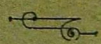


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**Taluk Mirasidars Conference,  
CHIDAMBARAM.**

**30 - 12 - 1934.**



**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.**



**V. NADIMUTHU PILLAI, M. L. C.,  
PRESIDENT.**



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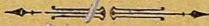
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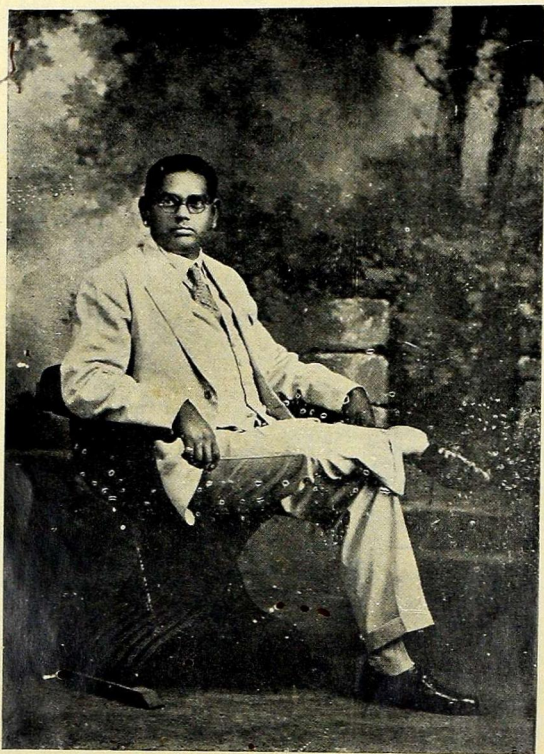


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**PRESIDENT.**





V. NADIMUTHU PILLAI, M. L. C.

# The Chidambaram Taluk Mirasidars Conference.

30th December 1934.

PRESIDENT

M. R. Ry. V NADIMUTHU PILLAI Avl., M. L. C.

## Presidential Address.

Gentlemen,

I thank you all most heartily for the honour you have done me by requesting me to preside over this Conference which is held at Chidambaram which withstood the shock of ages and is shining in all its pristine glory long ere humankind thought of recording the passing events of its country. That the most ancient of professions namely husbandry and affairs connected with it should be the subject of your deliberations in this holy city is a happy augury. I consider it to be my fortune that I should be called upon to preside over this conference which has just been opened by M. R. Ry., S. Satyamurthy Iyer Avl., one of the most eminent sons of India who has been spending all his lifetime for the sake of the motherland. He is not new to you and, as one connected with the Annamalai University here, he has often been amongst you and guided you on several occasions. You are well aware of the unprecedented success which crowned him at Madras in the recent elections to the Legislative Assembly and I am sure his extraordinary ability and worldwide knowledge of men and matters and his practical experience of conditions in South Arcot District will enable him to help us by inducing the Government of India to take all possible steps to aid the mirasidars to tide over the depression. Evidently, it is your friendliness and affection

towards a brother mirasidar of an adjacent district that prompted you to approach me for the purpose. Though one with actual experience in this Taluk may be able to help you better in your deliberations at this Conference, as the very existence of the mirasidars throughout the presidency is a serious problem, and as one in the very same predicament as any other mirasidar in the Province, I readily acceded to the request to preside over this Conference and I am sure you will all join hands in devising ways and means for alleviating the acute distress of the mirasidar at present.

### **The Agrarian Problem.**

One of the most urgent problems that the Provincial Government has to tackle at the present moment is the agrarian problem. This problem is not confined to this District or that, or to this region or the other. The agricultural problem is not only wideapread but is also acute and urgent. Unfortunately its real magnitude does not appear to be realised by those in authority. Whatever might have been the case with our land revenue system half a century ago, and however perfect it might have been in the conditions then prevailing, it has become far too antiquated to be satisfactory. Land tax to-day presses with undue severity on the poorer ryots. In the existing state of things the plight of the ryots is extremely precarious.

