Chapter 6

In Lieu of Summing up

In lieu of summing up the main findings of analysis and interpretation, here we attempt to privilege a few of these, and underscore their implications for the present day ‘truth talk’ in social sciences. The forest of this thesis is at once a site of convergence of “lived places” of the tribal communities and “conservation space” of the state. The ‘space’ and ‘place’ not only converged but also intersected constituting a ‘contact zone’ -- a zone of incommensurability, sharing, conflict and transgression. This contact zone has been constitutive of and is constituted through such co-presence of place and space in the forests and continued intersections and negotiations between them. These processes reconstitute the subject position of the communities and alter their self-identifications with their own community members, other tribal communities and with ‘others’.

Though the communities experience their relation with kadu, or rather, their intimacy with kadu, with remorse due to the sense of differentiation that they had to compulsively make due to the construction of dam and creation of protected area and concomitant displacements. At the same time this differentiation did not give way for complete separation between Man and Nature as it is in the development modernity of the mainstream societies. They have living memories, orally transmitted narratives and distinct thought process as also intermittent transgressions into the kadu – with state sanction and otherwise – that are still meaningful to them. For the developmentalist state, by contrast, forest is a conservation space, a repository of resources, space for the management of resources and governance of the people therein. We also found that forest may be seen as
a place, space and zone, but not mutually exclusive; they were intertwined conceptions leading to complex processes. From the material and devotional practices, it could be found that, complex processes are discernible although no one process is reducible to the other. Further, at least a few of the contact zone activities elude from modern scientific gaze.

In the anthropology of tribes, quite often, it is assumed that the tribal populations of the Western Ghats cannot be treated as endogenous communities as Morris persuasively demonstrated. There are sub-sets within this community which may be classified as endogenous. Yet, their existence may not be generalised as attributes of the community. The communities had, at the instance of local rulers and through collecting agents, fed forest produce to maritime trade from the Roman days. The trade in spices now is orchestrated by multiple tiers of agents even if the communities are directly linked only with the immediate buyer in exchange.

Mannans and Paliyans became even more unclassifiable as ‘endogenous community’, as they were implicated in the restrictive economy of local exchange and involved with varied agencies of development-conservation, from the local village panchayath through the state and national governments to the World Bank. The welfare measures, schemes, and projects introduced and implemented by colonial and post-colonial states insisted on refashioning the Self of the subject communities. The refashioning thus has genealogical antecedents as the communities were plugged into the infinite spatiality of the never ending possibilities. A spectrum of logic moulded and continues to mould their behavior in collecting/producing for own consumption and for the market.
The turbulent transformation in colonial conditions has been the concern of many social scientific and anthropological enquiries. Despite such commendable efforts, there seems to be a hiatus -- evidenced in the enquiries into the multifarious becoming of the economies in India; especially so in the case of Kerala. Conceptually, the hiatus springs from disregarding the general economy and confining attention to restrictive economic processes. This central distinction between the general and the restrictive economies as construed by Bataille are performatively revealed in this thesis. In moving to the nitty-gritty of the distinction and describing the implications of such conceptual innovation, some empirical findings need to be noted.

We may situate the present thesis as an attempt to hint upon, if not bridge, the hiatus. The subject communities of this thesis were neither endogenous nor they had any place and position within the mid- and low-lands of Kerala. They, however, are dependent -- and increasingly so - on the market for material goods including artifices of worship for collective, ‘irrational’ consumption.

The contact zone enables the market-remote communities to be positioned in a self-effecting manner within economies and fields of state governance. The modern notion of ‘consumption’ and ‘production’ are central to their experience of selfhood as well as relations with others. The engagements in the contact-zone are nuanced. Increasingly, the communities seem to privilege the ‘utility’ or ‘potentials of gaining back’ commodities for use or exchange. Though there is ambivalence and dilemma in their participation in the commodity market, non-participation in them is virtually impossible. Loss of intimacy with economic activities is articulated by the communities in their everyday life. Economic production is mainly for “acquisition” and
not oriented to the “dissipation of useful wealth”. Agencies of modernity like state and NGOs force them to mould themselves as a rational subject, and to become the *Homo Economicus* of the market economy. Welfare and development projects are instances of how modalities of government constitute ‘economy’ as an object of government, thus making it as a domain of regulatory practices or as in Bataille’s ‘restrictive economy’.

The state and other developmental agencies conceive the economy of communities in terms of its scarcity, and warp the question of “exuberance” or “unproductive expenditures”. Nevertheless, their economies may not be reduced to restrictive economy. Instances and aspects like ritual, festival and gift exchanges that expend for consumption without returns abound – very much like Bataille’s conception of “general economy”, an economy of ends in themselves. The exuberant consumptions of the communities are now linked with export prices. These are adaptations of older strains of economic logic to suit market or commodity economy, but at the same time coincide with “unproductive consumption”. Besides the distinctive existence of the elements and spheres of ‘restrictive economy’ and ‘general economy’, there are practices that belong to both realms at the same time. These kinds of practices came into prominence in their social life, as part of communities’ negotiations within the market system. As ritual expenditure and exuberant consumption of the general economy co-exist with restrictive economy, the economy of the communities under study is neither exclusively general or nor restrictive. Their economy is found to be “hybrid” as Yang proposed.

We see in the economic practices of Mannans and Paliyans in times present and past many that belong to multiple realms of economy. The intersection of “general economy” and “restrictive economy” is a site of hybridisation.
These practices came to prominence in their social life with increased and more intense negotiations with the market system. Ethnographic instances as noted in the thesis and evident elsewhere in documents, memories, imagination, and conversations underline the strains and tensions in the hybrid economy.