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**LAND, LABOUR AND MIGRATIONS:  
UNDERSTANDING KERALA'S ECONOMIC  
MODERNITY**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to map out the historical trajectory leading to a series of migrations in and from the erstwhile princely state of Travancore during 1900-70 in order to acquire and bring land under cultivation. It argues that these migrations undertaken with a moralistic and paternal mission of reclaiming 'empty' spaces into productive locations were a result of a specific form of economic modernity in Kerala as beckoned by colonialism and appropriated by a resolute local agency through a process of translation. The attempt is to disentangle the intertwining history of colonialism, capital and 'native' agency and thereby to capture the complex circumstances that unleashed a new discourse of development with land and hard work at the centre of its scheme. The transition was facilitated by a conforming social imaginary that not only dissented radically with the idea of leaving landscape empty and being idle but also advocated passionately the idea of using the opulent natural resources for the development of the self and the nation. Leading the transition the Syrian Christians were successful in wielding a new subjectivity of development with a specific authority over the modernity of Kerala as *purogamana karshakar* (forward-looking peasants).

**Key words:** Economic modernity, translation, objectification, social imaginary, migration, modernisation, development discourse.

**JEL Classification:** N5, P16, O13, O15

## **Introduction**

Kerala's story of agrarian capitalism is intermeshed in its specific history of colonial intervention and local reciprocation. The proliferation of agrarian capitalism in the region was a result largely of new mentalities among the natives regarding their 'own' nature along side a new ethic of labour that the colonial attitude towards land and plantation enterprises had exemplified to them. This paper seeks to narrate this highly nuanced local story by making explicit the historical background of a few streams of migrations in search of agricultural land within the geographical limits of present day Kerala. Significantly different from the emergent descriptions of agrarian capitalism in India as conditioned by the hegemony of agrarian elites, the experience in Kerala places marginal cultivators and their engagement with the wilderness at the heart of this historical transformation. The attempt here is to disentangle the intertwining histories of colonialism, capital and local agency and thereby to capture the circumstances that spawned the migration of 'forward looking', mostly marginal, peasants of erstwhile princely state of Travancore into its eastern hills and to the erstwhile British Malabar.

The colonial technology of expropriation of landscape for agriculture and the local response to it will be at the centre of this analysis. Though colonialism carried a set of 'universals' in its scheme of things, it infringed on different geographies using different keys, which in turn spawned dissimilarities at the level of reciprocation. Moreover, colonialism was not only a set of institutions but also a set of

discourses, produced by it inextricably for its own legitimization and reproduction. Such discursive structures enabled it “to define and describe itself,” in such a way as to bring an alien social and economic world under its control with significant compliance from the ‘natives’.<sup>1</sup> It was found that extraction of resources was much more effective when colonialism dismantled and restructured the existing economic and productive systems in the colony and engendered a development discourse in support of it. New development models were thus produced for the colony with the rhetoric of modernisation and progress, the manner in which extractive capitalism deployed itself across the world. Caught in the problematic of colonial control alongside the compulsions of transformations in the wider world and the enticing possibilities offered by the new model, it seemed unbeneficial to reject; but local specificities also made unmodified acceptance impossible. The outcome consequently was to be a translation. Thus, the economic transformations of Travancore during colonialism have a historical trajectory of dictation, mediation and translation. This is a contrast with the distinction made between ‘intentional’ and ‘immanent’ development by Cowen and Shenton in their attempt to argue that much of the former kind of development during the colonial time was aimed at limiting the destructive impacts of the latter.<sup>2</sup> British interventions on the landscapes of its colonies using the idiom of ‘improvement’ followed by that of ‘development’ was effectively to facilitate extraction for metropolitan growth; which, however, opened up spaces simultaneously for the local

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1 See Kaviraj, “On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony,” for a detailed discussion.

2 Intentional development is explained as planned initiatives by the state or other agencies to engender socio-economic change, while immanent development relates to the changes inherent to the working of capitalism and which radically altered the social and economic structures. For Cowen and Shenton much of the intentional development including initiatives such as rural development and expansion of agriculture were aimed at limiting the destructive impacts of immanent development. Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*.

agency to make novel interventions. This is not to suggest that Travancore offered extraordinary alterations to the model before them, resulting in exceptional modular mutations. Alterations and reconfigurations that were negotiated and involved in the translation were possible only within a space conceded and adjudicated by colonialism and its discourses. The story of this discourse formation in the realm of development in Travancore, with reference to capitalist agriculture, is therefore neither simple nor straightforward. Under the newly formed paradigm of development the idea of utilizing opulent natural resources for the development of the nation and its people had become a correct and an ethical economic choice, especially when industrialisation looked a bleak option. We need to look back a little in time in order to comprehend the processes involved in the fashioning of this discourse of development that advanced land as the ideal site for investment for progress and well being, and labour an all justifying ideology.

### **Hollowing the Travancore Crown: From Ally to Subordinate**

The dictation of the development model was preceded by a more resolute exercise by which the British succeeded in undermining systematically the crown of Travancore, whose position deteriorated from that of an ally to that of a political subordinate. As the historical experience of Indian princely states indicates, once the forbidden fruit of colonial alliance was eaten, a getaway unscathed was impossible. The British engagement with Travancore, previously Venad, started rather modestly when the English East India Company established a ‘factory’ at Vizhinjam (1644) for pepper and calicos trade. It was followed a little later by the opening up of similar trading posts at Kovalam and Anjuthengu. The Company seized the chance to negotiate a military agreement when Travancore under Marthanda Varma used its services to put down the Nair feudal chiefs and again sought its help against an impending threat from the Mysore sultans. The agreement reached in

1788 authorised the Company to station two regiments of the British subsidiary force in the state at the expense of the latter. Moreover, George Powney, a civil officer, was sent to the Travancore court as an agent, an archetype of the later Residents, of the Company.<sup>3</sup> Following the near convincing defeat of Tipu Sultan in the third Anglo-Mysore war and the conclusion of the Seringapatam treaty in 1792, the Company insisted that the existing contract must be converted into a ‘treaty of perpetual alliance’. The resultant treaty made Travancore a tributary state of the English trading Company by undoing its political and economic sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> In return, the Company took the ‘tiresome responsibility’ of protecting the princely state from all possible unprovoked external aggressions, by sea or land, in the future. When the treaty was ratified by the Court of Directors in 1797, the Raja of Travancore was made to agree to assist the Company with his troops if it were required in case of war with any other powers. The treaty not only caused a severe drain of Travancore’s wealth in the form of subsidy and war reparations but also mandated uninterrupted supply of pepper to the Company. The consequent economic crisis forced the Raja to borrow heavily and to resort to excessive taxation spawning popular discontent.<sup>5</sup> Instead of exerting pressure from outside, the Company sent a British Resident to Travancore in 1800 to ensure that the obligations of the

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3 Menon, *A History of Travancore*, pp. 160-63; Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, pp. 388-90; Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties* Vol.X, pp. 224.

4 Travancore was obliged to pay an annual subsidy equivalent to the expense of maintaining a subsidiary force consisting of 3 battalions and 2 companies of Lascars. The state had to bear part of the expenses of the third Anglo-Mysore war. The pepper contract of 1793 obliged Travancore to supply 3000 candy of pepper annually to the trading Company in perpetuity. The Raja was forbidden from engagements of any kind with other metropolitan powers or princely states without prior consent of the Company. For the full text of the treaty see, Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, Vol. X, pp. 228-32.

5 The Raja is said to have confessed that “I have raised money by doing what I ought not to do.” Quoted in Rammohan, “Material Processes and Developmentalism,” p.12. Also see, Baak, *Plantation Production and Political Power*, pp. 44-45.



state were met.<sup>6</sup> The excessive financial commitments led to a stringent fiscal predicament in the princely state. A proposal to cut the allowance of the Nair troops in 1804 in order to reduce expenditures resulted in a mutiny, which in turn provided an ideal opportunity for the Company to impose a fresh treaty. The Raja, despite his unhappiness, was forced to assent to the treaty due to the intense pressure exerted by “the obstinate, inflexible and inexorable” Macaulay and “his friend”, the *Dalawa*.

The ‘treaty of perpetual friendship and alliance’, signed on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1805 dismantled the political, military and financial autonomy of the princely state, though formally it continued to be self-governing and its Raja politically independent. The treaty invested the responsibility of defence of Travancore against all internal and external adversaries with the British Company. On the other hand, it virtually stripped the Raja of whatever residual autonomy had been conceded to him by the treaty of 1795 and increased the monetary obligation of the princely state in the form of annual subsidy. It also authorised the Company to decide whether the British Subsidiary force should be stationed within the state or on its borders, which under the earlier treaty had been the prerogative of the princely state.<sup>7</sup> Article V of the treaty authorised the Governor General to assume the administrative charge of Travancore directly if the state ‘defray from paying funds spent for the security of the state’. More importantly, the treaty opened a formal space for the British to dictate future policies of the princely state. Article IX

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6 The first British Resident in Travancore, Major Colin Macaulay, set the tone of the office by intervening and arbitrating in the economic and political affairs of the Princely state routinely. Menon, *A History of Travancore*, pp. 225-26.

7 Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, p. 428; Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol II, p. 461-62; Jeffrey, *The Decline of Nair Dominance*, p. 5; Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 46. The annual subsidy as per the earlier treaty was a little above two lakhs and forty thousand rupees and was now increased to 8 lakhs. Menon, *A History of Travancore*, pp. 189-90.

of the treaty made it obligatory for the Raja at all times to pay the “*utmost attention to such advise as the English Government shall occasionally judge it necessary to offer to him, with a view to the economy of his finances, the better collection of his revenues, the administration of justice, the extension of commerce, the engagement of trade, agriculture and industry or any other objects connected with the advancement of His Highness’s interests, the happiness of his people and the natural welfare of both States*” (emphasis mine).<sup>8</sup>

Unable to meet the pressing and insistent demands of the Resident, Velu Thampi *Dalawa* who had officiated the treaty, now rose in revolt against the Paramount power. Apart from the unjustifiable pressure on the princely state for prompt payment of subsidy, excessive and unruly interventions of the Resident in day-today administration made the *Dalawa* mutinous.<sup>9</sup> The revolt was suppressed by eliminating the insurgent *Dalawa* and was followed by measures of disarming the native state. The Travancore army of one and a half lakh soldiers was dismantled and the princely state was divested of arms and military stores. In an attempt to keep at bay the possibility of future insurrections and to generate absolute obedience, no one in the state was allowed to keep

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8 See Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties*, Vol X, pp. 234-38. for the complete text of the treaty.

9 For a detailed description of the revolt of Velu Thampi see, Nair, *A Tragic Decade in Kerala History*. The famous Kundara Proclamation of Velu Thampi, though often attributed to a reactionary disposition reflected in high caste anxieties, fore-grounded some of the impending ‘dangers’ that are pertinent in the present discussion. Velu Thampi was exceptionally displeased at the British for maneuvering the policies of the state to preempt indigenous political decisions. In particular, he fulminated against the Resident who was “intending to introduce reforms and practically administer the Government”. The *Dalawa*, among other things, also foresaw a different and aggressive colonial attitude towards land and he cautioned the people that the British would dare to “measure up and assert themselves as the absolute owners of waste lands.” For the full text of the Kundara Proclamation see, Menon, *A History of Travancore*, pp. 251-254

firearms without the consent of the government.<sup>10</sup> Ummini Thampi, the new Dewan (re-designated office of *Dalawa*), hunted down the family members and Velu Thampi in order to please the Resident Col. Macaulay. Most of them were exterminated and the rest were deported. On the death of Raja Bala Rama Varma in 1810, the new British Resident, Colonel John Munro (1810-19), supported Gauri Lakshmi Bhai to the throne of Travancore. The heir-apparent Kerala Varma, who was alleged to be involved in the rebellion of Velu Thampi, was imprisoned and deported first to Tellicherry and then to Chingelpet near Madras for the rest of his life. Gauri Lakshmi Bhai was “declared the rightful heir and successor to Bala Rama Varma and placed on the *gadi* with the approval of the Madras Government and the Court of Directors.”<sup>11</sup> The indebted Rani Gauri Lakshmi Bhai, in her coronation speech, declared that an “unprepared and unqualified” young female like her “could not do better than place herself under the guidance and support of the Honourable East India Company.” Addressing the Resident she affirmed: “[T]o you Colonel, I entrust everything connected with my country.”<sup>12</sup> Dewan Ummini Thampi meanwhile rose in revolt against the Rani and the Resident and was caught and sentenced to death; but later the sentence was commuted and he was banished to Nellore. With the aforesaid series of treaties and chain of political events, the decision-making authority was almost completely transferred to the British Resident and the Rani was forced to limit her administrative anxieties

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10 Ullor S. Parameswara Aiyer, “Colonel Munro”, in Joseph (ed), *Kerala Society Papers*, Vol II, pp. 41-70.

