A very high level of commercialization characterized the Malabar agrarian economy right from the late precolonial period. This highly commercialized economy was premised upon an unequal social order marked by a skewed distribution of property rights as well as acute caste differences. Malabar's main agricultural produce consisted of paddy and non-food crops such as spices, coconuts and timber. Its chronic deficit in the main staple, rice and dependence for cash on exported cash crops increased Malabar's vulnerability to the vagaries of the national and international market.

This market dependent agriculture was based on a complex pattern of tenurial rights which had been developed before the coming of the British. However, the powers of the superior right holder, the janmi, was made to closely approximate to that of the landlord and the kanamdar and verumpattamdar were reduced to tenants with the tenurial redefinition under British rule. Malabar was marked by a prolonged and deeply skewed distribution of land rights. Further, of all the Madras districts it contained the largest number of landless agricultural workers.

In this thesis we have tried to explain how the Malabar
agrarian economy changed in the course of more than a century. The preceding chapters attempted to trace some main trends in the agrarian history of Malabar from the end of the eighteenth century to the 1940s. In this period Malabar started with a structure of political economy quite different from the rest of the subcontinent and ended with changes, especially in agrarian relations, unprecedented in Indian history. Our discussion of the various determinants of change in Malabar's economy refuses to fit in with either the neat theories of changes effected by prolonged relative price changes or as one explained by exploitative 'feudal' relations of production. A large number of works dealing with Malabar's agrarian economy describe its social relations, rather uncritically as 'feudal'.

Characterizations of colonial Malabar and its janmis as 'feudal' without exploring the nature of agrarian change only fails to lead to better analysis. The labelling of colonial Malabar's production system as 'feudal' often runs the danger of becoming a substitute for attempts to discover the long term historical dynamics of the agrarian economy.

A running theme which is present in the discussion of

1. It must be borne in mind that the more advanced capitalist mode of production can be more easily abstracted and generalized. Earlier modes of production, studying which was not Marx's primary concern, greatly varied from one situation to another. Again we are not clear as to what features of feudalism Marx considered essential and what were variable.
the various aspects of the district’s agrarian economy, in the different chapters has been the crucial mediating property of local class configurations and agricultural production regimes in conditioning the impact and responses to larger stimuli such as political change, price changes and tenurial reforms.

A background study of Malabar’s late precolonial political economy in Chapter 1 calls for revising a number of assertions regarding the precolonial economy and the changes effected by European merchant capitalist trading companies in eighteenth century India. First, the sharp distinctions between indigenous economic and political change and exogenous factors need to be questioned, particularly in areas which had had a long history of commercial contacts with foreign countries. However, this does not mean that all foreign mercantile groups be considered as an undifferentiated entity. The activities of the European Companies’ need to be distinguished from that of West Asian traders. The structure of the State cannot be discounted in understanding the nature of economic change. The extremely localized nature of the ancien regime in Malabar with its fuzzy lines of command prevented the concentration of the returns from trade by a few central rulers simultaneously creating space for a high degree of political and military fluidity. The essentially military basis of the highly localized state structure in Malabar
also created conditions for European companies to intervene subsequently with their superior military technology. In such a political context the increasing cost of war was very significantly related to changes in the region's economy.

Monetization and commercialization were not directly state sponsored, but political power ensured better terms of exchange. The mere survival of indigenous or non-European trading groups in the face of Company competition thus provides inadequate evidence of continuity. The princes' increasing shortage of cash by the end of the eighteenth century suggests a growth in the demand for cash because of growing commercialization and a marked increase in their expenditure relative to income. Here again we see the close interweaving of the 'exogenous' and the 'endogenous'.

Finally, the British conquest of Malabar in 1798 should not be seen as a sudden rupture with the precolonial past but as the culmination of a long process of state involution occurring in the course of the eighteenth century. The extent of political and economic impact of the European Companies on different parts of the subcontinent appears to have depended on their antecedent trajectories of political economic development.

