

GEOGRAPHICAL ENCROACHMENT¹

The nature and extent of the peasant revolts for the colonial period had not been explored extensively in Indian historiography literature.² Existing historiographical literatures have mainly focused 'on national or regional leaders, patriotic ideologies, elite pressures or factional manoeuvres by patron-client linkages'.³ In recent years (since the 1980s), the historiography shifted to focus on the 'popular and particularly peasant initiative and "self-mobilisation"', in other words, 'history from below' or 'subaltern studies'.⁴ These studies criticised 'the key and overriding role of the nationalist ideology and leadership in allegedly giving for a sporadic discontent, the other at times perhaps overstressing or romanticizing peasant spontaneity, initiative and rebelliousness through a theory of a fundamentally distinct "peasant nationalism"'.⁵

There were two kinds of resistance during the colonial period, namely primary and secondary. The first type was witnessed during the early colonial period and was generally led by traditional elements (princes, tribal chiefs, zamindars and religious leaders) mainly for the restorative objective.⁶ Several studies were emphatic that after the emergence of the nationalist movement 'the rural masses in different regions joined these upsurges for reasons of their own - reasons which did not coincide' with the (ideology of the nationalist movement).⁷ These types of movements were usually against the immediate Indian oppressor and not anti-imperialist. According to Sarkar, 'The popular movements were directed usually against the immediate Indian oppressor rather than the distant white superior, and so were often not consciously or subjectively anti-imperialist'.⁸ Such movements had declined after the First War of Independence. The secondary resistance characterised by a new type of leadership was clearly not just for the restoration of the past.⁹

The word 'revolt' is invariably used to indicate the rebel consciousness of the person or group of people towards the authority in forms ranging from anonymous letters and riots to armed rebellion.¹⁰ Further, the

GEOGRAPHICAL ENCROACHMENT

rebel consciousness of the people was indicated by scholars by different names, namely jacquerie, revolt, insurgency, rebellion, mutiny, uprising, rising, riot, resistance, all kinds of resistance movements violent or non-violent, organised or spasmodic, pre-political or political.¹¹ It is also called movements.¹² Though called by different names, broadly it indicates the actions of a person or group of people against authority. The rebel consciousness consolidates itself predominantly due to the negative attitude of the government towards the poor, weaker sections and minorities and foreign alien forces.

The revolt/protest is not necessarily an armed struggle or a collective form of organised militancy. It could be also in the form of anonymous letters in the early stage. For instance, in England, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, about 300 anonymous letters were submitted to the government about both private and social grievances, most of them highlighting the latter. The grievances raised in them were food scarcity, high price of food, low level of wage rate, tithes, introduction of threshing machines, dismissal of servants, enclosures, agrarian unrest and so on.¹³ Rude (1985) says that economic issues have played a prominent role in the popular disturbances in the rural areas of France and England during the 18th and 19th centuries. Popular protests occurred both in England and in France

to maintain or improve living standards, to raise or prevent reductions in wages, to resist encroachments on their holdings in land or the rights of common pasture, to protect their means of livelihood against the threat of new mechanical devices and, above all, to ensure a constant supply of cheap and plentiful food.¹⁴

The popular protests were not intended to change the total structure of the society. For example, the popular protests in the 18th and 19th centuries of Europe were not intended to establish equality of wealth and landholding but for a 'right of subsistence'.¹⁵ Whenever their livelihood was not considered by the government in favouring the rich, the poor had protested and destroyed the properties of the rich. This is a way of subaltern protest against the economically and politically powerful. For example, in England, since the early 18th century, several game laws had been enacted and huge amounts of penalties were imposed on hunting. The landlords, however, availed the sole privileges for hunting over a large area of land. The law was very active when the poor were hunting for their livelihood but had remained passive towards the landlords. As a result, the poor burnt down the estates against the discrimination.¹⁶

Negligence of the subsistence of the subalterns by the rulers and the protective measures for the landlords or the economically powerful also led to revolts. For instance, during the 17th and 18th centuries several laws were enacted in England to protect the property of the individuals by imposing capital punishment, which had led to riots in the civil society.¹⁷ The people resorted to guerrilla activities to redress their grievances and attacked government properties. In Ireland, the white boys had indulged in guerrilla activities against the rack rent, oppressive tithe collection, excessive priests' dues and evictions.¹⁸

