This chapter examines the impact on agrarian Malabar of changes in land tenures, revenue demand, the changed composition of Malabar's exports and the increased financial integration of the district with Madras during the early colonial period. By the Treaty of Seringapatam (1792) Malabar was ceded to the English Company. The military conquest of Malabar merely ensured the British de jure political control over the region where further battles had to be fought to gain control of its coveted revenues and establish a government. Accumulation of an adequate stock of knowledge about the political-economic landscape of the newly acquired territory and the subversion of the political power of traditional local ruling groups by administrative, judicial and (in the last resort) military means to enable revenue maximization became major concerns of English Company rule in Malabar. The attempts at establishing British sovereignty immediately launched the Company on a collision course with the Malabar Rajas and chieftains. During the Second Anglo-Mysore War Lord Cornwallis had instructed the Bombay Government to induce the Malabar chiefs to enter the war against Tipu with the English Company. In a letter to Bombay, Cornwallis wrote, "on condition that they will submit to be directed by us in carrying on the War
against Tippoo, we will do our utmost to render them in future entirely independent of him, and at the conclusion of the peace to retain them upon reasonable terms under the protection of the Hon’ble Company."¹

Elaborating further he wrote "that in order to secure a willing obedience from the Malabar Chiefs, we should be contented with their paying a very moderate tribute, provided they will give the Company advantageous privileges of Commerce, in the valuable productions of the Country."² The Rajas of Chirakkal, Kottayam and Kadattanad in North Malabar agreed to these terms and aided the Company in fighting the Mysorean forces. As late as February 1792 the Bombay Government believed that Malabar would be restored to the Rajas under British protection.³

Immediately after the Treaty of Seringapatam, Cornwallis instructed the Bombay Governor, General Abercromby to investigate and report on the resources of Malabar and the most suitable means of governing it. The investigating officers were to lose no time in coming to some agreement with the friendly Rajas regarding the settlement of the revenue to be paid in the next year. The Bombay Commissioners, William Farmer and Major Dow were also made responsible for the maintenance of peace in the

2. ibid.
3. Letter from Abercromby to Bombay 29 Feb. 1792, Bombay Secret and Political Diary No.43, pp.212-213
country.

The Bombay Commissioners soon discovered that the earlier agreements between the English Company and the Rajas were "not so comprehensive as could be wished, since they provided for the emancipation of the Malabar Rajas from Tipu, but did not clearly express their dependence on the Company." After some initial hesitation all the important Rajas of North Malabar submitted to a drastic restriction of their traditional privileges and recognized the sovereignty of the English Company. The common features of these treaties which were forced on the Rajas were:

(a) The Rajas were to remain in control of administration but were to be subjected to Company control if they oppressed the inhabitants; (b) a joint team of the Company's and the Rajas' officials to assess the revenue yielding capacity of land; (c) the government share of the pepper produce to be paid at a price fixed in December with the Company having exclusive rights over trade in the remaining amount of the produce; (d) A clause stating that these terms were of a temporary nature subject to confirmation by the Bombay Governor.

Meanwhile, with the arrival of the other two Commissioners (Jonathan Duncan and Charles Boddam) from Bengal in December 1792 significant administrative reforms pertaining to the judiciary,

5. See Logan, *op. cit.*, vol.III
the revenue administration and commerce were instituted.⁶ These were "founded entirely on the Bengal Code, modified so as to adapt it to the circumstances of the country."⁷ Free trade in all articles except pepper was announced in December 1792. In January 1793 two separate judicial courts were established. The first was to try cases involving land claims of the principal landholders and the Rajas. The second was to try all other cases. The earlier juridical and penal rights of the Rajas were done away with and so were their rights to collect gifts. In March 1793 Malabar was divided into Northern and Southern administrative divisions under the general control of a Supravisor and a Chief Magistrate. All existing local levies and tolls were abolished and a single mint under Company control was established at Calicut, the capital of the province.

With these reforms the rudimentary administrative structure of the new colonial government was established. The early Company government realized that it was essential to prevent the Malabar chiefs from opposing the nascent British government to ensure the development of the region's resources and its profitability in

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⁶. Reports on a joint commission from Bengal and Bombay appointed to inspect into the state and condition of the province of Malabar, Madras, 1862. This report provides a most detailed account of the activities of the Commissioner in Malabar.


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the long run. The Governor General instructed the Bombay Commissioners to conciliate the landed classes in the initial years by imposing a "light" revenue demand "with a view to conciliate the native Rajas, landholders and cultivators to the Company's Government, and encouraged them to improve their respective Districts and increase their productiveness ... the revenue assessed on them, should in the beginning at least, be in general lighter than that exacted by Tipu ..." For the new colonial State, land provided by far the most important source of extractable surplus in the first years of the 19th century. Consequently the colonial government extended most of its administrative energy in trying to comprehend and classify the complex precolonial system of land relations.

**Land Tenures and Agrarian Relations**

In October 1793 the Joint Commissioners in a district wide promulgation declared the janmis to be the absolute owners of land and the kanamdar as "lessees" who could be evicted by the former on expiry of their leases. The tenurial redefinition of

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9. Extract from the Governor General's instruction to the Commissioners deputed to the Malabar Coast

the rights of the *janmi* and the *kanamdar* proved to be an institutional change of crucial importance in determining the subsequent course of agrarian relations in colonial Malabar. Institutional change has been explained differently neoclassical and Marxist economic historians. The former maintain relative price changes to be the prime motor of institutional change in history. In the field of property rights, they focus on demographic change altering the relative price of labour to land resulting in an incentive for the redefinition of property rights in land and changed labour relations.\(^1^1\) However, Marxists have argued that changes in relative prices cannot determine the balance of class forces or the outcome of social conflicts. At most, they can only change the costs and benefits of collective action on the part of different classes.\(^1^2\) According to William Logan, who was the first official to question this redefinition, "The Joint Commissioners viewed the status of a *janmi* as being equivalent in all respects to that of a Roman *dominus*. The matter was very insufficiently investigated by the Commissioners. The *janmi* was very simply a man exercising authority within a certain well defined area, and entitled as such to a well-defined share -----------


of the produce--the pattam or ancient land revenue assessment of the land lying within that area. But by the Commissioners' action the janmi was constituted the lord of the soil, and it is not to be wondered at that in time the jannis began, with the help of the courts of justice, to show very small respect for the rights of the tillers of the soil--the ryots in fact." Logan attributed this lapse on the part of the Joint Commissioners to their inability to understand the fundamental differences between Western and precolonial Malayali notions of property. "The European looks to the soil, and nothing but the soil. The Malayali on the contrary looks chiefly to the people located on the soil . . . the chief things conveyed were the different kinds of authority attaching to a Desam, a Temple and a Tara, and not merely the lands and the slaves." 13

