Conclusion

The revolt of Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam from 1792 to 1805, the revolt of the Mappilas from 1792-1856 and the revolt of the Kurichyas of Wayanad in 1812 mark an important epoch in the history of anti-colonial struggles in Malabar. It constitutes one of the important anti-colonial movements against the English East India Company in the history of South India. These movements were unique because these were not fought by Pazhassi Raja or the leaders of the revolt alone, but by different strata of people against the exploitative and corruptive socio-economic policies pursued by the East India Company in Malabar.

This analysis of the revolts has shown that one of the major reasons for this was the economic policies pursued by the East India Company in Malabar. The frequent changes in their revenue policies, and the strict and systematic assessments made by the Company provoked the people to revolt against it. The revenue policy that was followed by the Company had its serious impact upon the economy of Malabar. The creation of an absentee landlordism in Malabar through the assignment of the status of a Roman Dominus to the janmi, not only contributed to a regression of the economy, but also virtually pushed down the other two categories- the Kanomdars and Verumpattadars to the status of tenants at will. It created a class of discontented agrarian elements throughout Malabar right from its accession to power, who became the base for the rebellion against the Company. These discontented people consisted of people from all communities including the tribals. They constituted the people like peasants, traders, labourers, soldiers, company servants and the ordinary folk itself. Added to it the frequent changes in the assessment of the revenue in Malabar contributed to increase the agony of the people. The Company from its very inception
to power in the region introduced a number of revenue agreements with various Rajas of the district. None of these settlements were favourable to the common man of Malabar. Thus the economic policy followed by the English East India Company in Malabar, disturbed the very social structure of the society, which was functioning on the basis of a traditional customary relation called *kana-janma-maryada* system. Therefore, it was the British revenue settlement that intensified the multilayered discontent in Malabar.

The often asked question in similar anti-colonial movements is whether Pazhassi would have revolted against the Company, had he been restored to his earlier status. This question can be asked in the case of the Mappila uprisings and the Kurichiya rebellion as well. If the socio-economic structure prevailed during the Mysorean interlude in Malabar continued, would the Mappilas revolt against the English. The resistance itself could be seen as being against the conquest of Pazhassi Raja’s territories and the imposition of revenue system by the East India Company. Also the restoration of the Namboodiris and Nairs, who fled to Travancore, by the East India Company dislocated the Mappilas in Malabar. So one of the goals of these insurrections was apparently to annihilate or expel the English from Malabar. In this respect the rebellion was to reinstate the older order of agrarian relations and the chieftains in their respective regions. When argued from this point of view, the rebels would not have revolted against the Company, if their demands were conceded.

No doubt the personal grievances of the Raja and other leaders were a factor in precipitating the revolt. The fact that the Company made the revenue settlement for Kottayam with the Kurumbranad Raja, instead of the Pazhassi Raja must have been seen by the latter as a deliberate snub of his claim as the ruler of his terrain. His sense of anger must have been intensified by the refusal of the Company to accede even to
Pazhassi Raja’s request to allow him to be the revenue collector of Kottayam, in a system in which he would pay the Company the stipulated amount in the form of tribute.\(^1\) The Company’s rejection of Pazhassi Raja’s claim over Wayanad and its annexation of the territory were certainly the elements in the development of his personal conflict against the Company. As he declared in his letter to Kalliadan Kunju Emmen, Pazhassi Raja was determined to oppose the English, ‘whatever they do or say’.\(^2\)

But what the study has shown is that the Company’s attempts to subvert the economy of the region and its restructuring of the local polity and social systems created an atmosphere of unrest and agitation, which went beyond the sense of frustration and anger that have been a motivating factor for Pazhassi Raja, the Mappilas and the Kurichyas. Therefore, the uprisings cannot be understood in monolithic terms as springing from frustrations and disappointments of a deposed ruler or individuals. Indeed such movements can be easily suppressed. The evidence that has been reviewed in this analysis has clearly demonstrated that the major reason why the Company could not extinguish the revolt for so long was the widespread popular support and popular participation.

