INTRODUCTION

Geographical Background

Located at the southern extremity of the Indian subcontinent, the State of Travancore, was resplendent for its scenic splendour as well as its eminent contribution to the country's intellectual and cultural landscape. It was called by different names at different periods as Venad, Vanchi-desam and Tiru-adidesam. In Malayalam, the name of Travancore was interpreted as Tiruvithamkur and in Sanskrit, Srivardhanapuri or Srivazhumkode, meaning the abode of prosperity. The name, Travancore is the anglicised form of Thiru-vithan-kodu. The name Travancore is the abbreviated English form of ‘Thiru-vithan-kodu’, once the capital

---

1 Venad is originally known as Vanavanad which means the abode of the Devas, which was later simplified into Venad.
2 Vanchi-desam means 'the land of treasure'.
3 Tiru-adidesam is derived from the title of one of the local rulers called Tiru-adikal.
of the Kingdom and residence of the court, but now a petty village 30 miles to the south-east of Trivandrum. *Tiru-vithan-kodu* is said to be a corruption of Sri *Vazhumkodu* i.e., a place where the Goddess of prosperity dwells.

**Travancore was a land where people of diverse fashions and political beliefs had been able to forge a common ethos and find a common identity, yet the region comes into the limelight only in the 9th century A.D. There are indisputable evidences found in history works and inscriptions to prove that Travancore was known to people of other parts of India and abroad even from time immemorial.**

Travancore was formed by an irregular triangle between 8.4 and 10.12 north, latitude and between 76.1 and 77.38 east longitude at the west coast of peninsular India. It was bound on the north by Coimbatore and on the east by the Western Ghats, the district of Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tinnevelly. The Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea formed the southern and western boundaries respectively. The total area of the State was 762 square

---


miles. The State had a coastline of 180 miles in length and was the largest maritime State in British India. The mountain passes, rivers and forests added beauty to the State. Travancore was mainly an agricultural country. About 42.4 per cent of the population depended for their means of livelihood almost upon lands.

This princely State when compared to other native States of India had an Indian appearance. It was almost one twelfth of the size of Hyderabad and one fourth of Mysore. However, it was five times bigger than the size of Cochin and six times to that of Puthukottai. Travancore is not in existence now. On the 1st of November 1956, the State of Kerala was constituted by combining Malabar, Cochin and Travancore excluding the five Tamil taluks, viz Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam, Vilavancode and Shenkottai.

The view of Travancore from one of our hill-tops on the Western Ghats which separated the State from the erstwhile Madras Presidency, conferred a distinctiveness on its history of

---

11 Ibid, p.3.
culture going up an elevation of four or five thousand feet above the sea level. These mountains are responsible for the origin of numerous rivers and streams. Of the four rivers in Travancore, one is west flowing river and three are east flowing. Among the west flowing rivers, *Periyar* and *Pampayar* are important.

The State of Travancore is blessed with plentiful and fairly assured rainfall. It enjoyed varied climatic conditions and however the climate was never very hot or cold. The south-west breeze could keep the temperature approximately the same throughout day and night. The annual average rainfall was 18.33 cm. Usually the rainfall was regular and steady. The south-west monsoon called *Kalavarsham* yielded 10.50 cm while the north-east monsoon of *Thulavarsham* supplied 47 cm. Chances of storms and depressions affecting the State in the month of May are very less.

---

13 *Periyar*: This is the longest river in Kerala and also is the largest in potential. The Periyar river is formed by the confluence of a number of rivulets originating from the Sivagiri Hills at elevation above 1,830 M.

14 *Pampa River*: The Pamba river, the third longest among rivers in Kerala is formed by the confluence of Pamba Aar, Kakki Aar, Arudai Aar, Kakkad Aar and Kall Aar. The Pamba Aar in turn is formed by several streams having their origin from Peermade plateau at altitudes above 1,650 M.


16 V.Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.68.
During the period from 1891 to 1970 only three storms affected the State in the months of May.