The popular protests that emerged for a particular reason in Ireland and Latin American countries were basically against the alien forces and centred around the land question which had continued from the 9th century in Ireland and the 16th century in Latin American countries.¹⁹

In different parts of Madras Presidency, several *poligars* (owner of *Palai-yaputs*), headmen and peasants had revolted against the colonial government mainly for over-assessment of land revenue during the late 18th century.²⁰ The *poligars* of Panchalankurichi, Sivaganga and Virupakshi of southern districts of Madras Presidency revolted against the colonial administration at the end of the 18th century.²¹ In the Salem and Baramahall region of Madras Presidency, farmers had protested against the high rate of land revenue, demanding remission for drought years during the early 19th century. In 1810, in various places of Denkenecottah and Balaghat regions, farmers assembled together and protested by giving up cultivation against the high rate of land revenue. But the revolt was brutally suppressed by the government. Though the government did not take any disciplinary action against the farmers, it targeted the leaders, who were called ringleaders. About six ringleaders were apprehended at different times during the revolt, and the government had wanted to banish them in the court.²² In 1819, most of the farmers of Valloor and Karjadyar *mootahs* of Paramutty taluk had not paid a part of the revenue for the year 1818 owing to the very heavy assessment imposed that year. They demanded to remit that amount. About 19 inhabitants went about the *mootahs* and collected the farmers together, urging them not to cultivate the lands till the government remitted the previous year's balance. The collector arrested and imprisoned those who led the farmers against the government.²³

The colonial government suppressed the farmers' revolt by targeting the leaders of the revolt during the early 19th century like the anonymous petitioners in England who were identified and victimised during the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁴ Suppressing the revolt by using the military nevertheless 'could not crush the spirit of resistance that was because the underlying causes of the disturbances were left free to grow in every

village and district'.²⁵ Scott (1985) says that the peasant uprisings were 'nearly always crushed unceremoniously'.²⁶ In the agrarian literature, the tribal movements were invariably treated as peasant movements.²⁷ Despite the similarities common to both in terms of the causes for resistance, the tribal movements are much wider than the peasant movements, because the tribal movements were not confined to the agrarian issues alone. They encompass issues ranging from forest resources, ethnicity, political and cultural issues.²⁸ In other words, they represented a curious mix of political, agrarian and cultural questions.²⁹ Sometimes, the tribal-peasants revolted against the peasants for the alienation of their lands and other resources.

Ragavaiah gives a vivid account of the tribal revolts of different continents, namely Australia, South America and North America, where they had either progressively declined or disappeared over the period due to the settlement of British, Portuguese, French and Dutch intruders. In addition to this, they had lost their lands and became labourers and slaves, and moved into the jungles and other distant places.³⁰ He concluded that the

conflict based on racial prejudices, religious differences, economic exploitation . . . dominate the struggle. The weaker parties submit and surrender to the stronger ones, gradually lose their identity, solidarity and parity and finally get lost in a labyrinthine maze, becoming misfits in the new set up unable to relinquish their traditions, cultures and their old ways of life.³¹

In India, the policy of non-interference towards the tribals, followed by the erstwhile rulers in the subcontinent, continued during the early colonial period.³² Once the British administration intervened, the common property nature of cultivable land, traditional judicial systems, utilisation of forest resources, failure of the government in restricting religious conversion and exploitation by the moneylenders and the zamindars forced the tribals to revolt against these intrusions.³³ Further, he says that the tribals had revolted 'to safeguard their honour, to protect their cherished freedom, and to get redressal against the money-lender, zamindar, and other parasitic land-holders who tried to deprive them of all they had'.³⁴

Welfare of the tribals was practically ignored by successive Hindu and Muslim rulers, and the colonial rulers did not differ much in this respect.³⁵ The colonial government, which knew little about its aboriginal subjects, had neither formulated a consistent policy towards their betterment nor implemented any measures for their development with a specific object in view.³⁶ During the colonial period, the tribal problem was absolutely

neglected, and the main concern of the administration was preservation of law and order in the tribal areas. All the more, the colonial government encroached upon the tribal systems in different ways. Hutton says: 'Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of British rule in India did most of them much more harm than good.'³⁷ Consequent to these infringements, the tribals revolted against the colonial administrators, as well as the non-tribals, in order to protect their system.³⁸ Between 1778 and 1947, nearly 80 cases of tribal revolts had erupted in India.³⁹ Almost all such revolts in protest against high revenue demand were also an attempt at retaining their political, administrative and cultural identity and their subsistence economy.⁴⁰ The tribal revolt of Kolli hills had been left out in Ragavaiah's account.

