

INHERITANCE, PROPERTY CONTROL AND MARRIAGE IN COLONIAL SOUTH-WEST INDIA: THE CASE OF MATRILINEAL NAYARS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores transformations over time in the control of property through the mechanisms of specific inheritance and marriage practices amongst the matrilineal Nayars of colonial Malabar, relating these to wider changes in the political economy of Malabar.*

Section I sketches late precolonial Malabar's political economy and then goes on to describe the matrilineal system as it was practised in colonial Malabar by the Nayars and other castes in its specific features and its variations across caste groupings and the regions of Malabar. Section II collates available information from archival records, censuses, family records and later anthropological observations and explores the interrelationships between Nayar marriage, inheritance and household, on the one hand, and a range of social and economic variables on the other. Section III attempts to ground matriliney in the political economy of pre-colonial Malabar and relate its decline to subsequent changes in Malabar's economy and legislative interventions.

In the concluding section, I offer some tentative generalisations on the impact of the matrilineal system on selected demographic indices of women's well being, literacy and gender differentials in human development and the material underpinnings of kinship relations.

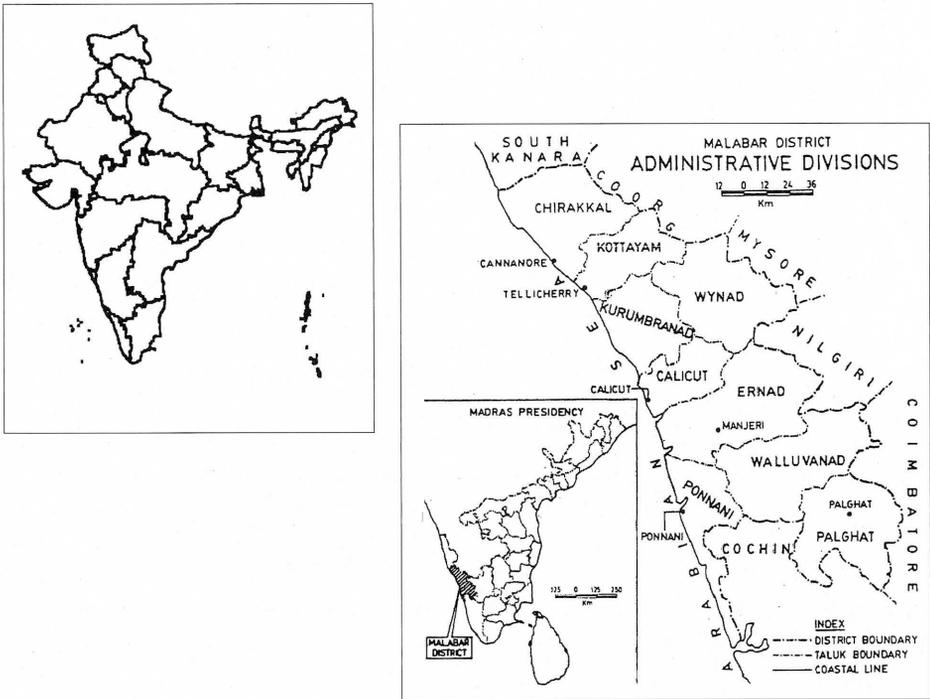
This paper explores transformations over time in the control of property through the mechanisms of specific inheritance and marriage practices amongst the matrilineal Nayars of colonial Malabar, relating these to wider changes in the political economy of Malabar.¹

Kerala is one of the most intensely researched regions in South Asia by social scientists, namely anthropologists, in recent times. The state's early reception of the major religions of the world, its vibrant maritime trade, exotic customs, and, more recently, its unique path of development combining high social development indicators with a lacklustre economic performance seem to have cast a spell on observers and scholars for more than eight centuries. In the medieval and early modern periods, Malabar's significance in maritime international trade brought traders from Arabia and then Europe to its shores. Whether Arab or European, the visitors were struck by the land's exotic social customs. The Nayar marriage custom, sexual codes and

¹ The British district of Malabar along with the Princely states of Travancore and Cochin were merged in 1956 to form the modern state of Kerala in 1956.

inheritance rules appears to have shocked nearly all foreign observers into commenting on them. The nature of the commentary, however, changed from detached observations to severe moralistic condemnation in course of time. In the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century the chorus against Nayar inheritance and marriage customs was taken up by the upwardly mobile Nayar men themselves, finally legislating matriliney out of the law books.

