Colonialism and coffee plantations: Decline of environment and tribals in Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century

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This article attempts to analyse how the colonial project of establishing coffee plantations disturbed the self-subsistent traditional tribal system, damaged the ecology, and resulted in environmental decline in the Shervaroy hills of Madras Presidency during the nineteenth century. The thrust of the argument is that the colonial administration was least concerned about the tribal people's customary rights over forest resources, and their traditional administrative and judicial systems. The British administration, which disregarded the tribal system, not only encouraged the British planters but even condoned their patently illegal activities. In other words, the means adopted to set up coffee plantations in the hills/forests to favour the British planters led to the disintegration of the age old tribal socio-cultural system and their forest-oriented economy. It concludes that in the process of commercialisation, the colonial policy refused to accord due importance to ecology and environment as well as to the sustainable livelihood of the tribal communities. Instead, its only concern was with the British planters establishing coffee estates during the nineteenth century.

The Problem

The debate on the environmental history of India that emerged during the last quarter of the twentieth century, which focuses predominantly on forestry, could be broadly classified into two categories, viz., commercialisation of forests and

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conservation of forests.[1] The first school of thought argues that while forest resources were exploited for commercial purposes, there was an appalling neglect of the forest-dwellers and users.[2] On the other hand, the second school contends that though commercialisation of forest occurred, conservation was also duly emphasised.[3] It is argued that the desiccation theory and forest conservation for environmental protection was shaped concretely in Madras Presidency during the 1830s, and in Bombay Presidency in the 1850s. Further, commercialisation of forests, according to this school, was not an early nineteenth-century phenomenon, but widely prevalent even before colonial rule.[4]

Literature suggests that prior to colonial intervention, commercial exploitation of forest produce was largely restricted to the collection of spices such as pepper and cardamom, and that of ivory, where extraction did not pose a serious threat either to the ecology or customary use. This ensured renewal and sustainability.[5] Different studies have pointed out that equilibrium of resources was thus maintained. An approximate equilibrium of natural resources base existed between AD 800 and AD 1800.[6] No ruler prior to colonial intervention had ever framed a sustained policy of intrusive exploitation or regulation of forest tracts.[7] Shiva also stresses this point: '. . . forest had been controlled and used collectively by village communities thus ensuring a sustainable use of these renewable resources'.[8] However, there were numerous conflicts over pastures and forests during the pre-colonial period in different parts of the country.[9] Conversely, the pre-colonial

[1] For a detailed review see Velayutham Saravanan, 'Colonial Commercial Forest Policy and the Tribal Private Forests in Madras Presidency: 1792–1881', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), Vol. 40(4), 2003, pp. 403–47; and Velayutham Saravanan, 'Colonial Agrarian Policy in Tribal Areas of Madras Presidency: 1792–1872', *Environment and History* (forthcoming).

[2] Ramachandra Guha, 'Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *EPW*), Vol. XVIII(44 & 45), 1983, pp. 1886–92; Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, 'State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India', *Past and Present*, No. 122, 1989, pp. 144–57; Marlene Buchy, 'British Colonial Forest Policy in South India: An Unscientific or Unadopted Policy', in Richard H. Grove, Satpal Sangwan and Vinita Damodaran, eds, *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*, Delhi, 1998, p. 669; Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Western Himalayas*, Delhi, 1989, p. 185; Velayutham Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forest, Environmental Negligence and Alienation of Tribal rights in Madras Presidency: 1792–1881', *IESHR*, Vol. 35(2), pp. 125–46; Saravanan, 'Colonial Commercial Forest Policy and the Tribal Private Forests', pp. 403–47.

[3] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, Delhi, 1995, Ch. 8.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 387.

[5] Guha and Gadgil, 'State Forestry and Social Conflict', p. 147.

[6] Madhav Gadgil, 'Towards an Ecological History of India', *EPW*, Vol. XX(45, 46 & 47), 1985, p. 1913.

[7] Mahesh Rangarajan, 'Protection, Desiccation and Forest Management in the Central Provinces 1850–1930', in Richard H. Grove, et al., eds, *Nature and the Orient*, p. 589.

[8] Vandana Shiva, *Ecology and the Politics of Survival: Conflicts over Natural Resources in India*, New Delhi, 1991, p. 14.

[9] Chetan Singh, 'Forests, Pastoralists and Agrarian society in Mughal India', in David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, eds, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History*

rulers neither had a sustained policy on exploitation of forest resources, nor imposed any regulations on forest users.[10]

Even the desiccation theory is contested and disproved at the Presidency level by scholars, and the colonial administration is blamed for vigorously pursuing commercialisation.[11] Any attempt towards conservation made before the Indian Forest Act 1878 was indeed intended to meet the future requirements of the imperial power.[12] Several studies have recounted in detail how forest resources were exploited and restrictions imposed on the tribal people using forest resources in different parts of the country during the nineteenth century.[13] However, these studies, with a few exceptions, are centred more or less on regions other than the Madras Presidency.[14] Interestingly, while the first school grounds its argument from the late nineteenth century, the latter has it as the early nineteenth century. Again, the first school takes into its ambit the different regions of the Indian subcontinent whereas the second concentrates mainly on the southern parts. However, the debate on environmental history, while focusing on forests in general, in fact failed to address the issues coterminous with the establishment of coffee plantations.

While analysing the emergence of the plantation sector and its disastrous consequences on environment in terms of destruction of forests and alienation of common property resources, this article attempts to explain how the market forces

of South Asia, Delhi, 1995, pp. 21–48; Sumit Guha, 'Forest Politics and Agrarian Empires: The Kandesh Bhills, c.1700–1850', *IESHR*, Vol. 33(2), 1996, pp. 133–53; Sumit Guha, 'Claims on the commons: Political Power and Natural Resources in Pre-colonial India', *IESHR*, Vol. 39(2&3), 2002, pp. 181–96; Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1991*, Cambridge, 1999, Ch. 5; Aloka Parasher-Sen, 'Of Tribes, Hunters and Barbarians: Forest dwellers in the Mauryan period', *Studies in History* (hereafter *SH*) (n.s) Vol. 14(2), 1998, pp. 173–91.

[10] Rangarajan, 'Protection, Desiccation and Forest Management', p. 589.

[11] Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forest, Environmental Negligence', pp. 125–46; Saravanan, 'Colonial Commercial Forest Policy and the Tribal Private Forests', pp. 403–23; Velayutham Saravanan, 'Commercial Crops, Alienation of Common Property Resources and Change in Tribal Economy in the Shervaroy hills of Madras Presidency during the Colonial Period', *Review of Development and Change* (hereafter *RDC*), Vol. 4(2), 1999, pp. 298–317; Velayutham Saravanan, 'Tribal Land Alienation in Madras Presidency during the Colonial Period: 1792–1947', *RDC*, Vol. VI(1), 2001, pp. 73–104.

[12] Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forest, Environmental Negligence', pp. 125–46.

[13] David Baker, 'State Polity, the Market Economy, and Tribal Decline: The Central Provinces, 1861–1920', *IESHR*, Vol. 28(4), 1991, pp. 341–70; Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecology change in India's Central Provinces 1860–1914*, Delhi, 1996; Rangarajan, 'Protection, Desiccation', p. 589; Buchy, 'British Colonial Forest Policy in South India', p. 669; K. Sivaramakrishnan, 'Colonialism and Forestry in India: Imagining the Past in Present Politics', *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 35(1), 1995, p. 9.

