# Chapter V

**Economic Impact of Land Tenure Legislations in Travancore**

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Economic Impact of Land Tenure Legislations in Travancore

A study on the historical evolution of land tenure systems in Travancore and an understanding of the various legislative measures taken from time to time throw much light on economic impact of the land tenure legislations in Travancore. Land is the basis of all economic activities and the prime resource of man. From the beginning of human existence man has directed his activities in relation to the earth’s resources and made use of them for his benefit. The available land resources of any country exercises a lasting effect on the economic life of the people of that country. The land ownership and cultivation of crops in the land constitute perhaps the most vital factors in the development of a country. The life pattern and social organization of people as well as the type of economy that emerged out of these factors determine the manner in which the agrarian issues are handled. The policy of the state towards land relations will naturally influence the other sectors. To put it in another way, the land tenure system of a country is an integral part of the agricultural expansion that will lead to rural uplift.

The agricultural expansion largely depends on the various inputs such as ownership right, freedom to cultivate any crop, institutional arrangements of lands etc. Of these inputs, the
institutional arrangement includes the ownership of cultivators of the land and control of it. Nowadays, it is a generally accepted fact that egalitarian distribution of land is a necessary condition for achieving distributive justice and promoting agricultural growth.\(^1\) A reform in the tenurial sector is a vital necessity for this purpose.

In recent decades there have been a number of attempts by ruling machineries to alter man-land relationships through legislations. Laws have been enacted to abolish feudal landlordism, to change the forms of tenancy, to regulate landlord-tenant relationship and to impose ceiling on land ownership. These changes have been the cumulative results of a growing feeling that prevailed among the agrarian communities, and the power structures that generated. In agrarian communities, tenancy reforms are vital factors of social equality and economic efficiency. It is argued from a social equity point of view that in peasant societies where land is the principal means of production, land reform is necessary both to achieve a better distribution of income as well as to attain social equality.\(^2\) Maintaining the economic efficiency is a primary necessity for the well-being and growth of the society.

Land is a primary sector of production and the land and the labour are the two major components of the process of production in agriculture. The agrarian structure consists of relationships between those who control and those who labour or make use of the land. It consists of different patterns of relationships which in turn are
influenced by different capacities. The ownership of land is accompanied by certain statutory rights and customary privileges connected with it. The cultivable land can be considered the centre of all social and economic formations. The Indian agrarian structure has undergone a long historical process of formation and transformation; while formation is the result of political factors, transformation is the result of legislative measures initiated by various rulers.

Land reform is the effective means to have better relation between man and land. In India, the aim of land reforms was also to abolish the existing defective ownership rights and to increase the productivity of the land. The progress in the agrarian field depends to a large extent on whether the land system provides incentives and opportunity for development. Land reform is also a means to maximize the socio-economic growth which is important factors which decide the welfare of the community.

**Scenario in Early Kerala**

Kerala is one of the Indian States where land reforms had been effectively executed from early times with a view to promoting the interests of the genuine farmers. There was a long process of implementation of land tenure relations starting with the native states before the formation of the State of Kerala. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Travancore, in Kerala had emerged as a largest consolidated political unit.
The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in the history of Kerala witnessed the emergence of a new atmosphere under the impact of diverse social, economic and cultural factors. Even towards the end of the eighteenth century the traditional social structure had begun to show signs of tottering. The centralizing policies of Marthanda Varma (in Travancore) and Saktan Tamburan (in Cochin) and the shock of the Mysorean invasion (in the Malabar region) served to give coup de grace to the old social order and to usher in before long a new era wherein the feudal mobility and caste aristocracy lost their old position of privacy. In spite of the centralization of authority in the hands of the kings in Travancore and Cochin and the assumption of direct administration by the English East India Company in Malabar, the upper castes in the society continued to enjoy many privileges and benefits. The upper castes constituted the land owning class and the tenants were put under the jenmies.

The tenurial relations that had existed in Travancore were different from the nearby native states. The two-third portion of the total agricultural land in Travancore was in the hands of the government itself. The tenants who had cultivated these lands had no ownership or proprietorship. However, owing to various factors the Government of Travancore followed a pro-tenant policy and accordingly the tenants were given proprietorship in the government lands by the Pattom Proclamation of 1865. The Proclamation
prohibited the eviction of peasants from the land without any solid reason. But the tenants of non-governmental lands were subjected to exploitation by the landlords. Measures were taken up by the rulers in due course to rectify these defects.

