Colonial constructions of 'agrarian fields' and 'forests' in the Kolli Hills

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Forest histories have more often than not remained aloof from more broad-based economic histories of agrarian communities. As a result, narratives of the forest economy have focused almost entirely on the process of forest settlement. This article focuses on regional processes of territorialisation associated with revenue and forest settlement in the context of the Kolli Hills. It is argued that the colonial state's usurpation of land created a false dichotomy between forests and fields that did not exist locally. Hence, the impact of colonialism on forest-dependent communities is understood within the wider purview of the land question in the Kolli Hills, both in the past and the present.

Introduction

The writing of India's environmental history has to a significant extent been the writing of India's forest history, and more particularly of colonial forest history. There have been vigorous debates around the discourses and ideologies of forest policies and their impact upon forest-dependent communities. The outcomes of these debates have often varied, depending on the period of study,[1] the extent of

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[1] The debate regarding the state's environmental credentials has much to do with the period of study, i.e., whether it is the early- or the late-nineteenth century. See M. Rangarajan, 'Imperial Agendas and India's Forests: The Early History of Indian Forestry, 1800–1878', *The Indian Economic*

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the disjuncture between ideology/philosophy and praxis,[2] and the regional landscapes in which academic inquiry has been situated.[3] Notwithstanding differences of interpretation, it would be fair to say that our understanding of forest history is considerable.

What is the need, then, to write another such regional history here? One could argue, following Grove, Damodaran and Sangwan,[4] that such histories remain necessary because of the vast territorial control the Forest Department exercised at the peak of its power. My study site, the Kolli Hills, moreover, are located in a relatively unexplored area, namely the Eastern Ghats of Tamil Nadu. This forest history of the Kolli Hills is attempted here not merely to fill a geographical void, however, but more particularly to underline that forest histories must be more than just histories of forests. As Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan have argued, forests are very much part of agrarian environments and need to be understood within such environments.[5]

The challenge, therefore, is to write forest history as part of a wider social and economic history. At present, for the most part, these two histories continue to stand apart. While some studies have attempted to understand forest settlements as part of a wider process of land settlements,[6] insufficient attention has been paid towards the complementarity of revenue and forest settlements in the context of the state's project of asserting and delimiting its own claims to land.[7]

How then does one go about locating forests in agrarian environments? At one level, it requires that forests be studied within the context of local production processes and subsistence strategies. Forest produce such as fuelwood, fodder, etc., are often critical to subsistence economies. But part of the challenge is also to problematise categories such as forest land and forest produce within the wider agrarian landscape, in particular examine how forests and forest produce are understood in the local imagination. This is important because the dichotomy between 'forest' and 'field', based as it is on ownership rather than use, is often

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and Social History Review, Vol. 31(2), 1994, pp. 147–67; R. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1800*, New Delhi, 1995.

[2] Much of the debate about the Forest Department confuses ideology with praxis. While Grove may be right in highlighting the importance of environmental concerns for the Forest Department, such concerns were rarely visible in particular regional contexts.

[3] I share Sivaramakrishnan's concern that forest histories need to be regionally-specific and that such specificity can often explain the differences in narratives around the forest: K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India*, New Delhi, 1999.

[4] R.H. Grove, V. Damodaran and S. Sangwan, eds, *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*, New Delhi, 1998.

[5] K. Sivaramakrishnan and A. Agrawal, eds, *Social Nature: Resources, Representations and Rule in India*, New Delhi, 2001.

[6] Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Colonial State and Agrarian Society', in Burton Stein (ed.), *The Making of Agrarian Policy in British India: 1770–1900*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 113–49.

[7] See in this connection Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso, 'Territorialization and State Power in Thailand', *Theory and Practice*, No. 24, 1995, pp. 385–426.

not very clear-cut in regions where public lands are subject to private use.[8] I argue, in fact, that the separation of forests and fields in much of the existing literature has divorced forest histories from agrarian histories and consequently created an imaginary disjuncture between the forest and the agrarian landscape.

The process of forest settlement, made possible by the enactment of the Madras Forest Act, 1882, resulted in vast tracts of land becoming legally inaccessible to village communities because they were declared as reserved forests. Prior to forest reservation, local communities had accessed these forests regularly for fuelwood, fodder and non-timber forest produce. The process of forest settlement resulted in the demarcation of land as 'state property'. Although the Malaiyalis (a Scheduled Tribe who constitute 97 per cent of the Kolli Hills. The name comes from the Tamil word *malai*, meaning hill, and *yali*, inhabitant) too classified lands in different ways, these classifications were based on either their cultivable potential or as potential sources of forest produce. State control over forests thus imposed new property rights distinctions upon the Malaiyalis that evoked a feeling of 'our land' versus 'their land'. Revenue settlement was to aggravate the distinction.

This article is therefore an attempt to write the forest history of the Kolli Hills through an examination of revenue and forest policy in the region, in order to retrieve the agrarian from within the forests. As suggested above, this requires examining the broader economic history of the area, inevitably in this case in the context of the wider compulsions of the colonial state. But because state policy is rarely received without being challenged or contested, this also requires some understanding of how local peculiarities imparted a regional flavour to a state policy motivated generally towards territorial colonisation, revenue extraction and capital accumulation.[9]

The other objective of this article is to examine the actual impact of the state's territorialisation and revenue extraction project in the Kolli Hills. In order to do this I have attempted to understand how the Malaiyalis value land within their subsistence economy and how forests enter this picture. I also examine how regional peculiarities shaped the impact of state policy in the post-colonial period. To do so, I focus on how discourses and policies of modernity and development in the post-colonial period were grafted on to territorial contours and property rights structures established by the colonial state.[10]

[8] While the disjuncture between fields and forests has been critiqued, the emphasis remains mostly on how forest produce needs are important to the agrarian economy. I argue that privileging forest produce needs a priori itself to be critiqued and that categories of field and forest scrutinised.

[9] The danger of Sivaramakrishnan's argument is that it can dilute the logic by which the colonial state functioned, and de-emphasise the importance of wider processes of revenue extraction and capital accumulation. The nature of revenue extraction and capital accumulation must be understood in the context of both the regional peculiarity and the 'relative autonomy' of state discourses. For a more detailed discussion on the colonial state, see A. Pathak, *Contested Domains: The State, Peasants and Forests in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, 1994.

[10] Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 8–15.

The remainder of this article is divided into three main sections. The first and second sections deal with the colonial period, namely with pre-modern and modern settlements. These sections detail the manner in which the colonial state constructed revenue and forest policy, its difficulty in conquering the hills and its dependence on the local administration. The third section analyses the impact of colonial constructions of fields and forests in the Kolli Hills in the present, and contrasts developments in two hamlets.