INDIA AND MALABAR DISTRICT WITH MADRAS PRESIDENCY IN LOWER INSET



Section I sketches late precolonial Malabar’s political economy and then goes on to describe the matrilineal system as it was practised in colonial Malabar by the Nayars and other castes in its specific features and its variations across caste groupings and the regions of Malabar. Section II collates available information from archival records, censuses, family records and later anthropological observations and explores the interrelationships between Nayar marriage, inheritance and household, on the one hand and a range of social and economic variables on the other. Section III attempts to ground matriliney in the political economy of pre-colonial Malabar and relate its decline to subsequent changes in Malabar’s economy and legislative interventions.

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SECTION I

Territorial Configurations in late precolonial Malabar

The later Chera period, after the eleventh century, saw the extreme parcellisation of political authority. (Innes 1908)² This general pattern continued till the end of the eighteenth century. In the early eighteenth century the Zamorins of Calicut were the largest and most vigorous power in south Malabar and the Kolattiris were the overlords of North Malabar. The Zamorins continuously tried to subjugate Chirakkal in the north and Cochin in the south, without much success.

Structure of the state

The persistently high degree of political decentralisation was a peculiar feature of the pre-colonial Malayali state system. Royal powers were severely circumscribed by popular assemblies of Nayars.³ The fragmentation of political power between the king and his large feudatory princes was usually based on a territorial division of authority. The other important loci of political authority below the territorial princes were the supralocal chiefs or *naduvazhis* in charge of *nadus* and below them were the village or *desam* chiefs known as the *desavazhis*. It was common for the same family to function in some areas as the *naduvazhi* and in certain others as *desavazhi*. As reward for their services these functionaries or title holders were allowed a part of the customs revenues, a fixed toll tax, various customary gifts and a small share of the agricultural and non-agricultural produce. Administration of the lands under their charge (*swaroopam*), the maintenance of an armed militia, the upkeep of specified temples, the maintenance of feeding houses for the Brahmins and the supply of drinking water in the summer months were some of the duties of the *naduvazhi*.⁴ The *naduvazhi*'s sources of revenue were the same as the Raja's but the rates of taxation were lower. The *desavazhi* was entrusted with the administration of the *desam*, which has been loosely translated as a village or a parish in later literature. He was entitled to a customary annual payment in kind from the agriculturists and a poll tax from the service castes. It was not necessary that every territory had to have both a *naduvazhi* and a *desavazhi*. This

2 This led a historian to comment - "though two steps might be made in one territory, a third must inevitably cross the boundary.

3 Commandeur Hendrik van Rheede writing in the second half of the 17th century commented that in Malabar 'subjects are not bound to observe any orders, commands or whims and council decisions of the king which are not in conformity with their laws, welfare and privileges and have not been approved in their own district and ratified at the meeting of their district assemblies.'

[Home Miscellaneous, #316@ 456(B) (1) (2)]Also see van Gollennesse for a similar observation. Groot, G. a., Ed. (1911). *The Dutch in Malabar being a Translation of Selections Numbers 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes*. Madras.

4 See deposition of Appukkutan Unni alias Kanakkat Moopil Nair, D.W. 14 in O.S. No.34 of 1919, Sub-Court, Ottapalam.

points to a structure of political hierarchy and control that was highly multivocal. A clearly defined linear hierarchy of titles was foreign to the pre-colonial Malabar state structure.