In the rebellions, it is found that various categories of people participated. The tribals like the Kurichyas, the Kurumbas, the Mappilas, the Mappila merchants, the Chettis and the poor Tiyyas supported the rebellion of Pazhassi Raja. The rich Namboodiris, Nairs and the Tiyyas, who enjoyed the favour and support of the Company, always stood with them. Indeed the rich often led to rebel attacks directed

\(^1\) Pamela Nightingale, *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784-1866*, p.107.

against them. The active participation of the tribals to the Pazhassi rebellion, against
the Company, prompted them to revolt once again against the Company in 1812.
Indeed the Kurichya revolt of 1812 was the continuation of the support rendered by
them in the Pazhassi revolt. The preparations made by the Kurichyas—the making of
weapons out of the railings of the bridge and the consultation of the Velichapadu—all
theses demonstrate the same. The Mappila Muslims, who rendered considerable
support to the Pazhassi revolt, had several grievances against the Company. The
displacement of the Mappilas from the higher socio-economic status, to which they
have been elevated in the brief interregnum of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, was the
main reason for their rebellions against the English East India Company. When under
the British rearrangements after 1792, the Mappilas lost their lands and their
economic and political power in the countryside. They nurtured not only a hope of
recovering their lost property but also an intense hostility to the British administration
brought about in Malabar. So the Mappilas recognized the Company to be the
progenitor of their socio-economic displacement.

The Mappila merchants of the coast who gave much needed help to Pazhassi
Raja seem to have done so because they were being pushed out of their traditional
trading occupation by the increasing control of Malabar trade by the English East
India Company. While the Mappila merchants chose to cast their lot with Pazhassi
Raja, the prosperous Tiyya merchants of Malabar did not join the revolt. On the
contrary, they often actively supported the Company. In view of the fact that they,
like the Mappilas, had also been victims of British rearrangements, this behavior
appears anomalous. One reason for their collaboration with the British could be that
many Tiyya elites had been given important positions such as revenue collectors and
Kolkars under the East India Company. In order to preserve their elevated status and position in the society, the Tiyyas rendered their support to the Company and its officials in Malabar. They also understood that it would be better for them to support the English rather than the rebellious Raja.

The study has attempted to grapple with question of leadership. In many such revolts it has been found that the leadership came from the traditional elites, in particular those which found their political and economic power curtailed by the British conquest. In the case of Pazhassi Raja, it was true that he emerged as a ‘crisis’ leader and mobilized the people against the Company. He was politically deprived off his country and thereby he was eliminated from the function of revenue collection, which was expected to be the insignia of authority and power in the pre-colonial Malabar. Such ‘crisis’ leaders are capable of mobilizing the people in and around them to resist against the external oppressors. In the case of most of the Mappila uprisings, too, it was a reality. But in certain Mappila uprisings like the Kulathur uprising, it is found that the leaders were four tenants of two land lords in the region, who initiated the rebellion. It shows that even without leadership, the people turned against the social and economic injustice and oppression committed against them. Therefore, the myth of leadership has been shattered when compared to the numerous uprisings that occurred before 1857 in different parts of colonial India. In such uprisings, it is found that the self interest of the rebels also provided the motive for the uprisings.

Historians have had difficulty in characterizing the diverse Indian resistance to the British rule in India, particularly those occurred before the Revolt of 1857. So, an

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3 Malabar Collectorate Records, KRA, 2636, Correspondence Relating to Pazhassi Raja’s Rebellion, (M.S.), pp. 141-144.
attempt was also made to find out the character of these rebellions occurred in Malabar before 1857. Historians like K.K Datta regarded these movements as anti-British plots. Before the Revolt of 1857, there were a number of movements and uprisings against the English in India and they were the widespread plots and movements organized against the English East India Company. Certain other historians attempted to regard them as primary resistance or resistance to the colonial intervention as their rule distorted the existing economic and social conditions in the society. The Subaltern historians characterized these movements as subaltern resistance, where by the rural communities responded to the intrusion of the British and their novel system of revenue administration in India. But the movements that occurred in Malabar during the early colonial days can be characterized as patriotic revolts supported by a considerable sections of the people in the society due to their loss of independence and infringement into their socio-economic life. One can detect a spirit of anti colonial elements in these uprisings. Therefore these resentments in Malabar, before the Revolt of 1857, evidently establish the fact that India was not motionless or passive towards the British rule in India and was patriotic in every sense.

