Chapter 5

The Tribals in Arms: The Kurichya

Revolt of 1812

The Kurichyas, who were the main supporters of Pazhassi rebellion, were subjected to untold miseries and privations under the reign of the East India Company. The Kurichyas were compelled to lead the life of poverty due to the various policies followed by the Company. The revenue officials and the Company’s forces made their life more and more miserable, as it was observed by Thomas Warden, the Principal Collector of Malabar in the following words:

…Having been an eye witness to the losses they have sustained in their grain and other property, it was convincingly convinced of their impoverished conditions and indeed the scarcity of means, in some to maintain their families during the rains…¹

Among the diverse tribal population in Wayanad, the Kurichyas were the dominant tribal group in the region. The very name Kurichya was ascribed to them by the Raja of Kottayam, as they were adepts in archery.² The expression Kurivechavan meaning the one who took aim was another story about the origin of the name Kurichya.³ The Kurichyas were very excellent in bow and arrow. It is also said that they belonged to a class of Nair’s known as Thekke Kari Nair, meaning karinayar of South,

¹ Report of Thomas Warden to the President and Members of the Board of Revenue, Vol. 2323, pp. 116-117.
² C. Gopalan Nair, Wynad, p.59.
indicating the erstwhile princely state of Travancore.\textsuperscript{4} The traditional account of the advent of Kurichyas to Kottayam is that Kottayam Raja brought them from Travancore for fighting against the Vedar rulers Arippon and Vedars and after the war they settled down the hills of Kottayam and the nearby regions. Whatever be their origin, they are a dominant tribe in Malabar, particularly in the district of Wayanad. They are great hunters, slaying even the tiger with their arrows. They chase the wild animal for long distances until it is hunted.\textsuperscript{5} They survived mainly by hunting and occasional shifting cultivation.

The Kurichyas follow \textit{Marumakkathayam} (matriliney) where the property is inherited in the maternal line. They believe that they occupy the highest status among the tribes of Wayanad, that they do not take any meals from any other castes except of the Brahmins and Nair’s of Wayanad. Their houses were polluted if any one belonging to any other castes enters their house. The slightest suspicion is sufficient enough for a Kurichya man or women to be out of their caste. They are religious, simple and truthful in their daily life. It was these Kurichyas who offered a heroic resistance against the East India Company in 1812. But the conventional social science in India ignored many such resistive movements merely because they went down in the official records as outlawry, decoity or some other form of statutory crimes.\textsuperscript{6} The Judicial and other records, particularly where the subaltern categories of people are involved and are expressed them in the similar sense. But this resistance movement, beginning at the grassroots level, emerges as a struggle between the state and community in course of time.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
These tribal communities were forbidden with any commercial intercourses with the outside world since suppression of Paszhassi Raja’s rebellion. They were also subject humiliation and devastation not by the revenue officers only but by the troops who annually over-ran the country. The life of the people in Wayanad was thus pushed to abject poverty and misery, which ultimately pushed them to an uprising against the Company.

**Land tenurial assessment in Wayanad**

Wayanad generally remained for a long time in a very unsettled condition, even though it was well peopled and extensively cultivated. Tipu sultan had occupied it in 1783-1784 by exacting sorely against the will of the Raja of Cotiote after some reluctant delay. But it is impossible to trace the nature of administration or revenue settlement introduced by Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, in Wayanad. It was only after the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799 that the English could exercise their complete sway over Wayanad. Immediately after the occupation of Wayanad by the English East India Company, Pazhassi Raja and the inhabitants of the region broke out in a new rebellion against them, and prevented any general settlement of the country till1806. Wayanad did not participate in the popular revenue settlement introduced by the minister of Tipu Sultan, Arshed Beg Khan, in 1783-1784. No trace of the land assessment or the revenue collection system introduced by Arshed Beg Khan can be found in the region. The continuous rebellion, followed by the occupation of Wayanad by the Company,

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prevailed in the region for a period of six years, further delayed the land tax settlement in Wayanad.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{The average rivaz\textsuperscript{12} rates of rice land assessment made by Mr. Baber}

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The earliest attempt on the part of the Company to make any assessment in the region was made by Baber in 1806. Baber commenced his jenma-paimash in 1805-1806 by calling on all proprietors to make returns of all assessable lands, showing the seed sown, rental, gross produce and so of their land. Then following the principle of taking one-half of the gross produce, Baber introduced a temporary measure into which each amsam a kind of rivaz or standard of rate of assessment on rice land, which has been

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Rivaz means the standard of rate of assessment of rice cultivating land.
continued more or less ever since. It was only the rice field alone became subject of assessment and the wet land or the up land was excluded from this taxation process.

The revenue administration introduced by the East India Company in Malabar, affected the very life and existence of the tribals in Wayanad. From the very inception of the Company in Malabar, there economic policies and revenue settlements affected the very life of the region. Further the periodical revision and rearrangement of the settlements made their life more and more miserable. The new revenue settlements introduced by Thomas Warden after the defeat of Pazhassi Raja in 1805 brought their life to a standstill. The tribal community felt as Baber, the sub-collector of Wayanad observed:

\[\ldots\text{ the most grievous source of complaint is the inequality in the land law, nominally the assessment in some districts a moriety and in other six tenths of their income, but if ever an account is made of the actual income, in each particular estate, it will be found that some are not taxed at all and generally the tax fluctuating from twenty to hundred per cent\ldots}\text{the Revenue officers under little or no contest, it is to be expected that there must be a great deal of partiality in assessments as well as the mode in which the collections were made}^{13}.\]