[14] Baker, 'State Polity, the Market Economy, and Tribal Decline', pp. 341–70; K. Sivaramakrishnan, 'British Imperialism and Forest Zones of Anomaly in Bengal, 1767–1833', *IESHR*, Vol. 33(3), 1999, pp. 243–82; Guha, 'Forest Politics and Agrarian Empires', pp. 133–53; Sumit Guha, 'Kings, Commoners and Commons: Environment in Western India 1600–1900', *Working Paper*, No. XI, Calcutta, 1996; Ramachandra Guha, 'Forestry and Social Protest in British Kumaon, c.1893–1921', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1985, pp. 55–100; Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest*; Richard Tucker, 'Forest Management and Imperial Politics: Dhana District, Bombay, 1823–1887', *IESHR*, Vol. 26(3), 1979, pp. 273–300.

irreversibly changed property rights and the tribal socio-economic administrative system during the nineteenth century. Prior to the establishment of coffee plantations, the tribal economy remained a subsistence one, with collection of forest produce and traditional cultivation being the dominant activities.[15] Being a non-market economy was its most distinctive feature and the community itself managed it without the intervention of external forces.[16] Introduction of the market economy, an inevitable consequence of external intervention—the arrival of the British and other non-tribal coffee planters—drastically altered the customarily managed non-market tribal economy, besides weakening the hill inhabitants' hereditary rights and unfettered access to common property resources.[17] In the Central Provinces, for instance, official policies facilitated the growth of market economy, which penetrated deep into the hill areas leading to the decline of the tribal economy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[18] In fact, the penetration of market forces was not confined to the economic sphere alone as it permeated the entire socio-economic, cultural and administrative set-up of the tribal community.[19] In this article, an attempt is made to analyse the impact of the intervention of external market forces on the tradition-bound non-market tribal economy, as well as consequences of this intervention on their common property resources, socio-administrative structure, environment and ecosystem during the nineteenth century.

While discussing the consequences of deforestation in the early nineteenth century, particularly in the 1830s in the Madras Presidency, an appraisal of the role of colonial officers who presided over the establishment and expansion of coffee plantations would be an important contribution in enriching the current environmental debate. The strategies adopted to exert control over the forests and encroach tribal lands for coffee plantations, a colonial project, require a rigorous analysis. The establishment of plantations through subjugation of the hill inhabitants and its disastrous consequences in Salem and Baramahal regions of Madras Presidency is the focal point of the article.

Whether the colonial rulers contained deforestation by making conservation a priority or whether they colluded in the destruction of the green cover is a pertinent question in this context. Whether the traditional system, especially that of the tribals, was respected and taken into account or disregarded would also be an

[15] Velayutham Saravanan, 'Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu: Subsistence to Commercialisation 1976–1995', *RDC*, Vol. II(1), 1997, p. 159; Velayutham Saravanan, 'Thamizhaga Malaival Makkalin Nila Urimai' (Land Rights of Tribals in Tamil Nadu), *Uzhavan Urimai*, [Special Issue], 1999, p. 54.

[16] Saravanan, 'Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu', p. 158.

[17] Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forests, Environmental Negligence', p. 146; Saravanan, 'Commercial Crops, Alienation of Common Property Resources and Change in Tribal Economy', p. 313; Saravanan, 'Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu', p. 166; Saravanan, 'Tribal Land Alienation in Madras Presidency', pp. 73–104.

[18] Baker, 'State Polity, the Market Economy, and Tribal Decline', pp. 341–70.

[19] Saravanan, 'Colonial Agrarian Policy in Tribal Areas'; Saravanan, 'Tribal Land Alienation in Madras Presidency'.

integral part of the study. Studies pertaining to some regions, north-east India in particular, show that colonial intrusion and the attendant commercialisation progressively curtailed communal rights, pushing the tribal society into the path of disintegration. Large-scale land alienation crippled the tribal economy, forcing the hill inhabitants to become dependants of the planters as cheap labourers.[20] Further, the colonial administrators extended privileges to their fellow countrymen for establishing plantations in the Shervaroy hills during the nineteenth century.

The article consists of five sections. The second section deals with the origin of the tribal people and their socio-political, economic, judicial and administrative system during the pre-plantation period (till the 1820s). The third section analyses the beginning and growth of coffee plantations in the Shervaroy hills. The fourth section discusses the approach of the colonial rulers towards the tribal people, ecology and environment, and the last section ends with concluding observations.

Tribal Socio-political, Administrative and Economic System: Pre-plantation Period (till the 1820s)

Origin and Settlement of Tribal People

The inhabitants of the Shervaroy ranges are called Malaiyalis, which means 'inhabitants of the hills'. In Tamil, 'malai' means hill or mountain and 'yali' ruler or inhabitant. Three different theories exist regarding their origin.[21] The first one claims that during the Aryan invasion, people from north Indian hills migrated and settled in the mountains of Tamil Nadu, which were uninhabited during the Dravidian period. According to Kanakasabhai (1904), these people, natives of a mountainous region in the north of Bengal, chose the hilly tracts such as Kolli hills (in Salem district), the Western Ghats, and the Nilgiris.[22]

The second theory argues that native Tamils had inhabited the hill areas right from the ancient Sangam period.[23] The word 'Malavar' found in the Sangam classics, some scholars explain, denoted only these people.[24] This theory claims that in ancient Tamil Nadu there existed three distinctive Tamil speaking people, viz., Aboriginals, Dravidian Tamils and Aryan migrants.[25] The third theory considers the Malaiyalis to be migrants of recent times. The Manuals, Gazetteers and Government Reports say that they were Tamil speaking people who had migrated

[20] Rajanajit Das Gupta, 'From Peasants and Tribesmen to Plantation Workers: Colonial Capitalism, Reproduction of Labour Power and Proletarianisation in North East India, 1850s to 1947', *EPW*, Vol. 21(4), 1986, p. PE.3.

[21] Velayutham Saravanan, 'Genesis of Hill Inhabitants in Tamil Nadu: A Review' (unpublished).

[22] V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 48.

[23] Even though there are controversies about the period of Sangam literature (approximately three centuries before and after the Christian Era), it is one of the earliest sources of information on tribal people in Tamil Nadu.

[24] Natrinai (in Tamil), poem-52, Madras, Kazhaga Pathippu.

[25] M. Srinivas Aiyangar, *Tamil Studies*, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 10–12.

from the plains in comparatively recent times.[26] However, they are distinct from those in the plains and quite different from the Malayalam speaking people of Kerala, although the name connotes both.[27] They are neither a carnivorous ethnic group like the tribes in the Nilgiris, where there is discrimination among the hill inhabitants,[28] nor are treated as untouchables like the Scheduled Castes.[29]

Although there is evidence in Sangam literature to prove that the tribals had lived in the mountains of Tamil Nadu since ancient times, details about their socio-economic, political, administrative and judicial institutions were not available until the end of the eighteenth century or even till the advent of British rule. The colonial records, while maintaining that the tribals were migrants from the plains between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, also admit the possibility of the hills being inhabited prior to this exodus. Malaiyalis of South Arcot, North Arcot, Salem, Dharmapuri and Tiruchirapalli districts were emigrants from Kancheepuram (Chengalput district) during the sixteenth century. However, there are different versions regarding their migration.[30]

Before the arrival of the plains people, tribal communities such as Vedan and Beder lived in different hills of this region.[31] Francis (1906) says, '. . . the hills were inhabited by Vedans, and that the Malaiyalis killed the men, and wedded the women, and at marriages a gun is still fired in the air to represent the death of the Vedan husband.'[32] Ehrenfels is of the opinion that '. . . they adopt new ideas from neighbours or invaders without usually realising that by so doing their former social system gets disintegrated'.[33] The present-day tribal people are neither purely hill inhabitants nor migrants from the plains, but remain a mixture of both streams with their own new system, developed in course of time. However, they are not ethnically distinctive groups.[34]

[26] Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. IV, Delhi, 1909, p. 406.

[27] F. Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. II, London, 1807, p. 197.

[28] For example, the Kotas tribes in the Nilgiris are treated as untouchable by Todas.

[29] Thurston and Rangachari, *Caste and Tribes*, p. 6.

[30] F. Cox, *A Manual of the North Arcot District*, Madras, 1880, p. 212; H.A. Staurt, *A Manual of North Arcot District*, Madras, 1895, pp. 211–12; F.R. Hamingway, *Madras District Gazetteer, Tiruchinopoly*, Madras, 1907, p. 124; C.D. Maclean, *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1885; F.J. Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer, Salem District*, Vol. I, Part I, Madras, 1918, pp. 152–53; Thurston and Rangachari, *Caste and Tribes*, p. 407.

[31] Board Petition No. 148 of 1871, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai (hereafter TNSA), and Letter from the Conservator of Forest to the Government, 25 Oct. 1867, TNSA.