In this context, the impact of very powerful political forces in this native state of Travancore was different in many respects than that of the Princely State of Cochin and the British Malabar. The political forces operated in a different direction in Travancore as far as land relations were concerned. The rulers of Travancore wanted to reduce the power of the chieftains and as part of that process, large areas of the cultivated land was brought under the ownership of the state. As cited earlier, the cultivated lands which were owned by the state were around eighty per cent by the middle of the nineteenth century. Travancore rulers were able to initiate the changes in the tenant structure as a result of this extensive state ownership of land under them.

The most essential factor for the development of agrarian economy in the state was the fixity of land tenure. The Proclamation of 1865 is of great importance as it was the first of its kind undertaken by a native state in India. The Proclamation, apart from its varied impact, had far reaching effects especially on the economic arena. The 1865 Proclamation of Travancore which was popularly known as *Pattom* Proclamation accelerated the tendency towards the break up of *taravad* ⁴ and the sale of land.⁵ When the hold of the
land owning joint families broke up the main barrier for the free transfer of land was cleared. The land owning joint families belonged to the upper caste communities. As the land became a transferable property this ownership rights now came to the hands of non-Hindu communities as well. The land owning Nair community had allotted relatively large areas of lands to other communities. When land became a property which can be transferred, it became easier for the already economically advanced castes to acquire them. The non-Hindu communities took advantage of the transfers of land that became possible. Mainly the Christians and Muslims acquired ownership rights in Travancore and Cochin, in the Malabar region majority of land ownership came to the hands of Muslims and also to Ezhavas.6

The expansion of agriculture led to greater productivity in Travancore. This new atmosphere of change encouraged trading activities of the people. The new class of land owners began to launch commercial activities as well. One main aspect with regard to this change was that, as the government abolished the system of payment of tax in kind by the Proclamation, the cultivators were compelled to sell their crops in the market so as to enable them pay tax in cash that promoted marketing facilities. There was the shift to the cultivation of commercial crops and high-priced food grains instead of traditional cultivation of food crops for local consumption.7 Slowly the commercialization of agriculture also began. The peasants
produced for the market because money had became indispensable to them. There was the swift change from subsistence farming to commercial farming. The introduction of money economy in the form of cash assessment of the land revenue and substitution of ‘rent in kind’ by ‘cash rents’ also influenced this economic change in the state.\textsuperscript{8} This further replaced the concept of the earlier self-sufficient village economy by the market economy.

**The Economic Expansion of Travancore**

The coming of the European powers to the region gave a boost to the economy of Travancore. This economic encouragement later helped the emergence of the new economic order in the region. The economic impetus which Travancore got as a result of the European migration was connected with land. When the Portuguese came to Kerala, they introduced new agricultural products such as cashew nut, tobacco, pineapple etc.\textsuperscript{9} They also encouraged the increased production of spices of the region like pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger etc. by exporting them to European lands. Their methods of scientific cultivation and arranging of markets for the products led to the commercial cultivation of many agricultural products like coconut in Kerala.

Later on, the Dutch who came to Kerala introduced new agricultural products and the innovative techniques of cultivation. The extensive cultivation of coconut on the coastal region and the trade connected with coir and coconut oil expanded during their
period. During the time of the British, they gave more importance to the increased area of cultivation. The development of forest wealth as well as increased cultivation of spices started in Kerala. The starting of coffee and tea plantations in the high range region was a boost for the economic growth of Kerala. These measures of the British fetched long time economic progress in Kerala. The teak plantations in Kerala, especially Nilambur teak plantations in Malabar (the oldest teak plantations in Kerala) were an example to this.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed economic expansion in the region. The transport facilities in the region were not effective till that time. But by 1863, with the arrival of Williams Barton as the Head of Public Works Department (PWD), the situation changed. Good progress was made in road construction. Within the next fifty years, the total length of roads newly opened and improved was 3,479 miles of main roads, 1,017 miles of village roads and 411 miles of traces. It was this increased facility in the field of transportation which encouraged the further commercialization of the agrarian sector. The rise in prices of agricultural products further supported this. The trading activities in Travancore were further expanded by the investment of capital in the region. The British began to invest their capital in the state in the agrarian sector. The rulers of Travancore encouraged waste land cultivation both by the natives and the foreigners.
During the year 1908, a separate Department of Agriculture was established in Travancore. The state was divided into three agricultural divisions’ viz., the central, southern and northern. Each of these divisions was put under the charge of an officer and also started a scheme of land record maintenance. Under the auspices of the department, new agricultural operations were inaugurated. Very soon a regular and comprehensive survey was conducted on all lands on the basis of systematic and scientific lines. Measures were also taken by the rulers for the simplification of tenures.