Pre-modern Settlement: Accessing the Hills through the Local Administration

The Kolli Hills are located in present day Namakkal district of Tamil Nadu and cover an area of 28 sq. km. Set apart from the plains below, they rise to a height of almost 1,400 metres. The hill range is not uniform in its physical disposition: whereas the Namakkal Kolli Hills are characterised by a flat-topped mass, high-level plateaus and basin-shaped depressions, the Rasipuram Kolli Hills[11] are noted for their massive and lofty dome shape.[12]

My historical account starts by taking a look at the pre-modern settlement period. To understand the nature of accommodation with the pre-existing local arrangements, it is necessary to understand the nature of local administration at the advent of British colonialism in the region. From the Baramahal records,[13] it would appear that the Kolli Hills were divided administratively into estates. These estates were divided into *nadu*s (villages) which themselves comprised a number of hamlets. Historically, the Kolli Hills were divided into four main estates, two in the Namakkal Kolli Hills and two in the Attur Kolli Hills. The two estates in Namakkal were Shelloor (Selur) and Gundur or Soel while the two in Attur were Anjoor and Moonoor. These four estates comprised a total of 14 villages and 174 hamlets.[14]

The four estates had a five-tier administrative system. *Periya-pattakaran*s or *guru*s (hereditary chief headmen) were at the top of the hierarchy followed by *pattakaran*s (hereditary headmen), under whom served locally appointed *manigakaran*s, *ur-kavundan*s (*oor gounders*) or *moopan*s and *kanganis*.[15] In all there were three *periya-pattakaran*s, one on the Attur side of the Kolli Hills and two (one in each estate) on the Namakkal side. The *periya-pattakaran* exercised both religious and

[11] Readers should note that during the colonial period, the Rasipuram Kolli Hills were known as the Attur Kolli Hills.

[12] F.J. Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers: Salem District*, Madras, 1918; T. Vasantha Kumaran, The Kolli Hills: Land, People and Place, mimeo, undated.

[13] The Baramahal records are a detailed compilation of British experiments with district administration in Salem and Baramahal, and of the inception of the ryotwari system.

[14] Shelloor consisted of Shelloor, Tinnanoor and Devanur Nadus, and Gundur of Gundur, Ariyur, Velappur (Valappur) and Valavandhi Nadus. On the Rasipuram side, Anjoor estate comprised of Bayil (Bail), Tiruppuli, Sittur (Chittoor) and Pirakarai (Perakkarai) whereas Moonoor was comprised of Gundani (Gunduni), Alathur and Edappuli.

[15] Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA), Board of Revenue (BoR), Vol. 1769, 23 September 1841, pp. 12105–9.

judicial authority locally and was in charge of deciding the amount of tax to be collected. For the most part, such assessments were based on the needs of the people and the number of implements used for cultivation purposes.[16]

The *pattakaran* was an intermediary between the *periya-pattakaran* and the *ur-kavundan*. The *pattakaran*'s post was a hereditary one, yet the *periya-pattakaran* had an important say in choosing *pattakarans*. The *pattakaran*'s role was revenue collection for which he was assisted by the *maniakaran*. As the hills were rented out to the highest bidder by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan who preceded the British as rulers of the region, the middlemen who collected revenue had to depend to a great extent on the *pattakarans* and *maniakarans*. The *pattakaran* also supervised the protection of local lands by appointing people to watch over them, and preventing outsiders from accessing the hills.[17]

Since the hamlet comprised the most decentralised unit within the administrative system, the *ur-kavundan* was the most important actor in the day-to-day affairs of the hills. The *ur-kavundan* officiated at important occasions such as harvests, festivals and marriages, as well as convened the local *ur* (*oor*) *panchayat*. The *ur-kavundan* convened the panchayat to discuss local disputes but made the final decisions himself after discussions with the members of the panchayat. The *kangani* collected information vis-à-vis local conflicts/disputes and gave this information to the *ur-kavundan*, who utilised it for formulating decisions.[18] The word of the *ur-kavundan* was final with regard to local customary matters.

What is also important to note is that the Malaiyalis' administrative system jurisdictionally extended to *kombe* villages located at the foothills. Though details of *kombe* villages and their relationship to the hills are scanty, the indication is that they provided the Malaiyalis a link with the plains, which was especially important for marketing local produce and finding employment opportunities during the agricultural off season.[19] Also, as *kombe* villages were located at the gateway to the hills, it was possible from these villages to spot outsiders entering the hills. The control of *kombe* villages by the Malaiyalis was possible because these villages were comprised mostly of their kinsfolk.

Despite the presence of a sophisticated administrative system, areas such as the Kolli Hills were known in the colonial imagination primarily for malaria and other tropical fevers as they were cut off from the plains below and generally inaccessible. Colonial authorities were, therefore, apprehensive to set foot in the hills. While the dangers associated with the hills may have been more imagined than real, the British knew from Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan's experiences that colonising the hills would not be easy due to the lie of the land. Moreover, any thought of renting out the hills

[16] A. Aiyappan, *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras, 1948, p. 20.

[17] V. Saravanan, 'Tribal Revolts in India with Reference to Salem and Baramahal Districts of Madras Presidency during the Late 18th Century', *Artha Vijnana*, Vol. 41(1), 1999, p. 73.

[18] Richards, *Madras District Gazetteers*, p. 154.

[19] *Ibid.*

to the highest bidder as had been done by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan brought with it the danger of non-payment, something common in pre-British times.[20]

Thus when the hills, like the rest of Salem, became part of the British domain in 1792, a professional surveyor by the name of Mr Mathew was hired principally because of the dangers of venturing into the hills and fears of disease. Though lacking any local experience, Mr Mathew was considered adept at conquering the hills.[21] Colonel Read, the Collector of Salem at the time of annexation, was convinced that it was necessary to undertake a survey of the hills to fix revenue rates more appropriate than those under Tipu Sultan. Writing to the Board of Revenue in 1797, Read argued that the success of revenue generation depended on setting fair rates, and sought the reduction of 'present rentals because only that can give value to the land'.[22] His logic was that only revenue rates that reflected the general poverty of the inhabitants, the precariousness of their crops, fluctuations in the prices of their grain, and smallness of their farms could assure higher revenue collection.[23] As the Board was growing increasingly concerned with the lack of permanent revenue accruing to the exchequer, Read's suggestions were taken seriously.

There were significant continuities nonetheless between pre-colonial and colonial revenue policy. The unit of revenue collection continued to be the estate as in the past, and joint responsibility in terms of unpaid dues continued to rest with the village community.[24] But like the ryotwari system, it was a system of annual settlements (based on average rates) directed at individual ryots (cultivators) whose land was assessed.[25] Other notable developments that accompanied Read's settlement were the advent of other taxes such as church tax, temple tax, road tax and market tax.[26]

Despite Read's effforts to set fair rates, the Malaiyalis were not happy about British intervention in the hills. The survey of the Kolli Hills and the resultant revenue demands led to local protest in parts of the hills, namely Anjoor Nadu. There were two main reasons for protest: assessment of *kombe* villages and high rates of revenue. According to Captain W. Macleod, Deputy Collector of Salem, the Malaiyalis 'refused paying their rents saying that if the *kombe*s were taken from them they could not live'.[27] This was reference to the fact that *kombe* villages of the plains had for the first time been measured and settled independently of the hills.[28]

[20] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 150, Section 1, *Baramahal Records*, p. 453; also section 6, p. 90.

[21] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 150, Section 1, *Baramahal Records*.

[22] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 183, G.O. Nos 15–16, 1793, p. 5197.

[23] Though Read did stand apart from many colonial officers in terms of his 'concern' for ryots, his actions were ultimately driven by his desire to expand colonial rule in the Salem region.

[24] Ryots were allowed to leave land uncultivated if they were unable to cultivate it.

[25] The amount of revenue collected increased in this period from 2,642 Company rupees in 1792–93 to 3,431 Company rupees in 1796–97.

