

INFARM : A study of Emerging Farmers' Movement in Kerala

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INTRODUCTION

When I decided to submit proposal of this study, the only intention in my mind was to document the mode of responses of the farmers of Kerala (who are the major contributors of state's economy) towards the recent challenges posed by globalisation. Various sections of the people all over the globe especially the farmers, peasants and working class etc. have been building up strong resistance against the WTO and the globalisation process ever since its commencement. The highest form of such protest was staged at Seattle Ministerial Conference in 2000. But before and after that incident umpteen number of farmers and peasants had to sacrifice even their own lives as a form of protest against the anti-agriculturalist provisions of globalisation.

In this regard Kerala's case is absolutely different. Since the evil effects of globalisation have affected the farmers, one section of them endeavoured to organise themselves to encounter this challenge. It was at a time when recurring downfall of the price of agricultural products in general and cash crops in particular created serious problems of bankruptcy and suicide of families. The repeated devaluation made the entire economy collapse so that even the very existence of farmers became a crucial issue. In such a turbulent time the political organisations of the state remained merely

mute spectators. The result was emergence of Indian Farmers Movement, popularly known as INFARM.

In the beginning of this study, I was enthused by the programmes and activities launched by INFAM. Many objectives they presented are supposed to save the farmers from exploitations and to make them self sufficient as well as self reliant. But unfortunately, as the study was in progress I could find the fact that it had no specific anti-globalisation politics. The study also had to examine the criticism that the church has been patronising INFARM as a safety valve to channelise the growing protests and agonies of the farmers. The question of church's stance towards globalisation is also became an important area of enquiry of this study.

The objectives of this study includes:

- a) to understand the dynamics of a social movement which has been functioning since 2000.
- b) To identify the ideology of the movement.
- c) To state the relation between political parties and INFARM and
- d) To examine the popular base of the organization

As a pilot study, it was hindered by time and resources and for that reason an extensive study was not an aim. But it opens a discussion and also raises some questions which may lead to further enquiries that needs more time and effort. This study is primarily depended upon the printed

materials, the documents of the organisation and interviews with its office bearers. I hope that the vacuum left by this study may be filled by further studies and discussions.

INFARM:A Study of Emerging Farmers' Movement in Kerala

Indian Farmers' Movement, popularly known as INFARM, is an organization of farmers in Kerala, emerged against the background of recurring devaluation of the agricultural products nationally and especially in the state. It is interesting to note that INFARM was formed at a time when the outcome of globalization started to affect the farmers badly as a result of formation of the World Trade Organization. With India's signing treaty at the WTO, the foreign agricultural products were flooded to the Indian market in abundant and the Government stayed as an idle spectator. As a result the market value of the cash crops like coconut, tea, coffee, ginger, rubber etc. diminished to the lowest at which the bare existence of small-scale farmers found miserable.

In such a situation, a section of the unorganized farmers of Kerala thought of an exclusive organization of the farmers to overcome the economic crisis of the time. According to the Working Report of INFARM, the representatives of the farmers from various districts and the community leaders, who were committed to the farmers, met at Kanjirappally Pastoral Centre and decided to form an exclusive organization of their own. As a

result INFARM was registered and started functioning on 7.12.2000.¹ For the last three years the Movement has been working among the farmers to attain its objectives.

Under section No.6 of the by-law of INFARM, there are about 53 objectives. As most of them are seemed to be similar or interlinked, only quintessential is cited below.²

- a) To organize the farmers irrespective of caste, religion, political affiliation and to defend the interests of the farmers.
- b) To educate the people to lead simple life by reducing their needs/expenses.
- c) To encourage the INFARM units to sell farmers' products and to establish the Credit Societies/Groups.
- d) Collection of regional/indigenous seed species and folklore of farming and sharing of these among the farmers.
- e) To educate the youth about the importance of agriculture and to remind them the fact that without which the existence of mankind is impossible.

¹ *Working Report* of Indian Farmers Movement, from 9.12.2000 to 31.3.2002 (hereafter WR – INFARM) p.3.

² *By-law of INFARM* (hereafter, *Bylaw*) p.1-6.

- f) Popularisation of multi-crop cultivation with the help of Governmental and non-Governmental Agencies.
- g) Popularisation of natural food systems, traditional medicinal system, farming of medicinal herbs etc.
- h) Empowerment of women through the formation of self Help Groups.
- i) Uplifting and fostering of agricultural related firms and imparting necessary training.
- j) Acquisition of national and international patents for crops, seeds, medicinal herbs and its products.
- k) Impart awareness about of the scarcity of water and invention of new techniques to tackle the problem of water crisis.
- l) Give necessary encouragement to farmers to boost the agricultural production.
- m) Take necessary steps to get the products sold at just price.
- n) Encouragement of bio-farming and export of those products.
- o) Networking of the markets to sell out the agricultural products
- p) Make the farmers aware of modern agricultural techniques.