The historical origins of tenurial differences in North and South Malabar can also be traced to the eighteenth century. The North was the most monetized and dependent on foreign trade generated revenues, as well as the most
deficient in locally produced rice. The political crises of the eighteenth century and the alienation of custom revenues and trading rights in pepper to the European companies severely curtailed both the chiefs' surplus as well as their supply of cash. The larger landlords in the North faced with a dearth of cash were forced to borrow to such an extent from their tenants that the kanam tenure became a real mortgage in the North while it continued as a nominal mortgage in the paddy cropped southern taluks.

The last part of Chapter 1 discusses the period of Mysorean control and the early Company rule. The short Mysorean interlude (1766 to 1792) witnessed not only the military defeat of the Nayar ruling class and a drastic disruption of agrarian relations in the southern part of the district but it marked the first attempt at creating a centralized bureaucratic administration. The shortness of Mysorean rule and fundamental changes under subsequent British administration make it difficult to estimate the extent to which Malabar's agrarian structure was altered under the former. What the Mysoreans accomplished was a disruption of the old order and an experimentation with new institutions of a centralized state. This short span of years conclusively proved that the old precolonial state structure of Malabar could not survive when threatened by the military fiscalism of Mysore.

Chapter 2 discussed the Malabar agrarian economy under
Company rule. The proclamation of 1793 provided the juridical basis for transforming traditional tenurial relations. Juridically contract replaced custom as the regulator of agrarian relations. The new tenurial status bestowed on the janmis and the kanamdars did not have any immediate political repercussions. The severely depressed state of the agrarian economy during the first fifty years of colonial rule in Malabar substantially lowered the returns from agriculture. This state of the economy postponed the sharpening of the new contradictions which the 1793 tenurial revision introduced into Malabar's agrarian relations. Thus it appears that the early colonial period was one of partial demonetization, a general slump in the demand for land and low wages. These years also saw Malabar being economically more closely integrated with the rest of the Madras Presidency.

The institutional changes brought about the early colonial government in Malabar were largely premised on Western notions of private property and necessitated by the need to standardize claims to land and facilitate collection of revenue. The replacement of traditional usufructuary rights by more precise private property rights were triggered off during this period by State intervention and not any endogenous relative price changes in the economy. The increase in land revenue collections in a period of price decline coupled with an increase in the cost
of monopolized items such as salt and tobacco instead of totally annihilating the district's economy only depressed the level of economic activities. Malabar's ability to survive any permanent economic damage seems to have been the inability of the colonial government to penetrate to the lower levels of the agrarian economy where production was carried out. The severe underestimation in official statistics on the resources of the country is representative of the early British Government's limitations. The economic history of Malabar in the early decades of colonial rule, with wide ranging juridical and structural economic transformation fails to support the 'continuity' hypothesis in recent Indian historiography, where a new colonial economy is dated only from the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century.²

**Chapter 3** delineates trends in agricultural production and tries to explain these. Given the inadequacies of the official output statistics, we constructed a revised series for paddy output. The revised paddy output, broadly agrees

with George Blyn's findings for India. According to Blyn's estimates per acre food grain yield declined by 0.18 per cent between 1891 and 1941, with the decline becoming more rapid after 1921. In Malabar, the downturn occurs in the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century. The Net Cropped Acreage expanded mainly into inferior lands such as 'cultivable wastes' and 'cultivable fallows'. Lateral expansion at the cost of fallows into less fertile lands in a context of no technological improvements points to a situation where one can expect falling yields. However, in the first half of this century there was no absolute shortage of land for lateral expansion.