[26] V. Saravanan, 'Commercial Crops, Alienation of Common Property Resources and Change in Tribal Economy in the Shervaroy Hills of Madras Presidency during the Colonial Period', *Review of Development and Change*, Vol. 4(2), 1999.

[27] TNSA, BoR, Baramahal Records, Section 6, *Land Rent*, pp. 123–24, letter of 24 May 1796.

[28] A more detailed account of this conflict is available in Saravanan, 'Tribal Revolts in India'.

The colonial government justified its action by claiming that the farmers of the *kombe* villages had expressed their satisfaction. Macleod was also convinced that he had persuaded the Malaiyalis of the need to assess each village independently. However, he was soon to find out that this was not the case. After promising to attend a meeting with him at Namagiripettai and to settle their *beriz* (payment), the three headmen of the hills who promised to come did not show up. When word came from them, they not only renewed their demand for the *kombe*s to be made dependent upon the hills, but also made a demand for a reduction of 500 chakrams[29] in revenue. When a government peon was sent to the hills to speak to the headmen, he was not allowed to proceed more than halfway, and the same demands were repeated to him. Although the colonial administration continued in their efforts to convince the headmen, they refused to relent. The tehsildar eventually sent a party of sepoys up into the hills.

Although there are no further records on this matter, available indications would suggest that the colonial government eventually had its way. The protest was, however, more important than the outcome as it reminded the British once more of the inaccessible and inhospitable terrain of this hill region. There were to be more such reminders in the future.

Despite these problems, the British chose to pursue their revenue ambitions in the hills. After 1797, the colonial administration fixed a five-year lease system. From the outset, the colonial state had preferred such a lease system as unlike the annual lease system, it would not result in fluctuations in revenue. Moreover, the opting out clause of the annual lease (by which cultivators could seek exemption from paying revenue on parcels of uncultivated land) was dispensed with in the five-year lease system. Thus, the five-year lease system was in theory a more secure source of revenue. Also, in general, the five-year lease for 1797–98 to 1801–2 was based on an increase from the earlier annual rates. The total average revenue collected from the Kolli Hills during this period was approximately 3,743 company rupees as opposed to 2,642 company rupees for the year 1792–93.[30]

The colonial government's obsession with raising revenue, however, led to the abandonment of this system as well. In 1802–3, a Permanent Settlement was introduced in the Kolli Hills despite warnings that it could cause innumerable hardships to ryots and, consequently, a shortfall in payments. The Board believed that a Permanent Settlement, based on a similar long-term principle as the village lease system, would result in additional wastelands being taken up for cultivation by the lessees of the land (proprietary farmers).[31] In hill areas, moreover, the possibilities of this happening were thought to be even higher due to the significant amount of uncultivated land available, which could presumably be put under the plough.

[29] A chakram was one-sixteenth of a gold pagoda. Three and a half Company rupees constituted a pagoda.

[30] In some nadus, however, the five-year rates were actually below that of annual settlement rates.

[31] It remains unclear in the case of the Kolli Hills who these proprietary farmers were. But they were most likely farmers from the plains. This set the Permanent Settlement period apart from other revenue regimes.

The Permanent Settlement was important for a number of reasons. First of all, it was clearly an attempt to establish private property in land. Until the Permanent Settlement, all forms of revenue collection were in some form or other village-based. Even the ryotwari system in the Kolli Hills, though targeted at the ryot, was implemented through village heads. Under the Permanent Settlement, on the other hand, no such collective arrangements were made, and proprietary farmers were left in charge. The British surmised that if rates were high, farmers would seek ways in which to increase their output and profit margins—presumably through 'commercialising' agriculture.

The results, however, did not bear out these expectations. While the Permanent Settlement rate at the outset in 1802–3 was the same as that of the last year of village leases, rates increased substantially over the next few years. Consequently, non-payment rates also increased. Whereas in the first five years of Permanent Settlement non-payment was only of the order of 3 per cent, non-payment rates between 1809–10 and 1814–15 were well over 20 per cent,[32] except in Moonoor estate where non-payment was less than 1 per cent.

The topsy-turvy nature of revenue settlement was to continue for a few more decades. In 1818–19, due once again to high arrears, the colonial government reverted to annual settlements in the form of the ryotwari system.[33] Once again, the colonial government depended on local intermediaries for revenue collection because the hills remained treacherous and unhealthy in the colonial imagination.[34]

The role of the intermediary, however, troubled the British particularly because local headmen were believed to be collecting more than the assessed amount of revenue. The colonial government therefore introduced the system of *amani* (or government) collection in the Attur Kolli Hills in 1819–20.[35]

The collector at the time, D. Cockburn, believed the *amani* system had restored control to the government and resulted in increased happiness for the people.[36] However, Cockburn's enthusiasm did not seem to last, nor was it shared within the colonial bureaucracy. Lands in the Namakkal Kolli Hills, for instance, continued to be rented to the hill people for two more decades. According to a sub-collector, Cecil Ogilvie, this made more sense because of the 'inconvenience the people from the lowlands found in ascending the hills to carry into effect the necessary

[32] Non-payment rates were 28.03 per cent, 20.12 per cent and 31.08 per cent in Seloor, Gundur and Anjoor estates respectively.

[33] In the ryotwari system, the government was supposed to collect revenue directly from the ryot, but this rarely happened in the Kolli Hills.

[34] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 1389, Nos 30–31, 23 August 1833, pp. 14535–39; despite the dependence on local headmen, many of the new features of the ryotwari system were adopted in the Kolli Hills. The ryotwari system was a more elaborate system than Read's initial annual settlements, and in fact aimed to correct some of the flaws of the earlier system. Of major concern was ryots defaulting on cultivated lands. Ryots were also obliged to pay higher revenue due to their self-initiated improvements, thus negating any incentive to do so. Finally, the notion of collective responsibility was done away with.

[35] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 1841(21), 5 May 1843.

[36] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 919, Nos 31–32, 18 July 1822, p. 6683.

measures for ensuring the collection of revenue'.[37] The *amani* system was introduced in the Namakkal Kolli Hills in 1842–43. It is not clear, though, how long it was in operation.

Revenue developments in the second half of the nineteenth century are not altogether clear. Some earlier records contain evidence to suggest that both the *amani* system and the individual lease system continued. There is also evidence from the Settlement Records of 1905 which shows that some form of detailed revenue settlement took place during this period. However, in the absence of records, it is difficult to construct a more detailed account.

Ambiguity also surrounds some of the administrative hierarchies entailed by different types of settlement in the Kolli Hills.[38] For example, it is not clear to what extent local people who were intermediaries in the village lease system were part of the Malaiyalis' administrative system described above. In other words, when land was leased to inhabitants of the hills, did the latter have or acquire any form of local legitimacy within the Kolli Hills? Another grey area relates to actual differences between lease systems in terms of the role of local intermediaries. It is impossible to answer these questions in the absence of records. What is clear, however, is that the need for local intermediaries in general implied that the British did not have a firm presence in the area.