### **The Resettlement.**

The last resettlement of Chidambaram Taluk took place in 1919—1920, when the price of paddy and groundnut, the chief agricultural produce of the taluk was at its maximum. At that time the Government enhanced the land revenue assesment by 33  $\frac{1}{3}$  per cent. But the mirasidars, misled by the period of boon and thinking that the price level will

be maintained, were apathetic and did not raise their voice in protest against such unjustified and disproportionate rise. In the adjacent district of Tanjore, where conditions are by no means different from those obtaining in this taluk, resettlement took place a few years later ; and the rates enhanced by 25 per cent, after strenuous exertions and the pursuit of a no-tax movement in parts of the district, with accompanying avoidable trouble for both the authorities and the ryots, the rate was ultimately reduced to 18 $\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. When the Tanjore ryot finds it absolutely impossible to pay the assessment so fixed when he had been reduced to a state of chronic indebtedness, when even the small benefits of suspension and remission of land tax by 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent bestowed upon him by Government has been of no use at all to alleviate his distress, and when he denied himself even ordinary comforts during the last two years and yet had to sell away the few gold ornaments and trinklets he had in the face of coercion by the collection authorities, one can very well understand the position of the ryot in this taluk. The average price on which the resettlement rate was based was itself unduly inflated by reason of the abnormally high prices that had ruled over a few years during the period for which the average was struck. This was done in this taluk when the price was at its highest, as it was only then the Great European war had ended. The poverty and acute distress of the ryot in this part of the Presidency has been aggravated by the recent devastating cyclone, not to speak of the heavy rains and floods that preceded it. These befell the ryots just when they were recovering from the disastrous effects of the breach of the Veeranam tank, 20 years ago. It is common knowledge such remissions as were granted did not and could not help the ryot to attain his former status. If, in addition to the havoc done by nature, the Government persist in squeezing from the ryots unbearable taxes one can easily imagine the

corner to which the ryot will be driven. Further during the past three years there had been a cataclysmic fall in prices all over the world in all primary commodities and economists are by no means unanimous when prices will be stabilised and at what levels. The small remissions (after a preliminary suspension) granted by the Government do not at all improve the economic condition of the ryot and the necessity for more general relief proportionately to the fall in prices is not in the least diminished. On the other hand in the Central Provinces, Punjab and other Governments including native States, the Government have come to the rescue of the ryots by imposing a permanent cut in the salaries of officials and by granting a 25 per cent reduction in the assessment of land tax while the Madras Government have not yet made up their minds to give further remissions but rushed to restore a 10 per cent cut in the salaries as soon as they sighted a small surplus in the budget.

### **The real situation.**

The Government is maintaining a huge and a highly paid establishment to collect land revenue, which, if not forthcoming on demand, is collected by distraint of property. The Government care more for the administrative agency than for the tax-payer, who is generally and for the most part dumb and ascribes everything to fate. It is the fear of distraint of movables that made collection of this heavy land tax easy and that is also responsible for the delusion of the Government regarding the reality of the situation, viz., the plight of the mirasdiars, who hustled by the thought that a failure to pay the kist would mean distraint of their belongings and just to avoid the scene of such a distraint were accustomed, regardless of their ability to pay off their kist by contracting debts or selling their valuables. This has been the case with almost all the mirasidars.

Every one of them is now steeped in debt because of the land revenue policy that has been adopted in this Presidency.

No doubt, though very late in the day, the Government have now ordered an enquiry into the extent of indebtedness of the Agriculturists. How long this enquiry will take, the results achieved by it, and the final orders of the Government thereon, all depend upon the method adopted by the Special Officer, the persons who are examined, the help rendered by the Mirasidars, individually and collectively, and the varying conditions prevailing in each District. This enquiry ought to have been ordered long ago so that relief can be given to the ryots when they need it. They can no longer wait for the enquiry to be finished as immediate redress is absolutely necessary if the Government desire that the very foundation of their finances—the agriculturist—should be saved from utter annihilation.