The analysis of the revolt found that the mode of operation adopted by the rebels against the Company was guerilla warfare. Their target was the English and their agencies. It is very evident from the fact that the rebels attacked the police posts of the Company at different places in Malabar, the jail at Calicut, the pepper


5 Eric Stokes, See for details, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857*.

plantation at Anjarakandy and the military stores and offices of the English that they followed the guerilla strategy. In the guerilla mode of operation, they would, initially, tend to form in the neighborhood of the settlements from which they drew their recruits, establish a base in the nearby mountains or forests, and begin their operations by activities hard to distinguish from those of the ordinary bandits. Only the social setting will be different. The minority of the unsubmissive were now joined in mobilization by the majority. Thus the guerilla mode of operation gradually attracted the majority of the population to the fold of resistance against the Company. They looted, plundered and even destroyed them as the rebels saw them as the symbols and representatives of oppression and exploitation.

Also the study found that the rebels utilized religion as a source of inspiration and to mobilize the people against the enemy. They issued orders in the name of their deities, consulted the oracles (Velichappad) and sought the blessings of Thangals. All these reveal that the rebels used religion as a means to channel the people against the Company. Moreover, it is found that the sense of nationality in India had always had a strong rootedness in religious themes and sensibilities. Thus, religion served the Indians as an instrument to regroup themselves, and the sally forth to assault against the elements of colonialism. The tribals like the Kurichyas also invoked religion and consulted their deity, Murikkanmar of Pulpally, as a means to unite the co-patriots against the English. They invoked religion and utilized it to stall the attempts by the English to take over the forests and forest land.

Also the study found that one of the modes of rebellion adopted by the peasants was evading cultivation to escape from the ruthless exploitation of revenue

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collections by the men and agents of the Company. The Mappilas and the Kurichyas often adopted it as measure to weaken the economic system of the Company and to demonstrate their opposition to the Company and its agents.

The analysis of the various revolts in Malabar, it is found that the rebels had utilized their own means of communications. The communication between the topmost leaders of the rebellion and their followers were not direct communications. It may be because there was lack of concordance between the social and political aspirations of the leaders and the followers. And, of course there was no mystery about such channels of communication in these resistance movements. The study found that the rebel leaders used to make correspondences in the name of their deities, to interact with the people and thereby they mobilized them. Also whenever, the rebels found any doubt or confusion, about their movements, they often consulted the Velichapadu (oracle) of the nearby temple and set forth their path undoubtedly. It was evident very much in the Pazhassi rebellion and in the revolt of the Kurichyas.

The rebels by harassing the Company and its men in different ways became criminals in the eyes of the state and authorities. But on the other hand they have been seen by their compatriots as peasant heroes, champions, avengers and freedom fighters. It has been argued by Hobsbawm that a man becomes a ‘bandit’ because, he does something which is not regarded as criminal by his local conventions, but is so regarded by the state or the local rulers.\textsuperscript{9} The acts of violence or theft by the rebels were considered by the East India Company as a challenge to their dominance and authority. But to the rebels these acts were a defiance or means of taking revenge on exploitative authority in the Malabar region. This underlying hostility towards the

\textsuperscript{9} E.J. Hobsbawm, \textit{The Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries}, Manchester, 1959, pp. 13-29.
oppressors invoked solidarity among the peasant class to rally around the rebel leaders. In the study of the various uprisings in Malabar, it is found that diverse categories of people rallied around the rebel leaders and supported them. Their basic mobilizing force was the hostility towards the oppressive rule of the English East India Company.