While Logan's criticism of the Joint Commissioners' views appears to have been correct, the redefined juridical status of the janmi and the kanamdar suited the British administration most admirably. The centralizing colonial regime had to do eliminate the multiplicity of local centres of political authority. Stripped of their extra-economic prerogatives, the erstwhile local potentates approximated notionally, to landlords in the Western sense of the term. Early British policy in Malabar, as in other parts of India was in favour of retaining and harnessing the local authority of these men to further the cause of empire


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once they accepted their subordination to the new regime. Thomas Munro writing in the second decade of the nineteenth century argued that "the preservation of and the independence of the great body of landlords though not necessary for the purpose of securing our revenue, is essential to the attainment of the higher objects of Good Government and the future improvement of the people." 14 Writing around the same time, Graeme viewed the Malabar landlords as a class "whose ideas, not being exclusively confined to the village of the ground or to servile occupation, are possessed of education to qualify them to be intelligent arbitrators in disputes, and able revenue police officers of Government ...." 15 Thus, given the new regime's need for a native class of landlords the superior janmam rightholders were eminently qualified for this role.

The immediate implication of redefining the janmi as the owner of the soil or the landlord was that the colonial state forfeited its claim to the absolute ownership of all land in its territories. Elsewhere in the Madras Presidency (except in South Canara) there was theoretically no intermediary between the landlord, State and the raiyat. The State's land revenue in Madras was pitched at one-third of the gross produce. For Malabar


15. ibid.
on the other hand, the British as well as Tipu made an exception by making only the net produce liable to taxation. The net produce was calculated by deducting the cost of cultivation and a profit of one-third (of the gross produce) to the raiyat from the gross produce. The recognition of private ownership in land also forced the government to relinquish claims over waste land.

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 articulation of the new contradictions which the 1793 tenurial revision introduced into Malabar's agrarian relations.

The Joint Commissioners failed to perceive the multivocality of precolonial tenurial categories and the analytical disjunction between juridical tenurial categories and agrarian economic relations. The colonial interpretation of the janmi as the landlord failed to appreciate that an individual or a family could simultaneously hold land on janmam and kanam tenures. Further there were wide economic and political disparities within the janmam and kanam tenure holders. The tenurial reclassification made in 1793 was to continue unchanged till the passing of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill of 1969. Having

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neatly classified Malabar's complex land tenures in a taxonomy readily comprehensible to the Western mind, the Joint Commissioners continued with their hectic experimenting in devising methods of revenue assessment and collection which were simultaneously economically profitable and politically safe. By August 1800 the Government had taken charge of revenue collection from most of the Rajas before the expiry of the settlements made with them on the plea that they had run up arrears. By the turn of the century, though most of the Malabar Rajas had got reconciled to British sovereignty, there continued to be isolated pockets of stiff resistance to British rule.16

In September 1801, the Government decided to wind up the Joint Commission and bring Malabar under the jurisdiction of a Principal Collector and three subordinate Collectors. Major Macleod, was appointed the first Principal Collector of Malabar and was authorized complete civil and military powers to punish "by summary process, crimes of every description". In January 1802 he attempted to disarm the population.17 The same year Macleod changed the existing rate of monetary exchange adversely affecting the revenue paying cultivators by increasing the real

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16. The longest and most well known of these rebellions was that of Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam which lasted from 1793 to 1797 and again from 1800 to 1805. Pazhassi Raja was joined by local leaders such as Unni Mutta Muppan, Manjeri Attan Gurukkal and some of the Iruvalinad Nambiyars. Innes, op.cit., pp 74-75.

17. Logan, Treaties, p.ccxxxiv
revenue demand greatly. In August 1802 he devalued the gold fanam from Rs.3.50 to Rs.4.22 or from 12.25 to 14.77 star pagodas. The silver fanam was devalued from Rs.5 to Rs.5.50 or 17.5 to 19.25 star pagodas. The star pagoda was a currency unit which was not current in Malabar but was used as the money of account in revenue transactions. Macleod’s successor Rickards described the impact of this devaluation on the region in the following words -- "[The changed exchange rates] in fact raised the revenue on every individual throughout the country 20 per cent in gold fanams and 10 per cent in silver, while for their commodities in the markets they could only get the old rates of 3-1/2 gold and 5 silver fanams per rupee.” 18

Soon after introducing these new rates of exchange Macleod made a fresh revenue settlement in Malabar within a ridiculously short period of forty days. This survey was conducted by amsom revenue officers or parbutties who were notorious for their corruption. The survey was characterized by highly unequal assessments, fabricated accounts and exaggerated estimates of produce. Macleod pitched the revenue demand on cultivation as high as 35 to 40 per cent of the gross produce. Subsequent estimates made by Graeme suggest that Macleod overestimated coconut yields by 94.57 per cent and the areca yield by 32.26 per cent. Not only did Macleod’s scheme increase the land revenue

18. Principal Collector Rickards to B.O.R., 27 April 1803, para 28
demand by calculating it on an erroneously inflated estimate of the gross produce, but further pushed it up by devaluing the *fanam*.

The impossibly high revenue demand provoked general resistance to British rule throughout Malabar in the early part of 1803. The popular discontent was utilized by the recently displaced members of the erstwhile ruling houses to foment rebellion especially in Wynad and interior North Malabar.