Thus the revenue arrangements made by the Company made a havoc in Wayanad. The arbitrary revenue collections increased the revenue of the district, but it ended the prevalence of tranquility in the region as the revenue officers practiced rapacity and wanton oppression.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13} Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, No 2281, } \textit{Judicial Consultations,} \text{ Vol. 74 B, pp.3699-3704.}\]
In Malabar, it was the Kanam-Jenna-Maryada system determined the nature and mode of revenue payment and collections. Usually it was paid in kind, a sharing systems based on the traditional customs. The British conquered Malabar and tried to alter the existing system in Malabar. The Government assessed the land revenue in kind at six-tenths of the rent and the exactions were made in cash instead of goods.\(^\text{14}\) Very often due to the regular and periodical revision of the revenue system in Malabar, the poor tribals found it difficult to make the payments. The introduction of a new currency conversion system by Macleod, affected the whole district of Wayanad.\(^\text{15}\) The rates thus fixed were invariably higher than the existing one. The monetization of the economy in Malabar also adversely affected the poor tribals. The tribal population survived with the forest resources and it was exchanged for goods. But the monetization often led them to acute poverty as once they sell their forest products, they received only very little returns because the tribal’s paid their dues in money of a designed character, the system often gutted local markets with produces and depressed the agricultural prices. More over they were unable to find a market for their produce because their commercial intercourses with the coast and the outside world was forbidden to them particularly after the Pazhassi Raja’s rebellion in Malabar.\(^\text{16}\)

In the assessment made by the Company, their existed an inequality of assessment and disparity between the prevailing market prices and the rates adopted by the Government for valuation of the produce, in monetary terms. The inequality in assessment laid the burden of land revenue upon the poor and the tribal communities, rather than the well to do ones in the society. The pressure of over assessment and the


\(^\text{16}\) *Report of Thomas Warden to the President and Members of the Board of Revenue*, Vol. 2323, pp.120-122.
disparity on conversion rates was acutely felt by the rural population. Thomas H. Baber expressed his concern and distress about the people in one of his proceedings as he wrote:

.........I cannot conclude this address without soliciting the humane consideration of Government to the lower order of the people in general in this Zillah. Their situations are truly deplorable; everything that can be laid hold of, even the most trifling article has been disposed of…… 17

Thus the condition of the people, particularly of the tribal community Wayanad was quiet deplorable and pathetic which often tempted them to rise in uprising against the Company.

The East India Company when established its dominance in Malabar, attempted to assert its monopoly in trade and commerce. The Company to obtain more wealth and to exploit the natives, introduced monopoly in the trade of certain products like tobacco, timber and salt, which affected the tribal people more than the others. Due to the monopolization of these products, the prices of these products had gone up. For example the retail price of tobacco in 1806 was Rs. 60 per candy of 680 pound and by 1812 the retail price had gone up to Rs. 106.5 per candy for the same quantity.18 The tribal’s, who were the major customers of tobacco found it difficult to afford the prices. The introduction of taxes on spirituous liquors and toddy extractors struck hard on the habits and mores of the tribal community.19 The Kurichyas, like any other tribal communities

lavishly consumed toddy and other liquors in every auspicious occasion. They used it in their religious rituals and ceremonies.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore the introduction of taxes on liquor created dissatisfaction and discontent among them. The introduction of the monopoly of price on certain products and taxes on spirituous liquor enhanced the revenue of the state. But it made the life of the tribal community all the more deplorable.

It was the mode of collection of revenue was more intolerable to the tribal’s than the exorbitant rate of revenue. Most of the revenue officers under the Company were corrupt and collected more amounts from the people than what is actually required. They exacted the inhabitants several thousand rupees to their private account. The poor inhabitants who contribute to the demands of the revenue officers knew that they would be disturbed in different ways, if they opposed these collections.\textsuperscript{21} Further the discontent of the people increased when the Company officials began to confiscate the properties and the personal effects of the revenue defaulters. All these added to the agonies of the tribal communities in Wayanad and prompted them to rise against the English East India Company.

The colonization of Malabar has influenced the traditional agricultural system followed by the inhabitants. Due to the high demand of market products, an offshoot of colonization tempted the people to shift their cultivation of traditional products to cash crops like pepper, cardamom, cinnamon and coconut. This naturally necessitated the expansion agriculture. Naturally, these expansions were to the interiors of Wayanad, where more suitable land for the cultivation of pepper was available. This expansion of agriculture into the interior brought them into contact with the shifting cultivation

\textsuperscript{20} Kumaran Vayaleri, \textit{Kurichyarude Jeevithavum Samskaravum}, Payyannur, 2010, pp.28-39
\textsuperscript{21} Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, No 2281 \textit{Judicial Consultations}, Vol.74 B, June 30, 1812, pp. 3706-3707.
practiced by the tribal communities, who produced hill rice and pepper on the foothills. These migratory cultivators were permitted an expanse at the cost of forest. They cleared the forest for pepper cultivation and hill rice. This expansion of agriculture to the interior of Malabar adversely affected the economy and life of the tribals in Malabar. The tribals, who gave neither any dues nor allegiance to anyone, were for all intents and purposes, regarded themselves as the owners of the soil ‘by rights of long and undisturbed possession’. So the systematic encroachment on the preserves of the tribals combined with the attempts at forest conservancy by the Government had prompted them to turn against the Company. This expansion of agriculture to the interior brought the tribals and their production under the sway of export economy. In all most all cases they were converted to the status of prodigal slaves. In earlier days it was a practice that the inhabitants were entered into contract, and when the forests were sold many tribals who were called themselves as the ‘men of janmi’ were also sold with it.\(^\text{22}\)

