A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

P. MOHANDAS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

2005

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CERTIFICATE

I do hereby declare that this thesis entitled "A Historical Study of the Colonial Investments in Malabar and the Nilgiris in the Nineteenth Century" is a record of bona fide research carried out by Shri. P. Mohandas under my supervision at the University of Calicut. This work has not been published or submitted either in part or in whole, for any degree at any University.

Calicut University
15-05-05

Dr. K.K.N. KURUP
Former Professor & Head
Dept of History
University of Calicut

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PREFACE

The present study is an attempt to analyse the colonial capital investments in Malabar and the Nilgiris during the 19th century. This study evaluates the numerous economic activities undertaken by emerging western capitalist forces in this region in the field of plantations. British colonialism during this period concentrated mainly on the appropriation of natural resources and a systematic establishment of plantations. The first ever of such plantations was in Anjarakkandy or Randathara, followed by the coffee, tea, and other plantations in other parts of India. Along with this they exploited forest resources, particularly timber. Teak became a major item of 'export' from India. Though the study is confined to the exploitation of natural resources through plantations, the labour aspect of the plantation system has also been dealt with. Thus the present study investigates into the type of systematic exploitation initiated by the colonial regime during the 19th century, which paved the way for the drain of wealth from one of the potential regions of South India viz. Malabar and the Nilgiris.

The pattern of documentation adopted in this thesis follows the style guide published by the Indian Council of Historical Research. It is hoped that there would be no difficulty in following the method adopted here.

I am grateful to those who helped me during the course of the preparation of this dissertation. No words can convey my sincere thanks to Dr. K.K.N. Kurup, former head of the Department of History and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calicut, who supervised this work. He not only encouraged me

but also initiated me into historical studies. Without his support and inspiration this work would not have been possible. I am also indebted to all other teachers and friends in the Department of History, University of Calicut, for their sincere co-operation. I am also thankful to Dr. K.V. Kunhikrishnan, former Registrar, Cochin University of Science and Technology; Dr. C.H. Jayasree, Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode; Dr. V.V. Kunhikrishnan and Dr. M.T. Narayanan for their sincere help. I am also thankful to the University Grants commission for awarding me a Teacher Fellowship for pursuing this research programme.

I acknowledge with gratitude the service rendered to me by the staff of Tamil Nadu Archives, Egmore, Chennai; Connimara Library, Chennai; Kerala State Archives, Nalanda, Thiruvananthapuram; Kerala University Library, Thiruvananthapuram; Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; The Nilgiris Library, Ooty; UPASI Library, Coonoor; C.H. Muhammad Koya Memorial Library, Calicut University; Kannur University Library, Kannur; Malabar Institute for Research and Development, Vatakara; and Krishna Menon Memorial Government Women's College Library, Kannur.

Above all I am deeply indebted to my family members for their constant inspiration, support and suffering throughout the course of my studies.

Calicut University
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDS	Centre for Development Studies
CWS	Co-operative Wholesale Society
MCR	Malabar Collectorate Records
MSC	Malabar Special Commission
PDSI	Planting Directory of South India
RAMP	Report of Administration of Madras Presidency
RSIPEC	Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee
TNSA	Tamil Nadu State Archives
UPASI	United Planters Association of South India

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The present study, "A Historical Study of the Colonial Investments in Malabar and the Nilgiris in the Nineteenth Century" is an attempt to analyse the impact of colonial capital investments in the plantations of Malabar and the Nilgiris during the nineteenth century. Malabar and the Nilgiris, like other parts of South India, were regions with immense resource potentials. This includes natural resources, human resources and the very environment itself. The colonial rule which dominated the land for about two centuries exploited these resources to the maximum damaging the rich biodiversity and ecological balance.

The systematic exploitation of natural resources of Malabar and the Nilgiris began during the late eighteenth century itself and it was intensified by nineteenth century. Though the British started with the cultivation of spices, new products were introduced later and a proper system of plantations was started by 1840. The Europeans were successful in linking these plantation products with the international market and thus South India was exposed to the world capitalist system.

This capitalist plantation system was new to the traditional agricultural operations which were prevalent in South India during the pre-colonial period. With the introduction of the plantations, the pre-colonial agrarian

system underwent tremendous changes and new agrarian relations based on capitalism emerged in Malabar and the Nilgiris by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Objectives of the Study

1. The major objective of the study is to bring forth the gravity of colonial intervention in the two major regions of South India, viz. Malabar and the Nilgiris. It is confined mainly to the plantation sector during the nineteenth century.

2. To show the strategy of resource appropriation by the colonial regime and its multi-faceted project of resource exploitation in these regions of South India.

3. To reveal how British colonialism exploited the human labour power, human expertise, the climatic and scenic peculiarities of the region and the vast forest resources with valuable timber and the like.

4. To show the process of resource drain to the European world from these South Indian regions.

Significance of the Period

The period under discussion is one of the significant periods in the history of colonial India. India was linked to the international market and the Indian goods were in great demand in England as well as in other European countries during this period. This contributed to the growth and development of a colonial capitalist economy in India.

This happened during a period when the British faced political turmoil within and outside the Empire. In the Indian subcontinent there emerged several forces fighting against the domination of Great Britain and it resulted in a series of rebellions that culminated in the great struggle of 1857.

The global competition for the domination over the world required the control of the seas. This created a huge demand for commodities like timber. The British wanted to dominate the seas which they thought was the only way to control the whole world. With this in view they brought the forest and timber resources in South India under their firm control. When the supply of oak became scarce in Europe, the Indian teak played a prominent role in the ship building activities of Great Britain. For that purpose they even started a plantation in Malabar known as 'Conolly Teak Plantations,' named after the then district collector of Malabar.

The nineteenth century was a significant period not only in the history of colonial political domination but also in the history of their economic supremacy. By the nineteenth century, the British colonial masters had almost completed their exploration of the natural resources in India, including South India. The plantation system introduced by them was part of a larger economic activity intended for the appropriation of the resources in the Asiatic countries. In conjunction with the investments in plantations they also started joint stock companies for manufacturing agro-implements and for supporting the development of agro industries. They also made attempts for gold mining in South India, but this was a failure.

But this study confines itself to the plantation sector alone. Thus it is to be noted that the period under discussion was one of the significant periods in the political and economic realms as far as the colonial domination in South India is concerned.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

So far no serious attempt has been made to analyse in detail the socio-economic impact of the capital investments in the plantations of Malabar and the Nilgiris during the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons for the absence of such a serious analysis is the dearth of adequate source material. The authenticity of the source material is another important factor. It is only through a scientific and objective analysis of the different sources that a clear picture of the period under consideration can be gained. Therefore a crucial problem faced by a researcher is the non-availability of adequate source material regarding the economic activities and the establishment of the early plantations during the early nineteenth century. This, in turn, points to the limitations of the work.

As mentioned earlier, the period under discussion was significant in the economic as well as the political history of Malabar. This can be considered the formative period of the colonial economy in India. But the South Indian regions including Malabar and the Nilgiris had their own peculiar economic significance due to the natural resources, environmental peculiarities and human resource potentialities. A close analysis of the archival sources especially the Malabar

Collectorate Records, Administrative Reports of Madras Presidency and journals such as *Planting Opinion* and *Planters Chronicle* will give us a picture of how the colonial government encouraged, in a systematic way, the European officials and non-officials to invest capital in commercial agriculture to make more profit. This study also tries to show clearly how in its attempt to systematize commercial agricultural activity the colonial state intervened 'positively' to make the land and labourers available to the planters under liberal terms. Viewed from this angle it can be seen that the much projected abolition of slavery and the change in land system were part of the broad policies of the colonial state to appropriate the socio-political situation to their favour. In the Nilgiris, the colonial state not only appropriated the natural resources but even the climate and the environment. These aspects of colonialism in Malabar and the Nilgiris have been analysed in this study by making optimum use of the available source materials.

The use of the terms 'Malabar' and the 'Nilgiris' is also to be explained here. The etymology of the term Malabar has very often led to much confusion. The term Malabar was used by the foreign travellers and writers to denote the Kerala coast. Al-Biruni appears to have been the first person to call the coast *Malabar*. Anyhow, the word Malabar is of foreign origin. The first two syllables are almost certainly the ordinary Dravidian word 'Mala' (hill, mountain) and 'bar' are probably the Arabic word 'Barr,' (continent) or the Persian 'barr,' (country). Malabar may therefore be taken to mean the hilly or mountainous country, a name well suited to its physical characteristics.

The term, 'Nilgiris,' means blue mountains. (Nila—blue, giri—mountain or hill). The area, which is under discussion, is the present Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu State. It was a part of Coimbatore district and later became an independent district under Madras presidency. This area was thus called by the people living on the plains, in view of the violet blossoms of the 'Kurinji' flower enveloping the hill ranges during its season.

Approach and Methodology

The present study is both descriptive and analytical. In this work an attempt has been made to give a narrative account of the establishment of plantations at different parts of Malabar and the Nilgiris from its origin to the close of the nineteenth century. At the same time the work tries to analyse how they managed to appropriate land, human and natural resources.

In this opening chapter, a general discussion of the study has been made. The significance of the study, the methodology and its limitations have been outlined.

In the second chapter, an attempt is made to trace the historical background of Malabar and the Nilgiris. In the case of Malabar, the present work tries to examine the political, social and economic changes that took place due to the colonial domination as well as the important features of the traditional society during the nineteenth century. Regarding the case of the Nilgiris, an attempt is made to analyse the chief features of the Nilgiris, its flora and fauna, its climatic and environmental potentialities and the 'discovery' and establishment of a hill

station in this land (perhaps the earliest hill station in colonial India) by the colonial masters. The study also analyses how John Sullivan, the then Coimbatore District Collector, was instrumental to the establishment of Udagamandalam or Ooty as a hill station.

The third chapter deals with the establishment of the first ever plantation in India, known as Anjarakkandy or Randathara plantations. Randathara was a portion of land assigned to the East India Company by the Prince of Chirakkal as a surety for the payment of debt in 1765. It is situated on the banks of Anjarakkandy River. Murdock Brown, a merchant of Mahe, who joined the service of the East India Company in 1793, started the plantation in 1797. During the early period the plantation had many crops like coffee, cinnamon, pepper and cardamom. But later it was transformed into a cinnamon plantation. This first attempt was very much encouraged by the Company officials in Bombay, especially Governor Jonathan Duncan. Due to the influence of Murdock Brown or the Bombay officials of the East India Company, Governor Duncan was appointed as the Deputy Commissioner of Police. He was given full charge of the planting operations as the Manager and Overseer of the new plantation scheme. The company gave Brown liberal grants during the inception of the plantation scheme and also during the different stages of its development. Brown employed slave labourers on a large scale even against the declared policies of the Company. Brown started the plantation with 200 acres of land and extended it within five years, to 3000 acres. This was done through legal and illegal means. He even encroached upon the property of local

landlords. But by 1802 Murdock Brown transferred the ownership of the plantation to his own personal account. This experiment in plantation in Malabar was the earliest in India and it developed into the biggest cinnamon plantation in Asia. It denoted a new phase of the emerging capitalist agriculture. The chapter also discusses the labour issues involved in the plantations during that period.

The fourth chapter is an examination of the emergence of organised coffee and tea plantations in the region of Wayanad. It analyses the colonisation of Wayanad and the important features of the Wayanad plantations. Wayanad is known for its coffee plantations. There was a heavy rush of European planters during the middle of the nineteenth century. About 30,000 acres of land were brought under cultivation during this period. After analysing these features of early coffee plantations the chapter gives details of the estates and the total area under cultivation. The chapter explores the background of tea cultivation in Wayanad. The growth and development of tea as a beverage and the progress of tea gardens in Wayanad are also discussed. The organised cultivation of tea by the joint stock companies like Parry & Company, Harrison & Crossfield, Pierce-Leslie and Kerala Tea Company are also analysed in this chapter. The labour issue of the Wayanad plantations is another topic of discussion in this chapter. In the last part of the chapter there is a brief analysis of the forest policies of the colonial government and the consequent deforestation in the area.

Chapter Five discusses the growth of Nilambur teak plantations. It explores how the forest policy of the colonial government was detrimental to the region of Malabar. Along with other agricultural crops, timber and other forest resources, were also widely used by the imperial powers to rule over the native states in Asiatic regions. Teak timber was used on a large scale for ship building due to the scarcity of oak in Europe. The chapter also discusses the early activities of the East India Company regarding the forest and timber and analyses the background of the establishment of the Conolly Teak Plantations in 1840. It traces the early attempts of the authorities of the East India Company to obtain plantation sites during this period. This chapter explores how the colonial administrators made use of the native expertise in the development of teak plantations. The example of Chathu Menon a sub-conservator of Nilambur forest is specially mentioned here. The scientific cultivation of teak and the use of native labour force for the plantation are the other topics discussed in this chapter.

The sixth chapter attempts a brief analysis of the development of the Nilgiri plantations during the nineteenth century. It traces the background of the coffee cultivation in the region and also gives an account of the early planters who came forward for the capitalist farming. The chapter also reveals the development of tea plantations in this region. Another important plant grown on a commercial basis in this region was cinchona, a plant brought from the American continent. Cinchona was cultivated directly by the government. From cinchona they extracted the valuable medicine quinine, an

effective medicine for malarial diseases. The chapter also gives an account of the horticultural experiments conducted during the nineteenth century. It shows how new European vegetables and other crops were introduced and cultivated in India. The same chapter also analyses the early cultivation of rubber in the Nilgiris. The forest policies of the imperial government and the destruction of the Nilgiris forest in spite of the forest laws passed by the government are the other issues discussed here. In the last part of the chapter, there is a discussion on the problems faced by the early planters in the Nilgiris, the early attitudes of the government towards the planters and the sources of labour supply.

The seventh chapter is exclusively on the labour issues in the plantations during the nineteenth century. Though there were discussions regarding the labour problems in the chapters concerned, this chapter specifically examines in detail the sources of labour supply to the plantations, the mode of labour recruitment, the living conditions of the labourers in the plantations, the bonded nature of the plantation labour force, the purchase of slave labour in the plantations, the recruiting agents or *kanganis* and the *kanganis* acting as *maistris.* This chapter also examines how the act of 1843 regarding the abolition of slavery was used for obtaining more labourers for the plantations. It reveals that the major intention of the act was not the abolition of slavery practised in some parts of South India especially in Malabar, but the release of the large-scale labour force from the agrarian sector.

In the last chapter a general conclusion of the study is given. This part evaluates how the Europeans appropriated the natural and human resources of the region and examines the resultant socio-economic changes brought about by them. The colonial investment in Malabar and the Nilgiris was, to a great extent, a kind of appropriation of the revenues the colonial authorities extracted from this region itself. It will be wrong to assume that the investment directly came from Europe in the form of direct investment. Some of the officials and non-officials also tried their luck in the plantation sector. Murdock Brown, the manager of Anjarakkandy plantations, later became an employee of the East India Company. He was then made an advisor to the Company. When plantations flourished new commercial agencies like Parry & Company, Pierce Leslie and others emerged and this paved the way for new economic activities and changes. They started manufacturing agricultural implements, equipments and the like. The climatic and ecological conditions of the Nilgiris were other prominent attractions for the Europeans. Like other hill stations of India Udagamandalam or Ooty also developed into an attractive hill station in South India. Later it was converted into the summer capital of Madras Presidency. When the British began the development of Ooty they compared it with Switzerland in Europe. Along with the commercial crops, the very nature and salubrious climate of the Nilgiris was also exposed to the international market.

The introduction of plantation and the recruitment of labour had introduced new production relations in the traditional society of Malabar and the Nilgiris. The early system

that prevailed in the agricultural sector was altered in favour of new production relations. The plantations had a new system of management and entrepreneurship. Though many companies were floated as commercial enterprises many of them withered away after a short span of its existence. However, some of them continued to exist throughout the colonial period and even after independence.

As the plantations were labour intensive, they generated new opportunities for employment in its multifaceted activities. The plantation system was entirely different from traditional agriculture. Labourers were forced to reside inside the plantation itself. It was the beginning of the spread of money economy in the rural areas.

In short, the new system of plantations introduced by colonialism in South India brought about new changes in the society, economy and culture of this region. Though these changes brought about new social transformations, the colonial domination over India contributed mainly to the underdevelopment of the people in this region and the destruction of natural resources.

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CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FEATURES OF MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Malabar

Malabar, which is now the northern region of the present Kerala State, was given the name by the Arabs to denote the whole of the Kerala coast. This part was under the direct control of British colonial authority since 1792 till the attainment of independence in 1947.

This territorial division always attracted the attention of the foreign traders and travellers because of its rich resources, flora, fauna, its river system, scenic beauty, etc. The British Malabar was divided into 18 Taluks and 2222 villages covering an area of about 6262 square mile.[1] It was bound in the north by the province of Canara, in the east by Coorg and Mysore, to the south-east by Coimbatore and in the south by the province of Cochin.

A clear picture of the population of Malabar during the early years of the nineteenth century is not available due to the absence of reliable sources. The first effort to ascertain the population of Malabar was made in 1802 when the district officials placed its population at 4,65,514. According to the taluk-wise

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[1] Ward and Corner, *A Descriptive Memoir of Malabar* (Thiruvananthapuram, 1995), p. 1.

survey made in 1831, the population was 11,13,497. The table shows the population of Malabar during the nineteenth century.[2]

Malabar was richly endowed with natural resources which attracted foreigners from all over the world. The region produced a variety of agricultural products like paddy, coconut, betelnut, ginger, pepper, cardamom, and horticultural products like jackfruit, plantain, mango, etc. Among these products the important items exported during the early nineteenth century were cardamom, pepper, coconut and coconut products and betel nut.[3] Pepper was the single largest export item from Malabar and it accounted for 45% of the total value of the exports from Malabar in 1804.[4] Pepper was known as the black-gold of Malabar and the power struggles between the European companies during the seventeenth, eighteenth centuries centred around this product of Malabar. The best variety of white pepper was produced in North Malabar.

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[2] Population of Malabar District during the Nineteenth Century

1802	4,65,514
1807	7,07,556
1831	11,13,497
1851	15,14,909
1861	17,09,081
1871	22,61,250
1881	23,65,035
1891	26,52,565
1901	27,90,281

[3] P. Clementson, *A Report on Revenue and Other Matters Connected with Malabar* (Calicut, 1914), pp. 19-23.

[4] *Ibid.*

Coconut and coconut products like copra, coconut oil, coir and coir products were the second important set of items exported from Malabar. Coconut cultivation was largely concentrated in the coastal regions. Rice was the staple food of the people and the chief agricultural produce. Rice was cultivated largely in the low-lying wetlands and the cultivation was mainly dependent on monsoon. Traditional methods of cultivation were used for cultivating paddy.

Buchanan estimated in 1800 that bulls, cows, male and female buffaloes were the important native cattle stock that existed in Malabar.[5] Buchanan says that horses, donkeys, pigs, sheep and goats were not the native animals of Malabar. Few of the above categories of animals found in Malabar were brought from outside the region. Poultry was also not a native item of Malabar, but was brought here by the Europeans. During the early years of the nineteenth century a large number of cattle consisting of bullocks, cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep were brought from outside through Palakkad.

Coffee was introduced in Malabar towards the close of the eighteenth century in Anjarakkandy. By the 1840s, coffee cultivation was undertaken on a large scale by European planters in Wayanad, taking advantage of the liberal encouragement given by the

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[5] Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar* (Madras, 1870), Vol. II. p. 36.

Government and the suitability of the local climate and soil.

Malabar had about 986 square kilometres of forest area. Most of the forestlands were under private owners. The State owned large tracts in Wayanad, Kottayam, Kozhikode, Eranad, Walluvanad, and Palakkad Taluks. The district was divided into three forest divisions each under a district forest officer with headquarters at Nilambur, Mananthavady, and Palakkad.[6] The rich bio-diversity of Malabar was a peculiar advantage in comparison with other parts of India. The rich variety of forests in Malabar can be classified into five categories.

1. Deciduous forests 2. Tropical Evergreen forests 3. Evergreen forests 4. Mixed Evergreen and Shola forests 5. Heavy Deciduous forests.[7]

Many valuable species of wood were found in the forests of Malabar. Among them Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Bombay Blackwood or East India Rosewood (*Dalbergia itifolia*), Ventek, Irul (*Xylia dolabriformis*), Karumarudu or Matti (*Terminalia tomentosa*), Poomarudu (*Terminalia paniulata*), Urupu (*Hopea pariflora*), White Cedar (*Dysoxylon malabaricum*), Red Cedar (Acrecarpus *frazinifolia*), Poonspar (*Calophyllum elatum*), Ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*), Aini (*Artocarpus hirsute*), Jack (*Artocarpus integrifolia*), Ironwood (*Mesua ferrea*), Pali (*Dichopsis elliptica*) and White dammer (*Veteria Indica*)

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[6] C.A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer*, (Thiruvananthapuram, 1997), pp. 239-40.
[7] William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I (Madras, 1951), p. 38.

were very important. Along with these different types of palm trees and bamboos were found in the forests of Malabar.[8]

British Administrative Policy in Malabar

When Malabar was brought under the control of the East India Company in 1792, the Government of Bombay decided to appoint a commission in order to assess the conditions in Malabar. The commission consisted of Alexander Dow and William Gamul Farmer from the Bombay Presidency as well as William Page and Charles Boddam from the Bengal Presidency. Later it was known as the Joint Commission. They were given instructions to assess and record the political condition and background of Malabar. General Ambercrombie, the Governor of Bombay wanted to streamline the whole administrative machinery in a well-organized system of the East India Company.[9]

Regarding Civil Administration, the whole Malabar province was brought under a supervisor and the northern and southern halves were placed under northern and southern superintendents to assist him. The superintendents exercised both financial and administrative powers.[10] The new kind of governmental and administrative set up was officially announced to

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[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Margaret Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest: Transition to British Rule in Malabar – 1790-1805* (Oxford, 2003), p. 99.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the Malabar Rajas and the people on 18 March 1793. William Gamul Farmer was sworn in as supervisor in the presence of Jonathan Duncan, the governor of Bombay.

One of the early ventures of the joint commissioners was the proclamation of freedom of trade to the subjects of the East India Company. This was intended to provide trading opportunities to the British merchants.

As part of the administrative reorganization process, 429 Amsams were formed by the middle of the nineteenth century.[11] Adhikaris were appointed as headmen of an Amsam or village by the British government. These officers were recruited from the old desavazhis or naduvazhis who had lost their privileged position due to the British rule. The most important function of the adhikaris was to collect taxes for the British. They were the most important people in a locality and enjoyed respect of the local people as they had contacts with the local authority. Actually they acted as a link between the Company's government and the local people. The British used them as middlemen to carry out their programmes and exploited their positions in the villages as landowners.

When the Company's government established courts of law at Kozhikode, Thalasseri and later Cherplasseri, a new era of Indo-British judicial

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[11] Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, p. 89.

administration came into vogue. The orientation of the British judicial administration was not the continuation of the old traditional system of Malabar. But it was oriented towards Anglo-Saxon customs. The local systems and customs were replaced by the codified laws with English inclinations. Traditional institutions were abolished by the Company in their new attempt at judicial reforms.[12]

There were further changes in the administrative structure of Malabar. The British government abolished the posts of northern and southern superintendents of Malabar as well as the divisional administrative system of the province into two. In 1801, they divided the province into ten districts and a revenue collector was appointed in each district and given limited legal authority. In the same year, the British government transferred the civil and military administration of Malabar from the Bombay Presidency to the Madras Presidency. But the department of trade still remained with the Bombay Presidency.[13]

The Malabar province was placed under the jurisdiction of a Principal Collector to whom three subordinate Collectors were assigned. The Principal Collector held civil and military power over Malabar. When the new British administrative structure was introduced in Malabar, changes also occurred in the traditional social structure. One of the significant

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[12] T.K. Ravindran, *Malabar under Bombay Presidency* (Calicut, 1979), p. 24.
[13] Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, p. 534.

aspects of that social change was that it adversely affected the status and position of Nayar tharavads. In the words of a modern writer:

> The British did not recognize their major function and importance within society; they stripped the Nayars of their political freedom, their right to share in decision-making and also their economic independence. As a result the Nayars were denied their traditional responsibilities, i.e., the management of the land and its people, and the leadership and implementation of local self-administration. The British also mistrusted the family organization within the Nayar tharavads. Thus the tharavads were not actually destroyed in physical terms, but they were broken as a political, social and ritual unit through the fundamental redefinition of their appearance and functions.[14]

A series of changes took place in the reforms of administration and patterns of social life which aimed at achieving more control over the land and its people. This paved the way for effective economic exploitation in the form of trade monopolies and tax collections from the peasants.[15]

Though their administrative system was modernized or westernized to suit the requirements of the East India Company's colonial policy, the existing method of agriculture was not at all modern. The backwardness of agriculture and the lack of development of other sectors gradually created a

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[14] Margaret Frenz, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
[15] *Ibid.*

situation of chronic unemployment and widespread poverty among the people. A large section of the population was compelled to live in a condition of perpetual famine. Logan has pointed out that near-famine conditions prevailed in Malabar during July – September and the victims were the poorer sections of the society. Malabar during the nineteenth century experienced frequent famines of a severe kind in 1865, 1866, 1876, 1877, 1878 and 1890. A severe famine, which raged throughout the Presidency in 1865 and 1866, made its effect felt in Malabar, and an average of 6353 people were provided relief daily during the five months from July to November 1866.[16] 1876-1878 was another period of famine and Innes, the author of the *District Gazetteer* speaks about the relief measures and camps organized in the different centres of the district like Vythiri, Mananthavadi, Palakkad etc.[17]

The productivity of land under paddy cultivation was very low in Malabar during the nineteenth century. This low productivity continued up to the first half of the twentieth century. The non-introduction of modern methods of agriculture, the unfavourable structure of land tenure and the land rights were the causes attributed to this condition. The land tenure system which prevailed in Malabar offered no incentives to the cultivating tenants to increase agricultural

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[16] C. A. Innes, *op. cit.*, pp. 281-2.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.

productivity.[18] According to the Malabar Tenancy Committee, "The average multiple outturn was stated to be ten by the joint commissions in 1793 and it cannot be said that it is more at the present day."[19]

The Land Tenure System

The original system of land tenure of Malabar was the customary sharing of produce, with each customary sharer being permitted to freely transfer his interest in the land. The sharing of produce of each *Jenmam* holding was in particular a matter regulated by customary law, which the *Jenmi* could not break. But the British conquest of Malabar in 1792 and the subsequent policy recognized *Jenmi* as the absolute owner of the land and declared the *Kanamdar* and *Verumpattamdar* as the tenants of the *Jenmi.* According to Dhanagare, "the British recognition of the *Jenmis'* right as an absolute proprietary right may be seen as part of a general tendency to relate the various forms of traditional land tenure in Malabar to the kinds of property right with which the English administrators were familiar at home."[20]

The British officials were anxious to keep the Rajas and former chiefs satisfied. One of the officials of the Company stated: "They were then called on to join our

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[18] B.A. Prakash, "Agricultural Backwardness of Malabar during the Colonial Period: An Analysis of the Economic Causes," *Social Scientist* 16, 6-7 (New Delhi, 1988), p. 55.
[19] *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee.* Vol. I (Madras, 1940), p. 14.
[20] D.N. Dhanagare, "Agrarian Conflict, Religion and Politics: The Moplah in Malabar in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries" in *Past and Present* (Oxford, Feb. 1971), p. 117.

standard, as people who are avenging their own injuries might prove useful allies to us."[21]

According to this new land policy, the Brahmins and Nayars were given full ownership rights in the land and the right to move the law courts for regaining possession of land which they had lost before 1787, during the rule of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan.[22] The British were quick to acknowledge the Jenmis as absolute proprietors of the soil because they wanted to rely on them in the days to come. Another factor which influenced their decision was that in Malabar the Government was not to be considered the owner of the soil. The Board of Revenue based their understanding on the report of the Malabar commissioners and accepted the ancient tradition of considering the whole territory as a gift to Brahmins thereby sanctioning the superior rights and proprietorships exclusively held by them. Since the land was not the property of the ruler they recognized it as the private property of individual landlords.[23]

The British recognition of the Jenmis' right as an absolute proprietary right was also part of a general move to reckon with property rights in India in the model of the British law regarding private proprietors.[24] Anyhow, the recognition of Jenmam as an absolute

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[21] Murdock Brown, "Report on Malabar Lord Tenures" quoted in V.V. Kunhikrishnan, *Tenancy Legislation in Malabar* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 8.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] D.N. Dhanagare, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

proprietary right in land led the commissioners to declare *Kanam* as a mortgage and *Verumpattam* as tenancy at will.

According to William Logan, this policy emerged due to an improper understanding of the land structure of Malabar. He stated:

> the essential difference between a Roman dominus and a Malayali Jenmi was unfortunately not perceived or not understood at the commencement of the British administration. The Jenmi has, by the action of the civil courts, been virtually converted into a dominus, and the result on the workers, the cultivators, has been, and is very deplorable.[25]

This land policy made the Jenmis powerful and it legalized the feudal land relations that existed in Malabar. Logan provides a description of the Jenmis:

> The big Jenmi's property is scattered widely over the face of the country and rarely held in compact blocks capable of effective management. Most of them do not know where much of their property lie, having never even seen it. They do not know the person who cultivate it and do not concern themselves as to whether their tenants sublet or not. Most of them care nothing for the welfare of the tenants. Moreover the men employed by these big Jenmis to manage their scattered properties are all men of common education, who get very small pay, and their chief duty is to grant receipts for rent collected.[26]

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[25] Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, p. 604.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 584.

As a result of this, land revenue policy adopted by the company's government the other co-sharers like *Kanakaran* and *Verumpattam* were pushed down to the status of mere tenants. In the feudal structure the Jenmi occupied the peak position while the agrestic serfs stood at the bottom of the hierarchy. Cultivation was undertaken by the poor *Kanam* or *Verumpattam* tenants or by a class of agrestic serfs known as *Cherumas*. A large proportion of the agricultural workers were, until the mid-1800s, slaves, subject to purchase, sale and transfer with or without the land they tilled.[27]

The *Kanam, Kuzhikanam,* and *Verumpattam* tenures virtually resulted in the loss of security of tenures and reduced the share of produce enjoyed by tenants. As a result of court rulings, the *Kanam* tenure became sometimes a lease or a mortgage or a mortgage lease. According to Logan, *Kanam* in the right traditional sense was the right to supervise or to protect all the inhabitants of a particular *nadu* or country, and for this service a portion of net produce equal in amount to that enjoyed by the *Jenmi* was paid to *Kanakkaran* or supervisor.[28]

At the time of British takeover of Malabar, the net produce was being divided equally between *Kanakkaran* and *Jenmi*. But due to faulty interpretation, the *Kanam* amount was later considered as an advance or rent

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[27] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[28] William Logan, Malabar Special Commission, 1881-82, Chapter 4, para 106.

given by a tenant to a *Jenmi* as a security deposit against failure of payment of *Pattam* dues.

Later, as a result of court rulings, the holder of *Kanam* tenure was made liable to renew the *Kanam* at the end of every twelve years.[29] The court ruling helped the *Jenmis* evict a tenant after twelve years or demand a sum for renewing the *Kanam* tenure. This measure had a very adverse effect on the *Kanakkaran*, since it destroyed the security of tenure, which in turn prevented tenants from making any improvements in the land. When they made improvements on the land, it became more productive and the *Jenmi* could offer the land to others at a higher rate of renewal fee and *Kanam*.

In the case of *Kuzhikanam* tenure also, the court rulings were highly unfavourable to the interests of tenants. The courts viewed the payment of compensation to *Kuzhikanam* tenants not as compensation to the cultivator for his customary share, but as a compensation for the customary share due to the *Jenmi*.[30] The court ruling of the power of ouster of a *Kuzhikanam* tenant had completely neutralized the benefits he derived from his power to sell or subdivide the holding. The low rate of compensation recognized by the courts were highly inadequate when compared to the actual cost of improvements valued at current

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[29] K.K.N. Kurup, *William Logan: A Study in the Agrarian Relations of Malabar* (Calicut, 1981), p. 7.

[30] Logan, Malabar Special Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

market rate. For crops such as coconut, betel nut, jackfruit etc., it took more than twelve years to bring the trees into full bearing. And during these initial years, the annual expenses were very high. Hence the tenant ended up losing if he was evicted at the expiry of twelve years.

The courts also viewed *Verumpattam* as a tenure extending for a period of one year unless the lease specifically provided for otherwise which was quite contrary to the traditional practice. At the beginning of the colonial rule, *Verumpattam* cultivators used to set up gardens and reclaim wastelands and were regarded as actual cultivators-cum-part-proprietors. They were also permitted to sell or subordinate their holdings. The colonial rulers curtailed all these privileges and rights enjoyed by them and pushed them to the status of tenants at will.[31]

Another result of the land tenure policy was that it prevented the emergence of a land market in Malabar, which was one of the pre-condition of commercialization or capitalist agriculture. When *Jenmis* were conferred with absolute ownership of the land, cultivable waste land and forest lands, as a class which had no interest in the land, they found it advantageous to sublet the land, retaining their ownership right and earn an income known as *Pattam* without making any effort from their side. Since the colonial government favoured eviction of tenants, the *Jenmis* could evict the tenants

[31] B.A. Prakash, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

without any difficulty. As a result of this, almost the entire ownership of land in a village was vested in *Jenmis*, temples and native rulers. The table below shows the number of eviction cases during the nineteenth century in Malabar.

Table 1

Number of Evictions

Period	Suits of evictions	Persons against whom eviction decrees have been passed
1862-66	2039	1891
1867-71	2547	3483
1872-76	3974	6286
1877-80	4983	8355
1891-96	3178	2352

Source: William Logan, *Malabar* Vol. 1. p. 583.