Above these local and district level functionaries stood the king. The king's rights and privileges in Malabar were essentially a replication on a grander scale of those rights enjoyed by his tributary princes and their subordinate functionaries. Kingship appears to have been guaranteed in the ultimate instance by the overlord's ability to mobilize superior military power vis-à-vis his subordinates. In the absence of a standing army the Malabar kings were dependent on their subordinate chieftains for resisting external military attacks and for territorial expansion. In military terms the overlord's own power would necessarily have had to be greater than that of any of his subordinate chieftains. It is in this context that the 'national' assemblies or *nadu kootams* assume significance in Malabar's political history. Rheede repeatedly points to the circumscription of absolute royal power by these assemblies.⁵ In cases where differences between the king and the assemblies could not be sorted out through negotiations military confrontation ensued.⁶

The Brahmins who were exclusively in charge of ecclesiastical affairs and owned very large landed estates were another important component of the state.⁷ The lands granted to the Brahmins were organised as a *sanketam* which was a self-governing, semi-autonomous territory. Though the *sanketams* were self-governing units with their own code of conduct and general rules, they were dependent on the king and subordinate princes for protection. The Brahmins had developed institutional forms of resistance (e.g. *pattini* or hunger strikes) to coerce secular authorities when all other forms of protest failed. The king in some documents also appears to have derived a revenue from the temples under the control of the *sanketam*. (Narayanan 1975) The semi-autonomous landed Nambudiri Brahmin groups while retaining substantial autonomy and ritually recognized penal powers even over the king depended on the secular heads for their protection.

Malabar's state structure does appear to have closely approximated to Southall's description of the segmentary state in Alur. (Southall 1956), (Stein 1980) In Malabar the king may not have had any 'ritual hegemony' in the sense of an accepted preeminent sacral status, but he did command 'authority.' This 'authority' was based ultimately on his greater military mobilizing capacity vis-à-vis his subordinate chiefs. However, without a standing army he could not exercise military and political control

5 "Assemblies are commonly held against the king and therefore he employs all measures to prevent them. But this cannot be easily done, considering the great number of armed men who resort to these assemblies, often amount (sic) to about 30,000."

[Home Miscellaneous, #316]

6 [Home Miscellaneous, #316]

7 The family records of the Vanjeri *illam* provide a valuable source for examining the relationship between the Nambudiri priests and the rulers in late medieval Malabar.

over his entire territory in any permanent, pervasive manner. Small kingdoms as it developed along the coast characterized the state system. Each kingdom with its trade centre on the coast needed to control the hinterland where its exported commodities were produced. As one went farther inland the control of the centre declined. Control was attempted either through direct rule where possible or through indirect mechanisms of allegiance. The chieftains further inland often played off rival kings against each other. This kind of spatial economic organization formed the basis of the segmentary state structure in Malabar. (Hall 1985), (Akinjogbin 1967)

Ecology and State Structure

Topography, climate and the cropping pattern crucially influenced the nature of the state structure in Malabar. The physiography of this coastal strip separated it from the rest of the Indian peninsula, minimizing social and political intercourse with the areas on the leeward side of the Western Ghats. The Malabar coast was dissected by numerous small seasonal rivers originating in the Ghats and draining into the Arabian sea. Maintaining regular links across any substantial expanse of this region was near impossible. During the torrential rains of the long monsoon months maritime communication came to a virtual halt and overland links became difficult. The virtually nonexistent road system in Malabar and the consequently high transport costs continued well into the nineteenth century. (Buchanan 1807) This was one plausible factor in limiting the extension of large highly centralised sovereign territorial units in Malabar.

The dispersal of paddy fields in the valleys seems to have encouraged the dispersed settlement pattern in Malabar. Ecology along with the politico-administrative structure appears to have contributed greatly to this pattern of habitation. The rice fields being widely dispersed made it important for the land. Settlement dispersal in turn further reduced the possibilities of tight administrative and political control.