The agrarian situation in Travancore underwent drastic changes by the second half of the nineteenth century. The period was significant by the beginning of modernization of agriculture. When the commercialization of agriculture started, the cultivators developed a special fascination for cash crops because they could acquire more wealth. Naturally the staple food crops like paddy, tapioca (cassava), coconut etc became commercial crops. The cultivation of plantation crops like pepper, coffee, rubber, cardamom, tea, etc. received a boost during this period. With the growth of plantation industry, the scope of merchant activities also developed. The British economic penetration and the efforts of the Christian missionaries encouraged the cultivation of cash crops. These ultimately led to the development of capitalistic agro based
economic order in the society. It also facilitated the growth of an industrial middle class in the agrarian sector.\textsuperscript{16}

The changes in the ownership of land that led to the promotion of plantation crops in the region, as noted earlier, were a boost to the economy. The government promoted plantations by offering liberal tax concessions to the cultivators. The forest and the waste lands were given for cultivation either as grants or at very low prices, i.e., one rupee per acre. Transport facilities were improved by constructing roads connecting hilly regions to trading centres. Available statistics show that the export of coffee in 1853-54 was to the value of Rs.6553/-. It went up to Rs.187875/- by the next 76 years. There was no export of rubber, tea or cardamom in 1853-54. But in 1937, the value of the exports of these items increased to Rs. 7489464/-, Rs. 22561823/- and Rs. 3301502/- respectively.\textsuperscript{17} A major economic impact of the tenurial changes in Travancore was thus commercialization of agriculture. Further, the cash crops of Travancore enjoyed growing demand from outside. The uncultivated highland regions got considerable momentum for cultivation as a result of tenurial changes.\textsuperscript{18}

**Launching of Owner Cultivation System**

Legislative measures on land tenure systems were of much importance in influencing the economy of farm management in Travancore. The system of land tenure in predominantly agricultural communities determined the social and political status as well as the
economic power of a large proportion of the population. The changes in the pattern of land tenure system in Travancore supported by legislative measures resulted in launching of the owner-cultivator system from the earlier landlord-tenant system. In the landlord-tenant system, the landlord was simply the provider of land and it was the tenant who contributed to the management and labour. But in the case of owner-cultivator system, proper utilization and control of land were held by the owner himself. The concept of land to the tiller emerged strongly in this context. The owner could introduce his innovations in cultivation. The owner-cultivator system is one of the most widespread tenure systems in the world and it is the one to which most cultivators aspire. It normally provides a basis for substantial incentives to the cultivator and can provide the basis for highly productive agriculture. The Pattom Proclamation in Travancore, in a way encouraged this system. It is through this system that this change worked smoothly.

**Cash-Crops Cultivation, Commercialization of the Economy, etc.**

The most important transformation in the economy of Travancore under the colonial impact was the breakdown of subsistence production and the rapid growth of commercial agriculture. Commercialization of agriculture introduced economic changes of a distinct type. These changes in the agricultural system had more power to transform the society than through political changes.
It is also to be noted that the various laws executed to improve the conditions of the tenants affected the traditional relations of different interests connected with land. The changes in the legislative measures in the tenurial field resulted in the cultivation of crops selected by the owner. The increased demand for cash crops encouraged the cultivators to concentrate on cash crops. Along with this, the concept of owner-cultivator system was an important factor responsible for the rapid commercialization of the state’s economy. As part of encouraging more areas under cultivation, the Travancore rulers provided loan facilities to the cultivators. The improvement in cultivation necessitated credit facilities and as a result, there emerged the indigenous credit institutions popularly called as kuries and chitties. The growth of these institutions later paved the way for the starting of commercial banking system in the state which had major impact on the potential growth of the economy of later Kerala. The credit institutions which started in the region worked as just agencies for providing credit facilities to the cultivators. But when commercial banking developed in the region at a later stage as noted earlier, they continued to be running kuries and chitties for the purpose of mobilizing savings and for attracting depositors. It is worthwhile to note the fact that the earliest new generation banking institutions initially started in the predominantly agricultural midland regions of Travancore.
The financial arrangements in the region led to the growth of other banking institutions, joint stock companies as well as other trading concerns. The economic transactions in Travancore were comparatively higher than the other states. This was evident from the growth of joint stock companies in Travancore. While in 1922-23 there were one hundred and forty five joint stock companies, by 1948-49 it rose to seven hundred and ninety six. In the Cochin region also, the commercial and other non-agricultural establishments increased but not at this pace as in Travancore. The details of joint stock companies in the region increased from twenty one in 1918–19 to three hundred and thirty two in 1948–49. In the case of Malabar, the land tenure structure was comparatively different from that of Travancore-Cochin and the impact of which was reflected in the number of banking concerns that emerged in the region. The number of joint stock companies in Malabar between 1922 and 23 was only fifty nine and later by 1932-33 it rose to eighty three only. This further suggests that there were regional differences in the quantum of economic development as a whole in Kerala but the tenurial changes caused the beginning of commercialization in the whole geographical area of early Kerala.

