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## COLONIAL AGRARIAN POLICIES (1793-1872)<sup>1</sup>

As I indicated earlier, the economic condition of the Indian subcontinent was marked by self-subsistence not only from the realm of agriculture but also from a variety of traditional industries that prevailed during the pre-colonial period; however, it deteriorated during the colonial period. According to Stein,

The crucial transitional criteria have to do with the distress of most of the peasantry arising from famines and the decline of prices between 1800 and 1850. Several famines occurred in 1799-1800, 1804-07, 1811-12, 1824 and 1833-4. In the next two decades the most serious agrarian problem was a secular decline in commodity prices.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, 'agriculture throughout the Madras Presidency suffered stagnation and impoverishment in the first half of the nineteenth century'.<sup>3</sup> This was due to the over-assessment, over-collection and poor communication with the markets and lack of support to irrigation.<sup>4</sup> A vast majority of the people in the Indian subcontinent had struggled to maintain their subsistence during the 19th century. According to Hunter, 'The greater proportion of the population was without daily sufficiency in food.'<sup>5</sup> Impact of British rule on Madras Presidency during the second half of the 19th century was reviewed by Raghavaiyangar (1988) who states:

The great majority of the population is very poor . . . there has certainly been improvement in the material condition . . . of the upper strata of society, and a reduction in the percentage which the lowest grades bear to the total population.<sup>6</sup>

Substantiating this further, Dharma Kumar says the proportion of the agricultural labourers to the total working force and total agricultural

working force had increased during 1871-1901.<sup>7</sup> Atchi Reddy observed that the economic conditions of the labouring classes had deteriorated in terms of wage rate during the early 19th century.<sup>8</sup>

The early colonial agrarian policy envisaged only expanding commercialisation of agriculture with links to the world trade.<sup>9</sup> Until the last quarter of the 19th century, the colonial government had followed the same policy.<sup>10</sup> According to the famine commissioner, the same colonial agrarian policy followed for the length of the period was unsystematic and totally ignorant of Indian conditions.<sup>11</sup> Until the late 19th century, the colonial agrarian policy gave emphasis only for the export of commodities to Britain besides the amassment of the land revenue. Neglect of farmers' welfare during the colonial regime was appalling, and the ryots were forced to pay more land revenue regardless of their conditions and natural calamities.<sup>12</sup> Those who protested against the high rate of land revenue, *mittadars* (owner of the subdivision of the district/taluk) and farmers, were imprisoned for a long period.<sup>13</sup> Farmers were even tortured for non-payment of land revenue in the different parts of Madras Presidency.<sup>14</sup> Given this scenario, this chapter attempts to analyse the colonial agrarian policies and their disastrous consequences on the traditional tribal system and their economy in Madras Presidency during the late 18th and 19th centuries, particularly the pre-survey and settlement period, in historical perspectives (1792-1872). Important research questions here are, had the colonial agrarian policy provided any measures for the development of the tribal economy or had it only extracted revenue from the tribals? Has it given any importance for environmental protection or merely expected more revenue? Has the government restricted the tribal land alienation and ensured that the tribals need not venture into the forest looking for fresh lands? Has it demanded more revenue, which might have forced them to expand the area under cultivation, leading to deforestation? Has it disturbed the traditional tribal system itself? These questions might be helpful in understanding the colonial agrarian policy with regard to the tribals (if any) during the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency.

### **Agrarian economy during the pre-colonial era**

At the time of colonial intervention in the Salem and Baramahal region, more than 63 per cent of the total geographical area was under cultivable and uncultivable waste. Of the total geographical area, about 22 per cent belongs to the hill areas (Table 3.1). Of the total number of habitations, 7 per cent belong to the hill villages and about 5 per cent of the population lived in the hill areas. It clearly indicates that a large extent of land existed

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Table 3.1 Details of land utilisation, hill areas, hill villages and population, 1793

Details	Area (acres)	Percentage
<i>Land details</i>		
Arable land	1,127,716	27.55
Fallow land	359,279	8.78
Cultivable waste	1,559,612	38.11
Uncultivable waste	1,046,366	25.56
Total geographical area	4,092,973	100.00
<i>Plain and hill areas</i>		
Plains	3,200,296	78.19
Hills	892,677	21.81
Total	4,092,973	100.00
<i>Plain and hill villages</i>		
Plains	5,606	92.80
Hills	435	7.20
Total	6,041	100.00
<i>Population of plain and hill areas</i>		
Plains	572,287	95.38
Hills	27,713	4.62
Total	600,000	100.00

Source: Board of Revenue (hereafter BOR), Vol. 151-A, 1791-94, pp. 41-42, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai (hereafter TNSA).

as common property lands in Salem and Baramahal region. Though more than one-fifth of the regions belonged to the hill areas, only less than 5 per cent of the people inhabited the hill regions. It indicates that not only was the population density in the hills lower than that in the plains, but it also varied from 1 to 33 in the different hills at the close of the 18th century.

As I mentioned earlier, for administrative purposes, the hills were divided into *Jagirs/nadus*, which consisted of many villages or hamlets. Each *nadu* had a four-tier administrative set-up: *Pattakaran* or headman, *Maniakaran*, *Ur-Kavundan* or *Moopan* and *Kangani*. The *Pattakaran*, chief-tain of each *nadu*, exercised diverse functions, both religious and judicial according to local laws, and enjoyed the revenue of the estate after giving a portion to the local deity. Depending on his own demand from the land, he decided the amount of tax to be collected from the tribals. The rate of tax was not always permanent as the assessment was adjusted according to the prevailing situation.<sup>15</sup> The *Maniakaran* assisted the *Pattakaran* in these works.<sup>16</sup> The *Ur-Kavundan* administered the tribals directly with the help of the *Kanganies*, who also functioned like the police. The main duties of the *Kangani* were guarding houses and crops, assisting in revenue

collection, keeping an eye on strangers and thieves and recovering stolen property.<sup>17</sup>

In the traditional tribal system, revenue was collected for maintaining temples and organising festivals. Tax was collected annually from married couples apart from a certain amount paid at the time of wedding. The Baramahal Records (BR) state: 'Annually from each married couple one Sultan fanam was collected to the guru or patriarch. At a wedding two Sultan fanams to the temple at Trinomalai' (Tiruvannamalai).<sup>18</sup> The tribals did not pay any tax to the rulers of the plains. But, in the later period, the powerful plains rulers who extended their suzerainty over the hills forced them to pay taxes. The village middlemen/headmen who collected taxes inherited the tax-collecting rights over the period, irrespective of whoever ruled the plains.

In the pre-colonial period, the hills were rented out to the highest bidders who never surveyed the land before the assessment.<sup>19</sup> The earlier rulers also did not have a direct relationship either with the tribals or with the headman, facilitating exploitation by middlemen in the name of revenue collection. Land revenue in the hills during the pre-colonial period was not collected on the basis of either the extent and quality of land or crops or the availability of water. Instead, it was fixed on the basis of the number of implements – ploughs and hoes – used for cultivation.

### Colonial agrarian policy: 1792 to 1802-3

Colonel Alexander Read wanted to bring revenue collection (from the farmers) under the direct control of the government, dispensing with the village headmen.<sup>20</sup> To realise this objective, the government ordered a detailed agricultural survey in 1793. Till the completion of the survey, revenue was collected through the village headmen, who were instructed by the government not to collect more than the fixed assessment.<sup>21</sup> When the survey was completed in 1797-98, Read introduced the direct method of land revenue collection, in other words, the *Ryotwary* system. Read's *Ryotwary* settlement was implemented in the Kolli hills along with the plains villages, while all other hills continued with the practice of settling with the headman. The survey settlement of Attur-Kolli hills had created several problems, and the tribals were forced to revolt against the settlement in 1796.<sup>22</sup> Every village in Kolli hills, in fact, every hamlet, was surveyed and the land revenue was fixed. The total arable land in the Attur-Kolli hills was 2,733.6 acres, and the total revenue demand was 850-43-35 *Star Pagodas*<sup>23</sup> or about 2,978 company rupees.<sup>24</sup> The average land rent per acre was only 0-14-1 *Star Pagodas* or 1-4-3 company rupees. The total arable area with a small extent of fallow land in the Namakkal-Kolli hills was 6,804.13 acres, and the total revenue demand

Table 3.2 Revenue collection in different hills: 1792-93 to 1797-98 (in Star Pagodas)

Year/hills	1792-93	1793-94	1794-95	1795-96	1796-97	1797-98
Attur-Kolli hills	833 12 43	52 36 23	988 37 30	988 37 30	1,057 7 35	1,107 40 73
Namakkal-Kolli hills	1,829 42 36	1,829 12 9	1,830 2 4	2,030 7 30	2,375 33 7	2,627 00 19
Pachamalai	238 4 63	266 32 27	287 37 73	280 37 73	352 38 24	351 16 50
Shervaroy hills	1,080 37 6	1,180 21 5	1,180 21 5	1,265 - 5	1,265 - 3	1,265 - 73

Sources: Permanent Settlement Records, Salem, 11 November 1800, pp. 4, 6, 19-21 and 28-31, TNSA; Proceedings of the Special Commission, Vol. 4, April to May 1802, pp. 1251-55, TNSA; Proceedings of the Special Commission, Vol. 10, 1 September 1802, pp. 1205-6, TNSA; BOR, Vol. 2051, No. 25, 7 December 1846, p. 15452, TNSA.

was 2,696-15-49 *Star Pagodas* or about Rs 9,436.<sup>25</sup> The average land rent per acre was 0-17-71 *Star Pagodas* or Rs 1-6-5. Prior to the permanent settlement, land rent of *punjai* (dry) land in the plains was 0-21-59 *Star Pagodas* for the central division and 0-25-48 *Star Pagodas* for the southern division.<sup>26</sup> Land rent in the hills was therefore lower than elsewhere in the region since the beginning of the colonial rule.

During Read's settlement, land revenue in the different hills was hiked annually from 1792-93 to 1796-97 (Table 3.2). Though the tribal lands were not surveyed and settled individually, the headmen were forced to pay a higher amount every year since 1792-93. In 1796-97, land revenue for the hills was fixed permanently with the headmen, and it continued till the permanent settlement (1802-3). After the failure of Read's settlement (1797-98), the highest amount of revenue demand between 1792-93 and 1797-98 was fixed permanently and it continued till 1802-3. Due to Read's *Ryotwary* system, the farmers had suffered heavily because of the high assessments and decline in agricultural output.<sup>27</sup> In the decade between 1792-93 and 1802-3, the colonial administration had not considered the actual conditions of the farmers but was interested in extracting more revenue from the tribals.