Colonial Extraction of Surplus in Land

Francis Buchanan provides information regarding the land tax system that existed in Malabar in the 1800s. According to him the *Pattam* or rent paid for sowing one *Para* of land in Palakkad region varied from 2 to 5 *Paras* of grain depending on the number of crops cultivated. On an average, rent for one cropland was

about 2.25 *Paras* for one *Para* sowing.[32] Excluding rent and other expenses of every kind, the cultivating tenant was entitled to get a net gain of about 40 percent of the gross produce. If we calculate the value of the rent received in kind at the low prices prevailing in the harvesting season, the landlord would be required to pay about 84 percent of his rent as land tax. On the other hand if he sold his rice at other seasons, he was required to pay 60 percent of his rent as tax. Buchanan considered this as one of the highest rates of land tax prevailing in any part of India at that time, which acted as a great disincentive for cultivation.[33]

Thomas Warden, Collector of Malabar described the method of sharing total produce between tenant, *Jenmi* and Government that prevailed in Palakkad region: "The cultivator got two-thirds of the total produce, one-fifth of one-third of the produce went to *Janmakar*, and four-fifth of one-third went to the government as land tax." It was pointed out that due to the very low prices that prevailed for rice, the share of rice earmarked for payment of tax was not sufficient to pay the amount and the cultivator was forced to sell a part of his own share to pay land tax. Thomas Warden attributed this as a major reason for the widespread poverty and perpetual indebtedness of the peasantry.[34]

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[32] Francis Buchanan, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] Thomas Warden, *Report on the Revenue System in Malabar* (Calicut, 1813), pp. 7-10.

To standardize the revenue collection the government introduced a new guideline for revenue assessment on 21st July 1805. Accordingly, for wetlands and garden lands the following rates were fixed: (1) On land, after deducting from the gross produce the seed and exactly the same quantity for expenses of cultivation, and allotting one-third of the balance as the collector's share, the residue as *Pattam* was to be divided in the proportion of 60 percent and 40 percent between government and *Jenmi* respectively and the government share was to be commuted into money. (2) In garden lands, one third of coconut and jack tree produce was deemed sufficient for the *Kudiyan*, the remainder of the *Pattam* was to be divided equally between the government and *Jenmi*. (3) On dry grain lands the government's share was to be half of the *Jenmi's Varam* or what was actually cultivated during the year.[35]

The result of the standardization of revenue assessment was that the colonial government and the *Jenmis* were entitled to a larger share of total produce as their portion when compared to their previous positions. The colonial government was able to enhance land tax rates and extract about thirty-five percent of the total produce as land tax.

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[35] Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, Vol. II, Appendix V.

Table 2

Land Revenue Collected from Malabar

During the First Half of The Nineteenth Century

Period	Revenue demand	Revenue collection	Arrears/ surplus
1801/02 to 1807/08	1874461	1859942	-14519
1808/09 to 1812/13	1711959	1718792	+6824
1813/14 to 1817/18	1693248	1695530	+2282
1818/19 to 1822/23	1691155	1745587	+54432
1823/24 to 1827/28	1623628	1593379	-30249
1828/29 to 1832/33	1577764	1548839	-28925
1833/34 to 1837/38	1610460	1613060	+2600
1838/39 to 184243	1641455	1640098	-1358
1843/44 to 1847/48	165418	1640992	-4426
1848/49 to 1852/53	1622206	1637574	+15368

Source: *Statistics of Malabar* (Calicut, 1874)

Economic activities and employment outside agriculture did not show a growth rate during the

nineteenth century in Malabar. The policy of importing large quantities of mill-made cotton cloth had destroyed the cottage weaving industry that thrived in some parts of Malabar. As early as 1800 A.D., cottage weaving handloom units producing wide varieties of cloth existed in a few places in South Malabar. The observation made by Clementson, Collector of Malabar in 1838, gives an idea about the extent of damage done to the industry by the import policy of colonial government. To quote Clementson:

> Malabar has never been famous for manufactures—coarse cotton cloths is manufactured in the Palghat and Temalpooram taluks and here and there on the coast; the vast quantity of European piece goods imported—and which are procurable at very cheap prices—have discouraged this branch of industry, so much so that the poorer class find it more profitable to turn their lands to agriculture.[36]

Along with cloth, a large number of consumer goods were also imported to Malabar, discouraging the growth of cottage industries. By the 1880s its industries consisted of weaving, coffee and ginger processing, oil processing, oil extraction, coir making and manufacture of toddy and liquor.

No large-scale industry was started in Malabar up to the close of the nineteenth century. It was only during the early decades of the twentieth century that some industries were started there. These include

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[36] P. Clementson, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

cotton spinning, weaving, saw mills, match factories, brick and tile works.

The colonial taxation policies also stood in the way of the expansion of economic activities and employment generation outside the agricultural sector. Colonial administration imposed taxes on skilled workers such carpenters, ironsmiths etc. and also on implements such as handlooms, oil presses, fishnets etc. A very high rate of tax was levied on this category of people during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The toddy tappers were required to take licences and had to pay tax at the rate of one silver *panam* per month or Rs. 2 and two-fifth per year in 1813.[37] A direct tax was also levied on the fishing nets and the huts of fishermen, thereby discouraging fishing activities. The policy of declaring salt as a state monopoly and importing the entire quantity of salt from outside Malabar resulted in loss of employment to many fisherfolk whose alternative occupation was salt-making.[38] The ferry tax was levied in such a way that it favoured the rich people with tax concession while full rates of tax were collected from poor people. According to Sullivan:

> The ferry tax in Malabar is in one respect obnoxious than that of the tobacco tax. All the classes are subject to the latter but the carriage and palanquin of the wealthy are allowed to pass toll free, the poor woman whose livelihood depends upon the bundle of sticks which she is

[37] Thomas Warden, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[38] *Ibid.*

> carrying cannot pass until she has paid. So hard does this tax press upon the lower orders that lives have been lost in attempts to swim the rivers for the purpose of avoiding it.[39]

Houses, shops bazaars were also taxed. Instead of encouraging skilled category of people to engage in productive occupations, the colonial power discouraged them and even prevented them from engaging in productive occupations through the wrong extractive policies of taxation.

The Caste System in Malabar

Even after the East India Company's administration was established in Malabar towards the close of the eighteenth century, the caste system, and practices prevailed there without any change in its rites and beliefs. This was one of the factors that drove Malabar to further backwardness. Castes were arranged in a hierarchical order from the highest and the most sacred to the lowest and least worthy. Caste system also recognized caste pollution. Everyman considered himself polluted by the touch of one of a lower caste, and there were castes lower in social scales which mutually conveyed pollution to each other. Again there was a recognized scale of distance at which members of each of the polluting castes were required to stand from a man of higher caste or his house.

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In the hierarchy of caste, *Namboodiri* stood at the apex of the system followed by *Nayars* and their sub groups. *Tiyas*, artisan groups such as *Kammalas* came in next in the ladder and at the lowest rung *Parayas*, *Pulayas* and *Cherumas* were placed. The *Namboodiri* Brahmins were often considered the most tradition-bound people who showed no interest in western education, commerce and industrial activities during the period of colonial domination. They considered cultivation an inferior activity meant for the lower castes. They deliberately avoided social contact with other lower castes except *Nayars*, on the grounds of caste pollution. By custom they were prevented from other occupations except religious exercises.

In the caste hierarchy *Nayars* and their sub-castes like *Kurup*, *Nambiar*, *Adiyodi*, *Pillai*, *Kartha* and others enjoyed a dominant position because of the relation with *Namboodiris* through *Sambandham*. In the pre-colonial days they played the roles of statesmen, soldiers, administrators and almost exclusively engaged in activities directly or indirectly connected with warfare.

The *Nayars* followed a matrilineal system of inheritance known as *Marumakkathayam*. The *Marumakkathayam* joint family or *tharavad* consisted of all the descendants of a common ancestry in the female line alone. The *tharavad* property was the joint property of all its members and each member was entitled to get maintenance right, but not entitled to get

partition. *Tharavad* was usually managed by the eldest male member termed *Karanavan*, who could be removed for mismanagement only by a decree of a civil court. Fawcett elaborates on the Nayars:

> The chief immediate interest attached to them lies in the fact of their being the best, that is the fullest, the most complete existing example of matriarchy, or to be more strictly accurate, of inheritance through females.[40]

Following the Nayars, in the next lower rungs of the caste hierarchy were the *Tiyas*, with toddy-tapping as the traditional occupation. During the course of colonial rule they engaged in other activities like cultivation, commerce and industry.

After the *Tiyas* there were the sections of polluting castes such as *Kammalas*, *Mukkuvas* or fishermen, goldsmiths, carpenters and blacksmiths. At the bottom of the caste hierarchy were the agricultural serfs known as *Cherumas* consisting of *Pulayas* and *Parayas* who did not occupy any recognized place in society. These castes supplied the entire agricultural labour force to the landlords of Malabar. Untouchabililty and unapproachability that existed as part of the caste system became a barrier to the occupational mobility and the economic development of Malabar.

In the tribal lands of Wayanad, slave labour existed as agrestic serfs bonded to the lands as in other parts of Malabar. Since there was a dearth of agrestic serfs,

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[40] F. Fawcett, *Nairs of Malabar* (Madras, 1990), p. 186.

slave trade developed as did an extensive market for such labourers.[41] Slaves used to be sold either along with land to which they were attached or separately from it. They could also be mortgaged or hired out. Slaves were in fact held in three kinds of tenure system: *Jenmam*, *Kanam* and *Pattam*.[42]

Under *Jenmam* or sale system, the full value of the slave was paid and the slaves transferred to a new master. In *Kanam* or mortgage system, the slave labour was transferred by the owner on receipt of a loan or money, usually two-third of the value of the slave, and a small measure of paddy and the slave could be redeemed only on payment of the loan. Third was the *Pattam* or rent system, under which the master lent the slaves for an annual sum to another man who commanded their labour and provided them with subsistence.[43]

The British rulers tried to alter not only the entire economic and social life of Malabar but also the cultural values of the people. The society was transforming very gradually from the feudal-oriented socio-cultural milieu to a capitalist and westernized social structure. The introduction of western education, the emergence of professional classes like lawyers, the rise of the banking system, development of railways, spread of newspapers, all led to the rise of a new age which challenged the

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[41] *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report, 1940.* Vol. I, p. 32.
[42] Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes* (Madras, 1909), p. 24.
[43] *Ibid.*

cultural and moral ethos of the traditional society. But in a tradition-bound, caste-ridden society, these new changes occurred very gradually and the upper castes, especially Brahmins and some *Nayars*, refused to cope with the situation.

Thus the major trends of the European rule and administrative reforms were very congenial to the rise and growth of new methods of economic exploitation. The growth of plantations and the emergence of commercial establishments were the result of the new changes that occurred in Malabar during the late eighteenth century. The major trends that emerged in Malabar during the close of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century can be summed up as follows:

1. The local chieftains, rulers and *Nayar* militia were weakened by the policies of land, revenue and judicial reforms.
2. A strong bureaucracy was deployed for the establishment of the colonial State machinery, where the traditional landlords had no significant role to play.
3. The traditional matrilineal system was discouraged and the old institution of agrestic slavery abolished by law to release labourers to the new colonial enterprises.
4. New commercial enterprises were developed and encouraged, and western and modern education was

introduced, which transcended the borders of caste and community.

In short, the traditional social and economic condition in Malabar was made very suitable for colonial exploitation through a series of legislations and administrative means by the company during the nineteenth century. As stated earlier, partition was not possible in the traditional *tharavads* of the land-owning families of Malabar. However the *tharavads* enjoyed large tracts of waste and forest lands under their control. Since no individual in the family had absolute right over the land, nobody showed interest in improving the land. So the concept of plantation or garden crop did not develop in the western sense. Monocrop agriculture and commercial capitalist cultivation were absolutely absent in Malabar during the close of the eighteenth century. Capital, one of the most important factors of commercial farming, was also absent in this land.

In the absence of private individual ownership of land there was no question of developing plantation agriculture in the traditional society. Therefore, plantation agriculture was a novel economic endeavour introduced by the colonial system by investing capital. For the development of such a system the British introduced changes in land system and tenurial structure of Malabar. In continuation of the series of changes they passed the British India Act IV of 1837 promulgated on seventeenth April which permitted the

British subjects to "acquire and hold, in perpetuity or for any term of years, property in land in any part of the territories of the English East India Company." This Act facilitated large-scale investment of capital in plantations and other cash crop cultivation.

Though all these changes were primarily aimed at the extraction of surplus resources from Malabar to Europe, their consequences in the society were multifarious.

The Nilgiris

The region of the Nilgiris was annexed by the East India Company in 1799 from Tipu Sultan of Mysore after a prolonged war. This led to the 'discovery' of the Nilgiris with its European climate in the tropical region of South India. It was an adjoining territory of the old Mysore State. Up to 1868 it was part of Coimbatore and then was made an independent district.

The Nilgiris is often described by writers as one of the districts which does not have a historical past.[44] Owing to the peculiar climate, difficult passes and feverish jungles, the invaders of the adjacent areas kept away from the conquest of this place. Till the early years of the nineteenth century this area had no towns or forts and the inhabitants were only grazers and poor cultivators. The district is devoid of adequate material or ancient inscriptions to account for the days preceding the British occupations.

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[44] P.K. Nambiar, *District Census Handbook Nilgiris* (Madras, 1965), p. 2.

The first mention of the name "Nilgiris' can be found in the *Silappadikaram.* During the reign of the *Hoysala* king *Vishnuvardhana* (1104-1121 A.D.), his general Punisa is said to have frightened the *Todas*, driven the *Kongus* underground, slaughtered the *Pallavas*, put to death the *Malayalas*, terrified King *Kala* and entered into a *Nila* mountain and offered its peak to the *Lakshmi* of victory.[45]

It is believed that the name Nilgiris was given by the people who were living at the foot of the hills, at the sight of the violet blossoms of the *Kurinji* flower enveloping the hill ranges periodically. Frederich Price stated:

> *Strobilanthes kunthianus*, a dwarf bush which at regular intervals—generally about twelve years—covers the slopes of the hills in many places with a sheet of beautiful clusters of pale blue flowers. These when seen at a distance, remind one somewhat of highland hillsides, but they lack the seal purple of heather. The effect is but a transient one for the bloom soon passes off, the plant seeds, and then dies down. The name Nilgiris is by some believed to have arisen from the occasional tinting thus given to parts of the hills.[46]

The Nilgiris district marks the western extremity of present day Tamil Nadu. Situated in the middle of the western border of Tamil Nadu, its boundaries are the Coimbatore district in the east, the Coimbatore district and the Kerala State in the west, and the Karnataka State and the Periyar district in the north. The total area of the Nilgiris district is 2549 square kilometres.

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[45] W. Francis, *The Nilgiris District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1908), pp. 91-2.

[46] Frederich Price, *Ootacamund: A History* (Madras, 1908), p. 38.

The district could easily be divided into two distinct natural divisions, viz. the Nilgiri plateau and the south-east Wayanad tableland. The Nilgiri plateau is 48 kilometres long and 32 kilometres in breath. This region with a uniform elevation is marked with hills everywhere and even a single square mile of level ground cannot be seen anywhere. This plateau has been divided into four regions, viz. the *Peranganad* in the extreme east, *Merkunad* on the west, *Tulunad* in the north and *Kundahnad* to the south-east.

Of these four natural divisions, *Peranganad* in the east was named after Rangaswamy the popular god of the *Badgas*. It is separated from the rest of the district by the *Mudkadu* stream, the orange valley and part of the *Doddabetta* range. Important settlements like *Coonoor* and *Kotagiri* lie within this region. The defence establishment at Wellington also was situated here. The *Merkunad* lies just west of Perangad. It is separated from *Tulunad* by the *Dodabetta* range and the *Biguli* River. *Kundahnad*, noted for wild life extends on the west and south-west of Biguli River which separates it from *Tulunad*. The western portions of the plateau constitute *Todanad*.

For administrative convenience, the district was divided into three Taluks viz. *Coonoor, Ootacamund* and *Gudalur*. The *Coonoor* Taluk consisted of *Peranganad* on the extreme east and *Merkunad* to the west of it. The *Ootacamund* Taluk besides the forested region on the northern foot of the plateau included *Tulunad* on the north and *Kundahnad* on the south-western corner of the plateau.

Colonial Occupation of the Nilgiris

Though the European colonial occupation of the Nilgiris started only during the early years of the nineteenth century, the religious zeal of Portuguese Christian missionaries took them to this area much earlier. Sir Frederich Price refers to the visits of a priest deputed by Fransisco Roy, the first Roman Catholic Bishop of the Syrian Christians, and the Rev. Jacome Ferreiri to the Toda settlements of this area as early as 1602 and 1603[47]. But the Catholics of Malabar did not take any further interest in the Nilgiris.

The next recorded visit to the plateau was of Dr. Francis Buchanan on 25th October 1800. He had been to the hill from *Dannayakankotai* and mentions the natural beauty of the area and the presence of the tribes like *Irular*.[48] It was in 1812 that William Keys, an assistant revenue surveyor, and McMahan, an apprentice, climbed the hill and became the first English men to reach the top.[49]

In 1818 J.C. Whish and N.W. Kindersley, who were assistants to the Collector of Coimbatore, crossed the plateau in a south-west direction. Sullivan, the then Collector of Coimbatore, had shown great interest in this area. His interest in this geographical area is very clear in his report sent to the Board of Revenue on 31st July 1819. He wrote:

> They (Whish and Kindersley) discovered at the computed height from eight to ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, a fertile region extending from east to west about forty or fifty

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[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
[48] *District Census Handbook* (Madras, 1965), p. 5.
[49] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

> miles, and from south to north not less than twenty; thinly populated, free from jungle, some parts of the land cultivated with great care, and bearing two crops in a season of wheat, barley, poppies, peas, millet, etc. and blessed with a climate, unusually temperate and healthy. I have had occasion to visit this part of the country twice within the present year, and feel great satisfaction in confirming, to their full extant, the accounts which had been previously given of the country by Messer's Whish and Kindersley.[50]

Sullivan, the Collector of Coimbatore, was much delighted by the natural beauty, ecological peculiarities and resource potentialities of the area. He prepared plans to make use of this rare and wonderful environment for the requirement of European citizens and the company's government. The district collector travelled the length and breadth of the plateau with his assistants in 1819. In this attempt he was accompanied by personalities like French naturalist Lesehenault de la Tour and others.[51] The company's government had given liberal grants to Sullivan for his early activities in this direction.

As part of the planned effort, he constructed a path from *Sirumugai* near *Mettupalayam* to *Kotagiri* and *Dimhatti.* In 1821 the work of the path was inaugurated and by 1823 it was completed. Till the construction of *Coonoor* Ghat in 1830-32, this path was considered as the best route to the hills from Coimbatore.

Sullivan made strong recommendations for shaping Nilgiris into a hill station. He built the first Bungalow for his residence in the hill which was popularly known as stone house, because

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[50] Frederich Price, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[51] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

the house was built entirely of stones. This area, where the first stone house was built, was purchased from Todas living in a Toda village called 'Wottakaimund' and the settlement apparently took the name "Ootacamund" from this association.[52]

Captain B.S. Ward made a survey of the district in 1821-22, drew a map, wrote a memoir and submitted it to the government in 1826. John Sullivan had his own concepts of transforming this beautiful land with salubrious climate into an ideal sanatorium. He wrote:

> We trust that future reports of the salubrity of this spot will remove all the apprehensions that have been entertained, and that it will become a place of resort for those whose state of health may require that change of temperature which it unquestionably affords. Should a continued residence in these regions prove that the climate is favourable to the European constitution it may perhaps be deemed expedient hereafter to form a military establishment for pensioners and invalids, with a regular hospital and if it would become a military station, with medical officers attached to it. Houses would soon be created and conveniences would be provided for those who might be compelled to seek the benefit of the climate; and in all probability many persons on the coast who have withdrawn from active life who do not intend to return to their native country would take up their future residence in Nilgiris.[53]

During the early decades of the nineteenth century there was no hill station in India. Europeans in India were going to Mauritius to spend their holidays. So his ideas of a hill station, a

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[52] Kaku J. Thana, *Plantation in the Nilgiris – A Synoptic History* (Glenmorgan, 1969), pp. 2-3.
[53] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

sanatorium and a resort were readily accepted by the higher authorities with the active support of the Company.

In September 1822 John Sullivan requested government permission to enclose 500 *Kallas* (1,910 acres) of land to make experiments in agri-horticulture.[54] This experiment was highly successful and by 1827 seventeen Europeans had built their houses in Ootacamund.

Sir Thomas Munroe and Lushington, the governors of Madras Presidency, were interested in developing the Nilgiris hills with the support from the Company and its governors. He made use of the natural beauty successfully to build a sanatorium for the Europeans. In this regard the work of John Sullivan was greatly praised by the Europeans. The author of the Nilgiris district Gazetteer observes:

> His contribution towards the early growth of the Nilgiri is remarkable. He was the first European Official to build a house and settle here. Here engaged a trained European gardener... Sullivan seems to have attempted some agro–horticultural experiments also in an estate of 200 acres in South Downs valley. A number of old varieties of plants of Europe and South Africa form part of the Nilgiris flora today, thanks to Sullivan. He imported improved seeds of barley from lower plateau. Barely is a staple grain and they call it 'Sullivan Gangi'... It was only at the instance of Sullivan, the military sanatorium was established at Udagamandalam. He planned and executed the formation of the famous lake at Udagamandalam by damming up the streams in the surrounding area.[55]

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[55] M. Gopalakrishnan, *Nilgiri District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1995), p. 15.

The establishment of Ooty was done during a period when the hill stations themselves were unknown to the British. Officers of the Company whose health was in a bad state either went to Mauritius or were sent back to England. It is said that Sullivan himself was one such case. The interest shown by him to establish such a sanatorium lies in his own personal experience. During 1817-19 he stayed in Mauritius and Cape of Good Hope for a long time. He compared those places with Ooty and had a high opinion about this place. He wrote in March 1819:

> Having myself passed all the winter and some of the summer months at the isle of France and a short time at the Cape, I can speak from experience and with certainty to the climate of the Neelgherry being more cold, equal and dry and I really believe more healthful than the climate of those places.[56]

Due to the interest shown by Sullivan and his contributions to this hill station he was considered as the father of modern Ooty by the European community. Sullivan was born in London on 15 June 1788. He joined as writer in Madras in 1804 and became Collector in Chinglepet district in 1814. In 1815 he became the Revenue Special Commissioner in Coimbatore. In 1819 he first visited Coimbatore. In the very next year he became the member of the Board of Revenue and got married in the same year. In 1821 he first visited the Nilgiris and in 1822 he started building Ootacamund and built his famous Stone House in the same year. In this work he was assisted by his Scottish gardener Johnston, and some local

[56] Board of Control Vol. 702, No. 19060, March 1819, Quoted in Alexander Morrison, *Creating a South Indian Ootacamund and the Nilgiris 1818-1837* (Place not mentioned, 2002).

Badagas and *Kota* villagers. The first Church, a small Roman Catholic Chapel, was built during the same period. From 1821 to 27 Sullivan was pleading to make the Nilgiris a sanatorium and achieved considerable progress in his attempt. He was directly responsible for the agricultural change by introducing European vegetables to the land that revolutionised the local economy.[57]

A peculiar feature regarding the Nilgiris was that some of the Europeans who stayed in the Nilgiris integrated well into the society and made it their home. Some of them spoke the local language fluently. When independence came in 1947 they stayed at Ooty. Unlike officials or even the business classes of Presidency towns, the European settlers on the Nilgiris were not mere sojourners, but saw their permanent residence in India and got acquainted with its language, customs and people.

Flora and Fauna

The area was endowed with rich flora and fauna. This rich bio-diversity is the major resource of the area and this rare combination of natural beauty and resource made the Nilgiris a major attraction of the colonial rulers. The hilly tracts of the district can be easily classified into four district divisions in order to consider their floral wealth.[58]

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[57] Paul Hockings, "British society in the Company, Crown and Congress Eras" in Paul Hockings (Ed.) *Blue Mountains-the Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 334-36.

[58] *District Census Handbook – Nilgiris, op. cit.*, p. 2.

(a) The deciduous forests of the slopes:

The flora of this region resembles that of the lower hills and plains of the district and most of the tropical trees and shrubs found in the other parts of the district are also found here. Valuable timbers obtained from this region are *irule* (*Xylia rolabriformis*), teak (*Tectona grandis*), *ventek*, sandalwood, white cedar etc. Majority of the trees that grow here are found to be more or less deciduous in character and hence during dry season—January to March—these forests have a bare appearance.

(b) Moist evergreen forests of the slopes:

Forests on the western slopes at an elevation of 3000 feet have fantastically tall trees which reach an average height of 200 to 250 feet. The evergreen character of these trees renders them extremely beautiful. Many varieties of trees and plants grow here but the timber obtained from them are of inferior quality. Noted timbers from these regions are iron wood, red cedar, ebony etc.

(c) Woods of the plateau:

The flora found here are similar to the evergreen regions but the trees do not grow very tall. The average height of the trees here is found to be 70 feet. The principal trees noticed here are *Mechelia, Nilerica, Hydnocarpus, Alpinus, Melicope, Indica* etc.

(d) Grassy lands of the plateau:

This tract is covered by many short and coarse species of grass. The fresh showers of March help them grow rapidly and by December–January they are all burnt up due to frost and sun. However, the trees here are scarce and sparsely distributed.

Important species of trees noticed here are *Rhododentras, Arboreum, Salixtelrasperma, Celtis, Tetrandra* etc.

Apart from this, various other plants of different kinds also exist in this area and a number of trees from various parts of world have been introduced into the region.

Population

By the close of the nineteenth century the population of the Nilgiris was 1,12,882.[59] In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the district was populated only by a few tribes, the chief of which were the *Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Badagas* and the *Irulars.* When the district developed as a hill station and as a plantation area, migration to the district took place in a large scale. From the south came the *Parayas, Pallans, Chakkiliars* and the *Vellalas.* From the west came the *Nayars,* the *Moplas* and the Syrian Christians. From the north came *Kannadigas,* castes like *Okkaligas, Lingayats, Goudas* and others.[60]

Badagas:

It is believed that *Badaga* tribes found in the Nilgiris were migrants from Mysore. The exact period of the migration to the Nilgris is, however, not known. They are found mostly in Ootacamund and Coonoor Taluks and that too mostly in the eastern part of the Plateau excluding Kodanad. They are found in different walks of life. They speak a language called *Badaga* which must have originated from *Kanarese.*

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[59] *District Census Handbook – Nilgiris, op. cit.,* p. 7.
[60] *Ibid.,* p. 8.

Todas:

The *Todas* are found mostly in Ootacamund and Coonoor area. They belong to a pastoral tribe and tend buffaloes in the Wenlock downs in the high plateau. The buffaloes here are quite different from the animals found in the plains. The *Todas* migrated towards the west on the Kundah side during the months of January–February when it was difficult to find pasture in the Wenlock downs.[61]

Kotas:

The Kotas were found to live in seven villages which are exclusively occupied by them. They were hardworking and intelligent; a tribe of musicians and artisans. Each village was divided into three *Keries* or blocks and the people living in these Keries belong to three exogamous sects. Agriculture was the mainstay of their economy.

Kurumbas:

Kurumbas or *Kurumans* living in the district were divided into at least five sects viz. (1) *Pal Kurumbas* found in the southern slopes of the plateau, (2) the *Jen Kurumbas* also called *Kattunaikans* (3) The *Urali Kurumbas*, (4) *Betta Kurumbas* and (5) The *Mullu Kurumbas*. Except the *Pal Kurumbas*, the other sects are found mostly in Gudalur Taluk.

The *Pal Kurumbas* in Ootacamund and Coonoor Taluks lived in small hamlets known as *Kombais*. They are short and dark complexioned. They speak a slang of *Kanarese*. They work as agricultural labourers under the *Badagas*. The *Jan Kurumbas*

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[61] *Ibid.*

are found near Gudalur. Collection of honey was their traditional occupation. The *Betta Kurumbas* and *Urali Kurumbas* are almost similar in many aspects. It is not definitely known whether they belong to the same ethnic stock or not. They make mud pots without the help of wheels. Their mother tongue is a slang of *Kanarese*. The *Mullu Kurumbas* belong to a different ethnic stock and their mother tongue is Malayalam. They are not only good cultivators but also good hunters and use bows and arrows. On all festival occasions they are obliged to go hunting.[62]

Irulars:

The *Irulars* are found in the lower altitudes on the southern slopes of the plateau and in the northern slopes of the Moyar valley. They are short in stature and black in complexion. The *Irulars* living on the southern slopes along the Bhavani river valley are called *Muddunars* and those in Moyar valley *Kasavas*. The former speak a slang of Tamil and the latter a slang of *Kanarese*. A few of them subsist by cultivating small patches of lands within the forest. They have a strong caste hierarchy for enforcing social discipline among themselves.

Paniyas:

The *Paniyas* are found in Gudalur Taluk in the Nilgiris. They are short in stature and dark in complexion. They have certain physical features resembling the Negroid race. Though they are agricultural labourers, none of them is known to be engaged in their own cultivation. They are generally considered to be lazy in nature.

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[62] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Mandadan Chettis:

The *Mandadan Chettis* is a cultivating caste found in Godalur Taluk. Many of them were owners of good lands in these parts. They have peculiar ways of dressing and wearing ornaments. They are mostly *Saivites* and they speak a corrupt form of *Kanarese* and follow *Makkathayam* law of inheritance.

Wayanadan Chettis:

The *Wayanadan Chettis* are said to have originally belonged to Coimbatore. Their social customs and manners are however more like those of *Nayars*. Cultivation is their main occupation. They employ *Paniyans* as their farm servants.

Along with them the area is also inhabited by the cast groups, which had been included later in the Scheduled Caste like *Parayans, Chakkilians Holeyas, Cherumas, Madigas* and *Valluvans.*[63]

During the early nineteenth century, when the British officials 'discovered' the Nilgiris, it was an area of bountiful natural resources. Added to the natural resources and human resources, the area was blessed by scenic beauty. In the words of Lord Lytton:

> Having seen it, I affirm it to be a paradise, and declare without hesitation that in every particulars it far surpasses all that its most enthusiastic admirers and devoted lovers have said to us about it. The afternoon was rainy and the road muddy, but such beautiful English rain, such delicious English mud. I imagine Hertfordshire lanes, Devonshire downs,

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[63] *Ibid.*

> Westmoreland lakes, scotch trout streams, and Lusitanian views.[64]

The attraction of the Company towards the Nilgiris was not only towards its natural resources but the environment itself became a point of attraction to the Europeans. During the nineteenth century itself they transformed the Nilgiris as a whole into an ideal base for their resource extraction not only in terms of concrete resources but the very environment itself became a source of colonial exploitation.

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[64] Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India as quoted in Frederich Price, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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CHAPTER THREE

ANJARAKKANDY PLANTATIONS

Towards the end of the eighteenth century there was a great demand for the agricultural products of the Asiatic countries in the European market. The English East India Company desired to exploit the situation by starting systematic plantation of cash-crops in its conquered territories. The cultivation of pepper, cardamom and other crops in Dharmapattanam was the beginning of such experiments in Malabar, sometimes in the whole of India. This was supervised and controlled by the Thalasseri factory and they kept separate accounts for such investments in the new endeavours. Later the cultivation of coffee, cinnamon, etc. was also included along with pepper and cardamom. The demand for agro-products in England and other European countries intensified these experiments in India in the subsequent period and many private individuals entered the field of agriculture, employing a capitalist mode production.

Malabar, except Wayanad, was surrendered by Tipu Sultan in favour of the English East India Company in 1792. This acquisition of political authority over Malabar boosted the experiments of the East India Company. The Company found that the ecology was suitable for developing agricultural products like spices

as it was trading in those commodities for over a century in Malabar. These products had so far been cultivated not in the line of the capitalist mode of production, but as products of peasant farming. Therefore the company decided to start a plantation in an area of 200 acres at Randathara which was directly under its control.[1]

Randathara was a portion of land assigned to the Company by the prince of Chirakkal as a security for the payment of a debt in 1765.[2] It was in 1797 under the initiative of Murdock Brown, a French merchant of Mahe, who joined the company's service in 1793, the Company started a plantation for spices like pepper and cinnamon.[3]

Brown, as described by the historians of Indian colonialism and trade, was a shrewd official and a clever trader. He resorted to all methods to attain his selfish goal. A famous author stated that

> Brown had spent the best part of his life on the Malabar Coast. In his youth he had been employed by the notorious William Bolts in trading adventures, but had settled at Mahe and had changed his nationality as it suited his convenience.

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[1] Though there were no serious studies on the Anjarakkandy Plantations, Francis Buchanan, William Logan, Innes and Evans had noted its existence.

[2] Home Misc. CDXXXIV, 201-2; Letter from G. Smith to Dundas, 25 November 1785 in Pamila Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 38.

[3] Murdock Brown, the originator of the idea of the plantation and its first overseer, had spent most of his lifetime in the Malabar Coast. The local rulers or Achanmar of Randathara had surrendered this land in favour of the Company even prior to 1792.

> Born a Scot, he became successively a Dane, an Austrian and a Frenchman, and wherever smuggling or illicit trade was carried, he was true to be involved. Even his detractors admitted his intelligence and unparallel knowledge of Malabar, and if anyone had the influence or initiative necessary to overcome Tipu's prohibition it was he.[4]

Many causes can be attributed for the establishment of the multi-crop plantation on the banks of Anjarakkandy River, situated 15 kilometres away from Dharmapattanam. The site of the plantation was very close to Thalasseri, the Headquarters of the British administration. It was easy to reach the place by water from Dharmapattanam.