[32] Thurston and Rangachari, *Caste and Tribes*, Vol. IV, p. 409.

[33] B.O.R. Ehrenfels, 'Traces of a Matriarchal Civilization among the Kolli Malaiyalis', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. IX(2), 1943, p. 75.

[34] Velayutham Saravanan, *Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu since the Colonial Rule 1792–1991*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Hyderabad, 1994, Ch. 2.

Socio-political and Administrative System Until the 1820s

For the purpose of administration, the Shervaroy hills were divided into several *nadus*,[35] each with a four-tier administrative set-up: *Pattakaran*[36] or headman, *Maniakaran*,[37] *Ur-Kavundan* or *Moopan*[38] and *Kangani*. The *Pattakaran*, chieftain of each *nadu*, had extensive powers and collected the contributions for the *guru*, besides acting as a mediator between the tribal people, while the *Maniakaran* assisted the *guru*.[39] If the *Ur-Kavundan* could not settle a dispute, it would be left to the *Pattakaran*, who was treated as the chief guest at harvest and marriage functions. Further, he controlled all the *Ur-kavundans*.

Installation of the *Pattakaran*, a hereditary office, was held in a lavish manner with a lavish feast and animal sacrifice.[40] If the *Pattakaran*'s son was a minor at the time of the former's death, his brother was appointed to that post. The decision of the *guru* would be final and binding in any dispute relating to *Pattakarship*. One among the *Pattakarans* in the Shervaroys would be nominated as the *Periya-Pattakaran*,[41] who functioned as an arbitrator in any dispute involving two or more *nadus*.[42] He performed diverse functions, both religious as well as judicial, according to local laws and enjoyed the revenue of the estate after giving a portion to the local deity. Depending upon his own needs, he decided the amount of tax to be collected from the tribal people. The rate of tax was not consistent as assessment was adjusted according to the situation.[43]

The *Pattakaran* appointed officials to protect the properties of the tribal people especially from thieves, and to check entry of strangers into the hills.[44] Their main duties were guarding houses and crops, assisting in revenue collection, keeping vigilance over strangers and thieves, and recovering stolen property. In the plains, the lower castes in the Hindu social order performed these traditional policing activities.[45] The *Pattakaran* was almost a petty raja, since nothing transpired in the hills without his knowledge.[46] The tribal people were brought under the

[35] A division of the country, or a division of the hills also called *nadu*.

[36] Headman of the estate or hills. He is the chief administrative and judicial officer of the estates or *nadus*.

[37] A subordinate native revenue officer employed in the collection and management of the revenue under the *Pattakaran*, by whom he is appointed, and to whom he is responsible. All *Moopans* were controlled by the *Pattakaran* with the help of the *Maniakaran*.

[38] Headman of the hill village.

[39] Board of Revenue (hereafter BOR), Vol. 1769, 23 Sept. 1841, p. 12109.

[40] A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras, 1948, p. 143.

[41] The head among the *Pattakaran* of difficult *nadus* of the hills.

[42] Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part. I, p. 154.

[43] Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions*, p. 143.

[44] Their role was like the traditional police, namely the *Taliaris* and the *Kavalkars* in South India.

[45] D. Arnold, *Police Power and Colonial Rule: Madras 1859–1947*, Delhi, 1986, p.17. See also Captain Alexander Read's *General Report on Salem*, 1800, TNSA.

[46] BOR, Vol. 1027, 18 July 1825, pp. 6307–38, TNSA.

control of the rulers of the plains only during the reign of Achuthadeva Raya of Vijayanagar Kingdom around the sixteenth century (1532). They, however, continued with the existing system of revenue collection through the *Periya-Pattakaran*.[47]

The *Ur-Kavundan* administered the tribal people directly with the help of the *Kanganies*, who also functioned like police. They collected information about developments in villages and passed them on to the *Ur-Kavundan* who took necessary action. Each and every transaction, viz., marriage, divorce, harvest, and celebrations including festivals were held in the presence of the *Ur-Kavundan*. When disputes like the partition of property among brothers or divorce were brought to his notice, he summoned the panchayat, consisting of the elected members of clans or family groups, for consultation and pronounced judgement. Penalties were imposed according to the nature of the offence or dispute.[48] This shows that the tribals had a well-established administrative system during the pre-colonial period.

The tribal villages, mostly located near a rivulet or a water source, were so small that each had not more than 10 families.[49] A fence to prevent the wild animals from destroying the crops surrounded each village. Instead of mud walls, the houses were built of *tatties* (mats) of split bamboo and thatched with jungle grass.[50] All materials for the hutments were collected from the hills. Every house had a five-foot high deck, used for sleeping. During winter, a fire was kept burning under the deck to protect them from the cold. Even though the Malaiyalis celebrated *Pongal*, *Adi* and *Deepavali*, the annual festival of their chief God of the hills was the most popular in which all congregated.

Pre-plantation Tribal Economy: Till 1820

The tribal subsistence economy was mainly dependent upon agriculture and forest produce. A number of plant species and fauna were found in abundance in the hills. Trees like sandalwood, teak, *vengai*, *kadukai*, tamarind and *karungali*, besides several medicinal plants, were in plenty in the hills.[51] The Sangam literature refers to the tribal people cultivating *Ivanam* paddy[52] in the wetlands and raising *thenai* in the dry lands.[53] Pepper was grown to some extent along with banana and

[47] R. Vidyasagar, 'Debt Bondage in South Arcot District: A Case Study of Agricultural Labourers and Handloom Weavers', in Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney, eds, *Bondage and Slavery in India*, Madras, 1985, p. 155.

[48] Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part II, p. 154.

[49] Baramahal Records (hereafter *BR*), Section VI, *Land Rent*, p. 123, TNSA, and Public [Sundries]: Vol. 121, 1792–99, p. 157, TNSA.

[50] Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer*, Vol. I, Part I, p. 108.

[51] Dietrich Brandis, *Suggestions Regarding Forest Administration in the Madras Presidency*, Madras, 1883, pp. 173–75.

[52] *Kurunthogai* (Tamil), Poem 371.

[53] *Ibid.*, Poems 133 and 198.

jackfruit.[54] Apart from this, they collected honey to a large extent.[55] They followed multiple cropping patterns,[56] and practised weeding and removal of insects from the crops.[57] Hunting was practised in groups and distributed evenly among villagers.[58] Though revenue was paid on the basis of the extent of land cultivated, information is not available on the share of agricultural produce.[59]

For livelihood and other requirements like housing materials, agricultural implements, fire-wood and grazing, they were entirely dependent upon forests which also provided them with social and cultural identities. No restrictions were imposed on collecting forest produce, viz., jackfruit, gallnut, tamarind, soap nut, lime and spices, until the establishment of coffee plantations. Thus, it becomes evident that the tribal economy could not be isolated from the forest.[60] Guha asserts that in the pre-British period, 'there was little or no interference with customary use of forest and forest produce'.[61]

Until colonial intervention or even a little after, the tribal people followed both shifting[62] as well as settled cultivation. On the one hand, shifting cultivation led to soil erosion and thereby affected the flow of water in the rivers downstream. This negative fall-out on the ecology and environment was a threat to sustainability.[63] On the other hand, it increased the area under cultivation and created more space for grazing, thereby enhancing the process of establishing permanent and semi-permanent agricultural production.[64] Consequently, there are two different views on shifting cultivation.[65] One school of thought argues that the expansion of shifting cultivation caused large-scale denudation of the forest cover. The other school contends that the development projects of the government and the timber lobby were mostly responsible for deforestation. The latter claimed that the effect of shifting cultivation on the forest cover was overstated.[66]

Further, the consequences of shifting cultivation largely depended upon the density of population and other external factors. Recent studies prove that shifting

[54] *Ibid.*, Poem 288; *Natrinai* (Tamil), Poem 222.

[55] *Kurunthogai* (Tamil), Poem 392.

[56] *Natrinai* (in Tamil) Poem 108.

[57] *Kurunthogai*, Poem 100.

[58] *Ibid.*, Poem 392.