11 Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.I, p. 456.

12 Installation speech by the Rani, quoted in Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol II, p. 503.

to the continuation of age-old *mamools* of the ‘self-proclaimed Hindu state’.<sup>13</sup>

Subsequent to the banishment of Dewan Ummini Thampi, Col Munro assumed the office of the Dewan in 1811 “at the request of the Rani and with the approval of the Government of Madras.”<sup>14</sup> He held the apex administrative position of the princely state till 1814. That was the time when Travancore was initiated firmly into intense reforms in multiple domains, catering to the strategic and economic interests of the Company.<sup>15</sup> True to the civilizing mission, he sought to transform

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- 13 In a letter dated 18th Edavam 986 M.E. (June, 1811), to Col. Munro, who was addressed as “my dear and brotherly Colonel sahib,” she requested the Resident to respect the customs and manners of her country. “All the systems established by my ancestors for the maintenance of the various charitable institutions, as well as the protection and advancement of the welfare of my subjects, I request the Colonel will see conducted according to *mamool* and without least difference.” The Rani concludes by saying that “As I am a female, and have entrusted my brotherly Colonel with all my affaires, I have full confidence that you will have me and my country with my subjects and all the charities, conducted in accordance with *mamool* (usage).” See, Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.I, pp. 459-60 and Menon, *A History of Travancore*, p. 281. The British largely allowed such rituals to continue recognising its political importance in a self-proclaimed Hindu state, Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State*, pp. 16-27.
- 14 Velu Pillai, the manual writer, himself feels that the clubbing of the two offices in one person, that of the Resident and Dewan, was an “extraordinary scheme” as the “jurisdiction of the two are clearly incompatible with each other”. Even though the appointment was said to have taken place on the request of the Rani, Pillai informs us that prior to that Col. Munro wrote to the Madras Government that “the office of the Dewan should be discontinued and that the Resident should superintend the administration.” Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-II, pp. 505-06.
- 15 The reforms included reorganization of administration on the British line, bringing the police force under the direct control of Dewan/Resident, promoting British commercial interests by resorting to measures such as abolition of tolls and internal duties on many products, abolition of state monopoly on ginger, cardamom, turmeric, etc. and its retention in the case of pepper, tobacco, salt, etc., annexation of devaswams to curtail their authority, generating revenue for the state, promoting Syrian Christians in an attempt to gain their support and to evangelize the Hindus. Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, pp. 6-7; I. Mathew of Mallappally, “Travancore a Hundred Years Ago: the Times of the Ranis and Colonel Munro”, in Joseph (ed), *Kerala Society Papers*, Vol II, Series-8 (1931), pp. 129-30; Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-II, pp. 505-15, 520-21.

the “tyranny, corruption and abuses of the system, full of activity and energy in everything mischievous, oppressive and infamous” to a disciplined administration with “humanity, mercy and justice.”<sup>16</sup> The British were successful in ‘manufacturing’ consent of the native state for change and modernisation by travelling along new routes. The regimes of two teen-aged princesses in succession, Gouri Lakshmi Bhai and Gouri Parvathi Bhai (1810-1829), were crucial in this regard as the political flaccidity during their tenure allowed the Paramount power to effectively launch manoeuvres to generate a longing for change. The British from then on preferred a non-Travancorean who was western educated and with a ‘modern’ bent of mind for the position of Dewanship. Consequently, the office of Dewan soon became “a gift of the Resident” and as the turn of subsequent events testified, the primary allegiance of the Dewan was to the British.<sup>17</sup> As a consequence, the system was re-ordered in such a way that in all matters of importance “the Resident ruled, the Dewan executed and the Raja sanctioned,” though in theory, the division of authority was, roughly speaking, Raja to rule, the Dewan to execute and the Resident to advise.<sup>18</sup> The Raja became a play actor for the colonial governance, and the Dewan became a glorified clerk to the Resident. The native crown was thus hollowed out effectively without a formal dismantling of the traditional political authority.

Even after Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858, the Resident continued to pay attention to almost all activities of the Princely state. Matters of high importance such as “legislation and finance, the appointment of high officials and even the succession to the *musnud*, or

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16 Report submitted by Col. Munro to the Madras Government dated 7th March 1818. Appendix to Report from Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company-Political, p. 276, quoted in Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-I, p. 461.

17 Though technically Dewans were selected and appointed by the Maharaja, the appointment then had to be approved by the Madras government.

18 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 47.

throne had to be submitted to the British Resident for his opinion and sanction before being carried into operation,” wrote Samuel Mateer in 1871.<sup>19</sup> The British handpicked Dewans of their choice to ensure that Travancore would not get diverted from the path of ‘development’ and transformation. This was best exemplified in the Dewanship for Sir. T. Madhava Rao (1858-72) who, with his perfect knowledge of English, well-grounded knowledge of the Company’s regulations and intelligence and acquaintance with the laws of Travancore, achieved a heroic image in the British representations.<sup>20</sup> The man who “brought sunshine into a land covered with darkness” and “secured the blessings of good government to a people harassed by anarchy,” pertinent to the present discussion, also undertook concrete measures aimed at reclaiming forests, cultivating wastelands and promoting new commercial crops like coffee on a grand scale.<sup>21</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century the British clearly distanced themselves from the internal affairs of the state,<sup>22</sup> but Travancore had already journeyed a long way in the direction of change and modernisation. Spanning a phase of active intervention (1805-1857) and ‘non-interference’ (1905-1947) with a significant mediating period of passive but effective intervention (1858-1905), the British were successful in seeing through the trajectory of reforms and

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19 Even “sentences of capital punishment too must have the concurrence of the Resident before being executed.” Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, p. 66.

20 Report of Lieut-General Cullen, the Resident, to the Madras government on the appointment of T. Madhava Rao as the Dewan, dated 25th January 1858, quoted in Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-I, pp. 523-24.

21 Quoted in Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-I, p. 557.

22 As Kawashima pointed out, though the British abandoned their policy of annexing native states after the Queen’s Proclamation of 1858, their interference did not cease. But it decreased drastically in the latter half of the 19th century with the exception, a temporary aberration during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1899-1905) when at least fifteen native rulers were ‘either forced to abdicate or temporarily deprived of their power’. Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State*, p. 44.

modernisation without any serious disavowals and reversals.<sup>23</sup> It was also the positive response from the side of the native state and its people for modernisation and change that ensured a place for Travancore in the good books of the colonial masters. The hollowed crown had evinced considerable but uninterrupted confidence in the capacity of the alliance with the British to reform the native state. It is not surprising that once it fell in line, the princely state which was once described as “capricious, oppressive and cruel” and a land “full of abuses”<sup>24</sup> metamorphosed radically into a “model native state” in the colonial accounts.<sup>25</sup>

### **Identification and Formalisation of Landscape**

The colonial intervention on the landscape of Travancore was preceded by a painstaking attempt on the part of the British to know its geography with its idiosyncrasies and subsequently to categorise it into ‘intelligible’ types. Understandably, nothing is more costly to any system of governance than ignorance, and knowing the subject and the territory they inhabit are integral to the building up of any effective dispensation of control and reformulation.<sup>26</sup> Scientific surveys, commissioned during the initial stages of colonialism were aimed at providing the British with essential information about the newly acquired territories, with which they had to engage with.<sup>27</sup> The surveys as a “modality of

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23 The period between the ‘treaty of perpetual friendship and alliance’ in 1805 and Queen Victoria’s Proclamation in 1858 was the time when the Residents actively exercised their regulative and pedagogic responsibilities. The time between Queen’s Proclamation and Lord Minto’s famous Udaipur speech in 1905 was that of passive intervention. The time between the Udaipur speech and Indian independence may be said as the period of ‘non-intervention’.

24 Colonel Munro; quoted in Yesudas, *Colonel Munro in Travancore*, p. 13.

25 Sir Stafford Northcote, quoted in Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, p. 82. This has been reinforced again in 1873 by Sir. A. J. Arbuthnot, the acting Governor of Madras, while applauding the services of Dewan T. Madahava Rao, quoted in Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol-I, p. 560.

26 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; Said, *Orientalism*.

27 Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, p.22.

investigation” also had a significant role in framing the legitimisation of colonial domination.<sup>28</sup> Though the epistemological foundation of knowing through surveys was rooted in an empiricist self-deception that the world is completely knowable through the human senses in subsumed forms and patterns, it is pointed out that the discourse of science had more compelling functions in the project of cultural domination. In this sense, colonial surveys implied an imposition of European rationality on the Indian landscape and a consequent redemption of the hitherto “mystical and religious space” of India to an intelligible entity.<sup>29</sup> The cultural authority of modern science not only allowed the British to distinguish themselves from the Indians but also allowed them to articulate a mastery over the Indian landscape.<sup>30</sup> The surveys also served more immediate but essential imperial projects, ranging from commercial to strategic purposes. But more fundamental to the present discussion, the surveys had an important role in seeing and discerning Indian landscape from an extractive capitalist point of view. The surveys helped the colonisers to identify core areas for exploitation, resource mobilisation and potential spaces that could be transformed into sites of agriculture with exotic varieties and plantations to serve the empire. The potential lands were not only identified but also categorised and formalised in such a way as to naturalise the imperial interventions into the Indian landscape and agriculture.

To Velu Thampi’s apprehension, the first indication that the British would dare to “measure up and assert themselves as the absolute owners

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28 The concept of “survey” in the context of colonial India, according to Bernard Cohn, covers “any systematic and official investigation of the natural space.” The other forms of investigative modality to him are historiographic modality, observational/travel modality, enumerative modality, museological modality and surveillance modality. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, pp. 3-15.

29 Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

30 Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, pp. 1-20; Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*, p. 40.



of waste lands” came when Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner were put in charge of making a survey of Travancore in 1816 with specific instructions.<sup>31</sup> The survey, though started slightly earlier, became part of the Great Trigonometrical Survey (GTS) of India and was carried out under the auspices of the East India Company.<sup>32</sup> The survey that supplied the base dossier for the subsequent ‘colonial fiction’ on Travancore was also central in inventing and circulating a rational/scientific topography of the native state with its imperial categorizations. Typical of the colonial perception of the Orient, the survey pronounces the “wretched appearance” of the places, houses, markets and cattle, the insalubrious and unhealthy inner villages, along with admiration of the “wild nature of the country.” Ward and Conner’s perception on the Travancore landscape was loaded with their own understanding of land use with a reductive gaze aimed at an ‘objectification’ of nature by attaching particular values and meanings to it.<sup>33</sup> Though Travancore was “rivalling in point of size the largest of the secondary German or Italian states,” the surveyors were disappointed by the fact that the greatest part of it was “lost to human industry.”<sup>34</sup> Out of the total area of

31 Benjamin Swain Ward and Peter Eyre Conner, who were officers in the Madras infantry, had their training in survey at Madras. See for details, S. Raimon, “A Biographical Sketch of Lts. Ward and Conner”, in Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*.

32 The Great Trigonometrical Survey of India was founded in 1818 with William Lambton in charge of its India-wide operations. See for details Edney, *Mapping an Empire*.

33 The concept of ‘objectification’ is taken from Bernard Cohn, by which he means the imposition of western conception of meaning and value on Indian forms and culture. It is a process of converting Indian forms to European objects, which were subsequently internalized by Indians. Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia”, in *An Anthropologists among the Historians and Other Essays* pp. 224-254 and “The Command of Language and the Language of Command” & “The Transformation of Objects into Artifacts, Antiquities, and Art in Nineteenth-Century India” in *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, pp. 16-56 & 76-105.