The tribal revolts/movements during the colonial period could be broadly classified into three major periods. Up to 1857, the movements were basically crude in form and at securing some concessions from the rulers; between 1857 and 1900, they were against the land revenue system, civil and criminal regulations and widespread famines; and from 1900 until independence (1947), they were against the non-tribal intruders, moneylenders, traders, zamindars and administrators who tried to exploit the tribal way of life.⁴¹

Tribal revolt defined in this chapter broadly includes a tribe or headman or a group of tribals collectively expressing their grievances in the form of disobeying government orders/directions or fighting with arms and ammunitions against the immediate authority of the government, but not necessarily to overthrow the system. The main objective of the revolt in Kolli hills of Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency was to retain the geographical boundaries – *kombe* villages – under tribal control. Until the Read survey, the *kombe* villages of the Kolli hills were controlled by the tribal headman of the hills. During the Read survey, these villages were notified as independent villages without consulting the tribal headman. The tribals wanted to keep these villages for their socio-economic importance and to retain their prestige as well.

Unlike the 19th and 20th centuries, exhaustive information on the colonial administration is not available for the 18th century, especially for the hill areas of Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency. This region, brought under colonial control on 17 March 1792, had remained under the same administrative system, that is through the tribal headman, which prevailed during the pre-colonial period. Hence, the colonial records did not give any information about the name of the headman, who headed the revolt, but they provided details about how much revenue was fixed for each division of the hills. Therefore, the particulars as to who headed the revolt, the number of tribals who participated and so

on were not found in the colonial archival records. However, the solidarity among the tribals, extent of the spread, the type of negative attitude that prevailed, origin of the revolt and its broad economic and social causes and its narrow specific concerns could be analysed with the help of the Proceedings of the Board of Revenue, Salem District Collectorate Records, Reports of Proceedings of the Special Commission, Permanent Settlement Records, Baramahal Records, manuals, gazetteers and other published materials. With the available information from these sources, an attempt has been made to reconstruct the historiography of tribal revolt in Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency in the light of subaltern literature.

Tribal system during the pre-revolt period

The Kolli hills is located about 60 km south and south-east of Salem, district headquarters. It is spread over 170 square miles, 18 miles from north to south and 12 miles from east to west. It lies between $11^{\circ}11'$ and $11^{\circ}30'$ latitudes and $78^{\circ}19'$ and $78^{\circ}32'$ longitudes. The Kolli hills is otherwise called 'suduragiries'; 'square mountains'; due its square shape;⁴² 'madhuvana' according to the great epic Ramayana;⁴³ and the Sendamangalam hills by the Europeans.⁴⁴

The ancient anthologies of the Sangam literature⁴⁵ give extensive details about the Kolli hills. According to them, the Kolli hill range was ruled by the Val Vil Ori, a philanthropist. This is further evidenced by Kabilar and Kalladanar in *Agananuru* and Palathanar in *Natrinai*. Later, the Kolli hills came under the Chera rulers. The Kolli hills was under the Chera prince Manthran Seral Irumporai during the reign of Chera emperor Senguttuvan, whose capital was Vanji on the mouth of River Periar in the west coast.⁴⁶ According to the stone inscription in the Arapalli Iswarar Koil (in the Kolli hills), during the 10th century the Kolli hills was ruled by Ponneri Varman.⁴⁷ At that time, about 500 Malaiyalis had inhabited these hills.⁴⁸ Malaiyali tribals mainly inhabited the Kolli hills. Though the Malaiyalis are not ethnically distinct, there are different traditional versions about their origin, which is discussed in Chapter 1.