Forest administration also entered the picture in the 1830s. The Kolli Hills, like many of the forested areas of the Salem region, were important to the British largely because of the presence of sandalwood. In 1837, a survey undertaken by the Board of Revenue revealed the presence of 13,846 sandalwood trees in the Namakkal Kolli Hills alone.[39] Despite this large number, the colonial government was convinced denudation was a problem, and was mainly caused by contractors from the plains. Not surprisingly, therefore, in June 1835 a proclamation was made forbidding people from the plains to cut down sandalwood trees from the hills, and merchants from buying sandalwood from them.[40]

Ironically, however, the colonial government ended up relying on contractors at almost the same time as it blamed them for the denudation. This about turn reflected the colonial state's inability to manage the forests on its own. There was no Forest Department at this time, nor any regime of management.[41] In 1835, the government rejected an offer from a Mr Fischer to rent the forest(s) of the Namakkal Kolli Hills for Rs 300 per annum for 10–15 years because, in return for this small amount, acceptance could result in the destruction and premature cutting of trees. However, this objection was set aside a few months later in response to a slightly

[37] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 1389, Nos 30–31, 18 November 1837, p. 14535.

[38] As pointed out earlier, colonial records for the Kolli Hills are very intermittent. Therefore, there are gaps in our understanding of different revenue systems.

[39] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 1857, 1837, pp. 16041–43 and 16057–58.

[40] V. Saravanan, 'Commercialisation of Forests, Environmental Negligence and Alienation of Tribal Rights in Madras Presidency: 1792–1882', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 35(2), 1998, p. 133.

[41] TNSA, BoR, G.O. Nos 27–28, 1836, p. 5076.

higher offer of Rs 340 per annum for five years, which was accepted on the grounds 'that it was chiefly to prevent the destruction of the trees'.[42]

What was different between revenue and forest policy in the early nineteenth century was that the latter was vested with people from outside the hills. Until 1835, the British had quite a laissez-faire attitude towards the forests. In practice, this meant considerable freedom to the Malaiyalis. The government permitted them to lease in some of the forest areas for collecting timber and bamboos, and in return expected them to look after the forests. But after 1835, local people were increasingly perceived as poachers, and the need was felt to contract out.[43] This situation continued until the 1882 Madras Forest Act.

The Building of a Modern Bureaucracy and the Colonisation of Land

Baden Powell, in his revenue history of the Madras Presidency, makes an important distinction between early and modern settlements.[44] Early settlements, he noted, were essentially based on previous assessments and were much less dependent on systematically mapping out villages. In this setting, local communities had considerable territorial autonomy. Modern settlement, however, involved the services of revenue survey and settlement officers to map out villages. Eventually, a Settlement Department was formed in 1858.[45] Rigorous criteria were developed to assess fields and determine revenues. Moreover, details of these assessments were made available to government staff in taluk, district and state centres. Thus, with the availability of both a large bureaucracy as well as a systematic method to survey areas, the locus of revenue authority increasingly shifted away from village level actors.[46]

One gets some idea of the success of the colonial state's settlement efforts in the Kolli Hills from the settlement records of 1905.[47] The settlement records distinguish between revenue accounts and survey accounts. Although the actual date of the revenue accounts is not known, one can presume that it predated the survey accounts of 1905, and given the detailed nature of the accounts, may have belonged to the second half of the nineteenth century. As Table 1 shows, the amount of dry land increased by 94.56 per cent and the amount of wetland by 62.63 per cent between the revenue and the survey accounts. These numbers may not indicate the amount of land actually occupied. But as I illustrate below, in the language of the colonial authorities, the word 'occupied' referred to cultivated land. Thus these numbers indicate that more land had been assessed as occupied by the Revenue Department. Consequently, more land also came under the purview of revenue officials.

[42] TNSA, BoR, Vol. 1463, G.O. Nos 51–52, 1835, pp. 8901–4.

[43] This was a somewhat unexpected development because prior to this period forest degradation was mainly blamed on people from the plains.

[44] B.H. Baden-Powell, *Land Administration and Tenure in British India*, Delhi, 1978.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 151–52.

[46] D. Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, Princeton, 1985.

[47] This section is based mainly on the Settlement Records, 1905.

Table 1
Occupied and Unoccupied Land in the Kolli Hills, 1905 (hectares)

	Dry Occupied			*Wet Occupied*		
(1)	*Revenue Accounts (2)*	*Survey Accounts (3)*	*% Increase [(3)–(2)]/100 (4)*	*Revenue Accounts (5)*	*Survey Accounts (6)*	*% Increase [6–5]/100 (7)*
Namakkal Kolli Hills						
Ariyur	322.32	714.40	121.64	16.79	39.44	134.90
Gundur	563.60	1,076.57	91.02	41.77	86.28	106.56
Tinnanur	523.64	910.56	73.89	32.13	87.24	171.52
Valappur	373.95	66.66	76.67	32.75	77.62	137.01
Valavandhi	271.02	564.73	108.37	26.15	53.16	103.29
Devanur	180.98	388.26	114.53	25.97	66.77	157.10
Selur	212.38	351.42	65.47	21.07	30.03	42.52
Namakkal Kolli Hills Total	2,447.89	4,666.60	90.64	196.63	440.54	124.05
Attur Kolli Hills Total	1,829.79	3,656.02	99.81	201.54	207.02	2.72
Kolli Hills Total	4,277.68	8,322.62	94.56	398.17	647.56	62.63

Source: *Settlement Records*, Salem, 1905.

This leads us to the distinction between occupied and unoccupied land. In the eyes of the colonial government, occupied land was cultivated land and unoccupied land was uncultivated waste.[48] On the one hand the colonial government attempted to boost revenue by encouraging farmers to put more land under the plough. On the other hand, as Chakravarty-Kaul[49] has argued, the process of surveying was an exercise to claim waste and put it under the control of the state as *its* property. The claiming of waste also epitomised a process by which ownership (defined by the state) took priority over use. Most land deemed to be occupied was considered *patta* (or private) and the rest (barring some *poramboke*) went to the state. Thus land ended up being classified in the following categories: *patta*, assessed dry and wet waste, unassessed waste and *poramboke* (revenue and forest). While *patta* lands were synonymous with cultivated land, assessed waste was land which had been assessed but which was not supposed to be cultivated until it was officially allocated by the Revenue Department. Property rights, therefore, remained with the state. *Poramboke*, for the most part, was land which was considered unfit for cultivation and thus set apart for communal purposes (state or village).

To understand the impact of settlement in the Kolli Hills, it is necessary to look at how land was categorised and used within the hills. In the Kolli Hills, land was always assessed primarily in terms of its cultivable potential as the Malaiyalis

[48] Though no clear definitions are provided in the Settlement Records of occupied and unoccupied land, one can presume with a degree of certainty that occupied land was land that was cultivated because of periodic references to cultivation.

[49] M. Chakravarty-Kaul, *Common Lands and Customary Law*, New Delhi, 1996.

were agriculturalists. Land was most commonly termed as *vayal*, *mettukadu* or *kollakadu*. *Vayal* was wetland, usually found in valleys or depressions which had natural seepage and consisted mostly of alluvial and clay soils. *Mettukadu* was rain-fed land with a low to medium waterholding capacity, whereas *kollakadu* was generally rocky terrain. Paddy was mostly grown on *vayal* lands, and millets, pulses, fruits and vegetables on *mettukadu* lands. Minor millets were grown on *mettukadu* and *kollakadu*. Some *kollakadu* land was also considered uncultivable wasteland (*dhirasu*).[50] Forest lands were lands where forest produce was available, regardless of whether they were owned by the community or the state.