### Colonial agrarian policy: 1802-3 to 1818-19

Despite the failure of Read's *Ryotwary* settlement and decline of land revenue, the colonial government expected constant revenue sources to meet its warfare in South India.<sup>28</sup> Based on the Bengal Presidency model, the permanent settlement was introduced in Madras Presidency in 1802-3. Under this, the Salem and Baramahal region was divided into several *Muttahs*, and the *Muttahdars* were given the legal rights to collect the rent.<sup>29</sup> Under the permanent settlement, this region was divided into a number of *Muttahs*,<sup>30</sup> each consisting of a cluster of villages. At the time of permanent settlement, there were 9 taluks divided into 205 *Muttahs*.<sup>31</sup> Of the *Muttahs*, nine belong to the hills. According to the collector, the permanent settlement of the hills was 'nothing more than the amount they produced the year previous to the introduction of the permanent settlement'.<sup>32</sup> As the land revenue in the hills was hiked every year since the beginning of the colonial period (1792-93), the highest amount was fixed as permanent assessment and the same was made applicable for the hills.

The original *Muttahs* were subdivided and annexed with the new ones over the period, and the process was solely driven by non-payment by the *Muttahdars*. In 1813, the numbers of *Muttahs* were increased to 291. The hill *Muttahs* were, however, not disturbed, because they had 'always been

regular in their payments. My [Collector] experience in these districts would not justify me [Collector] in recommending any deviation from the mode hitherto observed'.<sup>33</sup> In the hills, as evidenced by the collector, the high amount of land rent was paid without any arrears. This meant that the headmen of the hills had adopted coercive methods, creating all sorts of inconvenience to the tribals, to collect the targeted amount.

Even after the introduction of the permanent settlement, the revenue demand was not completely realised as the outstanding balance kept on increasing every year. It was high in the plains during 1808-9 to 1810-11 because of the farmers' resistance.<sup>34</sup> Though there were only nine hill *Muttahs*, the outstanding was high when compared to the total balance that was due from the remaining plains *Muttahs*. From 1802-3 to 1809-10, about one-eighth or 12.13 per cent of the total balance per annum was from the nine hill *Muttahs*. This rate had gone up between 1810-11 and 1817-18, with the average being about 58.55 per cent of the total balance (Table 3.3). The overall balance in the hill *Muttahs* from 1802-3 to 1817-18 was 32.96 per cent per annum. Of this, possibility for recovery was for 14 per cent, while the remaining stood beyond recovery. The hill villages had a large outstanding balance during the 16 years (1802-3 to 1818-19) of permanent settlement. The main reason for this was that the

Table 3.3 Balance of land revenue: 1802-3 to 1818-19 (in Madras rupees)

Year (1)	Total balance (2)	Hills (3)	Plains (4)	Percentage of columns (3) to (2)
1802-3	5,109 14 9	519 11 3	4,590 3 6	10.16
1803-4	8,284 12 5	734 6 3	7,550 6 2	8.86
1804-5	15,684 13 3	435 7 5	15,249 5 10	2.77
1805-6	1,293 5 8	516 12 1	776 9 7	39.91
1806-7	8,895 1 4	560 9 11	8,334 7 5	6.29
1807-8	3,927 11 -	612 10 -	3,315 1 -	15.58
1808-9	32,465 9 7	1,872 2 2	30,593 7 5	5.77
1809-10	68,318 15 6	5,250 1 1	63,068 14 5	7.68
1810-11	48,131 11 1	12,525 13 5	35,605 13 8	26.02
1811-12	23,972 6 5	11,739 7 8	12,232 14 9	48.16
1812-13	11,227 5 6	10,010 14 5	1,216 7 1	89.16
1813-14	10,106 2 7	10,106 2 7	-	100
1814-15	12,715 11 3	11,916 13 11	798 13 4	93.72
1815-16	20,640 10 6	12,175 11 6	8,464 15 -	58.99
1816-17	19,121 - 7	12,199 - 8	6,921 15 11	63.79
1817-18	32,566 2 2	15,092 9 6	17,473 8 8	46.34
Total	322,461 5 7	106,268 5 10	216,192 15 9	32.96

Source: BOR, Vol. 873, 14 December 1820, p. 10661, TNSA.

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Table 3.4 Revenue demand, collection and balance in hills: 1802-3 to 1817-18 (Madras rupees)

Year	Demand	Collection	Balance	Percentage of balance to total demand
1802-3	35,858	35,338 5 3	519 11 3	1.45
1803-4	35,858	35,123 10 3	734 6 3	2.05
1804-5	35,858	35,425 9 1	435 7 5	1.21
1805-6	35,858	35,341 4 5	516 12 1	1.44
1806-7	35,858	35,297 6 7	560 9 11	1.56
1807-8	35,858	35,246 6 6	612 10 -	1.71
1808-9	35,858	33,985 14 4	1,872 2 2	5.22
1809-10	35,858	30,607 15 1	5,250 1 1	14.64
1810-11	35,858	23,333 3 1	12,525 13 5	34.93
1811-12	35,858	24,478 8 10	11,739 7 8	32.74
1812-13	35,858	25,847 2 1	10,010 14 5	27.92
1813-14	35,858	25,751 13 11	10,106 2 7	28.18
1814-15	35,858	23,941 2 7	11,916 13 11	33.23
1815-16	35,858	23,682 5 0	12,175 11 6	33.95
1816-17	35,858	23,658 15 10	12,199 - 8	34.02
1817-18	35,858	20,765 7 0	15,092 9 6	42.8
Total		467,460 2 2	106,268 5 10	18.52

Source: BOR, Vol. 873, 1820, p. 10661, TNSA.

revenue demand fixed under permanent settlement of 1802 was unreasonably high as it was the culmination of the annual increase from 1792.

The amount fixed for the hills at the time of permanent settlement was Rs 35,858-0-6. The balance for the hill *Muttahs* was an insignificant amount, as it was about 3.66 per cent per annum between 1802-3 and 1809-10, and about 12.13 per cent during 1810-11 and 1817-18 (Table 3.4). However, as a proportion of the total demand, it remained a major one for the whole region. The balance in the hills had increased from 1810-11 to 1817-18, with an average of 33.38 per cent to the total demand from the hills. This was 58.55 per cent of the total balance in the district. The average balance from the hills to the total demand between 1802-3 and 1817-18 was only 18.52 per cent, and it formed 32.96 per cent to the total balance of the district (Table 3.4). It meant that a large amount of the outstanding balance during the period of permanent settlement was mainly from the hills. One reason could be that the amount fixed at the time of permanent settlement was too high, while the other is that the headmen might not have remitted the collections to the government. The collector's reports showed no outstanding arrears from the hills during the period prior to the permanent settlement. The *Maniakaran*

(headman) who actually collected the revenue from the hill inhabitants might have kept it with himself as his *mamool*.<sup>35</sup>

The colonial government also attempted to extract the permanent settlement amount irrespective of the prevailing situation. For example, if the price during the decade starting with 1801-2, as a base, was 100, the average annual prices during the succeeding decade had declined to 88.5 for 1811-12 to 1820-21.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the burden on the cultivators had increased and the farmers were forced to either borrow or dispose of their land to clear the revenue arrears.<sup>37</sup> Despite drought and deprivation, the higher revenue demand had exploited the farmers, particularly from the hilly tract.

### Colonial agrarian policy: 1818-19 to 1871-72

The difficulties encountered in the permanent settlement forced the colonial government to adopt a new strategy for revenue collection: entering into a contract with the erstwhile middlemen or leading cultivator of the villages. The initial lease period of three or five years was then extended to ten years, and finally, it became a permanent one.<sup>38</sup> The revenue fixed was too high even under this system. As a consequence, the arrears continued to pile up during this brief spell in spite of the best efforts of the leaseholders.<sup>39</sup> Hence, in 1822, the government decided to reintroduce the *Ryotwary* system after the expiry of the leases.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, the defaulting villages were brought directly under the government management, and this system had continued till the first survey and settlement (1871-72).

In view of the huge arrears, the annual revenue settlement system was reintroduced in the hills from 1818-19. Under this, *muchilika* (agreements) were exchanged between the government and the village headman. Though the revenue demand from the hills was initially fixed according to the conditions of the year, from 1818-19 onwards, it was hiked annually until 1853-54. In contrast, the average prices of the staple foodgrains in this region had declined drastically during this period.<sup>41</sup> Even then the actual collection from the hills during the period from 1818-19 to 1853-54 was never equal to the amount realised at the time of permanent settlement. Fixation of higher revenue demand was one of the major reasons for the huge outstanding balance. It was so not only in the hills but also in the districts in general.

In 1832-35, when a famine struck Salem and Baramahal region, a vast section of ryots as well as others were reduced to sustain themselves by gathering roots and herbs in the jungles, even from the pernicious species. As a result, many were reported to have died. In addition to periodical

disturbances, cholera was quite prevalent in different parts of the region, claiming high mortality rate.<sup>42</sup> Land rent remission was granted every year, but no separate account is available for the hills. In this region, the Brahmins generally continued to enjoy the privileges of remission and assessment.<sup>43</sup> The marginal fluctuations in the land revenue demand in the hills could be attributed to migration and unfavourable climatic conditions. Due to over-assessment in utter disregard of monsoon failure between 1831-32 and 1854-55, a large number of farmers in this region had deserted their lands and migrated to other places, mostly to neighbouring districts, while a few had even gone abroad as indentured labourers. However, the rate of migration in the hills remained very low for the same period.<sup>44</sup>

Until the survey and settlement in the plains (1872), land revenue was fixed based on the quality of soil, whereas in the hill areas, revenue was fixed in gross, and on a very indefinite proportion of the produce. But the actual revenue was collected based on the number of implements like ploughs and hoes used for cultivation.<sup>45</sup> Compared to the span of permanent settlement, the balance was less after the annual settlement between 1818-19 and 1837-38.<sup>46</sup> Only an insignificant amount was outstanding from the hills coming under the management of village headmen since 1820.<sup>47</sup> For this reason, the hills were brought under the *amani*<sup>48</sup> management in different periods between 1829-30 and 1853-54. In due course, parts of the Attur-Kolli hills in 1828-29, Aranuthumalai in 1836-37, Namakkal-Kolli hills in 1840-41, Shervaroy hills in 1842-43 and the remaining portion of the Attur-Kolli hills in 1853-54 were taken over by the government and brought under the *amani* management system.

Under this system, the number of ploughs and hoes employed by individuals per year was entered into the accounts with their names.<sup>49</sup> Land revenue was determined on the basis of the number of ploughs and hoes owned by each individual at the rate of 12 acres per plough and 3½ acres per hoe. About 125 different rates for ploughs and 22 for hoes prevailed in the different hills of the region.<sup>50</sup> Actually the tribals occupied a large extent of the land. The average rate of assessment based on actual area under cultivation would, however, be only two to three *annas* per acre.<sup>51</sup> Until the annual settlement, the government had followed the same method of revenue collection. After that, the method of land revenue settlement differed in each hill.

