the centres of government, the professional middle-man, who had no importance save the expertise with which he represented the interests of others, was progressively eliminated. In Nellore, for example, no Brahmin lawyer emerged to

[143] Biographies of Madras Legislative Councillors in Reforms (Franchise) B, March 1921, 34–99, NAI.

[144] V. C. Vellingiri Gounder possessed marriage connexions with several of the pattagar families—the religious leaders—of the Gounder community. Besides religious status, the families were among the richest in the Coimbatore–Salem area. A. Thangavelu Naicker was related to the largest landowning Palli families in the Arcot region and was the nephew of A. Dhanakoti Mudaliar, the Arcot and Madras city contractor. K. Audinarayana Reddi was credited with connexion to many of the principal Reddis of Nellore.

[145] Results in Reforms (Franchise) B, March 1921, 34–99, NAI.

[146] Results in *Hindu*, 10 to 21 September 1930.

[147] These were K. M. Dorasami, R. K. Venugopal Reddi and K. Ramachandra Padayachi.

[148] For brief biographies see *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938).

take over from A. S. Krishna Rao.[149] In Salem, after Narasimha Iyer's retirement from politics, the leadership of district-level affairs passed to a European zemindar, a Devanga merchant and various Gounder landlords.[150] In 1926, Chinnarappa Reddi switched his support from P. Kesava Pillai to a Reddi lawyer and Kesava Pillai lost his Legislative Council seat.[151] The development of political institutions in the countryside allowed the rural élite to stand on its own. Through an apparently endless series of factional alliances and confrontations, rural leaders established their own district empires which gave them seats on the Legislative Council. Secure in their home-bases from disturbances and threats from below, and capable of dealing directly with each other in rural institutions, they were the heirs of the economic and administrative developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

II

The Kistna and Godaveri deltas were very different areas from the dry region we have been examining. Whereas major pilgrimage centres in the dry districts were few and dispersed—notably Tirupati, Madura, Kalahasti, Srirangam—both the Kistna and Godaveri rivers were considered sacred to Hindus and attracted large numbers of pilgrims. In the deltas irrigation works were centuries old and had long made it possible to cultivate rice commercially. This may have been one reason why the dominant peasant castes, particularly the Kammas, had broader marriage patterns than in the dry region.[152] The wealth generated by wet cultivation could also be seen in the many small temples which dotted the countryside. Since medieval times the deltas had been the centre of Telugu culture. Brahmins were more numerous here than in the dry regions: 5 per cent of the population compared to about 2 per cent in most of the dry districts.[153] Long before the British arrived, the inhabitants of the deltas were more mobile and wealthier

[149] Reddi landowners consistently took one district Legislative Council seat and the family of the Venkatagiri zemindars the other.

[150] Notably T. Foulkes of the Salem zemindari, S. Ellappa Chetty and P. Subarayon, who owned the small Kumaramangalam estate.

[151] P. Kesava Pillai to Dr Subbarayon 5 December 1926, P. Kesava Pillai Papers, NMM.

[152] In 1891, about 40 per cent of the 850,000 people returning themselves as Kammas did not specify a sub-caste and another 35 per cent claimed one particular sub-caste—that found predominantly in the Kistna area. *Census of India. 1891. Madras* (Madras, 1893), Vol. XIII, Part 1 pp. 237–38.

[153] *Census of India. 1881. Madras* (Madras, 1883), Vol. II, p. 140.

than their neighbours in the dry zones. Since British rule did not shape society anew but rather tended to develop its existing characteristics, the different bases of economic and social organization in the dry and wet districts of Madras meant that the two areas diverged further under the same rule.

Between the 1840s and 1860s British engineers under Sir Arthur Cotton restored and greatly extended the irrigation works on the Godaveri and Kistna rivers. New channels built to carry the water inland brought about one and a half million acres of land under irrigation for the first time.[154] The 'flush' irrigation produced by the scheme, which led to the inundation of the fields, was perfect for the cultivation of rice and, by the later nineteenth century, the Andhra deltas fed the upper classes in much of the Presidency. A contemporary observer saw

> that the whole country looks like a single rice field, the groves around the villages, the road avenues and the white sails of the boats gliding along the main canals breaking the uniform sea of waving green crop.[155]

Statistical eccentricities, zemindaries, and the peculiarity of early settlements in the deltas make it difficult to determine the changes in landholding occasioned by the extension of irrigation. By 1900, however, it seems clear that the distribution of wealth from land in the deltas was significantly different from the pattern established in the dry regions. In Godaveri district, for example, barely 4 per cent of the ryotwari wet land was held in pattas paying less than Rs 10 per annum. The bulk of wet land—about 62 per cent—was held in the middle range of pattas paying between Rs 30 and Rs 250.[156] Holdings were still small in extent—most cultivators held less than eighteen acres—but the land was more productive. Eighteen acres in the dry districts paid between Rs 4 and Rs 30 a year in revenue; eighteen acres in the wet areas paid on average Rs 100 a year. By converting dry, or at best mixed, cultivating villages, into part of a huge complex of wet cultivation, the British irrigation works had, within a few decades, created a large class of prosperous peasant farmers.

Since the deltas specialized in rice to the exclusion of almost all other crops, they developed their own distinctive trading patterns. Most of

[154] A. V. Raman Rao, *Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh (1766–1957)* (Bombay, 1958), pp. 86–90.

[155] Quoted in O. H. K. Spate, *India and Pakistan. A General and Regional Geography* (London, 1954), p. 690.

[156] These figures calculated from 'Statement of the Rent-Roll' in *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1310 (1900–01)*.

the local crop had to be exported, and everything else had to be imported in return.[157] This greatly expanded trade was further facilitated by excellent internal communications by track, rail and water. The rail-heads and ports grew quickly in response to the rising volume of trade passing through them.[158] Marketing operations centred on a few towns which served wide areas, including their neighbouring dry taluks. In contrast to Coimbatore and Salem which in 1929 had 134 and 112 licensed markets respectively, the whole of Guntur had only six.[159]

The thriving commerce of the area meant that urban merchants were active in developing rural trade. Komati merchants expanded their family-based grain and moneylending networks deep into the countryside as they handled ever larger quantities of goods. Marwaris and Multanis flocked to the deltas. Rice was in such high demand in the rest of the presidency and elsewhere, and rice land so valuable, that they buried their scruples and risked their capital in rural moneylending and grain dealing.[160]

The delta ryot, himself, took full advantage of these developments.[161] His position as medium-sized landowner, with irrigation to free him from the vagaries of the weather, meant that he was seldom pressed by the government revenue demand into selling his crop cheaply at harvest time. He may have been in debt—probably rupee for rupee he was more in debt than the average dry cultivator—but the character of indebtedness in the deltas was very different from that in the dry region. The opening up of commerce provided the delta ryot with a multiplicity of sources of credit: the agents of urban merchants, innumerable ryots in his own village and even town banks supplied his needs. From 1904, Co-operative Credit Societies grew rapidly and with conspicuous success.[162] Security for loans was not a serious problem.

