CHAPTER II

Land Reforms in Travancore
Before 1865 A.D.
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LAND REFORMS IN TRAVANCORE BEFORE 1865

The areas of wet lands recorded in the Ayacut Permanent Settlement Record of 978 M.E/ 1803 A.D were not the result of actual measurements, but an estimate deduced in a rough way from the assumed quantity of seed required to sow each field.\(^1\) The subsequent Ayacut of 1012 M.E/1837 A.D was likewise defective, in that the correct areas of gardens were not ascertained and recorded though the gardens themselves were in a manner measured.\(^2\) The aforesaid Ayacuts were partial and incomplete as embracing cultivated land only, excluding wastes of all descriptions, it was resolved by the Government to carry out a complete Survey and Re-assessment of the entire State.

An accurate measurement, demarcation, mapping and valuation of properties of every description and a registration of titles are the basis of a sound Revenue Administration. Accordingly the new survey and Settlement accounts were recorded in terms of

\(^1\) *Travancore Government Gazette*, (Here-in-after referred to as T G G), dated 2-3-1886.

acres and cents, the equivalent in *Paras* and *Edangalis*.\(^3\) In the Settlement of 1012 M.E./1837 A.D, all productive coconut trees in the Taluks north of Chirayinkil were divided into four classes, and each class was charged with a distinctive rate of assessment.\(^4\) In the same way, jack trees were rated at four *chuckrams*\(^5\) per bearing tree, and the areca at half a *chuckram*. On the other hand, in the Taluks south of Quilon, not only the coconut, jack and areca, but also the palmyra, punnai, tamarind, mango and ilupai were assessed to the revenue; and the assessment, instead of being a single rate for each class or kind of tree, was based on no uniform principle and consisted of numerous and varying rates for each kind of tree in each taluk. In fact, the State of things found existing in this part of the country at the time of the Settlement appeared to have been left untouched.\(^6\)

The distribution of coconut trees into four classes in North Travancore appeared to have been made with reference to their

\(^3\) *Travancore Administration Report*, 1061 M.E/1886 A.D para-6

Edangali means “Standard measure of capacity equivalent to 80 cubic inches and also a land measure representing the area required for sowing an edangali of grain”.


\(^5\) *Chuckram* means “The earliest and the smallest silver coin that was current in Travancore, now substituted by copper coins of the small denomination”.

\(^6\) *Proclamation of His Highness the Maha Raja of Travancore* issued under dated 24th February 1886.
productive capacity as indicated by the number of bunches of nuts and the number of madals or fronds seen on each productive tree. This in practice proved a most difficult process and could not be expected to yield correct results. It was impossible for any agency to look up at each tree in a garden, form a correct valuation of its productive power and place it in one or other of any prescribed number of classes, with any pretensions to accuracy. The scope, too, for fraud and oppression with such a procedure must necessarily afford to subordinate officials whose operations it must be impossible for superior officers, in such circumstances, to check and control, must be very great.

In the Settlement prior to 1012/1837 A.D the coconut tree was assessed at one single rate only.\(^7\) This course had the undoubted advantage of being simple and of shutting the door on the abuses inseparable from all classifications, but then a uniform rate must be very low if it was to be paid with ease. Such a low rate would not only be unequal in its incidence, but it involved an unnecessary sacrifice of the public revenue.

\(^7\) *SFR*, p.137.
Therefore a uniform rate of assessment was introduced at the Settlement which immediately preceded that of 1012M.E/1837 A.D being expedient in the interests of the agricultural population. Accordingly, it was decided by the Government that the gardens throughout the State should be divided into blocks with reference to their situation, soil and productiveness. Each garden was charged with a distinctive rate carefully determined with reference, to the existing average assessment—such rate not to exceed four chuckrams or fall short of one chuckram for each productive tree in the garden.

The jack and areca were taxed at a uniform rate in North Travancore, while in the southern taluks, they and other kinds of trees subject to taxation were taxed at varying rates. As it was desirable both in the interests of the taxpayer and for the simplification of the revenue accounts, that each kind of tree should be assessed at one uniform rate.