Changing Political Configurations: the external dimension

The closing years of the fifteenth century marked the beginning of Portuguese commercial and armed intervention. Unlike the Arab trader the Portuguese introduced systematic non-economic coercion to maintain their commercial presence and viability in the East.

The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries witnessed the gradual growth of European companies' political and commercial power on the Malabar Coast and the ultimate establishment of the English Company as a major military and political power on the coast. European traders of the mercantilist era played a crucial role in deciding the political fortunes of these kingdoms.

In the field of revenues too there was only a difference in the scale of taxation

The most predictable regular sources of revenue appear to have been the ruler's income from the *cherical* lands and trade customs. It is interesting to note that land revenue does not figure as an important source of revenue in the above sources. Most accounts of the revenue system of precolonial Malabar have emphasised that a land tax was not levied by the state during this period. Logan's arguments in favour of a land tax remain the most perceptive historical treatment of this issue. He begins by asserting that a land tax was collected in Malabar till the time of the Perumals but subsequently fell into disuse. With the breakup of the centralised Perumal rule, the *various petty chieftains appropriated the pattom*. To quote Logan, "No revenue" was in one sense levied from the petty chieftains who thus flocked around the standards of the great families, for the petty chiefs themselves enjoyed the ancient land revenue assessment. But in another sense land revenue was paid on every cultivated acre; the difficulty was to see and realize that this was really what, in every other Indian province, constituted the basis of the revenues of the province. [Logan, 1951 #305@vol II, p.507]

The Nayars

The Nayars of Malabar were ritually positioned below the Brahmins and the Samantans in the sharply graded caste hierarchy of Malabar. Though numerically in a minority, the Nayars of Malabar formed a politically and socially very significant group in the region's population. They constituted 14.3 and 14.6 percent of the total population of Malabar in 1881 and 1931 respectively. Broadly speaking the Nayars were historically seen as warriors, though not all Nayars were engaged in soldiering. They were divided into a large number of subdivisions or *vibhagams*, whose number is not definite as the claims of some subdivisions to Nayar status was disputed by the 'real' Nayars. These subdivisions had occupational correlates for the lower groups. In the case of the upper groups some exogamous lineage groups that had *sambandham* relations often came together to form a subdivision. The status of a Nayar *taravad* was also measured by the status of the *tali-tiers*. Further, at the lower end while new groups claimed Nayar status, at the upper end the distinctions between the Nayars, the Kshatriyas and the Samantans was not very clear. (Fuller 1976) This points to the existence of mobility within the Nayar caste and cautions us against treating the Nayars even ascriptively as a monolithic, homogenous entity that was impervious to change.

The Nayars of North Malabar considered themselves to be superior to those of South Malabar and Nayar women of the North could not marry into the South. The marriage customs between these two regions were also very different. This point will be discussed in detail when we look at Nayar marriages. (Fawcett 1901)

The Kurup, Nambiyar, Viyyur, Manavallan, Vengolan, Nellioden, Adungadi,

Kitavu, Adiodi, Amayengolam were all superior clans belonging to North Malabar and their South Malabar counterparts were the Kiriya Nayars. In precolonial Malabar every Nayar chief had his followers – they were divided into the superior Purathu Charna Nayars or fighters and the lower ranked Agathu Charna Nayars or clerks and domestics. In economic terms too, to generalise, the Nayars of the North were better off than those in the South. The majority of Nayars were tenants on *kanam* lease. The fact that the *kanam* was a real mortgage, as opposed to being a nominal mortgage, in the South suggests that the Northern Nayars were better off. Another objective factor that may have contributed to the accepted superiority of the Northern Nayars was the negligible existence of large ritually and materially powerful superordinate Nambudiris in the North compared to the South. This short sketch clearly brings out the heterogeneity of the Nayars in terms of class, status and territory.