**The Impact of Later Reforms**

The *Pattom* Proclamation of 1865, paved the way for the economic expansion of Travancore, but at the same time it had certain defects too at the stage of its implementation. It was felt that
a more comprehensive legislation was necessary for both protecting the tenants from arbitrary eviction by the *jenmies* as well as to facilitate the speedy recovery of arrears due to the *jenmies*. To overcome this, the state intervened and issued series of supplementary Proclamations by which there was the further intervention of the state. This also was found to be inadequate and after a detailed study made by the Commission appointed by the government in 1885 resulted in passing of the *Jenmie-Kudiyan Act of 1896*, incorporating the necessary provisions of the earlier Proclamations. This legislation declared the *kudiyan*s’ right for occupancy and it was accomplished as a permanent right, exempting from eviction except on non-payment of rent continuously for twelve years or for refusal to take a renewal within the time fixed and on wilful committing of waste.

The agrarian economy of Travancore was affected by the unprecedented crisis that started from 1923. The severe flood which occurred in Travancore during 1923-24 caused great economic damage to the state. There was crop failure due to the flood. To overcome this crisis, the government granted tax remission to the flood affected areas. This crisis was further widened by the worldwide depression of early 1930’s. The cultivator could not get any profit from the land they cultivated. This resulted in the appointment of the Economic Depression Enquiry Committee by the Government in 1931. Recommendations of the Committee were
incorporated in the later Jenmie-Kudiyan (Amendment) Act of 1932.\textsuperscript{32}

The right of \textit{jenmie} on the land was limited to the mere \textit{jennikkaram}. This Act was further amended from time to time and finally it took the shape of the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963. Throughout this process of evolution from a mere draft Proclamation to an Act passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly, it helped in accelerating the growth of the economic development of the state at every stage.

\textbf{The Emergence of the Middle Class}

In the process of the evolution of the tenurial change, the economically and socially weaker sections of the society were brought to the forefront. The tenurial legislations in Travancore from time to time inspired confidence among this section of the population. There were outbursts of unhappiness in the society by way of various peasant movements. The movements of the Ezhavas and those of the untouchables voiced the grievances against caste discrimination which became the basis for the future peasant movements in Travancore. It was the economic backwardness of these sections of the population which prompted them to raise voice for their rights. This consciousness can be traced back to the progressive land tenure legislations enacted in the state from time to time. It is a historical fact that the initial agitation of the peasants was in the nature of protests against feudalism, but they were also against the caste based hierarchical society. The \textit{Nair} peasantry rose against the Brahmin \textit{jenmies} and the \textit{Ezhava} peasantry against their caste-
Hindu oppressors including the *Nairs*. They succeeded in changing the social order, broke the landlords as a class, put an end to the rent system and agitated for redistribution of lands. The absence of a clear perspective for this struggle is a noticeable feature. A series of peasant’s agitations in the twentieth century subsequently led to the organization of the peasantry in the 30’s and the 40’s. The socially and economically weaker section, the *pulayas*, for instance, fought for eradication of untouchability under the auspices of their caste organization, *Sadhujana Paripalana Sangam*. When they struck work in 1907–’08, their demand included increase in wages and job security, apart from seeking admission for their children in the existing schools. It was the changes in the land tenure systems in Travancore which paved the way for the transition to a new socio-economic order in the Travancore society.