The ilupai was taxed in only four taluks and the revenue derived from it was so small. Therefore it was resolved by the command

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9 Ibid.
10 The Royal Proclamation dated 21st Edavam, 1040 M.E.
that the tax upon it to be abandoned at the ensuing Settlement.\textsuperscript{11}

In some cases the palmyra was taxed at the last Settlement in the Trivandrum taluk, but as the trees, so taxed were few and if yielded little or no return, they were exempted from assessment. This exemption was extended to other localities in which this kind of tree was similarly circumstanced.

It was the practice at the previous Settlement to allow a remission called \textit{Nadavukur}\textsuperscript{12} from the assessment on \textit{pattom} and other gardens. But this practice was far from uniform.\textsuperscript{13} It was given at various rates and was granted in the case of some gardens and withheld in those of others. The remission was deducted sometimes from the pattom assessment fixed at the time of the Settlement, or at the assessment determined at one or other of the previous Settlements. In short, there is nothing to show what properties were at that moment entitled to this deduction and what rate or rates the deduction should be made and on what principle- the accounts were so confused and unreliable.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{S F R}, p.137.

\textsuperscript{12} The term \textit{Nadavukur} means "A special feature of the older Settlement in regard to garden lands by which the owners of garden lands especially those falling under Sirkar \textit{pattom} tenure were given an allowance for the labour and money spent by them in rearing new plants of the taxable species."

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{S F R}, p.137.
In these circumstances the oppression in the hands of the Pillamars would continue to prevent and complicate the accounts with an counter balancing advantage.\textsuperscript{14} It was applicable chiefly only to Sirkar Pattom lands. These lands were originally the absolute property of Government, and the tenants were mere tenants-at-will. But by the Royal proclamation,\textsuperscript{15} the Government generously waived all right to these lands and declared them to be the private, heritable, saleable property of the holders.\textsuperscript{16} When this was done, the right to the \textit{Nadavukur} remission emphatically ceased. On that occasion, it is true that the Government reserved to themselves the right of charging a fee of 2 per cent on every transfer of the class of the enfranchised properties. But even this fee, which for 20 years had continued to yield between forty and fifty thousand rupees a year to the Government treasury, was relinquished only two years ago, entirely in the interests of the agricultural population. Superadded to all this is the fact that the rates of garden assessment to be adopted at the ensuing Settlement would be the same as those fixed 50 years ago.

On these considerations, the Government resolved to abolish the \textit{Nadavukur} at the ensuing Settlement as a means both of

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{The Royal proclamation}, dated 21 Edavam, 1040 M.E.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}
simplifying the accounts and relieving the ryots from the hardships to which the continuance of a remission governed by no definite or uniform principles was likely to subject them.\textsuperscript{17}

The \textit{Rajabhogam} levied on \textit{Devaswam, Brahma\textit{swam}} and other favourably assessed gardens was not uniform but varied from $1/8$ to $2/5$ ths. The more prevalent rates, however were only two, namely, $1/6$ and $1/8$, the others were exceptional. As it was desirable that this tax would be levied at one single uniform rate throughout the State, and the Government commanded that the lowest of the existing rates-namely $1/8$-would be adopted at the ensuing Settlement.\textsuperscript{18}

The \textit{Kadama} levied on rice lands held as \textit{Devaswam, Brahma\textit{swam}}, etc, was unlike the \textit{Rajabhogam} on similar tenures in garden land, levied at so much per \textit{Parai} without reference to the quality or productiveness of the land. Therefore it was suggested to assess the \textit{Kadama} at one-eighth of the \textit{pattom} or full assessment of the land as in the case of gardens.\textsuperscript{19}

Like the former Settlements, the practice, in the case of \textit{Pandaravaga Otti} and other tenures such as \textit{Rajabhogam, Vitharai},