[59] K.A. Neelakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Geoffrey/Cambridge, 1955, p. 128.

[60] Saravanan, 'Commercial Crops, Alienation of Common Property Resources', pp. 302–4; Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forest, Environmental Negligence', pp. 125–46.

[61] Quoted in Richard H. Grove, et al., eds, *Nature and the Orient*, p. 11.

[62] In Tamil, it is known as *ponakkadu*. Lands are cleared, cultivated for a few years and then abandoned, which results in their being covered with a growth of jungle. In other words, such land in the hill areas is capable of being cultivated after a long interval with particular kinds of grain sown in holes dug with a spade.

[63] C.J. Jepma, *Tropical Deforestation: A Socio-Economic Approach*, London, 1995, pp. 3–4.

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] William D. Sunderlin, 'Shifting Cultivation and Deforestation in Indonesia: Steps toward Overcoming Confusion in the Debate', *Network Paper 21b*, London, Rural Development Forestry Network, 1997, p. 2.

[66] *Ibid.*

cultivation, practised in different pockets of tribal areas over the centuries, did not affect the sustainability of forest resources.[67] The British policy of restricting shifting cultivation was not only intended to bring forests under state control for generating more revenue, but also for facilitating commercialisation of forests.[68] After the Company Raj, direct rule under the British crown too discouraged shifting cultivation and served the cause of the Empire.[69] Low population density would not have caused any damage to the hill ecosystem.[70] The density of population being very low and scattered in the Shervaroys range, the damage this type of cultivation could cause to the ecological balance would be very minimal.

Land value was not much in the Shervaroys until the introduction of coffee plantations. Land revenue was paid on the basis of the number of implements, viz., ploughs and hoes used for cultivation.[71] Once land revenue was paid, the tribals were free to cultivate as much land as they could. Given the meagre population density and the abundance of land resources at their disposal, they were not aware of the value of the land. Moreover, external demand for lands never existed in the hills until the coffee plantations appeared on the scene.

The tribal men, women and children were all engaged in agricultural activities. Clearing forests by felling trees, procuring materials, building huts, and grazing the cattle were some of their other preoccupations. After the main work was over, odd jobs like weeding out and protecting the crops fell on the womenfolk, while the men generally indulged their leisure in smoking, chatting and sleeping.[72] Women thus played a major role in the task of agricultural production.

The tribal people rarely sought any service from outside since labour requirement was met by family members and relatives. The labour market was almost non-existent and the whole population depended on their own lands for their subsistence. Being self-reliant in economic transactions, their other requirements were also very few and limited. Except for clothes and salt, they were not dependent on outsiders during the pre-plantation period.[73]

[67] M.D. Subash Chandran, 'Shifting Cultivation, Sacred Groves and Conflicts in Colonial Forest Policy in Western Ghats', in Richard H. Grove, et al., eds, *Nature and the Orient,* pp. 678–80 and 700; Dennis P. Garrify and Chun K. Lai, 'Innovation in Shifting cultivation in Asia: Indigenous Fallow Management', in http://www.oneworld.org/ileia/newsletters, Sep. 2000, pp. 5–6; Eric Mayer, 'Forests, Chena Cultivation, Plantations and the Colonial State in Ceylon, 1840–1940', in Richard H. Grove, et al., eds, *Nature and the Orient*, p. 797.

[68] Jacques Pouchepadass, 'British Attitudes towards Shifting Cultivation in Colonial South India: A Case Study of South Canara District 1800–1920', in David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, eds, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, Delhi, 1995, p. 135; Guha and Gadgil, 'State Forestry and Social Conflict', p. 152.

[69] Pouchepadass, 'British Attitudes Towards Shifting Cultivation', p. 148; Chandran, 'Shifting Cultivation, Sacred Groves', p. 688.

[70] Meyer, 'Forests, Chena Cultivation', p. 797; Chandran, 'Shifting Cultivation, Sacred Groves', p. 675; Jepma, *Tropical Deforestation*, p. 86.

[71] BOR, Vol. 1817, pp. 10130–31, TNSA.

[72] John Shortt, ed., *The Hill Ranges of Southern India,* Madras, 1870, p. 41.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Growth and Development of Plantations

The British settlers introduced coffee in the Shervaroys during the second quarter of the ninteenth century. In 1825, steps were initiated in this direction and a few Britishers then attempted to occupy vast tracts of tribal lands and common property resources (CPRs) like tanks, creating a lot of inconvenience/problems for the tribal people whose access to the CPRs were restricted in the process.[74]

Consequently, in 1833, the Government of Madras enacted a law to regulate coffee cultivation in the Shervaroys. This made it possible for the British planters to obtain the required land on lease for 21 years by entering into an agreement with the government. Land was given free of rent for the first five years and on a nominal rent for the subsequent period. It was Rs 1 per acre per annum for the remaining 16 years.[75] Due to this largesse, many Britishers were attracted to this venture. In 1883, about 9,210 acres was under coffee cultivation. Of this, the Britishers held 7,776 acres or 85 per cent, and the remaining was with the Indians, mostly non-tribal people.[76] It shows that the colonial government's approach had accentuated the pace of tribal land alienation.

Alienation of Tribal Land, Common Property Resources, Administrative System and Decline of Tribal Economy

The Shervaroy hills of Salem and Baramahal regions was brought under the British administration on 17 March 1792 following the Srirangapatanam peace treaty between Tipu Sultan and the East India Company.[77] While establishing coffee plantations in early 1820s, the colonial administration alienated the tribal land and common property resources, wrecked the indigenous administrative structure, and encouraged non-tribal settlements in the Shervaroy hills. As a result of this, the tribal economy started declining and was on the verge of collapse in the Shervaroy hills during the nineteenth century.

Alienation of Tribal Land

The British settlers purchased large tracts of land from the native tribal people at a throwaway price. In addition, they also started taking control of the unoccupied lands and forests, hitherto used by the tribal people without any restriction, as common property resources. The colonial government claimed that the tribal people were consulted and their consent obtained before the lands were taken up for coffee cultivation. Actually, the hill tribes were not even aware of the formalities and the details documented in the official records. They neither had access to the

[74] BOR, Vol. 1012, p. 1689, TNSA.

[75] BOR, Vol. 1886, p. 614, TNSA.

[76] H. Le Fanu, *A Manual of the Salem District in the Presidency of Madras*, Vol. II, Madras, 1883, pp. 21–24; Saravanan, 'Tribal Land Alienation in Madras Presidency', pp. 73–104.

[77] BR, Section XXI, *Miscellaneous*, p. 25, TNSA.

gazette notification nor could understand its contents, even if it reached them, as they were illiterate. Until the survey and settlement (1904), the native tribal people practised cultivation according to their customary rights. It was ironic that the tribal people could not claim any legal right for their lands during the nineteenth century while the planters were given *pattahs*[78] for their land holdings. Before 1842, '. . . most of the old planters, obtained their lands from the Malaiyalis, and received *pattahs* for them prior to the circulation of the Government rules'.[79] This is a clear evidence of favouritism shown to the British settlers since the same legal rights over land holdings were denied to the tribal people.

In 1842, the colonial administration initiated certain steps to protect the tribal people, but in practice they either curtailed or encroached upon their earlier customary rights. The government ordered that the settlers in such localities should not occupy lands as it inconvenienced the natives. Thus, even if the tribal people were willing to part with their lands, the settlers waiting to occupy them could not do so.[80] This indirectly restricted the extension of cultivation by the natives, since as mentioned earlier, the tribals who did not enjoy ownership rights over their lands were also denied access to natural resources. The British planters clandestinely usurped even their access to the limited fertile lands. Consequently, the agriculture and forest-based tribal economy disintegrated, and the Malaiyalis were forced to become plantation labourers.[81]

British settlers were not alone in this land-grabbing spree. The colonial administrators, including collectors and judges, also joined them. Cockburn, Collector of Salem, by the power of force and authority, appropriated the best lands of the chief village of Mootoo Nadu by expelling the proprietors thereof. Neave, Judge of Salem, took possession of about 400 or 500 acres more within three years (1838–41) under not very dissimilar circumstances.[82] Not only, did the colonial government act in favour of British planters, its officers too encroached and alienated tribal lands in the Shervaroys to further their private interests.