Social bandits, according to Hobsbawm, are those peasant outlaws, whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within the peasant society, and are considered by their people as their heroes, champions, avengers, fighters of justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation and in any case men to be admired, helped and supported. The rebellion in Malabar, particularly the rebellion of Pazhassi Raja, seems to fall within the framework and scope of Hobsbawm’s concept of banditry. The rebels can be attributed with all the qualities of a social bandit. The relation between the ordinary peasants and the rebels makes social banditry interesting and significant. Hobsbawm’s concept of social banditry brings out three elements that characterize a bandit. First, the social bandit must remain within the peasant society. Secondly, there must be a vague social and political dimension in their activities. Thirdly, the peasants must support and admire the bandits. The analysis of the rebellions in Malabar during the period of study found that most of the rebel leaders fall under the purview of Hobsbawm’s concept of bandit. The rebel chieftains who resisted against the Company in Malabar passed quickly into popular culture as semi-divine warrior heroes. The Pazhassi Raja was assimilated into the folk-ballads of

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Malayalis.12 The case of most of the Mappila heroes and their activities were assimilated in the Mappila ballads and stories of Malayalam literature.

Hobsbawm further argues that banditry is universally found, particularly in the societies based on agriculture and consists largely of peasants and landless labourers who were ruled, oppressed and exploited by someone else – the lords, towns, Governments or even the banks.13 This argument of Hobsbawm was applicable to the case of Malabar, where the majority was landless labourers and they were greatly oppressed and exploited by the East India Company through their intermediaries, the janmis. In Malabar, almost all the peasants were landless. The study also found that most of the Mappilas in South Malabar were labourers without a single piece of land to cultivate. Since the burden of all taxes fell almost entirely on the people, especially those who lived in the country- the peasants- they rebelled against the authorities.14 The peasants found banditry as the easiest form of rebellion, especially in the mountainous regions, like Malabar. It was because the mountains and jungles provided them their common world, into which landlords and ploughmen do not enter and where men do not talk much about what they and do. It has been pointed out by Hobsbawm that the brigands flourished in remote and inaccessible areas such as mountains, trackless plains, forest and estuaries with their labyrinth of creeks and waterways.15 Also it is found that a region which has multiple frontiers, like certain regions in India, divided between the British and the numerous princely states, were in perpetual difficulties of bandit problems, for they can easily escape from one

13 E.J. Hobsbawn, Bandits, p.15.
15 E.J. Hobsbawn, Bandits, pp. 16 and 69.
territory to the other.\textsuperscript{16} In the analysis of the uprisings in Malabar, it is found that the conditions in Malabar were more or less ambient and suitable for bandits and the banditry.

One form of social banditry is the ‘haiduk’ form of banditry that is, the primitive resistance fighter or guerilla fighter, is more serious, more ambitious, permanent and institutionalized challenge to the official authority.\textsuperscript{17} The ‘haiduks’ lived their wild, free lives in the forest, the mountain caves and were armed with pistols and swords. It is not the geographical or political conditions that made such banditry possible, but it was certain political situations like a foreign conquest or certain types of social conflict which encouraged a ‘conscious’ form of banditry and thus structured it more firmly and permanently.\textsuperscript{18} In the analysis of the rebellions of Malabar, these arguments were quiet feasible. In the Pazhassi revolt or Kurichya revolt or in the Mappila revolts, they offered a firm steady and continuous challenge to the Company’s regime in Malabar. The geography of Malabar was much suitable for the ‘haiduk’ form of social banditry in the region. This was evident from these uprisings that took place in Malabar.