[157] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Appendix*, Vol. XIV, p. 270.

[158] A. V. Raman Rao, *Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh (1766–1957)*, pp. 251–54. The market towns of the delta area were among the fastest growing in the presidency. See *Census of India. 1921.* (Madras, 1922), Vol. XIII, Part 2, pp. 8–12. *Census of India. 1931* (Madras, 1933), Vol. XIV, Part 2, pp. 10–16.

[159] *RPBC*, p. 119.

[160] *RPBC*, pp. 219–20; *MPBC*, Vol. III, pp. 740–3, 1146.

[161] Rich delta ryots were, of course, as much involved in credit and trade in their own right as wealthy ryots in the dry districts. *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 743.

[162] In the Godaveri delta villages investigated by the Banking Commission, co-operative credit loans accounted for about one-third of all admitted loans. This was far higher than the average of dry district villages investigated. *MPBC*, Vol. V, pp. 86–255. Commercial expansion in the 1920s stimulated the development of several joint-stock banks, such as the Andhra Bank, and land banks, such as that started by the raja of Pithapuram.

The value of his crop guaranteed him a large and regular annual turnover so that he was unlikely to become bonded by the accumulation of debt to any one creditor. Most delta ryots took a hand in the market. Many carted or sailed their own produce to the towns and sold it directly to the export merchants.[163] As it was easier to export husked and boiled paddy, rice mills shot up in many of the larger villages—often built with the capital of local ryots. These mills, of course, bought locally, but they had to buy on different terms from those who bought grain in the Ceded districts. They had to compete in a relatively open market with many other buyers and they could not hope for annually glutted markets or a succession of bad seasons to drive peasants into dependence on them. If their rates were not close to those offered in the main towns, their mills would grind to a halt. The Royal Commission on Agriculture summarised the contrast between the delta and the dry areas thus:

> It is the cultivator's chronic shortage of money that has allowed the intermediary in the dry areas to achieve the prominent position he now occupies. Where the cultivators are tolerably well-off, as in the Kistna and Godaveri deltas, his position is not by any means so strong. There, the ryot, once he has paid his land revenue (kist) keeps a steady eye on the prices prevailing for rice imported from Burma, and is in no haste to come to terms with the agent or buyer if the terms do not suit him. The ultimate market for his produce (Madras city and the inland districts of Coimbatore and Salem) is close at hand; he sells his husked rice to local mill-owners who hull it before passing it on and who are at least as much concerned to keep their mills working as they are to beat down prices.[164]

Rice grown for the market integrated the economy of the deltas area and brought their peasant populations into close market relations with the towns.

Since there was so much more contact between town and countryside, the effects of their interaction went further in the deltas than in the dry zone. The marriage links between various Kamma sub-castes began to leap the boundaries of sub-castes themselves.[165] Prosperous delta ryots began to imitate urban ways in their villages. Bricks replaced mud, and tiles thatch in respectable houses;[166] traditional status deferences were abandoned;[167] peasants became increasingly involved in the religious

[163] *RPBC*, p. 106.

[164] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India. Appendix*, Vol. XIV, pp. 268–9.

[165] See Carolyn M. Elliot, 'Caste and Faction among the Dominant Caste: the Reddis and Kammas of Andhra' in R. Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics*, pp. 129–71.

[166] A. V. Raman Rao, *Economic Development of Andhra Pradesh (1766–1957)*, p. 192.

[167] *MPBC*, Vol. III, p. 744.

and cultural revivalism of the towns; the more adventurous village families sent their sons to the towns, and by sub-letting their holdings, they sometimes moved there themselves.[168]

Significant developments also took place in litigation and education. From the 1880s, 'litigation [was] developing with extraordinary rapidity' in the superior courts on the deltas.[169] Of course, a simple rise in litigation does not tell us much. Wherever there were zemindaris there was bound to be litigation. The courts of Ramnad and North Malabar were filled with cases, although both areas were extremely primitive. The zemindars of Kistna and Godvari also kept the courts busy, and their delta districts stood near the top of the litigation league.[170] But some of the rise was because the new courts were attractive to peasants. The Collector of Guntur complained that his courts were clogged with extraordinarily intricate village factional disputes.[171] Throughout our period, the slowest courts in completing cases in the whole province were those on the delta. In 1890, for example, the average time between filing and obtaining judgment in a suit before the Ellore district munsiff was 549 days; while his neighbour at Rajahmundry took 435 days.[172] Both of these were twice the presidency average. The main rivals of Ellore and Rajahmundry for the title of most arduous posting in the Madras judicial service were the courts at Guntur, Bezwada and Masulipatam. It was not that these courts handled significantly more cases than others in zemindari areas, but that the cases themselves were not the block filings of a zemindar, which could be sorted out by a single judgment. A great many cases were individual litigations and were contested every inch of the way.

The last decades of the nineteenth century also saw a rise in literacy in the delta districts. In general, the Northern Circars were more backward in education than were the southern districts of the Presidency, having neither the great cities of Madras, Trichinopoly or

[168] *Land Revenue Reports for Fasli 1315 (1905–06)*, p. 72.

[169] The comment particularly referred to the district munsiffs' courts at Bezwada and Masulipatam. *Report on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras in 1890* (Madras, 1891), p. 14.

[170] In 1890, for example, the zemindar of Telaprole, in Kistna, alone filed 2382 cases. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Kistna, Godaveri and, after 1905, Guntur were usually in the top half dozen districts in the presidency for the number of cases filed in ratio to population. See *Reports on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras* (annual series).

[171] *Statistics of Criminal Courts in the Madras Presidency for the year 1915* (Madras, 1916), p. 2.

[172] *Report on the Administration of Civil Justice in the Presidency of Madras in the year 1900* (Madras, 1901), p. 5.

Madura, nor the great concentration of religious traditions in a few ancient temple towns. However, between 1891 and 1931, the literacy rate in Kistna and Godaveri districts rose faster than anywhere else. Much of this development was in the vernaculars and took place among the main peasant castes—the Kammas and Kapus.[173] It was not confined to the towns. In 1908, for example, the Collector of Godaveri was horrified to discover 'seditious' vernacular newspapers circulating in many delta villages. Their readers were not only Brahmins—whom he considered to be beyond the pale—but also peasant landholders.[174] By 1929 the Banking Inquiry found a male literacy rate of between 15 and 20 per cent in the villages of Ramachandrapuram taluk in Godaveri district. This village rate compares with a 1931 average of only 21 per cent for the whole Presidency, including the towns, Madras city (52 per cent), and the advanced districts of Tanjore and Malabar (more than 30 per cent).[175]

Religious and cultural revivalism in the later nineteenth century shows the extent to which the delta countryside had been integrated with the towns. One of the most famous vernacular dramatic societies, the Rajahmundry Hindu Theatrical Company, financed by local landholders, performed in all the leading Andhra towns, and it toured the larger villages.[176] Religious agitation moved from peasants to townsmen. During the muhurram of 1884, for example, a small army gathered in Gudur, a village near Masulipatam, and marched through the countryside picking up support. 'The movement was not headed by any chief and was made from village to village with a flag bearing the imprint of an idol Anjamar'. It converged on Masulipatam and caused a riot outside the main mosque.[177] In the dry areas, this sort of religious violence was virtually unknown in the countryside, although there were occasional outbreaks among weaving-communities in the towns.