**The Way to the Peasant Proprietorship**

The amendment to the *Jenmie-Kudiyan* Act which was adopted in 1932 converted the *kanams* into peasant proprietors with the only obligation of paying *jenmikkaram*, which was the computed value of the rent due to the *jenmie*. Besides, the inflation of the post-war years and the Great Depression of 1930 are caused to disrupt the existing joint-family system. As mentioned earlier, owing to the commercialization of agriculture, land had already become a commodity in the market. The changed land relations on account of legislations created a condition in which anybody who had enough
cash in his possession could become a landlord.\textsuperscript{35} So the situation in the state had changed from the earlier landlord oriented land system to a new generation of ‘landlord’ who tilled the soil. The earlier landlordism based on caste determination has changed. In Travancore, Christians and Muslims largely engaged in commercial activities including processing of local agricultural products. These communities took advantage of the changes in the land ownership and the Christians in particular, acquired large areas of land in Travancore with their gains from the trade.\textsuperscript{36} Cutting across the various sections, the land tenure legislations effected changes in the economic status and hold of different communities in the society.

The nature of the tenurial changes in the erstwhile Travancore, Cochin and Malabar were different. Therefore the impact of the changes in economic arena also was different in these native states. As referred to earlier, the \textit{kuries} and \textit{chitties} were the initial mobilisers of savings and purveyors of credit in Travancore.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Economic Control During the English East India Company}

The coming of the English East India Company to Travancore had its impact on the socio-political as well as economic life of the state. The influence of the East India Company on the economic field was felt at first during the period of Balarama Varma (1798 – 1811). Under the able leadership of Velu Thampi who was appointed the Dewan there were drastic changes in the state. He reorganized the administration and it resulted in increasing the revenue of the state.
As part of the economic measures, the Travancore Government decided to reduce the strength of the state force and stopped field allowances to the soldiers. The Nair militia of the medieval times, though inefficient and disorganized continued as state force. There was mutiny of the militia, which erupted consequent on government order of retrenchment, and it was suppressed with the assistance of the British Indian troops in Travancore. This incident encouraged the English East India Company to demand a better treaty of understanding with the ruler of Travancore. As a result, in 1805 a treaty was signed between the East India Company and the ruler of Travancore. By this treaty Travancore became ‘a protected native state’. The annual subsidy of the state was fixed as Rs. 8 lakhs. Article V of the treaty gave the Governor General in Council, the right to assume and bring a part or parts of the state under the direct management of the company to ensure a regular payment of the subsidy. This was considered as a method of economic control over the native State by the English East India Company. This led to disturbances in the state against the East India Company’s attitude. Velu Thampi was in the forefront to oppose the British and at last he made the famous Kundara Proclamation. The Kundara Proclamation was a critique of the British colonial rule in trade.

Velu Thampi’s observation was that the policy of the East India Company in Travancore at that time was to obtain absolute control over the land and to impose exorbitant taxes as revenues.
proposed economic suppression of the state by the East India Company was felt and to a certain extent the rulers were vigilant through this incident. So the idea that control on land could be used for economic suppression was proved at an earlier stage in Travancore.

**Emergence of Capitalistic Tendencies**

The changes in the land ownership pattern as a result of land legislations had influenced the intrusion of capitalistic tendencies in the region. Changes in the ownership pattern, increase in prices of agricultural commodities as well as improved facilities of transportation encouraged cultivation in the region. The availability of credit facilities was an additional boost. There was a conducive atmosphere in Travancore with regard to agricultural growth and this encouraged the British to invest in the agrarian sector in the state. The emergence of plantations in Travancore can be considered in this context. The increase in the plantation companies as shown in table 5.1 further clarifies this fact.42
TABLE - 5.1

Plantation Companies in Travancore*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Registered Plantation Companies in Travancore</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figures from the Statistics of Travancore

The impact from the capitalistic penetration in Travancore during the early period was not much beneficial to the state. As early as 1879, the British Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company was registered and by 1897, Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company was opened. The Company’s tax due to the government was only a little over Rs. 30,000 for an area of 100,000 acres out of which the estate covered an area of 39,000 acres (i.e., 5 anas per acre). The unoccupied area leased out to the Company was not assessed at all.\(^{43}\) The rates of tax assessed for the plantation were comparatively very low compared with the income. The increase in plantations was mainly due to the government policy of encouragement in cash crop plantations and lands were granted on very favourable terms. For tea and coffee cultivation the rate of tax was Re. 1 per acre, for rubber and cardamom Rs.2 and Rs.3
respectively. For the plantations labour force was available cheaply from the eastern districts of Tamilnadu. The capitalistic penetration into the region had its impact over Kerala in the later years and the details are to be studied separately.