The Travancore kingdom was usually classified into three divisions, the high land, the mid land and the low land. The high land consists of areas lying 250 ft. above the sea level. The mid land is the region which lie between 25 ft. and 250 ft. above the sea level. The low land consists of the area with the altitude below 25 ft. above the sea level. 17

The upper regions of the high land are mostly covered with dense forests and high ranges. This region is the area of major plantation crops like tea, coffee, cardamom and other spices. 18 The mid land region is a highly fertile land and produces paddy, tapioca, cashew, pepper, ginger and rubber.

The low land consists of coastal areas. Throughout this region one can come across many rivers. Backwaters are linked together by canals such as the Kumbla, Kodungallur, Chittari, Bekal, Anjengo, Ashtamudi, Parur, Veliyangode, Vembanad and Veli. This land abounds with immense groves of coconut trees and

paddy fields. Tapioca, a popular eatable of the people is cultivated on a large scale.

The reserved forests cover one third of the entire area. They are full of teak, blackwood, ebony, jack and other useful trees. Besides these, the forests play an important role in controlling the climatic conditions. In the higher elevations, the climate is cool always and very cold during certain seasons.\textsuperscript{19}

The climate of the State is pleasant for most of the year. This part of the land receives a share of both south-west and the north-east monsoons, the former in larger measure than the latter. The south-west monsoon begins about the middle of \textit{Edavam} (May-June) and the north-east monsoon commences in the month of \textit{Thulam} (October-November)\textsuperscript{20}

Tucked neatly at the southern end of the Indian Peninsula between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea lies Travancore and its rich flora and fauna has been a tourist attraction.\textsuperscript{21} Teak, blackwood and sandalwood, grow in the forests. Paddy fields,

coconut groves and plantain groves around Neyyoor present a pleasing sight. Besides paddy, coconut, tapioca, pine-apple and other crops are cultivated.\textsuperscript{22}

The wild animals are deer, wild dog, tigers and more northerly in the high mountains the bison and elephant are frequently seen. The wild animals common in the forest of Travancore are the elephant, tiger, bison, elk, deer, wild beer, wild cat the black monkey and a variety of other animals.\textsuperscript{23} There are also numerous kinds of snakes some of which are very large in size and they are dangerous and poisonous.

Travancore consists of people of various religions and castes. Brahmins, Nairs, Nambudiris, Vellalas, Malabar Kshatriyas, Shanars, Ambalavasis, Ezhalavas and Pulayas are the major castes. They belong to different religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. They have their own temples, mosques and churches for worship. They generally speak Malayalam, Tamil and these languages are also known to them.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Nilkan Perumal, \textit{The Truth About Travancore}, Madras, 1939, pp.3-4.

\textsuperscript{23} S.Ramanatha Iyer, \textit{A Brief Sketch of Travancore}, (n.d), Trivandrum, pp.49-56.

Most of the people of Travancore were agriculturists or ryots. The term 'ryot' means "one who owns land and pays tax directly to Government". Like his brother in other parts of India, the ryot in Travancore was also an intelligent, industrious, loyal and law-abiding peasant-proprietor, but nevertheless by no means an affluent subject of the State. He lived from hand to mouth. He was burdened with his growing family, and with domestic and social obligations, and all entailing worry, expense and loss of time. Besides, he was a weak son of the soil, eating less, working less and therefore earning less than his counterpart in British India. Nature however was kind to him. Rains were regular and abundant and the earth yielded a fair return for his toils.

The wants of the Travancore ryot were very few. The *rice-conjee* (porridge) was his chief diet, and for the rest, succulent roots which the country supplied in abundance. His clothing was scanty, jewels were nearly unknown, house-building was cheap as the ancestral *Tarawad* garden supplied the materials

27 *Rice-conjee* (porridge) together with the water in which it has been boiled, a favourite form of food with the Malayali. The broken rice *conjee* with condiments constitutes a luxury with the rich.
for the same. The climate of Travancore was mild and equable all through the year. Droughts and famines were very rare. Life and property were secure under His Highness’ beneficent rule and trade restriction were minimised.