In 1864, when Hunter, a British planter, attempted to buy tribal land in Pattapadi and Kurdyoor villages, the native tribal people refused to sell it. He then made efforts to drive the natives out by disturbing them in every possible way, and pressed the other planters to do the same. Besides closing down every public path running through his land that the tribal people used, he shot and killed their cattle.[83] The British planters also used the colonial officers to intimidate and harass the hill inhabitants so they would dispose of their lands. When the tribal people were subjected to such harassment, the colonial administrators always favoured the planters and did not concern themselves with the plight of the tribals.

[78] Land deed or ownership rights to land.
[79] BOR, Vol. 2310, p. 16470, TNSA.
[80] Richards, *Madras District Gazetteer*, p. 47.
[81] Saravanan, 'Commercial Crops, Alienation of Common Property Resources', pp. 309–12.
[82] BOR, Vol. 1838, p. 16685, TNSA.
[83] Letter from Arbuthnot to the Board of Revenue, 23 May 1866, TNSA.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the colonial administration did not enact any legislation to protect the native inhabitants from the British planters and others, in fact, they encouraged the later. After the Mutiny, the subcontinent, hitherto under the control of the East India Company, came under the direct rule of the British crown in 1858. Even under the British Raj, most of the economic and revenue policies of the East India Company remained unchanged for a long period. However, in the process of expansion of the modern state during the post-Mutiny period, certain changes took place in the tribal areas of the Madras Presidency. In 1866, the 'village green' system was introduced in the Shervaroy hills to protect the tribal people from coffee planters. Under this system, a certain portion of wastelands was demarcated on the outskirts of each village for the tribals to cultivate. On the other hand, no restriction was imposed on the British planters from buying lands within the 'village green'. Subsequently, most of the 'village green' lands stood alienated by the planters. Non-tribal settlers of 13 villages in the Shervaroys had occupied about 40 per cent of them.[84] In 1871, the 'village green' areas were expanded further.[85] The apparently protective measure had in practice severely restricted the availability of cultivable land and made the collection of forest produce more difficult. Moreover, due to the increasing pressure from non-tribal people, the tribal communities gradually lost their lands and became agricultural/plantation labourers towards the end of the nineteenth century. As indicated earlier, about 10,000 hectares of tribal and forest land was brought under coffee cultivation. Consequently, 28 per cent of the total workforce came under the category of labourers in the 1871 Census and it further increased to 45 per cent in the 1901 Census.[86]

Alienation of Common Property Resources (CPRs)

An instance narrated below would show how the British planters encroached upon the tribal CPRs in the Shervaroy hills during the nineteenth century. A natural tank located high up at the source of two streams at Yercaud, now a popular hill resort in the Shervaroys, served drinking water needs of neighbouring villages and of devotees of the Perumal Koil[87] on certain festival days. It also provided drinking water for the cattle but was never utilised for irrigation purposes even by the tribals.[88] In fact, no individual had any right over this, since only the *Pattadars*[89] managed the wastelands, including tanks, as a common property for the community's use.[90] As such, it remained a common property resource until the early nineteenth century.

[84] Government Order (hereafter G.O.) No. 714, Revenue, 19 Mar. 1900, TNSA.
[85] G.O. No. 262, Revenue, 19 Jan. 1871, TNSA.
[86] Census of India 1901, *Village Statistics, Salem District*, Madras, 1902.
[87] Sacred place or temple.
[88] BOR, Vol. 2091, p. 10017, TNSA.
[89] Holders of the land deed.
[90] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7266, TNSA.

Let us now analyse how the British planters tried to appropriate the CPRs for their private use. Of course the available data would not give any account of the quantity of water used by the tribal people and the quantity of water diverted by the planters for their gardens and coffee plantations. The problem here cannot be reduced to mere diversion of water by the British planters to the detriment of the Malaiyalis. More importantly, it concerns the mindset of the British planters and administrators as to how they looked at this issue in the context of alienation of CPRs.

After the introduction of coffee plantations, this tank was expanded and repaired by the Collector at the government's expense, but was notoriously used for his personal benefit. This tank was desilted and deepened by digging 3,130 cubic yards at a cost of Rs 342[91] and 5 *annas*,[92] and loose stones were laid for 183 cubic yards at an expense of Rs 57 and 7 *annas* between 17 December 1823 to 24 April 1824.[93] This renovation was not intended to provide more water supplies to tribal people, but to irrigate the Collectors' large gardens and coffee plantations through pipelines. Incidentally, the pipeline burst in the first trial itself due to faulty construction.[94] These facts show how the colonial authorities indulged in personal aggrandisement at the cost of the exchequer.

Even as late as 1825, no attempt was made to divert the tank water for irrigation by the British planters/officials. In fact, the tank was of great help to the people during the summer as well, for its clay was collected and used to make bricks for construction of houses in the hills.[95] The tribal people had used the tank without any apprehension till 1839, when the government announced withdrawal of interference from all internal arrangements in the Shervaroys. As a result, the whole land of Perumal Koil, including the tank, was attached to the temple's property.[96] On the contrary, the agent of Neave, a British planter, claimed that the tank granted by the *Pattadar* in perpetuity to the late Johns in 1842 and transferred to Neave in 1843, continued to be in the same name.[97] Further, the agent claimed that he had paid a rent of Rs 4–3–2 for the land comprising the tank.

Contesting this, the *Curnam*[98] of Mootoo Nadu stated that the tank, entered as a *poromboke*[99] land of the government, was not included in any *pattah*[100] granted to private individuals.[101] He further clarified that the tank was neither entered in

[91] One Company rupee was equal to 16 *annas* or 172 *pies*.

[92] In the Madras Presidency, this was the lowest money measurement, which existed during early nineteenth century. Twelve *pies* equal to one *anna*, and 16 *annas* or 172 *pies* was equal to one Company rupee.

[93] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7348, TNSA.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 7344, TNSA.

[95] *Ibid.*

[96] BOR, Vol. 2125, p. 4439, TNSA.

[97] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7358, TNSA.

[98] Village accountant.

[99] Land reserved for purposes other than those of cultivation.

[100] Land deed or ownership rights of land.

[101] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7356, TNSA.

the name of Neave for one year nor excluded from his *pattah* subsequently.[102] However, the agent continued to claim ownership rights over the tank and, since 1842, Neave started collecting soil from the tank bed with the permission of the Collector.[103] In 1847, Leacher requested the agent to permit him to use the tank water for his gardens, stating that the late Neave and his agents had allowed him to do so.[104] The agent permitted him to use the tank water for one year from 17 September 1847.[105] That same year he also permitted another person to take water from the swamp contiguous to the sacred wood, and from the tank bed for one year.[106] Moreover, he built a wall around the lower part of the tank with an objective of enclosing it within Neave's ground.[107] He further claimed the right to dig clay and soil beneath the tank for construction purposes, as well as the right to enjoy valuable pasture around the tank during summer, and the orange and coffee trees on its bank.[108] To retain the tank and protect the coffee plants on its embankment, Neave's agent expressed his readiness to refund the cost of repairs and renovation to the government in 1824. He was also prepared to pay rent for the rocky and uncultivable land excluded from land rent.[109] However, contrary to earlier assertions, he further attempted to get the tank repaired at the government's expense[110] and intended to approach the court to retain his hold over the tank.[111]

The colonial administrators also attempted to appropriate CPRs such as tanks. For instance in 1847, the Collector, after purchasing the land below the tank, planned to raise the tank bund and repair it at his own expense to irrigate his fields. Considering the heavy expenditure, he dropped the proposal at that time.[112] Faced with criticism, he changed his earlier idea of extending irrigation to his gardens. In 1847, he decided to repair the tank at a lower estimate to benefit not only his kitchen and garden, but also the tribal community and their cattle.[113] Even when the colonial administrators intended to do something for the tribals, it was always accompanied by some personal benefit for the British settlers.