In the deltas the traffic between town and country moved both ways. Vernacular newspapers, which dealt mostly with religious and cultural matters, were published in the towns but read over a wide area.[178]

[173] *Census of India. 1931* (Madras, 1933), Vol. XIV, Part 1, p. 283; *ibid.*, Part 2, pp. 276–7.

[174] M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh* (*Andhra*) (Hyderabad, 1968), Vol. II, pp. 266–76.

[175] *MPBC*, Vol. V, pp. 86–255; *Census of India. 1931*, Vol. XIV, Part 2, p. 283.

[176] V. L. Sastri (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Madras Presidency and the Adjacent States* (Cocanada, 1920) p. 501.

[177] *Madras Police 1884*, p. 7.

[178] The delta towns easily led the Madras mofussil in the size and scope of their vernacular journalistic activity. By 1925, for example, Rajahmundry had at least 5 daily or weekly vernacular newspapers with a combined circulation estimated at

Another connexion was provided by urban groups such as the Komatis, who had many agents in the villages. Not only did they begin to exercise a tighter control over rural trade through Chambers of Commerce and joint-stock companies,[179] but they also spent money on temples dedicated to their caste saint, Kanyaki Parameswami, which served as focal points for the community. Komatis in the villages came back to the towns for religious festivals and to lay claim to a share of communal funds.[180] Their strong connexions can be seen in the cow-protection movement, in which many of the principal families in the delta towns and villages were involved.[181]

Most of the problems of government faced by the British in the delta districts sprang from the failure of their administrative system to take account of the social changes promoted by economic development. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, when the differences between this area and the dry region had been less remarkable, the delta ryotwari tracts had been settled on a uniform plan. Parts of the deltas had originally been settled under zemindars, but many of these had collapsed by 1850. From the 1870s the Madras government deliberately attempted to make the wet districts conform more to the general ryotwari pattern. Zemindari village officers became tied more closely to the tahsildar and the police superintendent than to their landlord, and they were paid from a government-administered cess.[182]

4,700; Masulipatam maintained at least 5 with a circulation of 8,000; and Ellore at least 3 with a circulation of about 2,000. Government of India, Home Political, File 261 of 1926, NAI.

[179] See, for example, the report on the foundation of the Guntur Cotton, Paper and Jute Mills Company, which involved the Lingamalee, Pydah and Majeti families, in *Hindu*, 13 September 1904. A Guntur Chamber of Commerce, consisting almost entirely of Komatis, was founded in about 1911 to regulate district commerce. See *Hindu*, 29 January 1913.

[180] For a description of the expansion of Komati religious and communal activity see the petitions of Komatis from various Andhra towns against the Hindu Religious Endowments Act of 1926 in G.O. 3666 (Local and Municipal) dated 8 September 1928. State Archives, Hyderabad. From 1907, a Komati caste conference developed from Guntur.

[181] Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence, 9 April 1910, Home Political B, June 1910, 17–25, NAI; also G.O. 216 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 3 February 1914, TNA.

[182] These developments, which were the result of administrative activity, received legislative ratification under the Zemindari Village Officers' Services Acts of 1894 and 1895. For discussions of the ways in which government had undermined the zemindars' authority in their estates see G.O. 351 (Revenue) dated 3 March 1925; G.O. 875 (Revenue) dated 12 June 1925, TNA. The presence of zemindars, of course, influenced the social and political life of the localities in which they lived. Zemindars both drew and spent a large income, which gave them many dependents. However, our main concern is the peasantry and there was as little difference in administrative

In the later nineteenth century, British administrative practice followed precisely the same course in the deltas as elsewhere. Village establishments were given greater powers: they managed the income tax, police, government-backed credit schemes, and village unions. Yet the whole edifice of government was being built on shifting foundations.

For an administrative system based on the village to work well, the village itself must be an important and coherent social unit. By 1900, in the deltas, this was no longer the case. So many rural people were involved in educational, marketing and legal adventures in the district towns that their society would be better characterized as an urban hinterland than as one of a collection of separate villages. Further, the great mobility of the labouring population undermined the autonomy of the village community. In the dry region, most villages had more labour than was necessary for their own needs, but in the deltas rice cultivation demanded twice in the year many more hands than were locally available. At transplantation and harvest, thousands of day labourers from the upland taluks and Ganjam and Vizagapatam districts poured into the delta and settled for a few weeks in camps on the outskirts of the villages. They were usually paid in cash and returned home as soon as their work was done.[183] Their bi-annual influx destroyed the cohesion of the delta village.

The Madras government's model of village government depended on the existence of village leaders who could rule. In the delta villages such leaders were hard to find. Certainly, there were some ryots who were much richer than others, and many of them were village officers. But they did not control the trade and moneylending of their localities to the same extent as the village Reddis of the Ceded districts and Gounder headmen of Coimbatore and Salem. Town courts undercut their powers of arbitration in local disputes. Their control over revenue payments was restricted by the ease with which others in the village could call in urban lawyers and officers. They could not overawe their highly mobile subjects who could always summon the outside world into battle against them. In the delta villages there was no entrenched, dominant, and unassailable peasant élite.

From the later nineteenth century, social and political control in the deltas was breaking down, and in the twentieth century it often collapsed. The village police could not maintain order. There was more crime in the Kistna and Godaveri districts than anywhere else in the

organization as in economic organization between ryotwari and zemindari peasants. Indeed, many zemindari village officers joined the rent-strike against government in 1921–22.

[183] *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India*, Vol. III, p. 316.