34 Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States* (1863), Vol. I, pp. 2-3.

6730¾ square miles, only 1097¾ square miles was under proper cultivation; the remaining area, partly or completely, was untouched by human activity and productive enterprises.<sup>35</sup> The area which subsequently attracted the extractive capitalist eyes was classified under at least three categories in the survey - 1000 square miles constituting slopes as available for temporary cultivation; 20 square miles as covered by pasturage and superficies occupied by low chains of hills; and hills and forests as “scarcely any part of which is improvable” occupying another 2379½ square miles.<sup>36</sup> The survey regretted that “the whole riches, population and cultivation of Travancore are confined to a contracted strip along the beach,” which was under the constant threat of encroachment by the forests and its wild inhabitants!<sup>37</sup> The situation portrayed was quite interesting; the tiny strip of habitation was shrinking due to the fast inroads of the wilderness into it, perhaps making the protection and expansion of the latter a compelling necessity.

The “baneful effects” of the hills and forests and “pestiferous” and “highly inimical” climatic conditions, especially for the Europeans and the residents of the plains arguably articulated the responsibility of the ‘new rulers’ against a recalcitrant nature. The survey time and again fore-grounded the general “abrupt and mountainous” character of the country in such a way as to give the impression that the landscape was excessively under-utilised. The “spacious valleys, high summits shaded with wood, small elevated plains and fine pastures” of Travancore attracted the attention of the colonial surveyors along with its wilderness forcefully infringing into human habitations. But the agricultural

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35 Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, p. 3. Rice land constitutes 741 square miles and ‘suparee’ and coconut 356¾ square miles.

36 Ibid. p. 3. Other categories were sandy extent covered with Palmyra trees chiefly to the south 115 square miles, Lakes, rivers and tanks 157½ square miles and site occupied by buildings of sort another 20 square miles.

37 Ibid. 43.

practice of the princely state was characterized as rude and backward with “cheap and miserable” implements and poor utilization of soil. The Nairs, who were said to be the principal body of cultivators, were portrayed as people with few wants and whose “indolence making their absolute necessities the scale of their assiduity, limits their industry to a measure that in other countries would scarcely obtain a subsistence.”<sup>38</sup> The *Purumboo* land, which the survey described as “the low slopes bordering the glens,” had been identified as areas where agriculture could be greatly extended and diversified.<sup>39</sup> The ideological call as entailed in the account was for extension and diversification with exotic crops, proposing a switch over from traditional to a capital-intensive agriculture by replacing indolence with an accumulative frame of mind.

From the perspective of extractive capitalism, the survey made more specific ‘discoveries’ in the landscape of Travancore in terms of its suitability for exotic crop varieties. In a state, where with few exceptions, “every produce of the soil is appropriated to food” and production done principally to answer its own consumption,<sup>40</sup> the surveyors identified atypical spaces where cultivation could be extended and crops diversified. Given the irregularity of the soil, the survey admitted that the more elevated parts of the hills were more or less barren, but brought to the notice of the colonial administration that “the soil of their (mountains and hills) sides and bases must be considered, as supporting so luxuriant a forest; that of a large share of the mountainous tract has sufficient depth to allow of cultivation.”<sup>41</sup> The major chunk of the hilly tracts and waste space were “abandoned to its natural state,” but the survey was quite confident that large expanses could be “cultivated

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38 The return from the land is stated far from satisfactory. *Ibid*, pp. 40-56

39 *Ibid*, pp. 64-66.

40 *Ibid*, p. 106.

41 *Ibid*, pp. 54-55.

with success.”<sup>42</sup> The survey observed that, though the land was generally mountainous and the soil infertile, its favourable climate and a variety of its spontaneous productions “encourages the belief that those of its agriculture might be more diversified than they now are.”<sup>43</sup> It recommended a variety of crops for the higher grounds, which were “greatly neglected” by the tillers, like cotton, indigo and coffee. Coffee was found to be particularly apt for the soil and hence recommended for cultivation.<sup>44</sup> In short, the survey carried out by Ward and Conner expressed a particular colonial attitude towards native landscapes and its potential use.<sup>45</sup> It allowed the Company to identify untapped areas for exploitation, resource mobilisation and spaces that could be transformed into grounds for imperial agriculture with exotic varieties and plantations, to serve the empire. The second part of the survey brought out more close and specific details of the landscape of each ‘districts’ in Travancore with the same frame of mind.<sup>46</sup> The objectification and formalisation of the landscape was prelude to expropriation.

### **Standardising Plantation Making as Modernisation**

The ‘knowing’ of landscape was followed by intervention through the creation of modern plantations. Inaugurated under the aegis and initial ownership of the British colonialists, it not only formed a new attitude towards land and nature but also generated and disseminated altogether new notions of economic development, which had far reaching

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42 Ibid, p. 56.

43 Ibid, p.82.

44 Ibid, p. 82.

45 Edney’s conclusion that a perfect geographical panopticon promised by the Great Trigonometrical Survey became “an empiricist delusion” is valid in the case of the Travancore survey by Ward and Conner as well. Edney, *Mapping and Empire*, p. 30.

46 Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States, Vol II* (Part-I in 1901 and Part-II in 1893 first published).

consequences on the peasant farming system and land usage patterns of the native state. It was also an attempt at reorganising the native production system with an orientation towards export to serve the economic needs of the metropole, but carried out with the aid of a legitimising discourse of modernisation. Political subordination coupled with the opportunities offered by the ensuing system caused the princely state to endorse and support the new system of agriculture.

It is argued that the British, conditioned by their own agrarian and military histories, came to South Asia with a deep ideological animosity towards forests and wastelands.<sup>47</sup> In the context of agrarian revolution in England, the cutting of trees and cultivation of wastelands were presented as signs of progress and undefiled lands were seen as an epitome of human indolence. In the background of Irish rebellions, in which the Irish rebels took forests and dense woods as their safe hiding places, woods and bogs were looked down as habitations of robbers, lawless squatters and was therefore uncivilized and unsafe.<sup>48</sup> The British thus carried a cultural baggage of hostility towards forests and untamed spaces to South Asia. Their economic concerns and the larger political motives of consolidating themselves in India also made the extension of cultivation by reclaiming ‘lands lost to human industry’ and the formulation of a productive system aimed at supplying products according to the needs of the metropolitan state a priority. Rational utilisation of nature and extension of cultivation by taming the wilderness was thus an ideological and practical preoccupation for the new rulers. The forest, jungle and wastelands, from the point of view of such discourses, were seen as testimonies of man’s lack of willingness to utilise them.<sup>49</sup> The forest and other untamed areas untouched by the

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47 Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest*, pp.16-18; Thomson, *Whigs and Hunters*.

48 Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest*, p. 17.

49 There were people who defined jungle as “land laid waste for five years”. N. Halhead, *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (Calcutta, 1776), quoted in Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest*, p. 17-18.

human application were seen as ‘empty’ spaces to be conquered and domesticated.

This cultural baggage of animosity to wooded lands, jungles and wastelands as well as the colonial requirement of reformulating the indigenous economy in tune with their economic interests and the changing global political economy set the backdrop of British manoeuvres to promote the plantation industry in Travancore. As early as 1824, the Court of Directors called the Madras Government to support those who were taking the initiative for commercial agriculture by supplying them with suitable land along with security of tenure.<sup>50</sup> Though the company initiated attempts to open plantations in the directly ruled Malabar district soon after its accession to the Madras Presidency in 1792 by setting up a spice plantation at Anjarakandy,<sup>51</sup> the agro-climatic and soil conditions for large scale plantations were more suitable in the high-ranges of Travancore, ‘indirectly’ ruled by them. Apparently, the light soil of good depth through which water percolated freely allowing ‘thick’ planting and the availability of required elevation from the sea level for plantations like tea made Travancore more appropriate and lucrative.<sup>52</sup>

The making of plantations in Travancore, therefore, was in tune with the larger British imperial interests, but was executed through a rhetoric of ‘modernisation’ of agriculture. The making of plantations also point to the transcendence of global capital from its locales of origin to other areas inclusive of the colonies, as a result of which the peripheries

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50 Imperial Resolution of the Court of Directors, quoted in *Report of the South India Planters’ Inquiry Committee*, p. 6.

51 Opened in 1797, the Anjarakandy plantation was leased out to the French industrialist Mardoch Brown for a period of 99 years. Brown developed it into a big plantation of 3000 acres with the help of the police and judicial support of the British. After 1817 it became a private property of Brown’s family till the term of its original lease expired in 1901.

52 George and Tharakan, “Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy,” p. 213.

were subsumed into the broader capitalist system.<sup>53</sup> Capital simultaneously catered to the global demands of new products like tea, sugar, rubber and further promoted such demands to significant heights for furthering its extractive accumulation.<sup>54</sup> The plantation crops that dominated the plantation scenario of Travancore over different phases of its trajectory were coffee, tea and rubber. The princely state entered the plantation scenario with coffee in the predominant company of European planters.<sup>55</sup> The British successfully transformed the state policy of Travancore in support of the creation of a new agro-economy that gave preference to the monoculture of ‘western oriented’ crops over the earlier traditions of a poly-culture agronomy. As in the social sphere, some missionaries took the lead in economic transition as well — along with some European planters and a few Indians like P.D. Devasahayam. The LMS missionaries started coffee estates in the Ashambu hills and some of the CMS missionaries in the north-eastern hills of Travancore.<sup>56</sup> As also

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- 53 This is a general position taken by the World System theories. See, Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*; Chase-Dunn and Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems*. Discussion in the specific context of Kerala, George and Tharakan, “Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy.”
- 54 See for detailed discussion of the issue: Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*; Drummond and Wilbraham, *The Englishman’s Food*.
- 55 The first known individual effort to grow coffee in Travancore was made by William Huxham, an Englishman, in the hills east of Quilon in 1824, but the development of a coffee ‘estate sector’ was largely a phenomenon of the late 1850s and early 1860s. Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 59-61
- 56 LMS (London Missionary Society) and CMS (Church Missionary Society) actively worked in Travancore. One of the earliest planters in Ashambu hills, John Cox was an example for planter-cum-(ex) missionary. Similarly, H. Baker, another missionary, his family and John Daniel Munro were the pioneers of setting up plantations in Peermade area in the northeastern hills of Travancore. Likewise, as Robin Jeffrey pointed out, there were many, like Samuel Mateer who was famous for his *The Land of Charity* (1871) and *Native Life in Travancore* (1883), who were missionaries with an explicit interest in planting. See Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, p. 119. It is estimated that there were at least eight plantations owned by ex-missionaries in South Travancore alone in 1877 with an average area of 107 acres. Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, p. 126. Also see, “A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District,” pp. 2-17.

representatives of an emerging lower middle class in Britain, the missionaries “combined a predilection for a sober and industrious life with a keen eye for economic opportunities that the native circumstances offered.”<sup>57</sup> The ‘coffee era’ in Travancore was dominated by individuals, mainly British (ex)-missionaries, their relatives, (ex)-government servants and a few natives, as coffee planting required only modest capital, seasonal labour and simple techniques of cultivation and manufacturing.<sup>58</sup> Towards the end of the 1860s, there were at least 50 coffee estates owned by European planters covering an area of 14,700 acres in Travancore.<sup>59</sup> The value of coffee exported from Travancore rose steadily from Rs. 8,397 (587 cwts) in 1859-60 to Rs. 8,39,000 (41,597 cwts) in 1872-73. It reached an all time high of Rs. 9.89 lakhs with almost 50 thousand cwts of export in the year 1876-77, only to decline to Rs. 42,061 with 2,087 cwts of export in 1890-91.<sup>60</sup> Coffee was losing its ground due to interplay of internal and external factors – internally due to coffee leaf-disease, *hemilia vaslatrix*; and externally due to the inflow cheap Brazilian coffee into the world market and a resultant depression in the coffee price. It is estimated that in Travancore alone, during the baneful decade for coffee, not less than 2,155 acres of coffee cultivation had been abandoned.<sup>61</sup> After a short interregnum of Cinchona cultivation,<sup>62</sup> tea took over most of the older estates that had given up coffee.