At the taluk level we find that while in North Malabar investment in agriculture constantly declined, in South Malabar the situation improved in Walluvanad and Ponnani from 1910 to 1920 to decline subsequently. On an average for the whole district, the capital inputs in relation to the cropped area declined during the brisk expansion of cultivation in the 1910-20 decade, Palghat and Wallavanad being notable exceptions. The 1930-40 decade again saw a similar decline in capital stock. However, the magnitude of decline was much less in the South vis-a-vis the North. The intensity of capital stock in Malabar's agriculture thus

exhibits a rise from 1904 to the mid-'20s followed by a decline till 1949-50, a trend similar to the output curve for paddy. The clearly discernible regional disparity in the size of capital stock between the North and the South persisted during the first half of the 20th century, but from the 1920s a pervasive fall in the intensity of capital use is observed in the paddy rich South also. Commodity production in agriculture predated British rule in Malabar. The logic of profit and the continued dominance of non-profit forms of exploitation and subsistence agriculture provided the setting for the unfolding of economic change in the Malabar countryside.

One reason for the fall in productivity appears to have been the increase in small holdings and some disengagement of large farmers from paddy cultivation. The tenurial and agrarian relations were more in favour of the cultivator one can logically expect such productivity increases to take place. In a context where the bulk of the cultivators were tenants with extremely tenuous rights to their plots, they had to be sure that any improvement made by them would be compensated for by the landlord. Thus one would expect to find increasing agricultural productivity and a greater intensity of capital inputs in the less unequal garden cropped taluks than in the wet paddy growing South. A

4. This theme is dealt with in detail in Chapter 5.
preponderance of very small peasants in no way able to undertake productive investments appears to have constrained Malabar’s agricultural growth. However, the standard characterizations of the janmi, as a rack renting landlord, content with endlessly exploiting a labour force and unproductively using his surplus needs to be modified, especially in view of the apparently anomalous productive performance of Palghat taluk.

The unchanging level of available technology has often been faulted for the impasse in which Indian agriculture found itself. For Western India, it has been argued that productivity enhancing investments were not made because there were none left. In Malabar it appears that even the limit of available technological inputs had not been reached. This hypothesis comes fairly close to Ludden’s typology of agricultural productivity in the dry and wet areas. Except for agricultural productivity, all the other characteristics of the wet and dry lands enumerated by Ludden overlap with those delineated by us for the garden and wet zones.

Chapter 4 looks at the demographic variable. Demographic changes have been emphasized as the crucial motor of social transformation by a number of historians. Population change in Malabar was the immediate product of differences between

5. Sumit Guha, op.cit.
fertility and mortality, with fertility being the more important variable. Migration was of little significance. Both fertility and mortality were closely related to economic changes in the agrarian economy and its social practices.

A close connection is seen between mortality and price hikes. This needs to be related to the fact of Malabar’s high level of commercialization, chronic dependence on imported rice (its staple cereal) and the large proportion of landless agricultural labourers and dwarf holders. The mortality-price nexus is exaggerated by the fact that price hikes occurred during the most unhealthy rainy season, when food stocks were low.

While demographic change can be unambiguously related to the internal working of the society, its independent impact on various indices of agrarian change is difficult to establish in the case of Malabar.

Finally, the moderate rather than very high fertility in Malabar, strengthens the case for the existence of varied fertility levels in pretransitional Indian demographic history. It also points to the need to study the relatively early fall in Kerala’s fertility to its past demographic structure.

Discussions of tenurial arrangements have dominated most of the earlier studies on colonial Indian agrarian history. These studies tended to over emphasize the tenurial
changes effected by colonial rule as the prime mover of agrarian change. In Chapter 5 we examine how selected State policies and price changes were mediated through the refracting prism of agricultural production regimes and class relations to differently affect different classes and regions. The response of the various classes to larger changes in the two agro-economic zones with their associated configurations of class power varied significantly. Malabar's recovery from the 1830s depression and the subsequent secular rise in agricultural product prices contributed significantly in translating the juridical tenurial rearrangements made at the beginning of the century into a changed configuration of agrarian class power. This situation comes close to the phenomenon described by Hayami and Ruttan for nineteenth century Thailand where increased rice prices brought about by the expansion of foreign trade led to a transformation of property rights. While these writers explain the resultant institutional change in terms of a sustained change in price, we see in the Malabar the changes that resulted were crucially based upon the antecedent and prevailing political and economic power of the jammis and the smaller peasants. The period immediately preceding the 1930 Act clearly shows these various forces at work. It has already been seen how in the garden dominated