- q) Establishment of research centres for agricultural industrial development and disseminate the new knowledge among the farmers.
- r) Giving short term loans to the farmers who have become bankrupts.
- s) Draw the attention of both of the Central Government the anti-farmers' policies to and pressurize them to amend those policies.
- t) To conduct the exhibitions, seminars, discussions etc. related to agriculture in and outside the country.

The objectives mentioned above are incomplete and for more details see the by-law of the Movement.

INAUGURATION

Inauguration of membership distribution of INFARM and sales of the first share of INFARM Company was done by Thalassery Arch Bishop Rev. Mar George Valiyamattom on 9th Decemember 2000, at a function held at SB College Hall at Changanassery. The function was presided over by Changanassery Bishop Mar Joseph Powathil.

IDEOLOGY

Office bearers of INFARM claim that it has a strong ideological backing

which is absolutely against globalisation and its policies. But none of its print materials reveals such a stance or single statement to substantiate this claim. Besides INFARM has failed to raise anti – globalisation slogans from the very beginning of its formation. It suggests that INFARM has only been trying to respond to particular situations ; for example if the price of the agricultural goods goes down, when the tax increases etc. it proves that INFARM cannot identify the real enemy of the farmers viz, the global capital.

ATTITUDE TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES

INFARM follows a policy of equal distance towards the major political parties. In the initial stage they were inimical towards the political parties. The reason was very simple ; the failure these parties to take up the grievances of the farmers in the state as their main political agenda. INFARM has been taking bold position against trade unionism and labour movements. It openly challenged the state government employees who were on strike in the year 2002. It also raised the demand to reduce the wages of agricultural labourers which was attained as result of years long struggles by them. INFARM also alleges the wages of the labourers as the major reason for the increase of agricultural expenses. In such a situation the major political parties, which have strong trade union support, look at INFARM as an organization safeguards the interests of affluent farmers.

MEMBERSHIP

INFARM claims that it has more than one lakh members from 375 Panchayats spread in various districts of Kerala.³ Membership is given to any individual who has completed minimum age of 18 and who is engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry or agricultural related activities irrespective of gender. One has to pay Rs.25 as initial membership fee and an additional Rs.25/- as the annual subscription. The membership may be renewed in every year in the month of June/July.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

INFAM has been structured on the basis of five hierarchical spheres of activities as General Assembly (Central Council), Regional Committee, District Committee, Panchayat Committee and the basic Unit (Ward) committee at the lowest stage, each having its own executive committee.

INFARM's core committee consists of three categories of Trustees, known as Founder Trustees, Nominated Trustees, and Elected Trustees.

Founder Trustees: Those individuals and representatives of the institutions who have played predominant role in the formation of the Movement. Their tenure is up to the time of their resignation. They may be ousted if necessary, by the procedure of a secret ballot with two thirds majority of the

³ WR – p.3.

Managing Committee. There should have the approval of General Assembly for this procedure.

The following list comprises the present Founder Trustees as per the General Assembly minutes book dated 29.5.2002.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuriyil
Infam Office
Parathode P.O., Kanjirappally
Kottayam Dist., Kerala
Phone: 0482-890546, 890646</p> | <p>7. Fr. Mathew Kocharackal
St. Thomas Moore Church
Alacodu, Meenmutty P.O.
Kothamangalam
Phone: 0486-276505</p> |
| <p>2. Fr. Antony Kozhuvanal
Nithya Sahaya Matha Church
Chevayur P.O.
Kozhikode Dist., 673 017
Phone: 0495-355424</p> | <p>8. Fr. Zacharias Illickamury
Kanjirappally INFAM
Regional Director
Infam Office Kanjirappally
Kottayam Dist.
Kerala - 686 507.</p> |
| <p>3. Fr. Joseph Ottaplackal
Sandesha Bhavan
Thalassery P.O.
Kannur
Phone: 0490-343757</p> | <p>9. Mr. Sebastian
Thiruthanathil House
Soman Thadukka
Mundaj P.O., Karnataka
Phone: 08256-75207</p> |
| <p>4. Fr. Gregory Onamkulam
Changanacherry Social
Service Society
Arch Bishop's House
Changanacherry
Phone: 0482-402345, 411817(R)</p> | <p>10. Mr. C.P. Paul
Champakulam House
Thiruvampady P.O.
Kozhikode Pin: 673 609
Phone: 0496-252244</p> |
| <p>5. Fr. Zacharia Attappattu
St. Joseph's Church
Poovarani P.O.
Paika
Phone: 0482-2225328</p> | <p>11. Fr. Devassy Erathara
Bishop's House
Thalassery
Kannur Dist.</p> |
| <p>6. Fr. Francis Nedumparambil
Vijayapuram Social Service
Society, Kottayam
Phone: 0481-301330</p> | <p>12. Mr. P.S. Antony
Nirappathu House
Veloor P.O.
Kottayam - 3.
Phone: 0481-583286.</p> |