For administrative purposes, Kolli hills was divided into *paliyaputs* or estates. Each estate was divided into *nadus*, and each *nadu* consisted of many villages or hamlets. The Kolli hills of Namakkal was broadly classified into two estates, namely Shelloor or Moonoor estate and Soel or Gundur estate. The Shelloor estate consisted of three *nadus*: Shelloor, Tinnanoor and Devanoor; these *nadus* consisted of 14, 8 and 3 villages, respectively.⁴⁹ The Gundur estate consisted of four *nadus*: Gundur, Velappur or Toppur, Ariyur and Valavanthi; these *nadus* comprised 22, 40, 22

and 17 villages, respectively. The Kolli hills of Attur taluk was classified into two estates: Anjoor or Pilla estate and Moonoor or Gundani estate. The Anjoor estate consisted of Pill or Bailnadu, Edappulinadu, Tripulinadu, Sitturnadu and Pikarainadu, and these *nadus* consisted of 15, 10, 8, 6 and 11 villages, respectively. The Moonoor estate comprised Gundani-nadu, Alathurnadu and Edappulinadu, and these *nadus* had only three, five and one villages, respectively.⁵⁰ The Attur-Kolli hills had control over 15 *kombe* villages at the foothills adjoining the plain areas.⁵¹

The Malaiyals of Salem and Baramahal had a well-organised 'traditional' administrative system. The *guru* occupied the highest rank among the Malaiyals and played a prominent role in the tribal system.⁵² The main function of the *guru* was to appoint the headman or *Pattakaran* in the different *nadus* and settle the disputes between the *nadus*. The Malaiyals had a four-tier administrative set-up in each *nadu* – *Pattakaran* or headman, *Maniakaran*, *Ur-Kavundan* or *Moopan* and *Kangani*. In the Kolli hills, *Pattakaran* is also called as *Periya-Kavundan*, *Dorai* and sometimes *Sadi-Kavundan*.⁵³

The Malaiyali tribals of Kolli hills also settled down in the *kombes*, the adjoining plains villages of the hills. Some of the *kombes* were inhabited by the sudras like that of the other plains villages, with others having the presence of both Malaiyals and non-tribals. The plains *kombe* villages, which had mode of communication with the hills, were inhabited by Malaiyals or both by Malaiyals and by non-tribals. These *kombe* villages were marketing places for both the tribals and plainsmen. In other words, they were a place of interaction of the tribal economy with the non-tribals and vice versa. Control over the *kombes* helped the tribals in the sense that it informed them about the movement of strangers into the hill areas. The Malaiyali *Pattakaran/Maniakarans* exercised control over the *kombes*, where the same tribal administrative set-up prevailed. The revenue in the *kombe* villages was collected by the tribal headmen of Kolli hills. Some of the *kombe* villages had been mortgaged by the headmen to the shroff/head farmer of Thammampatty, a nearby town, for a sum less than the quarter of the annual value.⁵⁴ In short, till the colonial intervention, the *kombe* villages had played a distinct role in the tribal economy, as well as allowed the tribals to interact with the mainstream.

Causes of tribal revolt

The tribal revolt in the Kolli hills emerged due to Read's survey in 1795. Before discussing the specific cause of the revolt, let us briefly examine the early colonial agrarian policy on land revenue in the Salem and Baramahal

region in general. Salem and Baramahal areas became part of the colonial domain from 17 March 1792 under the collectorship of Colonel Alexander Read. The immediate problem before Read was not only the restoration of peace and order but also collection of land revenue. The revenue settlement for the first year was made with the headmen of the villages. Read did not make any change except for a slight reduction of the taxation rates, particularly in the Namakkal and Paramatty taluks, because these taluks had suffered so much from the war. These rates were well below that of Tipu's. In the remaining taluks of the district, the taxation rate was higher than that of Tipu's. In short, the early colonial government followed the same system of revenue settlement as that of Tipu Sultan.⁵⁵

To save the farmers from irrational assessment, Read wanted to bring the revenue collection under the direct control of the government. He proposed:

A settlement to be made of these districts, village by village, in lease for five years, as a measure the best for the increase of cultivation and for ensuring the welfare of their inhabitants that it is intended to found this settlement on a proper investigation of their affairs, as well to ascertain the dues of the circar, as to render the strictest justice to every class of the ryots, by an equalisation of their rents according to the circumstances of their lands and cultivation.⁵⁶

To realise these objectives, the government ordered a detailed agricultural survey in Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency in 1793.