Cinnamon thrives best in alluvial sandy soil where the average rainfall is not less than 80 inches. Its cultivation is therefore mostly concentrated in the coastal region. The climate of Anjarakkandy is very humid being only about fifteen km. from the coast and almost at sea level, with salt water in the river during the summer. The cinnamon variety grown in Anjarakkandy was brought from Seychelles. It was considered as good as the Ceylon product; Ceylon quality being considered superior to the Cinnamon produced in all other countries.

Cinnamon bark of India was introduced in the European world by the Arabs. Malabar Cinnamon became the main article of trade when the Portuguese

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

established trade relations with India. But the trade in Malabar cinnamon declined considerably when the Dutch, after their occupation of Ceylon, promoted Ceylon cinnamon in the market. With the beginning of the cultivation of cinnamon in Ceylon, the trade in Malabar produce greatly declined.[5]

The pepper grown at Anjarakkandy had great demand in European states because of its superb quality. Thus it is clear that large-scale cultivation in this area became a profitable activity as far as the English East India Company was concerned.

Anjarakkandy or Randathara was formerly an area under Chirakkal Raja and included the places known as Edakkad, Chembilod, Eruveri, Makreri, Anjarakkandy, Mavila and Muzhuppilangad. But in 1741, according to a treaty by the local chiefs known as Achanmar, connections were severed with the Chirakkal Raja and the protection of the East India Company's factors at Thalasseri accepted. To the East India Company this was a chance to dominate an area of fertile land with pepper in abundance. The 'Achanmar' thought that the Company would protect them from the Kolathiri's demand for more revenue. The Company gave an amount of Rs. 60,000 to Achanmar and protected the authority. As such the factors at Thalasseri and the English Company had a very clear political domination over Randathara or Anjarakkandy right from the 1740s.

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[5] Department of Industries and Commerce, Government of Madras, *Cinnamon & Cardamom Oil Industries* (Madras, 1949), p. 2.

When they got the political control of Malabar except Wayanad in 1792, one of the enterprising merchants, with the assistance of the East India Company, chose the area for cultivation of cash crops.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century there was scarcity of pepper in Europe and the European merchants in Malabar were competing with each other for procuring more and more pepper. Murdock Brown was the principal merchant of the province and he offered prices for pepper and as such all the English private merchants were compelled to pay high prices. The English merchants like John Agnew and Robert Taylor declared Brown their bitterest foe. They knew that only a systematic large-scale cultivation would yield more pepper and other spices to satisfy the European demand. Therefore the search for a suitable land by merchants also contributed to the establishment of the plantation.

Availability in abundance of cultivable waste land was another important cause for the beginning of the Anjarakkandy plantations. At the close of the eighteenth century the garden cultivation of pepper and cinnamon was not in vogue. The merchants, both British and native, were collecting pepper from the interior areas. The Company and its merchants found large tracts of cultivable lands in the areas like Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kadathanad and other areas of North Malabar. They knew that they could easily make the land available without paying huge amounts to the

owners. Moreover, the existence of the private property system induced them to go ahead.

Murdock Brown knew that the bonded labour force of Randathara will be available for the plantation. Though in theory the English East India Company was opposed to slave labour, slave labour that prevailed in Malabar, Wayanad and other parts of South India made them think in terms of using cheap labour power for their plantation.

Although this was the first attempt by the European entrepreneurs under the auspices of the East India Company, the Company officials and Governor Jonathan Duncan actively supported the proposals for starting such a plantation at Randathara. Duncan thus consented to start a plantation under the direct ownership of the East India Company. This attitude of the Company and the active help and political support given to the overseer and manager, Murdock Brown, for recruiting labourers by giving him the power of a magistrate was a big step in promoting the venture by the state. He was also given adequate support in acquiring land for plantation.

The initiative and enthusiasm displayed by the merchant Murdock Brown, who became the first overseer and manager of the plantation, was another important factor in the establishment of Randathara plantations. Brown had been described not only as a shrewd merchant but also as a man who had close contact with the higher officials of the East India

Company, especially the Governor Jonathan Duncan. Walter Evan, one of the directors of the East India Company who visited Malabar in 1797, threw light on the nature of Brown's association with the top officials of Bombay Presidency.[6]

William Gamul Farmer, one of the Commissioners of Malabar appointed by General Ambercrombie, Governor of Bombay, was very much influenced by the views of Murdock Brown.[7]

The appointment of Brown as the Deputy Commissioner of Police in 1793 was yet another example of his influence in the company's administration. According to the Commissioner, the appointment was

> a mark of appreciation of Brown's zeal for the welfare of this province of which both myself and the Commissioner Duncan can bear witness in the very interesting information he has liberally and frequently afforded us, both as to commerce, government and revenue.[8]

Brown, a shrewd administrator, foresaw the fall of the French at Mahe and played his card well. He managed to establish close connections with Jonathan Duncan. Duncan had held a high opinion regarding the qualities, talents and interests of Brown. Since Duncan was one of the founder members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and was keenly interested in language, history

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[6] Nightingale, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[7] *Walker's Report on Malabar*, 24 August 1797 (TNSA).
[8] Letter by W.G. Farmer to G. Parry, 27 August 1793 (TNSA).

and culture of the people of India, he appreciated Brown's knowledge regarding Hindu laws and culture, the local language of Malabar, i.e. Malayalam, and the customs and manners of the people of Malabar.[9] Moreover Duncan's ignorance of commercial knowledge gave Brown a great deal of influence over him. Duncan never questioned the commercial advice which Brown gave him and used his influence to defend Brown's appointment as the Deputy Superintendent of Police when it was opposed by the Bombay government.[10]

With the influence in government and the thorough knowledge of Malabar, its language, people, customs, etc., Brown put forward his proposals to start a plantation at Anjarakkandy. He prepared a detailed project for it. His request to the court of Directors for advancing capital by the Company was considered favourably. This initiative of Brown was the major reason for the establishment of plantation, which happened to be the earliest of this kind in India.

Randathara or Anjarakkandy literally meant five and a half *Tharas* or *Deshams*; ie. Muringeri, Mamba, Cameat, Anjarakkandy and Paleri together with a strip of land situated on the opposite side of the Anjarakkandy River in Kotiody.[11] This plantation cultivated agricultural products like coffee, pepper,

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[9] Nightingale, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
[10] Letter from Law Department, 18 Dec. 1796, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1694 (TNSA), pp. 108-113.
[11] C. Chappu Menon, "Anjarakkandy," in Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, p. XXI.

cinnamon, nutmeg, cassia, cotton, sugarcane and sandalwood saplings in a systematic way.

The Company concluded an agreement with Brown at the instance of his assumption of charge as the overseer of plantation. This agreement reflects the contemporary attitudes of an emerging capitalist who wanted to promote the agro-products for supplying to the international market.

According to this agreement, Brown agreed to the following conditions of the Company authorities. The plantation was to be undertaken and carried on 'solely' and entirely on behalf of the East-India Company. He was to plant any special product suggested by the authorities of the Company and furnish the accounts of receipts and expenditure to the Company.

If the management and scheme of Brown were disapproved by the Court of Directors, the concern was to be undertaken by Brown on his own account. The money spent will be returned within three months; however the land occupied by the plantation was secured to him at a reasonable rent according to the custom of the country. In the event of the contingency referred above, the whole produce of the plantation shall be exclusively tendered in sale to the Company's agents.[12]

On 2nd January 1798, Brown submitted a detailed proposal for running the plantations. In that proposal

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[12] William Logan, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers,* (Madras, 1951) pp. 286-8.

he strongly argued that the systematic cultivation of pepper, coffee, cotton etc., would bring immediate benefit to the East India Company. He worked out a detailed plan and argued that if the company supported the plantation that would be a major source of income to the Company.[13] Brown was also much confident regarding the plan and had the full support of the authorities, especially Jonathan Duncan. Since he had experience in trading activities, and mastered the language of the natives, the authorities even looked at him for his support in the administrative matters.[14]

From January 1798 Brown started his vigorous planting operations. He purchased more and more lands and enlarged the area of the plantations. These purchases were made at nominal prices from the natives.[15] He purchased 35 plots of land from a local *Nayar* of Randathara and Brown himself recorded that the amount of the whole land he purchased was more than the value of the trees they contained.[16] Brown made many purchases with the permission of the Company authorities and also made considerable acquisitions of land without the sanction of the Company, though the authorities often reprimanded him for such illegal land grabbing practices. They insisted that he should get prior permission from the authorities

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[13] Malabar Special Commission (Revenue) Proceedings. Vol. 1713. p. 13-55. (MS).
[14] Nightingale, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
[15] Correspondences between the Commissioner and Brown, dated 5-10-1798, Malabar Special Commission Records Vol. 1695 (TNSA)
[16] *Ibid.*

for making such purchases.[17] Brown was receiving money from the Company regularly for the organisation and management of the plantation. He used to submit the estimates for every month in advance and received money at the end of every month.[18] Among the items included were the salary of the overseer, wages of the labourers, purchase of implements, purchase of plants, charges for elephants etc. Brown as overseer and manager was drawing a huge amount of Rs. 800/- per month as his salary.[19] The amount was equivalent to the monthly wages of 200 male labourers and this was an amount four times higher than the subordinate collector.[20] The total expenditure for the plantation generally came to the tune of Rs. 4,000 per month. In addition to this amount he demanded money for purchase of land. Jonathan Duncan had full confidence in the ability of Brown and his promises. Brown estimated an amount of Rs. 7 lakhs from the plantations after January 1802.

Brown played his part well. He frequently reported on the scarcity of labour in the plantations. He had also grievances of the troubles created by the local revenue collector. The permanent solution of the problem he sought was in acquiring the power of the

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[17] Letter from James Low to Murdock Brown, dated 11th October 1798. Malabar Collectorate Records Vol. 1695, p. 27.

[18] Malabar Special Commission (Revenue) Proceedings. Vol. 1713. pp. 13-6.

[19] Malabar Commissioners' Minute Book (Revenue) 1797-98. Vol. 1782. p. 43.

[20] Robert Rickards, Paper on the Administration of Malabar District (Calicut, 1904), p. 1.

magistrate and revenue Collector of that area. Therefore he recommended to Duncan:

> That he should himself be vested with the charge of the collections of Randathara, subordinate of course to the superintendent, and with the same judicial and revenue authorities, and under the sanctions and engagements on his part, for his faithful administration thereof as are now applicable to the assistance in local charge throughout the province. Mr. Brown having on this occasion further observed that the district of Randathara is so extensive and populous and that if he had authority in it, he could without detriment to its general cultivation ensure for the plantation, the labour of the plantation from 2 to 300 persons daily.[21]

Duncan had no objection in appointing Brown to the post of Magistrate and revenue collector.[22] With all these powers at hand Brown proceeded with his novel programme.

Progress of the Plantations

As shown earlier, Brown was given liberal grants by the Company authorities during the inception of the plantation itself. He built necessary buildings for his stay and for the workers. Separate accommodations were built for *Nayars*, *Tiyas* and *Pulayas*. He prepared nurseries for pepper and coffee plants in the month of June itself. His first nursery contained more than

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[21] Minute of J. Duncan, 8th February 1799, Quoted in Nightingale, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[22] *Ibid.*

42,000 coffee plants and 50,000 pepper plants.[23] He brought sandalwood trees from Coorg[24] and cinnamon from Ceylon.[25] He also built a road through the whole length of the plantation.

He made an attempt to plant teak and sandalwood on a large scale in the plantation. He thought that the cultivation of teak was advantageous to pepper culture too. He brought sandal plants from the Raja of Coorg.[26] This was the first attempt for transplanting teak and sandalwood in India and the idea of Nilambur teak plantation actually evolved from this experiment of Brown.[27]

Though he systematically cultivated pepper, cotton, cinnamon, coffee, etc. on a large scale, he had to confront numerous barriers in the initial stages. The initial problems were that of the availability of water and labour.[28] Brown reported that:

> The number of young trees transplanted out was daily diminishing and it was impossible for me to say what number of plants would survive until the draught ceased. From 2nd of September last and the 2nd of this month (June, 1799) there fell not a shower of rain in the plantation sufficient to enable me to discontinue

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[23] Malabar Special Commission (Diaries). Vol. 1694, p. 309.
[24] Malabar Special Commission (Revenue). Vol. 1697.
[25] Govt. Committee (Diaries). 1797-98, Vol. 2156, p. 115.
[26] Malabar Collectorate Records. Vol. 1697. p. 429.
[27] Malabar Second Commission. Vol. 1698. pp. 113-5 (TNSA).
[28] Letter from Brown to John Spencer, dated 5 June 1799, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1697. pp. 389-406.

watering the transplanted trees for a single day.[29]

Though he dug wells and cleared the old ones it was insufficient for the irrigation of the new transplanted trees. He kept more than 60 labourers to deepen the existing wells. Though he had lost more than half of the pepper vines and coffee plants during the period of draught he prepared pepper nurseries for the next year.

Mode of recruitment of labourers

The problem of labour also caused many difficulties in the way of the smooth running of the plantation. He could not employ sufficient labourers in the plantation, especially during the period of draught. He was in need of skilled labourers for preparing cinnamon bark. It was done by the Sinhalese labourers.[30]

Brown employed various methods to recruit labourers to his plantation. The most important method employed by him was that of recruiting them through *Kanganis*. The problem which Brown confronted here was not only the scarcity the labour supply in the area but also their reluctance to work in the plantations. Since the labourers were attached labourers of the feudal landlords, their problems were aggravated. The problem was described by him in a letter to the Bombay officials as follows:

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 389.
[30] Malabar Special Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

> I was in great concern. It was with great difficulty that I procured a small number of labourers and I was under the necessity of bringing people from Mahe to clear the ground requisite for the nurseries of coffee and pepper.[31]

In the same letter he described other difficulties that he experienced. According to him the *Moopans* or *Kanganis* were never loyal to him.[32] Then he sent his own people to bring workers to some parts of the district. It also failed. The local people abused them and even threatened Brown's men. Some of his men had beaten them and they in response spoke of the plantation with contempt. He was complaining to the government of the situation prevailing there. He also indirectly indicated his intention for acquiring some authority over the administration of the area.[33]

It is very clear from the response of the people to the plantation that they in general and the *Nayars* and the landlords in particular had contempt of the development of the European plantations. It would be difficult to trace the actual reason for that type of attitude. It could be presumed that they found the plantations as an investment for exploitation of the native property and the labour power for the enrichment of the foreigners. This was very explicit in the attitude

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[31] Letter from Brown to Bombay officials, Malabar Commission (Diaries) No. 1693. (TNSA), p. 219

[32] Letter from Brown to Bombay officials, Malabar Commission (Diaries) No. 1693. (TNSA), p. 282.

[33] *Ibid.*

of the *Pazassi* rebels who destroyed the plantations.[34] The *Nayars* tried their best to resist the recruitment of the *Tiyas* as labourers in the plantations. They discouraged the labourers who were working for them in the rice fields during the season joining the plantation even in the off seasons.[35]

During the early days of the plantation itself Brown showed interest in purchasing *Pulayas* and *Cherumas* from different parts of the district. When he reported the difficulties of recruiting labourers to the plantation he always indicated his interest of purchasing these slave castes. He believed that purchase of slaves and the employment of them would bring more profit than employing the wage labourers of other castes.[36]

Though the Joint Commissioners of Malabar issued an order in 1793 against the traffic of human beings, Brown very cleverly managed to employ slaves on a large scale. He also pretended that he was going to pay wages to the *Pulayas* like other labourers of the plantations.[37] His ultimate aim was to make profit out of the new enterprise and not to oblige the regulations of the company.

In addition to employing the slaves he succeeded in employing family labour. He used the labour of small children too. He employed children 8 to 9 years of age

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[34] William Logan, *Malabar op. cit.*, p. 538.
[35] *Malabar Commission* (Diaries) Vol. 1693.
[36] *Malabar Special Commission*, Vol. 1699.
[37] Letter from Brown to Bombay Governor, 28th May 1798, Malabar Commission (Diaries). Vol. 1693. p. 150.

for gathering cotton.[38] In gathering cotton he found that children were more suitable than a grown-up men or women. He brought many families from Cochin and had given a small amount as monthly pay. He paid Rs. 4 and 2 measures of rice as *Batta* per month to each man and Rs. 2 and 2 measures of rice to women and Re. 1 and the same quantity of rice to children.[39] This employment was a great advantage as far as Brown was concerned. Since the families were not given freedom of movement, this was a kind of bonded labour though he paid low wages to them. Since they were living in families it was not easy to escape from the plantation like the slaves. Such systems were introduced by planters in Latin American countries also in this period.

There are instances of Brown attaching the bonded labourers of the old feudal families with that of the plantations when the property of the Raja was brought under the control of the Company.[40] When the Malabar Special Commission asked to report on the conditions of such transfers of labourer he justified his position by saying that he acted according to the laws and customs of the country.[41] In fact the Company wanted to reform the native rules and regulations. This was the starting of the conflict of the Raj and the planters.

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[38] Letter from Brown to John Spencer, President of the Commission, dated 16.07.1799 Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1697. pp. 312-18.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Letter from Brown to Malabar Special Commission, Vol. 1695. pp. 330-5.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 335.

Regarding labour, the East India Company's double standards were very clear from its actions. When Vettathu Nadu's land was annexed with that of the Company, the Raja's labourers were also attached to the soil as per the request made by Brown.[42] The East India Company, on several occasions, gave assistance to the Plantation to purchase *Pulayas* and *Cherumas*. Above all there were instances of the Company giving legal assistances to Brown for purchasing labourers.[43]

He also employed convict labour for the plantations. On an experimental basis the commissioner sent the convicts to his plantation in 1799 itself.[44] It is not traceable from records whether these labourers were paid or not.

An interesting aspect regarding the plantation labour was that during the late eighteenth century itself there were stray instances of more wages being demanded by the labourers.[45] When the plantation developed and was fully established, Brown turned down these demands and he cut down the wages of the labourers.[46] He provided them with paddy and it was regularly supplied by the local *Rajas*.[47]

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[42] Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1695. pp. 8-9.
[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1695. pp. 63-7.
[44] M.S.C., Vol. 1698, 2nd Sept. 1799, p. 161.
[45] Brown's letter to the Commission, dated 7.2.99, in Malabar Special Commission, Vol. 1696, pp. 132-5.
[46] Malabar Special Commission Vol. 1698.
[47] Brown's letter to the Commissioner on 1.1 1799 and 4.1.1799 in Malabar Special Commission, Vol. 1696. pp. 98-101.

Brown brought skilled labourers from Ceylon to prepare the cinnamon bark on the plantation. He was very particular that the knowledge of preparing barks should not be shared with he native labourers. Therefore he wrote to the commercial resident of Colombo and brought labourers from Ceylon. He insisted that the technical know-how should not be imparted to the natives. Later in coffee plantations the method of curing was kept as top secret.[48]

From the evidences we cannot assume that the condition of the labourers in the plantation was better than the attached labourers of the feudal families. Though they were given wages per month and paddy as *Bata,* their condition was pitiable. Labourers especially the families and slaves were not in a position to move freely from the plantation. This was a kind of bounded labour and Brown made profit out of it. There were so many instances of absconding of the slaves which shows that the life was hard in the plantations.[49]

At the turn of the nineteenth century the plantations became one of the biggest establishments of the colonial power in Malabar. It was started with 200 acres of land in 1798. But within five years he acquired more than 3000 acres by different means; both legal and illegal. He even encroached upon the unoccupied wastelands of the local landlords. In the year 1799 itself

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[48] Letter from Brown to the Commercial Resident, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1766, 20 May 1798, p. 5.

[49] Malabar Commission (Diaries) Vol. 1693.

there were discussions among the Company's officials regarding the transfer of ownership to Murdock Brown himself.[50]

When Malabar was brought under the Madras presidency in 1800 Brown himself accelerated the process of transfer of ownership of the plantation to himself. In fact he had pondered to get the entire property for his personal benefit. In the document signed by him on 31st December 1797, he had given an undertaking to the company to this effect. The deed specified:

> I do further hereby bind and oblige myself that in case the present agreement and plan of carrying on the plantation, therein mentioned, shall when made known to the court of Directors, be disapproved of by them then and in that case, to take the while upon my account and to reimburse the Honourable company within three Calendar months after the same being duly notified to me the announced. Principal and interest of money expended on the said plantation as more particularly specified in the plan itself on condition of the possession of the ground occupied by the plantation being secured to me and those who in that case may concerned with me at a reasonable rent to be rated according to the custom of the country it being particularly understood that those whom I may associate with me, shall be such as are approved of by Government.[51]

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[50] Letter dated 27 October 1799, Malabar Special Commission Vol. 1698, pp. 102-3.
[51] Logan, *Treaties....*, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

This clause of the document had been ensured by Brown and his influence over the Bombay officials. Especially Jonathan Duncan was utilised by him to attain such provisions for personal benefit in a public document.

In the year 1799 itself the Court of Directors disapproved of the project as visualised by Brown and they ordered the transfer in favour of Brown according to the terms of the agreement.[52] The agreement was that the whole produce of pepper, coffee, cotton and all other articles should be sold to the Company's agents alone.[53]

However the actual transfer was done only in the year 1802 because of some delay. Soon after the transfer of the plantation, it was destroyed by the *Pazassi* rebels. This became another great problem confronted by the government and Brown. It took long years to settle the issue because Brown was not ready to comply with the agreement with the government because of the 'heavy loss' incurred to him. As usual the loss was amplified and he submitted his petition and made correspondence with the authorities during the subsequent period. The problem was settled only in the year 1817 and a fresh lease of the estate was granted to Brown for 99 years.[54]

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[52] Chappu Menon, *op. cit.*, p. CIXX.

[53] Agreement signed by Murdock Brown and Jonathan Duncan on 31st Dec.1797, Diary of the Malabar Commission in Logan, *Treaties....*, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

[54] Chappu Menon, *op. cit.*, p. CIXX.

The experiment in plantation in Malabar was the earliest in India. This cinnamon plantation later became the biggest in Asia. This was a major example of exploitation of both manpower and material of the colonies by the colonial rulers and their allies. Though Murdock Brown played a key role for his personal benefit he was amply supported by the authorities and with their support he resorted to all means to gather both land and labour from the natives. In fact it was a real exploitation of the labour and resources of a conquered territory by the colonialists.

This accumulation of property and the investments of capital show the early examples of the growth of the capitalist mode of production. But in this colonial venture the labourers were treated as slaves. Slave labour was widely used for the development of capitalist growth in the plantation in this area. This kind of wide supply of slave labour was the peculiarity of Malabar. Here the agricultural slaves were treated worst when compared to the other parts of South India.[55] The slave labour was exploited to the maximum by Brown.

This kind of exploitation by Brown and colonial authorities invited a kind of contempt towards the plantation in particular and their role in general. The interesting example of that is very clear in the destruction of the plantation by the *Pazassi* rebels.[56]

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[55] Dharma Kumar, *Cambridge Economic History of India,* Vol. II (Cambridge, 1984), p. 321.

[56] K. Rajayyan, *South Indian Rebellion: The First War of Independence 1800-1801* (Mysore, 1971), p. 181.

Apart from this, when the agents of the plantation went to the countryside for recruiting of labours in the early days of the plantation the people as a whole condemned the plantation and abused the agents. Brown himself reported that some of his agents were manhandled by the natives from Kannur and Thalasseri.[57]

It could be presumed that the natives of Malabar both the labourers and the landed class viewed the growth of plantation contemptuously and had a feeling that this will affect them adversely. Though they couldn't understand the volume of exploitation by the colonial rulers in its true sense, the people of the area sensed the danger lurking behind it. Though they couldn't develop a total resistance against such exploitation, they started protests against this conversion of their resources for the benefit of the colonial countries.

[57] Letter from Brown to Bombay officials, Malabar Commission (Diaries) No. 1693. p. 328.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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CHAPTER FOUR

EMERGENCE OF TEA AND COFFEE PLANTATIONS OF WAYANAD

A Peep into the History

Wayanad is a mountainous area with a general elevation varying between 2,000 and 6,000 feet and with ranges of hills, some with peaks over 7,000 feet high. Traditionally, Wayanad was under the rule of the *Vedar* (hunter) kings and later the Kottayam Raja conquered it and became its sovereign. The recognition of an external authority was the first change introduced into the hitherto isolated primitive tribal society of Wayanad. The need for occasional gifts and tributes to the Raja, mainly in the form of honey, made it necessary to generate an economic surplus in this form. However those payments were relatively small and once these were made, the tribals were left free to pursue their own mode of life in the forests.

Tipu Sultan, the Raja of Mysore, exacted from the senior Raja of Kottayam a deed of relinquishment of rights over Wayanad in 1786. On the fall of Seringapattam in 1799 Wayanad became part of the British Empire. *Kerala Varma Pazassi Raja* revolted against the British power and was killed in 1805. This was followed by the *Kurichya* and *Kurumba* revolt of 1812. This however was soon suppressed by the British.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, owing to the intermittent rivalry among the native Rajas, there was an

immigration of plainsmen from Kottayam into Wayanad and consequently a considerable spread of settled agriculture had taken place in the valley lands of the region. During the period of *Mysorean* invasion of *Malabar* under Tipu Sultan, there had been increased migration of people from *Kottayam* and that paved the way for the expansion of agriculture. Expansion of permanent field cultivation in proportion to the area depended almost wholly on slave labour.[1]

In the process, some changes had occurred due to political reasons. *Pazassi Raja* recruited able-bodied men among the *Kurichyas* and *Kurumbas* into his army to resist the onslaught of Tipu Sultan from Mysore. In return they were allowed to cultivate land for their own use.

Another factor which led to the expansion of agriculture in Wayanad during the eighteenth century was the change in the system of land revenue collection introduced by Tipu Sultan. He introduced the new system of land revenue as direct payment by the cultivators. This not only provided additional incentive for the extension of cultivation but also brought in more outside people, from the plains of Malabar as well as from neighbouring regions.

A major constraint of the expansion of agriculture during this period was the shortage of labour. The *Chettis* and *Gowndans* from *Mysore*, who purchased forest lands for permanent cultivation in 1773, faced acute labour shortage, as by then all the available labour force had already become attached to individual landlords. They therefore brought with

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[1] William Logan, *Malabar Manual* (Madras, 1951), p. 512.

them a large number of *Paniyas* and *Adiyans*, from Mysore and the Nilgiri forests lying contiguous to the *Wayanad* forests.

During the period 1792 to 1805 the tribals of Wayanad under *Pazassi Raja* were engaged in guerrilla warfare against the British. However, after the defeat and death of *Pazassi* in 1805, the tribals who were given land for cultivation by him continued as peasants, while the others continued as slaves.

In 1805, *Kuruma* and *Kurichya* peasants were made to pay land revenue directly to the British authorities. In 1812, when the British insisted on the payment of land revenue in cash instead of in kind, the *Kuruma* and *Kurichya* peasants rose in revolt. As a result, the military detachments were placed at Mananthavady and Sultan Battery. This was the first tribal peasant revolt against the British rule in its kind in the whole of British India.

Colonization of Wayanad

It was only after the suppression of the *Pazassi* and *Kurichya* revolts the British could firmly establish domination over Wayanad, though the fall of Seringapattam in the year 1799 marked the beginnings of British domination over Wayanad.

The British started systematic surplus extraction from Wayanad by the beginning of the nineteenth century itself. In the pre-British period land ownership was with the *Naduvazhi*s and *Deshavazhis*. It was the then Malabar Collector, Thomas Warden who introduced an elaborate scheme of revenue

settlement in Wayanad.[2] The division later included the Nilgiris also to form part of Wayanad Taluk. These areas were Munnanad, Nambalakkod and Cherankode. Periya, Edavakas, Nallurnadu, Ellurnadu, Kuppathode, Poothadi, Kurumbala, Porannannur, Thendar Nadu, Vythiri, Ganapathivattam, Edanadasakkur and Muppainad were the other *Amsams* of Wayanad divisions.[3]

Paddy was the major agricultural product of Wayanad up to the close of the nineteenth century. According to William Logan, in Wayanad paddy cultivation was costly because of the lack of adequate supply of labour.[4] The new revenue settlement was known as Warden settlement.

According to the census report of 1881, the total population of Wayanad was 88,091. This was the less populated taluk among the taluks of Malabar. Since 1871 the population had steadily declined. The total area of the taluk was 6,12,240 acres. According to the 1891 census, an average of 92 persons were living in a square mile.

Beginnings of Plantation in Wayanad

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the mode of exploitation was mainly the collection of revenue from land. But by the middle of the nineteenth century the colonialists dominated their control over Indian commodities and the Indian market. The British government passed the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833 with these ends in mind. Even before the

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[2] C. A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1951), p. 351.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 352.
[4] Logan, *Malabar, op. cit.*, p. 740.

eighteenth century, the products of Wayanad, especially cardamom, were very dear to the European world. Cardamom plants were not cultivated on plantation basis. Cardamom was collected from the forests of Wayanad by the local merchants and sold to European Companies through the different ports of India like Bombay, Cutch and Bengal.[5] The cardamom exported from Wayanad was first rate in quality, as testified by Francis Buchanan.[6] Pepper and sandalwood were the other two items exported from Wayanad during this period. Though Tipu Sultan had banned the export of sandalwood, the commodities were smuggled from Wayanad to distant parts of the world.

The beginning of modern plantations was actually a new system introduced by the Europeans in the nineteenth century. When the demand for coffee, tea and spices was very high and other conditions became favourable, there developed plantations not only in Wayanad but other parts of India also. As discussed in detail in Chapter II, the first of its kind was started in Malabar at a place known as Anjarakkandy.

Let us briefly examine the causes for the development of plantations in Wayanad during the nineteenth century. There

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[5] According to Francis Buchanan more than 65 varieties of cardamom were sold from Wayanad each year. There were so many merchants and Chovvakkaran Moosa was prominent among them. These merchants were very clever and exploited the poor people selling the spices. They were given a small amount in allowance. If the cultivator failed to give the sufficient amount of spices he had to pay back the amount of the spices at the existing market rate. When he failed to pay the amount his property went to the merchant. In these ways, these merchants grabbed so many acres of lands from the poor people of Wayanad. See for details Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras through Malabar, Mysore and South Canara,* Vol. II (London, 1807), p. 538.

[6] *Ibid.*

were specific causes for the development of plantation in Wayanad and South India.[7]

Abundance of Land and Availability of Labour

The vast area of fertile forest land was the peculiarity of Wayanad. Land was very cheap and purchased by the European planters for Rs. 2 to 5 per acre during the middle of the century.[8] The permission given to the servants and subjects of Britain to acquire landed property by lifting the restriction by the Act IV of 1837 also immensely helped the European entrepreneurs to purchase land at cheap rates in the hill tracts of Wayanad. During this period many European planters applied for huge areas of land in different parts of Wayanad.

Along with this, the cheapness of labour in Wayanad was also a major factor. Through the availability of labour was scarce, the system of slavery and bonded labour rendered the labour cheap in the plantations.

The system of agrestic slavery that evolved here was much suited for the paddy cultivation and institutionalised in the framework of caste society. It deprived the slave caste of their social, occupational and geographical mobility.[9] Although the socio-economic developments in the nineteenth century resulted in the decline of agrestic slavery as an organised

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[7] B.B. Chakraborthy, *Introduction of Tea Plantations in India* (New Delhi, 1942) , p. 42.

[8] W. Robinson, *Report on the History, Condition and Prospects of the Taluk of Wayanad* (Calicut, 1917), p. 22.

[9] K. Tharian George and P.K. Michael Tharakan, *Development of Tea Plantation in Kerala - A Historical Perception*, C.D.S. Working Paper (Trivandrum, 1985), p. 13.

institution, it has changed only in form as it evolved into attached labour system. When the plantations grew big they attracted these labourers gradually and later the immigration of large-scale plantation labour led to the development of casual labour system within agriculture.[10]

The plantations also used immigrant labour on a large scale. These labourers came with their family and lived in the huts within the plantations. So, a labourer's life became that of the captive, and practically this was a worst form of bonded labour. The labourers were forced to work on whatever wage was given to them. The women folk and children became prey to inhuman exploitation.

Isolation and complete absence of legal protection had placed the labourer in a position of total dependence. Consequently, the labourer had little chance of migrating elsewhere for better wages. The planters enjoyed full protection from the government, as it was the case everywhere in India. For instance, the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859, had provisions stipulating that the workers had to sign a contract agreeing to work in the gardens for a specific period of time. This rendered the labourer liable for prosecution for any breach of contract but gave him no protection against employers and laid down no conditions.[11]

The South Indian Plantations as a whole depended on immigrant labour as early as 1850. It was the poverty and periodic famine that compelled the workers to depend more on plantations during this period. This situation led the British

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[11] *South India Planters Enquiry Committee Report 1896*, p. 26.

planters to cast their nets wide in the famine-hit areas of *Tamil* districts like Salem, Madurai, Ramnad, Tinneveli, Trichnopally and Coimbatore. In the words of Daniel Moore:

> The famine relief operations in the plantation assured estate owners and managers a more secure, abundant labour force. Many agriculturists and agricultural labourers from the plains of Mysore who had earlier either to ignore the estate, migrated to plantations during the famine then returned in following years.[12]

Favourable Prices

Favourable prices for plantation products, especially coffee and tea, in the London market were another important cause for the steady development of plantation industry in Wayanad. Tea, which fetched 1 to 2 shilling per pound in 1865, steadily increased in price till around 1882. The opening of Suez Canal in 1863, which reduced the time and effort of transporting, and the increasing demand for tea from the working class of England are the factors normally put forward for explaining this. But due to the world-wide depression there was a decline in prices of tea. As a result there was also a decline in the consumption of tea in England. Even then tea plantations did not show any signs of decline. The favourable atmosphere of high prices in London and the European market was a strong background for the development of plantations in Malabar.