13. Fr. Thomas K.C.
Bishop's House
Belthangady
Karnataka
Phone: 08256-22439
14. Fr. Abraham Palathinkal
Director, P.S.S.P.
Pallippuram P.O.
Chakamthara, Palakkad Dist.
0491-525694, 323092.
15. Mr. John Pulickaparambil
Pulickaparambil House
Varanadu P.O.
Kokkamangalam
Cherthala, Alappuzha
Phone: 04782-812303
16. Fr. Chacko Edayal
Carmal Church
Mundoor P.O.
Trichur Dist. - 680 541
Ph: 0487-2211285
17. Fr. Michael Vettikattu
Chaithanya Pastoral
Thellokom P.O.
Phone: 0481-598185
18. Adv. K.T. Thomas
Kizhakkekara House
Kanjirapuzha
Palakkadu Dist.
Ph: 0492-422506, 438435(R)
19. Mr. Poullose A.V.
Arampallickudiyil House
Mandattu P.O., Muttil
Wayanadu Dist.
Phone: 0493-603383
20. Fr. Paul Moonjely
Director, Welfare Services
Ponnuranni, Vyttila P.O.
Cochin
Ph: 344243, Mob: 9847055763
21. Prof. Joseph Tito
Neriamparambil House
Thuruthy P.O.
Kottayam - 686 535
Ph: 0481-321167
22. Fr. Wilson Erathara
Director, Social Action Forum
Cathedral Junction West
Irinjalakuda - 680 121
Ph: 0488-821875, 826990
Fax: 821986.
23. Adv. A.P. George
Akkarakaran
Near Taluk Office
Irinjalakuda - 680 121.
24. Mr. Thomas Nelluvelil
Nelluvelil House
Padannakattu P.O.
Kasargode Dist. Pin: 671 328.
25. Prof. Syriac
Kodumthanamkunnel
Puthuvely P.O.
Monipally - 686 641.
26. Fr. Louis
Charuvila Puthenveettil
Asst. Executive Director
SREYAS
S. Bathery - 673 592
Ph: 0493-620479
27. Fr. George J. Gomez
Bishop's House
Vellayambalam
Thiruvananthapuram
Pin: 695 003.
28. Santhosh Behanan
Narakath (H)
Konnakudy, Ayapuram P.O.
Ernakulam Dist.
Pin: 683 541.

29. Mr. Joy John
Thengumkudiyil House
Potha nicadu P.O.
Kothamangalam
Pin: 686 671
Ph: 0485-562928.
30. Dr. M.C. George
Manayathu House
Ayavana P.O.
Muvattupuzha - 686 673
Ernakulam Dist. Pin: 682 310.
Ph: 0485-282226.
31. Mr. Moncy Vavachan
Channanathil House
Vadavucode P.O.
(R) 543032, Mob: 984734183413
32. Fr. Robin Vadakancheril
Pastoral Centre, PB No. 42
Mananthavady P.O.
Wayanadu Dist.
Pin: 670 645.
Ph:/Fax 0493/540828
33. Mr. K. Moidheen Haji
Chennattu House
Kakkattur
Enanellur P.
Muvattupuzha686673

Elected Trustees: District presidents of INFARM who are elected from the local units through Panchayat and district committees are known as Elected Trustees. An Elected Trustee is a single elected representative of each district. But if there are more than three hundred local units in a district, the district committee can send an additional representative as an Elected Trustee. See the list of present Elected Trustees:

1. Mr. Sebastian P. Augustine
Palamattom House
Beemanady P.O.
Kasargodu Dist.
Ph: 0499-741343.
2. Mr. P.D. Mathew
Purappamthanam House
Malaparamba P.O., Calicut
Ph: 0495-371541.
3. M.V. Mathai
Malepparambil House
Karimannur P.O.
Idukki Dist.
Ph: 0486-262016.
4. Mr. Augustine Joseph
Vellimoozhiiyl
Payappar P.O., Palai
Kottayam Dist.
5. Mr. Chackochan
Pullamthanickal House
Mullankolly P.O., Pulpally
Wayanadu Dist.
Ph: 0493-640303.
6. Mr. Davis Kannanaickal
Kannanaickal House
Kuttoor P.O., Trichur Dist.
7. Mr. K.E. Philip
Kumblathanathu House
Karimba P.O., Palakkad Dt.
8. Mr. John V.A.
Vilangupara House
Chitady P.O., Kannur Dist.
Pin: 670 571
9. Mr. P.V. Alias
Palanattu House
North Punnamattom
Kadavoor P.O.
Ernakulam (Dist.)
Pin: 686 671
Ph: 0485-568244, 568588.
10. Mr. Abraham Cherian
Retd. Supd. of Police
Chackolamannil
Maramon P.O.
Pathanamthitta
Ph: 04682-211821.
11. Tomy Elamthottam
Karikkattoor Centre P.O.
Manimala - 686 544
Ph: 0482-847259, 847159.
12. Reji Njellani
Kattappana P.O.
Idukki Dist.
Ph: 0486-873169.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>13. Raveendran Nair K.
Kaipuzha (H)
Neelamperoor P.O.
Alappuzha (Dist.)
Pin: 686 534.</p> <p>14. K.P. Joseph
Koolipurackal
Manimooly P.O.
Nilambur</p> | <p>Malappuram Dist
Ph: 0493-275989</p> <p>15. R.G. Ashoka Kumar
Farmers' Market
Balaramapuram P.O.
Thiruvananthapuram
Ph: 0471-404725, 402328</p> |
|---|---|

Nominated Trustees: The managing committee can nominate certain prominent figures from various walks of life to the General Assembly of the Organisation. They are known as the Nominated Trustees. Below given is the list of Nominated Trustees:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Mr. P.V. Narayanan
Seema Sadanam
Vallakadavu P.O.
Vandiperiyar, Idukki Dist.
Ph: 0486-352364.</p> <p>2. Mr. C.P. Thomas
Chollampuzha House
Chamal P.O., Calicut
Pin: 673 573
Ph: 0495-270172.</p> <p>3. Fr. Varghese Kattuparambil
K.S.S. Forum, Amos Centre
Adichira, Thellakom P.O.
Kottayam Dist. - 686 016.</p> <p>4. Fr. Joseph Peringarapally
Santhinilathan Society
M C B S Bhavan, Sagar Road
Shimoga, Karnataka - 577 201.</p> | <p>5. Fr. Sunil Vattakkunnel
St. Mary's Church
Pookkottumpadam P.O.
Nilamboor, Malappuram
Pin: 679 332
Ph: 0493-261366, 260574.</p> <p>6. M. Kunjabdulla
Moolayil House, Rayrome PO.
Alakkode, Kannur (Dist.)
Pin: 670 571
Ph: 0498-285933 (PP)</p> <p>7. M.G. Gopalakrishnan
Mookkilikkattu House
Velladu P.O.
Kannur (Dist.)
Pin: 670 571.</p> |
|---|--|

TENURE OF TRUSTEES

As per the Article 11/2 of the by-law, the tenure of Trustees is fixed up to three years. Any one of the trustees may be overthrown with a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly.

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

A managing committee should be elected from the General Assembly of INFARM in accordance with the interests of the majority. Members of the Managing committee can be elected from Founder Trustees. The proportion of Elected Trustees to that of Nominated Trustees is 4:2:1. Chairman and Managing Trustee, General Secretary, Treasurer etc. of the Managing Committee should be elected from the Founder Trustees. Vice Chairman, Secretaries etc. should be elected from the other categories of the Trustees. Tenure of all office-bearers is fixed for three years. The present Chairman and Managing Trustee and General Secretary are Rev. Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuri and Rev. Fr. Antony Kozhuvanal respectively.

The Managing Committee, the apex body of the organization has full control over the property and the day today administration of the organization. It is entitled to conduct the elections in lower units, to prepare by-laws and amendments of the same, prepare the annual budget, to appoint the staff and to take disciplinary action (if necessary) etc. and to engage in all monetary transactions of the organization. The Central

Executive Council - the Managing Committee - consists of Chairman and Managing trustees, Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Secretaries, Treasurer and the committee members.

The three strata of the General Assembly of the Trust are stratified as follows. Regional Committee, District Committee, Panchayat Committee and local (ward) unit in descending order.

ACTIVITIES

INFARM commenced its activities within a few months after its inception. First among its popular as well as important events was Declaration of Rights of Farmers. It was held on 28.3.2001 at Kozhikode in which Thalassery Arch Bishop Mar George Valiyamattom enacted a leading role. The Declaration underscored the needs of reconsideration of the anti-farmers policies and laws and cautioned that farmers cannot be exploited as before.