### Shervaroy hills

The government had exchanged *muchilika*'s with the headmen of different *nadus* of Shervaroy hills for the collection of land revenue in 1822-23. Each *nadu* was leased out to more than one person, and the

headman of each *nadu* had agreed to pay the fixed amount regularly.<sup>52</sup> The annual revenue settlement made in the hills was about 38.63 per cent less than the amount fixed during the permanent settlement.<sup>53</sup> About Rs 4,831-12-0 was found to be the balance in the annual settlements between 1822-23 and 1839-40, which was 8.4 per cent of the total amount. There were no dues between 1833-34 and 1839-40. Land rent remission was granted to the Shervaroy hills between 1822-23 and 1834-35 with an average remission of Rs 301-0-2. The remissions were mainly availed by the British coffee planters and other non-tribals. Between 1822-23 and 1834-35, the total demand outstanding per annum comes to 32.62 per cent, and this was mainly due from the British coffee planters. About Rs 1,913-10-0 (51.77 per cent) was to be paid by M.D. Cockburn, a former collector of Salem (1820-29), and Rs 122-8-0 by others. The tribals owed only Rs 122-13-0.<sup>54</sup> The British settlers did not pay the land rent to the tribal headman. Instead of taking action against the British defaulters, the colonial administration forced the tribal chiefs to be prompt in revenue payments. Ultimately, the headmen were stripped off their traditional and hereditary rights by the colonial government.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the hills were brought under the direct management of the government.

The headmen collected revenue from the tribals at different rates. In 1841-42, the rate of assessment varied from Rs 2 to 10½ per plough and half a rupee to three per hoe. The extent of land estimation also varied from 1¼ acres to 12 acres per plough, and the assessment also ranged from nine *annas* to two and half rupees per acre.<sup>56</sup> Even under the direct management, there was no uniform collection for the different villages. It goes on to prove that the sole intention of the colonial government was to amass as much revenue as possible from the tribals. Till the survey and settlement in 1904-5, the same method of revenue collection was followed. In the Shervaroy hills, the colonial government followed a dual land revenue policy. On the one hand, revenue was fixed at the rate of Rs 1 per acre for the coffee planters, and on the other, it forced the tribals to pay more. The British planters, besides aggressively encroaching on the tribals' lands as well as their common property resources, created several hardships to the tribals. In furtherance of their interest, the planters ensured the debilitation of the tribals' administrative, judicial and cultural institutions during the early 19th century.<sup>57</sup>

### Kolli hills

In Moonoor and Anjoor villages of the Attur-Kolli hills, revenue was settled annually from 1818-19, barring an insignificant amount of dues in

some years. However, in 1829-30, Anjoor hills was brought under the direct management of the government despite there being no revenue balance. Until 1823-24, the headman of Moonoor hills settled the revenue annually. However, in 1824-25, a part of the hill was brought under the *amani* management, and the remaining was settled permanently with these headmen and this continued until 1853-54. The tribals disliked the system of lease, even though the government had reduced the amount from Rs 813-6-6 in 1820-21 to Rs 700 in 1852-53. Over-assessment had forced the tribals to protest against the renting system. This was because the leaseholders levied more than what was due and the revenue payable in eight *kists*<sup>58</sup> was collected in four *kists*, resulting in greater hardships to the farmers.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, rent was collected irrespective of whether the land was cultivated or not.<sup>60</sup> As a result, 'some Malaiyals of the above [Moonoor] hills absconded'.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the remaining portion of the Moonoor hills was brought under the direct management of the government.

From 1819-20 onwards, the revenue demand of Namakkal-Kolli hills was fixed annually. The average amount collected there from 1819-20 to 1827-28 was Rs 7,347, about 26 per cent less when compared to the permanent settlement amount of Rs 9,264-8-0.<sup>62</sup> To avoid fluctuations in the annual revenue settlement, the government leased out the hills from 1828-29 to 1832-33 for an annual sum of Rs 9,066.<sup>63</sup> On the expiry of the first five years of the lease period in 1832-33, the government renewed the lease for the next five years up to 1837-38 at the rate of Rs 9,340-9-3.<sup>64</sup> The leased amount of Rs 9,340-9-3 was not realised every year, and the outstanding arrears stood at Rs 359-14-13 in 1835-36, Rs 639-7-0 in 1836-37 and Rs 519-9-5 in 1837-38.<sup>65</sup> Due to the arrears in the second five years, the government leased out annually for Rs 8,341-14-8 in 1838-39, Rs 8,051 in 1839-40 and Rs 6,875-6-10 in 1841-42.<sup>66</sup> The revenue decreased from 1838-39 consequent to the succession of bad years and desertion of several ryots.<sup>67</sup> Unmindful of this, the renters collected more revenue from the ryots. It was stated that 'the ryots on account of the short period of rent were harassed by those holding the same'.<sup>68</sup> Considering these facts, the hills were brought under the *amani* management in 1842-43.

### Pachamalai

From 1819-20 onwards the annual revenue settlement of Pachamalai was more rational in the sense that it took local circumstances into consideration. Consequently, the revenue arrears turned out to be negligible.<sup>69</sup> However, the government, charging the headmen with collecting large amounts from the tribals, brought these hills under its direct management

in 1829-30. The rates levied were 12 *annas* per *kuli*<sup>70</sup> of hoed land and Rs 1-4-0 for ploughed land.<sup>71</sup> The same system continued till the survey settlement in 1904-5.

### Kalrayan hills

The Kalrayan hill tribes did not pay any (land) revenue during the pre-colonial period, but they paid certain fee to their chiefs. This was 'for maintenance of a proper state and dignity and from a portion of these fees he [jagirdar] was bound to keep up the ceremonies of the temples, sacred to the Tirular<sup>72</sup> deities'.<sup>73</sup> They did not pay any tax either to the Hindu or Muslim rulers or to the colonial government, and they had been left entirely to themselves.<sup>74</sup> The government collected the lease amount from the leaseholders, which had the exclusive rights to purchase goods and articles from the Kalrayan hills.<sup>75</sup>

The colonial administration had made several attempts to bring the hills under its direct management, not to protect the tribals but to prevent illicit felling from the forests. However, evidences show that the *Jagirdars* were unwilling to surrender their rights. The collector's letter to the secretary to the BOR stated that

from enquires made, from time to time, during the last two years, I am quite sure the Jagirdar is not willing to rent his estate to government, all endeavors made both by myself and my predecessor to communicate with the Jagirdar having failed.<sup>76</sup>

The *Jagirdars* wanted to retain their rights with themselves and were averse to lease out the hills to the government. However, in 1867, the government tried to obtain permanent leases of the Kalrayan hills to secure unity of forest management. The Periya-Kalrayan *Jagirdar* agreed to the rent proposed by the government, which was Rs 1,500 per annum, under certain conditions.<sup>77</sup> Finally, Kalrayan hills was brought under government control in 1869.<sup>78</sup> The *Jagirdar* of Chinna-Kalrayan who was reluctant to accept the permanent lease proposed by the government evaded meeting the officers for a long time.<sup>79</sup> But he was arrested on a magisterial warrant and forced to execute the lease under custody.<sup>80</sup> But these hills were under the control of the government only for a short period.

### Incidence of land rent

The average land rent in the year prior to the survey and settlement of 1871-72 in the Salem and Baramahal region was Rs 1-10-15 per acre in

general, Rs 1-4-7½ for dry lands and Rs 6-0-1 for wetlands.<sup>81</sup> Land rent per acre in the hills was less than that elsewhere in the region both before and after the settlement. However, it varied from hill to hill. For dry land, it was lower than that prevailing in the district in general. For dry land, was lower than elsewhere in the year preceding the settlement, it was certainly higher after the settlement. Land revenue incidence before the settlement, which was Rs 5-8-1½ per cultivator in general, increased to Rs 5-11-5½ afterwards. It goes without saying that the tax burden on cultivators had gone up after the survey settlement in the region, including the hills except the Shervaroys. The burden of land revenue per cultivator, which was high in the large hills, was, however, minimum in the small hills.

### Decline of tribal economy

As mentioned in the beginning, the tribals in Salem and Baramahal region were dependent on agriculture and forest collection. In 1838, occupational classification data brought them under the category of 'cultivators'.<sup>82</sup> However, after the colonial intervention the non-tribals entered and settled down in the different hills but alienated the tribal lands. According to the 1871 Census, non-tribal settlers largely confined to the Shervaroy hills, Namakkal-Kolli hills, Attur-Kolli hills and Kalrayan hills, and their percentage to the total population was, respectively, 21.30, 10.37, 9.14 and 4.5.<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, about 100 persons including children belonged to the European stock among the settlers in the Shervaroy hills around the 1870s.<sup>84</sup> In addition to non-tribal settlement, introduction of plantations changed the issue of land alienation into an explosive one. In the Shervaroy hills alone, about 9,210 acres was under coffee plantation in the 1870s. The economic status of more than one-fourth of the total workforce had declined to that of labourers/plantation labourers during the pre-survey and settlement period (Table 3.5).

### Conclusion

The analysis of colonial agrarian policies, particularly land revenue policies with reference to South India, especially its unexplored areas, shows that the colonial government had not accorded due importance to the tribal traditional system. Its sole concern was extraction of more revenue. Moreover, the changes effected intermittently on the agrarian policies were aimed at bringing more and more land-mass into its territorial authority. In continuation of this project, it

Table 3.5 Occupational status of the tribals in different hills in the 1870s

Name of the hills (1)	Total population (2)	Total workers (3)	Percentage of column (3) to column (2) (4)	Cultivators (5)	Percentage of column (5) to column (3) (6)	Labourers (7)	Percentage of column (7) to column (3) (8)
Shervaroy hills	10,745	3,016	28.07	1,860	61.67	857	28.42
Attur-Kolli hills	5,533	2,231	40.32	2,113	94.71	71	3.18
Namakkal-Kolli hills	9,296	3,658	39.35	2,664	72.83	929	25.40
Pachamalai	2,166	795	36.70	753	94.72	27	3.40
Kalrayan hills	6,626	2,321	35.03	1,695	73.03	619	26.67

Source: Census of India 1871, Census Statement of Population of 1871, Salem District, Madras.

had brought the tribal areas under its control by means which often lacked legitimacy. Its gradual intrusion into the tribal areas ultimately culminated in the British establishing their control as early as in the early 19th century.