In an attempt to calm down the population Major Macleod resigned in favour of Mr. Rickards. By announcing concessions to the large landowners of South Malabar Rickards was able to halt the spread of the revolt in South Malabar. In the North in a bid to placate the agriculturists, Murdoch Brown conducted a new survey and assessment of Randattara. By the end of 1805 through a series of military engagements and the blockading of supplies, the rebel chiefs were either killed or apprehended and the first serious revolt against the colonial state was crushed.

Soon after the general upsurge of 1803 an attempt was made to establish some definite principles of determining the rate of revenue assessment. Rickards, the newly appointed Principal Collector met the leading *janmis* to elicit their views on the sharing of surplus produce. Rickard's scheme which was acceptable to the *janmis* was sanctioned by the Board of Revenue in July 1803 and proclaimed throughout the district in July 1805.

Under this scheme for wet land cultivation, the amount of seed and an equal amount for cultivation expenses were deducted
from the gross produce. One-third of the remaining produce went to the cultivator as profit. Sixty per cent of the balance (the pattam or rent) went to the Government and forty per cent to the janmi. The revenue share as it was calculated by Rickards came to be known as the vilachchal meni pattam (hereafter VMP). Apart from the VMP the two other important kinds of pattam were the verumpattam and the huzur niguthi. Given the different methods of calculating the VMP and the verumpattam (hereafter VP) the sixty per cent state demand was greater in lands subjected to VMP than for VP lands. The Joint Commissioners increased the rate of revenue assessment by charging an additional 10 per cent over Tipu’s assessment. This additional levy was retained subsequently.

In 1803 Rickards had come to an agreement with "principal Malabar Rajas, Head Nambudiris and Mukhyasthans" at Calicut on a standardized general mode of calculating the pattam on which the revenue demand was based.

His successor Mr Warden went a step further. He tried to obtain detailed data as a step to further revenue surveys by asking all proprietors of land to furnish a detailed signed statement of their property so that the government could ascertain the number of fields and the quantum of assessable produce. These statements known as the Janmi Pymash accounts were collected in 1805-06. Between 1806 and 1810 Mr Warden conducted a survey of wet lands with the help of Maratha revenue surveyors. The accounts drawn up by Mr Warden, were supposed to be the most
reliable Pymash and was known as the Hinduvi or Alavu Pymash. The yield was estimated for wet lands in South Malabar excluding Palghat. The output is expressed in terms of paras without any reference to the area cultivated.\(^\text{19}\) If we impute 1904 wet paddy acreage for these taluks, the yield estimate comes to 798 lb. per acre. This is higher than other available estimates for the district for the early 19th century but closer to the 1861 estimate 990 lb. for wet lands.\(^\text{20}\)

However, no revision in the revenue demand was made on the basis of Warden's wet land survey. The visit of Thomas Munro to Malabar (1817) in his capacity as a member of a commission for modifying establishments and his subsequent report on the revenue and administration system of Malabar once again led to a fresh spurt of modificatory experimentation. Munro criticized the Company government in Malabar for neglecting its duty to establish a viable village level administration. "There is none in which the overthrow of the native government has been more felt by the people--revenue on a higher scale, and Establishments as far as they are concerned on a lower scale than formerly,

\(\text{19. See Logan, op. cit., p.624. Output in paras have been converted into pounds at the rate of 28 lb. to a para for areas outside Palghat.}\)

\(\text{20. See Chapter 4 below for details.}\)
cannot be satisfactory to any class." Munro felt that as foreigners inexperienced in the customs of the country they needed the services of the precolonial elite in administering the country. He argued that reinstating the desavazhis as local administrative chiefs would provide a useful and loyal class of collaborators.

As regards revenue, Munro was of the view that though the revenue demand was moderate it did not in many cases have any relationship with the productivity of the land. This situation led to land sales for the realization of land arrears. Although the revenue thus realized was negligible the number of people affected was large. Acting on the basis of Munro's report of 1817 the Board of Revenue proposed to depute one member of the Board to implement Munro's suggestions. This was, however, not acceptable to the Government which in turn appointed Mr Graeme, a judge of the Southern Court of Circuit to introduce a new system of police and magistracy for Malabar; and to suggest feasible improvements in Malabar's revenue administration.

Graeme in his enquiries on rent found that the landed magnates had furnished exaggerated accounts of their share of the produce to Mr Rickards who had made this data the basis for calculating the V.M.P. Graeme did away with the V.M.P and adopted

15. ibid.
the V.P or actual rent by detailed enquiries and examination of lease deeds. He proposed to fix the assessment at 65 per cent of the V.P on wet lands. Since the V.P was lower than the V.M.P Graeme estimated that the proposed substitution of V.M.P by V.P would result in a revenue loss of about Rs. 1,39,922 or about 13 per cent.23

It seems rather surprising that Graeme's downward revision of the revenue demand was accepted by the Government when administrator after administrator harped on the fact that the revenue demand in Malabar was most "moderate".

In Garden lands Graeme first continued with Rickard's proposal of taxing half the rent or pattam. In the course of his enquiries he raised the tax on the pattam in North Malabar from 66.7 per cent to 80 per cent of the Garden Produce while continuing Rickard's old proportion of one-third in South Malabar. Adjustments were made for trees which were not yet yielding and for those which were too old to be productive.24 Next he calculated the money value of the Gross Produce and the locally prevalent pattam to arrive at the Government revenue demand. The restructured revenue collections thus made were estimated to fall short of the current collections by about 7 per cent. Graeme recommended that the revenue rates were to be revised every twelve years.

23. Innes, op. cit., p.333; Logan, op. cit., p.685

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On "Miscellaneous" lands the earlier system of taking 20 per cent of the gross produce was continued.

Graeme's proposals were accepted by the Governor of Madras in July 1822 with very minor modifications and he was asked to implement them. Graeme's departure from Malabar in 1823 did not permit him to carry out a full revision of Garden and Wet land assessments for the whole district. Graeme could complete only the revision of garden revenues for Calicut taluk. He however, left a scheme for continuing the operations to his successor Mr Vaughan.