The people consider the bandit as invulnerable. This merely expresses the wish that people’s champion cannot be defeated. This class of wish produces the iniquitous myth of good king- and the good bandit- that has not only really died, but will come back one day to restore justice. It also reflects the security which the bandits have among their people and their ground. The invulnerability of the good

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid pp. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p.66

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
bandit is not only symbolic, but also invariably due to magic, which reflects the beneficent interest of the divinities in his affairs. At moments of high millennial excitement, when the masses themselves rise in expectation, the bandits also believe themselves to be magically invulnerable. Magic, therefore, may express the spiritual legitimacy of the bandit’s actions and the function of leadership in the band. It is, thus, a sort of double insurance policy: one which supplements human skills, but also which explains human failure. For if the omens, have been read wrongly or one or the other magical conditions have not been fulfilled, the defeat of invulnerable hero does not imply the defeat of the ideal which he represents.19

When we make an analysis of these conditions and the situation brought forward by Hobsawm, the case of Malabar rebellions also had the similar backgrounds. The conditions prevalent in Malabar were not different. There were a lot of peasant landless labourers, who suffered all the burden of taxes, especially after the occupation of Malabar by the English East India Company. In the Mappila uprisings in the Eranad and Wallavunad regions, this situation was quiet apt. Also, there was a vast area of dense forests and widespread mountains which afforded the rebels protection and operates from there, their guerilla mode of warfare. Besides this, the people considered their leaders of rebellions as invulnerable. It was true in the case of Pazhassi Raja. They believed that the Raja as invulnerable and even after his death, created stories that he was not killed, but died himself. Again, at the peak of the millennial excitement the rebels consulted the Velichapadu of the temple to give a spiritual legitimacy to their action and leadership. This process was very much evident in the Malabar uprisings. Pazhassi Raja and the Kurichyas, in the peak of their uprising consulted the oracles. In the Mappila uprisings, it is found that they consulted

19 Ibid. pp. 43-44.
and sought the blessings of the *Thangals*. The study found that in the Mattanur uprising, the rebel chieftains traversed long distance to seek the blessings of the *Thangal*. Above all these, the rebel leaders were the heroes of the people, their champions, the bringer of justice and social equality, the righter of wrongs and even as a leader of liberation and so they helped and supported them. Therefore the uprisings, occurred in Malabar, were a form of social banditry.

At the same time, it should not be assumed that banditry was a form of traditional feudal opposition to the state authority, Banditry was created by the state itself, both by depriving some chieftains of their traditional rights (and hence the sources of wealth) and some peasants of their produce to feed the new bureaucracies, and by creating in the state itself a large concentration of wealth, such that it become more tempting to try and seize a part of it. Banditry was, thus a symptom of the dislocations caused by the tremendous economic reallocations resulting from the creation of the English mercantile economy. 20 Nor this analysis leads to the conclusion that the revolts in Malabar were merely a form of social banditry of a localized group seeking amelioration of their economic conditions. This study has in fact demonstrated that there were, embedded in the movement, the elements of a proto-nationalist, or at any rate an anti-colonial ideology, whether it is in the recognition of the Company as the enemy or in the various pronouncements of Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja and other rebel leaders, on the pretext that glimmerings of an anti-colonial consciousness which appears to have in many ways the sustained the movements by providing it with a many ways a degree of coherence. Whatever be it these early announcements in Malabar did provide an inheritance of sentiments,

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legends and doctrines, which were drawn upon by later nationalist leaders and supporters.

In the analysis of the rebellions in Malabar an attempt was made on the intentions of rebels and the rebel chieftains. It is found that in many case of the rebellion, the rebels remain silent about the intentions of their resistances. Their intention may be embedded in their peasant sub-culture and in the routine, taken for granted, as to remain inarticulate. The typical goal of the rebels was to work the system to their minimum disadvantage. The pursuit of this end, depending upon the circumstances, may entail the resistance, to its size and volume of petty resistance to the act of self defense. It may backfire, it may marginally alleviate exploitation, it may force re-negotiation of class relations and it may more rarely help to bring the system down.

Though the leaders of these resistances have been attributed as legendary heroes and a romantic narrative of their resistances against the Company had been made out, these uprisings by themselves hardly constitute a nationalist movement. These uprisings created an environment and background for the later construction of a nationalist ideology in Malabar. This was evident from the diverse movements and episodes that occurred in Malabar in the later stages.