The Agricultural pattern of the Kurichyas and the Kurumbas in Wayanad, from antiquity, was the shifting cultivation. The type of rice and crops cultivated by these different groups were completely different. The commercialization of agriculture had affected the shifting pattern of cultivation (punam cultivation) followed by the Kurichyas. In the process of the expansion of agriculture, from the non-tribal areas to the interior of Wayanad, particularly to the foothills regions, the Kurichyas lost their natural fields of cultivation and gradually they were pushed away from their traditional place of cultivation and dwelling.\(^\text{23}\) The new intruders into the tribal areas not only occupied their land, but also destroyed the forests for further expansion of crop cultivation. The big landlords had made large sums of money annually by leasing out areas from unsurveyed

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parts of their encroached forests for cultivation\(^{24}\). This process of encroachment had adversely affected the tribal community. Thus the commercialization of agriculture affected the very existence and survival of the tribal community in Wayanad.

Another aspect of the commercialization of agriculture was the introduction of plantation system in Malabar. The introduction of tea and coffee plantations in Wayanad directly affected the Kurichyas and other tribal communities of Wayanad. The beginning of plantation system was in spice plantations, the first of its kind in India, set up in 1798, at Anjarakandy in North Malabar.\(^{25}\) The investment was made in response to the initiative taken by the English merchant, Murdoch Brown. This was followed by the pepper cultivation in North Wayanad, tea and coffee cultivation across the district of Wayanad from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. The establishment of plantation industry led to the commercialization of land and the proletarianization of labour in Wayanad.\(^{26}\) The introduction of plantation system led to large scale plunder of the forest and it was made legalized by the stipulations and regulations introduced by the Company’s Government in Wayanad. In all most all the tea-growing regions in South India, the forest land which was officially labeled as ‘waste land’ was made available to the European planters at free of assessment for five years, on condition that at least one fourth of the land would be planted within the first three years.\(^{27}\) Even if there was tax to these lands, it was very low and in Wayanad many of the Europeans were free holders apart from giving the land at a throw away price to the planters, large sums were spent


\(^{27}\) *Ibid.*
by the state authorities to build up planting infrastructure such as the ‘planters’ roads’ maintenance hospitals and so on.\textsuperscript{28} The introduction of plantation system in Wayanad affected the very life of the tribal community. The transformation forest land into tea, coffee and pepper cultivating land reduced their sources of food and income. Due to the development of changes in the pattern of agriculture, many tribes were thrown out of the jungle where they resided and were forced to lead an entirely different way of life. It adversely affected their culture and their very existence. All these developments were not real developments to the tribal communities.

The source of labour to this newly developed agrarian economy was mainly constituted by the disposed tribals and tenants, particularly in the early years of planting. Most of the labourers recruited for the plantations were attached labourers. Many of these tribals, who were forcibly uprooted from their indigenous base, were compelled to make them available for the naked exploitation by the European planters. In many areas, the tribals were dispossessed through the direct purchase of land by the European planters and in some areas the local tribals were denied of their registration of lands they had processed. The tribals were even restricted from shifting cultivation even in the hill tracts by Government.\textsuperscript{29} This attitude of the Government towards the tribals led to the dispossessions of their land and were pushed to the margins and found them advancing to the frontier due to the colonial expansion. Thus the introduction of a new pattern of agricultural economy in Wayanad and commercialization of agriculture added the discontent of the poor Kurichyas and Kurumbars.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. p.245.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
The ecological differences emerged due to the deforestation and its outcome of plantation industry led to the poverty of the people in these pockets and compelled them to rise against the state. It was quiet visible in the case of the Kurichyas and Kurumbas of Wayanad. Eric Stokes argues that the roots of similar revolts can be traced to the poverty caused by the ecological differences and British land settlement policies rather than their frustrations of degraded proprietary classes\textsuperscript{30}. This is evident from the unrest among the grazeers and semi-nomadic communities of central India like the Gurjars, Bhattis and Rangars who are forced to sedentary agriculture in their pastoral economy.\textsuperscript{31} Thus the outcome of this commercial forest policy was that the increasing exposure of these indigenous primitive isolates to the process of degradation.\textsuperscript{32} It was these processes of gradual degradation prompted the Kurichyas to initiate a resistance movement against the English East India Company in Wayanad.

The issue of slavery that prevailed in Wayanad was another source of discontent to the tribal community in Wayanad\textsuperscript{33}. The revenue officials and Englishman often seized the tribals and compelled them to serve as bonded labourers under them in the newly developing agrarian economy. The Kurichyas, who regarded themselves as a superir caste in their socio-economic environment, was degraded and pushed to a despicable condition under the colonial system. Regarding the condition of the slavery that prevailed in Malabar Buchanan observed thus:


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 21-22.


…There can be no comparison between their condition and that of
the slaves in the West India I stands, except that in Malabar, there are a
sufficient number of females, who are allowed to marry any person of the
same caste with themselves and whose labour is always exacted by their
husband’s master…..

These Kurichya slaves were deprived of their caste by cutting off their lock of hair which
is regarded as distinguishing mark of their caste; by making them eat prohibited food and
by otherwise disguising and polluting them. The Kurichyas who regard themselves as
higher order in the society, believed that others would pollute them and so refused to
work as slaves under the English and other caste people. Thus the process of agrestic
slavery in Wayanad was a threat to the very existence of the tribals.