The Mirasidars could no longer command any credit because of the low prices of lands and its produce. One is at his wits end to solve the problem of paying the kist next month. It is the age-long false modesty of the mirasidars who often screen their difficulties and their poverty from others, that enables the Government to be of opinion that the Mirasidars were really rich and could well put up with high taxes. The political agitation for self-government is no doubt good in its own way; but the pressing concern of the hour is the agrarian situation. The country was directly hit by the agrarian troubles and hence the foremost duty of the Government is to ameliorate the lot of the agriculturists and Mirasidars.

If the Government persisted in collecting heavy taxes, without regard to the purse of the tax-payer, it would find itself in the unenviable position of having to spend more towards the collection of a



lesser amount. That is, the cost of collection will be more than the amount realised. They must reveal their real state of affairs, instead of screening it, out of a sense of false prestige.

The only way of real help to the Mirasidars seems to me to lie in the adoption of something like the suggestion made by Sir Herbert Emerson, the Governor of the Punjab. His Excellency recently announced what tantamounts to a revolution in the methods of assessment in vogue. The theoretical revenue rates will be based on commutation prices, itself being the resultant of the average of the previous twenty years; but each year an adjustment will be made according to the prices current during the previous year. This is perhaps the best suggestion within the limits open to the official world on so important an issue.

### High Salaries.

That the Government have not realised the impecuniary position of the mirasidars can well be seen from the fact that they jumped at a surplus of revenue for restoring the 10 per cent cut in the salaries. Who does not know when and for what reason the salaries were raised to the present position? Was it not during and soon after the Great War? Was it not because of a general and phenomenal rise in the price of food stuffs and other necessaries of life? What justification is there in persisting in the payment of the salaries at the same rate when the reason for the same has vanished? What was the land tax when the price of grains was what it is to-day? What were the salaries paid to the respective officers then? Why not reduce the land-tax and the salaries of high-paid officials and the strength of the various establishments to pre-war level? No sooner a demand for reduction of land-tax is made than the Government put forward a plea

that all works of improvement have to be stopped, and the Ministers dutifully echo that plea and make it their own. That argument can hold good if in all the years past a large portion of the land revenue has been diverted to such works. This has not been done and it has been in incessant cry of the ryot that a sufficient portion of the land revenue is not set apart annually to such purposes. If the Government have any the slightest idea of relieving the ryot from the unbearable burden he is groaning under, they must first reduce the salaries of all officers to the pre-war level and thereby bring down the expenditure under that head and radically re-adjust the taxes of their land revenue administration. Without doing this, any attempt at a small remission or suspension of revenue for a while is quite insufficient. That the fall in prices coupled with the system of land revenue in this Presidency constitutes the main reason for the present sad plight of the Mirasidars cannot be disputed.

### **Dumping of Foreign Rice.**

One other reason for the fall in prices is the uncontrolled import of foreign rice into South India. The import of foreign rice in this Presidency during the current year is over six times that of last year. From materials available so far such import till October 1933 was 6,458 tons of rice while during the same period this year the import has reached the appalling figure of 38,034 tons. This is a part from the very large quantity of foreign paddy which has been dumped into this part of the country. The dumping of foreign rice, from Indo-China and Siam has been continuing for some time past and the incessant cry of the ryot to prevent such dumping of rice has not been heeded to by the Government of India. The amount of rice imported from Siam and Indo-China during this year is several times the average imported from these countries every year. This

coupled with the low price at which it is sold contributes in no ordinary sense to the terrible fall of the price of food stuffs in this country. Such import should be totally prohibited atleast for sometime to be followed later, if necessary, by a heavy duty on such import.

