Chapter 5

Moments of Excess: Situating Unproductive Expenditure

This chapter deals with the general economy of Mannans and Paliyans. This is interpreted in the context of their embeddings with the market and “developmental” state. The chapter has four sections. The first section illustrates how “profane money” is channeled to sacred expenditure. The second section explores different ritual and festival economies of the communities. The third section interprets the gift economies, and the fourth section is about the economic ‘hybridity’.

1. Temple Economy: An important component of the India Eco-Development project is the Community Development Fund. Seventy five per cent of the total fund is contributed by the World Bank. The rest 25 per cent is contributed by the communities either in cash or through labour (DWB1996:124). World-Bank demands community contribution to make them aware of the reproductive potential of the resources. It assumes circulation of money for productive purposes and deny wasteful expenditure. By following the demand, Mannan families contribute fifty paisa from each kilogram of pepper they sold. With this contribution of families, more than one lakh rupees was collected in the Community Development Fund within a year (1999). Interestingly, the community decided to invest this money to construct a temple. For the deities - forest god (Vana devan) and forest goddess (Vana devi).

Mannan consulted a Namboodiri Brahmin priest from Kottayam to conduct the consecration ceremony. The priest assured his participation, but he insisted that the icons must be the ‘Hindu’ deities Siva and Parvathi
following the ancient Hindu texts, *agamas* and *silpa sastras*. The community constituted a temple committee to supervise the overall activities of the construction. To decide the site of temple and the demarcation of sanctum-sanctorum, they depended on a traditional carpenter (*Thachan*). The idols of the deities were sculptured at Madurai in Tamil Nadu. The Brahmin priest and his team conducted the consecration ceremony. The expenditure for this ceremony could not be met with the Community Development Fund. The temple committee thus collected additional donation of Rs.300 from all the families.

This illustrates an important dimension of the ritual economy of the communities, and also its link with the “market system”. It also illustrates a problematic relation of community’s notion of economy and “developmental apparatus” (Ferguson, 1990). “Developmental” apparatus is an institution formed for the purpose of the preservation, management and utilisation of resources. This apparatus is a nexus of local, provincial, regional, national, and global institutions from the tribal hamlet through the three-tier Panchayat, State, and national governments to international development agencies like World Bank.

Developmental agency’s notion of the economy has been shaped by neo-classical economics. It is based on the principle of scarcity and predicated on rational choice theory to satiate calculated individual self-interest. The first question these economists consider is how to maximise production with minimum scarce resources – the primary need is perceived to lie in the fact that it is necessary to balance the books. The emphasis must therefore be placed on production, which serves to create wealth that make use of these limited resources (Bataille, 1989b). The report of the World Bank
addresses the problem of the economy of the local people on the basis of scarcity.

Local people, when traditional rights and access are limited by the establishment of PAs, often have little incentive to use natural resources in a sustainable way (DWB, 1996: 1).

In the past twenty years, state government, with national assistance, have developed an extensive network of PAs strongly enforced by forest departments. During this period, governments’ approach to local people has sometimes been confrontational with significant impacts, mostly negative, on the tribal population resident within protected areas. There is a long history of communities, especially tribal groups, inhabiting or using forests that were subsequently designated as PAs. Local people were involved (usually without government recognition or sanction) in managing the forest and wildlife. Increasing government protection and legal control have curtailed local communities’ resources use and management, forced changes in traditional livelihood, and removed incentives to use resources sustainably. Forest department employment opportunities have also shrunk with the establishment of PAs and the ban on timber harvesting in most forest areas. (DWB, 1996: 2).