Vaughan continued Graeme's exercise with some minor changes and in 1824-25 unilaterally announced new revenue rates. The Government however did not recognize this settlement. The next Collector, Sheffield undertook a detailed survey in 1826. Efforts at revenue revision continued till 1840 resulting in a small increase (of Rs.18849) in place of the loss forecast by Graeme. In 1842 and 1852 the issue of revising the existing settlement was raised but nothing came of it because of the Collector's Conolly's opposition.

In the 1850s the revenue assessment of garden land in Kurumbranad was slightly reduced (by Rs.336) after receipt of repeated complaints over assessment.25 No further radical changes in revenue assessment or more detailed surveys were made till the end of the century although the inaccuracy and fabricated data

25. Innes, op. cit., p.335

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Basic Prerequisites of Revenue Policy: Agency

The early colonial revenue history of Malabar that we have sketched above constitutes only a partial statement of the State’s intervention in the agrarian economy. When the stated objectives and plans of revenue policy are studied along with its selective silences, omissions and inertia one gets a more complete picture of the character and limits of the State’s agrarian policy.

The revenue and tenurial systems though being only a part of the agrarian structure provide a convenient entry point to historically investigate the various determinants and constituent parts of the latter.

In the first decade of British rule in Malabar land revenue constituted more than 85 per cent of the total revenue of the district. With land being the single most important source of surplus, it is not surprising that the bulk of the early colonial government’s transformative energies were aimed at the agrarian sector. The establishment of a civil state in Malabar required the erstwhile ruling elite to accept their new subordinate status and collaborate with the colonial regime. Having been dispossessed of their non-land based sources of income by the late eighteenth century, the ancient ruling groups were by now wholly dependent on land. The fledgling colonial administration in trying to achieve its twin objectives of revenue maximization
and the maintenance of political order had to tread very cautiously in the formulation and implementation of its revenue policies. A delicate balance had to be struck between the need to increase revenue collections on the one hand and preventing political discontent and revolt on the other. Local level political configurations rather than considerations of political economy appear to have been the crucial determinants of the mode and extent of state intervention in Malabar's agrarian relations.

With only a minimal administrative infrastructure, the army was the mainstay of the early colonial administration in Malabar. With troop supplies from Madras and Bombay being very undependable the government had at best a tenuous hold over the district up to the first decade of British rule. Denied the services of an experienced class of revenue officials and without trustworthy records of the past revenue yielding capabilities of the district, the British were forced to depend on the various local Rajas for revenue collections. The earliest revenue settlements were thus *ad-hoc* quinquennial leases to the Rajas and chiefs of the various nads. The mode of assessment continued to be that framed by Arshad Beg Khan in 1784. The British aim in the early years was to collect as much as possible of the Mysorean *jama*, which was based in principle on unrealistically high rates

26. Expenditure on the Company's military establishments amounted to 76.5 per cent of the total estimated disbursements in 1793-94 while civil expenditure came to only 8.3 per cent. See K.K.N. Kurup, *Modern Kerala*, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1988, p.8
of taxation. By trying to collect the Mysorean jama with great vigour and further enhancing it (by claiming a larger amount of the pattam in the North and imposing a 10 per cent collection charge in the South) the revenue demand was sharply increased. The Rajas who had leased the revenue farms soon fell into arrears and between 1796 and 1801 the Company rapidly assumed direct charge of revenue collection and pensioned off the Rajas.

By 1802 a court of Faujdari Adalat was established in Malabar terminating martial law except in the insurgency hit taluk of Wynad. With the Rajas pensioned off, the British began a series of revenue surveys to ascertain the revenue paying capacity of the land. The revenue personnel involved in these land valuation exercises were the precolonial Desadhikaris, Mukhyasthans and Menons. The use of outsiders (Marathas) as revenue surveyors was tried out between 1806 and 1810 by Warden in preparing the Hinduvi Pymash but the practice appears to have been discontinued.

Desperately short of experienced revenue personnel and largely ignorant of customs of the country the British felt an acute need of a collaborating class of village headmen. According to Munro "Our situation as foreigners render a regular Village Establishment more important to us than to a Native Government. Our inexperience and ignorance of the circumstances of the people make it more necessary for us to seek the aid of regular Establishments to direct the internal affairs of the Country, and our security requires that we should have a body of Headmen of
Villages interested in supporting our Dominion." Munro argued for restoring the Desavazhis who were not acting as Mukhyastans to be appointed for managing their respective villages.

Thus we find that the earlier ruling elite though stripped of their political privileges were now entrusted with the task of distributing the land revenue demand. Consequently inequality in assessments and fabricated land deeds became the bane of revenue surveys which the Government was powerless to rectify.

Similarly tenurial redefinitions and the determination of rent were made by reaching a consensus with the principal landed magnates. In spite of the well known defects of this arrangement it did ensure an increasing trend in revenue collections. The old local ruling groups in their new role as subordinate revenue officials were permitted a number of economic perquisites which helped them retain and consolidate their superior economic status. The Mukhyasthan for instance was permitted a "delay in paying his rent by which he was enabled to keep his produce and sell it when dear--and as his services were useful to the Revenue Officers, his rent or a part of it was often carried to the head of irrecoverable Balances. He was removable at pleasure but usually remained in office during life." 28

The Government's failure to change the revenue personnel and its avowed policy of employing precolonial land magnates coupled

27. Munro, *op. cit.*
28. Munro, *ibid.*
with the fact that the revenue collections were made without difficulty helped to introduce a marked inertia in the revenue administration. According to Logan, "There is no record, so far ascertained, of any revision of the principles of assessment from 1805-06 down to 1861, when the Government . . . fixed an acreage assessment." 29

Easy realization of an increasing land revenue, the need to placate the erstwhile ruling groups and the absence of any serious general outward political discontent combined to discourage the British Government from initiating any radical change in its land revenue policy till the first half of the 19th century. The repercussions of this policy of limited intervention were to be felt in the latter half of the century when the cumulative agrarian contradictions which had been growing found expression in various kinds of landlord vs. tenant struggles. The vertical spread of colonial administration in Malabar terminated at the level of landlords. Attempts to penetrate deeper were neither felt necessary nor were they possible.