We now come to the Nayar customs of marriage and inheritance, the twin features that have aroused the curiosity of the travellers and anthropologists alike. The Nayars practised hypergamy. A Nayar woman could marry only a man from a caste or subdivision equal to hers or higher. The property holding and coresidential matrilineal *tarawad* or group was exogamous. Before a girl reached menarche she was ritually married to a Brahmin or man of her own subgroup. This ceremony was known as *talikettukalyanam* (*tali*- a small gold ornament tied around the neck; *kettu*- to tie; *kalyanam*- marriage. The *tali* was a symbolic badge of a married woman). The age of the ‘bridegroom’ was not important and the only requirement is that their horoscopes match. On the astrologically auspicious day the bridegroom ties a *tali* around the girl’s neck, they eat from the same plantain leaf and go through the fiction of cohabitation. On the fourth day the bridegroom severs connection with the girl by tearing the cloth (*kachai*) that she wears, symbolising divorce. The next life cycle rite in the life of the Nayar woman was the marriage or the *sambhandham*. There are a number of varying local names for *sambhandham*, but the essential principles are the same.⁸ To enter into a *sambandham* the only requirements are the consent of the girl and that of her *karnavan* or the male guardian of her matrilineal household. Religious rites, having already been observed at the time of the *talikettukalyanam*, did not attend the actual Nayar marriage. The astrologer decides on the compatibility of the couple’s horoscopes and decides on a favourable date and time in the bride’s house. The essential rite was the giving of a set of clothes to the bride by the bridegroom. This is followed by the newlyweds cohabiting for the night.

There are some broad differences between the *sambandham* in North and South Malabar. In the virilocal North, after the *salkaram* ceremony held the morning

⁸ The other terms used for the *sambandham* are Pudamuri, Vastradanam, Uzhamporukkuka, Vitaram Kayaruka, etc, Fawcett, F. (1901). Nayars of Malabar. *Madras Government Museum Bulletin*. Madras. 3.

following the *sambham*, the bride is taken by the groom's female relatives to his house. This is absent in the matriloal South. Even in the virilocal North upon the death of the husband, the wife and her children had to immediately return to her natal home. In the South in place of *vastradanam* or the giving of clothes, money is given to the bride. While the marriage was monogamous in the North, in the South it was not. The husband or husbands visited the wife only during the night. One or more partners would claim paternity if they were sure that the woman did not have sexual relations with any male from lower status group. In that unfortunate case, no one would claim paternity leading to the outcasting of the woman and her child. The man claiming paternity had to make the obligatory payment to the midwife and give gifts of cloth to the woman.

Other than giving the woman gifts such as oil or clothes at the time of important festivals the male partners had no other material obligation to the wife or their offspring. If these gifts were not given, it signalled the severance of the relationship. The woman and her children observed ritual death pollution only for the ritual husband and not for any of the visiting husbands. This being the socially accepted practise, no individual had any obligations to his patrilateral kin.

The woman or the man could sever the *sambandham* relationship unilaterally without attracting social censure.

This brings us to the Nayar household and inheritance. The traditional habitat of the Nayers was the joint matrilineal family household that was headed by the eldest male or the *karnavan*. Each *tarawad* traced its ancestry to a single founding female ancestress. Being matrilineal only the offspring of the daughters of the *tarawad* would be members of that *tarawad*. The sons' children would belong to their mother's *tarawad* and not to the father's. They had no claim on the property of their father's *tarawad*. The *tarawad* was impartible and every member had an equal share in it. It was however managed by the *karnavan*. While individuals could not lay claim to independent shares, stirpital partitioning was common, resulting in the fissioning of the original *tarawad* into matrilineal segments or *tavazhis*. The process of *tarawad* fissioning into *tavazhis* appears to have gained momentum in the nineteenth century. The generational depth of the latter being much more shallow than of the original *tarawads*. This has been noted for Central Kerala by Gough and Mencher. (Gough 1961) (Mencher 1962)

SECTION II

Nayar Marriage, Family and Inheritance in the late precolonial and colonial periods

The origins of matriliney and Nayar marriage and inheritance patterns belong entirely

to the realm of speculation. Substantive historical evidence on questions of origins and early (that is between the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries) transformations are not available or have not yet been discovered. Extant anthropological pieces, especially those of Gough, Mencher and Fuller, by dint of hard fieldwork and the use of genealogies have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Nayar kinship and inheritance. Though the use of genealogies does give these studies a temporal depth they are limited by a narrow understanding of macro changes in the political economy of the district. It is this lacuna that the present paper hopes to redress.