Presidency. But this crime was not the organized murder and looting thrown up by the factionalism of the dry districts, but petty theft and housebreaking which were the product of social instability.[184] Even the revenue administration—the centre of the entire British system—threatened to come to a standstill. Faced with large numbers of rich and independent peasants in his village, the village officer had to rely more on consensus than force to collect his revenue. Of course he had Leviathan behind him, but the district courts were far from the village and expropriation took time. If the British had had to use force to collect the land revenue, then their government in India would have been impossible. In the dry region, the authority of the village establishment guaranteed the smooth running of jamabundi. The decision to pay was taken and enforced by the élite. The delta village establishment, however, had to be more circumspect or it would face vigorous opposition. During the civil disobedience movement, many delta peasants refused to pay, and, in many places, the flow of revenue dried up. The village officers were not behind this: in many villages 'the rich ryots' simply ordered them to stay collections. When the government tried to punish the establishments of defaulting villages, it found that many village officers had been swept away on a tide they could not control.[185]

In the dry region, Fort St George's efforts to control its village agents had succeeded merely in irritating them. In the deltas they had more serious consequences. Here the leadership of the village official was already under pressure from the people below and the interference of government from above weakened it further. In the dry regions, government's inroads on the power and patronage of its overmighty servants only clipped a fraction of the authority of the Reddi and the Gounder; but in the deltas they knocked away the few remaining props on which the village officer leant. By the early twentieth century, many officers felt that there was little point in continuing to wear the hollow crowns of authority. Many men with long traditions of government service, finding more attractive opportunities open to them elsewhere, resigned or sold their posts. The Brahmin family of A. Kaleswara Rao, for example, auctioned its kurnamship in a village near Bezwada and moved permanently into the town.[186] At a lower

[184] See *Madras Police* for 1878–1925. G.O. 639 (Public) dated 5 June 1931, TNA.

[185] G.O. 938 (Public) dated 11 September 1931; G.O. 939 (Public) dated 11 September 1931; G.O. 980 (Public) dated 21 September 1931; G.O. 1075 (Public) dated 20 October 1931, TNA.

[186] A. Kaleswara Rao, *Na Jivita Katha–Navya Andhramu* (Vijayawada, 1959), p. 19. (Telugu).

level, the Collector of Kistna noticed many petty village servants quitting to work as labourers in the rice fields, where they could earn more money.[187] In the dry areas, by contrast, men were still willing to pay Rs 5,000 for just such petty offices which carried stipends of only Rs 4 per month.[188] Those who clung to office vigorously opposed all the government's changes. Between 1907 and 1914 Curzon's deputy police inspectors were most seriously obstructed in the delta districts.[189] By the time of the First World War, even the revenue department found itself in trouble. The Collector of Kistna reported in 1914:

> My taluk officers inform me that they find constant recurring difficulties in getting their ordinary revenue duties done by the village servants. Resignations are very common, temporary absence from duty of regular monthly occurrence and wholesale strikes are by no means unusual.[190]

Paradoxically perhaps, the very linkages between town and village, which had contributed so much to the decay of village government, provided irate officials with a powerful means of making their grievances known to government. When they learnt that government intended to end their hereditary rights, village officers organized association after association; they held regular taluk and firka conferences and published newspapers to publicize their cause.[191] Home Rule Leaguers and Congressmen from the towns played a large part in these organizations, seeing a chance of winning a following. As the power of village officers waned, their protest grew more violent. Finally it spilled over into Gandhi's non-cooperation movement with an officer-led rent strike in several parts of Guntur, Kistna and Godaveri districts.[192] The government fairly easily broke the move-

[187] *Madras Police 1913*, Appendix, p. 9.

[188] See comments of raja of Ramnad in Government of India, Home Judicial Files 1–2 of 1922, NAI.

[189] G.O. 1675 (Judicial) dated 18 August 1913, TNA; *Madras Police 1913*, Appendix, p. 9; *ibid.*, *1914* Appendix D, p. 72; *ibid.*, *1919*, Appendix E, p. 68.

[190] *Madras Police 1913*, Appendix, p. 9. See also report of a Legislative Council debate on village officer resignations in *Hindu*, 3 February 1915.

[191] For reports on various village officer association meetings see *Hindu*, 12 November 1920; and *Andhrapatrika*, 4 February 1919 and 7 September 1920; *Desabhimani*, 8 January 1919; *Gramapulana*, 10 September 1921, in *Reports on the Native Press in the Madras Presidency*, IOL.

[192] The most famous of the strikes was in Pedanannipad firka of Guntur district, which was not, strictly speaking, in the deltas. However, most of the original drive for a strike had come from delta villages. As early as August 1920, for example, village officers in Northern deltaic Guntur had begun their own strike. *Andhrapatrika*, 7 September 1920 in *Reports on the Native Press in the Madras Presidency*, IOL. And in December 1921, the Andhra Desa Village Officers' Association had called for resignations at Rajahmundry and had obtained them from about half the officers in this wet

ment,[193] but the campaign showed, by the desperation of the village officials, how meaningless the village had become as the basic unit on which the administration was supposed to rest.

The pattern of public politics shown in the non-cooperation campaign was nothing new in the area. The ease of communication, the existence of obvious centres for organization, and, above all, the large number of wealthy people in the countryside, made it possible to develop, and, for the government, impossible to prevent, widespread popular participation in political movements. Whereas we saw that the challenge of the forest department in the dry areas produced little organized protest, the challenge of the Public Works Department in the deltas was met with widespread popular resistance. The Public Works Department controlled the flow of piped water to many fields, and PWD men were said to be totally corrupt and to extort money by threatening to withold water supplies. Of course, delta ryots paid the bribes and, on N. G. Ranga's testimony, exchanged threat for threat,[194] but no small all-powerful élite existed with a vested interest in the system. Anti-PWD protest became a popular pastime. Urban-based stump orators never wanted an audience when they slanged the PWD.[195] At every Legislative Council election from 1892, prospective candidates had to make village pilgrimages to demonstrate their hatred of the PWD.[196] The earliest district conferences in Madras were those of Kistna (1892) and Godaveri (1895). They drew a large support from peasants and were often held in large villages.[197] During the First World War, anti-PWD agitation spread through the deltas even faster than the village officers' campaign. Dozens of small taluk conferences were held, newspapers—such as N. G. Ranga's *Ryotpatrika*—were

taluk. The Andhra Congress, which was wary of associating itself with such an obviously dangerous movement, held back from the village officers' campaign for sixteen months. Finally, in January 1922, it was forced to join in order to keep up its political credibility. It organized the strike in Pedanandipad, which was immediately adjacent to Guntur town, the Andhra PCC headquarters, with the help of P. Virayya Choudhari, a Kamma with close village officer connexions in Pedanandipad as well as political ties with Guntur town. The Pedanandipad affair was probably the least spontaneous although the most celebrated of all the strikes. See M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh* (*Andhra*), Vol. III, pp. 43, 244, 250–308; also K. Venkatappayya, *Sviya Caritra* (Vijayawada, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 226–301 (Telugu).

[193] 'Collector's Report about the Situation in Guntur–5', in M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh* (*Andhra*), Vol. III, p. 305.

[194] N. G. Ranga, *Fight For Freedom* (New Delhi, 1968), pp. 8–9.

[195] See, for example, the meeting of ryots at Ellore in 1894, addressed by S. Bhimasankara Rao, Rajahmundry muncipal chairman. *Hindu*, 12 October 1894.

[196] *Hindu*, 4 October 1894.

[197] *Hindu*, 17 April and 5, 6, 11, 12. 15 June 1896.

founded, and permanent organizations were set up.[198] The political culture of the delta districts was markedly different to that anywhere else in Madras.