### **Communications and Railway Freights.**

It has also been suggested that better communications and readjustment of railway freights are some of the remedies in the way of raising the level of prices. Though reduction of railway freight can help us a good deal, improvement of roads may be practically difficult and beyond the means of local board except in certain specified areas where the materials necessary may be available at hand. Reduction of railway freight is a serious question and has to be handled by experts, but it has to be faced and there must be substantial reduction in that direction so as to enable us to compete favourably with the trade of other countries growing rice.

### **Crop Planning and Marketing.**

The suggestion that we are suffering from over production of rice and that the area of cultivation of paddy should be reduced is based on ignorance as admitted at the Crop-planning conference in Simla. Owing to the uneconomic nature of the cultivation of certain crops at present the agriculturists themselves are restricting the areas of cultivation of the several kinds of crops and are intensifying their own economic distress. For example, the phenomenal fall in the price of ground-nuts during the year has resulted in the reduction of the area of cultivation and the forecast yield of ground-nut is reduced by above 50 per cent. But the wet-lands of this part of the country are usually cultivated with paddy and it is not easily possible to change the crop on such lands. It should therefore be the aim of every Mirasidar to work for the raising of the price of paddy

and restoring it to a fair level. To this end the agricultural produce must be carried to distant and favourable market at minimum cost of transport. Every country has been striving to find a new and favourable market for its surplus produce for several years past. Experts in marketing have been employed to explore the possibilities in that direction. In this province an attempt has just been made by the Government, nearly 4 years after the serious fall in prices began, of appointing a Special Officer to study the conditions prevailing before undertaking any scheme improving marketing facilities. When in previous years we approached the Government to help us substantially in the direction of selling our produce at favourable prices our requests were turned down by a remark that the producers must themselves find out the ways of disposing of their produce. It is a pity that the Government which depend for its revenue mostly upon agricultural produce did not think that easy collection of revenue is closely linked up with easy sale of the produce at fairly good prices and they have at last appointed, though belated, a special officer for the purpose. But as was found out in the Tanjore District, the Special Officer was everywhere brought up to face the fundamental difficulty i. e., the inequitable nature of the land revenue burden. Marketing is only a palliative and a deceptive palliative at that. The welfare of the Government is intertwined with the welfare of the tax-payer. It has taken such a long time for the tardy machinery of Government to move in the direction of enabling the ryot to vend his produce. The Special Officer has been touring in almost all the southern districts consulting the important Mirasidars and Associations regarding the local conditions in each district or taluk. No definite proposals have yet been formulated and it is not possible to expect any before the next kist season is over. At the same time the iron hand of revenue collection will not wait and in two days

more we will be considered to be in arrears to the Government. Suggestions have often been made, both on the floor of the Legislature and outside that the Government should revert to the pre-British practice of collecting revenue in kind, but the Revenue Member always turn them down on what he said were practical grounds. The ryot has exhausted all his extraneous resources in the past and the Government can depend only upon the standing crops for their revenue. It will be most easy to inform the Government of the real state of affairs by making them attach the crops and sell the gathered produce for the arrears of revenue. Then alone the Government will find out the real situation and understand that every Mirasidar, big or small, is groaning under the same unbearable burden and strain. It is therefore imperative that the Government should immediately come forward to help the ryot in marketing his produce and also converting his produce into other manufactured commodities which are now being imported from foreign countries. It is impossible to believe that we cannot copy the example of progressive states like Mysore and Baroda in the matter of improving our industries. Starting of new industries requires large capital which is not available here. The Government must first finance such industries and, whenever necessary, start a purely Government concern and later on transfer the same to the shoulders of private agencies. With the enormous electrical energy that South India is producing and is likely to produce in the near future such a step on the part of the Government must be very easy.