MEMORANDUM

After the formation of the existing ministry, the office bearers of INFARM met the Chief Minister and the other ministers on 28.06.01 and submitted a memorandum which put forward the following demands:

- a) Cancellation of agricultural loans of the farmers. If it is not viable, a moratorium should be issued on the loans to reduce the interest rates and make the short term loans as long term loans.
- b) Prevent the industrialists' move to import rubber and take necessary steps to export the rubber stocked in tonnes, and in which process INFARM should be included.
- c) All the newly built roads should be rubberized.
- d) Product like rubber, coconut, cashew nut, areacunut, ginger, turmeric etc. should be exempted from purchase tax .
- e) A committee of agricultural experts should be formed to advise the government and to find solutions to the problem of farmers.
- f) Steps should be taken to reduce the stamp duty on farmland transactions from 10% to 5%.
- g) Put an end to the recovery activities and stop collection of agricultural labourers' welfare fund from ordinary farmers with retrospective effect.
- h) Permission should be given to grow the crops other than rubber, coffee, tea, cardamom, etc. in the land given concessions in accordance with the Land Reforms Act.

- i) Farmers should be given rights to produce and to market soft drinks from coconut/tree independently.
- j) Extend protection to the farmers who are suffering from the natural calamities, and wild animals.
- k) Rights be given to plant sandal and teak and to sell the timber in accordance with the farmers' interests.
- l) Farmers should be given permission to plant any crops of their own choice.
- m) The labour laws especially loading and unloading laws should be reformed and make a favourable condition for industry.

TENDER COCONUT PANTHALS

As the price of coconut and coconut oil stepped downward, INFARM and *Deepika* daily jointly conducted a tender coconut festival (*Ilaneer Mahotsavam*) at Kottayam. Similar campaigns were held at various places in the state and tender coconut stalls were established. According to reports it badly affected the turn over of soft drinks in Kerala.

BOYCOTT OF PAMOLEN

To save the coconut farmers of the state INFARM launched a movement to boycott the Pamolen and to popularize coconut oil for the preparation of food stuffs. INFARM started some stalls to market the bakery items prepared in pure coconut oil. In many villages especially in Koorachundu in Kozhikode district, INFARM launched soap making training classes and popularization of locally made soap, which was being prepared only in coconut oil. Koorachundu was declared as the first Panchayat to boycott the Pamolen. Many Panchayath followed the same in tune with Koorachundu's experiences. INFARM has been marketing pure coconut oil as well.

MARCH TO MULLAPPERIYAR DAM

When the Central Advisory Committee decided to elevate the height of the Mullaperiyar Dam, INFARM jointly with Mullaperiyar Action Forum led a march to the dam site demanding protection to the life and belongings of the farmers in the state on 19.2.2001. About 3000 farmers reportedly took part in the March.

BLACK DAY

As a protest against the anti-farmers policies of the State Government, INFARM observed Chingam Ist (the new year day as per

Malayalam Calendar) as the Black day. The Farmers' March was inaugurated by Prof. Nanjunda Swami, the leader of Karnataka Karshaka Raitha Sangam.

RUBBER EXPORT SUBSIDY AND COURTING ARREST

According to the Working Report, INFARM's new programme of export of rubber was jeopardized by the state government by not reimbursing the subsidy so far. Eleven months after the export, the government is not ready to grant the subsidy amount to INFARM. For this the leaders of the movement had visited Chief Minister at least four times. During the discussion with the minister in charge (the name or his portfolio is not mentioned) on 5.11.02 the INFARM leaders were allegedly arrested without any reason.

FARMERS' MARCH (*Karshaka Munnetta Yatra*)

In response to the Government's attitude towards the subsidy issue and arrest of the leaders without any provocation, INFARM launched a march from north of Kerala to South. March was inaugurated on 8.12.02 by Talassery Bishop Mar George Valiyamattom and concluded on 21.12.02 at Trivandrum. The March passed through the districts of Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, Trichur, Eranakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kollam districts covering 85 farmers' meetings.

PROTESTS AND SUBMISSION OF MEMORANDUM

INFARM raised protest against the Anti-farmers' Acts and Policies and submitted a memorandum before the concerned authorities. The following are major demands of the memorandum:

- a) cut short the Farmers' debt
- b) amend the anti-farmers' excise Acts.
- c) review the hike in electricity charges.
- d) relax the stamp duties in land transactions.
- e) against the new spices import policies (zero percent tariff) of the centre etc.

SEMINARS

INFARM has organized three seminars on the issues related to the development of Kerala which were held in Trivandrum, Kochi, and Angamali.

'Whither Keralam' was the theme of the Trivandrum Seminar in which Bishop Mar Susarpakyam, Mr. Thalakunnil Basheer, Mr. MNVG Adiyodi, Mr. Michael Tharakan, Mr. Alphonsa Kannanthanam, Mr. Madhavan Kutty, Dr. Mohanan Pillai, Dr. Thomas Varghese etc. presented their papers.