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{SFR}, pp.15-16.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{TLRM}, vol.I, p.70.
and Mupparai was to deduct from the pattom assessment and to take the resulting amount as the demand against the properties. It was further a condition in many parts of the country that these tenures, on the transfer of any property by sale, was subjected to a process called Ottivilakkam\textsuperscript{20} by which the mortgage amount was reduced by one-fourth and the Government demand was enhanced by the amount of the interest on the sum reduced.\textsuperscript{21} This process was repeated at every succeeding transfer and the result was the ultimate extinction of the debt and the raising of the Government demand to the full pattom.\textsuperscript{22}

But, as always happens in such cases, the re-adjustment of the public demand entailed by the process described was almost invariably evaded in practice by transfers never being reported, i.e., the ryots did not come forward to seek the registration of the transfer, as it involved an extinction of a portion of the debt on which they were entitled to interest and a corresponding addition to their payments to

\textsuperscript{20} The term Ottivilakkam means "A special feature of the old Settlements in dealing with Otti lands. The holders of such lands were in the position of mortagees from whom the state had in fact or in theory borrowed specific sums, the interest on which was deducted from the standard assessment and the balance treated as the Sirkar demand. The moment the land passed into the hands of an alience, the mortgage amount was ipso facto reduced by one forth and the Sirkar demand was enhanced to the extend of the interest on the sum reduced."(TLRM, vol. IV, p.886).

\textsuperscript{21} The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore, Trivandrum, vol.1, p.73.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
the *Sirkar*. In few cases, which occasionally did come before Government, the calculations involved were tedious and the preparation of the annual accounts embracing the changes was often delayed; and, after all, the *Sirkar* gained little by the existing arrangements. It was therefore, to relieve the ryots from the hardships imposed by this *Ottivilakkam*, to remove the obstacles which it interposed to the free and unrestricted transfer of property, and, at the same time to simplify the accounts by entirely abolishing the *Otti* tenure.23

The *Inams* were of two classes viz., service *Inams*, and personal *Inams*. The service *Inams* were inalienable and were left in the undisturbed possession of the holders so long as the prescribed service was duly rendered. When the holder died heirless, the lands were conferred on somebody else on the same terms. In the event of non-performance of service, the lands were liable to resumption by Government. The personal *Inams* consisted of those that were by custom inalienable and which became subject to the process known as *Ottivilakkam* on alienation and those that were transferable without risk of the original tenure or tax being interfered with. The *Inam* lands were liable to the payment of *Rajabhogam*, and in some cases a

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23 *H C V R. Thirattu*, dated 974 M.E, 1799 A.D.
michavaram or quit-rent was leviable in addition. Rajabhogam was levied at numerous varying rates from $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{2}{5}$ of the assessment and michavaram also varied according to local usage from $\frac{1}{40}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the assessment.\textsuperscript{24} Some of the personal Inams were, however, rent-free. Distributed with reference to the tax payable, the Inams were of three classes: (a) those that were liable to only a Rajabhogam; (b) those that were liable to Rajabhogam plus michavaram; and (c) those that were absolutely tax-free.\textsuperscript{25}

All favourably assessed lands (excepting Devaswam, Brahmaswam, Madambimar and Erayali properties) such as Adima, Anubhogam, Tiruvilam, Thiruvadayalam were classed under the head of Inams. These were of two classes, viz., Inams granted for the support of individuals or families, or personal Inams, and Inams granted for the performance of specified services, or Service Inams. The recognized practice as regards these tenures was to abstain from all interference with service grants, so long as the service for which they were granted continues to be maintained. As to Personal grants, the right of the original grantee and his descendants to enjoy the Inam was fully admitted, but, when it was alienated by sale or otherwise,

\textsuperscript{24} S F R, p.22

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
the Sirkar steps in and subjects the property to the process of Ottivilakkam which was repeated at every subsequent alienation. All Inams were charged only with Rajabhogam which, generally speaking was the only payment made to Government on these tenures.²⁶