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57 Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, p. 127.

58 Lovatt, “A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District,” pp. 9-14.

59 *Travancore Administration Report* 1868-69, Cited from Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p.63

60 *Travancore Administration Reports*, respective years. See also Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power* p. 63 for the value and quantity of coffee export from Travancore from 1859-60 to 1899-1900.

61 Raman, “Global Capital and Peripheral Labour,” p. 23.

62 It was reported that cinchona was widely cultivated between 1870 and 1880 when quinine was fetching a price of 10 to 12 shilling per ounce. In 1885 there were 17 cinchona growing estates as against 2 coffee and 6 tea estates in the Kannan Devan Hills alone. Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 64-65.



Because of the burgeoning demand at home, the British were in search of new fields for cultivating tea since 1833 and India was seen as a possible alternative productive location for the future. An experiment of cultivating tea along with coffee and cinchona was made in the Government gardens at Peermade before the switch over to its large-scale cultivation.<sup>63</sup> The hills of Southern India were soon found to be appropriate for the new variety. The acreage under tea, which was a little over than 3,000 acres in 1885-89, increased to over 15,000 acres by 1895-99 in Travancore.<sup>64</sup> This increased further to 24,711.54 acres in 66 plantations altogether in the year 1904.<sup>65</sup> By 1913 it further increased to over 37,000 acres and by that time, tea production in Travancore surpassed other regions in South India.<sup>66</sup> The value of tea exported from the state increased by 88 per cent, as against a decline by 40 per cent in coffee export, during the period between 1891 and 1900.<sup>67</sup> The absolute value of tea exported from Travancore which was just Rs. 6,60,556 in the beginning of the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rose to Rs. 12,41,047 in the year 1899-1900.<sup>68</sup> This value constituted almost 11 per cent of the total value of goods exported from the state in the mid-1890s.<sup>69</sup> The value of tea export shot up further to Rs. 78,07,614 (total value of export being 3,70,99,409) in the year 1910-11.<sup>70</sup> The switch over from

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63 A Commission to study the prospects of tea cultivation in India was appointed as early as 1834. Lovatt, "A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District," pp. 14-15.

64 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 65.

65 Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 79.

66 Rammohan, "Material Processes and Developmentalism," p. 67.

67 Raman, "Global Capital and Peripheral Labour", p.28.

68 Travancore Trade Statistics in *Travancore Administration Reports*, issues from 1890 to 1900.

69 Raman, pp. 28-29. Baak estimates the share of tea in the total value of goods exported from Travancore as 10.5 per cent in 1896-97.

70 *Report on the Administration of Travancore for the Year 1910-11*, p. 37.

coffee to tea was more than merely a shift from one crop to another. First of all there was a geographical shift in terms of the core area of plantation from southern to central and northern Travancore.<sup>71</sup> The shift also made alterations in the quantum of capital investment and tremendous modifications in the ownership pattern of the plantations. Joint stock companies with a larger capacity to invest gradually replaced the individual plantation owners and family firms, as tea plantations required greater investment and professional management.<sup>72</sup> The substitution of homestead gardens and smaller estates by bigger plantation enterprises also unleashed a vigorous scheme of colonising hill tracts, slopes and forests in a massive way.

### **Subordination and Reciprocation**

Before moving into the subsequent twists and turns in plantation scenario of Travancore, it is essential to understand the role of the native state in making the transition possible. Though initially reluctant, with feeble political manoeuvrability due to its subordinate position, the princely state could not resist the British plantation designs for long.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was a particularly difficult time for the native state as it found itself in a 'perilous position' with alleged maladministration and 'concrete manifestations of misrule'. The period

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71 During the initial stage, when coffee dominated the scene, South Travancore with Ashambu hills, was the nerve centre and the core area. But tea was extensively cultivated in Peermade hills, Minachil and Changanacherry of Central Travancore and Kannan Devan Hills of Northern Travancore. Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III, pp. 74-79; 84 per cent of the acreage under tea in 1904 belonged to Central Travancore and Kannan Devan Hills, north-central part of the state, with 72 per cent of the number of estates. See, Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 67.

72 Lovatt, "A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District," pp. 17-21.

73 See Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 51-56, for a detailed description on the correspondence between Huxham, the first planter in Travancore, J. S. Fraser, the British Resident and the *Dewan* Soobrow in 1930s over the acquisition of land for coffee plantation, which testifies to this point.

between 1853 and 1857 was a time of frequent intimidations to the native state and there were strong indications of annexation which was averted perhaps because of the 1857 revolt and the death of the 'reluctant' *Dewan Krishna Rao*. The new *Dewan*, T. Madhava Rao, sailed Travancore successfully out of the troubled waters not only by producing budgetary surplus, but also by being an obliging official to the British interests with regard to plantations. The early disinclination to grant native land to the European planters had changed into active promotion of capital-intensive plantation agriculture in the 'unused' landscape of the state. Planters soon found themselves in an extremely advantageous position, where they could directly obtain land from a sympathetic Travancore government. In 1862, the practice of notifying government land in an auction for coffee cultivation started,<sup>74</sup> though a concrete legislation in this regard came into effect only in 1864.<sup>75</sup> It is argued that the main motive behind the establishment of a Survey Department in 1865 was to facilitate the sale of government land.<sup>76</sup> The 'Rules Regarding Grant of Land for Cultivation of Coffee' were formed in such a way as to stimulate plantation development in the state as it provided for grant of land "free of assessment for five years on the condition that quarter of the land shall be cleared and planted within the first three years." It was also provided that "the land applied for shall be granted in perpetuity as a heritable or transferable property" which conferred the full ownership rights of the estate on the planters.<sup>77</sup> The lands which were categorised as 'wastelands', were auctioned annually from 1865 to 1874. The

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74 Devi, *Plantation Economies of the Third World*, Appendix to Chapter 2, p.111.

75 *Travancore Land Revenue Manuel* Vol. II, p.3

76 Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, p. 120.

77 Rules Regarding Grant of Land for Cultivation of Coffee, Clause 6 and 8, *Travancore Land Revenue Manuel* Vol. II, pp. 1-3. It is important to note that much before the Pattom Proclamation, which conferred the ownership to the tenants of Government land with the power of alienation, it was granted to the planters.

auctions were stopped for two decades due to the failure of coffee but were resumed in 1895 only to be held more frequently than they had been earlier.<sup>78</sup> A little later, from 1877 onwards, grasslands were sold to the planters at an upset price of Rs. 2 per acre and if the given grassland encompassed any forestland within it and if the latter's area was less than one-seventh of the total area of the grassland, that was also sold along with the former but at an upset price of Rs. 20 per acre.<sup>79</sup> The 'Rules for the sale of Wastelands on the Travancore Hills for Coffee and Tea Cultivation' dated 7<sup>th</sup> July 1898 updated and integrated the earlier legislations on the subject with a pro-planter orientation.<sup>80</sup> Many a time the European planters, who were very influential and were on good terms with the forest authorities, managed even to get lands free of cost.<sup>81</sup> The land tax levied by the princely state on these lands under plantation crops was ridiculously light, not more than 12 annas per acre in 1870s.<sup>82</sup>

The European planters appropriated huge masses of forest and 'waste' lands in Travancore as 'concessions' too, as exemplified by the historic dispensations of 'Pathanapuram Concession' made in 1849 and the 'Kannan Devan Hills Concession' made in 1878.<sup>83</sup> The fact that the total quantum of concession acreage constituted an equivalent of one-seventh of the net cultivated area and almost one-tenth of the total forests of Travancore testify to the princely state's disgraceful

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78 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 77.

79 Rules for the Grant of Grassland to proprietors of Coffee Estates, dt. 31<sup>st</sup> July 1877, *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol II, p. 13.

80 Ibid, pp. 109-12. It fixed the land tax of all estates at 12 annas per acre.

81 Lovatt, "A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District," p. 9.

82 This levy was extremely uneven when compared with the land tax on paddy fields, which amounted about 20 per cent of the gross income from such lands. Devi, *Plantation Economies of the Third World*, p. 66.

83 See for the details of the concessions, Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual* Vol. IV, pp. 475-90.

subordination to the Paramount power. The European planters, in addition to availing enormous patronage from the Princely state, resorted to illegal measures without any hesitation, which according to Baak “contributed to an even larger extent to the growth of plantation industry.”<sup>84</sup> This included delaying or non-payment of tax, buying large tracts of land without any real intention of cultivating it, and large scale encroachments. Massive encroachment forced the *Dewan* to stop the sale of wastelands temporarily in 1874, explicitly against the wish of the Resident, to allow the Survey department to do the inspecting and assessment work on trespassers. But by and large such encroachments were often legalised as the state wanted to maximise its revenue and was in favour of converting the ‘empty’ spaces to opulent plantations. There were cases when the government disposed of the encroached land to the guilty at a price which was less than the standard value of land.<sup>85</sup> The planters also resorted to considered denudation of forests, hills, banks of streams and large areas of land ignoring the regulations and thereby disrupting the natural environment of the state. Various plantation ventures in those areas over years had “caused the complete denudation of timber standing in what were once virgin forests.”<sup>86</sup>

The state supported the newly emerging agro-economy by making land available in plenty and by myriad other means. The Princely state was quick in constructing a network of roads in the plantation districts connecting them with the mainland and thereby catering to the planters’ interests. Connectivity also facilitated more and more reclamation of dense forestlands and ‘wastelands’ which were otherwise inaccessible.

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84 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 78-79.

85 Raman gives an instance: when one British planter was found to have encroached 114 acres of forestland, instead of evicting or imposing a penalty or even giving a warning to the encroacher, the land was sold to him at the rate of Rs. 10 per acre when most of the adjoining lands were sold at an average value of Rs. 20 to 35. Raman, “Global Capital and Peripheral Labour,” p. 36

86 Kershaw, “Mundakayam”, in S.G. Spear (ed), *UPASI 1893-1953*, p. 211.

The government also provided grants-in-aid to those planters who wanted to build their own roads to their individual plantations.<sup>87</sup> The establishment of Public Works Department in 1860 was in response to the demands mainly by the European coffee planters. The Travancore government also spent handsomely on the experimental farm at Peermade, on police and magistrates stationed in the plantation districts and on the medical and telegraph networks in those areas.<sup>88</sup> The state also took measures for ensuring supply of labour to the emerging plantation sector. The colonial government insisted that the labour force under the traditional bonded systems must be set free and must be made available for the plantations. The princely state formally abolished slavery in 1855. Though it did not alter the rate of labour supply immediately, it had a drastic impact in the long run.<sup>89</sup> The Travancore state supported the *kangani* system, a method of labour mobilisation from the neighbouring regions.<sup>90</sup> The planters successfully got 'Criminal Breach of Contract Act' passed by the Travancore government in 1869. It made mandatory the signing of a contract for a specified period of time by the workers, and the breach of contract a criminal offence, to keep the labour recruited through *kanganies* in bondage. It helped to protect "the employer against the workmen and capital against labour."<sup>91</sup> On the

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87 Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India*, pp. 123-124. The Public Works Department started in 1860 and led by British Civil engineers did a lot of work under the 'food for work programme' of the 1860s. The share of PWD, which was just 5 percent of the total expenditure of the state in 1863-64, increased to 18 per cent in 1897-98.

88 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 131-134.

89 George and Tharakan, "Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy," p. 207; Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, pp.236-37; Lovatt, "A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District," p. 12.

90 The methods of mobilisation, terms and conditions of contract has been described in detail in the report of South of India Planters' Enquiry Committee, which was appointed in 1896 to enquire into the grievances of the planters especially on the question of labour supply, *The South of India Planters' Enquiry Committee Report*.