Clearly, this approach fails to engage with the question of “exuberance” or unproductive expenditures. Accordingly, Eco-Development Committee veils the expenditure for the rituals and festivals of local communities by clubbing it under the head of productive activities such as agricultural loan. Liberal Welfare state, unlike socialist state, does not use force against ritual and festival economies. They do not abolish these kinds of events (Yang, 2000). It is tolerated to the extent that it reserves and serves the necessities of the profane. The state distributes additional salary or bonus during the occasion of festivals; say, for example, Onam. However, this is subordinated to the need of the order of things. When it treats the “aborigines”, it justifies their rituals and festivals abstractly—as “cultural”. At the same time, excessive ritual expenditure is regarded as an example of backwardness and economic irrationality. As Census of India states:
The tribes here have very ardent interest towards festivals in as much as they are exhilarating and frolicsome. It has a salutary effect, albeit ephemeral, on human minds, rendering it light and happy. Thus the obvious reasons for its attractiveness if anything is psychological. The low economic position of these tribes is the only hurdle in their way, in celebrating these occasions with pomp and ceremony. Paliyans manage to steer clear of this difficulty by making each household contribute their mite for the common conduct of the function. Mannans have no such practice. If the crop fails, or if they fail to raise sufficient funds for the function, the various traditional punctilios of it will be dropped. The obvious after effect is the lessening of the gravity of the function. Further, the rigidities of their traditional rules and regulations regarding their function were too embarrassing to them in their new environment, and they have been considered to shed much of them. This has its own effect on the religious lives of these people. Their new ambience have helped them to cultivate a mood of ignore or defy anything restraining their freedom or is in apposite in their present conditions of life. They are in a sense but adapting themselves to capricious environment (COI.1961 vol. VII, 1966. 158)

Given the state’s stress on accumulation and production, the ritual consumption of local communities is not a contributing factor to further accumulation. However, this form of economy influences actions of the state at the local level. Local forest officials participate in the rituals and festivals of the communities as they are also likely to be with the logic of ritual economy. Some of them even gave directions and helped the community to construct the temple. The state is thus not a homogeneous institution with economic rationality in the post-colonial situation.

The economic behaviour of the Mannan and Paliyan communities cannot be reduced to the “useful” expenditure, especially when there are continuing instances of ritual expenditure in their social life. Bataille considered that life is essentially energy that strives to expend itself “uselessly”. Humanity needs to maintain this basic principle of life. From this perspective, neo-classical economics is based on the assumption that fundamental to human society is
the need to protect scarce resources. Bataille questions this assumption by emphasising the importance of “useless” consumption and the fact that in at least some societies, perhaps even in all societies prior to capitalism, it was the need to consume that was considered primary, and not accumulation. Societies were primarily structured in such a way to satisfy the needs of subsistence; though “prestige” has been associated with accumulation of surplus that could be disposed off in a prodigal way (Bataille, 1985). Like Mannans, Paliyans also constructed a new temple by consecrating the deities of Kali, Mariamma, Nagam, Ganapathi and Karuppuswami. They also relied on Namboodiri Brahmins and astrologer (Kaniyan) belonging to Kottayam. The total expenditure for the construction of temple reached almost to Rs.seven lakhs, on and above the community members’ contributions of free labour. They collected the money from various sources like donation from the families, local sponsors and even from a German tourist, who used to interact with them. In the current times, their ritual expenditure and exuberant consumption can be found to be linked to the world-market as well.

Such change of religious practices in India is conceived as a path for social mobility. Lower caste and tribal communities imitate higher caste’s customs and rituals for their upward social mobility (Srinivas, 1988). In Kerala, anthropologists have studied religion as a tool for the improvement and “progress” (Osella and Osella, 2000). In the context of Mannans and Paliyans, the Brahmin priest views that the new temple is an aid to the communities’ economic prosperity. Communities, however, do not associate temple with prosperity. Nor do they expect social mobility from their changes in practices of worship. They want Brahminical temple, at the same time they want their traditional deities to be retained. Paliyans consecrated their own traditional deities, while Mannans renamed the Siva.
and Parvathi consecrated by the Brahmin as Vana devan and Vana devi. Yet for both the communities, it is the Gods and Goddesses who demanded the temples by showing the sign of bad-omen (dosam) in everyday life and they constructed the temples in response to this demand. Gods and Goddesses are integral to their being and becoming. They are willing to spend money for more temples too. If so, construction of temples is an instance of the prevalence of ritual economy in their social and cultural life, and it is the communities’ effort to expend without return.