Moreover the conditions of these slaves during the colonial period were worse
than of the cattles. The slaves were the absolute property of their masters or lords. The
same has been corroborated by the reports of the East India Company when it reports as:

…….they are part of the livestock on an estate. In selling and buying
land it is not necessary that they should follow the soil; both kinds of property
are equally disposable and may fall into different hands. The slaves may be
sold, leased or mortgaged like the land itself, or like any cattle or thing.

The lives of the slaves were thus tied to the manner in which the land was owned
and transferred. Buchanan observes three ways of transferring the usufruct of slaves:

first, by sale where the full value of the slave was given and transferred to the new master; second, by mortgage, where the owner receives a loan of money, usually two third of the actual value of the slave and a small quantity of rice to show that his property in the slave still existed and third, transferring the slaves by rent.\(^{38}\) All most all these conditions were prevalent among the tribals of Wayanad, who were forced to slavery under the East India Company. So their situations made them more resistant towards the English and their Government in Wayanad.

The development of colonial infrastructure and the construction of roads in the tribal areas affected their peaceful cohesion and existence. Deforestation and the expansion of cultivation were going on even in the beginning of the twentieth century and fresh clearings were opened up in forested hillocks of Kottayam and Chirrakkal.\(^{39}\) This line of expansion was followed by the construction of roads: roads leading from Tellicherry to Coorg and the similar in Wayanad – pushed into the forested territories on either side. The roads were built for the free and quick movement the forces of the Company during the rebellion of Pazhassi Raja.\(^{40}\) It was through these roads the instruments of colonial administration penetrated into the tribal settlements. The colonial troops, revenue harvesters, officers, moneylenders, traders and so many entered into the tribal colonies and disturbed their peaceful cohesion. These agencies of the colonial regime exploited the illiterate and innocent tribal people to the maximum. The poor tribals, who were small growers of pepper and other agricultural products, borrowed money from the money lenders, traders or their agents for cultivating the crops. The crop that was cultivated was the security offered and they were compelled to sell all their


\(^{39}\) Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, p.23.

products to these agents, usually at less than the market rates, at least a year before the crops were formed. These traders, moneylenders and their agents were the only a nexus between production and market, and these people had no other alternative but to depend on them for money and selling their produce. These money lenders and other colonial agents exploited the tribals, harassed them and demanded exorbitant rates of interests on money and loans on the grain. Thus the infrastructural developments in the tribal areas led to the destruction of forest lands and the inflow of the colonial exploiters into their regions. It had affected the culture and their way of living. Many of them had, thus lost their traditional occupations and means of survival.

The advent of colonialism in Malabar had a serious brunt upon the tribal communities. The tribals, who regarded the tracts of foothills, for which they never paid any dues or allegiance to anyone, were in all intents and purposes the owners of the soil by rights of long and undisturbed possession were now alienated from them. The penetration of English and colonial machinery into Malabar society and its natural consequences the deforestation, establishment of plantations, change in this pattern of agriculture, transformation of cultivation from food crops to cash crops, the emergence of money lenders, the introduction of new Government officials like revenue collectors, accountants and so on; the appointment of offices to look after the law and order and free movement of the troops through their residential area: all these led to the process of alienation of the tribals and tribal lands. The question of indebtedness which was very acute and widespread in the tribal regions also contributed for their land alienation. The tribals who regarded the whole land as theirs now felt that they are losing their means of livelihood. So they were forced to turn against the English in Wayanad.

In short due to the violent, injudicious and oppressive conditions that prevailed in Wayanad during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, compelled the Kurichyas and
other people to rebel against the English. They led a life of misery and destitution. It was beyond their capacity of suffering. Above all the stubbornness of the Government of the East India Company in Malabar produced a firm and aggressive spirit of resistance among the people of Wayanad against them in 1812.

The Kurichyas and Kurumbas were very simple, innocent and trustworthy people, who would not have revolted against the Company, unless someone from outside, had not influenced them. It has been said that some of the relatives and dependents of the vanquished Pazhassi Raja was there to instigate them against the Company. There was constant request on the part of the dependents of Pazhassi Raja, exiled in Travancore to reinstate them to their lost territory of Kottayam. Since the East India Company turned down their request, there was every possibility from these dependents to turn against the Company. There also prevailed another argument that the leadership of the Kurichya rebellion was provided by the Nairs and Thiyyas of Malabar. After the Pazhassi rebellion there were a number of Nairs and Thiyyas, who were frustrated and dissatisfied with the occupation Malabar by the English. They were originally attached to the administrative services under the East India Company, but were unlawfully sacked for their sympathetic attitude and support towards Pazhassi rebellion and to the suffering of the masses in Wayanad. A good number of the Tiyyas and Nairs in Wayanad were affected by the diverse revenue settlement introduced by the Company. Thus these frustrated and discounted people were waiting for an opportunity and they made use of the Kurichyas to rebel against the Company in 1812. Whoever had

44 Ibid.
instigated them, it is true that the Kurichyas had a long tradition of resistance against the English in Wayanad. During the Pazhassi rebellion, the Kurichyas had actively supported him. Their leader, Thalackal Chandoo was one of the ablest guerilla fighters against the Company during the Pazhassi rebellion. Thus the Kurichyas were experienced in their resistance against the Company and so the revolt of 1812, it is said that it is the continuation of the Pazhassi rebellion, ended in 1805.