91 Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual* Vol. IV, p. 340.

request of the planters for the enforcement of the law, the Travancore government appointed a police force under a Superintendent, and judicial machinery under a Magistrate at Peermade in Central Travancore. Another Magistrate was installed at Devicolam in North Travancore as well in 1887. Further the 'Coffee Stealing Prevention Act' was passed by the Travancore government in 1879, which made the possession of coffee except for home consumption in the coffee regions illegal, a measure intended to prevent coffee stealing by the workers. A Rubber Theft Act also along similar lines came into force subsequently. As the labourers, were required to live in isolation in the plantations, especially in tea plantations, to correspond with the cycles of operation, in practice they were in a state of "resident captive labour."<sup>92</sup> The European planters exacerbated the multiple differences among the workers, recruited from different locations and backgrounds, to tighten their grip over the workers.<sup>93</sup> The Christian missionary work was a parallel but salient disciplining force in the plantations infusing new labour ethos among the workers, guiding them against theft, drunkenness and disobedience and imbuing in them a sense of personal duty and subordination.<sup>94</sup> The Travancore government thus responded to the demands made persistently by the planters and pressures of the British Resident and extended all legislative support for the advancement of their interests and that of the plantations. Plantations were encouraged despite the prevalence of abuses, violence and unknown diseases because commercialisation of agriculture and rational utilisation of 'abandoned lands' gained wider acceptability in the native governmental apparatus and began to be viewed as the fitting developmental model for the state.

The subordination was coincided with a more imaginative manoeuvre from the state to attract the native population to cultivate

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92 George and Tharakan, "Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy," pp.207-08.

93 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 119-20.

94 Kooiman, "Conversion from Slavery to Plantation Labour," p. 63.

their 'own' land for the world market and thereby make use of the emerging economic dispensation.<sup>95</sup> The early promotive interventions from the native state included offers of tax exemption to land, supporting with coffee seeds and plants and assurance of European expertise to the native farmers. But initially local cultivators were not willing to experiment with coffee agriculture as desired by the native administration and perhaps the British. This may have been another reason, besides the fact that undoubtedly the industry provided a fertile ground for capital investment, for the British entrepreneurs to move into establishing plantations in Travancore on a large scale. But the most important and far-reaching step in the creation of a new competitive society based on the individual rights on the soil in Travancore came in 1865 in the form of *Pattam Proclamation* from the government of Travancore. In a situation of feudal ownership in Travancore where the state was the biggest landowner, there was little space for individual incentive. It is in this context that the *Pattam* proclamation is often hailed as the 'Magna Carta of the Travancore ryots' as it conferred full ownership rights on the tenant cultivators of the government land, subject to payment of land revenue. It also allowed unrestricted transfer of property rights. As the ownership right was conferred on the tenants with the power of alienation, the tenant farmers became peasant farmers.<sup>96</sup> The proclamation converted Travancore into a state of numerous peasant proprietors and provided the peasants with security of ownership and ample space for individual initiative. At another level, it opened up potentially all government land for colonisation and appropriation alongside making land a marketable commodity and the most valued asset in the new economy.<sup>97</sup>

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95 In the beginning the local interest was not very significant, be it due to the discriminatory political and legal framework that had been created by the European planting community as Baak has argued (Baak, pp. 85-91) or due to the inclination on the part of the natives to move to the jungles as Lovatt had pointed out (Lovatt, p. 21)

96 Joseph, *Migration and Economic Development of Kerala*, pp. 65-67.

97 Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences*, p. 65.



During the entire second half of the nineteenth century, the plantation scenario in Travancore, initiated as late as the 1860s, was dominated by the British planters to the extent that Paul Baak calls it a “British Planters’ Raj.”<sup>98</sup> Writing in 1906, the author of *Travancore State Manual* was highly ambivalent about the question of promoting rubber cultivation among the local people.<sup>99</sup> But half a century of plantation experience in the princely state converted at least a section of the native population to the view that plantation agriculture was a profitable option. The high profits of plantation agriculture and the availability of forest and wastelands in plenty combined with low land tax, export duty and the like catalysed the option into a conviction in its favour. Newspapers like *Malayala Manorama* encouraged and propagated such ideas and called upon their countrymen to make it a reality. The editorial in *Malayala Manorama* that appeared on 2 December 1905 says:

For a long time we have been hearing of the great interest taken by the Europeans in this country in rubber cultivation. But we are surprised to note that *none of our people* has taken any step or shown any interest in the matter. When one realises the *enormous profit this cultivation will bring to us*, our lethargy and lack of enterprise will be condemned by *all patriotic people*. (emphasis mine)<sup>100</sup>

The editorial, apart from calling the local people to take up plantation cultivation, added punch by making it a patriotic act and a duty to the nation. It was a time when an Indian nation was in the making and the nationalist movement was gathering momentum; and

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98 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 61-137.

99 Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol III, pp. 80-83.

100 Quoted from Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 158-59.

the editorial rightly reflected a different channel through which the anti-colonial attitude that was gaining currency. For understandably, the argument also implied that it was unpatriotic to sit indolently leaving the opportunity unrealised when “the finest land suitable for rubber cultivation is plenty in Travancore.”<sup>101</sup> The question was stated explicitly elsewhere “if the Europeans can conduct this lucrative cultivation in such an organised manner, all are wondering why people of our country are not entering this field.”<sup>102</sup> An article assured the public that “at present prices rubber cultivation is more paying than gold mines and it is a great pity that our farmers are so disinterested about such a profitable venture.”<sup>103</sup> In an editorial almost half a century later, *Malayala Manorama* revealed radiant pictures of the achievements of the Syrian Christians in the eastern hills of Travancore, describing them as the “biggest agricultural community in the state.” Instead of instigating the natives to take up plantation agriculture by making use of ‘wastelands’ available in plenty, this article defended the Syrian Christians vociferously for their heroic accomplishments in the former malarial spaces of the state which was “abandoned by all who fear for life.”<sup>104</sup>

### **Syrian Christians: Making of an Agency for Change**

As already pointed out, the British dominated the plantation scene of the princely state during the second half of the nineteenth century. Among the natives, a few Syrian Christians, who were exposed to the art of planting as supervisors or clerks in the European plantations, took up

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101 Ibid, p. 158.

102 Quoted in Haridasan, *Management of Plantations*, pp. 34-5.

103 Ibid. Cited by Baak too, pp. 159. Writing his autobiography in 2008, the incumbent Chief Editor of *Malayala Manorama* in a thick reminiscence recalls thousands and thousands of columns his news paper devoted for promoting rubber cultivation in Kerala and takes pride in being nicknamed as the “rubber news paper.” Mathew, *Ettamathe Mothiram*, p. 390.

104 “Krishi Parivarthanavum Christian Missionarimarum –I,” Editorial, Tuesday, August 1, 1950, *Malayala Manorama*.

cultivation of tea plantations. But it was with the coming of rubber plantations in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the Syrian Christian participation became significant to the extent of wresting dominance over the Europeans quickly. The indigenous segment of the tea plantation, though impressive, did not exceed that of the Europeans till independence.<sup>105</sup> In the case of rubber, on the other hand, Travancoreans outnumbered the Europeans in 1930s itself both in terms of acreage under cultivation and in number of estates owned. The local rubber growers started investing in rubber plantations by the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the Kaliyar Rubber Estate launched by P.J. John in 1905 in north Travancore is regarded as the pioneering.<sup>106</sup> Since then the growth of indigenous rubber industry was quite swift. By 1925, natives owned more rubber estates than their European counterparts; 53 out of 86. And by 1934, the local planters outdid their foreign counterparts both in acreage and in number of estates. They owned 30,238 acres (61 per cent) of rubber out of a total of 49,553 acres and 169 estates (89 per cent) out of a total of 189 estates in that year. By 1948, 93,378 acres of rubber (85 per cent) out of a total 110,012 acres, and 353 estates (96 per cent) out of a total 366 were in the hands of native planters.<sup>107</sup>

The introduction and the subsequent consolidation of rubber brought multiple mutations in the plantation sector of Travancore. The tea plantations required large-scale capital investment. With the advent of rubber, smaller estates and smaller holdings began to predominate the plantation field.<sup>108</sup> No big investment was necessary for rubber

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105 In 1925 the indigenous planters possessed just 12 per cent of the total area under tea and 26 per cent of estates as their share in the tea segment of Travancore. It increased to 18 and 49 per cents respectively in 1934 and 31 and 62 per cent respectively in 1948, which represents undoubtedly a significant growth. *UPASI Planting Directory*, respective issues.

106 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 151-52

107 *Ibid.*, pp. 152-53

108 *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51. Baak defines small estates as those between ten and hundred acres in size and smallholdings as those less than ten acres.

cultivation and for processing latex from the rubber trees, and this allowed many small holders to join the ongoing commercialisation drive to make their economic fortunes. The fact that a reasonable acreage of rubber could be managed by family labour alone prompted every enterprising person, irrespective of economic position, to appropriate land and cultivate rubber. It also brought changes in the geographic location of plantations - a shift from Central Travancore and Kannan Devan Hills that continued to be the epicentre of tea, to Southern Travancore and Mundakayam area. It was mostly the Syrian Christians, who led this indigenous plantation drive by investing their capital in establishing new estates or smallholdings of rubber.

The Syrian Christians are identified as the group who benefited most from the new situation as they were more entrepreneurial and much more dynamic and flexible than other communities. It is argued that their strong farming tradition, their patrilineal system of inheritance and their patriarchal family structure had all bestowed on them greater dynamism and entrepreneurship. The training that many Syrian Christians got under the foreign planters in planting agronomy and processing, as supervisors, managers or clerks also allowed them to start, at a later date, their own enterprises and successfully run it.<sup>109</sup> The collapse of the native state, demilitarisation of Travancore and a British dominated commercial system heaved them out of their traditional economic niches.<sup>110</sup> The community had to recreate itself in that compelling situation by making use of the burgeoning economic system. The newspapers with a predominantly Christian readership, time and again published articles calling their people to 'use our land for our progress' and encouraged them to practice commercial agriculture. This allowed them to switch in accordance with the demands of the rapidly

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109 See for a detailed discussion, Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 151-162.

110 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 282-90.

changing economic dynamics.<sup>111</sup> Christians were also at an advantageous position as they already inhabited the regions that emerged as rubber plantation zones like North Travancore and Mundakayam. It allowed them to appropriate all potential plantation lands and exploit it.<sup>112</sup> It was also true that large-scale alienation of Nair lands, especially following the Nair Regulation of 1924 benefited Syrian Christians. The Depression of 1930s provided an opportunity to wealthy and land hungry Syrian Christians to purchase cheap lands abandoned by European planters. Syrian Christians enjoyed better access to financial resources than other communities, as they possessed common funding firms like *chittis* or *kuris* that allowed them to save and /or borrow according to the demands of the situation.<sup>113</sup> Travancore had a strong network of banks, mostly run and benefited by the Syrian Christians, with a rural concentration and financing significantly to agriculture.<sup>114</sup>

This transformation was also a result of a sustained campaign from a ‘nationalistic’ position since the turn of the twentieth century against the pro-European policy and legal framework in the case of plantations. The intervention through the press, especially through *Nazrani Deepika* and *Malayala Manorama*, unleashed a campaign with a theme something like ‘our land for ourselves’. The editorial in *Malayala Manorama* regretted that “Europeans are moving heaven and earth to corner all our available land” and asserted that they were not entitled to the fertile land in Travancore.<sup>115</sup> Both the newspapers criticised the

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111 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 151-52. A community with its coastal/urban concentration began to move towards interior and it was only by 1961 the proportion of Christians in the rural areas outnumbered that of the urban areas of Kerala; See Varghese, “The Alluring Music of Labour,” pp. 515-518.

112 Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences*, p. 119.

113 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 160-61. Modern commercial banks had its genesis in Travancore from such informal financial institutions.

114 See for details, Oommen, “Rise and Growth of Banking in Kerala.”

115 Quoted in Haridasan, *Management of Plantations*, p. 34.

Travancore government bluntly for promoting the interests of foreigners at the expense of the natives.<sup>116</sup> The issue gradually found its place in the discussions of Travancore Legislative council, where members agreed in general that neither the state nor the people had benefited from the new forms of agriculture and novel utilisation of land.<sup>117</sup> As a result of the Brooke Bond controversy of 1920s and the fierce debate it generated, it was decided to give preference to the subjects of Travancore in the allocation and registration of lands suitable for plantation cultivation.<sup>118</sup>

The rhetoric of Travancore land for Travancoreans also coincided with a systematic withdrawal of the British colonial administration from the internal affairs of the princely states, a measure taken in response to the growing influence of the national movement.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, a collective native commonsense in favour of more and more reclamation of land for the national development, which were lost to the human industry so far, was being structured. A simultaneous move was set off to increase the food grain production in the state, especially from 1930s. Commercialised agriculture as exemplified by the European planters began to be valued as the safe model to be adopted for progress. The result was the expansion of plantations further through the local agency. Learned from the previous experience of getting encroachments legalised colonisation of land by outright encroachments into hills, forests and wastelands occurred in a big way at this point. People did not wait for government notifications to take land and colonisation often preceded legalisation. The fact that there was no specific law regarding the allotment and taxation of government land for rubber

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116 Ibid, pp. 34-35.