2. Festival Economy

There is a non-utilitarian logic or otherwise called ‘ritual economy’ that energises the communities when they are in the festive occasions. Festival assembles men and women, for whom the consumption of the contagious (communion) opens up a conflagration. All possibilities of consumption are brought together—offerings, sacrifice, feast and entertainment—to the accomplishment of festivals as a spectacular event. It is a different sense of the economy in an expansive sense that includes principles of exchange but one goes beyond the narrow range of an economy that refuses to acknowledge its debts to the gifts it has received. It is like Bataille’s conception of “general economy”, an economy of ends in themselves. He attempts to imagine an alternative to neo-classical economics and classical political economy. He predicates a vision of economy on the problem of surplus which counters the culture of utilitarianism. Every economy is shaped not by how it meets its needs according to the principle of scarcity, but how it deals with the problem of its excess, its “accursed share”. The community’s focus is not on efficiency, but on expenditure. Communities’ festivals are an adaptation of older strains of economic logic of market or commodity economy, at the same time, we can say that the commodity
ends up with “unproductive consumption”. The ethnographic vignette of a festival called Pongala, an annual rite of Mannan community, is presented here to show the spirit of festival in the community.

Pongala is celebrated by different lineage collectives at different locations inside the PTR – Thanikkudi, Mullathodu, Thondiyar. The rites at Thanikkudi are conducted under the auspices of two lineage headmen, Olimannan and Chindrandimoopan and a ritual specialist, Vathi, with the help and favour of their opposite lineages (Adima). At Mullathode, the rite is conducted by the lineage headman Thellipparamoopan and at Thondiyar, by Naattumannan. Ritual participants (pongalites), that include old people, women and children, visit their ritual place by travelling more than five hours, first in boats1 through the Mulla Periyar Lake and then walking through the hilly terrains. They carry provisions, offerings to the deities and ancestors, vessels, mats, blankets, nets, fishing hooks, knife etc.

Moopans and Vathi follow ritual observances for many days prior to the rites. As Victor Turner observed, at the moment of “communitas”2 there are experiences of status elevation and status reversal, simultaneously (Turner 1969:167). They follow continence for more than a week before going to the Pongala by abstaining from all kinds of production and also the sexual relation. They vow and pray to the deities and ancestors in the morning and evening. As Bataille noted, social rank in pre-capitalist societies are won by partially sacrificing one’s fortune in unproductive social expenditure. They have the obligation towards the deities, ancestors and also towards their relatives that can be seen in their prayers and offerings. Before leaving their kudi, by facing various directions of the forest, they solicit:
We are going to do an important rite that has been celebrated by our ancestors, since long period. After crossing the check-post we will move to the wild forest. There are women and children along with us. No harm will fall on us. Protect from the animals and stormy rain. If some harmful happen that will be disgraceful to you also.

In between the journey through the lake, they step out from the boat at two locations near the place named Mullakkudi. Then they offer the lighted candles, betel leaves, areca nut and lime to the ancestors. Facing the hills they pray “we crossed the check-post, and now crossing here, with your permission. Protect us in the journey and in the wild forest. Give the blessings for the auspicious occasion”. After the pongalites return to kudi, there are again offering and prayers in the kooras of Moopans and Vathi,. The prayer includes their acknowledgement for being protected throughout the travel and stay in the forest.

Stepping into the ritual site is like stepping into another world. It is a creation of a ritual place from the forest space. Site for conducting Pongala at Thannikkudi is arranged on the bank of the river Periyar. Adimas and others clear out a flat land in the enclave of forest. It is the male folk’s duty to clear the forest, and it is a taboo for the female to participate. After clearing, a small enclosure (kovil kattala or temple door frame) is made for the purpose of keeping the images of deities and ancestors. It is made out of cane frame, wrapped with white cotton cloth, and its length is three and a half metres, three metres wide and its height is four metres. Images of deities, ancestor and ancestress are then kept inside the kovil kattala. These images are hidden at different sites of kadu. It is a taboo to keep the images in the human settlements or kudi. The images of Chindrandimoopan’s lineage are the deities of Ayyappan, Ganapathi, and their ancestor and
ancestress; the deity of Olimannan’s lineage is deity of Ayappan, and they also worship ancestor; Vathy’s deity is the goddess kali. They offer banana, cocoanut, betel leaf, arecanut, jaggiri, sandal stick, camphor, fried paddy (malar), rice flake (Avil) and also money. They light holy lamps (nilavilakku). The males sit around and smoke cannabis and it is offered to the ancestors and deities.