It was commanded that all Ottivilakkam should be abolished in the case of Otti tenures on account of its objectionable features. It was desirable that this should be done in the case of Inams also. This important class of properties, which was extensive, should be placed on a satisfactory footing advantageous alike to the holders and the Government. And this will be best attained by freeing them altogether from Sirkar interference of any kind, and leaving the holders at perfect liberty to deal with them as they like. Accordingly, the following rules were laid down for the Settlement of Inams, and they were given effect by the officers at the ensuing Settlement.²⁷

(1) All Inams granted for service of any description shall be left to be enjoyed without interference, So long as the service continuous to be fulfilled, subject to the payment of one-eighth of the pattom as Rajabhogam and any michavaram which may be payable. When, from any cause, the service has

²⁶ TAR, 1068 M.E, vol.1, p. 308.
²⁷ Ibid.
ceased or shall cease to be performed, the Inam shall be resumed and assessed with pattom.

(2) All personal Inams, found at the time of the Settlement to be in the enjoyment of the family of the original grantee shall be exempt from all interference and continue to be so held, on payment of one-eighth of the pattom as Rajabhogam plus any michavaram with which they are already charged.

(3) All Personal Inams, found at the Settlement to be in the enjoyment of individuals or families other than the original grantee or his descendants, shall be charged with the payment of one-half of the pattom assessment to Government, any michavaram with which it is already charged in favour of any private individuals or institutions being payable as usual.

(4) No Inam to be subject to Ottivilakkam here-after.

(5) A title deed to be granted to each holder at the time of Settlement, specifying the character of the Inam, whether Service or Personal, its extend and description, whether wet or garden, and particulars of the quit-rent with which it is chargeable under the above rules.
(6) After the Settlement of the *Inams* under the foregoing rules, the holders shall be at liberty to mortgage, sell or transfer them in any manner at their will and discretion, subject only to the payment of the quit-rent fixed.

(7) There shall be no further interference on the part of Government with these free-holds except such as might be necessary for the punctual realization of the quit-rent payable.

Of these extra cesses, many were abolished in former years, but many more still remain encumbering the accounts and serving as a source of annoyance to the payers and probably of gain to the lower Revenue Officials. Most of the cesses were petty, small in amount and falling on a few individuals. On the other hand, there were some which it would be a needless sacrifice of revenue to relinquish, when it was considered how little some sections of the community contribute towards the expenses of the State. For instance *Rekshabhogam, Ubhayampalisa, Chumattupanam, and Kada Pattom*. As it was considered desirable to clear the Settlement officials of all petty taxes as much as possible, the officials commanded that, 28

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1. All cesses which were of a personal character should be abolished.

2. Also, all cesses which fell upon any particular professions.

3. Likewise, all cesses falling on ryots already paying the pattom assessment-the cesses falling, on the other hand, on lands paying less than the full pattom being retained and incorporated with the Government demand.

4. The item of Ubhayampalisa was dealt with under the terms of the Proclamation of 23rd Mithunam 1056.

5. Kada-Pattom was retained in all cases.

Acting on the foregoing principles, the Settlement Officers made full investigation into the various cesses and laid the result before the Dewan who finally decided what should be retained and what abolished.  

The lands under this head comprise of:

(1) The Palliport Farm.

(2) A tract called Pulienthuruthu in the Alengad Taluk.

(3) A small tract of rice land and some gardens in the Shertallai Taluk.

29 SFR, p.19.
(4) And various small pieces of land scattered throughout the State belonging to the Sirkar and forming building-sites and compounds of Palaces, Cutcherries and other public buildings, which were leased out from time to time.

The proprietary right to the properties in the case of tracts (1) and (2) vested in the hands of Government, and accordingly, the resident tenants were held to be mere tenants-at-will, without even the right of occupation. The rates of assessment paid were also higher than in the case of Pandara Pattom lands. Although, in these circumstances, the Sirkar would be justified in selling these properties and recouping themselves for the money invested in their purchase, the Settlement Official deem it more important to encourage private industry and enterprise and impart to the industrious tenants already on the estate a sense of security, have resolved to confirm to them the garden lands now in their possession and confer upon them full property rights in regard to them, subject only to the payment of the present assessment (all extra payments being abolished) This assessment was higher than that of Pandara Pattom

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30 H C V R, Thirattu, dated 994 M.E.