117 Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, p. 167.

118 Ibid, pp. 167-172.

119 Though it started formally after the Queen Victoria's proclamation in 1858, the well-known Udaipur speech of Lord Minto in 1905 was the one that virtually inaugurated an era of active British non-interference in the internal affairs of the princely states.

cultivation accelerated land hunger. The result was massive land colonisation to bring government land under cultivation. Consequently, in the first half of twentieth century, Travancore was ahead of all other regions in South India in terms of the extension of plantations. In the case of tea 52 per cent (50,296 acres) in 1925, 49 per cent (76,659 acres) in 1935 and 49 per cent (78,700 acres) in 1948 was the share of Travancore in the total acreage in South India. The accomplishment of the state was even more impressive in rubber with 63 per cent (37,98 acres) in 1925, 67 per cent (49,553 acres) in 1934 and 72 per cent (110,012 acres) in 1948 of the total acreage under rubber cultivation.<sup>120</sup>

### **Small Holdings and the Scramble for Land**

The growing acceptance of commercial agriculture leading to the proliferation of plantations altered the landscape of the state as well. One may not get a sense of the quantum of alteration as the official statistics of plantations often do not include the smallholdings under plantation crops and those areas from where the government received no revenue. The steady increase of the share of smallholdings in the acreage under rubber in India amply testifies the rise in magnitude of this area as time progressed. The total area under rubber in India by 1938 was 99951 acres, out of which 64146 acres was in estates and 35805 acres was in smallholdings.<sup>121</sup> It increased by 1951 to 171191 acres with 103117 acres of estates and 54561 acres of holdings.<sup>122</sup> The acreage of holdings of rubber outstripped that of rubber estates by the end of 1957, 140432 acres as against 121566 acres of estates.<sup>123</sup> The share of the estates fell far behind that of holdings in 1961-62 - 138358.70 acres compared to 202755.77 acres of holdings in a total of 348114.47

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120 *UPASI Planting Directory*, respective issues; Baak, *Plantation, Production and Political Power*, pp. 163-64.

121 *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol I, 1958 (Kottayam, Rubber Board, 1958), p. 4.

122 *Ibid*, p. 7.

123 Together 261998 acres. See *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol I, 1958, p.4.

acres.<sup>124</sup> The acreage under holdings surpassed that of estates at an accelerated pace in the next decades. The share of holdings were 251708.41 acres, 337106.17 acres and 392350.32 acres for the years 1965-66, 1970-71 and 1975-76 respectively while it was 155297.40 acres, 164748.98 acres and 162211.26 acres respectively for estates.<sup>125</sup> The increase of the acreage under estates was marginal from mid 1950s onwards and it even declined from 164748.98 acres to 162211.26 acres between 1970-71 and 1975-76. Kerala in general and Travancore in particular, contributed almost all of the rubber produced in the country over the years; the contribution of other parts of India being negligible. Right from an early date, the small holdings under rubber in Travancore made spectacular progress. As early as 1925, out of the total 59518.33 acres of rubber in Travancore, smallholdings covered an area of 21712.06 acres, leaving the remaining 37806.27 acres under estates.<sup>126</sup> In 1935 it increased to 48498.18 acres out of the aggregate rubber acreage of 99075.45 acres.<sup>127</sup> The average area of smallholdings was about 4 acres in 1946 in India when average acreage of estates was 434 acres.<sup>128</sup> The average area of smallholdings continued to be 4 in 1950, but increased to 4.2 in 1954.<sup>129</sup> In spite of the huge increases in its acreage from 1955 onwards, the average size of the smallholding began to decline, which indicates more and more participation in rubber cultivation by clearing the 'available' land for the same. The acreage under smallholdings

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124 *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol X, 1967, p.11.

125 *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol X, 1967, p.13; *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol XII, 1971, pp. 9-12; *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol. XV, 1976, pp.1-4.

126 *List of Rubber Estates and Holdings in India excluding Burma for 1935*, published by P. Kurian John, Controller, Indian Rubber Licensing Committee, Kottayam, 1935.

127 Computed from the same source.

128 Sarma, *A Short Note on Rubber Plantation Industry in India*, p.2

129 Computed from 'Classification of Estates and Holdings According to size at the end of each year from 1950' in *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol I, 1958, p.7.



increased from 59184 to 89670 between 1954 and 1955. Smallholding units increased in the same period from 14169 to 26787, which also made the average size of a unit to dip from 4.2 to 3.5 acres. The acreage increased to 114294 in 1956 and the number of units to 35165 leaving an average size of a unit at 3.3 acres. The acreage increased to 140432 in 1957 and the number of units to 43516, reducing the average size of a unit to 3.2 acres.<sup>130</sup> From 1957 onwards the average area of smallholdings in Kerala as a whole also showed a similar declining trend. It was 3.15 acres in 1957, slightly increased to 3.28 in 1964-65, declined to 3 in 1970-71 and further decreased to 2.47 in 1975-76. Within Kerala, the average acreage of smallholdings in Travancore was the lowest. Even by 1960-61, the average area of smallholdings of the former Thiruvananthapuram districts was just 2.90 acres, while it was 6.86 in the districts of Malabar. In 1965-66, it decreased to 2.87 and 6.41 acres respectively and by 1969-70 it decreased further to 2.61 and to 5.43 acres. It declined again to 2.47 in Travancore by 1975-76 when Malabar, however, registered a marginal increase to 5.61 acres.<sup>131</sup> These data also point to the rapid exhaustion of land in Travancore and a far better situation in Malabar. By 1969-70, 96.7 per cent of the total smallholding rubber plantations in India were in Kerala state. Among the various districts in Kerala, Kottayam accounted for the highest percentage with 34.6 per cent of rubber smallholdings followed by Ernakulam and Quilon. Among the districts in Malabar region, Cannanore had 9.8 per cent of smallholdings in the country.<sup>132</sup>

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130 *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol I, 1958, p. 7.

131 'District wise trend in the planted area under Rubber' in *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol XV, 1976, pp.5-7.

132 Unny and Jacob, *Rubber Small Holdings in India*, p. 5. The percentage shares of various districts in Kerala to the total area under smallholdings rubber in India were as follows. Trivandrum – 4.2 per cent, Quilon – 14.2, Alleppey – 2.7, Kottayam – 34.6, Ernakulam – 15.4, Trichur – 2.2, Palghat – 1.7, Malappuram – 5.8, Kozhikkode – 6.1, Cannanore – 9.8, and a total of 96.7 per cent.

## Dearth of Food, Depression and Deaths

Forests and wastelands were brought under commercial agriculture as well as for food crop production as Travancore was undergoing severe food deficiency.<sup>133</sup> Even as there was expansion of area under commercial crops and subsistence food crops like tapioca, the production of rice, the staple food of the people, came down significantly in proportion to the population growth. It is pointed out that before the introduction of plantation crops, the cultivation of paddy was the site around which all other economic and non-economic activities of Travancore were organised.<sup>134</sup> In 1821, rice was cultivated in 474240 acres out of the total cultivated area of 702560 acres in Travancore, and it was one of the chief items of export from the state.<sup>135</sup> The area under rice remained more or less the same or declined marginally from 1921 to 1947. The acreage had increased from 474240 in 1821 to 657040 in 1921; increased to 696474 acres in 1931; declined to 649906 acres in 1941; and declined further to 621944 acres by the year of Indian independence.<sup>136</sup> On the other hand, the acreage of tapioca increased from 411500 in 1921 to 503522 by 1947. The extent of rubber increased from 500 acres in 1902 to 52363 acres in 1921 and to 113804 acres in 1947 and that of tea from 24711 in 1904 to 48797 acres in 1921 and to 98295 acres in 1947.<sup>137</sup>

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133 For instance, the acreage of tapioca, (considered to be a subsistence crop when rice was not available in the required quantum), increased from zero acreage in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to 411500 acres in 1921, 575631 acres in 1931, 494142 acres in 1941 and 503522 acres in 1947. Calculated from *Statistics of Travancore*, Respective Issues. Also see Table II.9 in Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, pp. 103-05.

134 Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, p. 6.

135 Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, pp. 78, 84.

136 Table II.9, Area under the various crops in Travancore (1921-41), in Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, pp. 103-05.

137 *Statistics of Travancore*, Respective Issues; *Report of the Rubber Small Holdings Economics Enquiry Committee*, p. 6; *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Vol I, p. 4; Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, pp. 103-05.

The enormous increase in the area under commercial crops could be seen as a consequence of a preferential treatment given to commercial agriculture over rice cultivation by the state as well as its people. The Government of Travancore pursued a policy of levying only a light tax on the plantation crops but taxed paddy heavily. Incentives were offered to take up plantation agriculture and plantation agriculture was in fact subsidized at the cost of paddy cultivation.<sup>138</sup> Government began large-scale import of rice from outside to ensure its availability at cheaper rates. From the point of view of farmers, paddy cultivation was unremunerative even during the depression when prices of plantation crops fell steeply, because the cost of production of plantation crops also fell sharply.<sup>139</sup> It was natural in such a situation that people preferred cultivating cash crops to food crops. Between 1921 and 1947 it is estimated that the acreage under paddy declined marginally in the Princely State, that of tapioca increased by 25 per cent, that of coconut increased by 30 per cent, that of rubber increased over 100 per cent and that of tea more than 100 per cent.<sup>140</sup> These changes in the cropping pattern were taking place at a time when the population of Travancore was increasing rapidly. The population, which was merely 13 lakhs in 1830s, rose to 29 lakhs in 1901, 39 lakhs in 1921, 51 lakhs in 1931, 61 lakhs in 1941 and to 72 lakhs in 1951.<sup>141</sup> As a result, in a state that had exported a significant quantity of rice, paddy and rice became the major items of imports from the 1880s. Paddy and rice together constituted 19

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138 Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, p. 66.

139 Ibid, p. 100.

140 Devi, *Plantation Economics of the Third World*, p. 6.

141 Ward and Conner's estimate for 1816 was 906,587 (p. 117); *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol I. pp. 374-75; *Census of Travancore*, Respective issues. The growth of the Christian population during this period was projected as spectacular. The Christians who constituted merely 4.6 per cent of the total population in 1820 shot up to 31.5 per cent in 1931. Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol I. pp. 388-89. According to the Census Report of 1941, the Christian population in Travancore increased by 181.1 percent between 1901 and 1941, with 633.7 percent increase in the Highland areas of the princely state, *Census of India; Travancore* (Vol. XXV), p. 241.

per cent of the total value of imports in 1880-81, shooting up to 41 per cent by 1910-11.<sup>142</sup> The value of rice and paddy import increased to Rs. 2,29,03,435 by 1923-24, further to Rs. 3,15,66,900 in 1927-28, when it constituted almost half of the total value of import to the state.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, we see a substantial increase in the value of export of plantation crops (here coffee, tea and rubber only). In 1870-71, they constituted only 8 percent of the total exports of the state, but increased to 22 per cent in 1910-11 and further to 36 per cent by 1942-43.<sup>144</sup>

For almost three decades, from the Great Depression of the 1930s, the people of Travancore suffered severe economic hardships in the form of fall of agricultural prices, agricultural indebtedness, severe unemployment, famine, nutritional diseases and the like. During the Depression, the prices of agricultural products fell steeply and the situation was particularly grim for the paddy cultivators. Their cost of production increased by at least 50 per cent,<sup>145</sup> while the prices of paddy came down drastically as a result of the Depression and the availability of cheap rice imported from Burma.<sup>146</sup> The state was suffering acute “cash famine” and agriculturists fell victims to huge debts. Unemployment situation became grave with estimates that at least 75,000 men were thrown out of work from the estates of Travancore alone, apart from a large number of Travancoreans working in Burma, Malaya, Ceylon, etc.<sup>147</sup> The dynamics of the Depression brought about severe agricultural indebtedness to rural Travancore.<sup>148</sup>

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142 *Travancore Administration Report and Travancore Trade Statistics*, Issues of 1880-81 and 1910-11.