The colonial government had increased the revenue demand every year during the last decade of the 18th century and made it as a permanent settlement for the first quarter of the 19th century, which was an indirect attempt to take over the tribal areas. During the second quarter of the 19th century, the colonial intrusion took a belligerent turn. Five major developments took place during then. (i) The different hills were brought under the direct management, and the tribals' traditional system was completely dismantled and it eventually faded away. (ii) Besides official patronage and encouragement, the British were offered several privileges to establish the plantation, especially coffee. In this process, vast tracts of tribal lands as well as forest lands were alienated, accentuating the disintegration of the traditional tribal socio-economic, cultural and administrative institutions. (iii) On the absence of the tribals having any property right over the forest, the colonial administration has extended its control over the forest resources to boost its commercial pursuits. (iv) The tribals' claim and assertion over their traditional rights on forest, footpath, headmanship, *guruship*, other common property rights and so on were always questioned and trampled upon by the colonial administration. The poor tribals were not able to produce written documents to prove their case when the administration demanded evidence. (v) Restrictions of forest use were imposed disregarding the interests of the hill inhabitants.

A reconstruction of the unexplored domains of agrarian history in the tribal areas of the late 18th and early 19th centuries pertaining to this region shows that deterioration and destruction were the hallmarks of the colonial project. What emerges clearly from the earlier analysis is that the colonial government had decided to administer the tribal lands directly irrespective of the consequences. Stripping tribal headmen of their rights and privileges was not definitely due to the outstanding balances in revenue collection as it had been established earlier. A direct result of this takeover was a step to erosion of tribal autonomy, facilitating further penetration of the colonial administration deep into the hills in Madras Presidency. On the one hand, without initiating any development or welfare measures for the tribals or considering the natural calamities and steep fall in the prices of commodities during the early 19th century, the colonial government had demanded more revenue from the farmers.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally published in *Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 2010. Reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers.
- 2 Burton Stein, 'Integration of the Agrarian System of South India', in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, p. 197; see also Dharma Kumar, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 2, C.1757-C.1970, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 220.
- 3 B.M. Bhatia, 'Growth and Composition of Middle Class in South India in Nineteenth Century', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1965, 2(4): p. 343.
- 4 Stein, 'Integration of the Agrarian System', p. 197.
- 5 Burton Stein, *The Making of Agrarian Policy in British India 1770-1990*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 8.
- 6 Srinivasa S. Raghavaiyengar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency*, New Delhi: Asian Education Service, 1988, p. 176.
- 7 Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India: Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency during the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 172-73.
- 8 M. Atchi Reddy, 'Trends in the Agricultural Wages in Some South Indian Districts: 1800-1980', *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 1986, 28(4): p. 342.
- 9 Stein, *The Making of Agrarian Policy*, p. 17.
- 10 S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1978, pp. 218-19.
- 11 Elizebeth Manak, 'Formulation of Agrarian Policy in Imperial India 1872-1929: A Case of the Madras Presidency', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1979, p. 24.
- 12 Kumar, *Land and Caste*, pp. 83-84; Stein, *The Making of Agrarian Policy*, p. 17; Neil Charlesworth, *British Rule and the Indian Economy 1800-1914*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, pp. 18-19; Kumar, *The Cambridge Economic History*, p. 220; Bhatia, 'Growth and Composition of Middle Class', p. 344; A. Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency 1800-1850*, Madras: University of Madras, p. 293; Sumit Guha, *Growth, Stagnation or Decline? Agricultural Productivity in British India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 37; Irfan Habib, 'Colonialization of the Indian Economy 1757-1900', *Social Scientist*, 1975, 3(8): p. 33; D.A. Washbrook, 'Land, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1981, 15(3): p. 665, see footnote; A.K. Bagchi, 'Transition from Indian to British Indian System of Money and Banking 1800-1850', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1985, 19(3): p. 505; D.A. Washbrook, 'Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History c. 1720-1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1988, 22(1): p. 79; David Hardiman (ed.), *Peasant Resistance in India 1858-1914*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 6.
- 13 Velayutham Saravanan, 'Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu since the Colonial Rule 1792-1991', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hyderabad.
- 14 *Report of the Commission for the Investigation of Alleged Cases of Torture in the Madras Presidency*, Madras: Government of Madras, 1855.
- 15 A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras: Government Press, 1948, p. 143.

COLONIAL AGRARIAN POLICIES (1793-1872)

- 16 Board of Revenue (hereafter BOR), Vol. 1769, 23 September 1841, p. 12109, Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai (hereafter TNSA).
- 17 Their role is like the traditional police, namely the *Taliaris* and the *Kavalkars* in South India.
- 18 Baramahal Records (hereafter BR), Section VII, *Imposts*, p. 134. TNSA.
- 19 Board Proceedings (hereafter BP), No. 212, 8 June 1906, p. 3, TNSA.
- 20 BOR, Vol. 69, Nos. 28-30, 8 April 1793, p. 1788, TNSA.
- 21 John Bradsha, 'Sir Thomas Munro and the British Settlement of the Madras Presidency', in William Wilson Hunter (ed.), *Rulers of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1893, p. 64.
- 22 For details, see Chapter 2.
- 23 One *Star Pagoda* is equal to 45 *fanams* or 3,600 cash. One *Star Pagoda* is equal to three and half company rupees.
- 24 BOR, Vol. 69, Nos. 28-30, 8 April 1793, p. 1788, TNSA.
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 BOR, No. 75, 3 January 1814, p. 854, TNSA.
- 27 Nilmani Mukherjee, *Ryotwari System in Madras, 1792-1827*, Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1962, p. 313.
- 28 Dietmar Rothermund, *An Economic History of India: From Pre-Colonial Times to 1986*, London: Croom Helm, 1988, p. 201.
- 29 B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. III, The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 63.
- 30 It was also called *mitta*.
- 31 There were 18 *Muttahs* in Salem, 17 *Muttahs* in Attur, 16 *Muttahs* in Rasipuram, 31 *Muttahs* in Namakkal, 19 *Muttahs* in Paramathi, 20 *Muttahs* in Sankary-Droog, 15 *Muttahs* in Omalur, 37 *Muttahs* in Krishnagiri and 33 *Muttahs* in Dharmapuri taluk.
- 32 BOR, Vol. 606, No. 35, 25 April 1813, p. 4067, TNSA.
- 33 Salem Collectorate Records (hereafter SCR), Vol. 3156, p. 63, TNSA.
- 34 SCR, Vol. 3163, Part II, pp. 93-101, TNSA.
- 35 SCR, Vol. 3169, 14 February 1816, pp. 43-44, TNSA.
- 36 Habib, 'Colonialization', p. 33.
- 37 Charlesworth, *British Rule*, pp. 18-19.
- 38 Kumar, *The Cambridge Economic History*, p. 218.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- 41 Government of Madras, *Papers Relating to the Survey and Settlement of the Salem District*, Madras: Government Press, 1879, pp. 185-87.
- 42 BOR, Vol. 1445, No. 38, 17 March 1835, p. 2817, TNSA.
- 43 Nilmani Mukherjee and R.E. Frykenberg, 'The Ryotwari System and Social Organisation in the Madras Presidency', in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, p. 223.
- 44 Velayutham Saravanan, 'Economic Transformation of Tribals in Tamil Nadu: Causes of Migration and Its Employment Pattern, 1792-1991', *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 1998, 41(4): pp. 696-700.
- 45 Letter from R.K. Puckle Esq., Deputy Director of Revenue Settlement, to R.E. Master, Esq., Officiating Director of Revenue Settlement, Sooramungalam, 26 October 1865, No. 90. TNSA.

- 46 BOR, Vol. 1208, No. 56, 5 October 1829, pp. 10436-39; BOR, Vol. 1689, Nos. 48 and 49, 19 December 1839, pp. 19533-40.
- 47 Up to 1826-27, BOR, Vol. 1208, No. 56, 5 October 1829, pp. 10436-39, TNSA; BOR, Vol. 1689, Nos. 48 and 49, 19 December 1839, pp. 19533-40, TNSA.
- 48 To collect the revenue directly from the cultivators by the officers of the government upon the removal or suspension of an intermediate claimant.
- 49 BOR, No. 212, 8 June 1906, p. 3, TNSA.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 BOR, Vol. 1769, 23 September 1841, pp. 12127-29, TNSA.
- 53 BOR, Vol. 1769, 23 September 1841, p. 12093, TNSA.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 12082-89.
- 55 See Chapter 8.
- 56 BOR, Vol. 1902, No. 46, 1 January 1844, p. 2035, TNSA.
- 57 Velayutham Saravanan, 'Thamizhaga Malaival Makkalin Nila Urimai' (Land Rights of Tribals in Tamil Nadu), *Uzhavan Urimai* (Special Issue), 1999, pp. 53-57; see also Chapters 7 and 8.
- 58 It denotes the portion of the annual assessment to be paid at specified periods in the course of the year. This periodical payment was called *kists*.
- 59 BOR, Vol. 2447, No. 44, 30 November 1854, p. 16175, TNSA.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 BOR, Vol. 2507, No. 26, 2 January 1856, p. 7475, TNSA.
- 62 BOR, Vol. 1389, Nos. 30-31, 18 November 1833, p. 14536, TNSA.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 BOR, Vol. 1429, No. 33, 20 November 1834, p. 822, TNSA.
- 65 BOR, Vol. 1429, No. 37, 20 November 1834, p. 12769, TNSA.
- 66 BOR, Vol. 1841, No. 26, 5 January 1843, p. 250, TNSA.
- 67 BOR, Vol. 1722, No. 28, 15 October 1840, p. 13644, TNSA.
- 68 BOR, Vol. 1841, No. 26, 5 January 1843, p. 251, TNSA.
- 69 BOR, Vol. 2447, No. 44, 30 November 1954, TNSA.
- 70 A measure of one square feet of land. It varied from place to place. In Salem district, 1 *kuli* means 24 square feet.
- 71 Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers*, p. 418.
- 72 Name of the God in the Kalrayan hills.
- 73 Report on Board Petition No. 148 of 1871, TNSA.
- 74 GO, No. 1028, Revenue, 10 June 1871, TNSA; Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers*, p. 301.
- 75 BR, Section VII, *Imposts*, p. 44, TNSA.
- 76 Letter from the Collector to the Secretary to the BOR, 12 March 1873, TNSA.
- 77 BP, No. 3517, 4 December 1874, TNSA.
- 78 BP, No. 2942, 10 November 1869, TNSA.
- 79 BP, Nos. 172-74, 22 November 1872, TNSA.
- 80 BP, No. 1015, 3 March 1877, TNSA.
- 81 Letter from the Director of Revenue Settlement to BOR, 22 January 1874, TNSA.
- 82 BOR, Vol. 1537, 10 November 1836, pp. 18133-36, TNSA.
- 83 See Chapter 8.
- 84 John Shortt (ed.), *Hill Ranges of Southern India*, Madras: Higginbotham's and Co., 1870, p. 7.