Kochi Seminar, on loading and unloading Bill, was inaugurated by former Chief Minister Mr. P.K. Vasudevan Nair. Kasim Irikkur and Chettur Sankaran Nair etc. led the discussion.

Angamaly seminar entitled, "Agricultural issues of Kerala and Media" was attended by Mr. M.P. Surendran, K.R. Vishwambharan, IAS, P.J. George, etc.

INFARM PUBLICATIONS

Infarm has published the following booklets basically to familiarise their organization and to discuss issues related to the farmers.

- a) *Guidelines for Formation of INFARM unit*
- b) *Farmers, Arise and Organise*
- c) *U.D. Tapping*
- d) *A Family can live with 20 cents of Land.*
- d) *INFARM Self Sufficient Collectivity.*
- f) *A Bank for Us.*
- g) *One Plant Tapioca 200 kg.*
- h) *Chicken Farm in New Style*
- i) *Fish Farming*
- j) *Guide to Build Ferocement tank*

INFARM TOWARDS INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

INFARM has realized the fact that the price of an agricultural product is determined by the market in accordance with the demands from the industrial sector. As a result INFARM has registered a company as 'Infarm Agro Movement' with the aim of achieving farmers control over the determination of price of the agricultural products. The shareholders of the company which is registered as per the Indian Companies Act section 25, have no claim over the profit of the company. Following are some of the proposed projects of the company.

a) Collection of Paddy and Rice Distribution

As a result of the discussion held by INFARM leaders Rev. Fr. Mathew Vadakkemuri, Rev. Fr. Grigory Onamkulam and Thomas Peeliyanikkal etc. with the representatives of rice farmers in 12 Panchayats of Kuttanad area, and the local rice owners, there emerged an agreement according to which the paddy can be collected by INFARM and the mill owners will give back rice at a fixed rate. This became greatly helpful to the paddy cultivators of Kuttanad area. INFARM claims that in the year 2000-2001 about 1000 quintal paddy had been collected and sold out under the title 'Infarm Rice' through its outlets.

b) Collection and Export of Rubber

INFARM started the collection and export of rubber to regulate the price of rubber by which to tackle the crisis of rubber farmers. INFARM had exported 1198.5 metric tonne in the year 2001-2002 to Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, UAE etc. It was 608 metric tonne in 2002-2003. By the export Infarm could make an impression that India has a good quality rubber.⁴

General Statement of export of rubber.

Sri Lanka	:	1619 tonne
Pakistan	:	172.5 tonne
China	:	76 tonne
UAE	:	19 tonne
Total	:	1806.5 tonne

C) INFARM Rubber Society/Depot

INFARM has 168 rubber collection depots spreading in eight districts functioning as the collection centres of the company. The buying price in these centres will not be below to the support price fixed by the government. When the price increases in the market comparative change also is

⁴ W.R. p.12

considered. The rate of INFARM Depot in October – November 2002 was Rs.37.50 while the market rate was only Rs.36. As the Company offers high rate to the graded rubber sheets, the farmers produce graded sheets to the depots.

d) *Net working of Markets*

INFARM has decided to distribute the micro filtered pure coconut oil to the farmers' stalls all over Kerala. These stalls are considered to be highly supporting hands to the farmers. The farmers' products are collected and sold out at a fixed minimum margin. So that the farmers will get better price, higher than that in the open market. There is no exploiting intermediaries between farmers and consumers. Local unit can organize a farmers' stall by distributing shares among its members.

e) *INFARM Coffee*

There are two coffee factories – one at Natavayal in Wayanad and Kanchiyar in Idukki where the farmers themselves started manufacturing and marketing of pure coffee. From Kanchiyar factory itself about 39.4 tonne of coffee was exported to Italy in 2003 March. INFARM started collecting coffee seed at the rate of Rs.35.50 from coffee growers while the market rate was Rs.32 only.

f) *Coffee Growers Societies*

This is to assist the coffee farmers by collecting their coffee seed and to export or market pure coffee in raw or as powder, with the help of which they can be saved from the exploiting intermediaries.

g) *INFARM Tea and Tea Society*

Tea farmers of Chettukuzhi in Idukki district have organised INFARM tea society and presently they have chalked out a plan to collect tea from farmers and to process the tea under the label 'INFARM Tea'.

h) *Collection of Cashew*

In 2001-2002, when the price of cashew was lowered, INFARM started cashew collection depots in Kannur and Kasargod districts. INFARM has been collecting cashew at an additional rate of Rs.5 than the market rate. INFARM claims that it is possible for them to earn a surplus of 30 crore rupees in a single season only. INFARM's cashew factory has been functioning at Cherupuzha in Kasargod district.