These were land use categories, not land-ownership categories.[51] To what extent notions of private property prevailed in the Kolli Hills is not easy to tell. Land was normally cultivated by extended households, but it appears that cultivated land was often open for grazing during fallow periods, and that many lands (common lands) were not cultivated at all. Equally important, if land was considered uncultivable, this did not necessarily imply that it was not productive. Many *dhirasu* lands, for example, were used for grazing purposes—thus although they may not have been considered a major revenue source by the government, they were important for those Malaiyalis who had cattle. The same held true for forests lands. For example, as settlement records illustrate, farmers often used crop stubble (mostly from ragi) for fuel. There were also patches of *samai solais* or sacred groves which were in reserved forests, but which held special meaning for the Malaiyalis.

Thus, the categories 'occupied' and 'unoccupied' that the colonial state used to classify land held no meaning for the Malaiyalis. Prior to colonial rule and even during early settlements, clear demarcations of property rights were either legally absent or not enforceable.[52] Thus, despite the presence of supra-local state structures, the local people retained a certain autonomy with regard to the use of land. The social meanings of land depended on use, and there were several uses other than cultivation. Nineteenth-century revenue settlements were also essentially concerned with 'cultivated' land. But at the time, the colonial government did not possess a bureaucracy capable of enforcing the non-use of uncultivated (or unoccupied) land. By the early twentieth century, this had changed.

The narrowing of use into ownership and the consequent alienation of land from the Malaiyalis continued thereafter. It is difficult to establish the exact changes that took place between settlement and resettlement as the records for the later period are incomplete. Nonetheless, if one examines the resettlement records for 1936–37, it is noticeable that occupied land increased, but the area classified as unoccupied

[50] *Dhirasu* lands in local parlance either meant waste or fallow lands, whereas in official parlance it meant wasteland, whether unassessed or assessed.

[51] My argument throughout this article is based on the distinction between ownership and use. As is argued later, social meanings to land highlight use categories, not ownership categories.

[52] C. Singh, *Common Property and Common Poverty: India's Forests, Forest Dwellers and the Law*, New Delhi, 1986.

remained considerable. For the eight villages for which records are available, at least 42 per cent of the land was classified as unoccupied. In Gunduni Nadu, as much as 86 per cent remained unoccupied. Other lands (not classified as occupied and unoccupied) which included unassessed waste and *poramboke* hardly accounted for 1–2 per cent. It would be fair to surmise from this that assessed waste comprised a large part of unoccupied land. As assessed land was potentially cultivable land, the fact that it remained with the state implied that the Malaiyalis did not have legal access to it.

Understanding the extensive territorial control that the state acquired requires looking at the process of forest settlement as well. The settlement of forests in the Presidency as a whole coincided with the state's need for forest conservancy, primarily because of the demand for timber for the construction of railways. The 1860s had seen considerable pilferage of forests in the hill areas and it was, therefore, deemed necessary to protect them in a systematic manner. Before forests could be protected, forest areas had to be surveyed. This was to be done by the newly-created Forest Department. Between 1872 and 1882, the Forest Department was under the direct control of the collector. It obtained independent control thereafter.

The Madras Forest Act, 1882 manifested itself in the Kolli Hills in 1887 when three forest areas were reserved, namely Varagur, Jambuthu and Puliansholai, the first of these in the northern part of the hills and the latter two in the east. Subsequent years saw a steady expansion of forest reservation throughout the hills including Karavallicombai, Selur, Bail and Ariyursholai (a rich tropical moist deciduous forest). Between 1887 and 1938, as Table 2 shows, 26,052.71 hectares came under reservation.

Table 2
Forest Reservation in the Kolli Hills during the Colonial Period (hectares)

Name	*Year*	*Extent*
Varagur	1887	1,447.16
Jambuthu	1887	2,030.91
Perumalmalai	1887	1,724.83
Puliansholai	1887	2,047.01
Varagur Extension	1892	140.84
Karavallikombai	1897	3,476.65
Selur	1901	5,430.89
Ariyursholai	1918	441.11
Selur Extension	1918	215.27
Gundur	1918	996.95
Naickenkombai	1937	1,749.72
Adakkampudokombai	1937	1,958.18
Bail Nadu	1938	4,393.19
Total	–	**26,052.71**

Source: List of Reserved Forests in Salem Division, District Forest Office, Salem, mimeo.

Only the inhabitants of Gundur and Ariyur Nadu were bestowed settlement rights.[53] These rights included access to pathways and dry and fallen non-timber forest produce throughout the Gundur reserves for residents of Gundur Nadu, and the same rights for residents of Ariyur Nadu in the Ariyur reserved forest. The other inhabitants of the hills had no legal access to the forests.

The colonial administration was not, however, unaware of what it called the 'wants of the population'. Working plans for the Kolli Hills, which appeared for the first time in the early twentieth century, clearly identified these wants, namely firewood, small timber for building and agricultural implements, bamboo, pasture and penning facilities, thatch, broom and fodder grass, fencing materials, green leaf manure and minor forest produce. Yet, despite recognising these wants, legal entry into forests was almost totally curtailed. There are a number of reasons why the authorities were not much concerned about the Malaiyalis' lack of legal access to the forests. First, they felt that many such wants like firewood, small timber and green leaf manure could be met from 'other' lands, namely *patta* and *poramboke*. Second, the licensing system permitted local residents to graze their cattle in specially designated grazing coupes within the reserved forests. Third, the British argued that it was possible to purchase many of these items in the market. In fact, bamboo working series[54] were a major source by which the state made marketable fuelwood available to local people.

I argued at the outset that the forest history of the Kolli Hills needed to be set within a wider economic and agrarian history. As mentioned above, the separation between state property and local forest property and the exclusion of local inhabitants from the forests, which resulted from the Forest Act of 1882, were defended at the time in two ways: communities could meet their forest produce needs from other lands, and reservation was necessary because of the wider public good functions of forests. However, while it is true that other lands also served to meet local communities' requirements for forest produce, such lands too were often under the control of the state. Besides, there is little to indicate that the Forest Department at this time was worried in practice about the public goods characteristics of forests, or at least their characteristics as environmental public goods. 'Working circles' were designated mostly for fuelwood and timber purposes, and often contracted out to private parties.

Despite the gap between the Forest Department's claims and what actually transpired within the hills, the state's legal presence was often quite fluid. Malaiyalis

[53] No reason could be ascertained as to why only villagers in Gundur Nadu and Ariyur Nadu received settlement rights. The process of settling rights had many problems, including village communities not being aware of the dates on which their representations would be heard. The process of granting or denying rights was also highly random in nature.

[54] The Forest Department has a number of working circles (sub-unit of a reserve) which are divided into coupes and then further divided into series. A bamboo working series, therefore, is a spatial unit that is set aside for bamboo production.

continued to venture into the forests to meet their needs for forest produce.[55] For example, there is little evidence from the Forest Department's working plans that many cases of illegal entry were lodged against them. There were two reasons for this: the area that Forest Department guards, who were mostly outsiders, had to patrol was so large that it was easy for local inhabitants to enter the forest unnoticed; it is also likely that in many cases forest guards were persuaded in return for a consideration to turn a blind eye to the entry of local inhabitants.[56]

A number of observations may now be made with regard to the process of land colonisation in the Kolli Hills. First, some features of this process had specific regional characteristics. I have tried here to describe these peculiarities, making use of the limited archival material available for the hills. What I hope has emerged is a history of how the colonial state continuously tried new forms of management (especially revenue management) to increase revenue or lower transaction costs. The other important point is that the forest history of the Kolli Hills was played out in lands other than forests as well, both because forest produce was available from lands other than forests and because the ownership and control over these other lands had a significant impact on the use of forest lands. Only studying the impact of forest reservations[57] would not have captured the relationship between agricultural land and forests that was central to the subsistence economy of the Malaiyalis.