## COLONIAL AGRARIAN POLICIES (1872–1947)<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines the colonial agrarian policies applied to the tribal areas of the Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency. It seeks to demonstrate the operation of colonial policies on the surveying and settlement of tribals and attempts to analyse the impact of such policies on the tribal economy during British colonial rule. By providing insights into colonial land revenue policies, such research helps us understand their negative consequences on the local tribal economy between 1872 and 1947. It is argued, in particular, that colonial land revenue policies did not consider the living standards of the tribals and the poor infrastructural facilities in the hill regions while imposing land revenues and became exploitative.

The existing literature on the economic history of Madras Presidency during the colonial period has insufficiently explored the agrarian economy policy of the region, and particularly its tribal economic history, largely based on agriculture and forest produce. Mainly based on archival research, this chapter attempts to lay foundations for further discussions of colonial agrarian policy in the tribal areas of Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency and its impact on the tribal economy.

### **The background of colonial agrarian policies**

The early colonial agrarian policy envisaged the commercialisation of agriculture to facilitate world trade.<sup>2</sup> Until the last quarter of the 19th century, the colonial government followed the same policy. Ambirajan (1978) rightly pointed out that there was no policy aimed at improving all aspects of agriculture. The focus was rather on the need to make Britain self-sufficient. Agricultural development was to be left to a 'free and unfettered market'.<sup>3</sup> According to the famine commissioner, the colonial agrarian policy of the period was unsystematic and totally ignorant of Indian conditions.<sup>4</sup> Until the late 19th century, colonial agrarian policies

either emphasised or extended privileges to assist the export of commodities to Britain and extract land revenue from the farmers.

The appalling neglect of farmers' welfare during the colonial regime meant that the ryots were forced to pay even more land revenue regardless of their conditions and the natural calamities.<sup>5</sup> The British rulers never listened to Indian voices raised against the high rate of land revenue. For example, R.C. Dutt wrote a series of letters to the viceroys in 1900, pointing out that land revenue had remained unaltered despite famines and other natural calamities afflicting the country.<sup>6</sup> He emphasised the need for a permanent statutorily limited revenue demand. Ignoring this 'land revenue debate', the colonial government remained as callous as ever and sought to justify its land revenue policy rather than addressing the problems it caused. Finally, this 'debate' ended without effecting any modifications to the land revenue policy.<sup>7</sup>

Several studies have observed the decline of the agrarian economy in Madras Presidency in the 19th century but differ on its causes. Dutt attributed the decline to the uncertainties of assessment as well as the over-assessment of land revenue.<sup>8</sup> Discounting over-assessment, Mukherjee argues, citing some places where agriculture flourished, that the decline was actually due to moderate assessment.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Bandopadhyay says that the development of the agrarian economy in some districts of Tamil Nadu was not due to moderate assessment but the result of increased factors of production.<sup>10</sup>

The vast majority of the people in the subcontinent struggled to maintain subsistence during the 19th century. An official, Hunter, confirmed that 'the greater proportion of the population was without daily sufficiency in food'.<sup>11</sup> Responding to this view, the colonial government appointed Seshiyar Srinivasa Raghavaiyengar to review the impact of British rule during the second half of the 19th century. Confirming that the majority of the people in India were poverty-stricken during this period, he admitted:

The great majority of the population is very poor . . . there has certainly been improvement in the material condition . . . of the upper strata of society, and a reduction in the percentage which the lowest grades bear to the total population.<sup>12</sup>

The East India Company had either absolutely neglected or never prepared a consistent policy for Indian agriculture. Issues concerning agriculture were administered by the governor in the council and boards of the province of the presidency. In other words, till the early 19th century, agrarian policy was treated as an 'Indian subject'. However, the East India Company had a concrete policy on trade and commerce administered by the various committees of the company under the leadership of the

Court of Directors.<sup>13</sup> During the early 20th century, the colonial government did not initiate any policy towards agriculture but irregularly effected some *ad hoc* regulations in various parts of the colonial territory. The surplus appropriated from commerce was used to further the interests of the British rather than the welfare of the Indian rural population.<sup>14</sup>

Those who protested against the high rate of land revenue, for example *mittadars* and farmers, were imprisoned, often for a long period. Farmers were even tortured for non-payment of land revenue in several parts of Madras Presidency.<sup>15</sup> Some of the farmers migrated to other places to escape from the high rate of land revenue. To be precise, farmers were exploited mercilessly during the early 19th century.

The colonial government did not initiate any measures to improve agriculture until the last quarter of the 19th century, and 'there were only "regulations" framed at different times and in different parts of British India. Such "codes" as were found to exist dealt with the administration of the land revenue, not its principles or policies'.<sup>16</sup> Until the great famine, colonial agrarian policy was focused on revenue collection from the farmers.

After the famine, the government set-up an agency to improve agriculture. The Agricultural Department, constituted in 1871 with the idea of promoting agriculture, was abolished in 1878 'because it did not generate revenue for the state'.<sup>17</sup> The Provincial Agricultural Department, established in 1882, also failed to address the problems of the poor and of agricultural labourers.<sup>18</sup> It was ineffective in developing the agriculture sector, and even its elected members, after 1920, did not help much in this respect. The Montagu-Chelmsford Committee pointed out that there was no coordination between the central and provincial government departments. Consequently, the government of India appointed a Royal Commission in 1926 to 'examine and report on the present condition of agriculture and the rural economy in British India and make recommendations for improvement of agriculture and promote the welfare and prosperity of the rural population'.<sup>19</sup> In 1928, the commission submitted its report in 12 volumes. But there was no change in policy due to the depression in Madras Presidency during the 1930s.

Washbrook observed that the agrarian conditions of Madras Presidency improved between 1850 and 1876. Grain prices began to rise slowly, government revenue demands were progressively lightened, road transport facilities improved, large irrigation works were completed, new cash crops were introduced and cultivation was extended.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, between 1876 and 1920, the agrarian economy recovered from the great Madras famine, and slow growth was recorded till the great depression.<sup>21</sup> Despite this general improvement in the agrarian economy, the conditions of the small and landless farmers deteriorated, due to lack of capital, credit and

marketing facilities, raw materials for cultivation and social conventions.<sup>22</sup> Having enough resources, the large farmers were not so badly affected by the famines. They provided credit to the small and marginal farmers, utilised the labour services by providing a maximum subsistence level, used non-village-based credit and marketing facilities and marketed their cash crops largely in the urban areas through improved transport facilities.<sup>23</sup> These developments led to widespread inequalities and exploitation of small farmers and landless labourers by the large farmers.

A similar conclusion is arrived at by Baker (1984) while arguing generally that the agrarian economy improved during the late 19th century due to the minimum facilities provided by the government and the increase in the demand for commercial crops. Contending that the agrarian economy witnessed a general decline during the early 20th century, he attributed this to the paucity of appropriate land for cultivation and scarcity of important agricultural inputs such as water and fertilisers, as evidenced in the fall of agricultural production as well as low levels of productivity. The decline in the availability of food was further accentuated by the choice of large farmers to produce cash crops.

The same period witnessed two features that were to become characteristic of the rural economy. First, the surplus in agriculture was not absorbed in agricultural production. Second, the social structure was characterised by an ever-increasing disparity, with all-powerful large farmers at the top and powerless agricultural labourers at the bottom. Above all, in the aftermath of the great depression, the colonial government's policy discouraged the reinvestment of agrarian capital in the agrarian sector and actively encouraged the transfer of investment from rural to urban areas. Cash crop farming and processing, factory and the artisan industry emerged as the major source of wealth in the society.<sup>24</sup> Exploring why this happened is beyond this overview.

During the 19th century, the rural economy of Madras Presidency was dominated and controlled by the large farmers. Frederick Augustus Nicholson's (1896) 'Report Regarding the Possibility of Introducing Land Banks into the Madras Presidency' showed that the credit facilities in Madras Presidency at the end of the 19th century, in particular 'grainlending, and to a lesser extent moneylending, placed a considerable amount of economic and political power in the hands of a minority of rich ryots'.<sup>25</sup> To overcome the difficulties and credit problems of small farmers, tenants and labourers, credit cooperative societies were established in Madras Presidency under the Cooperative Societies Act of 1904. They were nullified, however, by government's approach of encouraging the wealthy and influential farmers to become leading members of cooperatives and their administrative structure.<sup>26</sup> While the influential farmers

operated these societies according to their agenda, small farmers, tenants and labourers could not obtain credit facilities. That the small farmers, tenants and labourers suffered without any institutional credit facilities during the 19th century, even after establishing cooperative credit facilities in the rural areas, was pointed out by Bruce:

In forty-five years (1892-1937) the cooperative movement in Madras evolved from a ridiculed proposal for a technical and moral solution of the problem of rural indebtedness to a highly politicized credit structure manipulated by rural elites, local politicians, and the Government alike. . . . The inequities of the rural socio-economic structure combined with active government support, worked successfully to exclude the poor and place the rural rich in a dominant position in the movement.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, large farmers were able to invest in commercial ventures as they had access to credit facilities provided mainly by a particular community known as the Nattukottai Chettiyars.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it was a caste-based banking system that offered credit facilities mainly for commercial activities and not for agricultural purposes. Some of the *Dubashes* or mediators between the company and Indians also provided credit facilities.<sup>29</sup> Some of the *Dubashes* gave loans even to the Tanjore *rajas*.<sup>30</sup> During the 19th century, though there were few institutional credit facilities, the large farmers, businessmen and others first used caste-based banking systems and later utilised to a maximum extent the emerging institutional credit facilities.

### Tribal economic development

While much is known about the earlier developments, economic historians of South India have not given sufficiently detailed accounts of tribal economic history in colonial India. Although the pioneering and detailed work by Dharma Kumar (1965) focused on the economic history of agricultural labourer castes in southern India, it did not provide an account of tribal agricultural labourers. Her work pointed out in general that the proportion of the agricultural labourers to the total workforce and the total number of the agricultural workforce increased during 1871-1901.<sup>31</sup> However, realising the obvious omission in the earlier study, in the introduction to the reprint, she provides a bird's-eye view account of the tribal population, showing that tribal cultivators became agricultural labourers owing to the enforced forest policy, non-tribal settlement, growing population in the tribal areas and the ineffective laws restricting the alienation of tribal land.<sup>32</sup> Though she has not conducted any

intensive study, Kumar's general conclusion is that the number of tribal agricultural labourers increased during the colonial period.