Disintegration of the Traditional Administrative System

The traditional indigenous administrative system of the Malaiyalis and their hereditary rights were the other casualties of colonialism. An instance of British intervention into their traditional hereditary rights was the dismissal of the Moha

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 7357, TNSA.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 7347, TNSA.
[104] BOR, Vol. 2125, p. 4446, TNSA.
[105] *Ibid.*, p. 4447, TNSA.
[106] *Ibid.*, p. 4446, TNSA.
[107] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7345, TNSA.
[108] BOR, Vol. 2125, p. 4440, TNSA.
[109] *Ibid.*, p. 4441, TNSA.
[110] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7348, TNSA.
[111] BOR, Vol. 2125, p. 4440, TNSA.
[112] BOR, Vol. 2135, p. 7349, TNSA.
[113] *Ibid.*

Nadu village *Munsiff* in 1897.[114] This drastic action was taken for his failure to complain about the theft of coffee belonging to the British planters, to the police and Sub-Magistrate, and for having conducted a search in houses beyond his administrative control.[115] The theft had actually occurred in two adjoining places of the same village of which one was directly reported to the Police Station and the other was reported to the *Munsiff*. He had gone to the Station House and duly reported it. The Station House Officer asked him to proceed to the other village and investigate the matter, did which he readily.[116] Instead of appreciating his service, the planters alleged that the *Munsiff* was responsible for some careless lapses and secured his dismissal by using their influence.

Let us briefly have a look at the tribal administrative system in the Shervaroy hills. Each *nadu*[117] had its own hereditary chief or *Pattadar* who collected revenue from the ryots (with the help of the village headman) and remitted it to the rulers. This practice continued until the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. In the event of the *Pattadar* not having a son or he being a minor, his brother could take over the *Pattadar* rights. Generally, this right was conferred by the *guru*[118] in the presence of members of the community.[119] Once the hereditary *Pattadar*'s son became a major and was interested, he would be appointed to the office by the *guru*. In some cases, if the *Pattadar* was found to be ineffective in dispensing with his functions, he would be stripped of his office and the post given to his brother by the *guru*. Since the *guru* was the supreme head of all activities in the different *nadus* in various hills of Salem district, his verdict was final and binding in disputes between any two *nadus* and among *Pattadars*.[120] *Guru*ship was also hereditary. On the demise of the *guru*, his son/brother would take over the office accordingly. This administrative system prevailed in the Shervaroys prior to British intervention as well as during the early colonial period. Colonial intervention had a debilitating effect on this indigenous system and led to its eventual collapse. This was accomplished with a view to garner more revenue during the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

Since colonial intervention (1792), land revenue in the hills was settled annually with the *Pattadar* or headman of different *nadus*. The highest amount of the last six years (1793–99) was fixed as permanent assessment during the permanent settlement period (1802–3). Under this, Rs 11, 695–15 or the average of Rs 1,

[114] In Tamil, the *Munsiff* is known as *Maniakaran*. He was a subordinate native revenue officer employed in the collection and management of revenue under the native *Pattakkaran*, by whom he was appointed, and to whom he was responsible. In other words, he is a kind of head peon who, in conjunction with the heads of villages, superintends collection, cultivation, the reaping and selling of a crop, decides when the revenue has to be paid in kind, and settles the petty disputes of the villages.

[115] Petition No. 286, Revenue, 1 Feb. 1900, TNSA.

[116] G.O. No. 789 (Misc) Revenue, 19 Mar. 1900, TNSA.

[117] A division of the country or province or hill.

[118] Spiritual leader.

[119] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12124, TNSA.

[120] BOR, Vol. 1809, pp. 7264–68, TNSA.

299–8–10 per annum was the arrears between 1802–3 and 1818–19. Subsequently, it was remitted.[121] In 1819, this hill range was brought under the Collector's management, which continued till 1821. Even at that time, there was a balance of about Rs 500. Considering this, the Collector handed over revenue collection back to the *Pattadar*s in 1822. However, the Malaiyalis agreed to pay only Rs 3, 1,932 or Rs 1,234 less than the amount fixed during permanent settlement. The Mootoo Nadu *Pattadar* made an appeal for reduction in his revenue since others took away some of his lands. Consequently, the revenue demand for Mootoo Nadu was fixed at Rs 656–4 or Rs 212–2–1 less than the permanent settlement amount. An agreement was made and *muchilika*[122] exchanged between Mulliah Goundan, Moodoopoocar Andee Goundan of Mootoo Nadu and the Government.[123]

From 1821, Mulliah Goundan collected the revenue on behalf of the government and he looked after the business concerning only Mootoo Nadu. Between 1822 and 1839, Rs 3, 695–6 was the balance of which Rs 2,776–10 was remitted in 1834 with Rs 918–12 remaining unadjusted. Of this, Rs 683–7 was the due from Cockburn, Rs 122–8 from Gay and other planters, and only Rs 112–13 from the tribal people. Actually, from 1826 to 1841, Cockburn had not paid the land rent worth Rs 2,187.[124] In 1833, Orr, the Principal Collector of Salem, demanded the arrears due for the period 1826 to 11 July 1831 worth Rs 579–9 from Fisher, who held the original grant. But he refused to pay, saying that the land was transferred to Cockburn. He added that it was transferred again to Orpwood, who died soon, and his (Orpwood's) representatives he (Cockburn) had no acquaintance with.[125] In 1833, the government decided to collect the revenue from the actual holders.[126] In fact, the land was under the control of Fisher, to whom it had been mortgaged by Cockburn. Fisher subsequently re-transferred the land for which Cockburn did not pay the land revenue. He was requested by the government to remit his outstanding (14 years) dues of land revenue.[127] In favour of Cockburn, the government passed an order to limit the demand for the period of five years antecedent to the date on which he was called up to pay the arrears.[128] In sharp contrast, the native subordinates (farmers) were tortured and harassed to pay the dues.[129] Though the British planters had not paid land revenue for more than 15 years (1826–41), the government took no action against them to collect the arrears. On the other hand, it forced the tribal *Pattadar*s to pay the balance due from the planters and

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 7265, TNSA.

[122] A counterpart of lease conversant on the part of the proprietor's or cultivator's document agreeing to the rates of assessment imposed by the government.

[123] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12129, TNSA.

[124] BOR, Vol. 2067, p. 1751, TNSA.

[125] *Ibid.*, p. 2755, TNSA.

[126] *Ibid.*

[127] BOR, Vol. 1769, pp. 12080–85, TNSA.

[128] *Ibid.*, p. 12090, TNSA.

[129] See *Report of the Commissioners for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency*, Chennai, 1855, TNSA.

succeeded in creating divisions among the Malaiyalis, and finally withdrew the *Pattadar*ship, a symbol of authority for the community.

On 14 March 1840, Mulliah Goundan, the hereditary *Pattadar* of Mootoo Nadu, appealed to the government to restore the community headship that was dispensed by the Collector in 1839. He stated that several parties, mainly Britishers, who did not pay the land rent, had taken over a large tract of land for coffee plantations. When asked, the planters not only refused to pay the dues, but also denounced and assaulted him.[130] Substantiating this further, the Collector said, 'although the renters hold a *pattah*, the settlers refuse to pay him the amount due on their lands and more than one complaint has been brought against them for assault and ill usage when he demanded his due'.[131] The enquiry made by the assessors with the help of the taluk *cutchery*[132] records also proved that one Moya Goundan had taken upon himself the right to collect rent from the tribals of Mootoo Nadu by claiming *Pattadar*ship without authority. It was ordered that the collections made by him should be given to Mulliah Goundar Vellaya Goundar, the acknowledged *Pattadar*.[133] While the government recognised his office as the headman of Mootoo Nadu, it rejected his claim to have permanent possession of the payment of fixed *beriz*.[134, 135] Further, the government brought the Shervaroy hills under the *amani*[136] management and the Collector recommended that *Curnam*s and *Manigar*s[137] from the plains be brought for this purpose, as was the case with other hills.[138] Conceding his proposal, the government sanctioned one *Manigar*, one *Curnam* and two *Canganies*[139] for Mootoo Nadu under the *amani* management.[140]

The division of the British settlers into two groups, both creating a wedge within the tribal community to retain land they had occupied/encroached upon, was the sole cause for the dispute and dissension in Mootoo Nadu. European and native non-tribal settlers occupied about 452 acres in 90 spots in Mootoo Nadu. Of this, 105 acres of 40 spots were under cultivation, while 347 acres of 50 spots remained uncultivated.[141] A large extent of land was occupied by a particular planter, Fischer, Mootadar of Salem, with the help of Moya Goundan, who claimed *Pattadar*ship

[130] BOR, Vol. 1838, p. 16684, TNSA.