**The Migration of Cultivators**

Because of the favourable circumstances plantations began to develop in the eastern highlands of Travancore. The statistics in table 5.2 shows that the cultivation of various plantation crops increased rapidly in Travancore.

**TABLE - 5.2**

The area under different Plantation crops in Travancore *

(Area in thousand Acres)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rubber</th>
<th>Tea</th>
<th>Coffee</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td>111.6</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949-50</td>
<td>111.5</td>
<td>148.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figures from the Statistics of Travancore

When more area of land came under cultivation, it generated more employment opportunities in the agrarian sector. The majority of labourers in the plantations were recruited from the neighbouring
Tamilnadu. This recruitment of cheap labour to the plantations later led to the large scale migration of agricultural labourers to Travancore. Along with this, peasants from other parts of the state were also attracted towards this area and they also started occupying and cultivating the arable virgin soil on the slops and valleys of the hilly region. These people who occupied the slopes and valley of the hilly region began to cultivate other crops such as pepper, ginger, lemon grass, tapioca (cassava) etc. So the changes in the land relations led to further expansion of cultivation with a different variety of crops being cultivated in the newly acclaimed areas.

When new areas developed as a result of expansion of agriculture, there was the migration of agricultural labourers to that region to make use of the potential prospects of this occupation. As in the case of high lands, where plantations started, there was the migration of agricultural labourers to the newly acclaimed kayal areas. In the beginning these labourers got work opportunities but later these areas got exhausted due to the repeated cultivation and also due to the introduction of new technologies such as tractors and electric machines for cultivation. The change in the agrarian pattern forced the agricultural labourers to migrate to other areas for better job opportunities. In course of time the backwater cultivation became risky and costly due to the climatic changes. The reclaimable land became unprofitable to the investors and they began to abandon this area and went in search of new lands where cultivation
was profitable. So there was the migration of capitalist agriculturists to the forests region for engaging in plantations and cash crop cultivation which seemed more profitable than the backwater cultivation. This migration of the so-called agricultural capitalists as well as the labour force resulted in the dispersal of population to different parts of Travancore and also to the different areas in the north Kerala. The spread of economic activities to the unoccupied areas was also helpful for the later economic growth of the state in total.

**Cultivation of Garden Crops and its Influence**

Changes in the land ownership system also promoted the cultivation of garden crops such as coconut, cashew nuts etc. The cultivation of garden crops provided the raw materials for the development of some key industries connected with these crops. The climate and other conditions in Travancore were favourable for the cultivation of coconut trees and as a result, there was the growth of coir-making industry. The outer husk of the coconut was the raw material used for coir manufacturing. The backwaters in the region are good for the cultivation of coconut trees. The growth and development of these garden crops had its influence on the economy of Travancore.47 With regard to coconut, while the kernel of coconut was used for edible purposes the oil was used as the raw material for the manufacture of soap, candle etc. The garden crops helped in the development of large number of rural industries. As cited earlier,
these industries include coir making, copra production etc. It is out of these rural industries that the comparatively modern industries like coir factories, oil mills etc. have developed. When more people got the ownership right over the lands and the freedom to cultivate the crop of their choice, coconut began to be cultivated in every nook and corner of the state. Cultivation of plenty of coconut trees was a practice in those days.

**Expansion of Cultivation and Changes in the Cropping Pattern**

According to statistics, the area of cultivation was extended during the period under reference. Following is a comparative study (table 5.3) of the expansion of cultivation during the period 1920-21 and 1930-31.  

**TABLE - 5.3**
The extension of cultivation during the period 1920-21 and 1930-31.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Net Area shown</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1920-21 (in acres)</td>
<td>1930-31 (in acres)</td>
<td>The percentage of increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>648609</td>
<td>655087</td>
<td>02.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapioca (Cassava)</td>
<td>404092</td>
<td>480589</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>51018</td>
<td>61986</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut</td>
<td>455970</td>
<td>563048</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>47105</td>
<td>74616</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net area shown in the State</td>
<td>2008960</td>
<td>2201295</td>
<td>09.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Figures from the Statistics of Travancore
The extension of cultivation may be due to various reasons like increase in the population, supporting system of the government and also the incentive factor, as well as changes in the right over the land. This increase in cultivation of the various crops in many ways contributed to the economic development of the state. Both the administrators and the cultivators benefited from this expansion of cultivation which fetched more revenue to the government from land and this in turn was the main source of income to the government. The standard of living of the people increased consequently.