The prevalent view among economic historians that agricultural labourers were better off during the pre-colonial period is well researched, and there is a substantiated theory that their condition deteriorated only after colonial intervention. The detailed analysis of wage rates of agricultural labourers in Madras Presidency during the pre-colonial and the colonial period by Reddy observed that '[a]round 1800 the agricultural labourers in South India were getting from their employers enough food to eat, suitable dresses to protect from climatic conditions and a tolerable house for their families to live in'.<sup>33</sup> Reddy confirms that after colonial intervention

the economic conditions of the labouring classes had deteriorated between 1800 and 1844; wages of rural labourers had risen upto 1875, kept mostly stable upto 1890 and began to decline after 1891-92; the wages trend was stagnant between 1910 and 1974.<sup>34</sup>

Several studies of economic history have concluded that the economic conditions of Madras Presidency were better during the pre-colonial period than in the early part of the 19th century. After British intervention, economic conditions in general deteriorated, as the colonial commercial policy imposed restrictions on the earlier traditional administrative and judicial structures as well as the self-subsistence economy of the tribals. Moreover, the early colonial rulers undertook no welfare measures. The pre-colonial rulers avoided disturbing the tribal system, and there was no prohibition on the collections of forest produce. As a result of colonial intervention, many restrictions were imposed on cultivation as well as the collection of forest produce. Further, during the pre-colonial period, the revenue collection method in the tribal areas of Salem and Baramahal region was different from that in the plains. But the colonial government, which did not have a separate agrarian policy for the tribal areas, equalised its treatment with the plains.

### Origin of the survey settlement in the hills

Survey activities started as early as 1859, with the exception of the hill villages and a few villages in the plains of Salem and Baramahal region; accordingly, the settlement was introduced in 1872.<sup>35</sup> In the southern taluks, there were 772 villages. Of this, 666 *Ryotwary* villages were surveyed and assessed, leaving 89 hill villages and 17 plain villages. The 89 hill villages were excluded from the survey due to 'the unhealthiness of climate, difficulty of approach and other causes'.<sup>36</sup> The assessment collected

from the unsurveyed hill villages was Rs 21,500 and Rs 19,660 for the plains villages.<sup>37</sup>

In the northern taluks, 268 hill villages were kept off from the survey and settlement, as surveying in the jungle tracts was of poor feasibility and there was nothing to gain by making an attempt.<sup>38</sup> After the transfer of the northern hill villages to the North and South Arcot districts in 1885, only 164 villages remained unsurveyed in Salem and Baramahal region. Of this, five villages fell entirely within the reserved forests, while seven did not have the *Ryotwary ayacut*, an account of the total land belonging to the village, including houses, and particulars of its distribution and condition, to be kept by the accountant.

Of the remaining 152 villages, 12 were settled in 1892-93, and 31 consisting of 10 hill villages in the Chitteri hills were settled in 1899-1900. The remaining 109, excluding the Kalrayan hills and Jarugumalai, were settled in 1904-5.<sup>39</sup> Jarugumalai was settled in 1916-17, while Kalrayan hills remained unsettled during the colonial period. Therefore, until the 20th century, the hill villages were not completely surveyed and settled like villages of the plains.

### Settlement in the hills

The survey was completed for the hitherto unsettled hill villages of these regions between 1896 and 1900. Prior to this, there was no accurate measurement of landholdings. The settlement was therefore generally in gross and on a 'very indefinite proportion of the produce'.<sup>40</sup> When the ten hill villages of Chitteri hills were settled in 1899-1900, more than 1,904 acres and 29 cents or 85 per cent of the land cultivated by the ryots was brought into the settlement account. While the land revenue under the survey account had increased by about 150 per cent as against the old revenue account (see Table 4.1), after the survey and settlement in the Chitteri hills, the incidence of average assessment decreased from six *annas* five paise to five *annas* six paise. Actually, the incidence of land revenue had increased due to the survey settlement. Before the survey and settlement, the tribals paid only nominal revenue for a small extent of land, though they actually cultivated much undeclared land.

Though the incidence of land revenue had increased when compared to the pre-survey settlement, the tribals benefited in two ways. First, prior to the survey and settlement, they did not have property rights for their land, as they enjoyed only occupancy rights.<sup>41</sup> Only after the survey and settlement did they get legal ownership of their land.

Second, but for the survey and settlement, the Forest Department, which was then (in the 1890s) extending the reserve forest, would have

COLONIAL AGRARIAN POLICIES (1872-1947)

Table 4.1 Survey and settlement of Chitteri hills: 1899 (Rs)

Villages	As per revenue account				As per survey settlement						
	Extent		Assessment average		Extent assessment			Average			
	Acres	Cents	Rs	As	As	Ps	Acres	Cents	Rs	As	Ps
Avalur	97	32	52	2	8	7	80	88	60	11	
Kattripatty	221	75	91	15	6	8	282	98	194	1	
Karappadi	49	18	8	-	2	7	50	90	20	9	
Kambalai	90	64	30	8	5	4	97	58	33	10	
Suriyakadai	35	99	23	12	10	7	66	19	38	2	
Chitteri	626	47	359	2	9	2	1,646	47	1,159	7	
Mangadai	10	05	3	8	5	8	12	20	6	2	
Selambai	96	89	65	2	10	9	98	22	70	15	
Tekkanampatty	46	57	16	9	5	-	33	73	25	15	
Kolambinatham	-		-		-		-		-		
Total	1,274	86	650	10	6	5	2,369	15	1,628	14	5 6

Source: Board Proceedings (Revenue Settlement, Land Records and Agriculture), No. 56, 13 February 1899 (Press), Tamil Nadu State Archives, Chennai.

notified most of the lands under the possession of the tribals. The effects of this were clearly visible after the notification, as the tribals relentlessly protested against the Forest Department regarding their paths, temple, lands and tanks being included in the reserve forest by the latter. Initially, the colonial government neglected the survey and settlement of the hills considering the huge expenditure it required. Later, with increasing incidence of land revenue, the government provided ownership rights, and despite imposing restrictions, the earlier unrestricted utilisation of the land and forest resources by tribals could also not be denied.

In 1904, the government proposed to settle the tribal villages of Salem and Baramahal region, including the Chitteri hills, which had been settled in 1899-1900. However, the Special Settlement Officer of Salem (1903) argued that the Malaiyalis found it less easy to accommodate to the change in demand, though difficulties had been experienced in making the collections in Chitteri hills since the start of the settlement. He further said that 'it is inadvisable to make any enhancement in the assessment of these [Chitteri hill] villages of the present time'.<sup>42</sup> However, the earlier three 'sort' settlement system based on soil quality continued in the Chitteri hills, while a different method was adopted for the settlement of other hills in 1905.

For settlement purposes, the soil of the hills in these regions was broadly classified into two categories, red-loams (VII class) and red-sands (VIII class). In the surveyed area of 99 villages, the soil was classified into five

sorts.<sup>43</sup> The hill areas of the Salem and Baramahal region had quite fertile soils. About 91.6 per cent of the soils in the hills were red-loams and the remaining 9.4 per cent red-sands.<sup>44</sup> Of the red-loam soils, about 75 per cent belonged to the occupied dry and wet lands which came under the first three sorts and the remaining 25 per cent under the fourth and fifth sorts. About 80 per cent of the unoccupied dry lands came under the fourth and fifth sorts of the red-loam category. Almost all the fertile lands in the hills were occupied, while those left unoccupied were of poor quality.

During the first survey and settlement of 1872, the three sorts introduced in these regions classified soil into different groups, with the lowest dry group being rated third and the lowest wet group the fifth.<sup>45</sup> But in 1904-5, five sorts were introduced in the hills, while the previous three sorts system continued in the remaining parts of these regions. Considering the disadvantages of the hills, particularly lack of communication and marketing, the fourth and fifth groups for the dry land and the sixth group for the wetlands were created. These classifications were made on the basis of not only the availability of communication and marketing facilities but also the extent of excess land being brought into the survey account. No hill village was brought under the first two groups as they were clubbed into the fourth, fifth and sixth groups.<sup>46</sup>

Only two villages came under the third group, as both of them were located in the plains and had good communication and marketing facilities. The Shervaroy hills and Aranuthumalai were brought under the fourth group, because these hills were prosperous and developing almost at par with the land value of remote villages in the plains.<sup>47</sup> In the Kolli hills, a large extent of land was brought into the survey account,<sup>48</sup> almost double the revenue account.<sup>49</sup> Considering the extent of land in the survey, the Kolli hills was brought into the fifth group. The Pachamalai and Bodamalai hills did not have good soil and accessibility; hence, they were listed under the sixth group. The Kolli hills alone had irrigational facilities, and these wetlands came under the sixth group. Though the colonial government claimed that the assessment was determined on the basis of the economic condition of the tracts and a detailed comparison with the soil and assessment of the adjoining resettled tracts of the plains, its actual expectation was of more revenue from the hills.<sup>50</sup>

The settlements in the hills were not determined on the basis of the normal principles of settlement. In the plains, settlement was made based on the average price of staple grains – paddy for wetlands, *cholam*, *kambu* and *ragy* for drylands – after deducting traders' profit and transport cost, average yield per acre and agricultural expenses – wages, costs of seed, manure, weeding, reaping, threshing, repair of implements and fees of village artisans.<sup>51</sup> Whereas no standard crops were cultivated, no crop

experiments were followed, prices of the commodities, natural calamities, lack of communication, cost of cultivation, crude methods of cultivation, unlevelled land, clutches of moneylenders and the grain trade, mixed crops and sale value of the land were not taken into account in the hill areas. Without considering all these problems, land revenue was fixed as in the adjacent plain villages.<sup>52</sup> The tribal economy was absolutely different from the economy in the plains, but this did not deter the colonial government from fixing land revenue like that in the plains villages. This proves that the colonial government's interest lay in earning the highest revenue irrespective of the consequences for the economy of the tribals.

About 16,855.12 acres or about 65.82 per cent of land (more than the revenue account) was identified under the survey. Prior to the survey, the ryots had to pay only a meagre amount of land rent or about two-thirds or three, four, five and sometime ten times less than their cultivated lands. In the pre-survey period, the extent of occupied land was estimated on the basis of the village official's (*karnum*) account, and consequently, the revenue figures were for the most part imaginary or substantially lower.<sup>53</sup> Under this method, the tribals enjoyed more land at nominal payment. Consequently, after the survey, the growth rate of the extent of land was higher than the growth rate of assessment. The growth rate of land was about 66 per cent, but the assessment was only about 16.11 per cent (see Table 4.2). Though the growth rate of assessment was less than the land, the burden on the tribals had increased alongside restrictions on the extent of cultivation in the tribal areas. In other words, the tribals were forced to pay more for the same amount of cultivated land.