There is an economy involved in the Pongala fest, but it does not follow the equation between demand and supply. It has far more to do with the wishes of Gods, Goddesses and ancestors. It is a gift to the God and ancestors, a gift of relationship between relatives, and between the earthly people and the divine. Communion of people during the occasion of rituals is a gift of god. They conducted two major rituals during the occasion of Pongala, one on the first day and the other on the third day. In between these rituals, they prayed, danced and sang music (koothu). The rituals of Mannans consisted of chantings, offering of things and feast.

During the first day’s ritual, adimas blazed the lamp, burned camphor and sandal sticks. Moopans and Vathi bowed before the deities and ancestors, chanted the prayers and at times were affected with frenzy:

We came here after getting the permission from the ancestors. Protect us from all the dangers; we are staying at an open space in the kadu; wild animals like tiger, elephant, bear are wandering through; children and women are with us; protect us from stormy rain; protect our adimas. Protect the kadu, rivers, animals, hills, country, and people. Gives us the possibility to come again and conduct pongla without any hindrance.

Rituals are also conducted on the third day. There are offerings of things and food. Offerings of food included cooked rice to the deities, ancestors, lineages, and millet pancake mixed with cannabis for the furious deity.
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Muneeswaran. Offerings vary in relation to deities and ancestors. To the Ayappan, it is milk pongal, to the ancestors, sweet pongal, and to the Kali, rice and dishes. These are prepared in a new earthen pot bought exclusively for this purpose. After the offerings of food, Moopans and Vathi pray, “We have tried our best to conduct this rite that you also know. For long period our ancestors have been doing this. You allowed us to accomplish it without any hindrance of stars and stormy rain. Immediately, we will leave this place. Please, help us to come again”.

Ritual offering is a part of series of exchanges, which extends beyond the performance of the rite. It is an obligation between the deities and devotees. Who are the giver and receiver cannot really be determined by words because, at a time, the gift is given on both ways. Offerings are not considered as their ‘private’ contribution. These are viewed as belonging, in the first instance, to the deities. During the time of rituals, all pongalites stand near the kovil katala. No one is casual, devotion tells upon their body. Words are chanted in rapid-fire succession. Some of them, mostly women, get into trance on being possessed by the god or ancestor. They come in front of the images, and talk loudly. Koothu performance is also an offering, prayer, ritual.

On certain occasions, the possessors may state that authorities like moopans are not doing their duty properly. If they state so, elders should accept it seriously, because it is the voice of the god or ancestor. It is also an occasion to invoke many personal and family affairs such as the quarrel within the family, between families etc. At one occasion an old woman, after the possession, stated that one of the families within the group have prayed to the omen that her family might be attacked by the wild elephant. Elders took this
issue very seriously. They demand the deities to reveal the name of the evil-prayed, and then requested to pardon them. As Bataille wrote,

> The sacred is the prodigious effervescence of life that, for the sake of duration, the order of things holds in check, and this holding change into a breaking loose, that is, into violence. It constantly threatens to break the dikes, to confront productive activity with the precipitate and contagious movement of a purely glorious consumption. The sacred is exactly comparable to the flame that destroys the wood by consuming it (Bataille, 1989a: 52-53).

It makes one wonder what is really “giving”, especially the kind of giving in which the material object of giving does not observe the reality principle of things. Feast is an instance of relinquishment of object of preservation and its passing into the world of abrupt consumption. Giving meals is an act of symbolic exchange in which honour and generosity are valued and not the things that are given. The feast is given on behalf of the gods, goddesses and ancestors. Goods are brought from the market, and they are otherwise considered as commodity, an “end with utility”. What one gives is the useful. Feast symbolises the other way of evaluating value, where value seems to have no purpose – it is expenditure without return. It is not an object of preservation for the receiver. Ultimately the feast is a statement of loud generosity. It does not aim at profit, but implies consumption and gift expenditure.

Festivals are parts of the social landscape of both communities. They imitate and appropriate the festivals of nattukars - Onam, Vishu, Deepavali, Sivarathri. Besides these, they celebrate festivals in their temples. From the annual income of families, a lion’s share goes to the rites and festivals. Despite the possibilities of expending for private commodity consumption, saving and production expansion, the “exuberant consumption of wealth” is significant to the extent that families are even willing to get indebted for
ritual expenditure. The opposition between ritual and religion, on the one hand, and economic development on the other, does not hold in the case of Mannans’ and Paliyans’ economy. Rather than assuming that capital immediately transforms and converts everything it encounters, it is necessary to consider the existence of “heterogeneity” within the capitalist system. The interweaving of household production, families’ consumption and festival economy can be seen in the celebration of temple festival of Paliyans, called Pongal.