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[12] J. Daniel Moore, "Plantation Labour in Mysore 1871 - 1941: An Historical Approach to Migration Analysis," in N. Gerald Barrier (Ed.), *The Census in British India, New Perspectives* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 6.

The Climatic Conditions

The climate of Malabar, especially Wayanad, was quite favourable for the growth of coffee and tea. Tea is supposed to require a minimum rainfall within the range of 1150 – 1400 mm. per annum. Tea grows best in areas where there is high rainfall as well as bright sunshine. A temperature upto 35° is found to be agreeable for tea cultivation.

Coffee needs light soil with free subsoil and good drainage, and virgin forest land was usually chosen for planting. Coffee-bushes need shelter from high wind and from the sun in the hot, dry weather. Therefore it is always cultivated under shade in India.[13] The Wayanad hills, at an elevation of 2000 feet to 6000 feet above sea level, with adequate rainfall, were found to be ideal area for tea cultivation.

Encouragement by the State

The state encouragement through favourable Acts and legislations also became a boon to the development of plantations in Malabar. The administrative reforms and commercial laws passed by the British Parliament from time to time created a favourable environment for the development of plantations and thereby effected utilization of the resources. For example, the Act of 1843, which abolished slavery in legal terms, was a big measure to release slaves from the clutches of the traditional *Jenmis* or landlords in favour of plantation

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[13] Somerset Playne (Ed.) *Southern India: Its History, People, Commerce, and Industrial Resources* (London, 1914 - 15), p. 221.

owners. The control and monopoly over the slave castes by the *Jenmis* received a great blow and shattered the agrestic slavery and the system of attached labour. Though in its real sense no large-scale release of slaves from the hands of the traditional *Jenmis* took place due to this Act, it helped a free movement of labour from the paddy field to the plantations.[14]

Even before the promulgation of the Act of Abolition of Slavery, the East India Company itself had made with the feudal *Jenmis* of Malabar, contracts for labour force. For instance, in a contract of 1840 with one Sankaran Namboodiri of Nedunganad, the Company incorporated provision for supply of labour. It stated:

> ...If the government requires the services of *paniyars* and other slaves belonging to me in the above mentioned *Malavarams* (Hills and Forests) I consent to their being employed on a payment of customary wages.[15]

Thus the state policy throughout the British period during and after the East India Company's administration was highly favourable for the rapid growth of plantation in the regions like Wayanad. Together with this, the development of transport and communication network also helped the growth of plantations in Wayanad. When compared to other regions of present day Kerala i.e., Travancore and Cochin, the transport facilities were very meagre in Malabar. As far as Wayanad was concerned, the *Pazassi* rebellion gave a great impetus to road building activity

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[14]A series of Acts and legislations were passed by the British rulers in connection with the plantations. For details see collection of Acts and Regulations of the East India Company in India.

[15]Mortgage deed on 10 Dec. 1840 - Document in Appeal No.119 of 1922, Madras High Court. Quoted in K.K.N. Kurup, *Peasantry, Nationalism and Social Change in India* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 19.

from Thalasseri to Wayanad. Between 1810 and 1830 many important roads were constructed for the convenience of the military movement.[16] As a result of the constant representation and voice raised by the Wayanad Planters Association, roads were constructed during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1845-51, the road from Wayanad to Coorg was constructed. Gradually there developed a network of roads and communications partly due to the pressure by the planters association and partly for the sake of military purposes.[17]

Owing to these reasons Malabar, especially Wayanad, became one of the most important centres of spice cultivation and the statistics of spice export will show the potentiality of the area even during the 1870s. The table below shows the statistics of 1878-79:[18]

Table 1

Spices	Value Rs
Pepper	12,97,117
Ginger	9,99,811
Betelnuts	7,58,328
Cardamom	5,60,053
Cinnamon	12,559

[16] A. Sreedhara Menon, *Cannanore District-Gazetteer,* (Trivandrum, 1972), p. 164.
[17] See for details *Planting Opinion,* 20th June 1896 (UPASI, Coonoor). P. 18.
[18] Report of the administration of Madras presidency for the year 1878-79. p. 158.

Along with these products the other resources of Wayanad were also heavily exploited by the Company. The forest timber of Wayanad was an important attraction and along with that forest products like honey, wax, roots, fruits, gall-nuts, ginger, turmeric, dye-powder and wood-oils were taken away on a large scale.[19]

Emergence of Coffee Plantations

The commencement of the colonial planting industry in South India was with coffee. There is no clear evidence regarding the introduction of coffee into India. But it is believed that it was brought from Mecca by a Muslim pilgrim named Baba-ud-din in 1600 to Chik-Mangalore. The next mention of coffee is in the "Letters from Malabar" by Rev. Jacob Visscher. He wrote in 1723:

> The Coffee shrub is planted in gardens for pleasure and yields plenty of fruit, which attain proper degree of ripeness. But it has not the refined taste of the Mocha Coffee..... an entire new plantation has been laid out in Ceylon.[20]

Francis Buchanan noted in his account of his journey from Madras that in 1799 one box was the total export of coffee from Kannur and in 1800, 6 chests and 6 mounds. The plantation at Anjarakkandy of which mention was made in Chapter II was having a large portion of coffee cultivation. Coffee cultivated Baba Budan hills of Mysore became a monopoly of the Mysore state. In 1823 Parry and Company had

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[19] Board of Revenue proceedings, No.1989, March 1870 (TNSA)

[20] K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, A History of Kerala written in the form of notes on Visscher's Letters from Malabar Vol. IV (New Delhi, 1986) p. 19.

taken half of its share for Rs. 4,270 per year for a period of ten years.[21]

In Wayanad coffee cultivation was first started by military officials. The first plantation was started by a military official at Mananthavady, known as Captain Bevan, who was in charge of the 27th Regiment of the Madras Native Infantry of the East India Company.[22] He bought coffee plants from Anjarakkandy and it grew well. Because of this successful experiment, the then-collector of Malabar W. Shefield encouraged the cultivation by sending Anjarakkandy plants to Wayanad. But the large-scale cultivation proved a failure during the period, because of the lack of technical knowledge regarding the process of cultivation.[23]

Agents of Parry and Company, while on their way to Baba Budan hills in Bangalore, passed through Wayanad and were struck by the flourishing coffee plants in Wayanad. They were impressed by the growth of the trees and the quantity of the crop. Immediately, they made arrangements to start a coffee plantation near Mananthavady in North Wayanad.[24] Within a few years several entrepreneurs started estates in Mananthavady. Glasson, Richmond and Morris were the pioneers among them.[25]

There was a heavy rush of European planters during the middle of the nineteenth century in Wayanad. But they faced

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[21] Waddington, *Planting Directory of Southern India* (Madras, 1927), p. 2.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] C. Gopalan Nair, *Wayanad: Its People and Tradition* (Malabar Series) (Madras, 1911), p. 42.
[25] Waddington, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

many problems like the non-availability of land etc. during this period. The European officials and planters were trying to manipulate in different ways to get possession of the forest lands of Wayanad. The then-acting collector of Malabar, W. Robinson, wrote in 1857:

> There are hundreds of Thousands of acres of waste and forest land in Wayanad and along the Western Ghat, where European capital might be profitably invested which are claimed and owned by native proprietors for which nothing is paid to the state and which at the same time the proprietors have the power to close against all enterprise a power which they are using most disadvantageously to the public interest..... To resist this obviously is the duty and interest of the government.[26]

They required large tracts of forest lands for cultivation and were ready to purchase the forest lands by giving money. They were also ready to cultivate the land for rent for a certain period and also ready to pay an amount as revenue to those proprietors who were not willing to grant the land for rent.

During the middle of the nineteenth century, a steady growth of coffee plantation took place in Wayanad. In the fifties of the nineteenth century, 36 coffee estates were started in different parts of Wayanad. About 30,000 acres of land were brought under coffee cultivation during this period. In addition to this 1,500 acres were cultivated by native planters.

By 1845, an amount of 339 cwts. of coffee was exported from Wayanad. But by 1855 it increased to 23,044 cwts. The statistics given below will show the trend of the growth of coffee plantation in Wayanad:

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[26] Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Table 2

Year	Quantity of Coffee exported in cwts.
1844 -45	399
1845 -46	1,696
1845 -47	927
1845 -48	3,465
1845 -49	7,286
1845 -50	4,957
1845 -51	8,713
1845 -52	7,229
1845 -53	8,223
1845 -54	15,540
1845 -55	13,855
1845 -56	23,041

Source: W. Robinson: *Report of the History, Condition and Prospects of the Taluk of Wayanad*

The table given below will show the area converted by the European planters:

Table 3

Location	**Name of Estate**	**Area in Acres**
South Wayanad	1.Kennedy	1080
	2.Lakidy Estate	1600
	3.Pookkot	350
	4.Kullie	2500
	5.Vythiri	2200
	6.Vernen	1200
	7.Parry & Company	831
	8.Terryot	1156
North Wayanad	9.Lopez	150
	10.Mananthavady	1100
	11.Dindimal	1500
	12.Dindimal	800
	13.May	450
	14.T. Richmond	450
	15.Brown	351
	16.Tirunelli	200
	17.Pillay	160
Nambalakkot	18.Ochtorloney	700
	19.Godfrey	800
	20.Robertson & Company	100
	21. Lassels & Company	1200
	22.Wright & Company	600

Source: *Ibid.*

The trend in the development of coffee plantations in Wayanad reflected in many other fields also. Mananthavady, the centre of North Wayanad, became an important town and centre of brisk activity with a European club and Race Course. In 1857 itself the European planters of Wayanad formed their Association known as the Wayanad Planters Association. It was one of the earliest associations affiliated to UPASI.[27]

But by 1870 the coffee plantations of Wayanad showed the signs of steady decline due to various reasons. The main reason was the leaf disease. The leaf disease was a kind of fungal attack to the coffee plants known as *Hemelia vastatrix.* The spread of this disease generally devastated the estates.

The Ceylon system of cultivation without shade also caused harm to the plantation.[28] Along with these causes, the mismanagement and the injudicious choice of soil and locality, and ignorant and inefficient planting, all contributed to the decline of the coffee estates in Malabar.

The absence of sufficient road and communication facilities was another important problem faced by the planters in the nineteenth century Wayanad. There were a hue and cry for proper transport facilities and communication network by the Planters Association of Wayanad.[29]

The gold boom also contributed to the destruction of coffee plantations. The emergence of numerous mining companies and their experiments in the different parts of

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[27] Planting Directory of Southern India, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
[28] Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
[29] *Planting Opinion,* 20th June 1896, p. 11.

south and south-east Wayanad steadily destroyed coffee estates. According to K.M. Ganapathi:

> Perhaps the more potent foe was the disastrous gold boom that convulsed the South East Wayanad in the early Eighties. In pre-mining days Devala, Pandalur and Cherambadi were all large planting centres.[30]

Coupled with these causes there seems to have been a depression in prices of coffee during the ten years from 1879-1888. It is pointed out that the major factor behind the depression in coffee prices was the emergence of comparatively cheaper Brazilian coffee in the world market.[31]

Due to these causes the coffee plantation in Wayanad met with a real crisis. Then some other crops like cinchona also proved to be a failure. But the cultivation of tea on a large scale in the hilly tracts proved a real success and the experience paved the way for the growth of tea plantations in Wayanad.

The Emergence of Tea

The immediate background of the emergence of tea plantation in Wayanad was the failure of coffee plantations. The major causes for the failure of coffee have been briefly discussed above.

Although tea as a plantation crop was cultivated on a large scale in India and elsewhere only in the nineteenth century, the history of tea drinking habit can be dated back to

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[30] K.M. Ganapathi, *Malayalam Plantation,* (Cochin, 1975), p. 2.
[31] D.R. Gadgil, *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times* (Bombay, 1946), p. 81.

the 7th century itself. It was the people of China who began the habit of drinking tea as a beverage. On account of its growing consumption, tea cultivation took a commercial turn. However, tea industry in China was far from being organised or on a large scale. Tea is believed to have been cultivated on small plots and manufacturing comprised of hand rolling and roasting of leaves in pans over charcoal fire. The simple technique of manufacture was one of the prime reasons which led to universal habit of tea drinking in China.[32]

In the late 16th century, tea from China was imported to Holland which resulted in the spread of the tea drinking habit in Europe. The first box of tea leaves arrived in Britain in 1645 via Holland and this inaugurated an era of tea craze in Britain. Imported tea from Holland was sold at high prices in London, probably due to the novelty value of the exotic herb. However it remained a scarce and expensive item for the next century and soon caught the fancy of common man.

The growing demand for tea in Britain coupled with suitable geo-climatic conditions in North Eastern India, led to the importation of tea-seeds from China to India in 1774. With the break-down of the Britain-China treaty in 1833, the British East India Company lost its legal monopoly of tea trade with China. This necessitated serious efforts for locating alternative sources of supply. This was necessary to cater to the increasing demand of tea in Britain.[33]

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[32] Economic and Scientific Association - India Exchange. *Growth and Potential of Tea Industry in India* (Calcutta, 1983), p. 2.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

In 1833, Lord William Bentick appointed a Tea Committee to explore the possibility of tea cultivation in India. This responsibility fell upon C.A. Bruce, who was subsequently appointed the Superintendent of the Forests and was asked to establish a few plantations. Dr. Christie was the pioneer of the tea cultivation in South India. He experimented on the culture of tea in the Nilgiris. In 1834 the tea committee despatched 2000 plants from Calcutta to be planted in Coorg, Mysore, the Nilgiris and Wayanad as a subsidiary crop in the coffee estates. The widespread emergence of leaf disease, which damaged large sections of the coffee plantations in the South in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was the prime cause of the emergence of tea in Wayanad as elsewhere in South India.

It was in the Upper Assam that tea cultivation was first experimented on a large scale by the end of 1837. The first consignment of 8 chests of Assam tea received enthusiastic reception and fetched fancy prices in the London auction in January 1839. This attracted the attention of a group of investors in London who founded the world's first commercial tea Company, The Assam Company, with a capital of 2,00,000 pounds in the same year.[34]

Though tea cultivation in Wayanad was started in the 1870s, the organised planting of tea was started only in 1892.[35] The credit goes to Parry and Company, which planted it on a large scale on their Perindotti estate in South Wayanad. After 1892, the coffee estates and cinchona plantations were

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[34] Sanat Kumar Bose, *Tea Industry in India* (Bombay, 1968), p. 2.
[35] Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

transformed into tea gardens. Vigorous planting activities were started during this period and many bamboo forests were destroyed for the cultivation of tea in Wayanad.[36]

The first experiment of Parry and Company in Wayanad showed clearly that well-planted tea will grow very well and that the agro-climatic conditions of Wayanad were suitable for its large-scale cultivation.[37]

The success of Parry and Company and the increasing demand of tea in the European market attracted new tea companies to Wayanad. The availability of land and cheap labour strengthened the drive of the European companies.

The joint-stock companies like Harrison & Crossfield, Pierce-Leslie, and Kerala Tea Company were the big European companies which invested large amounts of capital in Indian tea plantations in Wayanad during the late nineteenth century. Within a short span of eight years more than 10,000 acres of land was brought under tea cultivation. The table given below shows the acreage under tea cultivation by various companies by the close of the nineteenth century:

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[36] *Planting Opinion,* May 21, 1899. p. 16.
[37] *Ibid.*

Table 4

Name of the Company or Proprietor undertaking the Tea Cultivation	Acreage
1. Eranad & Joint Co-operative Wholesale Society	3409
2. Harrison & Crossfield Ltd.	5012
3. Pierce-Leslie and Company	1452
4. T.C. Anderson	31
5. George Bros.	50
6. H.A.R. Jaffar Muhammed & Sons	153
7. George Romilly	284
8. W.T. Sargent & Sons	375
9. P.G.T. Tipping & Irwin	181
TOTAL	10937

Source: *Planting Directory of South India–1897*, p. 37-8.

Labour in the Wayanad Plantations

When we look into the problems of labour during the nineteenth century in the Coffee and Tea plantations of Wayanad, it can be understood that most of the labour force came from outside Wayanad.[38] Though a large labour force was available locally, the planters had to bring workers from outside Wayanad, mostly from Mysore, Eranad and the Districts of Coimbatore and Salem in Tamil Nadu.[39] This was mainly because of the peculiar custom that existed in Malabar and Wayanad as far as the land system was concerned. Though the

[38] *Planting Opinion*, 23 Jan. 1897. p. 17.
[39] *Ibid.*

British rulers passed the Act of Abolition of Slavery in the year 1843,[40] some sort of attached labour system prevailed till the end of the nineteenth century.

In Wayanad, the local labour force consisted of the tribal castes like *Kurumbas*, *Paniyas* and *Badagas*. Though the labour scarcity was severe in the early period of the development of the plantations, the situation changed gradually in later years on account of the growth of labour population.

The *Kurumbas* and other tribal castes joined the plantations in large numbers because of the constant persuasion by the jobbers of the planters. Since the *Kurumbas* were excellent axe-men, their labour force was heavily exploited for the development of the plantations in Wayanad.[41]

Though the labour force was tapped by the planters they were not given sufficient wages. They were given only two *anas* for an able-bodied man and an *ana* and four paise for a woman. Only after 1858 did the wages begin to rise. The wages in other parts of Malabar and South Canara during the period was also very low. Under the system of attached labour the agricultural labourers were given three *Edangazhi* of rice per man and two *Edangazhi* per woman.[42]

During these days the jobbers collected some commission from the wages of labourers. Child labour was also widely practised and children were given nominal wages. The planters

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[40] See the Collection of Acts and Regulations of the East India Company.
[41] *Planting Opinion*, Dec. 19, 1896, p. 20.
[42] A. Sreedhara Menon, *Gazetteer of Cannanore District* (Trivandrum, 1978), p. 450.

brought the labourers along with their families and employed child labourers on a large scale.[43] NB 4698

Planters generally gave advances to the Kanarese and Tamil *maistries* at the end of the season at the rate of five rupees up to ten rupees per coolie. Advances given by the planters to his *maistries* were recovered from the *maistry* at the end of the season when a fresh advance was given. But in some cases the *maistries* did not keep their contract obligation of supply of labourers.[44] The *maistries* belonging to the coast of Malabar generally did not receive advances because the labourers from this area did not like to remain permanently for one season in the estate. They usually went back to their native places after earning wages for a few weeks. These labourers were paid weekly by the planter and the local labourers were also paid accordingly. The life of a labourer in the plantations of Wayanad was pathetic due to various reasons. The occurrence of malaria was another threat to be met by the labourer. The absence of sufficient medical facility made the condition worse and the death of the labourers in the plantations due to malaria and other diseases was common.

The large scale deforestation of Wayanad

Wayanad was a land of forests till the early nineteenth century. As described by Gopalan Nair it was 'Wananad' or a land of forests.[45] After the colonial occupation of the land, the

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[43] South India Planters Enquiry Committee Report, 1896, p. 27.

[44] To check these practices the British government passed an act known as the Workman's Breach of Contract Act. See for details the Collection of Acts.

[45] Gopalan Nair, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

colonial axe fell upon the forests of Wayanad too. Large areas of forests were destroyed for the cultivation of coffee, tea and cinchona. For the convenience of planting, most planters burnt the forests for saving labour.[46] Such large-scale destruction of forests was one of the early consequences of the colonial occupation. Even before the plantations were started in Wayanad, teak and other hardwood were cut for the construction of railway tracks.[47] Large-scale cutting of hard woods like teak, blackwood and cedar was done during this period. However, the British officials were quite aware of the importance of forests during this period. R. Ribbontrop, a British official in charge of forests, said that:

> In a country like India it is absolutely necessary that certain portion of the land shall always remain under forest. It is not possible to ascertain the actual requirement. But the necessary area many be put down as not less than ¼ of the total area.[48]

Though the Europeans were aware of the importance of forests, they permitted European entrepreneurs to clear the forests for plantation of crops like coffee and tea. But they did not permit the natives to do so for the cultivation of *ragi.* A forest conservator of Malabar stated that: "The destruction of these forests is not continuing; teak for the bona fide cultivation of coffee may be considered legitimate, but not so for *ragi* which spoil the land."[49]

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[46] *Planting Opinion,* Dec. 5, 1896. p. 19.

[47] See for details, Review of the Forest Administration in British India for the year 1883-84.

[48] R. Ribbontrop, *Forestry in British India* (Calcutta, 1900), p. 82.

[49] Report of the Forest Conservator for the official year 1862-63 (TNSA) p. 15.

An order was issued by the government in 1862 to restrict cultivation by the natives. It stated: "No *Nair* or *Moplah* landholder would be permitted such wasteful clearings without being well paid for it." As per this order, all *ragi* cultivation of Wayanad was taxed.[50]

Though the British government evolved a forest policy by the middle of the nineteenth century, they interpreted it for their own purpose and exploited the resources for developing plantations. European capital was always encouraged not only at the expense of the native labourer and material but also at the expense of ecological balance.

The pioneering efforts in plantations opened new avenues of capital investment for the British. Several joint-stock companies were organised in London to promote capital investment in the plantation industry in Malabar. The plantation system based on capitalist mode of agriculture introduced a new opening for extraction of land resources. In the long run, the regions of Malabar, the Nilgiris, etc. were converted into farmlands of the British capitalists. New regulations were also promulgated by the Company to facilitate such rampant exploitation of resources.

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[50] Order No. 402, Government of Madras, dated 16th Jan. 1862 (TNSA).

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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CHAPTER FIVE

NILAMBUR TEAK PLANTATIONS

The teak plantations of Nilambur constitute another important source of surplus extraction by nominal investment from Malabar during the nineteenth century. It can be examined on the specific background of the forest policy of the colonial rule which undoubtedly became a part of surplus appropriation and exploitation of natural resources in the Asiatic societies.

Since the Middle Ages, deforestation was a common practice in Western Europe in the ages of economic growth. In addition to food they needed wood for their infrastructural development due to climatic conditions. The demand for oak was very high in developed countries like Britain. The scarcity of oak gradually made the colonial powers search for new kinds of timber for construction of vessels. Indian teak played a prominent role during this juncture.

The colonial government did not follow a clear-cut forest policy in India during its early days. The policy evolved by the Company was extraordinarily slow. There were many mitigating factors at the initial stages. According to Berthold Ribbontrop, "the scientific knowledge amongst European officials was confined almost entirely to the medical profession." Anyway, the British officials and scientists were not aware of the scientific use of forest resources during the eighteenth century. The first step towards forest conservation was an order issued by the Bombay Bengal Joint Commission appointed to inquire into the

internal circumstances of Malabar. They suggested some important measures like prohibition of the felling of teak below 21 inches in girth.[1] It was in 1805 that a committee was appointed to look into the matters of forests in India. The immediate result of the report was a general proclamation that the royalty right in teak trees claimed by former governments would be vested with the company and as such, the company prohibited all further unauthorised felling of such trees.

Therefore, the developments and policies in India had taken place in the background of the war requirements of colonial England as England was passing through a critical period in her history. Safeguarding of British colonies depended on the strength of her navy and durability of her vessels. The Indian Teak played a major role in saving England in her time of peril and helped her achieve supremacy in the high seas. [2]

Teak trees from India were used not only for building ships but for many other purposes as well. Railroad development in India was largely dependent upon the teak wealth of India. It was also used for the construction of buildings and bridges during the nineteenth century.

By 1790s construction of small ships became imperative. Till then the industry was confined to repairing old ones. These early chapters of the ship building activities were closely related to the attempts of the Company to control and utilise the great timberlands of India, beginning with the teak forests of Malabar. Consequently, half a century before the emergence of systematic forest management on an all India level, serious attempts were

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[1] E.P. Stebbing, *Forests in India* (London, 1922), p. 27.
[2] B. Ribbontrop, *Forestry in British India* (Calcutta, 1900), p. 65.

made to control the extraction, and utilisation of the principal products of the Malabar forests. These attempts were made due to the acute shortage faced in suitable shipbuilding timber in England.

Thus it could be seen that the destruction of the Indian forest was influenced by the international economic, political and military ties of British imperialism. Here Indian forests were drawn, like other resources of the country, inexorably into the worldwide dynamism of Western Capitalism, which was manifest in India in the form of the British colonial empire. The colonial empire, which had linked the environment of India with the world system subsequently, introduced a radical change in resource control and caused the beginning of major conflicts over natural resources. [3]

As noted earlier, the Bengal-Bombay joint commissioners were concerned with the continued availability of teak timber to meet the requirements of the Company. They suggested the prohibition of felling of teak timber of less than 21 inches. They were more interested in the products in the forests such as cardamom, pepper, sandalwood and other spices. However, the commission was aware of the future commercial potential of the timber trade. Another report was of William Thackeray who was investigating the revenue matters of Malabar and Canara. Thackeray's reports reflected a better appreciation of the need to control the forests and in the extraction of their produce. He also referred to the nature of the ownership of the Malabar forests and suggested that the government should get control

[3] Immanuel Wallerstine, *Mercantalism and the Consolidation of the European World Economy – 1600-1750* (New York, 1974), p. 10.

over the forests before the private owners got the real value of the forests. He advocated for the establishment of the Company's monopoly in timber trade.

The report of Ward and Corner referred to the luxuriant growth of forests and the magnificent dimension of the teak trees in the eastern parts of Malabar. They also described the cutting of teak and its transport to Kozhikode, Baypore and Ponnani. However, these reports were a purely descriptive account and do not contain any serious suggestions as to the control of forest products or the mode of their extraction. Dr. Francis Buchanan, who had undertaken a journey of exploration through Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, recorded that he had seen some of the finest forests that he had ever seen. He refers to the existence of *Kuttikkanam* (stump fee) by which any man who give the property owner a *panam* could cut a tree. He continues that many of the valuable trees, of which teak was the most valuable, were being cut through this method. H.S. Graeme's report of 1822 reflected the colonial concerns of timber trade. According to him, by that time timber operations had become a significant aspect of colonial administrative concerns. Graeme details the pros and cons of the monopoly established over timber trade during the period 1807-1822.

In 1823, Thomas Munroe, the Governor of Madras was instrumental in abolishing the timber monopoly established by the East India company in Malabar and in Travancore. He believed in the development of timber markets and hoped that better prices for timber would be enough incentive for private owners of forests to improve their timber stock.

Lord Dalhousie laid down the outline of a permanent policy of forest conservancy in India. His declaration in this regard was considered as the "first real step towards the scientific conservancy of the forests".[4]

The Malabar forest was one great wooded region, which attracted the attention of the British rulers from the very inception of colonial domination. After the acquisition of Malabar region in 1792, the East India Company had two important duties before them. The first was to root out the challenges from the neighbouring territories and the second was to make the administration economically viable. They exploited the agricultural revenue from all over India. However, when coming down to Malabar the natural resources were found in the form of abundant forest produce in the eastern parts of the Malabar Coast.

Forest conservation in India and in Malabar was not at all a part of the knowledge of forestry and the importance of the preservation of forests, but the material need of the East India Company. Ironically, when the knowledge on forest resources were increasing, increased destruction and depletion of forests and its resources occurred in Malabar during the early years of the nineteenth century.[5]

The report furnished by Ronald Martin emphasised the linkage between the availability of water, rainfall and the existence of forests. As a result, the Court of Directors issued

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 206.
[5] Ribbontrop, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

notices to the Presidencies and emphasised the importance of the preservation of forests.[6]

In 1852, the British annexed the province of Pegu. For nearly a hundred years teak timber in Burma had been one of the staple export from Rangoon and the forests had been claimed as royal property by the ruler. Following this precedent, all forests were declared to be government property almost immediately after annexation, and Dr. McLeland was appointed as superintendent. Although the forests were undisputed property of the government, their exploitation was done by private proprietors also. In 1854, McLeland submitted a report regarding the curtailment of the exploitation by private parties. In response to that report Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General, issued the "Charter of the Indian forests" outlining the forest conservancy for the whole of India.[7]

The background of the Forest Act as well as the forest policy of British India during the period of East India Company and after was to check the private non–British interference in the forest resources of Malabar. They wanted to use the resources without any external resistance and local intervention.

As noted earlier, the new technological innovations of England and their need for material resources for shipbuilding and other activities compelled the company to control and undertake new experiments in the timber resources of Malabar. This led to the establishment of a Teak Plantation in Nilambur in South Malabar after the model of Tennasarian forests of Burma.

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[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Nilambur, a part of Eranad Taluk under Malabar district had a very extensive forest area. It was one among the three ranges of forests viz. Palakkad, Wayanad and Nilambur. The Nilambur range consisted of a number of detached blocks of forest lands scattered over the Nilambur valley.[8]

Nilambur valley was a fertile area in the shape of a horseshoe elevated 400 feet above sea level. The hills surrounding it on three sides roughly form a semi-circle at an elevation of 3000 feet above sea level. The rainfall is about 120 inches annually, falling chiefly between June and November. Absence of high winds is another notable feature of Nilambur.

The rivers were navigable upto January and below Mambad, on the western side of the plantation, navigation was very easy. This river reached upto Kozhikode city.[9]

Kozhikode was described as one of the best timber markets of the world. Beypore was the centre of the timber market situated near the city of Kozhikode. All the Nilambur timber was transported through the Chaliyar River to Beypore. From the government depot at Beypore most of the timber went to supply the big timber industries of Kallayi. Kallayi was connected to Beypore River by means of the Conolly canal. From Kallayi and Beypore timber was exported to different parts of India and abroad. Teak was the principal timber exported by sea. It was exported directly to London for sale and sold at high prices. [10]

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[8] *Statistics of Malabar* (Calicut, 1874), Govt. of Madras. P. 12.
[9] Athol MacGregor, "Memorandum of the Nilambur Teak Plantations," in *Indian Forester,* Vol. II (Calcutta, 1877), p. 108.
[10] R.S. Bourne, *Revised Working Plan of Nilambur Valley* (Madras, 1929), p. 36.

H.V. Conolly, the acting Principal Collector of Malabar, initiated the very idea of Teak plantation in this fertile valley. The Conolly Plantation scheme is regarded as the beginning of teak plantations in India. But it is pointed out that in the Maratha country, Kanhoji Angre, the chief of Shivaji's navy, had started teak plantation with a view of ensuring the continuous supply of teak for Shivaji's naval crafts.[11] The company's administration also had experience of teak plantations long before such enterprise was started at Nilambur. Hugh Cleghorn reporting on the forests of South India in 1858 had recorded that he had cited the small teak plantations at Honore, Ankola and Sidashegar, in South Canara, which had been supervised by Col. Gilbert in 1804.

England had a long tradition and experience in plantation and forestry. But Conolly had no real and reliable information regarding the problems and patterns of plant growth in the tropical climate and soil conditions of the area. No information was available in India regarding this during that period. Actually, Malabar set a new ball in motion, and the other parts of South India followed suit. Anyway, the Nilambur experiment became a direct inspiration and a solid example for plantation throughout the Indian sub-continent.

Conolly was preparing for this ambitious project for long. He made a calculation that 1,20,000 teak trees would have to be planted for a profitable venture on a 60 year rotation scheme to meet the requirements of the naval and commercial purpose of

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[11] Hugh Cleghorn, First Annual Report on Forest Operations in the Madras Presidency (Mangalore, 1858), para 17.

Bombay.[12] But even before this kind of a serious move he successfully enforced a prohibition on the removal of immature teak as advocated by Mr. Sheffield in 1828. In 1840 Conollly had suggested to the government for the acquisition of 260 sq. miles of private forests in the Nilambur valley. He drafted a detailed proposal for planting of teak in the valley to fulfil the naval and other commercial needs of the British government. But the estimation worked out by Conolly was much greater than the real need because he was totally ignorant about the growth of the tropical forest.

The Madras government approved the proposals and instructed him to ascertain and report about the terms upon which private proprietors would be prepared to lease or sell their forests to the government. Lord Auckland, the Governor General in a minute of August 1840, approved the measures taken to preserve the Malabar teak forests. However, he did not consider imposing restrictions upon the felling of small trees on the ground that such periodical clearing was necessary to allow more room for growing trees. [13]

The whole objective of forest management and timber preservation of the colonial government was to extract as much timber as they could. From the beginning of the colonial rule to the middle of the nineteenth century they followed this policy and the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the same policy in a different way. The amount of the extraction of the timber during these two periods will clearly show the motives and the volume of the colonial exploitation of the huge timber

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[12] Stebbing, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

resources of Malabar. This will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Acquisition of the Plantation Sites

In the year 1940 the District Collector Conolly conducted discussions with *Thrikkalayur Devaswam*. The landlord Moorthy Sankaran Nambudiripad was ready to give some land on mortgage for the purpose. The financial difficulty of *Devaswam* was the immediate reason for the signing of the agreement. The deed was executed on 10th December 1840. The financial difficulties of *Devaswam* made matters easy and the temple authorities were ready to leave the forests for as many years as the government wanted. As per the agreement concluded with Nambudiripad, an amount of Rs. 8,000 was paid in advance including Re.1 per timber to be cut within the limit of the mortgaged land. [14] (The amount of mortgage was Rs. 1000 and Rs. 7000 was given in advance). The agreement reached between the two parties contained 12 terms.[15] The most important term of the agreement was the authority to cut forest trees including teak and to plant teak on a large scale in the mortgaged area. The landlords were totally ignorant of the colonial designs and long term planning behind the agreement. [16]

On 10th November 1842, Conolly obtained the lease of an additional area of land from the *Zamorin* of Kozhikode. A lease agreement was signed with Wandur Nambudiripad for the

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[14] East India (Forest Conservancy), Letter from P. Grant, Collector of Malabar to J.D. Sim, Secretary to Govt. Revenue Department, Fort St. George, dated 7th Aug. 1861, p. 70.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[16] For details, *Ibid.*, p. 72-6.