Land Revenue in Relation to 'Surplus'

Land revenue was the means used by the Colonial State to appropriate the agrarian surplus of Malabar. Land revenue in Malabar, since it came under direct British control was collected with relative ease unlike in many other districts of Madras

29. Logan, op. cit. pp.699-700
Presidency.

The share of land revenue in the total revenue rapidly declined by nearly 50 per cent in the course of the first half of the 19th century. The most lucrative non-land revenue sources which were introduced in the first decade of the 19th century were the monopolies on salt, tobacco and the transport cess or Sayer.

Graph 2.1 indicates the share of land revenue and "extra revenue" in the total collections. The contribution of land revenue to the total revenue declined from 100 per cent in 1800 to 51.68 in 1837. The nominal land revenue demand also exhibited a decreasing trend from 1801-02 to 1837-38 after registering a steep increase in the first decade of British rule.

Table 2.2 Land Revenue Demand and Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Nominal LRCOLL.</th>
<th>Deflated LRCOLL.</th>
<th>Deflated LRDEM.</th>
<th>LRCOLL/LRDEM. X 100</th>
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<tr>
<td>1792/95</td>
<td>1182</td>
<td>1362</td>
<td>86.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>1796/1800</td>
<td>1459</td>
<td>1565</td>
<td>93.23</td>
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<td>1787</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>99.03</td>
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<td>1730</td>
<td>1747</td>
<td>22.76</td>
<td>22.98</td>
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<td>1536</td>
<td>1603</td>
<td>72.38</td>
<td>75.54</td>
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</table>

Source: Appendix in Clementson, op. cit.
LRCOLL: Land revenue collection; LRDEM: Land revenue demand

However, the picture of a declining land revenue demand conveyed by the absolute revenue figures is quite misleading. On deflating the nominal demand figures by the export price of rice
Graph 2.1 Land & Extra Revenue
Percentage contribution to total

Graph 2.2 Movement of Revenue Demand
Index 1 1792=100, Index 2 avg 1792–1800=1

Graph 2.3 Export Distribution, 1804–3
Percentage of Total Export Value
Graph 2.4 Estimates of Land Prices
(Years of Purchase)

Sources: Clementson, Sullivan, B.O.R.
(comparable continuous price data is available only for 1804-05 to 1837-38) we notice an increase in the real burden of revenue from 1804 to 1835.

For Malayalis the centralized collection of a fairly uniform land revenue with a hitherto unknown degree of vigour was a novel experience. The first forty years of British rule saw land revenue collection increase by thirty per cent in nominal terms. The increase in real terms in the revenue was of an even greater order.30

Despite this increase in revenue demand, collections were made with considerable ease. For instance in Malabar although distraints and sales for arrears were resorted to physical coercion did not have to be used to collect revenue. Table 2.2 suggests that land revenue collections as a percentage of the demand was consistently high with collections generally increasing after years of fall in the real revenue burden and falling after periods of steep rises in the real demand. The ratio of collections to demand in Table 2.2 also provides a convenient index of the efficiency of the revenue collecting apparatus in Malabar and the revenue paying capacity of the country.

Real revenue demand and collection have been estimated by deflating the nominal figures by the weighted average export

30. Between 1806/10 and 1831/35 the deflated land revenue collection increased by 50 per cent.
prices of rice, coconuts and pepper, which we use as a proxy index for the general price level.\textsuperscript{31} The price data for the initial years are not available at regular intervals and the quality of available data is also highly suspect.

In order to comprehend the revenue burden imposed by the British \textit{vis-a-vis} the late precolonial period, the 1792 revenue collection has been compared with the subsequent figures. In nominal terms the revenue collected in 1792 more than doubled in the next twenty years. The calculation of the real incidence of revenue collection for the 1790s once again becomes a problematic exercise owing to the acute scarcity of reliable price data. However, scattered quotations of produce and land prices indicate that prices ruled higher by 40 to 100 per cent in the late precolonial period \textit{vis-a-vis} the subsequent period.

A real revenue increase of such gigantic proportions curiously was collected with remarkable ease. This would have resulted only if one or more of the following conditions were met:

i. the revenue yielding capacity of the Malabar economy was extremely high;

ii. the land revenue demand was based on a highly under stated revenue base, the coverage of which expanded with

\textsuperscript{31}Computed from Clementson, op. cit., Appendix. Weights have been assigned to rice, pepper and coconuts on the basis of the current year contribution of each of these commodities to total exports in terms of value.
time;

iii. a large scale turnover of property rights and a general period of deflation.

In fact, as we shall discuss below, all these three conditions combined to permit an increase in the real land revenue collections with serious consequences for the rural Malabar economy. Apart from land revenue the colonial state progressively increased its income from various sources which were clubbed together as "Extra Revenue". These constituted monopolies on the trade in salt and tobacco, ale breweries, licences, Mohturpha, Sayer, Sea-Customs and Stamp revenue. By the end of the 1830s these revenues became nearly as important as the land revenue in terms of its contribution to the exchequer. What we thus see is a sharp increase in the real burden of revenue and a marked expansion of the revenue base of the district.

**Impact of Revenue Extraction on the Agrarian Economy**

The escalation of revenue extraction of the magnitude described above coupled with the tenurial and administrative changes effected by the early colonial government in Malabar had significant and wide ranging repercussions for the district's agrarian economy.

Graph 2.2 suggests that the 1820s and 30s were a period of
price decline.\textsuperscript{32} Price data for the early colonial period though scattered is available only for agricultural products. However, qualitative evidence on land prices and transport costs culled from different Government reports do provide independent estimates which may be used to check the quantitative series. The price movement of the early 19th century like other aspects of early colonial history became much more expressive historically when compared with the trends in the late precolonial period. Price figures for the eighteenth century have been quoted from the English East India Company's Factory records and from transcriptions of interviews conducted by the colonial government with the erstwhile rulers in the early eighteenth century. The following is a summary of some of the eighteenth century price estimates for rice/paddy.