A temple committee is constituted by Paliyans, to organise the activities of the temple and its festivals. Prior to the festival, they fix an amount of money to be collected from the families. Families could supply the money in instalments, according to their frequency of income flows. Festival comprises rituals, entertainment and feasts. Brahmin priest officiate the conduct the rituals, and he must be paid. They also hire entertainment programmers for drama, music and dance. Besides the community feast in the temples, families also conduct feasts in their individual homes, into which relatives and friends participate. Families also buy new clothes. Some families may depend on local money lenders or other credit sources inorder to meet the expenses. As Mei-hui Yang (2000) observed in the context of China, tribal communities of Kerala do not operate under the dire colonial and exploitive conditions as in the case of Colombian peasantry or the Bolivian tin miners described by Michael Taussig(1980). As in Yang’s China, here there is no major fear or hatred of the immorality of the money economy or demonising of commodity fetishism. There is another attitude here: money can be made, but one must also offer it to the deities and ancestors. Instead of stories of the “baptism of money” and pacts with the Devil for illegitimate gain, there are rituals and gifts. From
the viewpoint of the economic rationality, money is seen as being withdrawn from rational use (personal savings, capital accumulation to expand production) and expended in “useless” ways: exchange with the superstitious forces and excess of indulgent consumption in this world. In this expenditure the strict heuristic division between gift and commodity are inappropriate. For instance, with the prosperity of production ritual expenditure also increases, as in the case of pongala and other annual and life-cycle rites.

3. Gift economy

One site of non-utilitarian expenditure may also be found in the kinship economy, of which lineage organisation and inter- lineage association are two major forms. The most significant economic dimension of these organisations is consumption, which links the living, and yet-to-be-born. Lineage members donate money to propitiate the ancestors and deities. Exchange of gift between affine relatives (udayon and adima) takes the form of ritual economy. Kinship and ritual economy are perpetuated within household production. Practice of giving gift money (kanikka paise) among Mannans is an example that illustrates how acquisition and expense relate to kinship and ritual expenditure. It shows the lacuna in attributing both self-interest and utility in all pecuniary exchanges. As Bataille states “Classical economics (cannot imagine) that a means of acquisition such as exchange might have as its origin, not the need to acquire that it satisfies today, but the contrary need, the need to destroy and to lose” (Bataille, 1985: 121).

Kanikka paise is an acquisition and spending of money by members of adima lineage. When they earn money they set apart a small portion of it
and keep it in a hundika. This money cannot be used by him or her for their individual or family needs, but it must go to the ritual of his or her opposite lineage (udayon). Udayon also has no right to spend this money. This can only be expended by adima, for giving gift to the udayon, to conduct feast during the ritual occasions. When a child is born, child’s father or grandfather, who belongs to the adima lineage, buys and keeps gold money (pon pannam) as kanikka paise. Later, this pon panam is taken to the udayon’s ritual place and put in his basket. During annual rites also, as in the cases of pongala and kalaoottu, and life-cycle rites like funeral, adima gives the kanikka paise. With this money adimakkaran buys ritual objects and gives to the udayon. He also conducts feast for his udayon. Interestingly, udayon cannot keep or use the food that reminds after the feast, but it must be taken back or be distributed by the adima.

Kinship obligation exists not only when they are alive, but continues even after their demise. There are obligations to the dead and living. In a strong culture of ancestor worship, funerals are perhaps the most important life-cycle ritual. If someone dies, the communities keep the corpse for one or two days, so that relatives can come and see the body. When relatives come they bow in front of the body and some of them –mostly women- cry loudly, expressing their grief. Relatives remain till the person is buried. Among Mannans, Adima of the dead person has to be necessarily present. They must conduct the ceremonies like bathing and shaving the corpse, initiate to conduct the ritual etc.