The rebels looked for a total revolution in Malabar. It is doubtful whether the rebels had tried to make any alliance with similar other discontented and dissatisfied people. It was found that one Fakir who was responsible for the Mutiny of Quilon in 1812 was brought into being in Wayanad by the officials of the Company.45 Also the secret intelligence of the Company found that two agents of the young Pazhassi Raja (the nephew of the late Pazhassi Raja), who was a state prisoner at Travancore, in the district of Wayanad.46 It was also expected by the rebels that he would come over to Wayanad to free it from the British occupation. All these indicate the fact that there was an attempt by the insurgents for a general turmoil in Malabar in 1812. This attempt was further intensified with the rumour that the young Pazhassi Raja, who was in Travancore had landed in Wayanad and would lead the rebellion against the English in 1812.

Whatever be the situation, the rebels made elaborate preparations for the rebellion. The rebels undertook the task of propagating the message of rebellion among the people who were exploited by the English. They enlisted the supporters of the rebel cause. The rebel leaders wrote letters to the Kurichyas and Kurumbas who were in the armed troops of the Company and in the revenue offices of the English to support their


cause and take part in the rebellion. Writing letters to instigate the dormant people in the region was a common strategy adopted by the rebels. In almost all similar out breaks similar strategy was adopted by the rebels. To solicit the support of these people the rebels utilized the spirit of religion. They propagated that it was the mandate of their God to rise in arms against the English. These writings and propaganda had the desired effect upon the people. Almost all of the Kurichyas and Kurumba Kolkars deserted the Company’s forces and joined in hands with the rebels. The rebels also collected new weapons to fight against the Company. They made arrow blades from the iron railings pulled out from the bridges in the surrounding regions. They don’t have the technology of mining the iron or sophisticating them. So the easy available iron objects to the tribals were the iron rails from the roadsides. They made use of them and made weapons out of them. All these indicate that the uprising of the Kurichyas in 1812 was a well planned one. The preparations and the movements of the insurgents were in secret. The Company or its officials were unaware of their arrangements till the rebellion broke out. For instance James Tagg who was stationed in Wayanad with two companies of forces was totally unaware of these secret planning of the Kurichyas. The rebels were working in the underground so that there was no sign of uprising in the region till it broke out. Everything was calm and serene so that nobody doubted about it. Thus the rebels were gathering the momentum to revolt against the English in Wayanad.

49 India D, Kuridhyarude Cherathunilppu, in P.B. Salim et.al. (Ed.), Malabar Paithrakavum Prathapavum, Kozhikode, pp. 188-191.
Most of the revenue collectors, *Kolkars* and a number of Kurichyas employed under the Government of the Company relinquished their positions and joined on the rebel side. The most prominent among them was Raman Namby, who was an awesome figure to the Company. The rebels with their country made bows and arrows attacked the troops of East India Company. In front of the sophisticated weapons of the Company, the bow and arrow was futile and it was not match to them, yet the rebels fought with great vigour and the rebellion lasted almost for six months.

The Kurichyas began their rebellion against the Company on 25 March, 1812. The immediate provocation for the uprising began with the disarming of the two *Kolkars* who attempted to collect revenue from the Kurichyas. The insurgents, who were camping at a place, Karachaanchal, in the Kurichipad Mountains, withheld *Kolkars* and prevented them from collecting the revenue. Though the police retaliated against the insurgents, it was not strong enough to counter their attacks and so the police was compelled to retreat. Meanwhile the leaders of the rebellion issued orders in the name of their deity, Murikkanmar (*Lava-Kusa*) of Pulppally and exhorted the people of Wayanad to stand united against English and to rise up in arms against them in Wayanad. The rebels also dispatched men to different parts of Wayanad to propagate the insurgency and to instigate the rebellion among the inhabitants of Wayanad. The consequence of these efforts made by the rebels was that the insurgency spread all over Wayanad. The whole of Wayanad rose up in arms against the Company. They took into custody most of the strategic places in Wayanad. They attacked the police posts at

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Mananthawady, Sultan Bathery and Panamaram.\textsuperscript{55} Attacking the police stations and Government officers were quiet common in similar uprisings. The rebels saw them as the symbols of the British Raj. Similar incidents were found in all the tribal uprisings in different parts of the country.\textsuperscript{56} Looting and plundering of the enemy’s arsenal was one of the modes of guerilla warfare often adopted in related risings. This strategy enabled the rebels with the possession of arms and ammunitions and at the same time destroyed the resources of the enemies. Therefore it is not surprising that such perceptions were maintained in similar rebellions against the East India Company all over India. Another important strategy adopted by the rebels was the blocking of the roads in the vicinity of Mananthawady and the passes to Wayanad. The Kuttiyadi pass, the Thamarassery pass and the Kottiyur pass were blockaded by the rebels.\textsuperscript{57} The insurgents gathered in all these passes and obstructed the easy movement of the \textit{Kolkars} and the other troops of the East India Company. So Baber wrote as early as on the 1 April of 1812 that:

\begin{quote}
...........the insurgents are assembled in considerable numbers and are in possession of all passes leading to Wayanad. They are said to be in two or three hundred in the Coteady Ghaut.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

These passes were the only means of transportation to Wayanad. Being hilly and elevated place there was no other alternative routes to Wayanad. The blockading of the passes enabled them to curtail the supplies to the English troops from the lower country.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{58} Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, No, 2254 \textit{Judicial Collection, January-June 1812}, pp. 108-110.
The rebels were successful in this strategy of warfare and the Company found it difficult to suppress the rebellion, as the forces of the Company found it difficult to move from one place to another as the insurgents were moving. It was Plakkal Chandu, Ayiramveettul Konthappan and Mambilathodan Yemu who heroically provided the leadership to the movement at this stage of the insurrection. Under their direction the rebellion spread to the nook and corner of Wayanad. Many of the Kolkars who were in the service of the Company, defected their establishment and supported the rebel cause. For instance Police force of the Company abandoned the Porkady post to the rebels and they openly supported the rebellion. Thomas Baber, the Deputy Collector of Malabar, had reported the developments of these incidents as:

……another party about twelve had surrendered their post at Porkady to the rebels, and I discovered afterwards that, several days before that event, Rama Namby, the rebel leader, had written to the naique of that party to the purport that twenty two Kolkars at Baisala Pora had delivered up their arms and that Kashoo Potowal (derogha of Wayanad) had fed him and then he must do the same…

Thus it was evident that many of the servants, under the Company were unhappy with their positions. It is true that many of these Kolkaras and other native sepoys who constituted the major part of the forces under the Company were not at all happy with their occupations. They were meagerly paid and had to face all the torturing and atrocities of their superiors. In fact they were waiting for an opportunity to overthrow their master and thereby to secure their independence. This attitude of the servants under


the Company can be seen in other parts of India also. Their sense of pride and honour impelled them an empathetic attitude towards their fellow men and that may be the reason why they joined hands with rebels. Whatever be the situation, the number of the rebels increased day by day and the rebellion which started originally at east Wayanad, now spread all over the district of Wayanad. Apart from the Kurichyas and Kurumbas people from various walks of life supported the uprising and the movement, thus become a mass movement.61

One of the interesting aspects of this movement was that the religion played a dominant role in the uprising during this period. The rebels believed and exhorted to the people that they were revolting against English as per the order of their deity, Murikkanmar of Pulpally. They appealed to the people of Wayanad to take arms against this Vattathoppikkar.62 The Velichappads (oracles) of these deities played a key role in instigating the people. The rebels assembled together and then they, as per the orders of the rebel leaders assembled together and they, as per the orders of the Velichappads, attacked the English and their agencies in Wayanad. In this context they believed that they were obeying the orders of their deities.63 The rebels counteracted the proclamations of the Company, by the orders of the oracles. Thus the religion was invoked to stall all the attempts of the English against the rebels.

62 Vattathoppikkar’ literally means the one who is wearing a round cap. This is a common name used by the Kurichyas to address the English in Wayanad.
63 See for a discussion, Ranjit Guha (Ed.) Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in India, New Delhi, 1983. Also see David Hardiman, The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India, Delhi, 1987.
It is said that consulting the oracles are nothing more than a relic of a long night of the early feudalism\textsuperscript{64}. The belief in Velichapadu was common among the tribal communities. They believed that the utterances of the Velichapadu as divine orders which cannot be disobeyed. Such religious beliefs in omens, prophecies and oracles reflect the ignorance and backwardness of the rural masses and it depicts the inability of these poor and innocent people to transcend beyond the feudal bonds\textsuperscript{65}. The faith in the Velichapadu and in his utterances and the related rituals had a negative impact upon the colonial people. It may be because of the fear of the unknown power, imbibed in such beliefs and rituals of the indigenous people. The English were much afraid of the witchcraft and sorcery prevalent among the natives. So it created, in them, a sense of insecurity and fear while they were in Asia and Africa.\textsuperscript{66} In Wayanad a similar fearful and awesome situation was prevailing and the rebels tried to make use of it.

At the same time, the consultation of the Velichapadu and the divine utterances of their Velichapadu engendered a positive impact upon the Kurichyas and Kurumbas of Wayanad. They utilised these measures to encourage the people to rebel against the Company and used it as a force to unite them. Very often the rebels secured their fury and enthusiasm to rise against the enemy, through such measures. So religion was utilized by the rebels to consolidate and drive the illiterate and simple people against the forces of the Company. Moreover, the support of religion and the use of oracles provided

\textsuperscript{64} Ranajit Guha, \textit{An India Historiography of India. A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications}, Delhi, 1983. p.3.


\textsuperscript{66} Ranajit Guha, \textit{An Indian Historiography of India, A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications}, pp. 10-11.
the insurgents with courage and identity with their fellowmen - a sort of forged solidarity enabling them to fight against their materially more powerful enemy.67

When the Kurichyas fought enthusiastically against the English, the Company did its best to put down the revolt. The initial retaliation of the Company was met with setbacks. Two of the Kolkars and the jemadar were wounded and the troop was compelled retreat68. The army in Wayanad was incapable to suppress the insurgency. Thomas H. Babar, the deputy Collector of Malabar, who was in charge of Wayanad was compelled to request to his higher officials for reinforcements. He requested for an additional company of sepoys to Wayanad,69 The rebellion was so wide spread that Baber requested to Col. Lockhart, the Commander-in-chief of the Army in Malabar and Canara to send Captain Walker or some equally intelligent officer to Wayanad to lead suppress the rebellion.70 Baber wrote:

….Pray send Captain Walker or some equally intelligent and active officer to look after the supply department and also an additional company of sepoys, and if you have no objection a few more Europeans. We shall have a good deal of opposition in the Ghaut and the country is also extremely strong in many places between this and Mananthawady.71

The letters written and the similar communications made by Baber to his higher officials, shows that he was worried and frantic about the rebellious situation prevailing in

70 Ibid, pp. 5158-5159.
71 Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, No 2254, Judicial Collection, January-June 1812, pp.113-116.
Wayanad. So, he wanted to suppress the rebellion at any to cost, at the earliest. The authorities of the Company readily responded to the frantic request made by Baber. The Company, brought forces both from the Coast and Mysore for the relief of the detachments at Mananthawady and Sulthan Bathery which were in a state of siege by the insurgents.\footnote{William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol. I, p. 552}

The Company, though brought troops from different regions, they were not able to put down the insurrection. Rather the rebellion became more intensified. There was a general uprising in the northern division of Wayanad. The existing militia in Wayanad was not successful in putting down the rebels. Baber, once again requested for further reinforcements from Seringapatam. The Resident of Mysore sent 2,000 troops to the border of Mysore-Wayanad to protect it from any rebel invasions.