143 *Ibid*, Issues of 1923-24 and 1927-28.

144 *Ibid*, Respective issues.

145 *Travancore Economic Depression Enquiry Committee Report*, p.18.

146 *Ibid*, p. 44.

147 *Travancore Unemployment Enquiry Committee Report*, pp. 1-37 and *TEDECR*, pp. 20-22.

148 *Report of the Agricultural Debt Redemption Committee; Travancore Banking Enquiry Committee Report*.

Economic distress was aggravated further by the Second World War, which also resulted in an unprecedented food scarcity in the state. The fall of Burma to Japan resulted in the cessation of rice imports from Burma from 1942. Consequently the price of rice had shot up and the State had to intervene to ensure supply of a minimum amount of staple food to its people.<sup>149</sup> The measures of control and regulation did not solve the problem as the deficit was enormous and the Government of India failed to supply adequate quantity of rice to the state.<sup>150</sup> The total deficit for the year 1943 was estimated to be 3,60,00 tonnes of rice and that of 1944 and 1945 even larger.<sup>151</sup> The quota received from the Government of India were 96,520 tonnes in 1943, 1,29,692 tonnes in 1944 and just 28,915 tonnes in 1945.<sup>152</sup> In the face of shortage of rice, reliance on tapioca increased heavily. The situation was so exigent that the Government prohibited the export of tapioca and fixed its price as well.<sup>153</sup> The gravity of the situation was such that the poorer middle classes began to live on one meal, the poor resorted to drinking greater quantities of rice gruel and consuming even boiled tapioca leaves; people even started to consume coconut oil cakes.<sup>154</sup> Articles, which were normally considered unfit for human consumption, were distributed to

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- 149 For details of measures taken up by the government to regulate the supply of food stuffs, see *Food Control in Travancore: Orders, Notifications, Rules, Press Notes and Press Communiqués*, pp.1- 140.
- 150 Rice was reported to be sold in the black market for a price ranging between Rs. 45 and Rs. 56 per bag of 162 lbs in Kottayam during those days as against a pre-war price of Rs. 8 and a controlled price of Rs. 30. Sivaswamy, "The Exodus from the Kottayam Division of Travancore to Malabar (1943 and 1944)" in *The Exodus from Travancore to Malabar Jungles*, Surveys by K.G. Sivaswamy et.al, p.1.
- 151 Sivaswamy, "Food Shortage and State Controls" in *Food Famine and Nutritional Diseases*, Surveys by K.G Sivaswamy et.al, p. 125.
- 152 Ibid, pp. 124-25.
- 153 Ibid, p. 144.
- 154 Ibid, pp. 144-45.

pacify hunger.<sup>155</sup> As a result of dearth of food, there were various diseases and excessive deaths. In 1940-41 alone there were 69,248 registered deaths in Travancore. But the actual number of deaths might have been much more than the registered ones as many deaths were not reported to the authorities. According to one estimate actual deaths in 1940-41 were 1,03,872.<sup>156</sup> It was 1,00,692 in 1941-42 (registered 67,131), 1,20,956 in 1942-43 (registered 80,637) and 1,27,880 in 1943-44 (registered 85,253).<sup>157</sup>

Strategies were devised to counter the distress, starvation and deaths. The Government on its part started the 'Grow More Food Programme,' allowed the peasants to cultivate forests and wastelands, technically under some restrictions but practically under none, for overcoming the food crisis. The 'forward looking peasants', who had already developed a passion for land in the problematic of economic modernity unleashed by colonialism, took the risk of migrating and cultivating the malarial tracts of eastern Travancore, rather than suffering partial starvation and diseases. Cash crop cultivation and food crop agriculture began to go hand in hand at this stage of massive migration, as people needed food crops to survive and cash crops for quick economic progress. Thus, land was colonised massively and the government statistics substantiates that by 1951, 98.1 percent of the total area available for occupation came under cultivation in the princely state.<sup>158</sup> Once the land in central and eastern regions of Travancore was exhausted, the Syrian Christians, mostly small farmers, began to migrate to the undefiled tracts of British Malabar, where almost half of the area

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155 Dewan's statement in the Assembly, January, 1944, Referred in .Sivaswamy, "Food Shortage and State Controls", p. 144.

156 Sivaswamy, "Vital Statistics and Public Health" in *Food famine and Nutritional Diseases*, pp. 81-82.

157 See the table in Sivaswamy, "Vital Statistics and Public Health", p. 83.

158 Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences*, p. 124.

available for occupation, excluding the wastelands and forests, was yet to be brought under agriculture. Despite initial setbacks, the migrant communities, both in the regions of Travancore and in Malabar, began to make their fortunes by cultivating new tracts in the respective areas, which precipitated further population movement in search of land. By 1940s, the share of rice and paddy in the value of imports in Travancore began to decline significantly. It fell from almost 50 per cent in 1927-28 to 28.5 per cent in 1940-41 and to further to 15 percent in 1945-46.<sup>159</sup>

### **From Natural to Rational: Landscape in Transformation**

This general historical context explains the population movements inside Kerala in search of cultivable land and the alteration consequently of the landscape. The landscape, which was left in its 'natural state of affairs' was altered rationally for self and 'national' development. Land here was discovered as among the potential resources, most responsive to investments, economic mobility and progress. The migrant settlers who were waging a "great battle against nature for agricultural development of the country" were seen quite naturally as "our national assets."<sup>160</sup> In such developmental commonsense, forests, hill slopes and wastelands were looked down as 'empty' spaces to be colonised and rationally utilised for progress and well-being. The depletion of forests in Travancore, among other things, points to the consequence of such developmentalism. When Bourdillon prepared his report on the Travancore forests in 1892-93, 50 per cent of the land in Travancore was reported to be under forests.<sup>161</sup> It declined to 35 per cent by 1920s and to 32 per cent by 1940s.<sup>162</sup> Similarly areas under hill-cultivation (*virippu*

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159 *Travancore Trade Statistics*, Respective Issues; The fall during 1945-46 was mostly due to the cession of rice import from Burma.

160 Sivaswamy, "Exodus from the Kottayam Division...", p. 3.

161 Bourdillon, *Report on the Forests of Travancore*, pp.13-16.

162 Devi, *Plantation Economies of the Third World*, p. 59.

or *malamkrishi*) disappeared from the cropping map of Travancore, and were replaced by enterprises to utilise them ‘rationally’.<sup>163</sup> Unlike other parts of India, both tribal and non-tribal people in Travancore practiced shifting cultivation on the hills and slopes.<sup>164</sup> An editorial of *Malayala Manorama* during the early twentieth century gives an impression that the land available for shifting cultivation began to disappear swiftly when the planters started descending from hills to the slopes for taking up rubber cultivation.<sup>165</sup> Ward and Conner had reported that in 1821 about 1000 square miles of slopes were available for temporary cultivation of rice and various other dry grains.<sup>166</sup> As a result of the forest conservation initiatives on the one hand and plantation enterprises on the other had the total area devoted to hill cultivation had come down to 781 square miles by the time of Bourdillon’s forest survey.<sup>167</sup> Bourdillon believed that all the areas under hill cultivation were originally covered with heavy forest and disapproved of hill cultivation on grounds such as timber loss, forest loss, impoverishment of soil, wasting land, encouraging idleness among the cultivators, loss of time and labour and high mortality among the hill cultivators.<sup>168</sup> There was a steady flow of rice from the hills of Travancore even down to the coastal areas of the princely state till the early decades of the twentieth century, but the dual compulsions of conservation and commercial

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163 Rammohun, “Material Processes and Developmentalism,” pp. 68-69.

164 Pandiyan, *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change: Nanchilnadu*, p.124. Also in Bourdillon, pp. 117-118.

165 “Thiruvithamkotte European Thottakkar”, Editorial, *Malayala Manorama*, 20 October 1906; Cited from Rammohan, “Material Processes and Developmentalism,” pp. 69-70.

166 Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, p. 3

167 Bourdillon, *Report on the Forests of Travancore*, p. 112; Rammohun, “Material Processes and Developmentalism,” pp. 68-69.

168 *Ibid*, pp. 114-118.



agriculture has made even the residents of the hilly areas to rely upon the imported Burmese rice.<sup>169</sup> The disappearance of *virippu* area by mid 20<sup>th</sup> century thereafter indicates that they went into the hands of planters and the ‘forward looking peasants’.

In short, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Travancore was inducted into the modern world economy through plantation agriculture which drastically modified the native landscape. This had a pedagogic impact on the natives, especially on those who were exposed to the new agronomy as subordinate managerial personnel in the colonial plantations. The Syrian Christians had other advantages too that made them more enterprising than others, especially in relation to land. The new discourse of development engendered a spirited drive for land reclamation for agriculture. The peculiar economic problematic of Travancore structured during colonialism and the consequent economic peril in the princely state quickened the change. A ‘forward looking community’ fashioned accordingly was ready to leave its native places in search of virgin soil, which became the most valued asset by then for progress and mobility.

### **Migration as the Panacea: A New Social Imaginary**

Thus, historical circumstances seem to have favoured land colonisation and migrations for the same as a panacea for the economic crisis and anxieties of development at a particular historical conjuncture. Two different sorts of migration could be easily identified: one centred on plantations and wealth creation, led by a wealthy section of entrepreneurs it has taken the service of nationalism and patriotism; and the other pinned on the moral right of the family to survive and on the princely state’s inability to govern. Instituting bio-politics as its driving imperative, the second one largely set the tone of the discursive matrix

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169 G. Raman Menon, “Thiruvithamkurile Uppum Chorum,” 14 August 1929, *Deepika*.

and constituted a *purogamana karshakan* around the Syrian Christian migrant farmer. The discursive formation, getting structured right from the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, was particularly provoked by the unprecedented economic crisis and food scarcity of the 1930s. Economic peril forced a significant section of people, mainly Syrian Christians, to leave their tiny holdings in their native villages and migrate to the upland regions of Travancore. The discursive context was in support of such spatial movements for a rational/appropriate use of ‘abundant’ natural wealth around. The state, where “a third of the area... is occupied by the reserve forests,” was urged not to “consider it a serious contraction of the forest area to throw open for cultivation about four or five hundred thousand acres of forest land, in view of the great benefits thereby accruing to the people.”<sup>170</sup> Dr. P. J. Thomas, a well-known economist and economic advisor to the Government of India (1945-48) made a call for ‘appropriate’ utilisation of “unexploited natural resources and labour power” as a solution to the problem.<sup>171</sup> The situation was such that it was difficult to understand “why lakhs of people [were] suffering without land for cultivation or stay” when one third of the total area of the state was “mere reserved forests.”<sup>172</sup> There are occasions when even *Mathrubhumi*, which allegedly had a predilection for conservation of forests and prevention of denudation, wonders “how could we resolve our food scarcity without suitably utilising the soil and manpower here.”<sup>173</sup> The

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170 Minute by Mr. Thariathu Kunjithomman, in *Travancore Economic Depression Enquiry Committee Report*, p. 168.

171 “Janavardhana Thadayukayalla, Ulppadhanathe Vardhippikkukayanu Vendathu—Dr. P. J. Thomas,” 7 April, 1938, *Nazrani Deepika*. Dr. Thomas was unable to understand why ‘people live in poverty in the midst of great natural wealth’, “Prakrithi Sambathinte Nadukku Pattiniyum Thozhilillaymayum—P. J. Thomas”, 11 August, 1952, *Mathrubhumi*.

172 Editorial, “Sadhukkalkku Poduve Colony Erppeduthanam,” 28 January, 1939, *Nazrani Deepika*. Forest was represented as ‘abandoned’, ‘forsaken’, ‘put down’ or ‘empty’ space. See for instance, ‘Ozhichidappetta Vanangal’, 9 April 1929, *Nazrani Deepika*.