The British developed their rural administration—through district and taluk boards and village unions—in precisely the same way in the delta districts as elsewhere. And there can be little doubt that here, as elsewhere, these institutions attained a paramount significance in the determination of local political positions, and contributed to the linking of district to provincial political arenas. Clearly, there were likely to be considerable differences, between the deltas and the dry districts, in the ways in which rural boards politics operated. In the deltas, the franchise extended to a larger proportion of a population which itself was more independent and possessed many more opportunities for establishing other kinds of political associations. Of course, there were men in the deltas who had great wealth, and who held many of the strands of personal power which went into the making of rural magnates; and it would be impossible to deny that faction was the most usual political structure in the area. Yet the battlefield on which factions met was of greater size and the armies involved very numerous. No politician could afford simply to sit on his personal dependency network and make secret treaties with allies. He had to use public techniques and to raise issues and causes in order to focus on him the attention of the considerable 'floating', or at least not directly tied, vote. In 1920, for example, M. Venkataratnam Naidu, a long-term opponent of the Godaveri district board president, D. Seshagiri Rao, attempted to split the board and undercut the president's majority by introducing the non-Brahmin issue into its deliberations.[199] No dry area district board paid the slightest attention to such matters of public conscience. At about the same time, P. C. N. Ethirajulu Naidu, the Guntur district board president, found that his enemies were raising a public outcry against him on the ground that he was 'a foreigner'—he came from the neighbouring district of Nellore.[200] During periods of nationalist agitation, many district board politicians found it expedient to identify with the Congress movement, and several rural boards passed funds to Congress-inspired national education colleges.[201]

[198] For the Ryots' Central Association, Guntur, see *Hindu*, 17 September 1918; taluk conferences at Razole and Amalapuram, *Hindu*, 27 December 1918; Bezwada Ryots' Conference *Hindu*, 17 February 1919. [199] *Hindu*, 7 May 1920.

[200] G.O. 776 (Local and Municipal, Local) dated 21 June 1919, TNA; also K. Kotilingam to P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, n.d. but probably in the spring of 1919, P. S. Sivaswami Iyer Papers, NAI.

[201] G.O. 211 (Local and Municipal, Local) dated 15 February 1919, TNA. In 1921,

Indeed, some crucially important rural district politicians, such as Dandu Narayana Raju and Maganti Sitayya, both of whom came from very rich west Godaveri families, openly identified with the nationalist movement, and sought to capitalize on their association at rural board and Legislative Council elections throughout the 1920s.[202] It is not surprising that in 1920 the only Legislative Council candidates who thought it necessary to issue manifestos and to campaign from public platforms, were those who stood in the delta districts.[203]

The vigour of rural board politics can be seen in the very different history of emotive 'caste' politics in the region. The 'Kamma scare' which beset Guntur in the mid-1920s, unlike the Reddi scare of 1926 and the early Gounder agitation, was something of a public movement. Of course, it did not appear spontaneously and it was part of a factional struggle between élite politicians. But, through the use of the press and public platform, it managed to recruit previously uncommitted support to a caste flag and it achieved great local significance. In north-eastern Guntur, a rich group of Kamma families, finding itself locked out of the district board by a cross-communal clique (which included some Kammas) based on Guntur town, mobilized behind it members of its 'dominant caste'. The group won over several independently constituted Kamma taluk board factions in other parts of the district. A venomous publicity campaign, which spawned associations and newspapers, attended its efforts, in part successful, to win Legislative Council seats. Finally, it contrived to upset the prevailing pattern of district alliances and to seize the district board presidency.[204] For six or seven years, the movement demonstrated the unusual power of emotional appeals in delta district politics. And when it broke up—shortly after the district board presidency had been won—its members did not desert the public platform and shut themselves away in sealed rooms,

the Guntur taluk board protested at the arrest of non-co-operators. G.O. 873 (Public) dated 18 November 1921, TNA.

[202] C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India 1919–1937', pp. 214–36.

[203] This produced analyses of the programmes put forward by the various parties and candidates. See P. Govindarow Naidu, *The Legislative Council Elections*. (Rajahmundry, 1920).

[204] The group of families was based around Nidabrolu in Bapatla taluk and was led by P. V. Krishniah Choudhary, his relative N. G. Ranga, and J. Kuppuswami who was one of the richest ryotwari landlords in the district, paying over Rs 8,000 a year in land revenue. They linked up with Kamma-based factions in the Guntur and Tenali taluk boards and overthrew P. C. N. Ethirajulu Naidu's district board presidency in 1929. P. V. Krishniah Choudhary and J. Kuppuswami also became Legislative Councillors. See C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India 1919–1937', pp. 196–213.

as the Reddi and Gounder élites had done. Rather, they split up to follow new and potentially more profitable lines of agitational politics. The north eastern Guntur families, for example, became prominent in the anti-zemindari campaign.[205] Although this required them to reshuffle their alliances in typical élite fashion (they now had to appeal to peasants other than Kammas to work against zemindars who included Kammas), they still had to appeal for support to 'the mass' of delta district voters.[206] In spite of their great influence, their political ascendancy was never sure.

Yet if delta district board politicians had to start hares in order to attract publicity, they also had to chase the hares started by others in order to keep it. Caste, religious, class and cultural movements and protests against the administration were capable of developing an existence quite separate from the formal institutions of local politics. The men who organized them could gain popular support even though they held no major office. The loss of a district board seat was not political death in the deltas as it was so often in the dry region. Indeed, in the delta districts the leaders of these independent movements often influenced affairs in the formal institutions in which they did not sit. For example, the Bezwada lawyer, A. Kaleswara Rao, was involved in the Andhra movement, the National Education movement, various vernacular and religious associations and countless other undertakings. Between 1916 and 1922, he was active in ryot and village officer protest. He was a successful lawyer, his family had important village connexions and he worked for the Komatis of Bezwada town. In 1922 he led a campaign which put his Komati backers into power in the Bezwada municipality.[207] At the same time, he acted as broker between the many factions in Kistna district politics. In 1926, he successfully challenged the powerful zemindar of Mirzapuram at the Legislative

[205] This was particularly N. G. Ranga's agitation. See his *The Modern Indian Peasant* (Madras, 1936); *Economic Conditions of the Zemindari Ryots* (Madras, 1933); *Revolutionary Peasants* (New Delhi, 1949). It is of interest that, until about 1930, he and his political group in Guntur, had looked to the favour of the zemindar-based Justice Party in provincial politics.

[206] This was more of a break than it may sound. The Kamma movement had hit particularly hard at the Telaga caste, of which P. C. N. Ethirajulu Naidu was a member. Now the Kamma leaders had to try to win the allegiance of Telagas who were an important group in the agricultural community.