We have the apocryphal account in the Keralamahatmyam of “how certain celestial damsels were brought from Indra’s world by Parasu Rama to satisfy the sexual cravings of the Keralam Brahmans, and it relates how Parasu Rama at Vishabhadri (Trichur), pronounced his commandment that to the women (not being of Brahman caste) to satisfy the desires of Brahmans, enjoining on them to put off chastity and the cloth which covered their breasts, and declaring that promiscuous intercourse with three or four men in common was void of the least taint of sin.” (Fawcett 1901) Despite the fact that the Keralamahatmyam was most probably a relatively new concoction of Brahman priests, it continued to command the respect of a number of Nambudiris as well as Nayars as evidenced by the replies to the Malabar Marriage Commission. (Madras 1891) Many of the modern Nayars suspected that Nayar hypergamy was a strategy devised by the ritually higher ranking Nambudiris to subordinate them. This speculation appears to be quite plausible.

Malabar finds a mention in accounts going back to Pliny in CE 77. (Fuller 1976) Ibn Batuta, who visited Malabar in the middle of the 14th century, may be credited with the first detailed description of Malabar. (Fuller 1976) What drew the attention of nearly all the early observers were the region’s caste arrangements, Nayar marriage practices and their martial prowess. The Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa who spent several years in Malabar in the very early sixteenth century and had learnt Malayalam left the most detailed account of the marriage practices of the Nayars. (Barbosa 1921) Barbosa describes the main features of Nayar marriage such as the *thalikettukalyanam*, *sambhandham*, the Nayar woman’s sexual freedom, matriliney and matrilocality. (Barbosa 1921) Much of Barbosa’s observations have been corroborated by subsequent observers and scholars. Sheikh Zayan al-Din writing in the sixteenth century also refers to polyandry among the Nayars comparing it to the polygyny among the Muslims. (‘bari 1833) Two of the commentators, Barbosa and later Montesquieu explained polyandry and matriliney in terms of ensuring military efficacy. The latter, who based his theory on the account of Pyrard de Laval, added a climatological dimension to it, much in the fashion of later day new French history.

The origin of this custom [polyandry] is not I believe difficult to discover. The

Naires...are the soldiers of all those nations. In Europe, soldiers are forbidden to marry; In Malabar, where the climate requires greater indulgence, they are satisfied with rendering marriage as little burdensome to them as possible: they give one wife amongst many men, which consequently diminishes the attachment to a family, and the cares of house-keeping, and leaves them in the free possession of a military spirit. [Montesquieu, 1952 #300@Book XVI, Chapter 5]

The Nayar inheritance pattern sketched above is thought to have continued without any major structural transformation till the middle of the nineteenth century. (Mencher 1962), (Gough 1961), (Fuller 1976). The current writer also has no reason to dispute these works.

However, a recent article on the basis of very specious historical sources and facts argues that “A striking difference between the *taravads* and matrilineages of the eighteenth from their mid-nineteenth century counterparts was that they could have been set up in a variety of ways.” Purchase is said to be one of them and the setting up of a new *taravad* by an eloped princess, another.⁹ (Arunima 1996) She asserts that in the eighteenth century *taravads* were being consolidated and represented greater fluidity. (Arunima 1996)

The eighteenth century was indeed a period of great change in the political economy of Malabar. During the eighteenth century not only did military conflicts become more frequent, but also the technology of warfare became more sophisticated pushing up the cost of war.

