Conclusion

In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to identify and interrelate the different determinants of the colonial agrarian structure in the context of Malabar. The assigning of determinants to a particular structure though a difficult and very often arbitrary task, cannot be shirked by any historian, as this is an indispensable requirement for explaining change or lack of change in history. Authorial intervention in economic history writing is much more pronounced and explicit in comparison with the writing of social and political history. In this latter sphere of historical writing specialization the narrative may be so modulated that apparently explicit authorial intervention is minimized. In economic history, however, the use of quantitative source material requires the historian to intervene to a much greater extent, because anything short of clear and explicit interjections
would result in a mass of raw, meaningless data. To elucidate the functioning of the Malabar agrarian economy certain broad variables, namely demography, the methods of production, labour and the market have been discussed, under the assumption that this would throw light, albeit partially, on the entire agrarian structure.

In colonial Malabar, while population exhibited a slow but secular increase, its dynamics were primarily governed by non-demographic factors such as climate, the production cycle and the market. The demographic regime was not a homeostatic one. Short-term mortality fluctuations were very sensitive to the cost of living (prices were taken as a surrogate for the living costs due to non-availability of continuous wage series and estimates of a composite unit of consumables), which in turn was in the middle term defined by the nature of agrarian production. Apart from stimulating lateral areal expansion, demographic variations had no independent causal impact on middle term determinants such as the social distribution of property, agricultural productivity,
technology and so on.

Agricultural technology was stagnant and there is no evidence of any innovations. Agricultural output as well as productivity did not register any significant increase during our period. Capital investment in Malabar's agriculture was greater in the labour intensive, high inequality paddy producing regions of the south, compared with the garden cropped taluks of the north. One also observes a progressive decline in capital investment which may have been due to two reasons: (i) greater fragmentation and turnover of the holdings and, or, (ii) the increasing shift to the more profitable and less labour and capital intensive garden crops. Insecurity of tenure and a high degree of exploitation of the cultivating peasantry by the _janmis_, the _kanemdas_ (tenants) and the money lender landlord and the money lender merchant appear to be the most severe hindrance to extended reproduction as well as the stimulus behind the fragmentation of holdings. The tenurial conditions in Malabar have not been dealt with in this dissertation,
as numerous detailed works are available on this subject.

As mentioned earlier, there was a temporal discontinuity between the labour process and the production schedule, the latter being chiefly determined by plant biology, soil conditions and climate. This diachrony, in the context of Malabar, resulted in the monsoon months which was a time of little agricultural activity, becoming every year a period of high unemployment, lowered incomes, high prices and high mortality.

The methods of cultivation was significantly different for garden crops and paddy. The former required more careful but less intensive labour input while the latter required much greater inputs of labour.

Agrarian labour concentrations were greatest in the paddy producing taluks, which were also areas, which earlier had the maximum number of slaves. Conditions of labour subordination were much more severe in the southern paddy dominated taluks in
comparison to the northern garden cropped areas. Though the Malabar agrarian workforce had its antecedents in the pre-colonial era and was not a creation of colonialism, it underwent significant mutations during British rule. The Malabar agrarian workforce was a body fragmented along caste and income lines, between 'tied' and 'free' labour. The lower paid, untouchable, subhumanly treated 'tied' labourer was descendent of the predial slave, while the 'free' labourer was better paid and usually belonged to a not so low caste. The latter category benefited more from the shift in the medium of remuneration from kind to cash, and shorter working hours. The bettering of conditions of this category of labourers may have been possibly related to the general movement towards garden crop cultivation. This general change in the cropping pattern with more land being allocated to garden crops may have further accentuated the fragmentation of the labour force.

The economy of Malabar, during the period of our study was highly commercialized. Around two-thirds
of the basic food grain—paddy, had to be purchased on the market, as the district was a paddy deficit one. As is to be expected, trade was more vigorous in non-food crop producing taluks. In spite of a high degree of commercialization the market showed no continuous trend towards integration. The market, however, increasingly influenced production decisions of farmers and largely determined mortality levels. The problem of acreage responsiveness to price largely corresponded to Dharm Narain's hypotheses. The impact of price on the material life of the people was mediated by mutations in the production process. Though Malabar's internal agricultural product market did not show any secular interpretation, the district as a whole was increasingly integrated both with the foreign market and the rest of the country. The demand for its major export commodity (spices and garden produce) was from abroad, whereas its supply of food grains was from within British India.

To be able to comment with any degree of historical finesse on the impact of British colonial rule on a micro region one must recognize
the polymorphous nature of colonial economic dynamics and its differential impact with respect to temporal and geographical scale.

The colonial totality was an aggregate of a multiple number of structures belonging to different historical epochs. These, in spite of their discordance with the ideological and economic requirements were appropriated into the colonial structure as long as this appropriation did not exceed the structural limits and form of the colonial totality. The concept of totality has been used as an abstraction of reality which is made finite by the necessary internality of its own causation and thus sets limits upon itself. This totality cannot transcend the limits of structural form and effect without undergoing a fundamental change. The totality will, however, try and appropriate even those systems which are discordant with its own structure as long as it can subordinate the effects of this appropriation and contain them within its structural limits.