After the death, it is believed that, the spirit does not go away from the body. They continue to draw love from their relatives. Whatever remains to be done in this world is to be completed. However, they do not have the physical body to act. So they depend on other’s body for his/her action. The
spirit will enter other’s body and express or communicate his/her wish. Relatives always ensure the spirit that they do not desert or live them alone. So the kin and *adima* assured gathering around the dead. Feasts are given, *koothu* performed. Towards its expense family may even draw on credit. Feast and funeral wake are chances of the relatives to show the departed spirit, how much they are obliged to it. Alan Klima’s (2002) narrative of a “funeral casino” at Lampang in Thailand, is quite revealing. The funeral wake in the night is a continuation of life project of the dead. The discontinuity is, the dead cannot “make any showy prestations to everyone anymore”. The funeral wake is the “last gift of the dead”, but they need the help of the living to give. A funeral,

> is given for the dead both in the sense of being given *over* to the dead but also in this sense of being given to others *on behalf of* the dead. The continuation of exchange beyond death is one in which, by proxy as it were, the dead man loudly gave a gathering to the community of the living, and the community gave the gathering to the dead man at the same time. The gathering is the gift, but who is the giver and who is the receiver cannot really be determined by words because, at any one time, the gift is being given both ways. Those “directions” are not really spatialized and the “movement” is not really temporalized because in a sense the gift itself, the gathering, is its own destination and it has already arrived; that is, the gift is also the giver and the receiver, which calls back to mind that what is really uncanny in exchange with the dead is the status of giving itself. It makes one wonder what it is, really – “giving”- especially the kind of giving in which the material object of giving does not observe the reality principle of things, any one of which is not supposed to be able in two places at once (Klima, 2002: 268-9)

After the burial of physical body, the spirit of the dead is not separated completely from the relatives. Relatives conduct series of rituals in order to separate it. After putting the corpse on the burial pit, elders offer rice, request the spirit to be solaced and go from the living place. Though the spirit is separated from the body of the living, they wander around their home. Relatives give food, three to five times a day. One relative sits near
the food, and assure the feeding. On the seventh day, family members offer food at the side of the burial pit and cry for the departed. Only then, it is believed, that the departed spirit has separated from the phenomenal world.

There is a gift economy in a possible and true sense of the term between the living and dead; a life-and-death obligation. Offerings of food are gift to the ancestor by descend. Drawing from the Maori, Tamati Ranaipiri, demonstrate the principle of reciprocity in the gift. Marcel Mauss disseminates the anthropology of “the spirit of the thing given”:

I will speak to you about the hau … The hau is not the wind that blows – not at all. Let us suppose that you possess a certain article (taonga) and that you give me this article. You give it me without setting a price on it. We strike no bargain about it. Now, I give this article to a third person who, after a certain lapse of time, decides to give me something as payment in return (utu). He makes a present to me of something (taonga). Now, this taonga that he gives me is the spirit (hau)of the taonga that I had received from you and that I had given to him. The taonga that I received for these taonga(which came from you) must be returned to you. It would not be fair (tika) on my part to keep these taonga for myself, whether they were desirable (rawe) or undesirable (kino). I must give them to you because they are hau of the taonga that you give to me. If I kept this other taonga for myself, serious harm might befall me, even death. This is the nature of the hau, the hau of the taonga, the hau of the forest. Kati ena (but enough on this subject) (Mauss, 1990:14).

The concern of the relatives with the ancestors is not different, “If I kept this taonga for myself, serious harm might befall on me, even death”. Ancestors give things, when they were living and after death, so the kin are obliged to return. This is the spirit of the gift. The rites during Pongala and Kalaoottu of Mannans underline such obligations to the ancestors.

Conduct of the rites, Pongala and Kalaoottu, are an occasion of offerings to the ancestors, besides to gods and goddesses. This they conduct every year. Kalaoottu is an annual feeding conducted by the community in the
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chieftain’s house and also at individual houses. In the chieftain’s house, they offer food and other things to all ancestors of the community. In the individual households, on the other, families offer to the ancestors of the family. This is a return gift by the relatives. Assembling of people is also reciprocity. So the obligation between ancestors and descend is an unending process.