The agricultural cattle which he maintained could graze in his own grounds and were fed in the nights with the straw cut from his own paddy lands. The cows yielded the needful quantities of milk and curd for the household. The ghee was of course avoided by the true Travancorean.\textsuperscript{28} To him the coconut oil was far dearer than the cow’s ghee, both in its sweetness and in its flavour. This oil he used largely in his meals and rubbed in his body.\textsuperscript{29} It seasoned his food, its use removed itch and softened the skin and prevented premature grey. The burning oil gave a clear and mild light and perfumed the house. The Travancore garden was full of trees of various kinds, sizes and ages. The dried branches and the decayed old trees supplied the fuel for the household, an important item of domestic economy in which the Travancorean’s lot was a real blessing.\textsuperscript{30}


\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

Every householder possessed a small plot of land, and it gave him a feeling of ownership. There were at least 500,000 tax-paying ryots for this small State which impressed the foreigners with a sense of general comfort and ease in the agricultural ryot not generally enjoyed in the adjoining tracts of the East Coast. Arthur Young pointed out that "why the whole of Travancore looks like one big garden, for the secret lay in what he called “the magic of property” which according to him “turns sand into gold.”"

It seems reasonable to suppose that the Jenmis took for themselves all land nearest to their dwellings and that the distant mountainous and jungle tracts were ownerless till the States grew up and acquired proprietary rights over them. The ruling chiefs must have then claimed these tracts as their own along with others acquired by them and granted them to the ryots for cultivation.

The Nair chieftains gradually became subservient to the growing colony of Brahmin settlers of the 64 villages and their

32 Jenmi - A Land-lord who holds in absolute free hold and not liable normally to payment of tax to Government.
estates became more extensive. With the advent of the Perumals a simple imperial tax was levied to defray the expenses of the Perumal viceroy. This was the origin of the modern Rajabhogam. The Nambudiri chieftains made also grants of lands to the Perumals which ultimately became their Jennam properties. Besides all the pakuthi or abandoned lands and the eschew properties as well as those taken or captured during the earlier wars of Travancore became the property of the kings or Perumals. Thus their lands increased from day to day and formed the nucleus of the present Sirkar lands. Towards the close of the Perumal period the country was parcelled out among the several chieftains who became independent rulers of their respective provinces. This State of things continued for several centuries until the whole country was conquered and consolidated by Martanda Varma Maharajah, when the rights of the several petty chieftains became vested in him as supreme lord of all Travancore. These conquests, however, did not affect the rights of the Brahmin land-lords. Thus arose the two classes of lands now extant in Travancore, viz., Sirkar and Jennam lands.

---


35 Light rate or quit-rent levied in the case of favourable tenures.

36 Dewan Mr.Seshia Sastri, TA R, 1048-1049 M.E, p.120.
The tenants cultivating them for the Jenmis did not alter their character but the Jenmam tenure ceased the moment such land passed into the hands of the alien for money consideration, whatever be the nature of the transaction. The moment an alienation of the above kind took place, the land became liable to a light tax called Rajabhogam. This light tax once imposed on the land continued for ever even though the land was redeemed by the Jenmi himself. As a consequence of the original transaction, the land was registered in Sirkar accounts in the name of the tenant or cultivator. The tax was levied from him only, and if he died heirless, the property was transferred to the Government. Similarly if the tenant abandoned the holding as unfit for cultivation, then too the Sirkar took up such lands as Nirthal and gave them on lease for a lower pattom as Sirkar lands.

The peculiarity of these Jenmam properties was that their owners had absolute control over them in connection with their revenue and rents. They took from the ryots the pattom or rent

38 Ibid.
39 Nirthal - Unoccupied lands or lands abandoned by the tenants as unfit for cultivation are taken up by the Sirkar as Nirthal.
40 Huzur Central Vernacular Records, (Here-in-after referred to as H C V R) Huzur Sadhanam No 5873, dated 20th 1072 M.E.
as well as the Rajabhogam which in the case of other lands would go to the State.\textsuperscript{41}

From time immemorial the Jenmi land-lords being owners of extensive tracts of land seldom or never cultivated their lands themselves. But simply leased them to the tenants under conditions of mutual rights and responsibilities. This custom of the olden days when the relations between the Jenmis and their tenants were very smooth was soon disturbed by various causes, and in course of time the Jenmi began to complain that his dues were not properly paid nor in due time and the tenant was often compelled to pay more than he originally agreed to. This led to several disputes and litigations.\textsuperscript{42}