This wider perspective on the environmental history of the Kolli Hills also helps map out the multiple social meanings that all types of land (cultivable and productive) had in the Kolli Hills. It is important to keep in mind the fact that the importance of forests (often taken for granted in forest histories and histories of forest-dependent communities) in the Kolli Hills depended to a great extent on the availability of other lands to meet the needs for forest produce. Equally, forest lands were at times important for agricultural purposes. Finally, a wider environmental history helps to problematise land categories as well as to draw attention to the impact of the conflict between the ownership and use of land.

Official Environmentalism in the Kolli Hills

Environmental histories are important not only as narratives about the past, but also as reference points for the present and the future. Several recent studies have traced the continuities between colonial and post-colonial forest policies and its

[55] The dependence on reserved forests varied considerably within the hills. In general, two factors affected this dependence: (*a*) distance from the forests; and (*b*) availability of other sources of forest produce.

[56] If a person was caught within the forests, very rarely were cases actually registered. Instead, the forest guard might confiscate sickles or receive a payment (in cash or kind).

[57] While Sivaramakrishnan talks about transition zones where the disjuncture between forests and fields is not clear, his interest remains primarily forests and not non-forest lands. The story he tells, therefore, pays less attention to the importance of non-forest lands in local subsistence economies. *Modern Forests*, pp. 1–33.

consequent impact on forest-dependent communities.[58] But these studies tend to be general, and not focused on specific local contexts or on how individual forest communities have reacted or responded to forest laws. On the other hand, detailed and more regionally specific agrarian histories rarely focus on historical continuities into the present.[59] In this section, therefore, I carry my story into the post-colonial period to illustrate the extent to which colonial constructions of fields and forests have reshaped the spatial configuration of the hills and affected local communities.

The colonial state was primarily preoccupied with revenue extraction, the post-colonial state with development. Yet what linked these periods together was the idea and discourse of modernisation.[60] In its quest to modernise, the post-colonial state built upon the bureaucratic foundations of the colonial administration by preserving many of the colonial government's institutions and its classification of fields and forests. I explore here the ways in which these continuities manifested themselves in the Kolli Hills.

With no tribal development policy in place, state intervention in the Kolli Hills was limited up to the 1970s. In 1975 the Kolli Hills became part of the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) and was earmarked as one of two tribal areas to be modernised in Tamil Nadu. The 1970s were the years of the Green Revolution. Though tribal areas were not direct recipients of Green Revolution technology, Green Revolution discourse, particularly in the form of high-yielding varieties of crops (HYVs) and other technologies for modernising production techniques, was very much part of the discourse of tribal development. Thus the tribal sub-plan for Tamil Nadu observed that 'where the tribals own agricultural lands and are engaged in cultivating . . . they still practice the old fashioned methods of cultivation'.[61]

The main thrust of tribal development in the Kolli Hills thus became modernisation and diversification of the agricultural base. This involved from the outset the promotion of a programme for distributing agricultural implements such as *mammatties* (or shovels), pickaxes, etc., providing improved HYVs of millets, wheat and paddy, as well as introducing new (or relatively less utilised) species such as fruits, vegetables and tapioca.[62] Extension work was critical to these ventures and extension staff played an important role in providing training. Animal

[58] See for example R.S. Ghate, *Forest Policy and Tribal Development: A Study of Maharashtra*, Delhi, 1992; R. Guha, 'Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 14(44–45); C. Singh, *Common Property and Common Poverty*.

[59] Studies such as M.V Nadkarni et al., *The Political Economy of Forest Use and Management*, New Delhi, 1989 and M. Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860–1914*, New Delhi, 1996, are excellent accounts of forest history, but their focus is not on specific micro contexts, i.e., at the level of the individual village and hamlet.

[60] See Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*, pp. 1–32.

[61] Government of Tamil Nadu (GoTN), *A Sub-Plan for Tribal Development*, Madras, 1974, p. 161.

[62] Tapioca is now the most prominent dry land crop in the Kolli Hills.

husbandry was also earmarked as an allied activity of agriculture, the official strategy being to upgrade the quality of local buffaloes, sheep and pigs, improve marketing facilities for milk and eggs, and bring more private land under fodder cultivation.

It is not the purpose here to assess the impact of the state's modernisation project, but rather to see how the modernisation discourse presupposed clear distinctions between state and private property, and then examine the consequences.[63] While modernising agriculture could be promoted by the state, it had to be undertaken by farmers on their private land. Some efforts were therefore made to distribute land to the Malaiyalis as recommended in the Tribal Sub-Plan in 1974 and by the Karthikeyan Commission in 1976.[64]

Non-*patta* lands (excluding those lands distributed) remained firmly in the hands of the state. The bulk of these lands were assessed as dry waste or lands that had been assessed for revenue purposes, and consequently deemed appropriate for cultivation. The other lands were *poramboke* (revenue and forest) and unassessed waste, the latter being inconsequential in terms of area. Although Nehru had famously spoken in his five principles about the dependence of tribals on forests, this was not evident in new policies and laws at the state level or in regional landscapes such as the Kolli Hills. The forests on the slopes of the hills remained firmly under the control of the Forest Department. The Kolli Hills also fell under the purview of the Tamil Nadu Hill Areas (Preservation of Trees) Act, 1955, which gave the Forest Department the power to make decisions even about felling trees on *patta* lands. Furthermore, approximately 22 per cent of the village area was also classified as reserved forests.[65] There were few changes, moreover, in the thrust of Forest Department policies. Working circles continued to be the order of the day. While new working circles such as eco-development were introduced and new restrictions imposed on the felling of coupes, forests still remained legally out of the reach of local communities.

The colonial disjuncture between agrarian fields and forests that continued to drive state policy in the post-colonial period has had significant consequences for the subsistence economy of the Malaiyalis. This needs to be seen both in terms of

[63] The cropping pattern has changed significantly in the Kolli Hills over the last 30 years. Whereas paddy continues to be the most important crop on wetlands, dry land agriculture (especially in the Namakkal Kolli Hills) is now dominated by tapioca cultivation. As a result, the area under minor millets has decreased significantly.

[64] Both reports made recommendations on many issues, the most important being bonded labour and indebtedness. The Shilu Ao Committee (1969) at the Centre had indicated that almost all tribal households were in debt and that loans were frequently taken for consumption purposes. Thus, the Tribal Sub-Plan and the Karthikeyan Committee report recommended the assignment of land to tribals in proximity to their habitations—even 'unauthorised' lands if that were unobjectionable—and to keep in mind the grazing needs of tribal households while assigning land.