The historical origins of tenurial differences in North and South Malabar and the differences in Nayar marriage and residential patterns can be traced to the eighteenth century. The North was also the most monetized and dependent on foreign trade generated revenues. This region was also the most deficient in locally produced rice. The political crises of the eighteenth century and the alienation of custom revenues and trading rights in pepper to the European companies severely curtailed both the chiefs’ surplus as well as their supply of cash. While the spread of the tax net shrunk greatly in the course of the eighteenth century, their expenses appear to have increased. Combined with this, it is possible that the economy was being increasingly monetized.

9 The evidence of eighteenth century *taravad* expansion or formation through purchase is based on two sale deeds from the seventeenth century. The story of the eloped princess is also conveniently abridged to excise the bit where her family nearly goes to war over her misdemeanor. Further, most of the significant anthropological works do recognise both spatial as well as class differences amongst the Nayars something that Arunima does not display in this paper.

...The documents of the Vanjeri *illam* record a number of *kuzhikanam* deeds from the 16th century to the early 19th century, but surprisingly these do not contain a single entry from the entire 18th century. See *V.G.*, Documents 34 A dated 1599, 80 A dated 1632, 88 A dated 1644, 100 A dated 1650, and 114 A dated 1820.

The existence of the *kuzhikanam* lease at the beginning of the 19th century provides some evidence of agricultural expansion.¹⁰ The increasing demand for spices, as evidenced by the increase in prices and the frequent references to smuggling suggest an increasing demand for these commodities. Population increase points to an expanding demand for rice. However, given the paucity of sources no definite assertion can be made on the issue of agricultural growth. Assuming no decline in the level of monetization, demographic growth even in the absence of agricultural expansion suggests greater demand for cash at a time when the rajas were facing a severe liquidity crunch. This resulted in a severe shortage of cash that seems to have got worse with the Mysorean invasions in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the British annexation and the revolts of the early 19th century. The larger landlords in the North faced with a dearth of cash were forced to borrow to such an extent from their tenants that the *kanam* tenure became a real mortgage in the North while it continued as a nominal mortgage in the paddy cropped southern *taluks*. Garden cultivation in the North expanded despite the dearth of cash by means of the subsidised *kuzhikanam* tenure which was granted by large *tharavads* for land reclamation. The large landlords could thus expand cultivation without investing any of their resources in the hope of future gains. The actual cost of cultivation was borne by the *kuzhikanam* tenants.

A closer study of the historical changes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries however clarifies the factors resulting in the differential income trajectories of the different agrarian classes in North Malabar. The *janmis* or the superior tenure holders belonged to the privileged and ascriptively superior Nambudiri and Nayar castes in Malabar. In North Malabar, however, Nambudiri monopoly over landed wealth was much weaker than in the South. An analysis of later village *patta* registers exhibits a concentration of titles to land in the hands of the *samantans* and Rajas who constituted the bulk of the regions royal or chiefly ruling groups.

Thus what seems to have happened gradually but progressively was a sharp increase in expenses on the one hand coupled with a shrinking revenue base on the other. In the absence of any regular and heavy land tax the actual cultivators in North Malabar were left with a substantial surplus in garden produce, which in a period of high commercialization found a ready market and constituted a significant source of cash income.

Another factor, one of long duration, in explaining the lower political economic skewedness in North Malabar is related to the economics and biological rhythms of garden crop production. The coast based Mapilla merchants derived huge benefits from their role in the trade of the region and as creditors to local chiefs as well as the

¹⁰ The documents of the Vanjeri *illam* record a number of *kuzhikanam* deeds from the 16th century to the early 19th century, but surprisingly these do not contain a single entry for the entire 18th century. See *V.G.*, Documents 34-A dated 1599, 80-A dated 1632, 88-A dated 1644, 100-A dated 1650, and 114-A dated 1820.

European factories. However, in North Malabar we do not come across any evidence for the investment of commercial profits by these merchants in land. This may have been due to the higher rates of return offered by trade than by agriculture.