Till the completion of the survey, the revenue was collected through the headmen of the villages. The headmen were instructed by the government not to collect more than the fixed assessment.⁵⁷ The survey was completed in 1797, and the direct tax collection method, that is *Ryotwary* system, was introduced. Under this system, the farmers need not have to pay any revenue to anybody except the government. But this system was not new for the Salem and Baramahal region, as it had existed in different parts of the regions during the pre-colonial period. From 1747 to 1768, the *Amildars*⁵⁸ of Attur, Sendamangalam, Namakkal and Paramatty regions directly settled the land revenue with individual landholders.⁵⁹ Due to Read's *Ryotwary* system, many landlords cancelled their engagements in lease, which they were unable to cultivate.⁶⁰ The general land revenue decreased by about 54,000 *Star Pagodas*⁶¹ in 1797-98 over that of 1796-97 in the Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency.⁶²

GEOGRAPHICAL ENCROACHMENT

Till the survey, revenue in the Kolli hills and their *kombe* villages was collected on the basis of the number of implements, that is plough and hoe, used for the cultivation and not according to the extent of land under cultivation. The tribal headmen had also paid only tributes to the plains rulers. They did not pay on the basis of extent of land under cultivation. Once they paid the revenue, they could cultivate as much land they could. The tribals cultivated four or five times more land than they had actually paid for. After the survey and settlement, the tribals were asked to pay the land revenue on the basis of the extent of land used for cultivation besides other taxes. While in the other hills, only land revenue was collected, in the Kolli hills, several other taxes, namely imposts – road and market customs, district taxes and licences and village taxes and licences; church beneficiaries – church, temple and mosque; service taxes – personal and pecuniary; and lesser estates – Brahmin and Muslim, were collected. However, revenue collected other than the land revenue was very insignificant (see Table 2.1). Though the amount of the other taxes was meagre, the burden of land revenue had increased.

The *kombe* villages, under the control of the Kolli hills, were settled independently during the survey like other plains villages. The tribals were unwilling to leave the *kombes* from their control and strongly resented this. They felt that 'if the *Kombes* were taken from them they could not live'.⁶³ After the independent settlement of the *kombe* villages also, the revenue demand of the Anjoor and Moonoor hills was

Table 2.1 Different kinds of taxes collected in the Anjoor and Moonoor Kolli hills in 1795 (in *Star Pagodas*)

Kind of taxes	Name of village		Total
	Anjoor	Moonoor	
<i>Land rent</i>			
From government land	951 34 34	195 15 03	1,147 04 37
From alienated land	36 00 50	1 21 71	37 22 41
<i>Church beneficiaries</i>			
Church	—	—	—
Temple	0 07 08	—	0 07 08
Mosque	—	—	—
<i>Imposts</i>			
Road and market customs	—	—	—
District taxes and licences	—	—	—
Village tax and licences	9 32 68	—	9 32 68

Source: Baramahal Records, Section XI, *District Registers*, pp. 65–72, TNSA.

GEOGRAPHICAL ENCROACHMENT

Table 2.2 Revenue from the different villages of Attur-Kolli hills: 1792-93 to 1801-2
(in *Star Pagodas*)

Villages	1792-93	1793-94	1794-95	1795-96	1796-97
<i>Anjoor or Bail Estate</i>					
Bailnadu	310 25 3	348 20 40	360 15 40	360 15 40	281 12 23
Edappulinadu	70 39 6	89 35 33	95 8 55	98 8 55	124 6 25
Sitturnadu	126 23 24	145 20 52	152 5 52	152 5 52	158 21 27
Pirakarainadu	122 16 3	139 17 20	144 35 39	144 35 39	100 34 41
Tripulinadu	90 37 66	115 19 6	122 4 62	122 4 62	205 37 14
Total	721 6 22	838 23 46	874 25 8	874 25 8	870 21 50
<i>Moonoor or Gundani Estate</i>					
Gundaninadu	57 13 72	62 4 13	62 4 13	70 25 11	90 4 37
Alathurnadu	11 19 9	14 44 40	14 44 40	14 44 40	76 - -
Pelappadinadu	33 18 20	37 8 49	37 8 49	37 8 49	40 5 54
Total	102 6 21	114 12 22	114 12 22	114 12 22	186 30 65
Grand total	823 12 43	952 35 68	988 37 30	988 37 30	1,057 7 35