i) *Coconut Collection Depot*

Members of INFARM who are engaged in coconut cultivation may take share in the coconut depot and he can supply coconut at a fixed rate. The organization fixes a support price, by which, the minimum substantial price of coconut can be maintained. INFARM coconut complex company

has decided to collect the coconut through these local stalls functioning in the villages. The price of coconut is fixed on the basis of weight not on numbers, so that the uneven size of coconut does not cause the price vary.

j) Farmer's Shops/Stalls

INFARM is planning to start a farmers' shop in each ward under the control of local unit, where rice, coconut oil, coffee, tea, banana, vegetables etc. are the main items for sale. In some stalls, already started their functioning, locally made products like honey, ghee, pickles, squash, bakery items, fodder, soaps etc. are fast moving items. Small shops functioning in the villages of Kannur, Kasargod, Wynad, Kozhikode, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Kottayam and Ernakulam districts. The big stalls in Kottayam, Pala, Muvattupuzha, Changanasery, Thodupuzha etc. are functioning very effectively.

GREEN BOGY

INFARM sent the first green bogy to Delhi from Kerala with vegetables and other food stuffs. Even now the food items and vegetables are regularly sent to Delhi by Trucks. Vegetables for this purpose are collected from the farmer's shop in Thodupuzha. Coconut, Banana, Tapioca etc. are the main commodities sent to Delhi. Delhi shop has 45 franchise shops, through which the goods are being marketed.

RESEARCH AND TRAINING

INFARM focuses on research and training of farmers for their better life and future. In this way INFARM has been engaged with the following projects:

- a) Rubber UD tapping
- b) Mixed farming and model farming.
- c) Nutmeg growers' society and nutmeg processing units.
- d) Banana processing factory
- e) Chicken farm research and collectivity
- f) Biogas plant and bio-farming
- g) Fero - cement water tank.

AGRICULTURAL INVESTORS MEET (AIM) 2003

Agricultural Investors Meet is the latest project of INFARM, supposed to be held in September this year. According to the INFARM sources, Agricultural investors' Meet is aimed at inviting investors all over the world to Kerala, to invest in Agro-based industries. The organizers believe that the Infarm supported projects shall:

- a) Respect and protect the unique cultural and geophysical heritage of Kerala and its terrain.
- b) Lend Priority to organize farming and farm products.
- c) Directly or indirectly generate more employment opportunities for the unemployed.
- d) Be sponsored preferably by NRI Malayalees.
- e) Undertake adequate backward integration through farm extension programmes for the farmers.

There are about 15 proposed projects to be presented in the AIM. They are discussed below in detail.

1. Coconut Milk and Milk Power Unit There is potential for 2-3 units in the medium scale sector costing Rs.75 crores each.

2. Integrated coconut complex : This project is intended to process the coconut and to produce various coconut based products such as oil, baby oil, deicated coconut, vinegar, coconut timber products, fibre and its products etc. There can be two major projects in North Kerala region, costing Rs.50 cores each.

3. Neera and Syrup Unit Two challenging health products that can be made out of the tender coconut toddy, investment required in Rs.50 crores.

4. *Organically Produced Kuttanadan Rice (Kuttari) and Basmati Rice*

This project can be successfully implemented at Kuttanadu with Rs.100 crores investment. Branded organic food products have huge export potential and high overseas demand.

5. *Plantains and Banana Processing Unit:* This project needs investment of Rs.50 crores. The indigenous Kerala plantains can be developed and cultivated. Products can be frozen/chilled and exported.

6. *Spices Development and Processing Unit:* Spices and derivatives such as Olioresin have great market demand. An integrated project that will support spice production at the farm level, and process units to convert the raw spices into consumable derivatives. Required investment Rs.500 crores.

7. *Organic Tea Products:* This project will have tea estates and factories of its own. Rs.100 crores.

8. *Rubber Based Projects:* A joint venture to manufacture and market all rubber products including tyres of all varieties is proposed at an initial investment of Rs.3000 crores. An international company with reputation in tyre field with buy back arrangements is preferred.

9) *Cashew Development:* A project to improve production of cashew and its processing can be conceived. Cost Rs. 25 crores.

- 10) Cocoa Plant:** A project to develop cocoa production and its processing in the JV sector. Investment Rs.50 crore.
- 11) Horticulture Unit:** A unit to produce, process and market organic pineapple and fruits free of hormone treatment. Cost Rs.25 crores.
- 12) Organic Meat Products:** To support a project that will breed poultry and meat animals without artificial hormone treatment and export meat products. Investment Rs.50 crores.
- 13) Rainwater Harvesting:** To harness the rainwater store in hygienic conditions and market to consumers, cost Rs.100 crores.
- 14) Pilgrim Tourism:** Has immense scope to develop ecofriendly pilgrim tourism. Investment Rs.100 crore.
- 15) Agricultural Information and Technology Development Centre:** An agriculture Academy and Technology Development and Research Centre dedicated to the development of organic farming technologies is proposed. The children of investors and farmers will be given preference in the admission to college. Investment Rs.250 crores.