173 Editorial, “Wayanad Colonisation,” 9 January 1952, *Mathrubhumi*.

Communists too thought that ‘cultivation of all wastelands’ along with modernisation of agricultural practice was the correct way to overcome poverty and food shortage.<sup>174</sup> The call was to “pledge not to leave even a single inch of land uncultivated.”<sup>175</sup> Once the land in the eastern/central regions of Travancore was exhausted, Syrian Christians, mostly small farmers, began to migrate to forests and wastelands in Malabar and subsequently to the adjoining Tamil and Kannada speaking areas.

The initial setbacks of the migrant communities both in the eastern region of Travancore and in Malabar soon turned into their success stories in the ‘inhospitable’ territories, precipitating further migration. This was the result of a process of translation of the development model, exemplified by the colonialists, by the princely state and ‘its people’ in tune with their requirements and capabilities. Such an exercise of translated internalisation of the development form generated a particular discourse of development which was against the retention of geo-spaces of hills, wastelands and forests and in favour of their expropriation to resolve the crisis and ensure ‘our’ development. Migration and subsequent extension of cultivation gained recognition as the appropriate way out of economic exigency, and a move towards progress and well-being. Clearing of woodlands and cultivation of ‘wastes’ became signs of progress. A ‘social imaginary’ was in the making that was not only unenthusiastic about uncultivated landscape but passionate in advocating migrations for agricultural

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174 Namboodiripad, “Onnekal Kodi Malayalikal” (1946), in *E. M. S. Sampoorana Krithikal*, Vol. 6, pp. 294, 345. The communist support to the migrants in the anti-eviction movements in the 1960s is another testimony of its predilection to a development conduit by making use of the unused landscapes; See for a detailed discussion, Varghese, “Memory as History,”

175 Namboodiripad, “Orinju Bhoomiyum Verutheyidillennu Prathinjha Cheyyuka,” in *E. M. S. Sampoorana Krithikal*, Vol. 20, pp. 238-39.

expansion and prosperity.<sup>176</sup> In this new ‘social imaginary’, certain practices and operations became reasonable and normal while other earlier practices lost their vitality and acceptability.

A negative view of woodlands and wastes went along with a feeling that being lethargic, when “Europeans were moving heaven and earth to corner all *our* available land,” was ‘*unpatriotic*’ (emphasis added).<sup>177</sup> The Syrian Christians proved to be ‘more patriotic’ in this regard and unleashed a spirited drive for domesticating the wild to the extent that “withdrawal from agriculture would become a virtual pulling out from life itself for them.”<sup>178</sup> The migrant settlers in the undomesticated spaces were epitomised as a ‘national asset’ who need “every kind of encouragement and assistance in the great battle they are waging against nature for the agricultural development of the country.”<sup>179</sup> The transformation of the wilder terrains into locations of production and opulence, “a story of man’s valiant battle with the nature and at the cost *our* resilient farmers’ sweat and blood,” became a matter of great pride.<sup>180</sup> Taming the recalcitrant nature and producing for themselves, for feeding

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176 The ‘social imaginary’ may not be absolute but it was shared undoubtedly by large groups of people. It structures a ‘common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy’. Charles Taylor defines ‘social imaginary’ as ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations’. It is both factual and normative: not only a sense of how things usually go but also of how they ought to go; Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 23- 30.

177 Citations are from the Editorial, *Malayala Manorama*, 2 December 1905, quoted in Haridasan, *Management of Plantations*, p. 34. Articles in both *Malayala Manorama* and *Nazrani Deepika*, two leading Syrian Christian dailies of the time, often wondered ‘why the people of our country are not entering the field’ when the profit is more than that of ‘selling gold cut out from gold mines’.

178 See, for a detailed discussion on the Christian daring in this regard and their tremendous achievements, Editorial, “Krishi Parivarthanavum Christian Missionarimarum,” 1 & 2 August 1950, *Malayala Manorama*.

179 Sivaswamy et al, *The Exodus from Travancore to Malabar Jungles*, p. 3.

180 Gopalan, *Ente Jeevithakatha*, pp. 305-07.

their fellow citizens and for the progress of nation endowed the migrant farmers with a distinctive moral authority as productive and industrious citizens.<sup>181</sup> They were given adulation for making agriculture a decent means of life, ensuring the agricultural progress of the country, and converting ‘empty’ spaces into gold yielding ‘paradises’.<sup>182</sup> Unsurprisingly the “sacrificing migrant heroes,” with “strong self-reliance, amazing ability of hard work and ceaseless courage,” became subjects of Malayalam literary creations as early as 1948.<sup>183</sup> Even the Nairs, who had once looked down on the economic activities of the Syrian Christians ‘with lordly disdain’, began to appreciate their migratory enterprise; the Nair leader Mannath Padmanabhan exhorted his brethren to “migrate, colonise ten or twenty acres of land and cultivate.”<sup>184</sup> He regretted that most of the Nair youth dissipate their

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- 181 K.C. Joseph Karuvachira, “Malabar Rangam, Nattukar Ariyendathu,” 26 November 1949, *Deepika*; Varkey M. Maruthanamkuzhi, “Wayanattil Chennal Kanhivellam Kutichu Marikkam,” 18-19 April 1950, *Deepika*; “Malabarile Colanikal,” 26 March 1961, *Malayala Manorama*; “Keralathile Kutiyettaprasnam Oru Puthiya Sameepanareethi Aavasyam,” 20 October 1961, *Malayala Manorama*; T.A. Mathew, “Malabar Karshaka Sangham: Malabarile Vanangale Vilabhumiyyakkunnavare Sahayikkanulla Sanghatana,” 18 December 1953, *Deepika*; “Malabarinte Malayorangalil,” series of articles in *Mathribhumi*, between March and July 1961.
- 182 “Malabarile Kutiyettakkar,” 31 October 1950, *Deepika*; “Krishi Parivarthanavum Christian Missionarimarum,” 1-2 August 1950, *Malayala Manorama*; “Malabarinte Aishwaryam Vardhichu Kutiyettakkarude Aagamanathodukoodi,” 13 February 1950, *Deepika*; “Malabarile Kutiyettakkarude Chila Avasathakal,” 19 February 1952, *Deepika*; Sebastian C. Vadakkayil, “Malabar Kutiyettam, Athengane Vijayapradham Aakkam,” 1 Januray 1954, *Deepika*.
- 183 Pottekkatt, Preface to the First Edition, *Vishakanyaka*, p. 5; See for a detailed discussion, Varghese, “Migrant Narratives.”
- 184 Mannathu Padmanabhan advocated that the Nairs should change their mentality and turn to and practice agriculture. He called upon them to migrate to Malabar, Mysore or wherever land is available: “Get at least ten acres of land each, if you die of malarial fever let it be, it is better to die by doing hard work for life than dying of starvation without employment and food”; quoted in Harindranath Kurup, *Mannath Padmanabhan*, p. 171. NSS under Mannam made efforts to make use of the opportunities opened up by Malabar migration by opening Nelliampathy estate and Panathady colony and attempted to get Kottiyoor Devaswam land by lease.

time in sleeping and festivities when the “white foreigners are making the awful hills in the eastern side heavenly” and were “living in royal status” and Christians were acquiring wealth and progressing by conscientiously toiling in the eastern hills.<sup>185</sup> He was clear-cut in his conviction that “any community that refuses to migrate would not progress anywhere at anytime.”<sup>186</sup> The Izhavas too quickly recognised the economic potential of migrations for progress and well-being of their people, though they could not intervene in the enterprise in an ‘organised’ manner as the Nair Service Society did.<sup>187</sup> Between 1930 and 1960, migration and agricultural expansion were deliberated widely as a solution for food scarcity, economic crisis and population growth; even migration to countries like Brazil and states like Madhya Pradesh were mooted as options.<sup>188</sup> The historical conjuncture was one where

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185 He asks his people to emulate the British and the Christians as a way to regain their lost ‘royal status’; see, Mannathu Padmanabhan, ‘Athmavisvasavum Swasrayasheelavum Valarthuka’, speech delivered in the Kothamangalam Karayogam meeting, 1928, in *Mannathu Padmanabhante Prasangangal*, pp. 5-7.

186 ‘Kutiyeri Parkkatha Samudayam Oridathum Orukalathum Nannavukayilla—Mannam’, 18 May 1955, *Deepika*.

187 By 1930s migration began to be seen by Izhavas too as a way to escape from poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation. Various options were open before them: migrating to the high ranges of Kerala and abroad, migrating to north Malabar for agriculture, joining the army and leaving home and migrating to urban centres of India for various jobs; see, Osella and Osella, *Social Mobility in Kerala*, pp. 75-77.

188 *Malayala Manorama* and *Deepika* continuously deliberated on the possibilities of migrations, variously, to Madhya Pradesh, the Andamans, Brazil, East Africa and so on. Among the Indian states, Madhya Pradesh was much preferred because, reportedly, while the ‘density of population is 1000 per square mile’ in Travancore, it was just 153 in Madhya Pradesh. See, “Madhya Pradeshathu Laksham Thiru-Kochi Kudumbangal Kutiyerunna Karyam Planning Commission Aalochikkunnu,” 10 January 1956, *Deepika*. Such articles and others recommending Africa, South America, Canada, Australia and so on, and calling for a supportive international policy appeared quite frequently in *Deepika*. For instance, Dr. L.J. Chittoor (“Kutiyettam” 27 November 1960, *Deepika*) invokes the Papal indoctrination that ‘wealth of the world is for all human beings’ and calls for the termination of all international regulations that disallow people moving across the world and sharing its riches.

‘spatial movement’ in search of wildernesses to be tamed by agriculture acquired a talismanic status.<sup>189</sup> Needless to say, this ‘social imaginary’ conceded hardly any space for the concerns of environment or for previous inhabitants of areas under reclamation. The overwhelming response to newspaper and journal articles that explored and examined possible destinations for migration and settlement indicates that migration had come to stay in the Malayalee mind as the right conduit for mobility and progress.<sup>190</sup>

The larger question involved in this local story is the complex relationship between the transference of western technologies of agriculture to the colonies and local responses to it. As different from the formulation of Daniel R. Headrick, who argues that colonial transference of technologies was not accompanied by a corresponding cultural transmission, caused mainly due to a failure of colonial ‘schooling’,<sup>191</sup> it could be seen here that colonial intervention changed the mentalities of the local people enabling them to view their own landscapes in new ways. The transmission and reception processes also cannot be a one-to-one and straight devolution; the outcome is bound

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189 This doesn’t mean that there were no other discourses of development at this historical conjuncture. There were subordinate discourses like that advocates green agriculture. See Santhakumar, “Technology in Kerala Agriculture”.

190 Dr. P.J. Thomas, then a Member of Parliament, wrote an article on the chances of large-scale migration to Brazil (‘Kutiyettam: Keralathinte Adiyanthira Aavashyam’ [Migration: A Pressing Need of Kerala], 15 August 1958, *Deepika*). He was stunned by the response (over 400 people wrote to him in person) and was forced to write again (‘Brazil Kutiyettam: Prayogiga Vasangal’ [Migration to Brazil: Practical Considerations], 25 September 1958, *Deepika*) requesting people not to write to him and that he would definitely intimate them of details through newspapers as and when the Brazilian authorities provided clearance. However, he continued to receive responses and queries, which forced him to repeat his request to the people not ‘to write to him on the subject anymore!’ (‘Kutiyettam Sanghatithamay Venam’ [Migration Should be Organized], 11 November 1958, *Deepika*).

191 Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*, pp. 209-11.

to differ in its configurations and priorities according to the requirements of the receiving context. The colonial imagination that posited wilderness as a threat to civilisation and a resource with enormous potential at the same time, found a local trajectory with changes in the intensity of participation, preference of crops, shift of locations and strategies of legitimation. 'Peasant agriculture' and 'commercial agriculture' were practiced together with the application of what could be considered as 'ordinary' and 'parochial' agricultural technologies. Moreover, hard work became an all-justifying ideology that legitimated the human transformative labour on untamed landscapes.

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