[207] A. Kaleswara Rao, *Na Jivita Katha–Navya Andhramu* (Vijayawada, 1959), pp. 291–360 (Telugu); G.O. 919 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 24 May 1921; G.O. 945 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 30 May 1921; G.O. 167 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 24 January 1922; G.O. 2322 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 27 November 1922, State Archives, Hyderabad; *Hindu*, 9 June and 5 December 1922.

Council elections, and later, in company with the peasant leader, M. Pallamraju, he helped to break the zemindar's influence by dividing the Kistna district board.[208] His local authority never depended on office-holding, for apart from two short terms as Bezwada municipal chairman, he never held any local positions.

Similarly, Konda Venkatappayya, a Brahmin lawyer from Guntur town, had a considerable rural following. Like Kaleswara Rao, his urban-backing came from rich Komatis. With several other Brahmin lawyers, he founded schools and organized religious festivals on their behalf. In 1917 he and the municipal chairman, N. Hanumantha Rao,[209] both of whom were deeply involved in the Home Rule League, helped to foment a riot between the Komatis and the local Muslims. When the police came out onto the streets, the two of them led 'the Hindu party' against them and won great reputations. They filled the Home Rule coffers from the flood of donations which followed.[210] Equally, Venkatappayya had contacts with several of the richer Kamma families in the environs of Guntur town.[211] Although Venkatappayya's hopes of rural board dominance were destroyed by the favours heaped by government on his major rival (the tobacco-merchant P. C. N. Ethirajulu Naidu, who was president of the taluk and district boards and chairman of the municipality), Venkatappayya's rural influence showed up in the non-cooperation campaign: the Kamma headmen of Pedanandipad were linked to Guntur town and Venkatappayya, while British investigators noted the presence of private armies of village Komatis who were 'centrally directed' to prevent defections from the rent-strike.[212]

The political élites of the delta districts were differently composed from those of the dry region. The peasant take-over of district levels or politics was not as complete as it was in the dry zone. Certainly, from

[208] A. Kaleswara Rao, *Na Jivita Katha–Navya Andhramu*, pp. 434–60.

[209] N. Hanumantha Rao also played a large part in the organization of the Komati-supported cow protection movement. G.O. 216 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 3 February 1914, TNA.

[210] See letters of E. A. Davis, Collector of Guntur, and S. V. Narasimhachari, Deputy Magistrate of Guntur, in G.O. 2461 (Home, Judicial) dated 26 November 1917, TNA. The political implications of the Komati–Brahmin publicist patronage relationship became clear in the 1890s when Guntur municipality was allowed to have a majority of elected members and to elect its chairmen. In 1892, the Komati caucus Taxpayers' Association, led by the Brahmin lawyer V. Bhavarnacharlu, won all the elected seats and put its representatives into municipal office, G.O. 1298 (Local and Municipal, Municipal) dated 5 August 1892, TNA.

[211] Particularly, P. Virayya Choudhari. M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh (Andhra)*, Vol. III, pp. 43, 244.

[212] *Ibid.*, pp. 264–70, 288–9.

the 1910s, increasing numbers of peasants were becoming literate and capable of conducting themselves in the larger district institutions. Indeed, there were many more of them than in the dry region. But political success did not hinge simply on the possession of small but secure vote banks and on bargaining in the district boards. The needs of publicity and organization guaranteed that there would still be a place, alongside peasant leaders, for the professional middle-man, the pure politician who had only organizational expertise. In some ways, as the political population of the deltas expanded in the 1930s, and as more voters entered the game, the middle-man became more important than ever. His ability to batten on any public issue kept him in touch with the sources of power in the deltas, and provided him with a viable political platform. A. Kaleswara Rao, who, we have seen, was no simple urban politician, did not suffer the fate of a Kesava Pillai. He was elected to the Legislative Council from Kistna in 1926, and to the Legislative Assembly from Bezwada-Masulipatam in 1937. Konda Venkatappayya was the only man to be elected to the Legislative Assembly in Madras in 1937 who had also sat in a Morley-Minto Council.

III

Two quite distinct patterns of district politics have emerged from our discussion. In the dry areas, economic and administrative development combined to produce an extremely powerful rural élite which kept localities tight under it and monopolized access to government institutions. There was little room for direct popular participation in politics, and the government's district boards came to form the major, and, for all practical purposes, the only, arena of district politics. By contrast, economic development in the wet region produced a wealthier and more mobile peasantry whose interests and influence did not stop in the locality. Many people were engaged immediately in far-reaching economic, social and political transactions. District politics developed as much as a result of movements 'from below' as of the government's imposition of district institutions 'from above'. This meant that not only were district board politics necessarily conducted with reference to a greater splay of public opinion but also political institutions emerged which were rivals of the boards, and which influenced the character of district politics.[213]

[213] Of course, there were a number of other elements in the composition of district politics which we have had to neglect. Rich urban merchants or zemindars, particularly

Political development, however, did not stop at the district level. The same factors of administrative decentralization, the creation of larger political institutions and the transfer of power from British to Indian hands also worked to produce provincial and national politics. Under the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms Legislative Councils were expanded in size, and Indian ministers with considerable local powers were made responsible to the Legislature. In Madras, this period witnessed the beginnings of 'party' government. Further, of course, the nationalist movement developed in parallel to the constitution, and rapidly came to form its own political system which competed with that of the government. Yet, in many ways, these larger political organizations were built on top of firm district structures which were independent and could continue to exist without them. In Madras, between 1920 and the mid-1930s, the various labels of provincial and national politics really adhered to groups factionally determined in the district rather than to groups consciously organized along party lines from the capital. As Dr C. J. Baker has shown, the leadership of provincial parties existed quite distinctly from any district followings they might possess.[214]

District institutions were the largest political organizations in Madras which directly administered their own patronage and power. Under the Montagu–Chelmsford constitution, the ministries—in image of the British—possessed only a supervisory role over the districts and were forced to administer indirectly through channels opened for them in the districts. This meant that the ministry was dependent on the support of powers constituted by political processes within the district and it could do little of its own volition. In the rural boards, for example, the ministries were faced with a majority of members elected locally. Certainly, they could nominate presidents and a few members but they had no influence over the way most members of district boards claimed their seats. The most that ministers could do was to support the dominant faction which emerged from district board bargaining. If they set up a president who was unacceptable to the majority, he simply could not work. The raja of Panagal, the chief minister from 1921 to 1926, had to back down on several occasions from confrontations with district board powers.[215] Indeed, in order to work the district

clever lawyers, particularly insensitive goverment officials, or even small social groups which had become disproportionately wealthy by means outside the main lines of the agrarian economy, could distort some of the behavioural patterns we have tried to establish.

[214] See C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India 1919–1937'.