Chathomboray block in 1871. In 1878 Amarabalam and Karimpuzha blocks were leased by the company and Amarambalam and Karimpuzha blocks were purchased by the government at a court sale in 1892.[17] Company also purchased land from Edavanna Kovilakom.

After the three important acquisitions of the 1840s, Conolly refrained from making further acquisitions of forest lands in Malabar. There were many reasons for this decision. One reason was that he was not confident about the future of the wooded area and secondly the discovery of considerable teak forest in Canara.[18] He reported to the Board of Revenue in 1843:

> I do not think it advisable for the government to make any more purchase of land unless under very favourable circumstances. So long as immature teak is not cut, it is not little matter as the ground on which it grows belongs.[19]

The Amarampalam and Karimpuzha purchases were the only purchase done by the company by paying a good amount of money. That too was Rs. 80,000 for nearly 4000 acres of land.[20] To Trikalayur Devaswam the company paid only Rs. 1000 and a stump fee of Re. 1. The *Zamorin* of Kozhikode also was not given any amount.

The Chethomporai block of 2000 acres belonged to the Nedivati Nambuthiripad of Wandur. Company officials reported that it should be secured on the same terms as the other land and an advance towards stump fee of Rs. 5000. The Raja

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[17] C.A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer* (Thiruvananthapuram, 1997), p. 224.
[18] Report to the Board of Revenue by H.V. Conolly, dated 30 Nov. 1843, quoted in R.S. Bourne, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] R.S. Beddome, *Report on Nilambur Teak Plantations* (Madras, 1918), p. 10.

however put in a claim to the land and the collector refused to purchase it. Subsequently the Company purchased the land of 700 acres for Rs. 5000.[21]

Attempts to Transplanting Teak

Side by side with the acquisition of the vast forest lands of Nilambur, Conolly started transplanting teak trees. As a preliminary experiment, he sowed 3000 seeds and planted 10,000 seedlings picked out from the natural forest. This method of direct sowing of seeds and transplanting seedlings, attempted upto 1843, ended in failure. As a result he appointed capable officials to discharge the duty efficiently. He decided to make use of the expertise of the scientists of cotton farms and botanical gardens of Pondicherry. However these efforts also did not prove successful because these officials found forest life very hard and they could not stand the discomforts of it. [22]

At this juncture the task fell upon the shoulder of the native sub-conservator namely Chathu Menon. He showed great interest in this new experiment and the subsequent success of transplantation was solely due to the initiative and deep devotion showed by Chathu Menon. After 1844, teak plantation was carried out with great success. In the initial period Conolly was assisted by H. Smith and Sergeant Graham. Chathu Menon continued his work entrusted to him until 1862. During this period about 1512.71 acres were planted with teak, at an average of 108 acres per year. It was a tremendous task under the hard climatic conditions that prevailed in the hilly region.

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] William Logan, *Malabar Manual,* Vol. II, Appendix XXI. (Madras, 1951), p. cccixv.

The locality was very much unhealthy with virulent malaria. Some of the months like March, April and May are generally considered fever months.[23] No communication facility was available, nor any means of transport. The labour force also was very inadequate.

During this period only the most favourable plots were taken up for planting new seeds and seedlings. Naturally the planting area was spread over a large number of scattered plots. However in 1854 planting had been restricted to a single compartment of 92.33 acres in the Panangode block. These activities may well be taken as the first step in the introduction of systematic management of teak plantation in British India. Apart from planting, Conolly and his colleagues recognised the need for proper tending of the saplings through weeding, pruning, spacing and thinning operations. [24]

At first, planting was confined to the river banks, west of Nilambur and in 1853 when this area had been exhausted, the eastern point was selected and planted upto 1856. During this period the planting area included so many laterite tracts and this proved a mistake and again new areas on the banks of the river had to be selected. During 1870-71 an area known as Nellikkutta was planted and a further area of 235 acres on the banks of the river was planted on 1873-74. [25]

The period from 1844 to 1862 can be considered as the period of Chathu Menon for he ably supervised the plantations. But he suffered much from the shortage of labour supply and he

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[23] Athol MacGregor, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 103.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

brought labour from distant places. In fact after some time, when thinning commenced, he found it impossible to continue the annual extension. In 1857, Dr. Cleghorn, the first conservator of Madras, advocated the temporary curtailment of the new planting in order that the establishment might be concentrated on the thinning and pruning.[26]

To overcome the difficulties of labour supply MacGregor recommended the opening up of a Cart-road from Mampad to the foot of the Carcoor Ghat. He hoped that the construction of this road would lead to a great influx of labour. But the problem of labour continued. The report of MacGregor gives a good idea of the problems confronted by Chathu Menon.

By 1860 the forest department expressed its full confidence regarding the growth and success of the teak plantations. The annual report of 1862-63 characterised the experiment as "successful and profitable". [27] It goes:

> The government is glad to learn that these plantations are thriving so well under Mr. Ferguson's care. A million and half of trees have been planted and are valued at 20,59,117 rupees. The plantation now yields a handsome profit from the sale of teak saplings and other timber; and the planting of fresh tracts should be systematically carried on.[28]

Cleghorn, the newly appointed Forest Conservator of Madras Presidency devoted much attention to the plantation work and visited the Nilambur plantations and expressed high opinion regarding its management. He was the first Conservator who received scientific training in forest management. He writes

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[26] Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. II, Appendix XXI, p. cccixvii.
[27] *Report on Operation of the Forest Department in the Official Year 1862-63*. p. 50.
[28] *Ibid.*

that the demand for teak timber was so high and so steadily on the increase as to indicate that at a near future scarcity of large sized logs would arise.[29] He advocated the extension of the plantation work. It was 14 years since the plantation had started when Cleghorn visited the area. He bears testimony to the flourishing condition of the plantations. The success of the 'operation' was also testified by the Marquis of Tweeddale, the Governor of Madras in his minute dated 8th December 1846. He says:

> ... I can assure the honourable court that their expression of confidence in Mr. Conolly's exertions for establishing a good system of management in the teak forests, as far as the plantations are now advanced is well merited. I have had much experience in plantations and woods on my own account at home, as well as in those of other proprietors, but I never saw a better commencement than in the Government teak plantations of Malabar. [30]

Contributions of Chathu Menon

Chathu Menon is considered the real foster father of Conolly t+eak plantations. In spite of hardships, malarial fever and frequent scarcity of food supplies he managed the plantation with utmost sincerity, where British officials left out. He had excellent control over his subordinates and labourers.[31] When he was appointed as sub-conservator of forests he was paid Rs. 50 as monthly salary. He served the company for more than 18 years and contributed much to the development of forestry and

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[29] Hugh Cleghorn, *The Forests and Gardens of South India* (London, 1961), pp. 304-5.
[30] Minutes of the Marquis of Tweeddale, the Governor of Madras, dated 8th Dec. 1846 in *Ibid.*, p. 314.
[31] R.S. Bourne, Nilambur Valley Working Plan, Vol. I (Madras, 1921), p. 18.

plantation. Actually his experiment was a landmark in the history of forestry in India which decided the main thrust of forest development for the entire country for more than a century. It was also indirectly ushering in a new forestry technique of artificial regeneration of preferred tree species in monoculture plantation. [32]

He was held in high esteem by the authorities. He took great pride in the success of these plantations. The continuous extension of the plantations owed a lot to the industrious and sincere effort of Chathu Menon. Cleghorn commended the great work done by Chathu Menon:

> I, this week (Aug. 1857) visited all the extensive teak plantations on the banks of the Nilambur river and it gives me great pleasure to bear testimony to their flourishing and satisfactory state, which promises apparently certain ultimate success and neglects great credit both upon the judgement of the zealous originator (Mr. Conolly) and upon the perseverance of Chathu Menon, the sub-conservator, who has almost from the very beginning tended the nurseries and watched the young plants. [33]

He was not in favour of retirement of Chathu Menon when he attained the age of 58. Instead, he advised the Collector to appoint an assistant to share the work of Chathu Menon.[34] In 1858 when Lord Harris, President of the company visited the plantation, he ordered the presentation of one ornamental Wood Man's knife and belt to Chathu Menon in recognition of his

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[32] S. Sathish Chandran Nair, Long Term Conservator Potential of Natural Forests in the Southern Western Ghats of Kerala (Peechi, 1980), p. 24.
[33] Cleghorn's Report to Collector of Malabar, in Cleghorn, *Forests and Gardens of South India* (London, 1861), p. 318.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 319 (TNSA).

meritorious service. Chathu Menon was also granted an honorary pension.[35] As a tribute to the pioneering efforts of Conolly and Chathu Menon, an extent of 5.75 acres of the 1846 plantation raised by them was retained as a permanent preservation plot. This is one of the most famous forestry plots in the world where foresters from all over the world come and pay homage to the pioneers.[36] The pilgrimage-like practice continued through the years. In the words of R. S. Bourne:

> He took greatest pride in the success of early plantations; in fact the more or less continuous extension of this plantation to the present day is indirectly attributable to his honesty and integrity. [37]

Thus, the forest question was addressed in terms of the value of timber and money. Conservation was fully ignored and timber trade was started in the name of preservation. Chathu Menon, a sincere forest officer from India became the most suitable instrument in the hands of the colonial government for their exploitation of the natural resources and the destruction of our environment.

When Hugh Cleghorn, the Conservator of forests, Madras, visited Nilambur he opined that "the plantation is worthy of a full and separate report which will be a historical record of what can be affected by artificial means." He firmly believed that the Nilambur plantations would be an important source of timber supply in the future.[38]

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[35] Letter from R.H. Beddome, Conservator of Forest to C.G. Master, Secretary to Govt. Revenue Department, dated 20 April 1878. No. 104 (TNSA).
[36] Stebbing, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-4.
[37] R.S. Bourne, *Working Plan, op. cit.*, p. 63.
[38] Cleghorn, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

Period of more Scientific Cultivation

Chathu Menon was succeeded by Ferguson as the Sub-Conservator. He involved himself in the task of extending the plantation in a more methodical and systematic way. He was in charge of the plantation from 1862 to 1883. During this period, he rendered very valuable and dedicated service to the growth and development of the plantation. He conducted new experiments and innovations and utilised labour force in a more systematic way.

As he was trained in the scientific method, he adopted the system of spacing the plants. A kind of scientific espacement of plants was the first important task before him. He utilised the local or tribal labour, since more labour force was needed for this effort. There were differences of opinion regarding the spacing of the plants among experts themselves. Beddome recommended an espacement of 6 feet by 8 feet. Nevertheless, Ferguson argued for a system of 6 feet x 6 feet and 9 feet x 9 feet depending upon the quality of the soil. [39]

The first step in the whole process was planting. Planting was done in square holes of 12-inch depth as to just cover the root. In the early days of plantation activity, natural seedlings were transplanted in addition to sowing. A successful nursery was established in Nilambur. The size of the nursery beds were 40 feet by 4 feet and 9 to 12 inches high[40] and Chathu Menon used plants with full taproots.

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[39] R.S. Bourne, *Revised Working Plan, op. cit.*, p. 32.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

However, Ferguson cut and shorted the taproot to six inches and planted with the short portion in tact. But the taproots were found to develop into thick carrot, not suitable for planting. Hence, small transplants stripped of all leaves except terminal leaves were used for planting. This practice continued till 1933. Stump cultivation came into use from 1936.

T.F. Bourdillon, Conservator of forests, Travancore, developed the stump planting system and the technique was introduced at Aryankavu in 1891. This technique was expected to overcome the mortality of seedlings in drier areas. From 1893 onwards stump planting became an accepted practice in Travancore. Later, other scientists perfected this system. Tending the planted saplings also occupied the attention of those in charge of plantations from the very outset. Weeding was the first task to be taken up.[41] But over the years the pattern of weeding to a radius of about 1½ feet had developed and came to stay. This allowed free growth and reduced soil erosion.

Thinning was recognised as an essential right from the beginning of the plantations. In 1851, on the advice of MacGregor, Superintendent of Horticultural gardens, Ootacamund, Conolly marked for thinning certain plots in the plantations of 1843 and 1844. In 1854, Conolly advised the thinning of plantations by the removal of one tree between every two. Gibson, Conservator of forests from Bombay, who visited the plantations in 1854, advised the thinning one fifth of smaller trees and a further of one fifth after 7 years. In 1856, Gibson observed that there seemed to be only one essential factor to the entire success of this great experiment, the careful and

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

systematic thinning and pruning of the plantations. In 1874, Ferguson had noted: "If the plantations are intended for first class timber, the thinning should begin from the 6th or 7th year."[42] Beddome, Conservator of forests reported in 1878 that Ferguson actually began the thinning in the ninth year with further thinnings to follow in the 13th, 16th, 20th and 32nd years. The anticipated rotation in the later half of the nineteenth century was 50 years but gradually extended to 70 years and that was followed till the 1960s. In the meantime, from 1863 onwards elephants were employed in dragging timber and saplings. Till then they had been dragged by hand. At first elephants were obtained from the Commissariat department at Kannur. Later they were hired locally. The employment of elephants led to savings in a considerable amount of labour and the surplus labour force was utilised for further planting by Ferguson.

He reorganised the entire system of forest administration and employed more supervisory staff. Since the blocks were distributed in different areas of Nilambur valley this could not be easily managed.

Side by side with the task of administrative measures, Ferguson started the job of planting more and more areas. He conducted negotiations with Wandur Nambudiripad in 1868 for further acquisition of plantation and completed it in 1871. As a result, the Amarampalam Raja offered the government, the Amarampalam forests containing a teak plantation along with the Karumpoya forest. The main reason for this offer was his financial difficulty. He was badly in need of money and the

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

government sanctioned Rs. 80,000 for these lands. However, the intervention of Beddome was a barrier for the further accumulation of forest area, since he insisted on a detailed enquiry regarding the area before entering into a deal.[43]

From 1867 to 1876 a total of 3,100 acres were planted. But the planting spree was ended by 1876, again because of the visit and instructions from Beddome. He wanted to stop further extension of plantation for two reasons. One being the already planted size of the area was very large and second, he wanted to take stock of the money already spent towards the improvement of the teak forest. [44]

The report presented by R.H. Beddome recorded his full confidence on the profitable nature of the teak plantations. He notes with full satisfaction that the sale of saplings alone nearly equalled the expenditure. This was barely 36 years after the first seedlings planted. In 1878, long before the final harvest was taken from the plantation, the sale of saplings alone had paid for all the expenses hitherto incurred by the government on the project.[45]

Ferguson was succeeded by Gordon Hadfield and he was in charge from 1883 to 1895. He introduced two thinning schemes for 1885-89 and 1889-94. These schemes were drawn up by Campbell Walker. During the same period, some administrative changes were also introduced. Some general rules for the forests were prescribed because of the passing of the Forest Act in 1881. The division was divided into three ranges—Nilambur,

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[43] R.H. Beddome, letter dated 12th June 1872, quoted in R.S. Bourne, *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[45] R.H. Beddome, *Report on the Nilambur Teak Plantations* (Madras, 1878), p. 128.

Amarampalam and Palakkad. But the Palakkad range was reduced to Mannarkkad area and renamed as Mannarkkad range.

Campbell suggested and undertook the extension of plantation during this period. He drew up a scheme with an estimate for planting an area of 1,000 acres in 10 years. The implementation of the scheme was started in 1886. Within the nine years from 1886 to 1895, an area of 1,100 odd acres was planted.

All the operations related to timber were also made more profitable by Hadfield. Previously, drawing timber upto the riverbanks was done by hired elephants. But Hadfield started capturing elephants at his disposal to get these works done. He systematically undertook the works like planting, weeding and pruning. He also started schemes for fire protection on a large scale, which proved very successful. To conduct these schemes he employed more personnel and constructed buildings at Nilambur. [46]

The experience gained and the possibility uncovered by the Nilambur experiment inspired the administrators to start plantations on similar lines elsewhere as well. The Nilambur system was followed in both North and South Canara. The experience and confidence gained from Malabar and Nilambur areas were transmitted to other areas of India and Burma. The Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces recommended the establishment of plantations in Narmada and Tapti valleys on the lines of Nilambur plantations.

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[46] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Since teak trees were taking an average 60 years for its full growth in the nineteenth century, the government did not earn much from the plantation except from the natural forests and thinnings. Only by the dawn of the twentieth century, the plantation accounts showed high revenue receipts. In the long run, the government amassed a huge revenue from the plantation.

In fact the colonial experiments in teak plantation had an educational value also. Later they turned their attention to planting teak trees along with other plants in Wayanad and other regions. Such plantations gave sufficient timber to the colonial government for the expansion of railways in the twentieth century. The extraction system of teak later helped to procure more revenue to the exchequer. Even then teak forests are a major resource for the government.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
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CHAPTER SIX

THE NILGIRI PLANTATIONS

The Nilgiris were one of the potential areas of South India where the Europeans, during the early years, started plantations. Though, as noted earlier, they occupied this region with the intention of developing it as a sanatorium for the invalids among the European officials, they found that this part of South India was very suitable for the cultivation of various crops, both eastern and western.

Ooty or Ootacamund, the headquarters of the Nilgiris, depended substantially upon Indian capital and entrepreneurship for its early establishment. The Madras government was unwilling to spend any state money for its development despite the health benefits Ooty offered to its troops and civil servants. Here, Parsi and Gujarati merchants, as well as Tamil, Kanarese and Malayalee immigrants from the plains engaged themselves in activities in which the hills were not self-sufficient. They built bazaars, rented houses, sold building materials, and supplied grains and other necessities which the hills could not produce in sufficient quantities. But from 1840 onwards planters, market gardeners, retired European officials and others started settling in this land. The earliest plantation crop they cultivated was coffee.

Coffee Plantations

It was during the 1840s that the earliest coffee plants were brought to the Nilgiris. It is believed that the origin of coffee cultivation in the Nilgiris was from Mysore. The correspondent of *Planting Opinion* remarked:

> It was in 1840 when public curiosity was somewhat excited by the arrival in Ooty from Mysore of eight bandies laden with Coffee plants, long straggly things grown up under the shade of plantain trees, and brought from the natives for Ten rupees a thousand.[1]

The first attempt at growing coffee in the Nilgiris was made in 1838 by a European namely Dawson in Coonoor. Another experimental plot was opened at Kalhatti in 1839 with seedlings from Mananthavady. Under the partnership of three Europeans, namely, Lascelles, Pope and Magrath, there started another plantation.[2] Along with them a British civil servant, M.D. Cockburn, at Balahardar on the Kotagiri Ghat, and his son George Cockburn also started estates under Bishop Stove at Kotagiri.[3]

Systematic planting started here with the opening up of estates by M.D. Cockburn in Kannahatty estate in 1843. Cockburn is generally considered a pioneer of coffee planting in the Nilgiris.

Plantation at Bonnahuttee, commonly known as Hoolical, commenced in 1841. When it became known that these areas were within the range of frost, and were suitable for coffee, their

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[1] *Planting Opinion*, Nov. 1895, p. 2.
[2] Kaku J. Thana, *Plantation in the Nilgiris – A Synoptic History* (Glenmorgan, 1969), p. 37.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

owners tried their luck in the lower localities and the slopes of the ghats began to be taken up, and have continued in profitable cultivation.[4]

Another noteworthy planter in the nineteenth century was S. James who planted at Seegoor, which was then considered an abode of fever. Later this land became a property of H. Schnarre. The coming of James Ouchterlony to Naduvattom and his commencement of three estates—Lauriston, Suffolk and Sandy hills—may be considered the beginning of regular planting in the Nilgiris.[5]

The valley later known as Ouchterlony valley was pointed out to him by his brother John who had in the 1840s surveyed the valley and been struck by what he saw of it from the top of a hill in its north-western corner. In the words of J.H. Wilkes,

> The whole of it was then an unbroken sheet of forest, and its sheltered position, elevation, rainfall, rich soil and numerous streams have resulted in its fully realizing the expectations formed of it, the coffee grown there being considered one of the best marks among East Indian Coffee.[6]

In 1845 James Ouchterlony leased the eastern part of the valley from the Raja of Nilambur for Rupees 1500 with a rent of Rupees 20 a year and planted his first coffee there. This estate was later known as Lauriston estate. Ouchterlony's first manager was Alpin Fowler, who left the valley in 1854, and his first superintendents were brothers Alfred, Alexander and Adolphous Wright.

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[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[6] J.H. Wilkes, quoted in M. Muthaiah, *A Planting Century: The First Hundred Years of United Planters Association of Southern India 1893-1993* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 27-8.

Following this, coffee plantations started from 1854 in Gudallur and the Moyar valley. J.B. McIntyre, a Ceylon planter, opened up the Moyar valley, a rich merchant, Hassan Berrate, opened up estates on Naduvattom Ghats, and the Wright Brothers were opening up plantations in other parts of the valley.

James Ochterlony had to face many challenges during the early years of his planting. Due to various reasons he was not entirely successful during the initial years. Pests like black bug, the stem borer and leaf disease were some important reasons for the failure.[7]

In 1866-67 the area of coffee plantation was estimated to be 13,500 acres. The average yield was 3.5 million pounds of crop. The eastern, southern and western slopes proved the most favorable to the growth of coffee.[8] The Kundahs to the west was well exposed to the south-west monsoon, but the northern slopes were too dry.

It is said that coffee cultivation reached the peak of prosperity in 1879. During this year, the area cultivated in the whole district was 25,000 acres and the total crop 4,500 tons. The cultural conditions that prevailed then in the district were extremely favorable and the yields were also very heavy.[9]

There were several reasons for the destruction of coffee plantations in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Low prices due to increased production in other countries can be considered a major reason. The search for gold was another blow

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[8] East India (Progress) Statement of Moral and Material Progress of India (Statement submitted to the Parliament) 1866-67, p. 63.
[9] *Ibid.*

to the cultivation of coffee. Along with that a scale insect (*Cocus viride*) rendered coffee cultivation almost unprofitable and coffee in the district was largely replaced by tea.[10]

Tea plantations

The Nilgiris are one of the largest tea-producing areas of India. When the British East India Company's official Sir Joseph Bark studied tea plants and climatic conditions, he had suggested to the company the cultivation of tea in Cooch Bihar and the Nilgiri hills in 1823. Robert Bruce, an assistant surgeon of East India Company discovered tea plants growing wild in Assam. But much credit goes to his adventurous brother A.C. Bruce for establishing the first plantations at Gabroo Hills in Assam.[11] Although the Nilgiris were not the first place where tea was introduced in the country, the early association of it with the district is interwoven with fascinating history. In 1832, Dr. Christie, Madras-based surgeon, while on special duty in the Nilgiris to conduct meteorological and geological investigations, decided to experiment with tea planting in the district. He applied for a grant of land in the Nilgiris for experimentation, but he died before the arrival of plants from China. When the plants did arrive, however, a few were given to the commandant of Ootacamund, who planted them in the garden of Crewe Hall and distributed the rest for trial in various parts in the Nilgiris.[12] Unaware that the tea plant was found in Assam, Lord William Bentick, the then-Viceroy of India, sent a commission to China to

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[10] Somerset Playne, *Southern India: Its History, People, Commerce, and Industrial Resources* (London 1914-15), p. 221.
[11] *Planters Chronicle*, March 1888, p. 16.
[12] UPASI, Tea Plantations for the Nilgiris (Coonoor, 1989), p. 2.

bring seed and expert tea makers to India. As a result, plants were distributed to many parts of South India on an experiment basis. More plants were distributed in 1834, which resulted in an experimental farm being opened up in Ketti under the management of Perrottett, a French Botanist. The development of tea plantations on commercial lines was started by a planter known as Mann.

Mann secured a good number of quality tea seeds from China and started an estate near Coonoor. With his success in tea plantation began an estate in Thaishola in 1859 by employing Chinese prisoners of war.[13] Thaishola has been described as one of the most beautiful estates of the Nilgiris comprising undulating hills divided by valleys through which flow streams.

During the same period an estate known as Dunsandle was opened near Kalhatty by a European planter. Another early tea estate was Nousuch, near Coonoor, where sixty acres were planted as early as 1860.[14] By the end of 1869 tea had been planted in some 200 to 300 acres at the Nilgiri hills. Breeks, the Commissioner of the Nilgiris, had intimated the British government about remarkable growth of tea plantations in the Nilgiris. He also informed that the area under cultivation of tea was increased in 1869. In 1876-77 there were 3,142 acres of tea plantation in the Nilgiris of which 1,514 acres had mature plants. [15]

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[13] The Chinese prisoners of Opium war were brought and jailed on the Nilgiris in two camps—one at Naduvattom and other at Thaishola reserve forests. Although nothing is mentioned about the performance of these prisoners in the history of Thaishola, there is a local legend that the Chinese prisoners gave instructions to the planters in the cultivation and manufacture of tea. UPASI, *Plan and Planting* (Coonoor, 1989), p. 7.

[14] M. Muthaiah, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[15] M. Gopalakrishnan, *Gazetteers of Nilgiri District* (Madras, 1984), p. 82.

According to the Royal Commission reports of 1887, the land under tea plantation was very limited, but the requirement was increasing. Therefore it recommended that the government should bring more lands under tea cultivation.[16] From this stage onwards the growth of tea cultivation was steady and the acreage under tea in the Nilgiris rose to 4,799 in 1895. According to the UPASI report of 1897, nearly 21,000 acres were brought under cultivation in South India. Among it the share of the Nilgiris was 7,000 acres. [17]

The first record of the planting of tea in the Ouchterlony valley was at New Hope in 1874, when a few acres were planted in 1898 by J.S. Nichols.[18] Shortly afterwards, the English and Scottish Joint Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited (CWS) acquired several plots of land around Devala and Pandalur and commenced tea plantation during the early twentieth century.[19]

The first shipment of India tea reached London in 1839 and was auctioned at fancy prices. During the next twelve years there was more export because more area was cultivated in North Eastern India, mainly through private planters.[20]

Cinchona

Cinchona is a medicinal plant introduced by the Europeans in India, especially in the Nilgiris. It was due to the horrible malarial fever which ravaged the hills during the nineteenth

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16 Percival Griffiths, *The History of The Indian Tea Industry* (London, 1969), p. 151.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
19 *Planters Chronicle, op.cit.*, pp. 16-18.
20 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

century that the need of a proper medicine became an imminent requirement.

The natives of Peru and Bolivia had been using the bark of cinchona as early as 1600 against such fever. The Incas had knowledge of the medicinal value of the tree. The Spanish Jesuits named the tree after 'Countess Cinchona' the wife of Spanish viceroy in Peru and brought the species from the 'New World' to the European continent in 1640.[21] The decoction was used in Europe as a remedy for fever for several years.

There were some widespread legends among the people regarding the medicinal value of the Cinchona tree. One legend has it that the water of a particular lake in the wild forests of the land had curative properties as those that drank of it were found to be cured of fevers. The more intelligent among the people however soon came to understand that the medicinal property was endowed by the bark of a tree which had fallen in the river. Another legend has it that the Pumas or South American Lions used to chew the bark of the tree to rid themselves of fever. The property of the bark then came to be known to the Spanish Jesuits who were then serving in Peru and through them the bark found its way into civilization in the year 1640.[22]

It was a French chemist who found the presence of quinine alkaloid in the bark of the tree and explained that it was lethal to malarial parasites. But this discovery resulted in the indiscriminate felling of cinchona trees and pushed them almost to the point of extinction. However in 1780, a French botanist

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[21] A.Y. Swamy, "Cinchona Plantations in Nilgiris," in Krishnamurthy, *Agricultural and Horticultural Plants in Nilgiris* (Madras, 1969), p. 19.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

known as Condamine raised a warning voice against such indiscriminate felling and suggested to the government that strong and effective steps should be taken to introduce the plant in other parts of the world. [23]

Hence the cultivation of this tree was recommended in various parts of the world and thus in 1839 Forbes Royle advocated the suitability of the Nilgiris climate for the cultivation of cinchona. He strongly recommended its cultivation. [24] Later, in 1852, the Dutch under Hassakal undertook an expedition to Peru and after collecting several species of cinchona plants arrived in Java in 1854 and started the cultivation of these plants. In 1856 Royle again suggested to the East India Company that the introduction of cinchona into India should be taken up without further delay. But the government did not act positively till 1858. It was Hugh Cleghorn, the famous British horticulturist who had taken some initial steps towards the cultivation of cinchona in the Nilgiris. [25]

It was Clement Markham, a civil servant in India Office with practical knowledge of the forests of Peru and on the frontiers of Bolivia who offered his service for the purpose and was deputed to South America in the same year, to obtain plants and seeds. He was assisted by an eminent botanist known as Richard Spruce. [26]

Markham revisited India in October 1860 with his small collection of seeds and plants of cinchona and entrusted them to W.G. McIvor, Superintendent of the Botanical garden at

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] W. Francis, *Nilgiris District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1908), p. 170.

[26] Richard Spruce, *Report on the Expedition to Procure Seeds and Plants of the Cinchona Succirubra or Red Bark Tree* (London, 1861) p. 3.

Ootacamund. To him it was a tremendous task of converting the wild trees of the Western hemisphere into cultivated ones of the eastern. McIvor, as a well-experienced horticulturist, was an ideal person to carry out the task for the colonial government. It was due to his work that cinchona came to be established in the Nilgiris.

Cinchona plants reared in the garden were transplanted to large scale plantations in Naduvattom (1860) Pykara (1862) and Doddabetta (1863) covering a total area of 1,36,343 acres. [27]

After the successful planting of cinchona in the above plantations, the government evaluated the whole process as a great achievement. The administration report reviewed the progress of cultivation in the following words:

> Notwithstanding an unusually trying season, the progress of cinchona cultivation on the Nilgiris has been, in all respects, most satisfactory and encouraging. The rate of propagation has been greater than in previous years; the monthly average having been 15,326 plants and the maximum 32,408. The total number of plants produced up to 31 May 1864 has been 416,909. The first plants, planted in August 1862, have now attained heights varying from six to nine feet, with thick stems well furnished with lateral branches, and presenting every appearance of health and vigor. The chemical analysis of the bark this year had shown an extra-ordinary increase in the yield of alkaloids, the result being six percent of rough alkaloids against 4.3 percent in the previous year. [28]

Though the average rainfall was very less in the subsequent years, the propagation of the plant was not far less when

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[27] *Report on Government Cinchona Plantations and Botanical Gardens 1863-64,* (TNSA), p. 2.
[28] *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency 1863-64,* (TNSA), pp. 28-9

compared with the early years. During these years new varieties of cinchona were also introduced in the Nilgiris. [29]

By 1868 numerous private investors also entered into the arena of cinchona cultivation. Seeds and plants were freely given to private investors to cultivate cinchona. [30] Plants were not only supplied within India but places like Mauritius, New Zealand and Java. A manual for the culture of cinchona was published with illustrations in detail. [31]

Plantations came up in Coorg, Sheveroys, Palanis, South Canara and Tinnevelly with the material obtained from the government gardens. Thus it could be said that most of the cinchona plantations in the country and Ceylon, both private owned and government owned gardens owed its existence to Ootacamund Botanical Gardens.

Convicts were brought from the plain to work in these plantations. One of their camps was set up in Naduvattom with hospital facilities. Any land in the Nilgiris was found suitable for cinchona and the trees grew robust whose bark yielded quinine of finest quality. By 1870 the plantation expenses had been considerably reduced.

As plantations grew up, the need for a chemist with necessary equipment to analyse the bark so obtained as well as to manufacture the alkaloids from the bark was strongly felt. In 1870 a government factory was started at Naduvattom and a person known as Broughton was appointed as chemist and he

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[29] *Report of Administration of Madras Presidency1867-68,* (TNSA), p. 42.
[30] *Report of Administration of Madras Presidency 1870-71.* (TNSA), p. 83.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

started the manufacture of febrifuge, which became the nucleus of the quinine factory.

Regarding the technical aspects of extracting alkaloids, many discussions went on in India and abroad. Broughton, an expert in this field, found that it was much cheaper to extract alkaloids from green bark. According to him, the saving of acids from this is more than one fourth. Further studies in the field made it clear that the harvest should be taken between January and March, when the atmosphere is very dry on the Nilgiris. The maximum alkaloids in the bark are also found to be in the dry season and the minimum during the monsoon. [32]

The medicinal value of quinine was tested in Indian hospitals and found out that it was undoubtedly a powerful medicine to treat any kind of malarial disease. Under the leadership of Dr. French the examination was conducted taking twenty one cases. He claimed that in all the cases it was very successful. [33]

Quinine was given greater returns than coffee cultivation in the Nilgiris. It became a permanent measure for malarial fever. According to official records the total expenditure of cinchona cultivation was 70,000 pounds upto 1872. To them the return represents a value which is simply incalculable and priceless. [34]

Though profit was the major inspiration behind the large-scale cultivation of cinchona all over the Nilgiris, the official

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[32] East India (Progress) Statement of the moral and material progress of India (Statement submitted to the Parliament) 1868-69, p. 51.
[33] Collection of papers showing the recent results of the trial of Cinchona Febrifuge, quinetum alkaloids and sulphate of quinetum (Calcutta, 1878), p. 55.
[34] East India (Progress) Statement of the Moral and Material Progress of India (Statement submitted to the Parliament), 1872-73, p. 65.

statements show sympathy towards the poor people. The Guide to Nilgiris attested:

> Its main object was to bring this fever allaying alkaloid within the reach of the very poorest in the country where fever accounts for more deaths than all the epidemics of cholera, small pox, plague etc. put together. Today the poorest in the land can get for a paise, a packet of quinine from the nearest post-office sufficient for a couple of doses. Naturally government declined to retire from this beneficent work: but at a time when the price of bark fell below remunerative prices both in the home and continental markets, government came to the assistance of the planter by buying bark which they required in excess of what their plantations could supply from them. More recently still the government has been importing high-class bark from the plantations of Java for the manufacture of quinine. [35]

The cinchona cultivation in India produced great results as far as the colonial government was concerned. In addition to the Nilgiris, cinchona cultivation was extended to the maximum possible areas in India. Darjeeling, Assam, Belgaum, Coorg, Palani hills, Travancore, Marcara etc. were the places where it was cultivated on a large scale.