[131] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7273, TNSA.

[132] Office of revenue administration.

[133] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12126, TNSA.

[134] *Beriz* refers to the total assessment of a village for land revenue.

[135] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12315, TNSA.

[136] During the early nineteenth century, the colonial government followed/experimented with various methods of land revenue settlement. *Amani* settlement was one of them. This was known as the direct land revenue settlement system or sharing system. In fact, this simply consisted in taking the actual share of the grain by the government officers directly. In short, land and other sources of revenue were held and managed directly by the government.

[137] Both were subordinate revenue-officers.

[138] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7273, TNSA.

[139] Inspector/Watcher of crops/villages.

[140] BOR, Vol. 1847, p. 1581, TNSA.

[141] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7278, TNSA.

for Mootoo Nadu. He was patronised by Fischer, who oppressed the others. This created apprehension among the other planters regarding the prospect of Fischer emerging as a landlord.[142] Consequently, they were divided into two groups, one headed by Fischer and the other led by Gay.

The planters who obtained most of the land through Moya Goundan were insecure since they had occupied them without prior permission of the government. Further, they did not pay the land rent for their holdings. In June 1841, certain coffee planters complained to the government that they were unable to pay the rent since two persons were claiming the headmanship of Mootoo Nadu.[143] They were aware that if any one of the two objected on behalf of the tribals, their unauthorised lands would be disposed of.

To save their occupied (unauthorised) land, they created divisions in the tribal community's administrative system. Let us have a cursory look at how the British settlers were instrumental in creating a dispute over the office of *guru*ship. Tanaudee Goundan of Chitteri hill, the *guru* of the tribal people, was assisted by Latchma Goundan, his brother's son. The British gave the latter employment in government service, and used him as a weapon to create a dispute to dispense with the office of *guru*ship. Latchma Goundan claimed that it was he who had appointed Mulliah Goundan, the original *Pattadar* of Mootoo Nadu in 1822, when he was only in his mid-20s. In an attempt to clarify the matter further, he said that he had never visited Mootoo Nadu before the appointment of Mulliah Goundan, who died in 1831 leaving behind his brother, Mulliah Goundar Vellaiah Goundan, and a minor son, Chinna Goundan. Expressing ignorance about having any idea of Mulliah Goundan's family, he claimed that he had conferred *Pattadar*ship on Moya Goundan, a descendant of Mulliah Goundan's father's brother.[144] The sons who executed an agreement with the government, Chinna Goundan s/o Mulliah Goundan and Chinna Goundan s/o Andee Goundan, also supported this view.[145]

Contradicting this, the *guru* Tanaudee Goundan, aged over 60 years, said that on the death of the original *Pattadar*, his brother Mulliah Goundan Vellaia Goundan was appointed as *Pattadar*, and he continued to be in service till 1839.[146] The British administration accepted the version of the young man who always favoured them, and ignored the view of the aged *guru*. Such were the means adopted by the British settlers to create divisions among tribals and wreck their administrative set-up.

The colonial government intended to put on hold the land disposal rights of the tribal *Pattadar*s so as to provide more lands to the British planters, and thereby garner more revenue from the hills. The government disregarded the views of the *guru* of Chitteri hills and others who were strong advocates of these hereditary rights. The government claimed that no such right had been given since 1825

[142] *Ibid.*, p. 7272, TNSA.
[143] BOR, Vol. 1760, p. 8090, TNSA.
[144] BOR, Vol. 1769, pp. 12111–15, TNSA.
[145] *Ibid.*, pp. 12115–19, TNSA.
[146] *Ibid.*, pp. 12105–11, TNSA.

when the original *Pattadar* died. To put off any claim made by the hereditary *Pattadar*s, it forced them to pay the long outstanding land rents that had accumulated for over 19 years, and were mainly from the British planters.[147] Invariably, it approached all those who were related to the original *Pattadar*. The son of a former *Pattadar* submitted an application stating that he could take the rights for either one or three years if rent for the lands occupied by Cockburn and other Britishers was reduced to Rs 177–8.4 from the original *beriz* of Rs 868.[148] Without considering the hereditary tribal *Pattadar* system, the Collector called a tender for revenue assessment. A person from the plains made an offer for the lands other than those granted by the government at Rs 750.[149] Avaricious as it was, the colonial administration, in its attempt to garner more revenue, deliberately divided the tribal people, created dissensions within the traditional system, and eventually withdrew the hereditary titles of *Pattadar*ship and *Guru*ship.

Right from the days of colonial intervention (1793), land revenue in the Shervaroy hills was collected through the *Pattadar*. During the Read settlement (1793–97) land revenue was collected even annually through the *Pattadar*s and it continued till the Permanent Settlement period (1802–19). In 1819, the hills were brought under the direct management of the Collector, and this system continued until 1822. After this Mulliah Goundan alone performed the duties of the *Pattadar*.[150] In 1823, the government executed an agreement for the assessment of Mootoo Nadu with Mulliah Goundan and Andee Goundan for Rs 650–4.[151] Even after the agreement lapsed, Mulliah Goundan continued to collect the money as *Pattadar* and looked after the affairs of Mootoo Nadu, assisted by Andee Goundan.[152] Mulliah Goundan died around 1825, leaving behind a brother, Vellaiah Goundan Mulliah Goundan, and a minor son, Chinna Goundan. Since then, the government did not have any agreement with the succeeding *Pattadar*s.[153] It is evident that the land disposal rights were under the control of *Pattadar*s. The administration's claim that the *Pattadar* was merely a community head of the tribal people was contrary to facts, and was intended to vest the land disposal rights with the government.[154]

Non-Tribal Settlement

In the early nineteenth century, the presence of non-tribal people in the hill areas was insignificant. After the settlement of the Britishers, plains people also migrated in large numbers. Till the 1871 Census, there was no separate data for them in the

[147] *Ibid.*, pp. 12103–23, TNSA.
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 12099, TNSA.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7268, TNSA.
[151] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12127, TNSA.
[152] BOR, Vol. 1809, p. 7269, TNSA.
[153] BOR, Vol. 1817, p. 10130–31, TNSA.
[154] BOR, Vol. 1769, p. 12096, TNSA.

hills. According to the Census of 1871, total population of the area was 10,745, of which 1,943 persons or about 85 per cent of the non-tribals were Pariahs[155] (a Scheduled Caste); six were Chetties; 22 were Muslims, who introduced the usurious rate of interest; and the remaining 318 belonged to the other castes.[156] Of the rest, about 100 persons including children belonged to European stock.[157] Migrants in the later period were mostly Scheduled Castes who had fled the plains to escape the tyranny of oppressive traditional systems. The non-tribals migrated to the hill areas to take advantage of the low prices of land. Hence, it might safely be assumed that during the early nineteenth century, land alienation, though negligible, was due to the British settlers, Pariahs and the Other Backward Classes, and not because of the moneylenders and traders, who arrived on the scene only during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Before colonial intervention, people from the plains refrained from settling down in the hills due to fear of malaria. It was only after British intervention that some non-tribal people made their settlements. But this could not be the reason for large-scale alienation of tribal lands. The initiatives of the British planters gave an initial thrust to the problem, and non-tribal people followed suit to aggravate it.

Impact of Forest Acts

Under the Forest Act of 1882, the tribal people could claim only a right of way, watercourses, pasture and forest produce (Section-10). These too were not allowed either wholly or partially by the Forest Department (Section-11). Further, these rights were granted intermittently, with quantitative restrictions (Section-12). Fresh clearings for cultivation or any other purpose were also restricted (Section-7). Use of any of the prohibited items could lead to imprisonment for a period of six months or a fine of about Rs 500, or both (Section-21). Grazing on forestland was limited and liable for suspension (Section-22). Grazing cattle in the closed lands would attract imprisonment for a month and/or penalty of Rs 200 (Section-28). Besides, they were forced to render free service to the police and the Forest Department officers.