Occasions of rituals involve excess consumption in the forms of offering, gift and feast. For Mannan and Paliyan communities, these symbolic exchanges with the dead and deities are real, obligatory and inevitable. Alan Klima, following Bataille and Mauss, recognise in the economy “the connection with the dead, supernatural and the spirit of the gift, a mindful economy of real consequence” (Klima, 2002:233). Besides the goods in a market, their economy includes principles of exchange and exuberant consumption that goes beyond the restrictive economy that refuses to acknowledge its debts it has received and squandering of the things it possessed. So economy is neither reducible to strictly economic fact nor understandable in terms of rational activity. It institutes new possibility to show heterogeneity of human activities.

For Bataille, the overall understanding of economy can never be fully understood within a narrow frame because the economy permeates the social panorama. As he writes:

> economic activity is so far reaching that no one will be surprised if a first question is followed by other, less abstract ones: In overall industrial development, are there not social conflicts and planetary wars? In the global activity of men, in short, are there not causes and effects that will appear only provided that the general data of the economy are studies? Will we be able to make ourselves the masters of such a dangerous activity … without having grasped its general consequences? Should we not, given the constant development of economic forces, pose
the general problems that are limited to the movement of energy in the 

Bataille conceives society as a social whole which may be understood only 
if one takes into account of all the elements within it. He therefore stands 
against any conception of social being that reduces society to its constituent 
parts. His analysis is directed toward the overthrow of economic principles 
considered in isolation since this inevitably reflects a system of moral 
values he rejected.

4. Economic hybridity

The economy of the communities under study is neither exclusively general 
or nor restrictive. Their economy is hybrid (Yang, 2000), as ritual 
expenditure and exuberant consumption co-exist along with restrictive 
economy. This co-existence has a long history in Kerala. From the ancient 
days of long-distance trade with Rome through the middle centuries of 
Arab trade and much more intensely as also extensively from the period of 
the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the British colonial trade, 
southwest India has been world’s spice garden. The local princes of 
Travancore and Cochin imposed state monopoly of maritime trade and the 
tribal communities were the collectors of spices and other forest produces. 
Drastic changes began to be felt on the tribal communities when the 
princely state recast the forest as a game sanctuary and privileged the 
princely and colonial interests over the local livelihood cultures. 
Unproductive expenditures of the communities is coterminous with the 
commodity production and consumption.

Yang’s notion of “economic hybridity” is significant, because unlike 
conventional anthropological conception of economic change that situates 
two modes of economy as two different entities. Instead, notion of
hybridity captures local economy as a converging site of local and non-local energies. They converge in such a way that the distinctions among them are blurred. It is a process in which difference is embodied internally. It emphasises strains and tensions resulting from hybridization of convergence (Yang, 2000). We can see in the economic practices of Mannans and Paliyans certain spheres that belong to multiple realms. The intersection between “general economy” and “restrictive economy” is a site of hybridisation. These kinds of practices came into prominence in their social life as part of communities’ negotiations with the market system. Ethnographic instances underline the existence of strain and tensions in the hybrid economy.

Donation drives (what local people call “collecting funds” from the families) have become parts of the social landscape of Mannans and Paliyans. They are launched whenever there is any community effort, activity that needs funding such as construction of temple, community rites and a movement that demanded land from the state. Led by elder people, who command the social respect necessary to solicit contributions, these donation drives are remarkably successful and families are quite willing to impart money. Generally, elders fix an amount to be collected from the families, but some families will voluntarily pay more than the amount fixed. For example, while communities constructed the temples, temple committee fixed an amount to be collected from each family. Some families, however, apart from donating the fixed amount, have contributed more money, materials and things to the temple construction. As mentioned earlier these donations drives are also subjected to criticism and controversy within the community.
Temple committees are formal organisations constituted solely for the purpose of the functioning of temples and its festivals. Besides collecting donations, they expend money by dividing it to different purposes like ritual, feast, entertainment and so on. All the money matters are accounted and they are entered in books. Finally, they present among the community members the balance of payment and expenditure. These procedures are required because both community members and temple committees believe that money belongs to people. Even though the expense is for the “unproductive” purposes the accounting and other procedures is similar to that of restrictive economy. Things are now more complicated, after they began to receive money from outside sponsors. At times allegations are raised against the temple committee that there are misappropriations of funds. It is alleged that some temple committee members used the money for their private gain. Members of temple committee, however, have the opinion that they are indulging in the temple affairs without any gain, while others are involved in their individual livelihood activities. Activities of chieftain also subjected to criticism.