The changes that took place in Travancore in the cropping pattern influenced the mode of development of the economy of the state. Though there was an appreciable increase in the area of cultivation, it is to be noted that the rate of increase in the production of paddy was not much even though rice was considered the staple food of the people. The growth in cultivation of various commercial products and industrial crops which could fetch more revenue to the government increased. The cultivation of subsistence crops did not show a shift in its priority. It is presumed that the changes in the land tenure pattern considerably influenced a shift in production of products of high demand. This shift in cultivation of primary industrial crops and spices and other items of export deflected cultivators from the cultivation of paddy which left only smaller margins of profit. This had its influence in the later socio-economic life of the people of Kerala.
The transformation from the ancient ‘self consumption economy’ to that of one ‘producing for the market’ leading to commercialization of agriculture had an adverse effect in the sense that in due course Travancore became an importer of food stuffs instead of remaining an exporter like in the previous decades. One example is the paddy cultivation in the state where rice was the staple food. The following table (table 5.4) might prove this.

**TABLE - 5.4**

The extent of diminution of area under paddy cultivation.⁵¹*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area in Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>6,68,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>6,73,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>6,70,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>6,69,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>6,65,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>6,58,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>6,96,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>7,01,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>6,90,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>6,90,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>6,90,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>6,63,183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Figures from the Statistics of Travancore
The table shows a systematic decrease in the area under paddy cultivation.\textsuperscript{52} The Census of India, in 1931 has recorded that between 1921 and 1931, the net area sown under paddy increased only by 9.6 per cent while the increase in population was 27.2 per cent.\textsuperscript{53}

It is also interesting to note that while there was decline in the cultivation of traditional crops, the export of cash crops increased in a big way.\textsuperscript{54} The following table (table 5.5) illustrates this.

**TABLE - 5.5**

The increase in exports of cash crops (The price of exports in Rupees)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>1854</th>
<th>1862</th>
<th>1938</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>6553</td>
<td>37370</td>
<td>1,87,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>74,89,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22,561,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardamom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33,01,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coconut Oil</td>
<td>12,7395</td>
<td>13,4649</td>
<td>59,51,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coir</td>
<td>92,427</td>
<td>59,3926</td>
<td>16,410,624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: the Travancore State Manual

Thus, Travancore was subjected to the consequences of unbalanced development of the economy due to this change. There was a situation that the state had to import essential food stuffs from outside.\textsuperscript{55}
The Emergence of Backwater Cultivation

The cultivation of cash crops replacing the food crops led to the growth of capitalist farms. The basic feature of capitalism in agriculture is the organization of production for profit as against for self consumption. The production of surplus value is the absolute law of this mode of production. The increase in the area of cultivation and the rise in the price of agricultural commodities along with the capitalistic tendencies in agriculture in Travancore were noticeable in every sector. The encouragement on the part of the administration was an inducement for new methods of cultivation and also to bring uncultivable areas under cultivation. Through the land tenure legislations the Travancore rulers encouraged waste land cultivation. The enterprising cultivators went to the extent of large scale cultivation of the swampy areas around the Vembanad backwater. The increase in the price of rice that prevailed after the Second World War further accelerated the cultivation and they began not only to reclaim the swampy lands but also to convert parts of the backwater itself for cultivation. This was known as kayal cultivation (i.e., the backwater cultivation) of rice. For kayal cultivation, extensive areas in the back waters were reclaimed by constructing enclosing bunds around the cultivation blocks. It was followed by draining of the closed area, levelling the ground and construction of drainage as well as irrigation channels and also small bunds inside the block. This operation needed large scale employment of wage-
labour and capital. Affluent groups in Travancore invested their capital in this effort. Later the high price of rice that prevailed during and after the Second World War promoted the grand scheme of the *kayal* cultivation. In course of time the whole area of the backwater was brought under cultivation and the area *Kuttanad* emerged as one of the most important rice bowls of the region.

**The Emergence of Agro-based Economy**

The economy of Travancore during the early twentieth century was predominantly agricultural. Though there were industries, these industries were agro-based. Trade relations were also confined to the trading of agricultural commodities. Under the colonial impact, there was a transformation of the economy of Travancore. The earlier system of subsistence agrarian practices changed into the growth of commercial agriculture. The impact of the change on the agrarian economy was that it transformed the society speedily than the political changes. The land tenure legislations were enacted from time to time mainly for the purpose of improving the conditions of the tenants and also to free the land for cultivation. But in practice, these tenurial legislations were influential in the age old relations of different interests connected with land. The orientation of Travancore economy on capitalist lines shook the traditional social balance based on land ownership and land use. The change in the power politics was also to a certain extent, due to the changes in the land relations. The ownership of land enabled the owners to exercise
power over others at lower levels. The economic changes in Travancore along with the socio-political changes as a result of the changes in the land tenure systems had its impact on the later Kerala State.

