PREFACE

The genesis of this PhD project was accidental. I was part of a research project on globalisation of the Centre for Development Studies (CDS), a premier social science research institute in Kerala (India) and the Development Study Group of the Department of Human Geography of Zurich University, Switzerland. My entry into this project was through my supervisor, Dr Vineetha Menon, who was one of the senior researchers in a large collaborative.

My enthusiasm to be part of the larger project of CDS conducted in Western Ghats region was due to two reasons. The main attraction was the umbrella theme of the larger project - globalisation and state decentralisation—which was close to my heart though my understanding of it, as I realised later, was too naive and a bit too straightforward. Another reason, quite personal, that I was also looking for a way out of the shallowness of being a reporter in a television channel and wanted to specialise in some topic in the long term pursuit of knowledge.

The topic of my research evolved over a period through my association in the research project, especially through the interactions with the North–South research network and my academic interactions in CDS. The research questions for the study have been thoroughly shaped and reshaped through and interactions to the ‘academic globalisation’, though the problem identified for this research project remained same,

I made my entry into Wayanad, a region which is very close to my home district Kannur in northern Malabar, as part of the research team from CDS during an extremely difficult period for the people there. These people attributed it to an agrarian distress caused by ‘globalisation’. This period of livelihood distress had also been instrumental in creating anger, distrust, and cynicism among the people in the region- a very uncongenial time for any kind of research.
State decentralisation programme had already got institutionalised by this time and people’s enthusiasm over it had begun to fade. Still there were some who believed in it as a panacea for all problems, while some others blamed it for all faults. A polemic had been formed around the discourse of decentralisation within the state by the time of our research providing a framework for the extreme perceptions at the local level.

It was an interesting and dynamic socio-political and economic context gave the empirical as well as epistemological entry point for the present study.