The coordination of the projects presented in the AIM will be done by INFARM and it will set up a separate secretariat, that shall help the investors with the necessary technical and consultancy services in identifying project sites, obtain licences, and source materials, as well as to

clear the bottlenecks at any stage of implementation. It will also works in tandem to identify global markets.

CONCLUSION

Indian Farmer's Movement is an organization founded under the aegis of the church, the strongest religious institution in Kerala. The list of the Founding Trustees, itself reveals the fact that out of 34 members, 16 are priests from various regions and all the trustees except one trustees belong to Christianity. The list of Elected Trustees and Nominated Trustees also implicates that the majority of the members are either priests or Christians. From this we can infer the fact that INFARM is evidently the brain child of the Church in Kerala.

INFARM got inception in the year 2000, which was in the context of recurring devaluation of prices of the agricultural products. In such a situation the established political organizations kept mum over the pertinent issues like devaluation of cash crops, unemployment in the agricultural sector, and the problem of reduction of import duties etc. The Church realized the fact that farmers are the backbone of Kerala economy , so that to organize and chanelise those farmers was the need of the hour. Otherwise, the farmers would have deviated from church and might have thought of organizing some radical movements. To ease this pressure the

church authorities, with the support of big farmers, gave birth to INFARM, or Indian Farmers Movement.

It is a fact that the Movement is the by product of the economic policies of Globalization and liberalization. But INFARM has failed to identify the root cause of the miseries faced by the farmers. Instead of critically analyzing the reality, the INFARM is trying to pressurize the Government to change its policies. Even a single piece of literature or statement of INFARM has never been found criticizing globalization or its politics in any of its printed matters. To understand this, the relation between the church and its related agencies with the global capital should be examined. There arise a question of de politicization of society when the church activism develops into a semi-political organization.

Another question, I would like to raise here is of the favourable conditions for the formation of such an organization. It may be because the major political parties' failure to identify the evil effects of globalization and the problems faced by the farmers. When the desperate farmers thought of the futility of institutionalized political parties, the church could manipulate them with its some what 'moral' powers. When we examine the strongholds of INFARM, we can locate most of them in high range areas, the strongholds of the Church as well.

There is a problem with the very name, structure and objectives of INFARM. Even though it is said to be for the well-being of the farmers as a

whole, the implication of the word "farmer" is to be problematized. The word 'Farmer' in social science discourse stands for the landed and labouring cultivators. But actually the policies and many of the objectives of INFARM culminate in marginalization of the small scale farmers. To get a picture of what I mean, the editorial of *Infarm Vartha* (INFARM NEWS) on Mathikettan forest land issue is worth mentioning.⁵ It argues that, if somebody has been living in Mathikettan without necessary documents, he/she might have been cheated by the government's revenue officers. This kind of statements reveal a tendency of defending farmers actions whether right or wrong which may be ultimately beneficial to the big farmers.

This kind of support of rich farmers is also found in the case of collection and export of rubber. According to the Working Report, one who wishes to export his rubber he should deposit the annual average amount of his production availed in a whole season. It is very difficult for a small scale farmer to deposit such an amount before selling his products. There is a criticism that it is quite natural that the major beneficiaries of this programme are the rich farmers.

The very pertinent issue regarding this collection and export of rubber is the establishment of a parallel to the institution of Government. It may be argued that, if the state and ruling parties are passive and this way

⁵ *INFARM Vartha*, June – July 2002, p.1.

of activities can only open the eyes of rulers. But the problem is that if this reoccurs itself in the case of every product or export item, that will challenge the existing system of state and government and cause to loose the control of government both in the way of social welfare and in the case of social security. It will indirectly make easier the process of globalization and liberalization by reducing the position of Government as a mere facilitator.

The latest programme launched by INFARM is Agricultural Investors Meet (AIM) proposed to be held in September 2003 (But not yet held. It is programmed against the back ground of the Global Investors Meet (GIM) held under auspices of the Government of Kerala. If GIM was held to invite the investors to industrial sector, AIM is intended to invite the investors all over the world to the agricultural sector. If the former was an effort of the Government the latter is entirely under the direction of the central committee of Infarm. As in the case of rubber collection and export, there arise the question of a parallel government. Secondly, the projects mentioned here are mega projects demanding investment of crores of rupees. These projects may possibly be taken up by industrialists or big farmers only. If so how can the interests of the small scale farmers working in their own little stretch of land be protected? How can he be freed from exploitation and intermediary positions? Finally, if these projects get materialized in the future, naturally the church will be the sole controller and it may be established as a manipulator's role.

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