Table 2.3 Rice prices in the eighteenth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Value (in Rs.)</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price in Rs./seer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March, 1728</td>
<td>92.88-98.04</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.088 to 0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 1735-36</td>
<td>65.36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov., 1735-36</td>
<td>82.56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Re. taken as approximately equivalent to 5 Fanams.
Source: Tellicherry Consultations 1727, 1728, 1735-36.

\textsuperscript{32} See footnote 25 for commodity coverage, data coverage and
The average rice price based on the above table was in the region of Rs. 0.129 in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century. In the second decade of the 19th century, the colonial administration carried out a series of interviews with the precolonial landed magnates and Rajas to ascertain the state of the Malabar economy around the time of British annexation in 1792. 33 The rice and coconut prices quoted for Ernad taluk before 1791 areca Rs.2.2 to 3.3 per Macleod Seer and Rs.75 to 150 per 1000 coconuts respectively. Going by this quotation what we find is a sharp price increase from the early decades of the eighteenth century to the 1790s - an increase of the order of 1507 per cent. Although we cannot consider a single quotation as adequate evidence for such a massive price hike it does point to a very considerable increase in prices between the early decades and the closing years of the eighteenth century.

For the first half of the 19th century we have three sets of price data for rice. The independent generating sources of the series make them ideal for counter checking one on other as well as in providing information on the differences between export prices, officially used prices for determining commutation rates.34

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[cont.]

data source.

33. See B.O.R. Proceedings, vol.110, Yernaud Talook Examination made on the 19th Middom 994 M.S or 30th August April 1819

34. Srinivasa Aiyangar, Memorandum on the progress of Madras Presidency, 1893, and Clementson, A Report on Revenue and Other
The export prices of rice and coconuts exhibit a declining secular trend for the period 1804 to 1837 with the fall being more marked in the case of rice. Exported rice prices remained remarkably constant up to 1820 to dip sharply in the subsequent years. While the export prices behaved in this fashion, the prices received by a village landlord (which may be taken to be fairly representative of harvest prices) remained virtually stationary between 1820 and 1837 except for a small dip in the curve in 1830. The third set of price data gives quinquennial figures for second sort rice from 1809-13 at irregular intervals up to 1883/84 to 1887/89. These official prices do not move in sympathy with any of the other prices except during the depression of the early 1830s. The following are the differences (in per centage terms) between the three sets of prices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820 - 1823</td>
<td>A 0</td>
<td>433.33</td>
<td>318.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828 - 1832</td>
<td>A 0</td>
<td>303.13</td>
<td>246.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A, B and C denote farmgate prices, export prices and commutation prices.

The difference between the harvest prices and export prices was more than 300 per cent and that between the harvest prices and commutation prices more than 200 per cent. The least difference was between the export price and the commutation (government) price. However, between 1820-23 and 1828-32 we find

[cont.]
some decrease in the price differential between these three sets of figures.

The coefficient of variation in the price series A and B were expectedly lower in the case of A possibly because of exports being more vulnerable to market fluctuation compared to harvest prices in a rice deficit region.

Prices in Series A have been taken from the private accounts of a rich landlord in Palghat, a rice surplus taluk of Malabar which exported rice to the rest of the district. Since the Palghat rice and paddy prices were about 4 per cent lower than the district average for the 1860-1870 period and subsequent years we have to inflate the Palghat harvest prices by this factor to make it representative of the average district price. However, even an upward revision of this order does not bridge the slowly decreasing but very large gap between series A on the one hand and B and C on the other. This extraordinarily large difference appears to be most probably the result of faulty data. If indeed the difference suggested was true, then logically most of Palghat’s paddy output would have found its way into the export market.

The price data available from the 1720s up to the 1850s provide some indication of the long term trends in agricultural prices in Malabar. It suggests a sharp price rise in the course of the eighteenth century. The increase in the price of imported rice during the eighteenth century was accompanied by a sharp increase in pepper prices. The spike in prices at the end of the
eighteenth century may have been partly due to the disturbed political state of the coast plagued by frequent Mysorean military incursions, rebellions and consequent supply bottlenecks. While the 1790s rice prices appear exaggerated, the coconut prices for the same period appear more realistic. Comparing the average coconut price during 1804 - 1808 (Rs.14.39) with the 1790s price of Rs.75 one again finds a fall of 81 per cent. Thus what emerges is a price curve which rose up to the end of the eighteenth century and subsequently declined. Pepper prices slumped also because of changes in the world market. The Americans carried pepper to England at low carrying rates from Sumatra and swamped the market. 35 Pepper prices in the London market slumped from 15 5/16d. per pound in 1801 to 8 3/4d in September 1805. The prices recovered briefly after the defeat of Napoleon to once again collapse from 7 1/2d. per pound in 1817 to 5d. in 1824. 36

Series B, C and D suggest that the rate of price decrease became higher in the 1820s and 1830s. The fact that the local selling price of rice (Series A) remained largely constant except for a short sympathetic downward movement along with the other series may be explained by the possible lack of market integration and by a regular inelastic demand for rice within the

[cont.]

Matters connected with Malabar, 31 Dec.1838, p.20

district. Another possible reason for the absence of downward fluctuation in the local sale price may have been because the very low level at which it was pitched did not allow any further decline except during the worst years of the 1830s depression.

The price decline described above for agricultural products also extended to wages, transport costs, and land values. Clementson, the Principal Collector of Malabar replying to a questionnaire circulated by the Madras B.O.R in 1838 noted: "the increase in population on the one hand and the cheapness of grain (compared with the prices which existed twenty or thirty years ago) on the other, have had the tendency of reducing rather than increasing the price of labour. The above circumstances, added to the present improved state of the Roads . . . have reduced the expense of conveyance of Goods by more than 50 per cent below what it was 20 or 30 years ago." 37 Clementson also observed that "landed property has become less valuable in proportion to the cheapness of grain. The value may be stated at 40 fold of the clear net annual income derived by the Possessor -- the medium at 25, minimum at 15, the average 26-2/3" 38 Sullivan writing in 1841 tried to refute Clementson's data and asserted that the price of landed property had fallen lately by quoting 1813 figures -- "By a return made to the Collector in 1813 of 67 actual sales it appears that in one instance only, the land fetched a price equal

[cont.]