Among these communities social rank is won on the condition that fortune is partially scarified in unproductive social expenditures. Chieftain is expected to meet the entire expenditure incurred for kalaoottu. When the chieftain possessed larger areas of land, that is, before their displacement, he could do so. Now, the chieftain owns same areas of land like any family of the community. Among Paliyans, nobody is holding the position of chieftain. Among the Mannan community the present chieftain is a retired civil servant. He saves the money for the rituals, from his pension. He mobilises additional money by depending on the money lenders. Other social functionaries like vathi also procured the money from the market.
The vathi’s daughter says that most of days her father goes to the lake for fishing because he requires money to expend during pongala and kalaootu. It is noted that community members praise these social functionaries because of their sacrifice of surplus. Otherwise, they consider them as the mere possessor of ranks.

Families donate and contribute money for the rites and community requirements, even by taking credit. They depend on private money lenders and public credit institutions for this purpose. Public credit institutions do not give loans for the “unproductive expenditures”. Families therefore take credit by showing some productive purpose in the book and expend it for “unproductive expenditures”. In our conversations, members of the community usually complained about the insensitivity of the agencies like Eco-Development Committees for not giving money to the “unproductive expenditures”.

Not only the state, but also other agents and agencies impose rigidities, directly or indirectly, on the popular ritual. We saw orthodox Hindu worship imposed ritual rigidities over spontaneity of “tribal “religion in the construction of temple. With the Brahminisation of temple, worshipping practices has also become hybrid. Though there were differences of opinion regarding the appointment of the Brahmin priest, the new formal worship practices in temple demand his presence. Initially, they paid monthly salary to the priest. Later, the temple committee failed to pay it and the priest moved to the court. The court pronounced that community should pay the salary of the priest.
There exists another of hybrid economy, pleasure economy that merges individual unproductive expenditure with market economy. The main component of this economy is the dimension of general economy, that is, a prevalent mode of the ‘unproductive expenditure’, and on the other, has the dimension of restrictive economy, that is, a commodity from the market. Unlike, other ‘unproductive expenditures’ like ritual and festival economy, which is a collective consumption, this is an individual indulgence, especially male individuals. It can also be seen as booze economy, consumption without productive returns. They also offer liquor to their deities and ancestors. Thus, the pleasure economy has been incorporated into their ritual and gift economy.

Their lavish expenditure for consuming liquor got noticeable by outsiders, especially when there are surpluses from their cultivation. During the harvesting of pepper males go to the local bar and drink liquor excessively. Bar becomes a site of excess expenditures. They depend on rickshaw to return home although they are long distance walkers, both in the kadu and nadu. They also pay excess money to the rickshaw person, that is much higher than the usual charge.

The reckless expenditure of a drinking male is incommensurable with the idea of asceticism, discipline and prudence that are the hallmarks of modern developmental economy. The anti-asceticism of pleasure economy is articulated by the community members themselves. There is no explanation or reason for the consumption of liquors, but there is an economic reason for those who stop the habit of drinking; “my daughter has reached to the stage of marriage” or “I want to build my house” and so on. Given the stress on asceticism and instrumental rationality, state and other developmental agencies are afraid of such trasgressive expenditure
for drinking alcohol. Besides the reckless spending, a drinking man can act violently. There are many instances of community members bashing and quarrelling with the authorities of the state after getting drunk. It is a moment of expression of angeriness against the disenchantment of the social world.

1 They depend on the boats of Kerala forest department (KFD) and Kerala tourism department corporation (KTDC). This is based on an oral agreement of the department with the communities’ elders, after accepting the “cultural” significance of the local people. Communities are paying money for the diesel charge of the boat, which is less than the rent of the boat. Before the availability of the boat, Pongalites went to the rites by walk through the forest.

2 “Communitas”, Victor Turner described, how in the context of liminal phase of life-cycle rites and annual rites, social relationship is simplified and communitas are formed. Victor Turner schematised two models for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating man in terms of “more” or “less”. The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is a society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (1969).

3 Smoking cannabis is a collective consumption among the community members. When they smoke they give you as a feast.

4 Yang draws the idea of economic hybridity from Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of linguistic hybridity. Linguistic hybridity is a mixture of two languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousness, separated one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor” (cited by Yang 2000: 485).