After the introduction of the Madras Forest Act 1882, a large amount of forest land was notified as reserve forests. In the 1890s, the total forest cover in Salem and Baramahal region was 2,725,395 acres, of which 1,025,310 acres was occupied and 1,700,085 acres remained unoccupied. While the government had ordered that about 518,853 acres of the unoccupied land should be brought under the reserve forest, the Forest Department brought about 704,310 acres under the settlement.<sup>54</sup> In 1896, still more areas were brought under the forest reserve and settlement than the prescribed extent. Of course, most of the reserved forests were in the hills. Despite several objections raised by both the tribals and others against the proposed reserve forests, a large amount of forest cover was notified as reserve forest at the close of the 19th century. Earlier, these areas had been utilised by the tribals without any restrictions. Consequently, the availability of forest land for the tribals was reduced. In fact, there existed little possibility of extending cultivation into the hills at the end of the 19th century.

Table 4.2 Difference between the revenue and survey account in different hills: 1904

Hills	As per revenue account						As per survey account									
	Extent			Assessment			Extent			Assessment			Incidence			
	Acres	Rs	As Ps	Rs	As Ps	Rs As Ps	Acres	Rs	As Ps	Rs	As Ps	Rs As Ps				
<i>Dry lands</i>																
Shervaroys	9,685.57	9,681	7 2	1	0	14	12,079.74	11,072	15	0	0	14	8			
Aranuthumalai	987.68	1,115	4 1	1	2	1	1,562.20	1,228	11	0	0	12	7			
Bodamalai	463.84	292	11 5	0	10	0	1,009.67	337	15	5	0	5	4			
Namakkal-Kolli hills	6,046.25	6,470	8 0	1	1	1	11,526.50	7,113	15	8	0	9	11			
Attrur-Kolli hills	4,519.58	4,530	6 5	1	0	0	9,030.37	4,991	3	11	0	8	10			
Pachamalai	1,030.36	943	12 0	0	14	8	3,021.54	1,093	9	0	0	5	9			
Villiyampatty	328.74	231	3 3	0	11	3	400.18	324	2	8	0	12	10			
Palamalai	806.37	470	11 0	0	9	4	1,204.27	698	2	7	0	8	4			
Pachagoundan patty	81.58	54	1 8	0	10	6	110.26	63	13	2	0	9	3			
Veppadi	495.81	416	7 3	0	13	5	653.12	451	14	4	0	11	0			
Malaiyalapatti	179.61	134	5 0	0	11	11	200.89	139	8	0	0	11	2			
Puluthikuttai	302.03	287	6 2	0	15	2	361.87	262	10	7	0	11	6			
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,927.42</b>	<b>24,628</b>	<b>3 6</b>				<b>41,163.61</b>	<b>27,778</b>	<b>9 4</b>							
<i>Wet lands</i>																
Kolli hills	983.47	3,127	9 11				1,602.50	4,450	3 0							
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>25,910.89</b>	<b>27,755</b>	<b>13 4</b>				<b>42,766.01</b>	<b>32,228</b>	<b>12 4</b>							

Sources: GO No. 605, Revenue, 30 June 1905, p. 52, TNSA; GO, No. 102, Revenue, 10 January 1910, pp. 28-83, TNSA.

It is important to be aware that, until the survey, land assessment was determined on the basis of the number of ploughs and hoes used for cultivation. The tribals cultivated more land than the government's estimation per plough or hoe. So, naturally, the incidence of tax was low. Tax incidence of the survey assessment per acre apparently seemed to be low, while the real incidence of tax was high. After the survey and settlement, the tribals thus had to pay a higher amount of rent for the same extent of cultivated land, resulting in a higher incidence of tax.

### Resettlement in the hills

Since the first survey and settlement, the colonial government did not initiate any development measures such as credit and marketing facilities, irrigation and other infrastructural facilities for the tribals until the resettlement period. Whether the colonial government had considered the backwardness of the tribals or was interested only in extracting more revenue during the resettlement period is an important question that needs answering in order to understand the framing of colonial agrarian policy of the tribals in Madras Presidency.

It appears that the colonial government did not consider the welfare of the tribal population of the same period. Until 1937, only the Pachamalai inhabitants were recognised as the 'Jungle Tribes'.<sup>55</sup> Later, in 1938, the hill inhabitants of Kalrayan, Yelagiri, Jawadhi, Chitteri, Kolli and Aranuthumalai were also recognised. This indicates that the colonial rulers had not given any attention to the development of the tribes in Madras Presidency.

Until 1938, the hill inhabitants were treated merely as 'revenue-bearing souls', and the government of Madras undertook no welfare measures for them. The colonial government ordered an inquiry in 1937 to ascertain the needs of these tribes and communities and contemplate measures necessary for their welfare. In a separate communication to the Salem collector, the government ordered that the report should be prepared only for the Malaiyali inhabitants of Salem district.<sup>56</sup> The report was to cover education, communication, medical facilities and the different forms of exploitation faced from outsiders. The report, dated 29 April 1942,<sup>57</sup> stated:

There has been no appreciable change in the economic and social condition of the Malaiyalis in the Salem district during the year 1941-42. Poverty, want of education and inherent indolence arising out of the unhealthy localities they live in are responsible for this state of affairs. Improvement of communications in hill tracts, the opening of more schools and dispensaries are needed urgently.

However, the colonial government did not execute any developmental activity based on this report. Meanwhile, in 1946, A.M. Somasundaram of Dakshina Bharata Adivas Seva Sangh, Musulipatnam, appealed to the colonial government to form an 'Aboriginal Tribal Enquiry Committee' to formulate policies and developmental measures.<sup>58</sup> In response, the government constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Vanmelakanti Raghavaiah. The committee, after visiting the area, prepared a detailed report on tribal economic and social conditions, customs, habits, mode of worship, marriage and rules.<sup>59</sup> But continuing with – and apparently hiding behind – its policy of non-intervention, the colonial government did not initiate any welfare measures of a practical nature.

To secure more revenue, different methods like permanent settlement, annual settlement and *amani* management (directly from the cultivators) were resorted to during the early colonial period. The British rulers' claims that the administration emphasised welfare of the tribals are belied by their actions. Whenever a balance of land revenue arose in a particular system, they changed it and retained it to yield a high revenue collection. For example, during Read's settlement (1793-95) and at the time of the first survey and settlement (1871-72), the hill villages were not surveyed like the plains. This was because it required a huge amount of investigation, while the government cited the 'unhealthy climate' in the hill villages as the reason for non-action. To substantiate increased demands in land revenue, the colonial government eventually proffered reasons like improved communication, better credit and marketing facilities and increase in land value in the hill areas. But, actually, no such change had taken place in the hills during that period.

Thus, though no significant improvement had taken place in the agricultural sector since the first survey and settlement in the hills, land revenue was hiked during the resettlement period. The revenue settlement period of 30 years in the hills, which expired at the end of 1934-35, was extended to 1935-36 to synchronise with the region in general. The resettlement of the hill villages was started in 1936-37 with the same classification of three sorts in the Chitteri hills and five sorts in the other hill tracts. The sixth group was removed. The Bodamalai and Pachamalai hills were brought under the fifth group, while the remaining hills continued in the same group as in the 1904-5 settlements. Jarugumalai hill, the first to be settled in 1916-17, was initially brought under the sixth group and was resettled in 1936 along with other hills and listed under the fifth group.<sup>60</sup>

Though the colonial government claimed that the social and economic conditions of these areas were duly considered, after a detailed comparison of the existing assessment with the plain villages and making liberal concessions for the hills on the basis of their disadvantageous situation, it

can be shown that the revenue assessment was hiked. Actually, the government expected more revenue from the tribals.

Revenue settlement of the hill villages was based neither on productivity per acre nor on the changing prices of commodities in the hill areas. The land rent was hiked from Rs 6-4-0 per acre to Rs 12-8-0 on the basis of increased sale value of land in these tracts ranging from 43.75 per cent to 156.25 per cent for the five years ending with *fasly* (a crop year starting on 1 July and ending 30 June) 1342 (1932-33) over the figures of the first five years of the settlement.<sup>61</sup> The increased sale value was not because of improvements in agriculture but caused by non-tribal settlement and the introduction of commercial crops in the hills. But there was no change in the money rate of the last settlement (1904-5) for Aranuthumalai, Jarugumalai and Pachamalai. In the Kolli hills and the 'village green' (common grazing area) of the Shervaroy hills, the increase rate was at 12.5 per cent or two *annas* for the rupee and 6.25 per cent in the Chitteri hills (see Table 4.3). The 12 per cent enhancement of land revenue was imposed in all the hills except the Chitteri hills, and the tax incidence was high in the Kolli hills and Shervaroy hills. Although there was no remarkable improvement in communications, education, marketing and credit, the rate of assessment had increased.

Lack of communication facilities in the hill areas remained one of the major constraints in tribal development. Before colonial intervention there were no roads in the hills, only footpaths. After colonial intervention, bridle paths and pack-bullock facilities were developed in some of the hills in the western parts of the Shervaroy hills, which had a concentration of British people. No such facilities, not even a good footpath, were laid in the eastern parts of the Shervaroy hills, where only tribals lived.

During the 20th century, the colonial government improved some communication facilities in the different hills of the Salem and Baramahal region. In the Shervaroy hills, a new ghat road for wheeled traffic was laid during 1902-3. The remaining two-bridle paths were modified for easy transportation. In the western parts of the hills, roads were laid to link different villages. In addition, many coffee planters had constructed private roads. But the eastern parts did not have any roads except for the footpaths, which were unusable even for pack-bullocks.<sup>62</sup> In 1913-14, five bridle paths with a length of about 31 miles were opened in the Kolli hills. However, these were not modified for wheeled traffic and pack-bullocks.<sup>63</sup> In 1929-31, an unmetalled road of 6½ miles was laid in the Kolli hills. In Aranuthumalai, only one tract was accessible by pack-bullocks and asses.<sup>64</sup> Thus, a limited extent of communication and infrastructure were established during the colonial period mainly in the semi-tribal areas, whereas other tribal villages remained deprived of such facilities.



In addition to the lack of communication networks, there was no institutional credit facility available to the tribals of Salem and Baramahal region till the end of the 19th century. The only source of credit was from the non-tribals, particularly the Chettiyars and Muslims, who extended credit on several conditions. They charged a higher rate of interest than the market rate and purchased commodities from the tribals at a low price. In general, they functioned like moneylenders-cum-traders.

