Glimpses of peasants' revolt

"Inscriptions of 14th and 15th centuries reveal resistance to conversion of farm lands"

Special Correspondent

PUDUCHERRY: There are inscriptions to suggest a peasants' revolution in 14th and 15th centuries against conversion of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes, said Y. Subbarayalu, Head, Department of Indology, French Institute of Pondicherry.

Delivering keynote address at the inauguration of a three-day workshop on understanding labour, region, caste and gender through history and literature, organised by the Department of Indology, French Institute of Pondicherry & Tamil Nadu-Puducherry Progressive Writers Artists Association, here on Wednesday, he said there was a gradual increase in non-agricultural industries from the 13th century onwards. It became more intensive during the 14th and 15th centuries and the economy became monetised.

At the same time, people were being subjected to more and more tax exploitation under new rulers, including those of Vijayanagar dynasty. The landlords and military officials exploited the direct producers, cultivators and craftsmen.

This brought about a solidarity among all direct producers under the banner of 'Left-Hand' and 'Right-Hand' communities (idangai and valangai) and kindled them to revolt against the rulers and landlords in the first month (Chittirai) of the year Sau-

mya (about March 1429).

Stating that it was sort of class struggle, Mr. Subbarayalu said it cut across caste affinities, bringing together all direct producers against the ruling class.

But, the revolt fizzled out in the later part of the year when landlords conceded to the demands of the revolting people and joined them to oppose the rulers.

According to him, there were inscriptions that showed that till about 10th century, land was enjoyed in common in most village communities in medieval Tamil Nadu.

However, a few communities did not follow this practice. There were several inscriptions in the 12th century relating to transactions in human merchandise.

The owners of slaves were found to be landlords, military chiefs, and religious leaders, besides temple authorities.

Land owners and cultivators owned slaves not only for domestic duties but also for cultivation.

Inaugurating the workshop, Basudev Chatterji, Chairman, Indian Council of Historical Research, emphasised the need for preserving all reliable documents and evidence for research.

Dr. Pierre Grard, Director, French Institute of Pondicherry and others spoke.