37. Clementson, op. cit.
to 47 years purchase of the rent -- while the minimum was as low as 6 years." 39 Sullivan may have been correct in pointing out that there was no fall in the price of land in the late 1830s, but on comparing the 1813, 1838 and 1849 figures with those for 1791 and earlier we find a drastic slump in land prices. During an examination of "different Namboodiris of Manjerry and other principal inhabitants" in 1815 they stated "Formerly the price (of land) was higher. It used to be ara kal and kal Palisha, or interest (meaning 10/16 and 1/4 per cent for money lent, or 80 and 40 years purchase). At present arra palisha is with difficulty procurable for the 2 in 10 of the Parroms (meaning 5 per cent or 20 years purchase)." 40

The land prices like agricultural product prices exhibit a steep fall from the late pre-British period to 1791 and then show a small sluggish increase. Clementson in 1838 tried to provide an explanation for this pervasive downward trend in agricultural prices and wages by attributing it to increased agricultural supply -- "The price of agricultural produce, has been decreasing in proportion as the produce increased. The difference may on the average be stated at 100 per cent." 41

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[cont.]

38. Clementson, op. cit.


40. Further Examination of different Namboodiris of Manjery and other Principal Inhabitants on the 28th of April 1815
Sullivan in his report of 1841 contested Clementson's claim that prices had fallen in proportion to an increase in agricultural produce. Sullivan pointed out the fallacy of this claim by arguing that the increase in output had been accompanied by a commensurate increase in Malabar's population. He in fact denied a price decline in recent years on the grounds that in some taluks the market prices were higher than the commutation prices. While Sullivan may possibly have been correct in arguing against a general price fall in the past decade, all available evidence suggests a secular fall in prices since the turn of the century.

To understand the possible determinants of the marked fall in the factor prices of agricultural production one needs to investigate a complex of phenomena associated with the working of the newly established colonial state in Malabar.

Apart from a secular price decline we find the commodity composition of Malabar's export trade exhibiting significant changes in the first four decades of colonial rule. While the money value of Malabar's export trade constantly increased from 1804 to 1837, its traditional high value exports, namely pepper and other spices were increasingly displaced by cotton piecegoods manufactured outside the district in Coimbatore, Salem and Tinnevelly (see Graph 2.3). Rice and paddy, items in which the district was deficit were now important export revenue earners,

[cont.]

41. Clementson, op. cit.
exhibiting an increase till about 1824. The district registered a continuous and increasing positive balance of payment of foreign trade.43

The changed composition of exports was both a cause for and effect of the district’s changing financial and agricultural structure. While contemporary administrative reports claimed that Malabar’s agricultural production had gone up, the extant information on falling agricultural wages, rents and land values contradict it. The export of rice and paddy was used as evidence to argue that the district’s paddy production had increased to such an extent that it had begun exporting rice, a commodity in which it was chronically deficit before colonial rule. With all available information on the land (See Graph 2.4), labour and rental market in agriculture indicating a decline, it is difficult to believe that Malabar changed from a major rice importer to a rice surplus exporting region within a span of a decade or two.

The sudden rapid increase in real land revenue demand coupled with an increase in the prices of commodities such as salt and tobacco and a fall in the prices of agricultural produce significantly decreased the returns to the producer. The large price differential between the export and local selling price of rice appears responsible for the increase in exports of rice from [cont.]

42. Sullivan, op. cit., p.3

43. Malabar’s balance of payments from seaborne foreign trade increased from 1804 to 1837 at an annual rate of 4.12 per cent.
Malabar although the district continued to be deficit in rice.

The simultaneous decline in the export share of spices and garden produce with an increase in the share of cotton piecegoods suggest that the exports earnings of Malabar declined because most of the piecegoods manufactured in the Tamil districts were now merely re-exported from Malabar.

The intervention of the colonial state in Malabar's economy was responsible to a very great extent for the lowering of prices in the district and retarding the demand for the factors of agricultural production. The long term trend in prices for the early 19th century in the various Madras districts in spite of marked variations show a similar trend of long term decline. Malabar and Ganjam were two districts where in comparison with the rest of Madras prices were much lower. Given the inelasticity of food grain supply and an increasing population, the fall in prices cannot be attributed to excess supply.

The new revenue and financial arrangements to which Malabar was subjected and the change in the district's export trade composition have to be studied to explain the depression of the early 19th century.

While Malabar's export revenues from its lucrative spices decreased, the Government land revenue collections, customs and sayer duties increased. The increase in taxes meant that a greater part of the available social surplus was being absorbed

[cont.]

See Clementson, op. cit., p.13
by the State. This by itself need not have caused a general deflationary condition. However, instead of returning the taxes thus collected into circulation, the collections were remitted out of the district treasuries.\textsuperscript{45}

Another deflationary stimulus came from the decreasing share of spices in Malabar's export trade. Pepper and other spices had earlier attracted considerable "Investment" by the Company. With the share of these high value commodities declining, the bullion earned on this account also decreased progressively. In the textile exporting districts of Salem, Coimbatore and Tinnevelly the decrease in piece goods exports had a similar impact on exacerbating monetary stringency.