The reinforced forces of the Company began a new strategy to put down the guerilla warfare adopted by the Kurichyas. They followed the policy of combing out the rebels from the jungles. The army began to slash the jungles from three directions under Col. Webber, Col. James Welsh and Cap. James Tagg.\footnote{Col. James Welsh, *Military Reminiscences*, Vol. II, p.26.} The forces of the Company marched through the length and breadth of Wayanad to terrorize the people. They began to comb out the rebels and their leaders from all directions. They set fire to the houses of the rebels and their family members were arrested by the troops of the Company.\footnote{*Ibid.* p. 28.} They did all atrocities to rebels. They destroyed the properties of the rebels, created a panic in their minds through their cruelties.\footnote{*Ibid* pp. 29-30.} The troops established a chain of posts in the wild jungle country stretching to the north of Sulthan Bathery namely, Porakady, Pakam,
Mananthawady and Panamaram. Thus with the combing out of the jungles and the establishment of military posts in Wayanad, along with other pacificatory measures, the Company was able to assert its dominance in Wayanad. Many inhabitants of Wayanad submitted to the Government of the Company and accepted its authority.

Baber, the shrewd and clever officer in Wayanad made use of the situation. Under the instigation and compulsion of Baber, the surrendered people betrayed all the rebels and their leaders. The most tragic episode in this series of betrayal was the betrayal of Raman Namby, the rebel leader who was feared by all the Englishmen in Wayanad. Raman Namby was captured on 1 May, 1812, and was beheaded. His head was then demonstrated to his son, a young lad, and his family members. The object of such cruelties by the Company was to create a panic in the minds of people, so that they may turn back from the rebellion and will not support the rebels at any costs. In similar rebellions in the colonies, the colonial militia, hanged or beheaded the captured rebels. They did all atrocities to the rebels. The colonial army adopted all such oppressive measures and the object of such measures was to put down the uprising immediately. The last blow to the rebels was the killing of Venkalone Kelu, another important leader of the movement. With the murder of Venkalone Kelu the rebels lost their leadership. Thus with a firm hand the uprising of the Kurichyas was suppressed. By the beginning of May 1812, peace restored in Wayanad. Almost all the rebels were either captured or murdered. Only a few of them, still continued with the rebellion and their whereabouts were unknown to the Company.


The rebellion of the Kurichyas lasted only for a short period. Even then it was a total disturbance in Wayanad. The rebels inflicted heavy causalities to the Company and its men. The English were, in fact, afraid of the rebels that they may occupy the whole region. The Company often highlights these facts. So the importance of this rebellion cannot be ignored. The Kurichyas were very strong and enthusiastic in the rebellion. Often the troops of the Company found it difficult to root them because of their bravery and firmness. The Company officers have often stated that the agility of the Kurichya fighters were no match to the Company’s forces. It was because the rebellion though localized in the Wayanad region alone, the entire people of Wayanad in one way or other were inclined to the cause of the insurgents. The tribal communities of the Kurichyas, Kurumbas, the trading communities of Wayanad, the Chettis, the peasants and many other classes of people supported the rebellion. Many of them directly participated in the uprising. Others, who could not participate in it directly, cooperated or sympathized with the rebels. Thus the Kurichya rebellion of 1812 was a mass movement directed against the oppressive and exploitative political and economic policies pursued by the English East India Company in Wayanad.

The Kurichya rebellion of 1812 was, thus, a major uprising in Malabar against the English before the Great Rebellion of 1857. It was a movement where all categories of people participated in it spontaneously. There was no one to organize or guide the movement. Yet it was a well planed and calculated insurrection by the tribals. All sections of people were active in this rebellion. In order to mobilize the people they utilized the spirit of religion. But some people like the landed aristocracy of the region joined in hand with the English and acted as the collaborators in suppressing the

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78 Ibid. P 30.
rebellion. It was because of the collaboration of the rich with the Company led to the easy suppression of the Kurichya uprising.

The analysis of the rebellion of Kurichyas in 1812 shows that element of nationalism or the idea of patriotism that prompted them to revolt against the Company is to be doubted. In fact the first decade of nineteenth century never witnessed the genesis of nationalism in the Wayanad region. More over the tribal community of Kurichyas were illiterate and were not concerned about the State mechanisms of Government or its legal systems. It was out of the despondency and dejection that they turned against the Company. The economic policies and revenue farming by the agents of the Government had affected their traditional life and culture. They did not have any other alternative, but to turn against the English. Also the peasantry in Wayanad was nostalgic about their fate. The payment of revenue in cash instead of kind and the devaluation of currency by Major Macleod had virtually ruined their life; they don’t have any other alternative, but to join in hands with rebels. Thus the colonial intrusion into Wayanad, their exploitative policy, and the oppression made the people to turn against the Company. In fact, it was a mass movement as Colonel Stevenson brought out:

…indeed there is a ground to apprehend that all the inhabitants in the part of Wayanad are inclined in favor of the cause of the insurgents.79

The tradition and experience, the people of Wayanad, particularly, the Kurichyas had caused them to revolt against the English. The Kurichyas, who actively participated in the Pazhassi rebellion, was not happy with the British regime in Wayanad. They were looking for the good old days of their great martyr, Pazhassi Raja Kerala Varma, because there was fabrication of accounts, over assessment of the produce and the rigid exaction

with all inequalities, and all these made the people of Wayanad antagonistic to the Company and its men. All these made the life of the people discontented and gradually the rebellion precipitated in their minds. The experience the Kurichyas had under Pazhassi Raja, the tradition and leadership of Thalackal Chandoo were an instigating factor for the Kurichyas to revolt against the English in 1812.