[65] Forests in the Kolli Hills are located both outside village jurisdictional boundaries and inside villages. Almost half of all land in the Kolli Hills is outside the 16 revenue villages, much of it in the so-called uninhabited villages. In addition to this half, another fifth to a quarter of the land within the villages comes under the jurisdictional control of the Forest Department.

the overall land situation within the Kolli Hills and the wider context of social meanings to land. In other words, although the state has made efforts to make more land available to the Malaiyalis, significant amounts of assessed wastelands remain under state control. With the population also growing from 25,036 in 1971 to 33,888 in 1991, there has been some fragmentation of landholdings and a decline in the average availability of *patta* land per household and per capita. In 1970–71 (before the state's active intervention), marginal and small holdings accounted for about 64 per cent of total operational holdings. By 1996–97 this proportion had risen to almost 69 per cent. The average per household and per capita amount of *patta* land also decreased from 1.77 ha and 0.44 ha respectively in 1971–72 to 1.42 and 0.37 ha in 1991–92.[66]

The allocation of assessed wastelands for other purposes requires further attention. Over the last 20 years or so, since the state has imbibed the environmental discourse of the forestry intelligentsia, silver oak plantations have emerged on many lands under the Forest Department's jurisdiction. According to Forest Department records, there are well over 100 such plantations throughout the Kolli Hills.[67] Though the state is legally within its rights in establishing these plantations, the latter have had a significantly adverse impact on the local communities. The main reason for this is that historically, *poramboke* and assessed dry wastelands have been extensively cultivated in the Kolli Hills, mainly with minor millet crops such as *ragi*, *samai* and *thinai*. In the more recent past, crops such as tapioca and pineapple have also been grown. As a result, some amount of cultivable land has now been transferred to the Forest Department and taken up for plantation purposes.

The nature of this impact has been locale specific and many dimensioned. It is important to keep in mind that 16 revenue villages occupy approximately 282 square kilometres of the Kolli Hills. There are broad regional differences between the Namakkal and Rasipuram sides. Rasipuram is considered the drier part of the Kolli Hills, with less irrigated land, smaller holdings and more area under crops such as *ragi*, *samai* and *thinai*. While the Namakkal side has benefited more from horticultural crops in the last 20 years, the cropping pattern has changed significantly in the Rasipuram side as well.

There are over 200 dispersed hamlets within the 16 revenue villages. Each hamlet is distinct in the type of land, use of land and the crops grown. The precise nature of the changing agrarian landscape, therefore, can only be fully understood within the context of specific hamlets. I will briefly touch upon these locale-specific contexts by highlighting shifts in land use, land-ownership and land control arising from new plantations in two hamlets—Kattangattupatti located in Devanur Nadu in the Namakkal Kolli Hills and Edappukkadu located in Bail Nadu in the Rasipuram Kolli Hills.

[66] The scenario has remained much the same after 1991–92.

[67] It is not very clear what type of lands these plantations are located on, but the fact that most non-*patta* lands are assessed wastelands would indicate that many of the plantations are located on such lands. Thus, when I speak of plantations on *poramboke* land, this is essentially *poramboke* land as perceived by the people. Legally, it could very well be assessed waste.

Kattangattupatti has 47.92 ha of land.[68] The vast majority of land in this hamlet, 34.60 ha or over 72 per cent, is *poramboke*. Dry land accounts for 8.90 ha (18.57 per cent), and wetland for another 1.39 ha (2.90 per cent). About 3 ha (or 6.32 per cent) of the total comprise mostly assessed dry wasteland distributed to tribal households under the Tamil Nadu Land Reforms Act, 1961, and are referred to locally as D-card *patta*. With 19 farm households[69] and a population of 110, the average landholding per household prior to the plantations was 2.52 ha, and the per capita holding 0.43 ha.

Poramboke land was thus crucial for the local economy. Each household had on an average 1.82 ha of *poramboke*, of which roughly 1.40 ha per household was cultivable.[70] *Poramboke* in Kattangattupatti was historically cultivated with minor millets such as *samai* and *thinai*. These crops were central to the local diet, and coupled with paddy on wetland also provided diversity and security from risk. Minor millets have also been an important source of fuelwood. Dry lands, on the other hand, were used for growing millets and paddy, though over the last 20 years mostly tapioca (a cash crop) has been grown.

In the early 1980s, after the introduction of the Forest Conservation Act, a lot of attention was paid to afforestation within the Kolli Hills. It was now the time for plantations, and one such plantation emerged in Kattangattupatti, on the *poramboke*. The fact that the land was locally in use meant nothing to the bureaucracy as it was revenue *poramboke*. Nonetheless, so long as it was under the revenue department, the locals were able to cultivate it without much ado. Their problems started when the Forest Department took over the land, as it meant a change in land use pattern. It was less, therefore, a case of property rights than one of enforcing them and establishing control.[71]

Spatially, the plantation does not cover the whole *poramboke*. It occupies 13.80 ha out of a total of 34.60 ha. This 13.80 ha represents, therefore, the land lost locally in terms of cultivation. Of the cultivable *poramboke*, only 20.80 ha is now available, and only 34.12 ha of land in toto. Cultivable *poramboke* land per household declined from 1.82 to 1.09 ha and the per capita holding from 0.31 ha to 0.19 ha. As a result, the extent of productive land per household and per capita declined from 2.52 ha to 1.80 ha and from 0.43 ha to 0.31 ha.

The vulnerability of the local economy and the effect of these changes on local subsistence strategies deserve further exploration. The loss of land for growing

[68] This area does not include the residential area of the hamlet.

[69] A farm household is one that cultivates land together. It is opposed to a Census household, which is defined as a household that does its cooking under the same roof. Farm households do not necessarily coincide with the distribution of actual *pattas*. However, given the problems with the quality of landholding data for Census households, it is the most appropriate unit of analysis.

[70] The distinction here is between cultivable and productive land. While cultivable land is land deemed fit for cultivation, productive land can also be used for other purposes such as meeting forest produce needs, grazing, etc. In the Kolli Hills, most land is considered productive in the latter sense of the word.

[71] See Rangan, 'Property vs Control: The State and Forest Management in the Indian Himalaya', *Development and Change*, Vol. 28(1), 1997, for a more detailed discussion.

millets such as *samai* and *thinai*—both central to the local diet—was reinforced by the substitution of tapioca for millets on dry land.

Poramboke land was also a source of forest produce. Minor millet wastes have historically been important as sources of fuelwood. Tapioca, unlike millet, is not a multipurpose crop and cannot be a substitute for minor millets. The greatest impact seems, however, to have been on the availability of fodder rather than fuelwood. There are only small numbers of cattle and livestock in Kattangattupatti now: at the time of my survey there were only 50 goats, 13 cows and 11 bulls. But village elders recalled a time when there were more than 400 goats, 50 cows and 50 bulls. The availability of fuelwood has not been as seriously affected because the silver oak plantation has become a new source of fuelwood despite plantations being under the control of the Forest Department. Although species such as *pongam* (*Pongamia pinnata*), *sala* (*Chukrasia tabularis*), *nava* (*Crataeva religiosa*), *athi* (*Ficus racemosa*), *vengai* (*Pterocarpus marsupion*) and *thagiri* (*Cassia flora*) are common fodder species and are available in the reserved forest, access to the forest has been difficult.

A similar scenario emerged in Edappukkadu a few years later. At its inception Edappukkadu was a small hamlet of 13 households. At present, however, there are 48 separate farm households and a population of 230. Edappukkadu is one of the main hamlets of Bail Nadu and is located near Powerkadu (Edappuli Nadu), which is the major hamlet in the Rasipuram Kolli Hills.