Thus at the time of independence, the Princely State of Travancore had a history of continuous engagement with the economic process in the agrarian economy which was unparallel in most of the other Princely States. The land reforms along with the structural changes in the agrarian economy were a unique feature in the history of Travancore. The progressive legislations in the region could insulate the economy of Travancore from tenancy problems whereas in many other states in India it still remains unsettled. The economic impact of land tenure legislations in Travancore were seen in various areas like man-land relations, changes in the agrarian practices, the commercialization of the agrarian economy, the migration of the people which all finally resulted in the emergence of an agro-based economy.

All this paved the way for accelerating activities leading to social justice in the economic life in modern Kerala. This study on the economic input of land tenure legislations in Travancore sheds more light on the man-land relations of earlier times. A better relation between man and land would lead to a better system of land based production. An effective land reform policy would smoothen the economic well-being of the society.
The coming of the European power to the region also was a boost to the agrarian economy. Introduction of new agricultural products as well as the facilities for production growth enhanced with the coming of the European powers. The establishment of a separate department of agriculture in Travancore was a noteworthy feature. The new development took up the comprehensive survey of the lands on a systematic and scientific basis. The legislative measures on land tenure systems in Travancore were of much importance in influencing the economy of farm management in the region. There were the changes in the existing agrarian practices and the legislative measures brought owner cultivation system which promoted the economic power of the larger section of the society. There was also transformation of the economy of Travancore as a result of the commercialization of agriculture. The systems of subsistence production were replaced by cash crop cultivation and further the rapid commercialization of agriculture. The emergence of credit institution and the new generation banks were an impact of this.

The economic growth of the middle class population due to these tenurial changes led to the evolution of various social movements. As a result of this, the earlier order of economic status in the society has changed. The changed tenurial system helped in the emergence of capitalistic tendencies in the region. The starting of plantations and the migration of cultivators were an impact of this.
The changes in the cultivation and cropping pattern also resulted in the economic position of Travancore. The transformation of earlier ‘self consumption economy’ to ‘market oriented economy’ encouraged the cultivators to bring more areas under cultivation including the backwaters. This transformation further directed towards the emergence of an agro-based economy.

The major impact of the agrarian economy of Travancore was that it resulted in the transformation of society speedily. The drastic economic changes in Travancore paved the way for a restructuring of the socio-cultural framework of the state, the impact of which was seen in the modern Kerala State.
Notes and References


2  Ibid., p.142.


4  Tharavad is a term used for the Hindu family.


   Ezhavas in Malabar were also called as Thiyyas in some parts of the region.


12 *Travancore Administrative Report*, 1946-47, Trivandrum, p.82.


21 *Ibid*.

22 Varghese T.C., *op.cit.*, p.112.


26 *The Joint-Stock Companies in India*, published by the Government of India for the respective years.

27 *Jennie-Kudiyan Act* of 1896, Sections 5 to 7.

29  *Cover File No. 1847/26*, dtd. 13 December 1926, Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum.


35  Parameswaran G., *The Peasant Question in Kerala*, Bombay, 1951, pp.111


40  Ramachandran Nair S., *op.cit.*, p. 36.
41 Ibid., p. 37.

42 Figures from the *Statistics of Travancore*, issued by the Government of Travancore, yearly.


44 Ibid., para 70.


46 Varghese T.C., *op.cit.*, 119.


48 Suresh Kumar., *op.cit.*, p.32.

49 Figures from the Statistics of Travancore, *op.cit*.


51 The figures in the table are taken from T. K. Velupillai, *op.cit.*, p.28.
52 Suresh Kumar., *op.cit.*, pp.27-28.

53 *Census of India.*, 1931, Vol. XXVIII, Travancore, Part-1, Trivandrum, 1932, Chapter 1, p.22.

54 Suresh Kumar., *op.cit.*, pp.28-29.


58 *Memorial submitted to Government of India*, New Delhi, regarding the “Restriction on possession and ownership of Land Bill” of the Travancore Government by Shine Associations of Travancore, 1955.

59 Varghese T.C., *op.cit.*, p.120.