Since the cultivation of cinchona and quinine extraction became one of the major activities of the colonial government they decided to establish a separate department for the purpose and thereby it became one of the strongest activities of the British government.

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[35] *Illustrated Guide to the Nilgiris* (Higginbotham, Madras, 1912), p. 19.

Horticultural Experiments in the Nilgiris

Any analysis of the colonial exploitation of the native land and water cannot spare the early attempts made by the British East India Company in the realm of horticulture in the Nilgiris. It was during the period of Lord Mayo in 1869 that systematic attempts at the exploitation of land and water of India to the fullest was planned. In his own words:

> ... The time has come when the great importance of obtaining exact information as to the natural capabilities of the land and water of the vast empire of India is beginning to be fully and clearly appreciated....[36]

But the horticultural experiment in the Nilgiris had begun even earlier to this statement. It was during Sullivan's early career in the Nilgiris that the foundation was laid for the exploitation of the climate, soil and water of the Nilgiris to the maximum. When he built his stone house and Dimhatty bunglow in Ooty, the experimental farm at Ketty and South Downs were also established. [37]

He was very successful in raising the cultivation of European plants and vegetables on a very large scale in this land. That success prompted him for asking for a grant of land for the large-scale utilization of the purpose. He enclosed an area of 200 acres in Ooty known as South Downs which came to be called as Bishop Downs. The government had given not only the necessary permission but also the assistance of a horticultural expert. [38]

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[36] East India (Progress) Statement of the Moral and Material Progress of India (Statement submitted to the Parliament) 1872-73. p. 46.
[37] M. Gopalakrishnan, *Nilgiris District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1995), p. 343.
[38] H.B. Grigg, *Nilgiris District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1910), p. 456.

In continuation of these successful experiments, a horticultural and agricultural experimental farm was set up in 1830. [39] This was under the special interest of Stephen Rumbold Lushington, the Governor of Madras. So the farm was named after him. He was very keen in the all round development of the Nilgiris and demanded periodical report regarding the prospects of the land. It was during his period the developments in Ghat roads especially Coonoor ghat road etc. had been constructed. He gave liberal grants to such constructions and activities. [40]

The farm in Ketty was set up in 200 acres of land which was mostly annexed high-handedly from the local Badagas.[41] The agricultural implements were brought from Madras. Artillery horses were procured to work the heavy imported ploughs. Cattle for both dairy and draft purposes were brought from the plains. [42] Seeds and saplings were brought from abroad and the experiment commenced under the initiative and leadership of Major Crewe. [43] But this experiment was not very successful as was anticipated. The return from the farm was far less than they expected. So they decided to give up the experiment for the time being and returned the land to its old Badaga owners and they cultivated it with European technology.

The botanical garden was another experiment conducted under the auspices of the Europeans at Ootacamund. This was started as a subscriber's kitchen garden in 1845. [44] By 1840 the

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[39] *Ibid.*, p. 454.
[40] W. Francis, *Madras District Gazetteers – Nilgiris* (Madras, 1908), p. 202.
[41] Robert Bike, The Neilgheries, including their account of their topography, climate soil and productions (Calcutta, 1857), p. 41.
[42] Frederich Price, *History of Ootacamund* (Madras, 1910), p. 42.
[43] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
[44] Hugh Cleghorn, *Forests and Gardens of South India* (London, 1861), p. 8.

supply of vegetable to the market decreased when Ootacamund was about to be abandoned as a military sanatorium. Hence the residents subscribed Rs. 3 a month and raised this garden to meet their vegetable needs. But this experiment also proved to be a failure because the return was far below what they expected. But the authorities didn't give up the idea. Major Ouchterlony in his survey report advocated the idea of a farm for growing wheat, barley and vegetable. [45]

He recommended that the soil was rich, the climate was favourable and the native labour was cheap. He considered that the hills were far better than the Australian and African colonies.

This report created interest not only among the residents but also the Government of Madras. The Madras government decided to grant liberally to the cause. The governor himself contributed Rupees One thousand to the farm. [46]

W.G. McIvor, a scientific and practical gardener, who was well trained at royal Kew gardens, took charge of the gardens in 1848 as superintendent. [47] With the monthly government grant of Rupees one hundred and the support of the garden committee he promoted the primitive jungle into a beautiful public garden which was considered to be one of the most beautiful gardens in India.

Sim's Park at Coonoor was a subsidiary garden of Ootacamund started in 1874. The property of J.M. Sim who showed great interest in Botany, located on the north upper Coonoor was found fit for experiments of certain species which

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[45] Grigg, *op. cit.*, p. 456.
[46] Frederich Price, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[47] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

could not thrive in Ootacamund. Therefore, his property was taken over by the government and named after him. [48] These experiments were started during the turn of the nineteenth century under the initiative of Sullivan, the pioneer of all these experiments. In England this was a period of enclosure movement which paved the way for the Agrarian Revolution.

Rubber in the Nilgiris

It was Sir Henry Wickham who brought the rubber seeds from Brazil to tropical Asia in 1876. Rubber was known to the natives of South America and Central America in the sixth century. The first rubber trees planted in South India were in the teak plantations in Nilambur as suggested by Colonel Beddome, conservator of forests.[49] Plants were sent from Kew to South India in October 1878. In the very next year another variety of rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) was received by the same plantations from the botanic gardens of Ceylon. The name rubber was coined by a European known as Priestly because of its ability to rub out pencil marks on paper. [50]

In 1878-79 four plants of *ceara* variety of rubber were planted in the Barliar gardens. In the next year two plants were introduced in Kallati gardens.[51] Other varieties like *Castilloa elastica* and *Hevea brasiliensis* were brought to the garden in the subsequent years. Pava rubber seeds brought from Burma and Cylon were tried in Coonoor. But the plants thrived only on the

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 206.
[49] Somerset Playne, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
[50] Kaku J. Thana, *op.cit*, p. 32.
[51] R.L. Prowlock, *Notes on Rubber Producing Plants* (Ootacamund, 1907), p. 2.

warmer parts of the Nilgiris. Plots of rubber plantations were raised in Glenbur, Clovelly, Lower Droog, Aderly, Hallocarry and Singara. The total extent of the rubber plantations were 1200 acres.[52] Some coffee planters showed interest in the combination of coffee and rubber in the same plantations. A.G. Nicholson and Hawthorne tried the combination of the two. But the ceara rubber actually killed all coffee under its shade.

Skilled labourers were brought from Assam for tapping and other allied work.[53] Tapping began in 1893-94 from the trees of Barliar gardens. In 1904-05 good revenue was collected from the sale in London.[54] The biggest venture in the Nilgiris was that of Glenrock estate at Pandallur which obtained rubber seeds from the Barliar gardens. [55]

Although the European capitalists who emerged from the salaried bureaucracy in India had invested their capital in planting experiments, it is not possible to trace out the details of such investments. The sources are silent particularly on their investments and pattern on developments. However one can clearly surmise that a huge capital owned by different individuals and government had been invested in plantations. The plantations of cinchona trees and the extraction of quinine had brought multiple profits to the owners. As it reduced the malarial diseases, the health of the labourers was well-maintained and several hundreds of human days were saved for productive purposes. The medicinal extraction of quinine gave further profit

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[52] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
[53] Prowlock, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[55] Kaku J. Thana, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

to the planters as an industrial experiment. The new profit was again channelised in the way of new plantations.

Forests of the Nilgiris

The large-scale plantation of coffee, tea, cinchona, vegetables and rubber had confronted its own natural ecological consequences. The devastation of large tracts of forest areas in the Nilgiris became a crucial issue in the Nineteenth century. The large tracts of shola lands were leased and brought under plantations and cultivation. [56] As a result of this streams dried up and monsoon became irregular. The deterioration of the Nilgiri environment attracted the attention of the Madras government which directed the superintendent of Ooty gardens to take suitable measures for the preservation of the Nilgiri sholas. [57]

The British forest policy was designed to the requirements of colonial motives. The exploitation of the forest and forest products were the major aim of the policy. The growing industrial and commercial needs of Britain were clearly reflected in their policy. Through their policy they aimed at certain important objectives. [58]

1. Obtaining timber for local constructions.
2. Obtaining and exporting large quantities of Indian timber for the construction of vessels for the use of British navy.

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[56] Shola is an evergreen forest that can be seen only in the Nilgiris.
[57] J. B. Lal, *Indian Forest: Myth and Reality* (Dehra Dun, 1989), p. 18.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3. Exporting scented sandal wood to various European countries.

4. Allowing clearance of forests for the development of agriculture.

Captain Watson was instrumental for large-scale timber exports from India. He actually plundered the timbers of south India. Before the nineteenth century it was largely used for ship building. The middle of the nineteenth century onwards, large quantities of timber were used for the construction of railway lines. Since coal was not mined in India during this period, timber was also used as fuel.

Although in 1837 a law was passed to check the destruction of the shoals it was not enforced seriously. This was the fate of almost all laws pertaining to the destruction of forests.

Another important stage of the forest administration was the formation of the department of forests in 1857. The appointment of D. Brandis, a trained German forester, as the Inspector General of Forests in 1864 was another step in this regard. [59]

When Captain Beddome inspected the Mudumalai forests in 1862 he found that the period of lease has been about to expire. He was very particular that the lease should be renewed again for a period of 99 years for the reasons that the extraction of timber will be very valuable. He proposed for the renewal of lease and the government agreed with him.[60] The chief provisions of the agreement were as follows:

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[59] W. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

[60] H. G. Hicks, *Revised Working Plan for the Mudumalai Forests* (Madras, 1928), p. 2.

1. The rent of Rs. 3500 be paid by government in advance each year.
2. The government should have the right to cut down trees like teak or other trees and plants.
3. The government was at liberty to seize or destroy elephants or any wild beasts causing damage to the forests.
4. The government should be at liberty to erect any buildings.
5. Trees within 80 yards of pagodas and Devastanams should not be cut down.
6. That land cultivated with paddy should not be interfered nor objection raised to cultivation of land adapted for that purpose.
7. The huts of hill tribes should not be interfered by the government.
8. The local tribes should retain the rights of collecting bee wax, cardamom, gallnut, sealing wax and pitch.
9. The coffee cultivators should pay a rent to the local tribes in accordance with the law of the country. [61]

Though there were provisions for paying rent to the local tribes and for retaining their traditional rights, these were practically ignored by the colonial rulers. The major aim of the British officials was to secure maximum amount of land for their plantations and other constructions.

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[61] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Another law was passed in 1882 known as Madras Forest Act. Its major objectives were:

1. to demarcate and declare the definite boundaries of government forests and safeguard them.
2. the protection of the wild life.

The section 26 of the Act prevents the destruction of forests by people. However the Todas being the traditional tribe they were privileged to graze, take fuel, collect bamboo and grass for making their mud huts and temples.

As stated above, these series of measures did not bear fruit. Larger-scale deforestation and destruction of animals in the name of plantations, railways, industries and other 'developmental' activities continued throughout the colonial period.

The military department of Wellington itself used a very large quantity of teak timber through out the second half of the nineteenth century. In the words of H.G. Hicks deputy conservator of forests:

> The military works department at Wellington had already obtained from Capt. Morgan no less than 118,750 cubic feet of Madumalai teak. About 30,000 cubic feet of fashioned teak was ready for carting from the Gundelpet workshop. Wastage in the workshop amounted to about 8,000 cubic feet of timber lying in the forest. To supplement the above supply, 50,000 cubic feet of teak had also been delivered at Wellington from the Anamalais. During 1860-61 felling continued on an extensive scale and at the end of the year 33,396 cubic feet of teak was stored at

> Masinagudi depot and 93,290 cubic feet of timber in logs were felled but not dragged. [62]

The forest policy in general was aimed at the exploitation of the forest resources of the country. The provisions for protection of the resources and of the forest tribes remained on paper. The government used the forest resources to its maximum and elaborate plans were prepared to plant teak trees in Mudumalai. The Mudumalai teak plantation was devised in the form of Conolly plantations of Nilambur.

Hurdles in Early Planting

The pioneers of the planting community of the Nilgiris faced many obstacles in their job. The vast forest area without roads and adequate footpaths, absence of dwelling places, the menace of malarial fever, absence of communication facilities etc. were some of the initial difficulties confronted by the planters in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Most planters who entered the arena were actually not a group of people who were well versed in the plantation industry. Among the planters who invested their money in Nilgiris and Wayanad were retired civil servants of the East India Company. Most of these pensioners were not interested in returning to their native place because they could not buy a good house back home with their earnings. They calculated that if it was invested there they could gain a very large area for plantation and make huge profits out of it. This group included army and navy officers, civil

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[62] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

engineers, merchants, carpenters and others. But it is generally assumed that they were not successful planters. [63]

The lack of experience in the field and the strange terrain created problems to the early planters. But the climate and the environment were familiar and dear to the European planters. Unmindful of the difficulties, the enterprising Europeans transformed the vast forest land of Nilgiris for cultivation. They travelled tirelessly along the muddy tracts of lands. A contemporary writer describes the scene:

> The land that plantation country (sic) in southern India today is a far cry from what the pioneers opened up. It was almost inaccessible hill tracts, dense jungle and malaria infested marshes that the early planters cleared to create the first plantations that have grown into the giant estates of today. They rode on horse or sat up in bullock carts or carried in a variety of slung chairs along the rude tracts of plains that passed for roads and they took to foot to climb the peaks. They followed the elephant trails, and made the first clearings in forests infested with elephant and bison, tiger and leopard, wild boar and wild dog, built grass huts to live in and shot the sambhur (or elk) and boar, wild pigeon and jungle fowl and a variety of small game to live on. [64]

Although they were not familiar with the topography of the land, the Europeans along with others, took it as a challenge and prepared the ground for plantations in the Nilgiris. In the words of a famous scholar:

> Miles and miles of evergreen forests lay before them on their lonely travel, they came across jungle inhabitants who showed enthusiasm to render assistance and services to their new

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[63] *Planting Opinion,* 19 December 1896, p. 19.
[64] M. Muthaiah, *op. cit.,* p. 13.

> conquerors of the jungle, but alas! They could not speak each other's language. Compelled by circumstances the pioneers were impelled to learn the local language quickly so that they may freely converse with their helpers. [65]

The life of the pioneering planters was very miserable in the jungle. They lived in huts made of mud and grass. They cooked their food in ovens made of kerosene tins. The food materials had to be brought up from the plains. During the rainy season even the movement of food stuff by head load was impossible. All the connections were cut off from the outside world during this time. *Planting Opinion* describes the early problems of the planters in the following words:

> ... kept their pots full of venison or game bird to go with the coarse black rice that was their daily diet except for a few days every month when bread came up from Ooty. Rice was brought by the Brinjaries, brought at the rate of 30 measures to the rupee and stored for weekly sale to the labour at 20 measures to the rupee. Horse gram also was brought from the Brinjaries at forty measures to the rupee and salt at fifteen measures to the rupee. [66]

The planters found the wild animals another important threat to their enterprise. The main enemy of the young plantation was the sambhur. Various methods were tried by the planters such as fencing, basketing the plant, scaring the animals with packs of dogs, spring guns etc. They sought permission from the collector to shoot sambhur in the government reserve forests adjoining the plantations. There were instances of indiscriminate shooting and killing of wild animals with and without permission

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[65] Kaku J. Thana, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[66] *Planting Opinion*, 19 Dec. 1896, p. 22.

from the government. The early accounts of the planters made special mention of the killing of hundreds of elephants by a planter, namely Captain T.H. Godfrey, a retired army official in Bombay. [67]

Medical aid was another crucial issue confronted by the planters. Working hard under severe strain they were also subject to virulent strains of influenza. The correspondent of *Planting Opinion* puts it thus:

> The coolies looked very sickly, suffering from malarial fever and enlargement of spleen.... Many poor coolies died from fever and dysentery... When stricken with occasional malarial fever they took tartar emetic, and if the fever became high and the headache worsened, a couple of horse leeches were applied to the temple till they drew blood. To them the emetic was severe but the leeches were a relief. [68]

No communication system was developed during those days. Postal system arrived at long intervals. They had to walk long distances to reach the nearest town. Only the very well to do maintained ponies to ease their travel, and tongas also came into service much later. Hurricane lanterns were the only mode of lighting. Drowning was a common tragedy in those days especially during the monsoon season. According to a writer:

> ... in 1863, a part of the land was purchased by Mr. J H Schnarrs, who was soon after killed by drowning in a flooded river on his way to Ootacamund for money. His horse was washed away from him when crossing this stream, and this spot is still called after Schnarrs. [69]

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[67] Muthaiah, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[68] *Planting Opinion*, 19 Dec. 1896, p. 17.
[69] Kaku J. Thana, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-5.

Such streams and rivers caused difficulties before the planters. There were such innumerable stories which prevented Europeans coming to Nilgiris for a long while. [70]

Roads and paths were constructed very gradually in these ghats. Till then they had travelled through the paths cleared by wild animals especially elephants.

> Elephants, it has been recorded time and again, are the finest road makers in the world and the early planters would have had an even more uphill task had it not been for the labyrinthine ways which from time immemorial have been laid out by these intelligent beasts. Indeed, the success in road engineering achieved by the early planters in South India had much to do with the efficiency with which wild elephants travel by the easiest contours and across the principal key points. [71]

The condition in the Ouchterloney valley was also not different. No good road, no bridges, no post office, no hospitals and other basic facilities to the planters as well as the coolies existed there. If letters had to be posted, they had to send them all the way to Ooty. If any serious accident happened, the poor coolie or planter had to be carried all the way upto Ooty or down to Kozhikode for medical treatment. During the monsoon all communications were at a standstill for weeks as the streams were overflowing. The only road was Tipu's road on which no cart or any kind of vehicle could go. No inns for the coolies to break their journey to Ooty, and many poor coolies died on the way to

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[70] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[71] Muthaiah, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Ooty. Some early writers described the incidents of such deaths of the coolies on the roadside half eaten by jackals. [72]

In the absence of such facilities during the early years of planting life was very miserable not only to the poor coolies but to the planters as well. Since they were isolated in the forest area the middle class planters were not in a position to send their children to respectable educational institutions. The middle class and lower class planters were not rich enough to send their kids to Bangalore or such other cities for education.

The early planters were severed from society and lived a life of solitude. They faced all the difficulties that confronted them with utmost patience and endurance, concentrating only on their main task of opening up plantations, and looking after them carefully. It was with their initiative, courage and adventure that the plantation industry came into existence. In the words of the official historian of UPASI: "It is a story of adventure and courage, determination and progress all of which have been spear headed by some outstanding individuals, few of whom are remembered today."[73]

Labour in the Plantations of the Nilgiris

The issue of labour in general has been treated in a separate chapter. Here I would mention some of the particular concerns regarding the labour issues of the Nilgiris. Like in other plantation sites, labour was considered very scarce in the Nilgiris also. The early writers on plantations spoke about their

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[72] *Planting Opinion,* 19 December 1896, p. 22.
[73] Muthaiah, *op. cit.,* p. 9.

difficulties in obtaining labour. They brought coolies from different parts of South India. Labourers from Coimbatore, Mysore, Salem, Eranad etc. were brought during the early days of the plantations. Gradually they persuaded the native tribals of the Nilgiris. They at first employed *Kurumbas* for felling trees. They were considered excellent axemen. [74]

In the Ouchterloney valley, the *maistries* were paid monthly salary but not commission for bringing coolies from different parts of South India. The rate of wages is five or four *anas* per week for able-bodied men, and one *ana* and four paise for women.[75] In later days the *maistries* were paid commission at a rate of ten percent on the wages earned by their coolies. Some of the planters had *maistries* or duffadars on monthly salaries. By the close of the nineteenth century, they recruited local labourers among the tribals like *Kurumbas, Paniyas, Badagas* and *Chettis*. [76]

Besides these, there were a large number of *Mappilas* and *Cherumas* who had come from Eranad Taluk. Planters generally paid advances to the *Kanarese* and Tamil *maistries* at the end of the season for want of sufficient coolies for the next season. Recoveries of the advances from the *maistries* were made by the planter during the period of fresh advances. But it is the general complaint of the planters in South India that the *maistries* were not keeping their contract strictly, by not appearing at the estates on time. [77] The coolies from the coastal areas of Malabar did not get money in advance because they did not remain permanently

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[74] *Planting Opinion*, 19 December 1896, p. 18.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 22.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*

for one season on the estate, but returned to the villages after spending a few weeks in the plantations. [78]

Artisans like smiths, brick makers, brick layers, and carpenters were brought from Wayanad, Coimbatore and other parts of Malabar. They were paid a rupee per day. The condition of the labourers was very miserable during the whole of the nineteenth century due to the lack of basic facilities, low wages, cruel punishments and bonded nature.

Planters' Associations

To build a common platform for the planters, associations were formed all over South India during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Nilgiri Planters' Association was born in 1891. The most important aim of the association was to protect the common interests of the planters. One of the characteristic features of the planting life of that period was the readiness to act united for a common cause.

The Nilgiri Planters' Association covered the whole revenue district of the Nilgiris until 1918 later the Nilgiris—Wayanad Planters' Association was formed incorporating the Wayanad region of Malabar. The records of the early planters' association are not available now. The major activities were reported in the contemporary planters' journals especially *Planting Opinion* as follows:

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[78] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

The important objectives of the Planters' Association were:[79]

1. to promote and protect the various interests of the planters and to consider all questions concerned with the plantations.
2. to assist in promoting or opposing legislative and other measures affecting the field.
3. to collect, classify, circulate any public statistics and other information relating to planting.
4. to subscribe to and become a member of and or co-operate with any other association, whose objectives are similar to the Nilgiri Planters' Association and to procure from and communicate to them any such information as may be likely to forward the objectives of this association.
5. to act as arbitrator in the settlement of disputes arising out of commercial or other transactions among its members.
6. to acquire property and deal with the money of the association.

The Nilgiri Planters' Association (NPA) played a prominent role in taking up the causes of the planters. They did not confine their activities to problems concerning planting alone. They tried to promote educational activities to impart education to the children of the planters and their staff and took keen interest in other welfare measures.

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[79] Kaku J. Thana, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-7.

When they felt the need for a central representative body they had taken initiative to start a central organization of the planters of South India. NPA played a distinguished role in the formation of the United Planters' Association of South India in 1893. [80] The headquarters of UPASI was in Coonoor in the district of Nilgiris and one of the most important centers of the early planters.

A detailed study of the emergence of the Nilgiri plantations would reveal that the civil and military servants of the British government in India wanted to deposit their meager capital and salary surplus in the plantations. The virgin lands of the mountain ranges were found suitable for coffee, tea, rubber and cinchona cultivation. However these experiments were not based on large scale cultivation and well-organized labour. They were just in their initial stages and later found to be fruitful. As the high elevation of the land provided a salubrious climate, the European officials found it suitable for their residences also. During the twentieth century, there was an influx of European migration to the Nilgiris as it became the summer capital of the Madras Presidency. It became one of the important centres of colonial administration as well as plantations. The planters in this region enjoyed more facilities on account of their proximity to the power centre. This situation facilitated them to present their grievances to the administrative authorities in time. That is why they were able to organize their association as early as 1893 to represent their grievances before the government. However their counterparts in Wayanad could not make such social and political experiments.

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

In the twentieth century, as the planters could avail of more land and capital, there was an expansion in the economic activity in this region. Their headquarters was at Coonoor and the office of the United Planters' Association, South India was established there.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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CHAPTER SEVEN

LABOUR IN THE PLANTATIONS

The question of labour in the plantations of Wayanad and elsewhere in Malabar during the nineteenth century is a significant issue that will be discussed in this chapter. From the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, there was a pattern in the employment of labour in the plantations. This pattern was discernible not only in Malabar but also in other parts of India like Assam, Bengal and Bihar, where the Europeans had started their plantations in the same period.

Sources of Labour Supply

The major sources of labour supply to the plantations during the period were the slave castes and tribes, non-tribal migrants from villages hit by famine and other natural calamities, and the attached labourers of the plains released by the landlords.

It has been argued that the prime intention of the abolition of slavery by the British Government through the Act V of 1843 was to release slaves to the newly started mines and plantations. [1] According to Francis Buchanan, in Malabar alone, there were

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[1] K.K.N. Kurup, "The Colonial Investments and Abolition of Slavery in South India: A Case Study of Kerala," in T.K. Ravindran (Ed.), *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. XI December 1984 (Trivandrum, 1984), p. 193.

more than 41,000 slaves in the beginning of the nineteenth century out of a 3 lakh population. [2]

According to a census conducted in 1857 on the slave population in Malabar it appeared that there were more than 1,87,000 slaves. The taluk-wise distribution of slaves are given below:

Table 1

Sl. No.	Taluk	No. of Slaves
1	Kottayam	2,859
2	Kurumbranad	16,590
3	Wayanad	16,561
4	Kozhikode	14,082
5	Eranad	35,419
6	Walluvanad	34,419
7	Palakkad	25,280
8	Ponnani	28,668
9	Kochi	71
Total		**1,87,812**

Source: *Census of the Slave Population of Malabar: 1857*

We cannot assume that all these liberated slaves became labourers in the plantations. Most of them continued as attached labourers in the fields of their masters. Only a small minority became the labourers in the plantations during their off-seasons.

Another source of labour supply was the tribals who were thrown out of the forest when the Europeans bought and cleared

[2] Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through Malabar, Mysore and South Canara,* Vol. II (London, 1807), p. 282.

the forests for starting the plantations. These tribals were forcibly uprooted from their real base and had no other option but to serve in the plantations. They became prey to the naked exploitation of the planters.

The increase in land revenue and other factors made paddy cultivation unprofitable and the farmers were compelled to seek employment in the plantations. The resistance against renting larger areas of land to the landlords was met with the policy of eviction. A rapid increase of evictions can be seen during the period between 1860 and 1889.[3] The average annual number of the suits for evictions had risen from 2,039 in the five years ending 1866 to 4,983 in the four years ending 1870. The average annual number of persons against whom decrees for eviction were annually passed rose from 1,891 to 8,355 in the same period. [4]

Villages hit by famine and natural calamities were another source of labour supply. The great famine of 1876-8 had a disastrous effect on seven out of twenty-one districts of Madras Presidency which compelled a large number of people from the lower castes to go to the plantations. [5] It is estimated that during 1877 about 3,50,000 persons from Mysore were searching for employment in the plantation areas of the Nilgiris, Wayanad, Kolar and Hassan. In 1881 the Famine Commissioner estimated that about 50,000 labourers from Mysore migrated annually to the neighbouring plantations of Malabar and Coorg during the harvesting season. A good number of labourers, however, were

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[3] C.A. Innes, *Malabar District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1951), p. 231.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] A. Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1941), p. 283.

recruited in the famine-hit districts of Madras Presidency like, Salem, Madras, Ramanad, Tinnevelly and Coimbatore. [6]

Another source of labour, especially during the early years of the plantations, was the convicts. Murdock Brown, the overseer and manager of the Anjarakkandy plantations, extensively used the convicts as labourers in his plantations. [7]

Mode of Recruitment of Labourers

The recruitment of labour was another important problem faced by the European planters in the nineteenth century. Though there were plenty of slaves and attached and bonded labourers working in the paddy fields of the landlords of Malabar, for various reasons they were not available to the planters for their work in the hill stations.

One important reason was that they were not ready to leave their traditional masters with whom they were working as attached labourers. Though they were not given work throughout the year most of the labourers were unwilling to work in the plantations during their off season. [8]

Throughout the nineteenth century, labourers were mainly recruited by the intermediaries known as *Kanganis*. They were natives who worked not only as middlemen but the supervisors of the labourers in the plantations. Without the help of *Kanganis* planters could not employ labourers. These *Kanganis*

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[6] *Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee* (Madras, 1896), p. 10-1.
[7] Malabar Special Commission (Diaries) Vol. No. 1698. p. 161.
[8] See Malabar Commission Diaries. Vol. 1693. p. 112.

exercised the powers to determine the working hours, wages of the labourers, etc, and they got a good amount as Commission.

Because, especially in the early years, these labourers from the plains as well as the tribals were reluctant to work in the plantations, coercion and brute force were extensively used to bring labourers to the plantations. [9] They were not ready to settle in the vicinity of these plantations. The labourers from the plains preferred to settle down in their own villages. [10] This was a barrier in the way of a permanent source of labour supply in the plantations.

Numerous instances can be cited of the use of force and the consequent escape of labourers from the Anjarakkandy plantations of Brown. Brown himself had described an incident of the absconding of 5 *Pulaya* slaves among 45 purchased by him from the *Daroga, Corathara Moopan* of Chavakkad. [11] There were instances of attack by the natives against Brown's men, while they were searching for the labourers. [12] The natives were hostile towards the plantations and a partial destruction of the plantation during the *Pazassi* rebellion was a clear proof of their attitude. [13] However, Brown tackled the problem of the shortage of labour by purchasing slaves from Malabar and elsewhere. Though the slave trade was prohibited by the British government, Brown was given sanction to purchase *Pulayas, Cherumas* and other slave castes from different parts of Malabar

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[9] Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in the Plantations System* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 42.
[10] *Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee*, 1896, p. 11.
[11] Letter from Murdock Brown to the Commissioner (Malabar Commission Diaries) 14 May 1798. p. 170.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] K.K.N. Kurup, *History of Tellicherry Factory* (Calicut University, 1985), p. 285.

by the Bombay authorities. [14] In the purchase of these slaves the natives like *Puthiya Veetil Chandu* and others themselves acted as middleman. [15]

Brown not only purchased the slave labourers from the traditional slave castes of Malabar, but also from *Tiyas* and *Nayars* and people belonging to other castes residing in different parts of Malabar. When he became the Revenue Collector and the Magistrate of Randathara, he acquired a huge area illegally by usurping the properties of the inhabitants and kept a huge number of bonded labourers. [16] He made use of his political and judicial authority for maintaining this army of bonded labourers in his plantations. He brought families on a large scale and exploited the labour of women and children without giving adequate wages. [17]

By the close of the nineteenth century in the whole of South India more than three lakhs of workers were employed in the plantations. The major chunk of the labourers was brought from other parts of British India. Only a small quantity of labour was available to the plantations of Malabar. This was the case of other areas like the Nilgiris, Coorg, Travancore, Cochin and Mysore. The table given below shows the actual position of the availability of labour towards the close of the nineteenth century. [18]

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[14] Malabar Commission Diaries, Vol. 1693, p. 153.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
[16] Kurup, *op. cit.*, p. 284. See also Pamila Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India* (Cambridge, 1970) , p. 102.
[17] Malabar Commission Diaries, No. 1693. p. 153.
[18] *Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee,* 1896, pp. 10-6.

Table 2

Labour recruitment in South India in 1896 (in percentage)

Region	Local Labour	Labour Imported from British India	Labour Imported from Mysore
Wayanad	20.0	54.0	26
Nilgiris	17.5	44.5	38
Coorg	20.0	53.0	27
Mysore	37.5	62.5	-
Travancore	20.0	60.0	20
Cochin	4.0	96.0	-

Source: *South India Planters Enquiry Committee Report*, 1896.

Slave labour in Malabar during the nineteenth century was divided into three categories. The slaves belonged to *Jenmam*, *Kanam* and *Pattam*. In *Jenmam* or absolute sale system, the full value of the slave was paid and the slave was transferred to a new master. In *Kanam* system, a slave labourer was transferred by the owner on receipt of a loan of money, usually two third of the value of the slave, and a small measure of paddy (in order to establish his continued right over the slave) and the slave could be redeemed only after the repayment of the loan. Under *Pattam* the master leased out slaves for an annual sum to another man who commanded their labour and provided them with subsistence. [19]

In the agricultural operations this kind of slave labour was used extensively in Malabar. The planters attempted to exploit this traditional system of Malabar and to a certain extent were

[19] M. Kunhaman, "The Tribal Economy of Kerala," Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation (Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1982). p. 21.

successful in their attempt. In addition to agriculture and plantation sectors, slave labour was extensively used for gold-mining in Wayanad which had been one of the important sources of income for the early Malabar Rajas. Since moving about in the tunnels for mining gold was highly risky, free labour was not available for the work. Hill tribes such as the *Kurumas*, *Cherumas* etc. were therefore employed for the mining operations. When Malabar came under the colonial system, the European gold-mining companies also employed tribals on a large scale. [20]

The emigration of labourers to Ceylon, Burma, Mauritius, Nepal and other places from Madras Presidency was a factor which contributed to the labour shortage in Malabar. It is estimated in 1896 that no less than 1,23,000 persons emigrated to Ceylon alone in the nineteenth century. Increased public work activities also heightened the demand of labour. [21]

The Conditions of Agrestic Slaves of Malabar

According to Francis Buchanan, the agrestic slaves were the absolute property of the masters who kept them along with the labouring cattle in the open. These poor creatures were considered too impure to be permitted to approach the house of their *Devaru* or Lord. The agrestic slaves were drawn from a few castes such as *Cheruma* and *Pulaya*, which might be termed the agricultural labour castes. All the labour castes, whether free or

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[20] Edgar Thurston reported that he received the skulls of two Kurumas who had gone after a porcupine into a deserted tunnel in the Glenork Gold Mining Company's land in Wayanad. The roof fell in them, and they were buried alive. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India,* Vol. IV, (Madras, 1909) p. 175.