The residential area of the hamlet is significantly larger than that of Kattangattupatti. More importantly, land types (in terms of ownership) are also significantly different. The total area of land within Edappukkadu is 71.18 ha. However, before the plantations arrived, households in Edappukkadu also cultivated 3.56 ha in another hamlet; therefore, the total availability of lands was 74.74 ha. Dry lands comprised 54.37 ha (or 72.75 per cent) of the total area, whereas *poramboke* comprised 16.24 ha (21.73 per cent) and wetlands 4.13 ha (or 5.53 per cent). In household terms, what this meant was that on an average each household had 1.56 ha of land, of which 1.13 ha was dry land, 0.09 ha was wetland and 0.34 ha was *poramboke*. The mean per capita land availability was 0.34 ha.

In Edappukkadu, a jack (as opposed to a silver oak) plantation was planted in the mid-1990s, once again on *poramboke*. The extent of *poramboke* used, however, was less than in Kattangattupatti, namely 6.68 ha. Nonetheless, as a result of this, 0.14 ha per household of land was lost.

There are substantial differences between the effects of Forest Department plantations in Edappukkadu and Kattangattupatti. Though once used for growing minor millets, since the mid-1980s the inhabitants of Edappukkadu used *poramboke* mainly to grow pineapples. Consequently, the plantation did not result in the displacement of staple food crops such as minor millets as it did in Kattangattupatti, but rather in the displacement of a cash crop. The reduction in area under pineapple thus put household incomes under strain. Tapioca too is grown in Edappukkadu, providing to some extent cash alternatives within the local economy. But the area under tapioca is marginal, both because of the relatively small extent of *patta* lands as well as the fact that dry land is also used for food grain crops. Prices of tapioca,

moreover, have declined substantially—often a bag (75–100 kg) fetches not more than Rs 75.

Here, too, the plantation should be viewed in the wider context of the local economy. As in most hamlets of the Kolli Hills, scarcity of productive land is a central concern. The loss of *poramboke* took away productive land from local inhabitants and reduced their cultivable land. Second, the loss of land, understood in the context of local land use patterns as mentioned above, meant the loss of cash crop land in Edappukkadu. As cultivation on *patta* lands has never provided round-the-year security, any additional income they earned helped local residents tide over the agricultural off season. Third, the plantation has given the state an additional presence within the hamlet. Though the state always controlled a significant extent of land within the hills, the plantation in the midst of the hamlet has resulted in a more overbearing presence of the state.

Unlike in Kattangattupatti, however, the plantation has not directly affected forest produce needs. To some extent this was because *poramboke* land ceased to meet forest produce needs when it was turned to growing pineapples. The neighbouring reserved forest seems always to have been a more important source of forest produce in Edappukkadu than Puliansholai has been for Kattangattupatti. In addition to fuelwood and fodder needs, households in Edappukkadu have over the last five years collected *kuluma* leaves which are utilised primarily as a spice to add flavour to biryani. Locals sell these leaves to contractors from Namakkal at Rs 5 per kg. The collection of *kuluma* leaves has thus been an important additional source of employment and income.

These differences are important for the forest history I am trying to write. Central to the narrative laid out in this article is the contention that forest histories often have to be much more than just histories of forest lands classified as such in law. In the Kolli Hills, other lands such as *poramboke* and assessed dry waste have also been important sources of forest produce. The point here is that land acquires meaning in the Kolli Hills according to use, and property rights are rarely markers for the land use choices made by individual households. The loss of *poramboke* and assessed dry wasteland to the Forest Department has reduced the amount of cultivable land and not only the amount of productive land.

Equally importantly, these short hamlet interludes also highlight the fact that these lands are important for cultivation, the mainstay of the Malaiyalis' livelihood.[72] The forest history of these two hamlets is, therefore, interlinked with the unfolding of their respective subsistence economies. Despite significant shifts in the cropping pattern, most households in these two hamlets have chosen from a mix of paddy, other food crops, and a cash crop. The consequent variations in terms of land use have stemmed to a great extent from the manner in which this mix of needs could be met, which has itself depended on the extent and quality of land. The apparent differences with regard to the use of both *patta* lands and *poramboke*

[72] I have not addressed intra-hamlet inequalities in this article. Though the Kolli Hills are relatively homogeneous, differences have emerged over the last 20 years.

are alternate responses to scarcity conditions with regard to land, coupled with varied compulsions triggered off by the increasing demands of the cash economy. These different land use patterns have also manifested themselves in different scenarios with regard to meeting forest produce needs. Conceptually, this implies the presence of many varieties of forest-dependence and types of forest dependent communities, rather than a single, homogenous, forest-dependent community.

Finally, it is important to highlight the implications of a broader-based narrative of forest history such as this for questions of environmental sustainability. Central to the debate around forest history has been the ideology/praxis of the actors, most notably forest-dependent communities and the Forest Department, and their respective roles in forest use and management. I have tried to show in this section that whether or not forest-dependent communities lived symbiotically with nature depended on the nature of their agrarian landscape and their ability to access other types of land, private or public. In the Kolli Hills, in particular, access to agricultural land is critical to the manner in which communities or even individual households perceive the forest. In other forest-dependent communities, these landscapes might differ, and so consequently their relationship to the forests.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to reconstruct a history of the forests of the Kolli Hills within a broader history of the state's revenue and forest policy in the region. This broader canvas is needed because forest-dependent communities view land in terms not so much of ownership but of use. Forests, therefore, are to be found as much on agricultural lands and *poramboke* as they are in legally reserved forests.

The reconstruction of forest histories also needs to pay close attention to local and regional peculiarities. While the history of the colonial revenue settlement in the Kolli Hills was not smooth or continuous, the process of colonisation depended both on the state's ability to take over large areas of land (whether forests or other types of land) and the ability of local communities to shape the state's initiatives to at least some extent. This ability was reflected and underlined by the state's dependence on local intermediaries in the Kolli Hills, especially for revenue collection purposes. Although this was to change over time, the manner in which state policies reach local communities in the Kolli Hills continues to be determined to some extent by the latter's reception and response.

It would be shortsighted to suggest that the colonial period did not change the trajectory of future developments in the Kolli Hills. What this article has highlighted is that change itself needs to be problematised and regionally situated. In the case of the Kolli Hills, this has meant understanding what the history of colonial and post-colonial interventions has meant for the present-day subsistence economy of the Malaiyalis. Critical to this understanding is moving away from juridically constructed notions of fields and forests and looking at the whole agrarian landscape in interlinked ways, and in a manner that is sensitive towards local social ecologies.

Glossary of Local Terms

Dhirasu:	In local parlance land which is not cultivated or fallow; in official parlance land that is waste.
Kangani:	Administrative assistant of the *ur-kavundan*
Kollakadu:	Rocky land
Kombe:	Malaiyali dominated villages at the foothills
Maniakaran:	Malaiyali revenue collector and assistant of *pattakaran*
Mettukadu:	Rain-fed land with a low to medium water holding capacity
Patta:	Private land or title thereto
Pattakaran:	Malaiyali headman of the village or *nadu;* mediated between periyapattakarans and the village.
Periya-pattakaran:	Malaiyali chieftain of the estate
Poramboke:	State property under the Revenue or Forest Department
Ragi:	Finger millet
Samai:	Little millet
Thinai:	Foxtail millet
Ur-Kavunan:	Malaiyali headman of a hamlet
Vayal:	Wetland