6. Hayami and Ruttan, op. cit.
North the *janmi-kanamdar* relation was politically, socially and economically less unequal when compared to the South. In this context when agricultural product prices increased sharply in the period between the War and Depression all tenurial classes would have tried to increase their land resources. In the wet paddy dominated *taluks* the extent of land cultivated by the *janmis* increased at a much faster rate than that of the *kanamdars* (including sub-*kanamdars*) as opposed to the garden cropped *taluks*. In Palghat, which was characterized by the maximum level of inequality during the entire colonial period, *kanamdar* cultivated lands actually registered a decrease while that of the *janmis* increased greatly. The changes in agrarian relations in the one and a half centuries beginning in 1800 was marked by distinct phases. The early years of Company rule experienced a general depression. The recovery from the depression in the 1850s was accompanied by extreme *janmi* exploitation and pockets of militant peasant resistance. Heightened agrarian tensions forced the State to intervene to check the *janmis*. The result was the passing of some minimalist legislation, and the consequent rise of the well to do *kanamdars*. Kanamdars could take advantage of protective legislation in areas where janmi power was relatively weaker. These were generally in the garden dominated Northern *taluks*. The Depression was marked by some disengagement of large holders from wet cultivation, easier access to land and the entry of
militant organized peasant resistance to landlordism. Combined with this the breakup of large Nayar taravads also contributed to the decline of landlordism, though not to very significant extent in the Malabar region. This period also witnessed a significant movement of population away from the agrarian sector. It needs to be pointed out here that although janmis were more powerful in the South, this did not prevent them from making productive investments in land. Palghat taluk is a case in point. Landlordism, per se was not an obstacle to increasing agricultural investment. Similarly, an increase in self cultivating farmers, did not ensure increase in agricultural investment or productivity.

Chapter 6 deals with agricultural labour. While one finds significant continuities between areas of pre-colonial slave concentrations and colonial labourers, definite changes took place in the nature of the colonial agrarian workforce during our period. The colonial agrestic labourers, far from constituting a homogeneous entity, were a fragmented body. The fragmentation was both along caste and income lines.

The free casual agricultural worker benefited during our period, whereas the tied serf may or may not have done so. We are not sure about the latter group, because, even though their wages should have logically increased in real terms (because they were paid in paddy at a constant rate and the paddy prices registered a steep hike) extra-economic
handicaps imposed on them often prevented them even from getting their due shares. Further, wage movements, cannot be explained mechanically by changes in the land-population ratio.

The shift from kind to cash payment which started at the turn of the century appears to have been the result of two simultaneous movements-- the increasing price of paddy and the increased availability of labour in the post 1921 period and the secular shift away from wet paddy cultivation.

The agrarian structure of Malabar emerges from the above discussion as highly, but differentially, commercialized. Chapter 7 discusses the market and Malabar's agrarian economy. The degree of commercialization varied between garden and paddy producing areas. Further, Malabar's spices which formed its staple high value export upto the early decades of the 19th century progressively lost their foreign markets and its significance decreased in the district's basket of exports. A high degree of dependence on the market persisted throughout our period because the region was dependent on external markets both for buying its exports and supplying its basic food staple. Malabar's agricultural product prices moved in close association with export and import markets. During periods of increasing prices the Malabar farmer appears to have responded positively in terms of increasing supply, whereas, during the Depression, the reverse did not happen. The beginning of the Second World
War marked a definite break in the direction of the district's export trade, which now became predominantly dependent on Indian markets.