[21] *Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee,* 1896, p. 11.

bonded, were not agrestic slaves. But most of the members of these castes were, in fact, agricultural labourers not only in Malabar but in other districts of the Madras Presidency as well.

One cannot find much difference between agricultural labourers and agrestic slaves. Theoretically the former was free to choose his master while the latter had no such freedom. But in reality the bonded labourers who had received an advance from his master had no liberty. According to Graeme, the habits of the slaves in Malabar were, "formed in subservience and accommodation" to it.[22] The agrestic slaves were traditionally denied all social and economic rights, which increased their helplessness. They were always kept enslaved by the economic domination and socio-political situation. This remained mostly a Hindu institution, although in South Malabar some Muslim landlords also kept slaves.

The confusion over the names of agrestic slaves was partly due to the ignorance of the early British writers about the castes and tribes of India. Apart from this, the names of castes and sub-castes varied from place to place in Kerala. Within each slave-caste there were endogamous sub-divisions, variously used as *Cheruma*, *Pulaya*, *Kanakkar*, *Paraya*, *Malaya*, *Kader*, etc. According to Buchanan, the term *Cherumar* was applied to slaves in general in certain parts of Malabar, irrespective of their caste. But in some other areas *Cheruma* were suffixed to a particular caste, who were also known as *Pulaya*. According to Logan, the name *Cheruma* was derived from '*Cheru*' meaning

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[22] Graeme, H.S., *Report on the Revenue Affairs of Malabar, 1822* (Calicut 1911), p. 11.

small, an adjective which suits their appearance, and they were the aboriginal class. He wrote:

> Size and stature depend more upon conditions of food than upon anything else, and a race which has for centuries and centuries continued to be fed by its masters on a minimum of what will keep body and soul together is partly sure in the long run to degenerate in size. [23]

According to Thurston, their name signified that they were sons of the soil (from *Chera*-dam and *Makkal*-children, *Cheru*-mud). They were born and lived mostly on fields. The word *Pulaya* is said to be derived from *Pula* meaning pollution. [24]

Many agricultural tribes were found in Waynad Taluk. Among them *Kurichiyas* was a jungle tribe who migrated to Wayanad from the plains of *Malabar.*[25] A few of these found in Kurumbranad, Kottayam and Kozhikode Taluks. They were mostly *Punam* cultivators. Other important tribes included *Kurumbas, Paniyas, Karimbalans, Malakkar, Malayas, Vettuvas, Mavilon, Adiyan, Kader,* etc. Among these castes *Kurichiyas, Paniyas, Adiyas* and *Kader* were agricultural labourers. The *Paniyas* were actually agrestic slaves, bought and sold with the land, to which they were attached as slave labourers. They were a hardy people who could do the hard agricultural work in the humid climate and malaria-ridden conditions of Wayanad.[26] Baber observed that in the upper country of Wayanad there were agrestic slaves known as K*urichiyas, Kurumas, Kader* and *Paniyar.* He called them conditional labourers. *Kader* was never

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[23] William Logan, *Malabar Manual,* Vol. I (Madras, 1951), p. 147.

[24] Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes* (Madras, 1909), p. 87.

[25] A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Agricultural Tribes of the Province of Madras* (Madras, 1948), p. 93.

[26] *Ibid.*

sold; if beaten or ill-treated, they invariably deserted. *Paniyar* alone were liable to be disposed off but never out of the country of their birth. Their main occupation was to cultivate the paddy fields. [27]

Murdock Brown classified the agrestic slaves into several principal classes. 1. *Vettuva* 2. *Erulan* 3. *Kannakan* 4. *Malien* or *Malayan* 5. *Punneen* or *Panniun*, 6. *Poolen* or *Poolyas* 7. *Paraya.* According to Francis Buchanan even among these slave castes the pride of caste had its full influence.[28] If a *Cheruman* or *Pulayan* was touched by a slave of the *Parayan* tribe, he was defiled. Brown said that the *Pulaya* remained 10 paces from the *Vettuvan*, the *Paraya* the same distance form *Pulayan* and the *Nayadi*, a free man, but of a caste lower than the lowest of the slaves, 12 paces from the *Paraya.* [29]

Graeme has noted that the slave castes of *Pulaya*, *Valluva* and *Paraya* should remain 72 paces from a *Brahmin* and *Nayar* and 48 paces from a *Tiya.* A slave of a *Kanakkan* Caste should remain 64 paces from a *Brahmin* or *Nayar* and 24 from a *Tiya.* [30] According to Baber, the slaves were held very impure and if the higher castes were polluted they had to fast and bath. When a *Cheruman* met a person of higher caste, he had to stand 30 feet away from that person. The very approach of a *Cheruman* within the prescribed distance itself causes pollution.

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[27] Baber's answer in the evidence taken before the select committee (House of Commons), 1832. p. 557. C. Gopalan Nair, *Wynad: Its People and Traditions*, Malabar Series (Madras, 1912), pp. 100-4.

[28] *Law-Commission Report.* 1841, p. 128.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 129.

[30] Graeme's Report, *op. cit*, p. 12.

In addition to these slave castes, *Ezhavas* and Muslims also became agrestic slaves. Though they were not considered as belonging to slave castes, their poverty and dependence made them slaves. *Cheruma* as a slave caste had done the greater part of the cultivation in Malabar. Their expertise in agricultural operations was considered greater than that of any other class of people.

Diseases of malnutrition were common among the serfs and slaves of Malabar during the nineteenth century. In Malabar the lack of food and nutrition led to the high mortality rate especially among their infants and children. Early in the morning they would drink the remains of the *Kanji* or rice-water prepared during the previous night. "They take two meals a day and take fish and toddy whenever they can procure them".[31] Generally the *Cheruma* went to the master's house in the morning with a pot or leaf basket for the remains of food and for the instructions of work to be done for the day. They were given food in plantain leaves, arecanut spathe and coconut shells, which were thrown away later. Sometimes, holes were dug in the ground where leaves were placed in which food was served, and that prevented the possibility of their utensils or themselves coming into contact with those of their masters. They were not permitted to touch wells, and were even denied access to pure drinking water. In the evening after a day's hard work, they would return to their huts and take their humble food. Usually they were given paddy as daily wage and they had to thresh it into rice before cooking. They would also catch crabs, tiny fishes, etc., to supplement their diet. When there was no harvest

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[31] Ananthakrishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

they had to content themselves with fruits and roots. Whenever they got some milk or eggs, they preferred to sell rather than use them. [32]

Sometimes the *Cherumas* were given the previous day's gruel when they went to their masters' houses. They were not allowed to use the vessel but had to dig a pit and spread a leaf in it to use as a vessel. Sarada Raju observed that the agrestic slave was given a hut, an allowance of grain, two usual presents on the occasion of ceremonies and festivals. Yet the slaves cost the master less than even subsistence wages that were paid in kind. [33]

Purchase of Slaves in the Plantations

By the introduction of plantations the purchase of slaves took a new turn. As mentioned in the first part of this chapter, labour power was exploited by different means by the European planters. But in the early years of the nineteenth century, Murdock Brown, the overseer of the Company's plantation at Anjarakkandy, purchased slaves from different sources.[34] When T.H. Baber, the then District Magistrate of Malabar, asked Brown for the details of slave labourers, he protested against it. From Baber's letter we knew that slaves were stolen from their relatives and masters to work in the plantations. Some of them were the natives of Travancore and were sent to Brown by an agent named Assen Ally from Alleppey.[35] Baber furnished the

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[32] Baber's answer, *op. cit.*, p. 554.
[33] A. Sarada Raju, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[34] T.H. Baber's letter to Brown, dated 15th Dec. 1811.
[35] Baber's letter to Brown, dated 27th Dec. 1811, North Malabar, Fort St. George. 1811.

details of slave children who had been discovered at *Mahe.*[36] Apart from a large number of *Pulayas* and *Vetuvar* children, there were free-born children who were brought to Brown's Plantation as slaves. Baber sought the attention of the Resident of Travancore to the fact that these free-born children from Alleppey and Mahe brought by *Moplahs* were committed for trial before the court of Quarterly session. Assen Ally confessed that he had sent the children from Alleppey and that they were stopped in Travancore. He said that he had to pay for getting them back. They were disguised as *Moplah* children. However it may be stated that 76 men, women and children who were found in Browns plantation declared that they were brought by *Moplahs.*

When Baber asked the details regarding the purchase of slaves Brown justified his position by saying that the sale of slaves was authorised by the custom of Malabar and that many of these were born on the plantation from which they were removed by Baber's orders. Brown considered the slaves as his property and the act of Baber an 'oppressive' interference of his property.[37]

Anjarakkandy was only the beginning of a new dimension in the problem of slavery. In the other plantations that grew up in the later years also started new types of slave labour which changed the course of the colonial economic penetration in Malabar.

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[36] Baber's letter to the Resident of Travancore, dated 22nd Dec. 1811. Fort St. George. 31st March. Judicial Consultations, 1812.

[37] Letter dated 31st March 1812. Brown to Baber, Fort St. George. 1812.

During the early years of the Company's rule, the British officials had taken some steps to 'improve' the conditions of the slaves or the bonded labourers. These discussions of the 'improvement' were prolonged for the whole of the nineteenth century. The schooling of the children of the slave castes like *Cherumas* and others was one of the object of the discussions. In 1838, the Governor called upon the Principal Collectors for a better treatment towards these slave castes especially to their children. He wanted the landlords to assure that the *Cherumas* were better fed and clothed. But he was not for a legislative enactment in this regard. [38]

According to Graeme a slave family resides in a hut in the centre of the paddy fields. His perception was that he was industrious, but not an intelligent being. "He is a wretched, half-starved diminutive creature stinted in his food exposed to the inclemencies of the weather."[39]

There were differences between the Hindu lower caste slaves and the Muslim slaves. The lower caste slaves were largely employed in the paddy fields and plantations. The Muslim slaves were employed in the households. In the words of Graeme the slaves in Malabar were entirely primordial, or rustic, being engaged only in the cultivation of paddy fields and plantations except of course, the Musalmans, who may be domestic slaves and lived in the houses of their masters and enjoyed all the privileges of their religion. [40]

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[38] Extracts from the Minutes of Consultations, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1740, p. 24.
[39] Graeme's Report *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Regarding the origin of slaves, myths and legends were propagated by the upper caste Brahmins. According to one version, slaves were introduced by Parasurama for the tillage of the ground when he gave the country to the Brahmins. Another version was that the slaves were those people who were punished by the Hindu law. These individuals became outcastes or *Chandalas* and subjected themselves to servitude.

Some of the Rajas sold the outcastes to the Muslims, who accepted them in their religion. As a result the caste stigma imposed on them by Hindu laws and customs was cleared.

Slaves were sold along with or without the soil where they had their habitat. They were transferred to a taluk contiguous with their place of birth. Transferring them to far off places was not a practice adopted by the landlords of Malabar. Different types of practices were adopted by them in letting out slaves, like *Verumpattam, Panayam, Kanam, Wettee* and *Attipper.*

In certain occasions, on a birth or death or marriage in the family of slaves, they were given presents of clothes, oil or grain by the peasants who were in direct contact with the slaves. In the time of harvest these slaves were entitled to the crop of certain portions of the land for guarding the crops, a duty known as *pandal kaval.*[41]

The major complaint of the officials regarding the bondage and slave like treatment to the *Cherumas* was that they were ignorant of their new position and the attitude of the government. The report admitted that though the government

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[41] This is a common duty of slaves in Malabar.

had taken measures to emancipate the *Cherumas*, they remain in the same position.

Even the slave trade was very active during the period and the minutes of consultations testified the fact that an average cost of a young male slave was less than that of an adult male. The same document shows that an infant of 12 months old was sold out at a price for Re. 1, 10 *ana* and 6 paise. The British Indian officials claimed that the sale of slaves had been forbidden in India by 1821. But they reluctantly admitted the continuance of the sale of slaves as the part of the cultivation in Malabar. The court of directors stated: "We are told that part of the people employed in cultivation in Malabar are held as slaves that they are attached to the soil and are marketable property".[42]

One of the district judges of Malabar, E.B. Thomas, opined in 1833 that the slaves in Malabar are kept for profit and for show. "It is therefore the master's interest and aim to get as much work out of them as he can." He felt that the condition of the *Cherumas* were in the same state as they were 50 years back.[43]

His observation clearly showed an increase in the number of slave population in Malabar by 1830.[44] He estimated from the official sources that the number of bonded labourers increased from 1,44,000 to1,59,000 by 1833.

According to the Company officials the price of the slaves had been raised during the 1830s because of the greater demand

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[42] Graeme's Report, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[43] Letter from E.B. Thomas, District Judge of Malabar to the Registrar of the Court of Sadar and Foujari Adalath Fort St. George, p. 1.
[44] *Ibid.*

in the plantations.[45] East India Company wanted to tap the labour sources either as bonded labour or free cheap labour. But they could not argue for bonded or slave labour. Therefore they continued the rhetoric of the emancipation of slavery in their writings.

In the same letter, Thomas argued that the slaves of Malabar were not generally desirous of emancipation because of their utterly degraded condition and long and hopeless servility. The report concludes that: "A slave is better off on the whole than a free man in his interests bound up with his master's prosperity that he enjoys benefits and fixed rights." Still he had his reservations in the case of the *Cherumas* of Malabar. He admitted that in the case of the *Cherumas* of Malabar, they were denied all rights and benefits. According to him they got little respect from the 'fair' stock of his master. "The ox and *Cherumar* are both housed and fed upto their value for work—but very little beyond it.[46]

The Role of *Kanganis* in Recruiting Labourers

As stated above the *Kanganis* were intermediaries between planters and the labourers. But they also acted as supervisors in the plantations. They exercised powers in determining the wages and other conditions regarding the labourers. They used almost all means to recruit labourers with the active support of the State. During the early days when Anjarakkandy plantation had started functioning the *Kanganis* as a class had not emerged. There were references of the *Kanganis* being employed

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[45] Minutes of Consultations, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

by Brown. But Brown referred to them as a set of people who often cheated him. Because of the lapse from the part of these *Kanganis*, he employed his own European agents to collect labourers from the countryside. But the natives showed their contempt towards the men of Brown and some not only abused but also manhandled them.[47] But in the later period of plantations, the *Kanganis* emerged as a strong group and became an indispensable part of the system. But being professional recruiters they were mainly concerned with their commission regardless of whether the labour was suitable or not. As such many instances of quarrels between the planters and the *Kanganis* were reported during the period.

Generally the *Kangani* or *maistry* entered into a contract with the planter in writing and signed by the planter and *maistry*. The document is seldom registered. In some cases it was only a verbal agreement. In some places like parts of Travancore a verbal agreement is supplemented by a promissory note executed by the *maistry*.[48]

According to the agreement the *maistry* received a lump sum amount in advance and undertook to supply a certain number of coolies for plantation work for a certain period. The period of contract was usually nine months and never exceeded a year. The *maistry* then proceeded to the villages and collected the labourers. In some cases the *maistry* handed over the charge to a headman and he led the gang of labourers to the plantation

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[47] Proceedings of the Meeting of the Officials: Malabar Collectorate Records. Vol. 1693. p. 12.

[48] *Ibid.*

while the *maistry* remained in the village itself. The maximum strength of a gang came upto a hundred coolies.[49]

Generally a considerable number of labourers returned to the same estate. According to the United Planters Association, on average 60 to 90 percent of the labourers returned to the same estate.[50] But the amount of permanently resident labour on estates in South India was less than 10 percent. [51]

As referred to earlier, a *Kangani* or *maistry* was not only a recruiting agent of labourers but they acted as supervisors. They were supposed to be in charge of looking after the general welfare of the labours recruited by them.

They were men of influence in the local area. So they were able to recruit labourers for the estates from the rural centres. They advanced some money to the labourers to pay off their old debts and that was deducted from the earnings from the estates. [52]

The *Kangani* system was more than a recruiting agency. It was a system of employment in which the liaison between the employer and labourer was established. This system helped them exploit labourer's ignorance of regulations and recruiting practices. In a dispute or a quarrel between labourers and *Kanganis*, the latter used to get the support of the managers and the government. In fact, there were voluntary immigrations from some tribes to the estates of South India during this period.

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[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Report of the Royal Commission of Labour in India*, p. 355.

[51] *Report on an Enquiry into Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India* (New Delhi, 1943), p. 119.

[52] Amitha Baig and William Handerson, *Facts of Hundred Years of Planting: A Century of Planting in the Kannan Devan Hills Concession, 1878-1978*, (Munnar, 1978), p. 38.

The *Kangani* system became very significant after the establishment of the large-scale plantations in 1880s. A *Kangani* as the employ of the estate was expected to do his best for the plantations. The *Kangani* labour was also cheaper when compared to direct labour since the commission paid to them was less. *Kanganis*, on behalf of his employers undertook to provide food, clothing and travel expenses for the recruits.

There were immigration labours to other parts of the world like Malaya, during this period. The *Kanganis* took them to these estates and it was mainly from the lower castes of South India. The slave castes like *Pulayas, Parayas, Cherumas* and *Chamar* were the main sources of the labour recruitment for estates outside India. [53]

As stated earlier the *Kangani* system was more than a recruiting agency, it was a method of employment in which liaison between the labourers and the employment was chiefly established through *Kanganis* of the estates. This system helped the planters exploit the labourer's ignorance of regulations and recruiting practices.

The most important feature of the *Kangani* labourer was that the labourers were forced to live in the plantations which were isolated from the rest of the population, and as a result, they became practically resident captive labourers. There were many instances of these labourers trying to escape from this atmosphere of isolation and bondage and the plantation guards opening fire on these desperate men. Under the system the planters could extract the maximum benefit from the labourers.

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[53] Kermial Singh Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 90.

These bonded labourers would work hard on whatever wages given to them. [54]

Because of the isolation and the lack of legal protection, the labourers were wholly dependent on the planters. They could not even migrate from one plantation to another for better wages. The broker had to sign the contract for a specific period of time. He had no choice at all. However the planters enjoyed full protection from the government.

A series of laws had been passed regarding bonded labour and immigration during the second half of the nineteenth century. An act was passed in the year 1837, which legalised the contract of indentured labour. The Workman's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 strictly stopped all possibility of escape of labourers from the estates. The Act of 1863 allowed the planters right to arrest runaway coolies and the Act of 1882 allowed uncontrolled recruitment without license which heightened the planters control over labour. In fact legislations came to safeguard the interest of property owners and not of the labourers.

There was no system of registering the contracts signed by the *maistries*, which were customarily kept by the planter. Sometimes informal verbal agreements took place instead of written contracts. *Maistries* generally received a lump sum in advance for the supply of coolies for their work for a certain period.

Maistries often accompanied his labourers to the estate. He himself made necessary arrangements for the journey of the

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[54] A.V. Jose, "Agricultural Labour in Kerala: A Historical and Statistical Analysis," Ph.D. Dissertation (Kerala University, 1980), p. 74.

coolies, looked after their general welfare on the estate and brought their complaints to the notice of the planters. Actually *maistry* was in charge of exacting hard and efficient work from the labourer for the period of his contract. In some districts the *maistry* received only a commission, usually ten percent of the wages of the coolies, while in some others he received both wages and commission, and elsewhere only wages. Even after the coolies reached the estate, each gang had a headman to supervise it.

According to the British officials, the *maistry* system was indispensable in the plantations. It was not possible for planters to travel from village to village to collect the thousands of coolies they required. As such, a *maistry* for recruiting plantation labourers was absolutely necessary. Initially this job was done by planters themselves or their helpers. But gradually the task was transferred to the *maistries*, who later became a professional class of recruiters. A large share of success of the plantations depended on the *Kanganis*. Without their help it would not have been possible to ensure sufficient labour flow into the plantations. [55]

The planters of one district brought coolies from their own and the neighbouring districts as well as from their castes. The transportation of the coolies was made by the *Kangani* and they were not given any allowances by the planter. The expenses of the journey were met by the coolies themselves from their wages.

Though the British government passed an Act which made slavery illegal, the planters wanted the perpetuation of the

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[55] *Report of South India Planters Enquiry Committee.* 1896, p. 23.

system. They denied even the elementary of protection to the plantation labourers and maintained a kind of labour relations based on 'domination and subordination'.[56] They perpetuated slavery in new forms in the plantations. According to Hugh Tinker, "The most important feature of plantation slavery was the enclosure of the slaves within the estates, preventing them from establishing contact with the outside world".[57] This actually paved the way for the strengthening of colonial capital system. They even practised Baracon system that prevailed in Latin America under Spanish and Portuguese colonialism.[58]

The Britishers eloquently demanded the abolition of agrestic slavery in the cultivation of paddy in British India, and they were supported by the British planters.[59] The decision for abolition of slavery worked in two ways: It released the agrestic slaves from the paddy fields and supplied bonded labourers to the plantations on low wages. But when compared to the conditions of plantation labour, agrestic slavery was much better.

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[56] Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation, Society and Colonial Order in South East Asia* (New Delhi, 1989), p. 143.

[57] Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974), p. 10.

[58] Baracon System: Along with the Plantation there was shop attached for the sale of provisions run by the management itself. Each labourer was given permission to buy provisions from the shop by issue of a permit. This system was known as Baracon in Latin America and was practiced in Malabar plantations also. This system permitted the management to accumulate profit out of the sale of commodities and provisions by way of high price fixation. As permits were issued instead of money the labourers could not buy commodities from the open market.

[59] S. Uma Devi, "Commercialisation in Indian Agriculture," Paper presented at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1981.

The rate of wages differed in different districts of South India. Generally it was 4 *anas* for a man, 2 *anas* 8 paise for a woman and 1 *ana* for a child.

There were incidents of mortality on the road among the coolies while they were returning home.[60] According to the Superintendent of Police in the year 1892, 109 destitute persons had been picked up on the road, dead or in extremely pitiful condition. A sick coolie was a burden on whom the employer had no interest. The *maistry* who was bound to look after him also showed no interest in him. As wages and the possibility of redeeming debts were the only factors which could attract labour to the plantations, the poor backward classes alone formed the major component of labour migration. The conditions on the tea estates were very unhealthy. Though they were signing the contracts the coolies were fully ignorant of the terms of the contract and underwent virtual slavery as an ultimate result. They were ill-treated under subhuman conditions which were worse than beasts of burden. [61]

The 1843 act of abolition of slavery was thus not an act aimed at the liberation of bonded labourers or the slave castes of India. It was primarily intended to release labourers to the newly developed plantations of India. This is quite clear from the letter to the Chief Secretary T. Pycroft from the Acting Collector of Malabar in 1856. It reads:

> Of the slave population of 1,87,758 about 1,48,210 remain with their former proprietors; 39,548 or about 21 percent have availed themselves of the freedom secured by the Act V of

[60] Report of SIPEC Madras, 1896, p. 15.
[61] Dwarakanath Ganguly, *Slavery in British India* (Calcutta, 1972), pp. 2-3.

> 1843. Thus the great bulk of slaves of Malabar still remain with their former masters. But they as well as their masters are quite aware of the fact that they are at liberty... But though aware of law, the *Cherumar* are not as a body in a condition to avail themselves of their liberty due to poverty, ignorance, reluctance to change, uncertainty of employment. They are entirely dependant on them for remaining in their present houses and gardens, operate to prevent their breaking off the ancient ties and degraded as they have been under the immemorial conditions of slavery... But on the whole a great change has been taking place and the wages and comforts are improving and independence springing up.[62]

The same document again praises the act and interprets the plantations as a real liberator of the slave class. The letter continues,

> The *Cherumar* as a body constitute the only really good and certain body of agricultural labourers. The land proprietor knows his worth ... Public works and coffee plantations in Wayanad are exercising an important influence on wages in Malabar and the general rise acts on the conditions of *Cherumar*. It is common to hear the exclamation: 'The slaves have become masters.'[63]

There were many examples of the intervention of the government officials to change the status of these castes. They started schools aimed at admitting the children of the *Cherumas* and argued for the right of using public roads. Though these acts did not bring the required results, it is very clear that these

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[62] Letter from W. Robinson, Acting Collector of Malabar to T. Pycroft, 27th Dec 1856, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1715. pp. 225-229.

[63] Letter from H.V. Conolly, Collector of Malabar to T. Pycroft, dated 7th June 1855, Malabar Collectorate Records, Vol. 1715. pp. 331-42.

attempts were aimed at releasing them from their natural attachments.[64]

There were instances of lamenting by the British officials in the attachment of slaves to their landlords. A British official wrote "As long as their masters have got a job for them to do they will not work for any other person until such time as that job is finished no matter what amount of wages might be offered to them."[65]

The only attraction of the coolies who prefer to come to the plantation was the wages. The class which was attracted towards the plantation labour was the backward and poor sections of the society. They were compelled to sign the contracts. Often they were unaware of the harsh terms; in some cases the terms were misrepresented. But once they signed the contracts they had no liberation and years of servitude were the result. [66]

They were housed in an atmosphere of filth and provided no medical facilities at all. There were so many cases of sickness of coolies because of the poor sanitary conditions and malnutrition. They were not supplied blankets and adequate clothing and were exposed to the harsh conditions like cold weather.

Though the government talked about the protection of labourers, they were not at all given a sympathetic treatment. Logan in his proposals appealed to the government to take measures for better treatment of the labourers. He had a direct experience in Wayanad and he picked up labourers from the

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[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Minutes of Consultation, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[66] Dwarakanath Ganguly, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

roads of Wayanad who had been discharged from the estates between 1876 and 1877.[67] Did Logan ever visit Wayanad ?

This system of labour had far reaching consequences in the subsequent history of Malabar. While during the early period of the plantations, the attached labourers were unwilling to migrate to the plantations, the second generation of the labourers willingly took up plantation labour. Labour migration became a common feature in the plantation system. The subsequent generation migrated not only within the continent, but even outside the country.

At any rate, it was a change in the old system of agrestic slavery. But the condition of the labourers was basically left unaltered. There was not a change for the better. A new type of serfdom was created in the plantations. The aim of the colonial masters was to exploit the labour for the plantations to the maximum. The payment of wages in terms of cash provided a capital market in the land and it also served the colonial interests. This was an early expression of capitalist interest of colonialism and as such the colonialists introduced a new tendency of capitalist mode of production in an agrarian system which had prolonged to exist on a feudal mode of production. Their efforts to make free labour were also related to this new economic relationship in the forces of production. In fact the plantations inaugurated an era of agrarian capitalism in a colonial society where pre-capitalist agrarian relations had already continued for centuries.

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[67] *Report on South India Planters Enquiry Committee*, 1896, p. 30.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Indian landowners were familiar with the techniques of land management and agriculture. However, they depended more on agricultural slave labour and meagre capital investment. Free labour and capital flow for a developed agrarian system were unknown to them. As such there was no change in production relations for the last several centuries. The feudal mode of production was extended up to the nineteenth century without major changes.

The colonial dominance in this region introduced radical changes in socio–economic relations. The Company permitted their servants to own property by regulation 1838. Further, they abolished slavery by regulation No.5 of 1843. These legislations further resulted in the articulation of new productive forces in the field of agriculture. Many of the servants of the Company rose to the occasion.

Further, the Company occupied large tracts of land in Wayanad region following the suppression of the *Pazassi* rebellion of 1805. Therefore the Company could assign suitable land for plantations in favour of private individuals, with remission of revenue.

A large number of European officers, after spending long years in India with all comforts of life, power and authority, were not willing to go back to their country where these facilities were

not available. They knew better that they, with the meagre resources at their disposal, will not be able to occupy comfortable houses, farm land etc. in England. Most of them came from the lower classes of European society without financial stability.

Naturally, they decided to settle in India and make profit out of their meagre capital in plantation sector and such efforts strengthened the capitalist mode of production in agriculture. Further, the British authorities were eager to introduce new cash crops like tea, coffee, cinchona, rubber, etc. for profitable trade in Europe. They were also experimenting with ecological imperialism for making huge profits out of the colonial situations in South India. The planters were provided with other facilities like transport and communication and their entrepreneurship was promoted. This attitude of the colonial authorities along with other factors later paved the way for the emergence of new plantations in India.

During the pre-colonial period, the people of Wayanad and the Nilgiris had little contact with those of the plains. It was during the early nineteenth century when the British, under the leadership of Sullivan, 'discovered' the cool climate of the Nilgiris, that they started colonising the area and encouraged the people in the surrounding areas to migrate to this hill tract. When the facilities of transport and communication increased during the second half of the nineteenth century, the commercial planting of a variety of crops was strengthened in both regions.

These changes resulted in the clearing of natural vegetation on a very large scale for commercial crops. Small townships developed in the plateau at this time. These paved the way for the integration of the area into the international market through the cash crops produced in those regions.

During the early years of colonial rule there was some direct investment by the East India Company itself. But later this policy was changed and private enterprises were encouraged. The Company granted revenue concessions for promoting new plantations.

Teak plantation started in Nilambur during the nineteenth century directly under the British government. It was a long-term process to get sufficient timber for ships, railways and other construction purposes in India as well as abroad. This direct investment of colonial revenue in plantation was also an experiment of state-owned entrepreneurship.

Thus the colonial government also benefited from the direct exploitation of plantation industry by investment of their capital derived from land revenue. This recycling of capital, particularly in teak plantation, was well appreciated by the British authorities. The native officials who had given leadership to such experiments in Nilambur were also well appreciated and encouraged by higher officials.

Murdock Brown exploited the colonial authorities like Jonathan Duncan for selfish motives. Duncan was supportive of private enterprises and encouraged them in their march to prosperity. In Gujarat, persons like Niguel de Lima e Souza, a Portuguese subject of the Company, tried to monopolise the

purchase of cotton. In fact the authorities fell susceptible to the influence of those private merchants during the process of transition to regular government by the Company. Pamila Nightingale thinks that the imperialism of private traders had a constructive role in realising the resources of the conquered territory while the Company was still concentrating on the policies of direct or indirect administrative system. For instance, the Bombay Presidency had not envisaged a policy of investment of revenue capital in the plantations at Anjarakkandy. But Brown, a private trader, persuaded the authorities to introduce a major policy in that direction. Finally, as expected and desired by Brown, the Court of Directors rejected the entire programme. Thus, the plantations became the private property of Brown.

Private enterprises like Thomas Parry and John Binny managed to make their fortunes by investing in the trading houses. Brown and many other planters in the Nilgiris invested their private capital in the plantations for making profits. Most of them lacked financial ethics as in the case of modern multi-nationals or trans-world corporations.

The private traders or interlopers influenced the administrative policy of the Company. The availability of new opportunities for the company's servants, commercial agencies and plantations compelled the company to take a radical decision to instruct their officials either to continue in bureaucracy or in private enterprise. It forbade them to pursue both simultaneously. Thomas Parry and John Binny were such officials of the Company who gave up their placements in favour

of private trade. In fact, in the 1820s, Parry, became the founder member of Madras Township.

Murdock Brown, the pioneer of plantations in South India, was a French interloper who later became an employee of the East India Company and invested money in the plantations at Anjarakkandy. He became an adviser and employee of the Company. Finally he could establish his authority over the entire plantation in an agreement with the Company. When he started, the plantations at Randathara or Anjarakkandy was confined to 200 acres. But within two years he appropriated the nearby holdings and enlarged it to 3000 acres. Although slave labour was restricted by the Company, Brown engaged himself in the purchase of slaves and made more profit out of the institution of slavery.

The exploitation of cheap labour and surplus land became a new model for other planters to emulate in the long run. Therefore Brown had to face native resistance against his ownership and authority.

When the plantations flourished, new commercial agencies like Parry & Company, Pierce-Leslie and several other trading agencies were engaged in agro business in South India. They were the chief agencies to purchase tea, coffee, rubber, cinchona bark, etc. from the local plantations. In Gujarat and other areas, these private traders were engaged in the trade of cotton. These trading agencies also imported agriculture implements, equipments, household items manufactured in Great Britain for the use by the planters. In that way the expansion of the multi-activities of the planters contributed to the development of the

local towns and their economic growth. These trading agencies imported many items related to the culture and civilization of Europe so far unnoticed in traditional society.

When the commercial crops and vegetables were cultivated, they were exported on a large scale. The climatic and ecological conditions of the Nilgiris were another prominent attraction to the Europeans. Like other important hill stations of India, Udagamandalam or Ooty was also developed into an attractive hill station in South India. It was designed as a sanatorium to accommodate the aged and the invalids of the English of the British India. During that time, they had to go to Mauritius or South Africa for such purposes. But later this hill station was converted into the summer capital of the Madras Presidency. A prime centre of attraction with the famous lake and the botanical garden, Ooty became an important destination of the tourists from all over the world. When the British began the development of Ooty they compared it with Switzerland in Europe. Almost all important officials of the East India Company and the British government visited and stayed here. Along with the commercial crops, the lush nature and salubrious climate of the Nilgiris were also exposed to the international market.

The introduction of plantation and recruitment of labour had led to new production relations in the traditional society. The early system that prevailed in agricultural production was changed in favour of new production relations. The plantations had a dynamic management and entrepreneurship. Scarcity of capital was a major problem for many of the plantations started

in the first half of the nineteenth century in places like Wayanad. The first plantation which started on an experimental basis at Anjarakkandy by the British also had such problems. However, the resources required for these plantations had been diverted from the revenue account. Large amounts had been incurred under this item of expenditure and the company authorities later objected to that. Therefore, later, the Court of Directors decided to leave out the entire plantations in favour of private individual. The Company government was not ready to meet the heavy expenditure required for a plantation. Further, whatever may be the nature of plantation, the owner had to wait at least eight to ten years to get a profitable income out of it.