The mode of operation chosen by the Kurichyas in this revolt was guerilla warfare. In this, the rebels often avoided open conflicts with troops of the Company. The rebels, often, ambushed and sniped the different army columns in Wayanad and recaptured or reoccupied the regions through which the forces of the Company had passed. Here the rebels deployed spies to gather information about the troops and the Company officials. It enabled the rebels to know the movements of the enemy and thereby avoid the direct conformation with them in advance. The terrain, which was familiar to the rebels, was totally unfamiliar to troops of the Company. Taking advantage of all these, the rebels easily followed the guerilla tactics in Wayanad. The change in the strategy of the rebels often impelled the Company and its officials to make fresh reinforcements of troops to cope with the situation. All these shows that the rebellion was a well planned one and it had a sound leadership.

The rebellion of the Kurichyas in 1812 was mainly led by the Kurichyas. They were a tribal community in Wayanad. Naturally it may be doubted how illiterate and innocent Kurichyas could wage a war against the mighty English. It has been argued that

82 Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, No 2356, Military Consultations, Vol. 475, PP. 5160-5167. The British Resident in Mysore detached 2,000 Mysore troops, His Majesty’s 80th Regiment by Major General Wetherall form Seringapatam; His Majesty’s 30th Battalion and 15th native infantry from Cannanmore under Lt. col. Webber to the rebellion bound Wayanad region.
they had the support of Nairs and Tiyyas. It was possible that some outside forces might have supported and helped them. The leadership of such movements was not entirely vested in the hands of outsiders. It was the poor Kurichyas who had exercised a fair measure of initiative and leadership. It is found that they had made several weapons in advance; they consulted the oracles of their deity, the Pulppally Murikkammar, and circulated the orders of the Velichapad, exhorting the people to join hands with the rebels.83 All these showed that they had a disciplined leadership behind it. Such leadership need not be spontaneous but this uprising was impulsive in nature. The leadership of the uprising was not the result of any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leadership, but was brought about through everyday experience, illuminated by “common sense” i.e., by the traditional popular conception of the world.84 Thus, the spontaneity created an occasion for the Kurichyas and other tribal communities in Wayanad to decide and direct their course of action. It is well evident from the leadership of various leaders like Rama Namby, Venkalone Kelu, Plakal Chandoo, Ayiram Veettil Kontappan and Mambilattedan Yemu. They led the rebels and to a great extent they were a threat to the forces of the Company. It had a very gloomy impact upon the English soldiers who were deployed for operation in Wayanad as evident from the writings of Colonel James Welsh:

…hardly one of my servants lived to return with me to Bangalore. Several of our officers, who were in Wayanad, died shortly afterwards, and the faculties amongst our men and their families were truly distressing.85

83 T.K. Ravidran, *The Kurichya Rebellion of 1812*, pp. 536-537
Thus the leadership of the Kurichya uprising was a planned one and they made sufficient preparations for it. Because of this, the rebellion was really an eye opener to the English in Wayanad in the forth-coming years.

In short the economic imperatives were the motivating factor for the Kurichyas to revolt against English in Wayanad. Thought it lasted only for a few months and was localized in and around Panamaram, Kaniyanpatta and Mananthawady, it had a deep impact upon the society and the colonial authorities in Malabar. The question that arises here is that can we regard the Kurichya rebellion of 1812 as the continuation of the revolt of Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam. The very enthusiasm and vigour shown by the Kurichyas and their preparations for the revolt indicates the same. They made weapons with the available materials from the region. They made elaborate preparations and consulted the Velichapadu of the locality. The people of Wayanad became conscience of their exploitation by the English in Wayanad. They realized the true nature of the English and their Government. The confiscation of the properties of the rebels who participated in the Pazhassi rebellion antagonized the general public. The revenue paimash introduced by Rickards was still followed in Wayanad. It had several inequalities and it varied from village to village. The inequality of assessment and the disparity in the prevailing market price, which prevailed during the rebellion of Pazhassi Raja, was still practiced by the English East India Company in Wayanad. It thus formed a major source of frustration and distress among the people of Wayanad. With these entire ambiances prevalent in Wayanad, it may be argued that the Kurichya rebellion of 1812 may be a continuation of the Pazhassi rebellion. Whatever it may be, all these led

to the genesis of an anti-colonial feeling among the people of Wayanad and it indirectly led to emergence of proto-nationalism in the region. Therefore this tribal uprising can be integrated with the political mainstream of the national movement.

The Kurichya rebellion of 1812, thus, was a rebellion of the whole people of Wayanad and it had a number of leaders. But the regretting fact today is that even its local leaders were not remembered by the present generations. The very identity of the great hero of Kurichya rebellion, Raman Namby, had gone into oblivion. Their names remains perpetually only in the records of the East India Company. It is doubtful whether the reminiscence of this great leader is cherished in the memories of the Kurichyas or other tribal communities in Wayanad.