In the early nineteenth century, a very large part of tribal lands were alienated and their traditional administrative structure dismantled, while during the last quarter of that century all the CPRs were taken over by the Forest Department. About 68,751 acres or roughly 107 square miles were brought under the reserve forest in Shervaroy hills in 1892.[158] Even while holding the tribal people responsible

[155] 'In times prior to colonial rule the whole of the Pariah community, without exception, were slaves of the superior castes', Census of India 1871, *Census of Madras Presidency—A Report*, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 169.

[156] Census of India 1871, *Census Statement of Population of 1871, Salem District*, Madras.

[157] Shortt, *The Hill Ranges*, Part. II, p. 7.

[158] Board Proceedings (hereafter BP) No. 117, Misc., Chief Conservator of Forests, 5 Feb. 1892, TNSA.

for deforestation, the government encouraged non-tribal people, particularly Britishers, to settle down and take up cultivation on the forestlands. For example, in 1925 there were 15 coffee estates spread over 3,613.48 acres of land, the lease for which was also extended.[159] Hence, it becomes clear that to satisfy the requirements of non-tribal people, especially the British settlers, all the rules and regulations of the Forest Department were flouted.

Decline of Tribal Economy

Consequent to the decline of the tribal economy, the Malaiyalis who were cultivators earlier were reduced to being agricultural and plantation labourers during the nineteenth century. In 1836, the entire tribal population in Salem and Baramahal regions was brought under the occupational category of 'cultivators'.[160] Later on, further deterioration set in with their occupational position having taken an irreversible downward slide. On the one hand, the British and other non-tribal settlers brought a large part of the tribal managed lands under coffee plantations since the early nineteenth century, and on the other, vast tracts of forest area was notified as reserve forest under the Madras Forest Act in 1883 which crippled the growth of the tribal economy. Till the 1880s, about 10,000 acres of land in the Shervaroy hills was brought under coffee cultivation. In 1871, the total population of Shervaroy hills was 10,745, of which 7,729 persons (including children below 10 years) accounting for 71.93 per cent were classified as non-workers. Only males above the age of 10 years were taken into account for the occupational classification. Since then, the category of non-workers increased steadily over the period in the Shervaroy hills. In 1871, only 2,289 persons in the Shervaroy hills were under the non-tribal category. The introduction of coffee cultivation, besides drastically changing the tribal modes of production, degraded the Malaiyalis from a position of cultivators to that of agricultural labourers. The British planters, who indirectly held a huge portion of unoccupied lands which were used as CPRs, directly occupied a large extent of tribal lands. Consequently, large proportions of the tribal people were forced to depend either on the land of their own community people, or turn to the planters as labourers.

In 1871 Census, women and male children below 10 years were not included in the occupational classification and were notified as non-workers.[161] As such, 68.46 per cent of the tribal people were classified as cultivators and 31.54 per cent as labourers. It indicated that about one-third of the tribal people had lost their land at the onset of coffee plantations. In 1891, the proportion of cultivators had further decreased to 55.27 per cent, while there was a rise leading to a total ratio of 44.73 per cent in the category other than cultivators, predominantly agricultural and plantation labourers. This was because, as already noted, after the

[159] G.O. No. 1505 [Misc], Revenue, 29 Sept. 1925, TNSA.
[160] BOR, Vol. 1537, 10 Nov. 1836, pp. 18133–36.
[161] *Report on the Census of the Madras Presidency 1871*, Vol. I, Madras, 1874, p. 176.

introduction of the Madras Forest Act (1882), a large extent of forestland was brought under the reserve forest category at the end of 1891. As a result of this, there was hardly any possibility of extending cultivation into the forests. Hence, the growing population was forced to become agricultural/plantation labourers.[162]

Although the percentages of agricultural and other plantation labourers increased, the wage rate did not increase correspondingly in the Shervaroy hills. Even though the coffee estates were established around 1830, the earliest available wage account is only for 1864. The wage rate for the plantation workers was 2 annas 4 pies per diem in the Shervaroy hills in 1864.[163] In 1870, for the coffee plantation works, the male workers earned from 1 anna 8 pies to 3 annas; the female workers received 1 anna 6 pies; and the children under 12 years 1 anna.[164] In 1872, the wage rate in the Shervaroys was Re 1 for six days.[165] In other words, it was only 2 anna 8 pies per day. The settlement report (1905) said that the wage rate was Rs 1 to Rs 1–2–0 for six days work.[166] It shows that the wage rate did not change during 1862–1905. However, the wage rate had increased slightly in the plains of the district in general during the nineteenth century.[167] Not only did a large proportion of the tribal people become agricultural/plantation labourers, their wage rate too remained almost constant during the nineteenth century, a clear indication of the collapse of the tribal socio-economic system.

Concluding Observations

Interpretations of nineteenth-century environmental history, particularly those concerning coffee plantations, clearly show that the colonial administration, which disregarded the welfare of the tribal people, also ignored the conservation of the ecology and environment of the hilly regions of Madras Presidency. On the one hand, the colonial medical practitioners expressed grave concern over consequences of deforestation while on the other, the colonial administration as well as the British settlers established planters' Raj by alienating the tribal lands and appropriating the CPRs. In other words, in spite of the commendable talks on conservation, the colonial government had actively encouraged the British planters to engage in large-scale denudation of forests for setting up of coffee plantations, leading to ecological and environmental degradation in the Shervaroys.

[162] E.W. Wilkins, 'The Shervaroy Hills', Compiled by Somerset Playne, *South India*, London, 1914–15, p. 407.

[163] D. Hamilton, *Notes on the Shervaroy Hills*, Madras, 1862, p. 6.

[164] Shortt, *The Hill Ranges*, p. 42.

[165] S. Srinivasa Raghavaiyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the Last Forty Years of British Administration, Madras*, 1893, Appendix-CC.

[166] G.O. No. 605, Revenue, 30 June 1905, p. 13, TNSA.

[167] M. Atchi Reddy,'Trends in the Agricultural Wages in some South Indian Districts: 1800–1980', *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol. XXVIII(4), 1986, pp. 343–49. Also see Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 163.

Vast tracts of forests were cleared not only to establish the plantations, but also to lay roads to the estates in order to transport the produce and process it. Due to large-scale alienation of tribal lands and CPRs, the self-reliant agrarian economy and the traditional socio-political and administrative system started crumbling slowly and disintegrated beyond redemption. Subsequently, the forests were notified as reserve forests by the Madras Forest Act of 1882. All these culminated in forcing the tribal people to become wage labourers, a thing unknown to them in their history. Quite clearly tribal development was never on the agenda of colonial rule, despite the conditions of the hill inhabitants worsening in the nineteenth century.[168]

The CPRs became out of bounds for the tribal people and with the introduction of the Madras Forest Act of 1882, the restrictions effectively curtailed their access even to the natural resources. Even prior to this (since 1825), these rights were restricted in the Shervaroys with the arrival of the coffee plantations. Most of the lands and forests, which were used as CPRs with unfettered freedom, fell prey to the planters' Raj. Land alienation and ecological degradation were the direct consequences of the introduction of coffee plantations in the hills, coupled with the demise of the tribal institutions. Intervention of market forces into the non-market tribal economy irreversibly altered the ground realities wherein the customary tribal rights on the use of CPRs were made redundant in favour of private property rights that benefit non-tribal people, leading to the collapse of the traditional system and steady decline of tribal economy during the nineteenth century. Stated briefly, the interpretation of the unexplored areas of nineteenth-century environmental history nullifies the imperial environmentalist's claim as far as the hill areas of Madras Presidency were concerned.

[168] Saravanan, 'Colonial Policy and Tribal Welfare Measures in Madras Presidency during the Colonial Period: 1792–1947' (unpublished); Velayutham Saravanan, *Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu.*