Considering the difficulties, a new system was introduced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Capital was amassed from interested groups by allotting a number of shares with a fixed price for each share. This was the Joint Stock Company system which was able to launch many corporate plantations or Joint Stock Companies in Malabar and the Nilgiris. Such capital was invested not only in plantations but also in commercial corporations. For instance, companies like Pierce-Leslie, Aspinwal, Wolkot Brothers and Alpha Gold Mining Company were floated by such subscriptions. Such a system was new to the traditional Indian society. This pattern was the same as that of the origin of the East India Company.

Although many such companies had been floated as commercial enterprises, several had withered away after a short span of their existence. However some of them continued to exist throughout the colonial period and even after

independence. A few companies exist even now in the former territory of British Malabar, incorporating large capital investments. The technological aspects of manufacture of coffee and tea, processing of cinchona, cinnamon bark etc. were kept secret from the indigenous people at the time of introduction of such enterprises. In fact knowledge was treated as an instrument of profit, as in the modern period by multi-nationals.

Another challenge before the plantation management was the poor communication and transport systems. Thus the management had to invest their own capital in transport and communication. They had also pressurised the government to construct roads and bridges in the region of Wayanad and the Nilgiris. However the colonial government was not ready to invest sufficient capital in the communication system. Even now these regions have only very poor transport and communication system. Some of the plantations were started away from the transport and communication system.

As the plantations were labour intensive, they generated new opportunities for employment of labour in its multi-faceted activities. This is entirely different from traditional agriculture of paddy and coconut. Labourers were forced to reside within the plantations. But they were given cash as wages. It was the beginning of the spread of cash economy in the rural areas. The plantations in the interior gradually invited the attention of the government for starting roads and communication network. Such aspects turned out to be the elements of modern and civilized life in the hilly regions. The labourers assembled under one management started the organised bargaining. In 1797 the

plantation labourers in Anjarakkandy cinnamon plantation demanded an increase of six paise in their wages. Finally the planter yielded to the organised demand of the labour force. This was an unprecedented incident in the labour system. It was the beginning of collective bargain for wage enhancement.

The planters were responsible in pressurising the local governments for better tenancy legislations and fixity of tenure. The land was liable for eviction after 12 years or on demand by the landlord. When several cases came before the courts of law, the legal authorities suggested that they had no authority to change the traditional laws.

They opined that the changes should come from legislative authority of the government. In Travancore, Sir T. Madhava Rao introduced the *Kanam* proclamation of 1865 to give more tenure security to the tenants. This was done mainly to please the emerging planting community because without long-term fixity of tenure they could not realise more profit out of the plantation which required more capital investment. The colonial government also appointed the Malabar Tenancy Commission, to recommend on land tenures headed by William Logan. His recommendation to give fixity of tenure to cultivators was the starting point of radical agrarian legislations in South India. His recommendations became a bolt from the blue for the traditional landed aristocracy.

In the twentieth century, the planters could enjoy the monopoly over land even after the implementation of land reforms in independent India. The government of India was not ready to abrogate the rights and privileges of the foreign capital,

particularly in the plantation sector. This shows that the planters' lobby remained a new power bloc in the new agrarian system of India. It was mainly based on their capitalist mode of production in Indian agrarian economy. The authorities like Gregory Kotovsky have said that a planter exploits the resources in two ways—as a landlord and as an industrialist. The system exists even now in India. The multi-nationalist joint stock companies like Harrison, Wilson and Malayalam plantations still dominate the entire production of coffee, tea etc.

The Europeans had introduced new varieties of plants and vegetables for their use in Asiatic and Latin American continent. In fact coffee, tea rubber, potato, cabbage and other vegetables and fruits were introduced from one country to the other under the system of capitalist mode of production, and made a bonanza of crops and profit out of the new environment. They introduced new agrarian techniques and created new tastes and habits. This introduction of new commercial crops again paved the way for creating new tastes among the people all over the world. The introduction of new taste in the global market was the handiwork of colonialism. For instance, drinking of coffee and tea was unknown not only to the traditional society but also to the European world. Now these items have become popular drinks and necessary items even for a man in the street. Thus colonialism not only dominated over the economic sphere of a territory, but it also conquered the personal sphere of taste and habit of each and every individual.

Emergence of plantations had totally changed the ecological system by over-exploitation of the natural resources.

The loss of fertility of soil due to the large-scale cultivation, large-scale deforestation for mono-agricultural planting etc. had its own impact on ecology. Loss of bio-diversity in general and rare species of animals and creatures in particular, soil erosion and depletion of water resources etc. were other negative results of these changes. Along with these changes, the rich resources of medicinal plants, honey and such valuable forest products were affected heavily. Wild animals lost their natural sanctuary and many of them became homeless and vanished from the area.

Although the new commercial agricultural system was gradually adopted by the natives during the nineteenth century itself, the plantation system as a whole was conceived as a colonial system by the ordinary people of this area. They opposed this new system and it was expressed in several occasions. One such occasion was the *Pazassi* rebellion, when the natives destroyed the plantation in Anjarakkandy. During the period of Malabar rebellion in 1921 the rebels attacked the Kalikavu plantations near Nilambur. These incidents show that the attitude of the natives towards the plantation system were totally antagonistic.

As a result of the emergence of the plantation system, some educational institutions were set up in different parts of Malabar and the Nilgiris. These were set up under the initiatives of the planters as well as the Christian Missionaries. It was due to two important reasons. One is that the small planters wanted to educate their children. Some of them were not able to send their children to the big cities like Bangalore for education.

Therefore they wanted local facilities for education. The second reason was that the new plantations were in need of educated employees for their enterprises to carry out their day-to-day administrative activities. Thus they were in favour of establishing educational institutions. Such efforts were supported by the indigenous people also.

The plantation system gradually paved the way for the emergence of a society, where people mingled together cutting across the caste and religious barriers. During the early years of the plantations especially at Anjarakkandy, separate sheds were built up to put labourers belonging to each caste group. But later, labourers from different parts of Kerala and South India were put in the same site and they not only worked together but also dined and lived together. There was no room for caste discrimination or traditional pollution including untouchability.

The plantation system was again instrumental in the large-scale internal migration of labourers from different parts of South India. During the early years of plantations the most important issue raised by the planters was the scarcity of sufficient labour force to the plantations. They brought labourers from different parts through *Kanganis* or middlemen. But during the close of the nineteenth century they got more labourers from South India. At least some social scientists have admitted that this was an immediate result of the abolition of slavery in the territories owned by the Company. In the third stage there were large-scale labour migrations to the plantations. Labour migration became common during the

twentieth century and it had even taken place to countries like Ceylon and South East Asia.

During the early years of the plantations, the capital was invested by the State itself. Anjarakkandy, the first plantation, was a state scheme during its inception. The Nilambur teak plantation was also a state enterprise but later the attitude was changed and as a result of new liberalism, private enterprises were encouraged. All the plantations during the second half of the nineteenth century were owned either by the private individual or by the joint stock companies. The theories of *Laissez faire* had compelled the state to withdraw its control even private capital.

Another major consequence of the rise and growth of plantation system was the alienation of the tribal people. Although the ordinary natives were incorporated to the system gradually, the tribals were not really incorporated and they were thrown out of their forest habitat. This alienation continued even after independence. They were made labourers, exploited heavily and were deprived of decent living.

Although plantations were enterprising areas for entrepreneurship some of the planters had perished due to unforeseen situations and lack of experience. Most of them belonged to the Company service as part of the bureaucracy, and they had no technical know-how in management of plantations and agriculture. The climatic conditions and the epidemic diseases like malaria and smallpox had ravaged the labour force and it also gave them further setbacks. Many Joint

Stock Companies lost their capital by experiments in gold mines in Wayanad and the Nilgiris.

There were no proper pesticides and pest-resistant varieties of plants to withstand the contagious diseases of plants and seedlings. For instance, the emergence of tea as a major plantation crop was due to the diseases like coffee blight. However, the accumulation of land was a major impetus for future development.

Although many of the planters belonged to the multinationals and their world system, they were exposed to the mechanism of international price system. The global competition among the producing countries had sometimes adversely affected their monetary interests. For instance, the low priced coffee from Brazil had created the fall in the price of South Indian coffee. It is believed that the labour cost in South India was not so cheap as in Brazil and Ceylon. The fluctuations in the market system of other countries had adversely affected the Indian planters. Such situations continued in the twentieth century also.

Now globalisation and the Indian economic conditions have created havoc on Indian plantations. Many of the small and big planters are facing new crises on account of the new international system. Their cost of production is rising higher and higher and the price is exposed to acute competition. Some of them have retrenched labour to cope with the situation and ultimately resulted in the deterioration of their plantations. The retrenched labour forces like tribes are compelled to migrate to different centres in search of food, work and shelter. The decline

of their habitat had resulted in new agrarian struggles under new leadership and ideology. The struggles in Muthanga in Wayanad by the tribals have their roots in such an economic situation.

In brief, the East India Company and its authorities including the bureaucracy had taken every possible step to promote plantations and thereby exploit the native natural resources. In the prolonged history of the century, the English East India Company found plantations to be a major area of capital investment and thereby accrued huge profits out of the interplay of land and labour for their private individuals. Now the plantations play a prominent role in the economy of the country. The experiments of the Company in investing its own revenue and capital in common and teak plantations in Malabar were gradually shifted to the private enterprises that amassed large profits in the twentieth century. Tea and coffee and other spices became commodities for international trade. Such a trade system and mode of production opened avenues of labour in a traditional agrarian society. Gradually, in the turn of the twentieth century, this capitalist mode of production based on wage labour became popular in Malabar and the Nilgiris.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

P. MOHANDAS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

2005

APPENDIX I

AGREEMENT SIGNED BY MURDOCK BROWN AS THE OVERSEER AND MANAGER OF THE RANDATHARA PLANTATION ON 31ST DECEMBER 1797 IN THE PRESENCE OF JONATHAN DUNCAN, GOVERNOR OF MADRAS

William Logan, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and other Papers of Importance Relating to the British affairs in Malabar (Madras, 1951).

1st. – Be it known to all men by these presents that I, the undersigned do hereby solemnly promise and do bind and oblige myself, faithfully to execute, to the utmost of my abilities, the duties of Overseer and Manager of a plantation on account of the Honourable United East India Company in the manner they are pointed out and particularly explained in a letter addressed by me to the Honourable Jonathan Duncan, President in Council and Governor of Bombay at Tellicherry, on the 8th of August last, containing the plan of the said plantation and proposals to undertake and carry it on account, and solely and entirely, on behalf of the said Honourable Company, copy of which letter is hereunto annexed.

2nd. – I do moreover bind and oblige myself that all the produce of the said plantation as well as of the article specified in the aforementioned letter, as of any other s that it may be hereafter found eligible to cultivate and that shall be cultivated thereon shall be most faithfully and truly delivered to the Agents of the Honourable Company, to which effect I, the undersigned, am ready to take and sign such oath as Government may direct, copy of which shall be annexed to the present obligation.

3rd. – I do further hereby bind and oblige myself that in case the present agreement and plan of carrying on the plantation, therein mentioned, shall when made known to the Court of Directors, be disapproved of by the, then and in that case, to take the whole upon my account, and to reimburse the Honourable Company within three calendar months after the same being duly notified to me the announced

principal and interest of money expanded on the said plantation as more particularly specified in the plan itself, on condition of the possession of the ground occupied by the plantation being secured to me and those[1] who in that case may be concerned with me, at a reasonable rent to be rated according to the custom of the country it being particularly understood that those whom I may associate with me, shall be such as are approved of by Government.

4th. – I do moreover bind and oblige myself faithfully and truly to observe and follow the instructions[2] received from the Honourable the Committee of Government under date of the 31st December 1797, consisting of eleven paragraphs, viz. :-

5th. – To be careful to plant in the first instance a good number of those cuttings which shall produce the second year, that is, in thirteen or fourteen months after being planted as pointed out in the 10th paragraph of his address, so as the Honourable Company may have some returns as speedily as possible to enable them to support the first outlay of this plantation.

6th. – To preserve as many as possible of the larger trees that are now standing on the spot fixed on for the plantation so as to be able to ascertain and show the relative advantage of raising the vines on dead wood and on living trees, etc.

7th. – To be careful to reduce the expense of the plantation as much as possible by reducing the wages of the labourers, if practicable, without diminishing the number wanted, below what I have allowed in my statement, and also by rearing the plants at the least possible expense.

8th. – As the Committee of Government cannot undertake to insure to me the 5 per cent mentioned in the 23rd paragraph of my letter aforementioned to them, I do hereby agree that this condition shall remain open for the confirmation of Honourable the Court of Directors to confirm this Commission to me as specified in the paragraph of my letter before quoted, trusting to the well-known justice and liberality of the Honourable Court of Directors for an adequate remuneration for my time and labour as may appear to them to deserve in the arduous exertions I shall bestow in creating, as it were to them, so certain and desirable an additional sources of revenue to this province.

9th. – I do further bind and oblige myself to make a trial of the Bourbon, Malta and Guzarate cotton and to report on the result of each trial as directed in the 9th paragraph of the said instructions.

10th. – I do also further bind and oblige myself to begin the ensuing year to plant cocoanut and betel-nut trees as pointed out in the 34th and 35th paragraphs of my before-quoted address to the Cassia, native nutmeg, and sandalwood plants, as I shall have been able, until that time, to procure and also to endeavour to propagate the cinnamon tree sent round on the Drake with the assistance of the Cyngalize cultivators, and to report to Government such information as I shall be able to collect respecting these productions.

11th. – I do moreover bind and oblige myself most faithfully and truly to execute to the best of my abilities such further instructions as may be issued by Government for my direction and guidance.

12th. – I do moreover hereby bind and oblige myself that in case of my being permitted to carry on the plantation on my own private accounts, the whole produce of pepper, coffee, and cotton, and all such articles as shall be produced thereon, shall be wholly and exclusively tendered in sale to the Honourable Company's Agents, the Honourable Company paying for the same, viz., for the pepper and coffee at the prices[1] specified in the 14th paragraph of my before-quoted address to Government, and the other articles at such prices as Government may deem their qualities and species entitles to.

13th. – I do also hereby bind and oblige myself to send every month to the Commissioners for executing the office of Supervisor and Chief Magistrate of this Province, or to such other local authority as Government may direct a statement of my receipt and expenditure to which shall be annexed a monthly report of the work done and progress made in the in the plantation, so as to enable Government to form some judgment of its progressive value.

Witnesses (Signed) MURDOCK BROWN.

(Signed) J.A. GRANT

(,,) G. WOOD

APPENDIX II

AGREEMENT OF MURDOCH BROWN ON 30TH APRIL 1817 IN THE PRESENCE OF WILLIAM SHEFFIELD, ASSISTANT COLLECTOR OF MALABAR

William Logan, A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers of Importance Relating to the British Affairs in Malabar (Madras,1951).

Be it known to all men by these presents that Murdock Brown, formerly Overseer of the Honourable East India Company's Plantation in Randatarra, and now residing at Anjarakandy on the said plantation, has this day become bound towards the said Honourable Company to the fulfillment of the following articles of agreement, viz:-

1.- Whereas the Right Honourable the Governor in Council of Fort St. George on behalf of the said East India Company having been pleased to grant to the said Murdock Brown a lease of 99 years of the Honourable Company's Randaterra Plantation, as made over to him by the Principal Collector of Malabar, Major Willaim MacLeod, in the year 1802 (consisting of the five tarrahs or deshums of Mooringury, Mamba, Cameat, Anjarakandy, and Palery together with a strip of land situated on the opposite side of the Anjarakandy river in Cotiote, bounded by the Dyke of ten feet in height constructed in the year 1800 for the defence of the plantation and containing about 40 acres of land). Murdock Brown does hereby bind and oblige himself, his heirs and assigns to the due payment and discharge of the Revenue of the aforesaid land amounting to annual sum[1] of Rs. (2,257-2-0) by such kists or instalments as the Collector of Malabar may from time to time direct.

2.- When a new survey of the land revenue of Malabar shall take place, Murdock Brown for himself, his heirs, and assigns, does hereby bind and oblige

himself to pay the new revenue thereon to be assessed at the same rates as the same species of land and productions of the district shall be then assessed.

3.- Whereas according to the original plan and agreement between Murdock Brown to the Honourable the Governor of Bombay in the year 1797, the extent of the plantation was fixed at 2,000 acres of arable land, and whereas within the said five tarrahs (the whole arable land of which does not exceed 2,000 acres) 918 acres consist of land occupied by inhabitants and paying revenue, it shall be lawful for Murdock Brown to purchase with the consent of the inhabitants, all or any part of the said 918 acres, or in the Court of Zillah (and it is thereby understood that all and every part of the land of the said five tarrahs, with the exception of the said occupied land now paying revenue is the property of Murdock Brown under the said lease).

4.- It shall be lawful for the said Honourable Company to prohibit Murdock Brown, his heirs or assigns, from purchasing occupied lands for the inhabitants but in that case the said Honourable Company shall be bound to put the said Murdock Brown, his heirs or assigns, in possession of an equal extent of unoccupied arable land (not exceeding 918 acres) in the vicinity, at the time of such prohibition being signified to him, and he shall hold such land on the same terms and conditions as the rest of the plantation.

5.- At the expiration of the lease it shall remain at the option of Government to resume the lands thus leased, on repaying to the lawful owner the sums paid to the natives for their Jenm and Koodima Neer, rights and the products on them, when purchased. An account of the sums so expended until the 1st of July 1802 was delivered to the collector, Major MacLeod, and what may henceforward be purchased shall be paid for agreeably to the sums specified in the respective registers of the deeds.

6.- Whereas the said Murdock Brown of himself, his heirs and assigns, did in the year 1802 offer and agree to pay for the purchase of the said plantation, the amount expended, until that period on it, by the Honourable Company with certain deductions agreed to by the Right Honourable, the then Governor in Council of Fort St. George, and whereas the total destruction of all the building and nearly all the productive vines and coffee trees, in year 1803 by the Rebels from Cotiote, put it out

of the power of Murdock Brown to fulfil the agreement then entered into and induced the Government to grant a farther extension of term for the payment of the sums due by Murdock Brown as a aforesaid and also to take under their consideration what reductions ought to be allowed to Murdock Brown for the heavy losses and destructions suffered by him, from the incursion of the rebels aforesaid, and whereas the Right Honourable the Governor in Council after receiving the reports of the Collector of Malabar, and Board of Revenue on the subject of remissions to be granted to Murdock Brown has thought fit to refer the same to the Honourable the Court of Directors for their final decision. Be it further known that Murdock Brown having already paid two instalments 10,0000 rupees each on that account does hereby bind himself, his heirs, executors and assigns to pay to the Honourable Company such instalments, as the said Honourable Court in their wisdom, shall determine, deducting therefrom the Court in their wisdom, shall determine, deducting therefrom the value of the goods delivered to the Honourable Company's Commercial Resident in Mahe, agreeably to the account delivered to the Principal Collector, Major William MacLeod in 1802.

7.- Murdock Brown, the occupant of the plantation, shall at all times conform to all lawful orders issued to him under the authority of Government or of its officers.

In the presence of Witnesses. M. BROWN.

H.M. WOOD.

J.L. LACON.

Entered into before me at Tellicherry this 30th day of April 1817.

WM. SHEFFIELD,

Hd. Asst. Collector.

APPENDIX III

CORRESPONDENCE IN RELATION TO SLAVERY IN PLANTATIONS BETWEEN

T.H. BABER, COLLECTOR OF MALABAR AND MURDOCK BROWN, OVERSEER OF ANJARAKANDY PLANTATIONS.

For St. George 22 December 1812. Judicial Consultation.

To, Mr. Murdock Brown

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter informing me you had purchased many Pooliars families and some even very lately from different quarters in consequence of the permission and sanction of Government soon after you began your undertaking. I have to request you to furnish me with the permission to sanction referred to that I may report the same for the orders of government. In answer to your last para I have to inform you that my requisition for the list of persons sold to you as slaves, we made in virtue of the powers vested in me by the regulations as the Zillah magistrate and my commission as one of this Majesty's justice of the peace.

Zillah. North Malabar

20th Dec. 1811.

Signed T.H. Baber

Magistrate

To

Mr. Murdock Brown

at Tellicherry.

Sir,

The officer who I deputed to search for some kidnapped children reported to be amongst the slaves in cuncil to acknowledge this receipt of your letter of the instant No.1 and its enclosures related to the practice of selling female children to dancing girls.

2. It is understood from your letter that in the opinion of the Judges of the Foujdari Adawlat, no new enactment is required upon this subject because the selling or purchasing of children for the avowed purpose of prostitution may be punished under the law as it at present stand.

3. The Governor in council entirely concurs with the judges in deeming any enactment unnecessary and is further of opinion adverting to the nature of the institution of dancing women and to its connexion with the ceremonies and observances both religions and civil of the great bulk of the people that if it is at all expedient for the officers of government to interfere for the purpose of preventing parents or guardians from assigning children in the customary modes to be brought up to this profession, the interference required to be conducted with greatest caution. The remarks in my letter of the 28th of June to which reference is made by the Foujdari Adawlat, relate to the practice of selling children to be made slaves, and

generally to the usages of the country with respect to slavery and it was observed that subject was one of much difficulty and delicacy. The subject now under consideration is of no less delicacy and seems to afford less inducement to interfere, for it is to be considered that loss of personal freedom is not among the consequences of being bought up to be a dancing woman and that the species of immorality which the interference would propose to repress, prevails and is generally tolerated in the most enlightened and most highly civilized nations of Europe and is much more closely connected with general depravity and with on your plantation have returned and brought with them twenty six men, women and children who say they were all stolen or forcibly carried away from their relations and masters, six of the children are not of the tribe were of unfortunate persons who are considered as slaves. Two being Nair boys aged about 8 and a Tier girl about 12, who say they natives of Travancore and ever within the last six months stolen from their relations and sent by Wallapagata Assen Ally from Alleppy to you. I have been most particular in questioning these unfortunate and have no doubt in my own mind that they were kidnapped. It becomes in consequence of my duty to discover in this human traffic: I therefore must earnestly call upon you to afford me every information in your power to that end and in regard to the others. I am ready to receive and investigate any evidence or documents that you may have to adduce in support of any claims you may have upon them.

Zillah North Malabar

27th Dec. 1811

Signed T.H. Baber

Magistrate.

Fort St. George 22 December 1812

To the Provincial Court of the Western Division

Humbly Sheweth,

That your Petitioner has received the Extract from the proceedings of the provincial Court of the 6th Instant and in obedience to the injunctions therein contained to indicate himself from the accusation of the magistrate, your petitioner here with transmit his answer to the magistrate on that subject to which he has now to add that the man who sent up those six persons from Travancore is arrived from thence fully prepared to establish his right to them by purchase in conformity to laws of the country. Your Petitioner is further enjoined to state what commission he had given to the person who send him up the six children from Travancore and as to any precaution he may have adopted in restricting that person to the purchase only of the such castes as are by the constitution of society in Malabar considered as bondmen and transferable by sale in the like manner as other real personal property. In reply to which your Petitioner begs leave to state that, he never gave any commission or instruction on the subject and that the purchase and the sending of them to work on the Plantation was solely the act of the person himself and that your petitioner did not at any time regard them in any other light that labourers sent to work on the plantation where there is always occupation for persons al all ages.

In regard to what are termed the depositions of 55 Pooliars and Betwas your petitioner deems it totally inconsistent with his duty as a man to sanction so great a violation of the right of property by giving any answer to them. That 200 servants or slaves against whom not a word of information was lodged and from none of whom the smallest complaint had been preferred should be forcibly driven away without warrant exhibited or reason assigned, for so violent a proceeding and then that their Depositions should be forcibly taken (for they have been detained here in custody form the 18th ultimo to this day) and brought as accusations against their master or employer is so great a violation of every principle of British jurisprudence and the effects of such an exertion of authority so highly injurious to your petitioners extensive labour-that your petitioner must again pray for redress and protection against similar violent and unlawful acts. Your Petitioner therefore can only say that the Pooliars and Betwas brought here as above mentioned, were the major part of

them sent to the Plantation in the years 1799 and 1800 when the undertaking was carried on by the honorable company. By the company's Darogha at Chawgate Canwakaren moopa and under and order (copy of which is enclosed) from the commissioners of Malabar to the assistant collector and magistrate in that district, your petitioner seems it necessary further to state that all these persons were questioned on the 18th December at Anjarakandy by the person deputed (but who acted without any authority exhibited) by the magistrate at which time their answer were in total contradiction to what are now termed their depositions. Your Petitioner begs leave further to state that soon after he undertakes to superintendent, the undertaking at Anjarakandy on account of the company in 1798, the impossibility of procuring a sufficient number of laboureres to settle there, induced him to suggest the purchase of Pooliars, Betwas and other low castes who are and must be agreeable to the customs of the natives always be in a state of bondage. This suggestion was approved of by the Government of Bombay and since that period your petitioner has continued from time to time according to his means and to the facility of procuring them to increase their number; but he begs leave to add that in thus complying with the custom of the country in this mode of procuring labour, he has never at anytime considered the persons thus acquired, as slaves nor deemed that he had or has ever ... any greater degree of authority over them than over his other labourers of which the number has always been considerable. On the contrary, the condition of out caste has been ameliorated and themselves advanced in the scale of human being to be on a level in point of comforts with and in some respect inferior to other labouring people which fact it is in the power of the court of ascertain by enquiry on the spot. The very idea that one man has a right to make a slave of another, is and has been repugnant to the sentiments of your petitioner. The deed of sale of all those persons are in the possession of your petitioner and no claim against the legality of the sales has ever been made nor the shadow of a complaint made to the magistrate on that subject. Should his property in them be legally desputed he is prepared to prove it.

In conformity to the sentiments expressed in the proceedings of the court with regard to your Petitioners receiving back from the magistrate the Pooliars and Betwas

detained by him your petitioner begs leave to state that he yesterday sent a person to receive them. When the magistrate delivered 55 men, women and children but still detains 16 Pooliars without assigning any reason farther than their saying that they were stolen. It is admitted by the Magistrate that those people are in a state of bondage and must have belonged to some other person before they came into the possession of your petitioners. If therefore they had been stolen, the former owners would no doubt long since made their appearance to claim them, but no such has ever appeared and your Petitioner must again respect that the assertion is without foundation and he therefore submit to your Honorable Court that those people were illegally taken from him and continue to be legally detained.

Tellicherry — Murdock Brown

11th Jan. 1812 — Owner of the Randathara.

(Fort. St. George 31st March 1812. Judicial Consultations)

To

Mr. Murdock Brown

Sir,

Having received information that a considerable traffic has been carrying on in children between persons in this Zillah and in the adjoining districts and that several had been sent to your plantation at Anjarakandy. I have to request you will inform me whether you have made any purchase of that description and in that event that you will send ma a list there of their caste, age and sex with the names of the persons from whom you purchased them and of the agents employed by you. The Darogah of

Cotiote and Randathara has received my orders to proceed to Anjarakandy and call before him the whole of the labourers on your plantation and put certain questions to them with which he has been furnished.

I am

Zillah North Malabar — T.H. Baber

18 December 1811 — Magistrate.

Fort. St. George 31st March 1812

To

The Magistrate of the Zillah of South Malabar

Sir,

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of yesterday's date and enclose copy of the authority of Government under which I have purchased Pooliars for the labour of this undertaking the original stands recorded in the proceedings of the Commissioners at Calicut.

Agreeable to your letter of yesterday, the whole of my Pooliars, male and female and their children were brought before the person who delivered me your letter, when the assisted by the Menon from Pychy and the Commissioner from Srewery accompanied by a number of armed holders to guard the Pooliars called them one by one before him and put such questions to them as he pleased. When the emancipation was over he placed 20 men and women and children, under a guard of

holkars under which they remained all night and until eleven 0' clock this morning when he returned. When he went away last night he desired that all the other hired labourers that I employed should be ready for a similar examination this morning; they were accordingly assembled, at seven 0' clock and remained until the Executor of your orders appeared when instead of examining these thus assembled, he sent his holkars and by force brought together all my Pooliars that had been already examined yesterday. I told him protested against all such violence and against his removing them from the plantation as being contrary to all the existing regulations that I am acquainted with which require that some specific complaint shall be made against any person or persons before they can be thus violently treated my protection was not listened to, and the whole were carried off by him and his guard of armed men, without allowing them to take their food or to feed their children, many of whom are at breast and only a few months old so that it is very probably their being thus forced to go so far in the heat of the sun (it being exactly mid day) will be the death of some of the children.

I have already noticed that I cannot believe there is any Regulation existing to authorize this oppressive interference with my property and still less the cruelty committed on nearly 200 men, women and children excepting a formal complaint against the persons themselves or a claim being made by some persons to them in consequence of some invalidity in the sale. If either of these have been furnished with a copy of it before this extraordinary violence was resorted to.

The sale of slaves is not only authorized by the customs of Malabar but is expressly but is expressly permitted by the Mohomedan laws under which this country is governed, and for these 13 years past no question has ever been put to me on the subject of my purchase, nor any complaint form any person claiming the Pooliars so purchased and also I know to a reference form the Principal Collector of Malabar to the Board of Revenue on a complaint of slaves being brought form Travancore to Malabar, he was told that the trade being authorized by the law he had no business to interfere in it ; for all these reasons I know most solemnly protest

against the violence you have caused to be committed on those innocent persons, many of whom were born on this plantation from which they are now forced away without any reason whatever being assigned for such barbarous usage. I also protest against it for the loss that it has already and must continue to make me suffer putting a stop to my extensive labours here where upwards of 350 persons are daily employed but of whose services have deprived me :-

I have the honour to be

Anjarakandy (Signed) M. Brown

21 Dec. 1812.

P.S. The copy of the authority granted to me by the Bombay Government for the purchase of Pooliars and Betwas is not forthcoming here having been destroyed when this house was burnt to the ground in 1803 but the Collector of Malabar can furnish an attested copy of it. I obtained one from him some months ago to send to Cochin to a person who under that authority purchased and sent 12 or 13 Pooliars, men women and children to me that are amongst those whom your people have placed under a guard.

Signed

M. Brown

[Judicial Department 1812 March]

APPENDIX IV

CONDITION OF SLAVES IN MALABAR-1856

LETTER. FROM W.ROBINSON, ACTING COLLECTOR OF MALABAR TO T.PYCROFT.C.S

In the second half of the 19th century it is reported that of slave population of 1,87,758 about 1,48, 210 remained with their former proprietors. 39,548 or about 21% have availed themselves of the freedom secured by the act of 1843. Thus the great bulk of slaves of Malabar still remain with their former masters But it is interesting to note that they as well as their masters are quite alive of the fact that they are at liberty . Despite this fact most of them preferred to continue with their masters raise many questions like what are the causes or the circumstances that prompted or compelled most of the slaves to continue as earlier. There may be many reasons like poverty, ignorance about their rights, reluctance to change the existing way of life, uncertainty of employment etc.. In the case of cherumars though aware of law, they are not as a body in a condition to avail themselves of their liberty . They were entirely dependent on their masters. They were entirely dependant on their masters for repairing their present houses and gardens operate to prevent their breaking of the ancient ties and degraded as they have been under the immemorial condition of slavery , many still bear severity and wrong with indifference, but on the whole a great change has taken place and the wages and comfort are improving and independence springing up.

The Cherumars as a body constitute the only really good and certain body of agricultural labourers. They constitute the majority of the labour power in Malabar. Without them the plantation industry might experience slow growth. So the landed proprietor knows his worth and gradually he is become ready to give incentives gradually to them. Here it is noted that public works and coffee plantations in Wayanad are exercising an important influence on wages in Malabar and the general rise on these area also improved the condition of Cherumar. So gradually their condition of living improved. It is common to hear the exclamation "the slaves are became Masters ." In the meantime the roads are kept free to them thanks to the social

reform movements and slaves and untouchables were allowed to enter every public office in the country. Education was also introduced to them. Thus Cherumars too got the social freedom and most of them got educated and this created an awareness about social rights and conditions among Cherumars. So as said above, education has been attempted among them and every expedient that British abhorrence of slavery can compass to rise the degraded class is resorted to.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE COLONIAL INVESTMENTS IN MALABAR AND THE NILGIRIS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

P. MOHANDAS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

2005

GLOSSARY

Achanmar	Rulers
Adiyodi	An upper-caste group
Badaga	A tribe in the Nilgiris
Batta	Allowance
Cheruma	A lower caste group
Desham	An area of land
Devaru	Lord
Edangazhi	A measure
Irular	A tribe
Janmi	Landlord
Kammala	A caste group
Kanam	Mortgage or lease
Kangani	Middle man
Karanavan	Headman of a tharavad
Kolathiri	Ruler of Kolathunadu
Kota	A tribe in the Nilgiris
Kurumbas	A tribe
Kurup	A higher caste group
Kuttikkanam	Stump fee
Kuzhikkanam	A deed of mortgage for the improvement of cultivated lands
Maistry	Overseer
Makkathayam	Patrilineal system

Marumakkathayam	Matrilineal system
Moopan	Elderly person
Nayar	A higher caste group of Malabar
Para	A measure
Paraya	A polluted caste
Pillai	A higher caste group
Pulaya	An untouchable caste group of Malabar
Thara	Place
Tharavad	Joint family
Tiya	A lower caste group below Nair community
Verumpattam	Simple lease
Zamorin	Ruler of Kozhikode

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