The Travancore products were much in demand in the markets of the world. The land-tax was light as compared with other countries. But litigation was plentiful and the Marumakkathayam law of inheritance stifled the natural instinct for the acquisition of wealth. Hence the necessity for strenuous or sustained labour was non-existent, and the profits which he made were much less

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

than might have been.\(^{43}\) Time was when those who held lands of Brahmin *Jenmis* as well as those who held Government lands known as *Pandaravagai Pattom*\(^{44}\) were merely tenants-at-will.\(^{45}\)

In Travancore there has been from time immemorial a class of large landed proprietors called *Jenmis*, whose, lands, as long as they were not alienated, enjoyed absolute exemption from taxation. But they were largely alienated on what is called *Kana Pattom*\(^{46}\) tenure under which the tenants were subject to pay an annual rent called *michavaram* to the land-lord.\(^{47}\) Under such tenure thousands of ryots had been occupying lands for generations, building on them houses and churches and carrying out various improvements as if the tenures were permanent.\(^{48}\) An important question was raised and pressed by the *Jenmis* whether they had not the right to eject the tenant on repayment of the consideration or *Kanam* amount received from them ages ago. Although it seemed probable

\(^{43}\) *H C V R, Huzur* order No. 450, dated 1\(^{st}\) Audi 995.

\(^{44}\) *Pandaravagai Pattom* - Lands owned by the *Sirkar* and let out to the tenant under a particular system of land - tenure.

\(^{45}\) *Settlement Final Reports*, (Here-in-after referred to as S F R) p.13, para 21.

\(^{46}\) *Kana Pattom* - A fee in token of allegiance, 'pattom' means a kind of lease.

\(^{47}\) *Sir J. Madava Row’s Notes on Kana Pattom tenure of Travancore*, p.24.

\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*
that such a right originally existed or was reserved, yet it appeared as a matter of fact that it had not been practically exercised and that for generations the conduct of the parties on both sides had been such as to generate a belief that the tenant would not be disturbed so long as the stipulated dues were paid to the land-lords. Hence it was thought undesirable to refuse to an industrious tenantry the benefit of the prescription that had thus arisen and that any such step would lead to a general unsettlement. This question of vital interest to agricultural prosperity underwent the fullest discussion commensurate with its importance. Since this emancipation of the ryot, there has been a keen competition of ownership of land which, always a badge of respectability as in other parts of India, has now become a boon and blessing to the Travancorean.

Excepting the pagodas and the Nambudiris, the bulk of whom were Parasurama's Jenmis, paying no tax to Government for lands in their own hands, which were entirely free-hold lands, all the others such as foreign Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Ambalavasis, Sudras, Chettis, Weavers, Ezhavas, Kammalars, Shanars, Mohammedans, Christians, even Pariahs and Pulayas, furnished members to the ryot

---

50 Ibid.
class in Travancore. The theory of course is that the Sovereign was the land-lord of all land, lying outside the Jenmam-properties, but in practice, the ryot was to all intents and purposes the virtual owner had an indefatigable right to it, to use it, alienate it or bequeath it, or do anything with it, as he pleased, with the simple restriction that the Government tax was the first charge upon it. It was the proud boast of the well-to-do Travancorean that his homestead supplied him with every necessary of life except salt and tobacco. The rice that he ate grew in the valley below at the foot of his ancient residence.

The ancestral garden in which his home stood produced the needful coconut, which in its manifold uses formed the mainstay of his everyday life. It produced also in abundance the plantain leaves which served as his eating plates, the useful quantities of edible roots, the jack fruit and the mango which formed the solid portion of his daily meal. The open space on which the noon-day sun shines helped to grow the necessary cereals, such as the green peas, the black gram, the Perumpayar and the gingelly. One corner was set apart for the rearing of the vegetables such as the brinjal, varieties of the gourd, the lady's finger and the chillies, and