31 Proclamation of His Highness of Maha Raja of Travancore issued under dated, 24th February 1886.
lands, but this was unavoidable being an incident of the original tenure of the properties. It would be open, however, to the holders to purchase exemption from the high assessment, and have the gardens placed on the same footing as other pattom lands, by paying down once for all 20 times the difference between the normal and the exceptional assessment. This would be allowed either at the time of the Settlement or subsequently according to the convenience of the holders. All the gardens in question would of course be demarcated, surveyed and assessed in the first instance.32

The rice lands comprised in the above properties and the whole of No. (3) were entirely at the disposal of Government and led no resident tenants with any rights. They would therefore, after being also demarcated, surveyed and assessed, be sold by auction to the highest bidder, to be held like other pattom lands subject to the payment of the Pattom or assessment fixed at the ensuing Settlement.

The building sites leased on Kuthagai Pattom would continue to be so without change. The Kadukaval lands were not any longer be retained under the head of Kuthagai Pattom.33

32 Ibid.
The *Kandukrishi* lands were what may be termed the Crown-lands or the home-farms of the Sovereign. They were granted on simple leases recovable at pleasure, and the ryots had neither proprietary rights, nor even transferable rights of occupancy. The rent was generally fixed and payable all in grain. Though the tenants were, strictly speaking, no more than mere tenants-at-will, the *Sirkar* as a rule, never interfered with their occupancy so long as the rent was regularly paid.\(^3^4\)

These lands were called the Home Farms or the private property of the Sovereign and were cultivated by tenants who were entitled only to the cultivator’s share and had no rights of any kind in them. Formerly, the Proprietor used to supply to the cultivating tenant the seed and cattle required for the cultivation, and in return received payment, in addition to the *Melvaram* or Government share, of what was called *Kolulabham* or the proprietor’s share. But as this custom was now ceased and the labourer was left to find his own seed, cattle and implements, the Settlement Official commanded that this *Kolulabham* should be no longer levied, but that the lands, after being demarcated and surveyed and assessed on the same principles as other

\(^3^4\) *H C V R, Neetu*, dated, 17th *Kanni*, 958 A.D.
lands, be allowed to be enjoyed on the existing terms, subject only to the payment of the *pattom* in kind as at present. All extra payments outside this *pattom* would be abolished.\textsuperscript{35}

**The Nair Viruthi System**

The Nair *Viruthi* system, owing to failure to adapt it from time to time to altered economic conditions was known to have become far less efficient for its purpose than when it was originally established. To entail hardship in its practical working on those subject to its operation; and whereas it was necessary to check the abuses which in process of time have unavoidably grown around the system, and to improve the condition of the *Viruthicars* by the application of remedial measures which past experience has shown to be called for, it has been resolved by the Government to take the opportunity afforded by the Revenue Settlement, now in progress, to cause a searching inquiry to be made into the condition of the holders of the *Viruthi* tenures and to afford them such relief as may be found necessary.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} *S F R.*, p.19.

\textsuperscript{36} *Government Order No. 102728/L.R.*, dated 8th August 1909.
Abolition of Viruthi System:

1. The services at present rendered by the Viruthicars, whether in the shape of finding supplies of vegetables, or of providing labour and building materials on stated occasions would carefully scrutinized and revised.

2. The future requisitions for such provisions and labour, and the occasions on which, and the quantities in which, they should be made, would be reduced and restricted as far as practicable in the course of such revision.

3. A new schedule was then be framed of such requisitions showing for each Village, definitely and clearly, the supplies of provisions and labour and materials of every description which would be demanded hereafter; the institutions or purposes for which and the occasion on which they would require and the number and names of the Viruthicars who had to render the services.