[215] In 1921, for example, Panagal tried to reward the loyal Justice Party man

boards at all he had to destroy the *raison d'être* of his so-called party. He led a nominally anti-Brahmin party, yet, when it was necessary, he supported powerful district Brahmin politicians and neglected many of the faithful of the 1917–20 non-Brahmin agitation.[216]

The Montagu–Chelmsford Councils turned the ministries into the lackeys rather than the masters of district factions. The Justice Party's weakness in its relations with the district boards was reflected in the composition of the Legislative Council. If the ministries could not direct the affairs of the district boards, they certainly could not control the electorate. In fact, the Montagu–Chelmsford electorates were constituted in such a way that no 'party' or central organization could operate in them. The constituencies had several members, but each voter had only one vote. Unless there was an elaborate caucus organization to distribute votes, two members of the same party who stood in the same constituency had to take votes away from each other. The Justice Party never attempted to build such a caucus. It stayed in power by buying support from district politicians whose methods suited the electorates. It was entirely a conciliar party dependent for its majority on the jobs, district board places, nominations to temple committees, and other gifts, which it distributed to anyone who would vote for it. Its ultimate failure in 1937 came from the disappearance of most of its gifts and their replacement with a whip. From the later 1920s, further measures of decentralization meant more elections and fewer nominations in district politics. Much of the Justice Party's patronage was therefore liquidated. The ministry, still needing the support of district politicians, began to use threats instead of rewards. In 1930 the raja of Bobbili, the new chief minister, began to supersede awkward local bodies. The policy went awry, for while earlier ministries had managed to win the favour of dominant district factions, Bobbili, on nearly every occasion, contrived to madden them. In 1937 when they revolted against him, the Justice Party was beaten out of existence.

P. L. Ramaswami Naicker with a seat on the Salem district board. The board president, the European zemindar T. Foulkes, however, would not have him and insisted on the nomination of a Brahmin client of his own. Panagal was forced to give way. During the course of an angry exchange of letters with Panagal, Foulkes neatly summarized the weakness of the Council ministry: 'On general principles if Government is going to nominate members without reference to responsible local opinion, it is merely a matter of time when Government is going to land itself in difficulties'. G.O. 1295 (Local and Municipal) dated 5 July 1921, TNA.

[216] Such as T. Desikachari, Nyampalle Subba Rao, A. S. Krishna Rao, T. M. Narasimhacharlu and P. Siva Rao. *The Cult of Incompetence, being an impartial enquiry into the record of the First Madras Ministry*, pp. 37–8. Those neglected formed themselves into the 'Anti-Ministerial' Justice Party.

Even Bobbili lost his seat in his home district—to a professional Congress worker called V. V. Giri.[217]

The history of the Justice Party shows how far the district remained the most vital level of political organization. Yet the Justice Party was not the only organization attempting to win support from the districts. Although the Congress was formally opposed to constitutional politics for much of the period between 1920 and 1937, it also needed to show its district following, if it were to have any credibility in politics. Its ability to compete with the Justice Party for district affections depended very much on the nature of district politics and, as might be expected, its success differed considerably between our 'wet' and 'dry' regions. These differences came to be expressed not only in the size of the different Congress organizations but also in their character and in what they were trying to do.

In the dry districts, the formal institutions of politics had achieved such a massive importance that no party could succeed without paying heed to their connexions with the Legislative Council. The Congress offered no way of influencing political events in the district institutions. Lacking a base for popular politics it offered no alternative system of politics. Non-cooperation made little impact on the rural élite of this region, save for sporadic fighting over the forests here and there. In so far as it won any support at all, this came from the towns and from a few isolated rural groups which had been at odds with the administration for many years.[218] If the Congress were to find a role here, it would have to be as a constitutional party, involved, somehow, in obtaining Legislative Council rewards for its followers. During the 1920s, the tensions between Gandhian agitation and constitutional co-operation wrecked the Tamil Nad Provincial Congress, which represented most of the dry region, and led to the development within it of two separate parties with opposing ideologies. The first, led for most of the time by C. Rajagopalachari and supported by an extraordinary assortment of political malcontents, clung desperately to the Gandhian ideal. There was never any question that it could succeed in constitutional politics in the 1920s; it had no influence in district affairs, no secured localities under it, and little hope of winning any election. The other Congress, led by S. Srinivasa Iyengar, A. Rangaswami Iyengar and S. Satya-

[217] C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India 1919–1937', pp. 451–4.

[218] The one exception to this would be the area around Coimbatore where non-cooperation anti-drink propaganda fitted in with V. C. Vellingiri Gounder's caste movement. Yet Vellingiri Gounder's intrinsic lack of interest in the wider purposes of the Congress campaign was clear in his refusal to resign the Legislative Council seat he had won in 1920.

murthi, all of whom had powerful contacts in the Secretariat, the High Court and the university in Madras city, had expressed a deep revulsion from Gandhian politics in 1920, and sought to bring the Congress back to reality.[219] In 1926, in the form of the Swarajya Party, they defeated the Justice Party ministry at the polls. Their victory, of course, was not because they had a programme which could mould a new public consciousness; as Dr R. A. Gordon has seen, they achieved it largely by allying with men in the districts, many of whom had sat or stood for election in the Legislative Council when the Congress was noncooperating.[220] The Swarajya Party consisted in the main of district bosses who had been unable to reach satisfactory arrangements with the Justice Party and were looking for an alternative government. Although in the end Srinivasa Iyengar did not accept office, it was by no means clear at any time before the election that he would not, and he only refused to do so after extreme pressure was put on him by the all-India leadership of the Swarajya Party.[221] Torn by bitter fighting between the two schools of thought, between non-cooperation and civil disobedience, the Tamil Nad PCC had a small and very irregular following. Apart from the 1926 election, it took no significant part in the politics of the presidency.

By comparison, the Andhra PCC, which was run from the delta districts, was a permanent and powerful political institution at the district level. While a moderate such as Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer could mock the supporters of Tamil extremists as 'the rabble in the towns'[222] nobody could treat the followers of T. Prakasam, A. Kaleswara Rao or Konda Venkatappayya in such a cavalier fashion. Although they operated from the towns, their connexions with Komati networks, with vernacular newspapers read in the countryside, with religious revivalism and with local grievances enabled them to build a large and influential rural following. As early as 1894, the Rajahmundry Hindu Theatrical Company, of which T. Prakasam was a member, had used plays to convey the Congress message to rural Godaveri.[223] In the

[219] *Hindu*, 23 and 24 June and 16 August 1920.

[220] Of the 47 Swarajysts elected, 20 had sat in the 1923 Council, and 4 others had stood for election in 1923 but had been defeated. Only 7 of the 47 had been members of the original Swarajya Party formed by Congress politicians in 1923–24. R. A. Gordon, 'Aspects in the history of the Indian National Congress, with special reference to the Swarajya Party, 1919–1927' (D. Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1970), pp. 292–4.

[221] C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India 1919–1937', pp. 406–8.

[222] P. S. Sivaswami Iyer to G. A. Natesan, 13 August 1920. P. S. Sivaswami Iyer Papers, NAI.

[223] *Hindu*, 1 October 1894.