52 Ibid.
almost essential items of his daily curry-stuffs. The arecanut, so
indispensable to his perennial chew, dropped day after day ripe
from the tall areca palms, growing luxuriantly at the fringe of his
spacious domain. The coconut leaves afforded excellent material
for a neat thatch every year to his old mansion. This annual renewing
of the roof kept the timber work of the building perennially fresh.
Repairs to the mansion itself were undertaken with the timber cut
within the estate. For purposes of bathing and drinking he had his
own tank and one or two never-failing wells, within the enclosure.
This reckoned for the health and cleanliness of his family and
the proverbial neatness of his surroundings. "The life of the Travancore
ryot was laid for him in happy Arcadian lines by an all-merciful
Providence, who however has denied to him the strength of physique
and sustained capacity for labour, which the denizens of more rigorous
climates have inherited or acquired from their surroundings.
Travancore recognised on land-lord's right over peasant proprietors
in the state, that the sovereign right of leasing the lands was the only
one claimed and maintained for ages past."53

All these circumstances have contributed to make the lot
of the peasant proprietor class in Travancore a happy one which, in the

words of the *Dewan*, Sir. T. Madava Row "presents a most pleasing picture of light but diversified labour, health, content and comfort unruffled by anxieties, unembittered by rivalries." The whole description is well worth quoting and though it was written about forty years ago it still holds good in spite of increase of population, pressure for space, less certain seasons and keener competition with superior foreign capitalists.

**Scheme of Study**

Research on any topic in history or social science is based on a functional design. This is called scheme of study. It consists of the importance of the topic, purpose, area, period, scope and limitations of the study, hypothesis, sources and chapterisation.

**Importance of the Topic**

The present study on the topic "The Travancore and Agrarian Reforms 1800-1956" is a study of the peasant communities of Travancore and the reforms introduced by the rulers of Travancore now and then for the betterment of the farmers. A study of this kind is of major interest to historians, sociologists, anthropologists, economists and other scholars today. Peasants existed as an

---

54 Ibid.
important section of society throughout the ancient period of Travancore history. The economic forces here partly depended on peasantry. Depression in the socio-economic status of the peasantry is noticeable in the epigraphic evidences of the early medieval period. A comparative study of the earlier period will make the point clear. Since land became the main source of income for the rulers, the period selected for the study witnessed an immense increase in the burden of taxation on the peasantry. Yet some facilities were provided by the rulers for the upliftment of agriculturists, and the facilities included relief measures during famines, provision for seeds and other articles and migration facilities. In consideration of the multifarious benefits of the reforms introduced by the rulers which enabled the agriculturists in their social change. The present topic is selected for a systematic study.

**Purpose of the Study**

1. To study and investigate the growth of agriculture in Travancore.

2. To study the land reforms introduced first in Travancore to prevent evictions and grant permanent right to the tenants.

3. To estimate the agricultural benefits of the ryots by the *Pattom* Proclamation of 1050 ME (1865 A.D)

4. To study in detail the Settlement Proclamation of 1867-1883.
5. To study the cause and effect of the Settlement Proclamation of 1886.

6. To study the system of land reforms and the procedure introduced during the period of Dewan Rajagopalachari and Dewan Krishnan Nair.

7. To discuss the Jenmi-Kudiyan Regulations of 1108 M.E (1933)

8. To explain certain rules and regulations of the Land Assignment Act of 1950.

Area of the Study

Certain agrarian reforms were introduced by the Maharajas of Travancore from 1800-1956. Accordingly the area of the study is confined to Travancore. The agrarian reforms introduced by the Travancore Kings helped not only the development of the agriculturists; but also led to the general socio-economic prosperity of Travancore.

Period of study

The reign of Marthanda Varma was not only one of conquests and administrative achievements; but also of progress in
the fields of many reforms related to agriculture. Hence, this period starts from 1800, the year in which the Maharaja Marthanda Varma became the ruler of Travancore. The study ends with the year 1956 when the merger of four taluks namely Agasteeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode with the present Tamilnadu.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is not restricted to one or a few aspects of the agrarian reforms. It is an elaborate study which covers all aspects related to agriculturists problems like land system, land tenure, proclamation, regulation and the present status of the Agriculturists of Travancore. These agrarian reforms are the scope of the study.