Sources: Permanent Settlement Records, Salem; BR (Misc.) Vol. 29, 11 November 1800, pp. 19-20, TNSA; Proceedings of the Special Commission, Vol. 10, 1 September 1802, p. 2806, TNSA.

not reduced by the colonial government. In fact, the land revenue of the Anjoor and Moonoor hills had been increased from *Star Pagodas* 823-12-43 in 1792-93 to *Star Pagodas* 980-37-30 in 1794-95 (see Table 2.2). In other words, revenue had increased by about 18 per cent between 1792-93 and 1794-95. In spite of the neglected hereditary claims of the tribals, the colonial government's attitude to extract more revenue forced the tribals to involve themselves in refractory activities.

Forms and methods of revolts

The revolts or movements in any society would not be a spontaneous one. According to Guha, Antonio Gramsci observed that 'there is no room for pure spontaneity in history'.⁶⁴ Sarkar (1983) says that the pre-First World War era was 'essentially "spontaneous" and no more than marginally affected by intelligentsia ideologies, objectives or techniques. The limitations of such "spontaneity" are fairly clear'.⁶⁵ Any revolt would not emerge spontaneously and ought to be communicated through different forms of meeting. 'There were meetings of clan elders and caste panchayats, neighbourhood conventions, larger mass gatherings and so on.'⁶⁶

Hence, a revolt has to emerge through the consciousness of the people, and the tribal revolts were not an exceptional one. Any

revolt should first have 'a "conscious leadership", secondly, some well defined aim, and thirdly, a programme specifying the components of the latter as particular objectives and the means of achieving them.⁶⁷

As such, a revolt is 'almost invariably marked by much temporization and weighing of pros and cons on the part of the protagonists'.⁶⁸ The tribals led the revolt through their headmen of different villages with a clear aim to get back their *kombes*, and to achieve this objective they refused to pay the land revenue to the government. Since the tribals had a well-established administrative and cultural system, establishing the consciousness among them was not a difficult one. The tribals used to obey the commands and orders of their headmen. If the headman protested, it naturally meant that the tribals too had protested. Since the traditional administrative structure like *Kangani*, *Ur-Kavundan*, *Maniakaran* and *Pattakaran* existed in a particular *nadu*, the decision of the *Pattakaran* was easily transmitted to the people through the *Ur-Kavundans* and *Kanganis*.

Though the entire range of Kolli hills was inhabited by Malaiyalis, the protest was confined only to the Moonoor and Anjoor regions of Attur-Kolli hills, because the economy of these regions had an interaction and exchange with the plains people through the *kombes*. Hence, like the peasant uprisings, which often did not exceed local boundaries, the territorial coverage of the revolt was confined to the people who were actually affected due to the independent village rights for the *kombes*.⁶⁹ Till the end of the 19th century, the geographical extent of the revolt/rebellious thinking and action was broadly local in nature.⁷⁰

Generally, the revolts initially were not armed insurrections. Most of the protests initially were representations to the authorities to redress grievances. Then, they followed petitions and peaceful demonstrations. Taking up arms was the last resort.⁷¹ The tribals who represented their grievances to the authorities then refused to pay the revenue and boycotted the revenue settlement meeting.

The district collector invited them to attend the *Kacheri*⁷² at Namagiripettai to settle their *beriz*⁷³ for five years. The assistant collector sent a messenger to the Kolli hills to inform them to attend the *Kacheri* at Namagiripettai. In response, the three headmen of Kolli hills replied through their own people that they were not attending the *Kacheri* due to the unavailability of one of the *Kavundans* in the hills. The tribals used to make conscious decisions in consultation with the village heads, before taking any plunge regarding any issue. The cooperative understanding among them would not create any stumbling block to bring solidarity. Invariably, in every peasant revolt, the spirit of emulation and solidarity

is indispensable.⁷⁴ Following the failure of the tribal headmen to be present at Namagiripettai, the assistant collector wrote to them a *samjhaish*⁷⁵ (letter), asking some of them to come in person to make *sawal-jawap*.⁷⁶ Refusing to heed the direction, they laid down some preconditions for their presence. The tribal headmen answered that they would come only if their *beriz* was made 500 *chakrams*⁷⁷ less than what was before and return of the *kombes* to the hills. This second demand was not for monetary consideration but to emphasise their hold over the *kombes*. The tribals had not only stopped communicating between the hills and the low country, but also refused to admit the tahsildar's peon who came to collect the *kist*.⁷⁸