Extremist-Moderate confrontation of 1906–08, the Andhra Extremists spread their propaganda widely. In Godaveri, British officials smelt 'sedition' in many villages, while in Kistna the influential editor of the *Kistnapatrika* added to his rural fame by combining political meetings with wrestling matches.[224] Of all the Extremist groups in Madras, those in the Andhra deltas were alone in founding permanent institutions. They established a National School at Masulipatam which taught practical subjects entirely in the vernacular. Between 1911 and 1917, this leadership channelled the strong but incoherent currents of vernacular revivalism into the Andhra movement and finally won its own provincial Congress committee. Above all, the leaders of the Andhra Congress were able to turn the chronic irritation against the administration to their own advantage. At one time or another they had all been involved in anti-PWD agitation. Between 1916 and 1922, they were able to count on considerable support, from ryots and village officers alike, in the nationalist movement.

During the difficult 1920s, the Andhra Congress remained the focal point of many popular protests. This propped up its importance in the political situation created by the development of the rural boards. At the same time it kept its own organization and much of its membership. Local politicians fought each other to use its organizations in their squabbles. At rural board elections, candidates paraded their Congress affiliations.[225] It could influence district board affairs, as we have seen from the experiences of A. Kaleswara Rao, whose greatest asset was his high place in the Congress. In the delta districts, it was important to be a Congressman. This was shown in the way the Andhra Congress was prepared to obey the orders of the all-India Congress leadership at all times, no matter how asinine those orders might appear from a local standpoint. For example, Kaleswara Rao, Prakasam and Venkatappayya non-cooperated in 1920; undertook 'constructive work' between 1922 and 1926; accepted the Swarajya Party's mandate in 1926 and, in Kaleswara Rao's case, won election to the Legislative Council; and offered civil disobedience in 1930. Although

[224] M. Venkatarangaiya, *The Freedom Struggle in Andhra Pradesh (Andhra)*, Vol. II, pp. 177–311.

[225] In the Rajahmundry area, for example, municipal and taluk board elections were fought on party tickets between 1921 and 1923. *Hindu*, 10 May 1921, 4 September 1922, 14, 19, 20 April 1923. The local position of the Congress became so strong that fights for power in local institutions were conducted within it. *Hindu*, 11 September 1924. In Ellore, the struggle for power between Mothey Gangaraju and Dandu Narayan Raju, which dominated local affairs between the mid-1920s and 1937, was fought at the polls on Justice Party–Congress lines. C. J. Baker, 'Political Change in South India, 1919–1937', p. 224.

there were major faction fights for control of the Andhra PCC,[226] they did not, as in Tamil Nad, lead to a split over the very purpose of the Congress, or to the exit for long of the losing faction. For many politicians, membership of the Congress was too important to be thrown away simply because they disapproved of the course Congress was taking.

From the end of civil disobedience, the Congress parties of Andhra and Tamil Nad moved closer together as it became clear that the Congress itself was to take office. The 1934 Legislative Assembly elections and, above all, the 1935–36 district board elections which put the key to Legislative Council success into the hands of the Congress, pointed the way to 1937. Yet the Congress parties which won in the dry and wet regions were of different characters, indicating the differing histories of the Congress and the differing nature of district politics in the two areas. In the dry districts, the majority of Congressmen elected to the 1937 legislature had come over to the Congress only since the end of civil disobedience and the collapse of the Justice Party's political machine. Their interest in Congress awakened only when it promised to provide them with a government in Madras city which would help them. Most of them were rural board politicians, still working within the framework of the government's institutions. Of the 50 Congressmen returned from this region, only 13 had been sufficiently active in civil disobedience to have gone to prison.[227] But among Congress members from the delta districts, there were many more old party stalwarts. Although they were also rural board politicians, many of the new members of the Council could also show membership of the Congress going back without a break to 1920. Of the 15 Congressmen elected, no fewer than 9 had been to prison in civil disobedience and two others were well-known supporters of the movement.[228] Even as the Congress stood proclaiming victory for a national ideal, the ambiguities of trying to construct provincial politics on a base of district-level institutions stood out clearly.

Conclusion

Although the area of our inquiry has been confined to two fragments of a single Indian province, it is hoped that our findings suggest approaches to many of the more general problems of rural history in our period.

[226] Between 1920 and 1937, Kaleswara Rao, Venkatappayya and Pattabhisittaramayya (who was thoroughly unsuccessful) spent a great deal of time feuding with each other for Congress pre-eminence.

[227] *Directory of the Madras Legislature* (Madras, 1938). [228] *Ibid.*

Clearly, a basic question which emerges from our discussion is the way in which British administrative institutions 'fitted' the political hierarchy which developed from agrarian economic relations. Control of the economic resources of the countryside put one form of power into the hands of certain men, and, in various areas, the provincial governments of British India tried to use or to destroy the bases of this power. Recent research on the United Provinces, for example, suggests that, beneath many of the estates of taluqdars and zemindars, economic conditions were fairly similar to those we have seen in our dry region.[229] Political and economic control in the village, and a monopoly of the connexions between the village and higher administrative organizations, rested firmly in the hands of a small and resilient village élite. Yet the administrative development of the United Provinces was very different from that in dry Madras. Rural boards never achieved anything like the same significance, and the village élite was never encouraged to participate in the broader structures of government. Rather, the British built on the shaky foundations provided by zemindars and taluqdars who packed the district and provincial-level institutions of government. The incongruity between lines of actual rural power and of access to the political institutions of the British might be seen to account, at least in part, for the social tensions which produced kisan disruptions and the extinction of the landlords in the 1937 election.

Another feature of our analysis which has possible implications elsewhere is the character of political society in rural areas possessing large numbers of wealthy, mobile and market-oriented peasants. The problems of finding any political system capable of maintaining stability were virtually insurmountable: controls supplied by the economy simply could not hold down enough people, while the ease of communication prevented the acceptance of any single system of formal political institutions. In the Andhra deltas, men who lost out in the district boards or in the division of spoils by the administration were able to manufacture their own rival political systems based on agitation, protest and publicity. In looking for points of comparison with other parts of India, we might notice that Midnapore in Bengal and Bardoli in Gujerat, whose rent-strikes posed similar problems to government during the days of high Gandhian politics, were also areas in which the moderately rich peasant, with a large number of direct connexions to the market, abounded.

[229] See P. J. Musgrave, 'Landlords and Lords of the Land: estate management and social control in Uttar Pradesh 1860–1920' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, Part 3, July 1972, pp. 257–75.

An essay of this nature must necessarily exclude a great many particularities which influenced the nature of specific events. Its purpose has been to try to paint some background against which the action in the foreground becomes more readily comprehensible. Out of the many possible factors which affected the growth of rural political society in the period, it has selected the two which seem to indicate the most obvious lines of comparison with organization in other parts of rural India. All peasants had to earn a living and all were involved in some kind of administrative structure. This essay has tried to put these two types of activity into a single context.