Limitations of the Study

This study has certain minor limitations from the view point of the sources. One limitation is the lack of literature on the different land tax and land tenure. Yet an attempt has been made to set right the limitation by collecting data through archival evidences that prepares a comprehensive account of the agrarian reforms by the rulers of Travancore.
Hypothesis

1. The proclamations connected with agriculture issued by the Maharajas made them popular.

2. The study of the Agrarian Reforms reflects the Maharaja’s deep commitment to the upliftment of the agriculturists in the State by giving several concessions for them.

3. Not less than one-fifth of the whole annual revenue of the state was expended for the support of the agriculturists and their subordinates.

Sources


The important secondary sources for the preparation of this thesis are Baden Powell’s Land Systems of India, Cochin
Chapterisation

This thesis is concerned with the nature of the emerging agrarian relations in Travancore (1800-1956) in the context of some state initiated programmes such as land reforms, welfare measures like relief to the rural indebtedness, abolition of certain obnoxious taxes and minimum wages for agricultural labourers, etc. Since Independence several measures have been taken to alter the traditional agrarian structure and ensure socio-economic justice in agrarian relations. Land reforms programme may be mentioned as one such attempt which gained both political and economic importance in Travancore for a variety of factors.

The thesis is organised in eight chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. In the introductory chapter, the researcher traces out the geographical features of Travancore. The chapter gives an account of natural divisions, geographical position, mountains
and hills, passes, sea, rivers, back-water, climate, fauna and flora etc along with various sections of the people with special reference to their occupation. The primary and secondary sources available for this study are also elaborately mentioned.

The second chapter explains in detail about the history of the ancient kings such as the Ays, the Pandyas, the Cholas, the rulers of Vijayanager, the Nayaks, the Nawabs and the kings of Tranvancore till 1956.

The third chapter explains the land reforms introduced first in Travancore to prevent evictions and grant permanent rights to the tenants. In it, how the royal writ issued in 1088 M.E (1863 A.D) prevented eviction of Kanam tenants before a period of 12 years is elaborately discussed.

The content of the fourth chapter is one of the earliest pieces of land legislation in Travancore namely the Pattom Proclamation of Edavam 21, 1040 M.E (June 2nd 1865). It is considered as one of the major attempts in the field of land reform. This proclamation, which was hailed as the "Magna Carta' of the Travancore Ryots" enfranchised the Sirkar Pattom lands and converted a large body of agricultural ryots from the position of "tenants-at-will" to that of full proprietors. This proclamation conferred on the holders
of *Pandaravakai* lands, proprietary and transferable rights. It also relieved the tenants of the fear of arbitrary eviction and encouraged them to effect substantial improvements to their holdings. *Sirkar Pattom* lands were put on the same footing as the ryotwari lands. The chapter also describes the Royal Proclamation of 1042 M.E (1867 A.D) which defines the mutual rights and obligations between land-lords and tenants.

The fifth chapter titled "The Settlement Proclamation" discusses the achievements of T. Madhava Rao’s administration and ends with the issue of the Settlement Proclamation (1867-1883) which constituted a scientific development in the field of Settlement in Travancore.

It was by the issue of the Settlement Proclamation in 1886, that a definite and final shape was given to the scheme itself. The real commencement of Settlement was, therefore, subsequent to this Proclamation. Hence the year 1887 A.D has been adopted as the commencement of the period dealt with in the sixth chapter.

The improvements and amendments in the system of land reforms and procedure introduced during the period of *Dewan* Rajagopalachari (1907-1914) and the *Dewan* Krishna Nair (1914-1920) are explained in the seventh chapter.
The eight chapter is “The *Jenmi-Kudian Regulation of 1932*. It explains the regulation XII of 1108 M.E (1933) which conferred full proprietary rights on the *Kudiyān* subject only on payment of *Jenmi-Karam*.

“The Land Assignment Act-1950” forms the ninth chapter. In this chapter an attempt is made to explain certain rules and regulations of this Act. The chapter explains how this Act helped to improve the plight of the indignant and the landless agriculturists of Travancore.

The observation, findings and how the series of land reforms introduced in Travancore helped in accelerating the pace and economic progress of the State are discussed in the conclusion of the study.