4. A thorough revision was made of the prices paid for the provisions and materials supplied; as those prices were considerably below the current ruling prices. This revision would be based on the returns of the prices of late years, so that the payments made by Government in future might represent, as near as might be what the Viruthicars would realize if they carried their goods into the open market.
5. The table of rates prepared as above indicated, would be afterwards revised, when necessary, with reference to any material rise or fall in the prices ruling in the open market.

6. While the Viruthicars were thus paid for their provisions and materials, at the prevailing market rates, they would need to be remunerated for the expenditure of time and labour involved in their fulfilling this obligation and for performing such personal services as they might undertake to do; and for this purpose, a grant of land, at so much per head, to be determined by the Settlement Peishkar in communication with the Dewan would be made out of the present Viruthi holdings. And such land was subject to the payment of Rajabhogam only and be exempt from all other demand.

7. No addition would be made to the services fixed under para 3 of this Proclamation at the time of Settlement as those to be rendered by the Viruthicars thereafter.

8. No Viruthicar was at liberty to alienate, by sale, gift, mortgage or otherwise, the Inam given to him for the Viruthi Service. All such alienation should be null and void, and the Government had the power of resuming any such alienated Viruthi Inam and restoring it to the holder or otherwise disposing of it as to them might seem fit. No action should lie respecting any such land in any Court of Law.
9. All transfer of *Viruthi Inams* lands were from the date of this Proclamation, be exempted from the payment of any *Arialum*, *Adiara* or other fees.

10. All surplus land, if any, out of the present *Viruthi* holdings would remain after allotting fresh *Inams* under para 6 of this Proclamation, should remain at the disposal of the *Sirkar*. They would either be assessed with full *pattom* and confirmed to the present holders if they so wished it, or otherwise disposed of according to circumstances.

11. Any *Viruthicar* who might be unwilling to continue the *Viruthi* service even under the terms of this Proclamation should be at liberty to relinquish the same.

12. If such *Viruthicar* had no land assigned to him for the service, but had only *Muthalelpu*, whether in paddy or money, to make good, he would be relieved of the *Viruthi* on his paying down the *Muthalelpu*; or, failing that, on his agreement to pay, till the debt was discharged, interest on such *Muthalelpu* at 3 per cent per annum charged.

But if the *Viruthicar* who sought to withdraw from the service if possessed both of *Viruthi* lands and *Muthalelpu*, he would
be relieved of the Viruthi on his surrendering to the Sirkar such lands, whether rice land or Puraidam or both, and on his also paying down the Muthalelpu, or, failing this last on his undertaking to pay interest thereon at the rate of 3 per cent per annum till the debt was repaid. The viruthi lands surrendered would be allowed to be held by the outgoing Viruthicar on Sanjaya Pattom, to be ultimately disposed of as the Government might think fit. The pattom fixed would be that determined under the new Settlement.37

Such were the principles and procedure the Settlement officials approved, sanctioned and commanded to be carried out at the new Settlement. Their paramount aim and object in laying down these principles would be to avoid those periodical revisions of the garden assessment, once in 12 years which though not strictly carried out in practice formed an essential condition of the last Settlement and which a system of assessment of trees by sale necessarily entailed. Such revision meant the employment of a large body of Pillamars throughout the country to count the trees, to make out accounts of those entitled to remission for trees, lost, and of those who had become liable to it for trees newly planted. And the employment of a large staff of such

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37 H C V R, Circular No. 8045, dated 17th Karkadgam, 1039 M.E.
low-paid agency meant petty extraction and oppression on one side, and fraud on the other. Such a process, repeated once in 12 years, must have the effect of destroying the confidence of the ryots in the permanency of the assessment, impairing industry and checking the free employment of labour and capital. To obviate these evils and to secure to the land-holders the utmost freedom of action in improving their properties and turning them to the best advantage according to their means and inclination, the Settlement Officials resolved to declare the new Settlement permanent for a term of thirty years.