Large scale issue of Bills by the Court of Directors for making payments to the Madras Presidency after 1819-20 below the bullion rate of exchange led to a further shrinking of bullion imports. Clementson observed in 1889: "Until fifteen years ago a great deal of Gold coin such as old and new Gold mohurs, Bahdary, Sultani and Ichery Pagodas, Venetians were current in the District, but they have gradually disappeared, and are so rare that a few that are now and then found in the markets are not

\textsuperscript{[cont.]}\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44.} Sarada Raju, \textit{op. cit.}, p.227

\textsuperscript{45.} Sarada Raju, \textit{op. cit.}, "Formerly in several of the districts, revenue was seldom remitted to the Presidency, and all of it returned to circulation. But later, as there was no occasion for the retention of money in the district treasuries,
procurable without the payment of a Premium."\(^{46}\) In 1820 a remittance of Rs. 1,00,000 to Bombay entirely in Gold mohurs led to the virtual disappearance of the currency from the Malabar markets. The recall and demonetization of the old Bombay copper pice from the district was also expected to cause considerable dissatisfaction among the people.

Apart from the Bombay rupee the Malabar coins were not in circulation in the other districts with which Malabar had trade relations. Consequently the Madras coins commanded a high premium in the district. The fall in the rate of premium from 14 per cent to 3 to 10 per cent in 1838 points to an integration of the money market and a fall in transaction costs between Malabar and the other Madras districts.

Money supply to the Madras Presidency as a whole also shrank because of the changed mechanism of sending remittances from Britain to the Presidency. The use of Bills by the C.O.D to make payments to Madras went up sharply from Rs.9,427 in 1819-20 to Rs.2,66,412 in 1835-36 to Rs.50,90,346 in 1845-46.\(^{47}\) With the bills fixed at rates below the bullion rate it reduced the import of bullion from England and other countries with which the metropolis had an adverse balance of trade. This contraction of bullion earnings of the Madras merchants was seen in a reduction of bullion brought by them to the Madras Mint from an average of [cont.]

\(^{46}\) Clementson, \textit{op. cit.}, p.6.

\(^{47}\)
Rs.3,25,000 between 1820 and 1834 to Rs.1,12,677 in 1847-48.48

The depression of the 1830s and ’40s was relatively less severe in Malabar compared to the Tamil districts. Sarada Raju explains Malabar’s different experience thus--"In the first two districts (Ganjam and Malabar), prices were always low and fluctuations slight, and hence they were not severely hit by the fall in prices. Further, there was a considerable increase in the production of commercial crops to compensate for the loss due to grain. In Malabar there was a steady expansion in the cultivation of pepper and coffee."49 Sarada Raju’s first contention that prices were always low in Malabar is correct for the early 19th century. However, there is no evidence to conclude either that the price fluctuations were low or that commercial cropping expanded to "compensate for the loss due to grain". In fact what our data suggests is a decline in the share of food crops only after 1840.50 Thus the slighter intensity of the Depression can be explained only in terms of the already highly depressed state of the district’s economy.

During the prolonged depression of the first four decades of the 19th century a distinct weakening in the demand for land, labour and credit can be seen. This along with the export of paddy from food grain deficit Malabar and a fall (in

[cont.]

47. Sarada Raju, op.cit., p.235
48. Report of the Mint Master, 11 April 1851
49. Sarada Raju, op.cit.
proportionate value terms) in spice exports suggests an apparent process of "decommercialization". Commercialization of an economy or any sector of it refers to increase in market participation by its members. This increase could come about by greater buying or selling on the market. The reverse process may be designated "decommercialization". A large deficit in the staple food grain and increasing production of non-foodgrain commercial crops can be taken as an unambiguous index of commercialization. This was the case in late precolonial eighteenth century Malabar.

A decrease in garden crop production accompanied by an increase in paddy output would logically suggest an opposite movement towards decommercialization. The early 19th century administrative reports by district collectors in their eagerness to please their Madras superiors invariably claimed growth in all forms of agricultural production, population, revenue and trade. In the absence of any kind of quantitative evidence it is difficult to accept their claims that in Malabar wet, dry and garden cultivation was increasing continuously and that the district had become a surplus paddy producer.

The available data for the first half century of colonial rule suggests either a "decommercialization" of Malabar's agrarian economy or a shift from autonomous or voluntary commercialization. Definite conclusions regarding these questions become difficult given the extreme paucity of reliable quantitative evidence. If we assume that the export data on the quantum of spice and rice exports provide an approximate proxy

[cont.]
index for Malabar’s spice and paddy output, we may argue that the greater exports of rice (relative to pepper and other spices) represented a greater expansion of paddy production than spices. If this indeed was the case then what happened was some shift from an exclusively non-food commercial crop to a food crop. Rice in spite of being an exported commodity (at least during the colonial period) was also Malabar’s single most important subsistence staple. Given the fact that Malabar was a rice deficit economy it appears plausible that if paddy production increased a relatively larger proportion (relative to the late precolonial period during which there is no record of rice exports) of the output would be retained for self consumption and hence did not enter the market. This situation in conjunction with a scarcity in the circulating medium and an increase in extracted revenue (which was not ploughed back into circulation) suggest a process of "decommercialization" of Malabar’s agrarian economy in the early colonial period.

An alternative scenario reconstructed from the available evidence is as follows: Food grain or paddy output continued to lag behind population increase but rice and paddy exports as a proportion of the district’s estimated output increased sharply from 8.6 per cent in 1808 to 39.53 per cent in 1813. Such a large export of rice from a rice deficit region could only have been brought about by the need of the cultivators to resort to distress sales to meet revenue obligations. The difference between the Government sale price and export price being around

[cont.]
21.51 per cent between 1820 to 1823 and 13.95 per cent between 1828 and 1832 there appears to have been a strong incentive to export. Export in turn led to a further participation of the cultivator in the market as a buyer.

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

[cont.]

112
of colonial rule, with wide ranging juridical and structural economic transformation fails to support assertions of 'continuity' across the colonial divide. 51 It was not so much a dramatic change vis-a-vis the centralizing policies of Tipu Sultan, but the fact that an entirely new political and economic structure of rule began to be vigorously established. Even elements of continuity such as land revenue maximization and centralization acquired a totally different specificity under the new dispensation. 52 However, if the policies and structure of the early colonial state are compared with the pre-Mysorean state system in Malabar, a clear, unqualified disjuncture is clearly evident.

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[cont.]
50. Logan, op. cit., vol. III, p.CCCXXIX