### **Indian Trade & Industry.**

That the year 1933—34 has been one of swift alternations of hope and disappointment and there are as yet no striking and convincing signs of an early arrival of prosperous times is the melancholy

note struck in the Government's review of the trade in India in 1933—34. The economic conditions in various parts of the world have had their own repercussions on Indian trade. The failure of the World Economic Conference proved a signal for excited action on the part of most of the participating countries so that a further, freer and more-extended charter has been given to economic nationalism with all its weapons of restriction, control, prohibition, quotas and tariffs. And while country after country has thus been reviving the use of ancient weapons in the national economic armoury, international finance has continued in a state of chaos and uncertainty. We are aware that every country is taking special steps and introducing new schemes for tiding over the depression. What are the steps taken in India? None. India has been the feeder of raw-materials to several industrial countries and when the latter impose restriction on the purchase of Indian raw material, we have to suffer from a phenomenal fall in prices. Such is the case of groundnut and cotton for example. Steps must be taken to advance our industrial progress in such a manner that our raw products can be used in India for the manufacture of commodities for which we have been till now depending upon other industrial countries. ~~That is,~~ an attempt should be made to make India self-supporting as far as possible. It is the Government alone that can and ought to help us in the matter. No duty or any kind of taxation should be levied on manufactured articles as is now being done in the case of sugar and matches. We are aware that we were depending on Sweden for our matches only a decade ago. When we find that India can well nigh claim to be able to manufacture all the matches it requires, a stumbling block in the way of any improvement of the industry has now been laid by the imposition of an excise duty on matches in spite of protest from all quarters. Every blessed article is being taxed. What is there

that is not taxed? Possibly air alone remains; and when is its turn to be taxed?

Much more can be said. The time at our disposal is very short. I do not wish to trouble you with endless statistics to prove what has been stated already. You are aware of the acuteness of the situation without my bringing it home to you.

### Conclusion.

Let it not be thought that the grievance lies only in the Tanjore District because it is alone vociferous and litigious in the matter. There is need for united action. You must drive home to the Government the real facts relating to the sad plight of the mirasidars. The land revenue assessment should be only  $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the net produce throughout the ryotwari areas in the Presidency. This should be declared permanent. The revision of the principles of land revenue assessment in an equitable manner and their being placed on a statutory basis should no longer be delayed. You must bring pressure to bear upon the Government of India to take steps for the elimination of unfair competition and for the provision of legitimate transport facilities. Steps should be taken on one hand to raise the price level and on the other to regulate the burden on the land with reference to its capacity to bear it. Increase the strength and personnel of your Taluk Mirasidars Association and create Mirasidars Association in each village. The observations of the Finance member when presenting the budget to the effect that the small pattadars do not care for the small remissions asked for but only the big mirasidars raise the cry is a pet theory of Government which brushes aside public opinion on the flimsy ground that the cry does not emanate from every human soul. To remove from the mind of the Government this seeming misconception, it is the

duty of every ryot in every village to become a member of the village Mirasidars Association to be formed immediately and represent their grievances to the Government systematically, persistently and by all constitutional means. Provide yourself with sufficient funds and try to secure cohesion among the land-holders irrespective of caste, colour or creed. Let not differences of opinion create splits in the rank and file. Undertake an exhaustive survey of the economic condition and the agricultural indebtedness in each village. This should be completed at once and at all costs and the results placed in the hands of the Special Officer appointed by the Government. Collect statistics of cultivation, irrigation, outturns, wages, prices, exports and imports of agricultural produce and the net yield per acre of every sort of land. Place the facts then and there before the Government. No matter how often we approach them. No matter we have failed to awaken the sympathies of the Government so far. Do not get disheartened at endeavours lost. "We fall to rise and we fail only to succeed". Devise ways and means to improve the industries so that the raw products can be consumed here itself as far as possible.

Join hands in ameliorating the lot of the forlorn mirasidars, who are almost in a slough of despondency. The cause is our own and our self-interest, if not any other laudable motive, ought to spur us on to ceaseless activity and agitation in the matter of the reduction of the land-tax, the burden of which, heavy though it already was, has become quite unbearable.

I thank you again for the honour you have done me.

CHIDAMBARAM, }  
30—12—34.

V. NADIMUTHU PILLAI.