To protect the tribals from the clutches of moneylenders, the government opened five agricultural cooperative societies in the Kolli hills and eight in the Shervaroy hills during 1921-22. Only a few tribals became members of these societies, however, which had a very low working capital. In 1923-24, the average working capital was only about Rs 70. During 1932-33, the number of members as well as working capital considerably increased (see Table 4.4). The Malaiyalis showed least awareness of the cooperative societies and reportedly never returned the borrowed money in time. Since the money they took was mostly spent on unproductive activities, the cooperative societies lent a meagre amount only. The report of the agricultural cooperative societies confirmed that the Malaiyalis did not make use of the cooperative societies to their best advantage. Citing their irregularity in repaying the loans, the societies did not extend any fresh loans to the tribals and limited the society to loan recovery.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, the cooperative societies failed to expand their duties.

In the Shervaroy hills, the number of members and the amount of working capital had increased to about 25 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively, during 1922-33 (see Table 4.4). The cooperative society had extended assistance mainly to agriculturists and gave few loans to non-agriculturists. Though it gave considerable advances to the Malaiyalis, it could not survive, as the report shows: 'No amount was borrowed during

Table 4.4 Members and working capital of the Kolli and Shervaroy hills' agricultural cooperative society: 1922-23 to 1932-33

Year	Number of members	Agriculturist	Working capital
<i>Kolli hills</i>			
1922-23	136	—	1,194
1923-24	136	132	9,404
1932-33	116	109	6,152
<i>Shervaroy hills</i>			
1922-23	321	318	1,166
1932-33	438	433	9,828

Source: GO, No. 1793, 17 August 1936, pp. 28-29, TNSA.

the last five years (1928-33) . . . presumably due to the fact that the Malaiyalis are unable to act up to the rules of the societies in regard to the repayment of the loans.<sup>66</sup> These institutionally sponsored credit facilities, though meagre, were available only in the Shervaroy and Kolli hills and helped only an insignificant number of the Malaiyalis. While the tribals were not properly informed of the credit facilities, traders and middlemen indulged in false propaganda to prevent them from becoming members of the cooperative societies, saying that 'the societies would take away their lands and other properties by law if they failed to repay the loans in time'.<sup>67</sup> The stringent rules and regulations of the cooperative societies, as well as the lack of capital and information of the tribals, were the main causes of the failure of institutional credit facilities in the hills.

### Cropping patterns

Foodgrains were largely cultivated in the region until the beginning of the 20th century, and the cropping pattern in the different hills did not change much between the settlement periods. The main crops cultivated in the hills of Salem and Baramahal region until the 1905 settlement were *ragy* or *kevaroo*, *thinay*, *varagu*, *cholam*, *kambu*, *panivaragu* and dry paddy; pulses — *mochaikottay*, *thovarai*, *tatapyru*, *kodallay* and *avarai*; and condiments — mustards, chillies, onion and garlic.<sup>68</sup> In 1904, about 86.62 per cent of the total cropped area in the different hills was under foodgrains; 7.09 per cent was under pulses; 3.6 per cent was under oilseeds and only 2.7 per cent was under other crops, such as coffee, tobacco, fruits and vegetables (see Table 4.5). The same cropping pattern had continued almost till the resettlement period. In fact, the area under foodgrain cultivation had increased in most of the hills. The area under other crops had also increased marginally in the various hills except the Shervaroys, where coffee was cultivated to some extent mainly by British settlers and others from the plains. This shows that even during the resettlement period, there was no considerable change in the cropping pattern.

The tribals, who were dependent upon non-institutional sources for marketing, sold only a small quantity of their produce, largely non-food crops, through them. The price of the products in the hill areas was always lower than that in the plains. In the Kolli hills, about 9 to 12 *annas* per *kandagam* (80 Madras measures) was lower than that of the market price in the plains (see Table 4.6). Such price differences existed between the hills and plains during the resettlement period due to the lack of transport facilities in different hill areas. The Malaiyalis were unable to get the full market price for their small quantity of marketed goods till the end of the colonial regime, largely due to the non-availability of institutional marketing facilities.

Table 4.5 Cropping pattern in the different hills: 1904-33 (in percentage)

Products		Chitteri	Aranu-	Boda-	Kolli	Shervaroy	Pacha-	Jarugu-
		hills	thumalai	malai	hills	hills	malai	malai
Rice	1904	3.19	0.09	0.18	15.23	3.20	10.81	-
	1933	9.65	0.83	0.80	20.61	2.29	13.59	-
Cholam	1904	2.71	0.17	0.53	0.18	5.26	-	11.66
	1933	4.13	0.66	0.13	1.51	5.97	0.88	-
Kambu	1904	6.43	1.25	-	.30	0.01	5.36	16.67
	1933	2.01	0.71	-	0.72	0.02	5.08	-
Ragy	1904	51.51	62.28	31.50	38.85	41.67	43.19	40.00
	1933	59.04	56.25	35.15	28.88	23.74	28.08	60.33
Varagu	1904	11.68	-	-	1.28	3.24	24.66	-
	1933	9.31	8.03	4.77	4.62	13.27	19.54	10.87
Samai	1904	7.38	0.98	18.05	13.92	15.00	13.45	-
	1933	4.71	2.48	28.88	20.78	16.36	20.42	7.06
Other	1904	2.60	32.20	26.73	16.29	19.71	2.00	12.92
	1933	3.38	25.43	14.46	9.35	6.67	0.92	10.87
Total	1904	85.5	96.97	76.99	87.05	88.09	90.47	81.25
	1933	92.23	94.39	84.19	86.47	68.32	88.49	89.13
Horse gram	1904	4.83	0.27	11.33	0.64	-	1.52	8.33
	1933	2.76	0.55	4.64	1.62	0.41	6.42	-
Other	1904	4.89	2.14	8.50	5.24	0.01	0.24	1.67
	1933	2.52	2.09	2.52	2.73	8.75	1.19	6.52
Total	1904	9.72	2.41	19.83	5.88	0.01	1.76	10.00
	1933	5.28	2.64	7.16	4.35	9.16	7.61	6.52
Groundnut	1904	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1933	-	-	-	0.30	-	0.13	-
Other	1904	3.35	0.44	2.12	3.34	-	7.61	8.33
	1933	1.84	0.94	2.52	2.86	1.74	3.03	4.35
Total	1904	3.35	0.44	2.12	3.34	-	7.61	8.33
	1933	1.84	0.94	2.52	2.86	1.74	3.03	4.35
Other crops	1904	1.43	0.18	1.06	3.73	11.9	0.16	0.42
	1933	0.65	2.03	6.13	-	20.78	0.74	-

Source: GO No. 1793, Revenue, 17 August 1936, TNSA.

Table 4.6 Price differences between hills and plains: 1904

Crops	Price in the hills			Price in the market			Difference		
	Rs	As	Ps	Rs	As	Ps	Rs	As	Ps
	Raggy	3	3	0	3	12	0	0	12
Samai	2	12	0	3	8	0	0	12	0
Millet	2	12	0	3	8	0	0	12	0
Mochai	5	0	0	5	9	0	0	9	0
Wheat	2	0	0	2	9	0	0	9	0
Mustard	9	0	0	9	12	0	0	12	0

Source: GO, No. 605, Revenue, 30 June 1905, p. 3, TNSA.

### Alienation of tribal land

Tribal lands had become increasingly attractive to the non-tribals due to lower prices when compared with the plains. This led to the alienation of a large amount of tribal land. Table 8.12, pertaining to the alienation of sale transactions in the hills compared to the plains and also the period differences of agricultural land in the hills and outside. Further, it shows a steady increase in the sale value of the land in the hills. Actually, land value increased not so much due to the improved land conditions, such as land levelling and improved irrigation facilities, but due to the settlement of non-tribals and introduction of commercial crops in the different hills.

Land alienation in the hill areas first began with the arrival of the British settlers. Later, the plains people also followed, thereby accentuating the problem. Subsequently, lack of institutional credit facilities pushed the tribals into debt, and as a consequence, the avaricious moneylenders encroached on their lands. While the former factor played a major role during the 19th century, the latter was the sole cause of the problem during the 20th century.<sup>69</sup>

The colonial government ordered that there should not be any separate assessment for the hill areas from the coming revenue settlement. The order stated that 'these hill villages are to be taken up for next resettlement along with the plain villages and a uniform percentage may, with advantage be adopted for both the tracts'.<sup>70</sup> Here, the sole aim was to extract more revenue from the hill people.

Land assessment rates, which went up in the hill areas after the 1905 survey and settlement, were further enhanced during the resettlement period. This was justified by citing developed infrastructure facilities in the hill areas while no such improvements were evident during this period. Consequently, the survey and settlement increased the burden of the hill inhabitants. The colonial government's disregard for a separate revenue settlement for the hills evidences that it did not sympathise with the tribals' isolation, their underdevelopment and other problems, while its main objective was and remained to extract as much revenue as possible.

### Conclusion

Until the third quarter of the 19th century, the colonial agrarian policy in Madras Presidency focused on encouraging export-oriented commodities and extracting land revenue from the farmers. No considerable measures were initiated for the development of agriculture and to protect the farmers from natural calamities. The objective of the colonial agrarian policy with an emphasis on extracting land revenue from the farmers got changed after the great famine, turning the attention towards

the farmers. This, however, benefited only the large farmers. The Royal Commission reported on agriculture, though its recommendations were not implemented due to the depression. In short, even the few measures initiated for agrarian development benefited only the large-scale farmers while having an adverse impact on the small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers in Madras Presidency during the colonial period.

Throughout Madras Presidency, the colonial government did not formulate a policy for tribal welfare and development in general and agrarian policies towards the tribals in particular, until the end of the 19th century. In fact, until the early 20th century, the colonial agrarian policy in the hill areas was solely concentrated on extracting more land revenue from the hill people.

While introducing the survey and settlement in the hills during the early 20th century also, the colonial agrarian policy emphasised only revenue and did not envisage any steps of tribal development. The colonial government disregarded the difficulties of the tribals while fixing the land revenue in the hills in line with criteria for the plains villages.

The settlement in the hills only increased the burden on the tribals, along with restrictions on their rights and access over land and forests in Madras Presidency during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Prior to the survey and settlement, the hill inhabitants cultivated a large tract of land and paid revenue on the basis of the number of implements used for cultivation and not according to the area of land under cultivation. After the survey and settlement, they were compelled to pay on the basis of the area under cultivation. While land rights were restricted, the revenue incidence had gone up.

During the second quarter of the 20th century, the inadequate communication and credit facilities provided in the hills were mainly for the British-inhabited hills. Consequently, the land rent was hiked in the different hills. The changes that had taken place in the agrarian economy of Madras Presidency since the late 19th century are not reflected in the tribal economy until the end of the colonial regime. The colonial agrarian policy in the hill areas of Madras Presidency, it should be admitted, meant only to extract land revenue from the tribals, and nothing else.

### Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally published in *South Asia Research*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Copyright 2006 © Sage Publications. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.
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