The assistant collector also tried to convince the tribals through the tahsildar's peon that their demand was wrong and 'to prevail on them to be *rujua*'.⁷⁹ But the peon was not allowed by the tribals to reach the Kolli hills. He was stopped at a station half way up to the hills by a group of tribals with 'pikes'. They told him that they would not abide by any term other than getting back their *kombes*.⁸⁰ They also put forth the demand to reduce the rent of 1795 to 500 *chakrams* less than that of 1794. Then, the tahsildar was directed by the assistant collector to send some of the chief ryots at Thammampatty to persuade the tribals to pay the rent for 1795, which was lower than the 1794 rent. This attempt also failed to bring them under control. The tahsildar recommended to the assistant collector that 'it will be necessary to send a party of armed men up to *zabti*,⁸¹ a paddy crop which is nearly ripe'. The tahsildar also warned the tribals that if they did not pay the land revenue, the government no longer would treat the problem in a peaceful manner and sepoys would be sent up to the hills to forcefully put them under the government's control. The assistant collector recalled a similar instance in the Kolli hills in 1785 when these people showed refractory behaviour on the same issue. At the time, 20 *kandacharam*⁸² peons with matchlocks⁸³ went to the hills and brought them under control without any loss of human life. Finally, sepoys were called upon to subdue the rebellious Malaiyali tribals.

The method of this revolt was also a distinct one. Initially, the tribals had represented their grievances to the collector and participated in a discussion with the collector's subordinate. Once it failed, they were forced to change their strategies. Their protest took the form of non-payment of land revenue. Even the officers who had attempted to collect the revenue were not permitted to get into the tribal areas. As a consequence, the tribals threatened with arms and instruments. Even in terms of antagonists, they did not act like the other tribals' or farmers' revolts in general.

In the Kolli hills of Salem and Baramahal region of Madras Presidency, the tribals' system was not disturbed either by the Hindu rulers and their

successive Muslim rulers, but the British had intruded at the end of the 18th century. Until British intervention, the plains rulers interacted with the tribals only for a very limited purpose and that too through the headman to collect revenue. They did not intervene in the socio-economic, judicial and cultural set-up of the tribals, as well as in the geographical area. The negative and insensitive attitude of the British administrators towards the tribals' traditionally controlled geographical areas forced them to revolt. Interestingly, not all the Malaiyalis of the Kolli hills took part in the revolt or had shown solidarity towards their own people. Hence, the territoriality of this revolt was confined only to the particular region and did not even extend beyond the division of the same hills. With the tribals having a well-established administrative system, communication of the causes could have been made very quickly to enlist the people's solidarity to the leaders. Like the other tribal revolts and peasant movements, this too got confined to a particular area as the causes were also very specific.⁸⁴

Though the scholars claim that the main aim of the tribal movements was to remove the British from the subcontinent, this revolt was not to overthrow the colonial power but to retain their hereditary rights on their *kombes*. Hence, it becomes evident that the early tribal revolts were not in terms of independence from the British unlike the Palayagars of Panchalankurichi and elsewhere in the early 19th century or the national movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tribal revolts were basically to address the immediate grievances to colonial rulers to retain the erstwhile geographical regions. In the end, the tribals who revolted against the colonial government to retain their hereditary rights were suppressed by superior military force and made submissive.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was originally published in *Arthavijnana*, Vol. XLI, No. 1, 1999. Reproduced with the permission of the copyright holders and the publishers.
- 2 K.N. Panikkar, 'Peasant Revolt in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in A.R. Desai (ed.), *Peasant Struggle in India*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 601; David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudem-Rampa Risings 1839-1924', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 89.
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- 75 Satisfying one's needs.
- 76 Question and answer, whether spoken or written.
- 77 One-sixteenth part of gold *payodas*.
- 78 The periodical payment of annual assessment.
- 79 Money payments received by public officers, as prerequisites attached to their office.
- 80 Letter from Macleod to Read, 24 May 1796, TNSA.
- 81 To be under sequestration or attachment.
- 82 Native Militia.
- 83 Usually a market.
- 84 Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen', p. 141.