Given the negligible political and economic power of the Brahmins (both Nambudiri and Pattar) it is not surprising that the practice of visiting husbands was uncommon in these parts. The strength of the upper class Nayar *taravads* again fits in well with the near absence of any strong centres of de facto political authority for more than a hundred years. This gave the local lordly Nayar *taravads* much more power than their counterparts in South Malabar. Finally, the injunction forbidding Nayar women to marry both into the Chirakkal territories in the North and into South Malabar seems to be related to the North Malabar Nayars' attempts to remain independent of the expanding Chirakkal rajas to the north and the Zamorin in the south. This instinct for territorial independence appears to have amalgamated with the different marriage customs and the North's lesser subservience to Nambudiri control to contribute the idea of the Northern Nayars being superior to those in the South. From Barbosa in the sixteenth century to Fuller in the 1960s, the origins of Nayar matriliney and polyandry have been ascribed to the military industry of the Nayars. The history of late precolonial North Malabar is more replete with battles than the South. But it is here that we find a tradition of monogamy and partially virilocal residence. What seems to be the key factor in shaping Nayar marriage practices appears to be the strength or the lack of it of Brahmanical commandments. The significance of Brahmanical injunctions in the relative absence of powerful Brahman landed magnates appears to have been much less.

In South Malabar, on the other hand, we do not witness any equivalent weakening of the erstwhile ruling and land controlling groups *vis-à-vis* the subordinate revenue holders. Here the relation between the *janmi* and the *kanamdar* approximated very closely to that between the typical landlord and a tenant. The *kanam* amount was nominal and consequently the rent payable by the tenant was high. In these areas possibly because of the greater economic distance between the *janmis* and the *kanamdars*, the crises faced by the ruling groups could not be exploited by the subordinate tenure holders to their own advantage. Further, alienation of revenue rights to the Europeans and the parcellization of sovereignty was negligible in comparison to the North.

Here too we find evidence of a stringency of money faced by the local rulers. However, the Pattar or Eastern Brahmin traders who were active in the interior country trade of this area and in the coasting trade with the Tamil areas, seem to have acted as creditors to these late precolonial ruling houses. The more dependable returns from wet paddy cultivation combined with the higher rent extractable from wet paddy cultivation may have constituted an adequate incentives for diverting trading profits to agriculture in this region. Being a relatively larger producer of the staple food grain, in the

southern *taluks* (especially Palghat) the dependence on the market was much less than in the North.

The short Mysorean interlude (1766 to 1792) witnessed not only the military defeat of the Nayar ruling class and a drastic disruption of agrarian relations in the southern part of the district but it marked the first attempt at creating a centralized bureaucratic administration. With the military defeat of the chiefs, a crucial prop of the traditional Malabar state structure collapsed.

The Mysoreans did not pursue a uniform revenue policy throughout Malabar. The revenue collection in the northern *taluks* was left largely to the local chiefs in the North but in the South the revenue administration was conducted directly by the Mysorean officials. In North Malabar where the Rajas remained in charge of revenue collection till the fag end of Mysorean rule, circumstantial evidence suggests a possible worsening of economic conditions for the agricultural producers. Having accepted the status of tributary princes under the Mysorean regime, the North Malabar Rajas were no longer dependent on their erstwhile vassals militarily and politically. [Buchanan, 1807 #291@vol. II, p. 189-90]

Finally, the British conquest of Malabar in 1792 should not be seen as a sudden rupture with the precolonial past but as the culmination of a long process of state involution occurring in the course of the eighteenth century.

Nayar Taravads and macro political economic changes in the early nineteenth century.

Anthropologists have concluded on the basis of genealogical information that *taravad* partitioning speeded up in the second half of the nineteenth century. The early nineteenth century is characterised as the 'old order' (Fuller 1976) or 'traditional.' (Mencher 1962) These conclusions fit in well with the political economic changes of that period.

By the Treaty of Seringapatam (1792) Malabar was ceded to the English Company. In October 1793 the Joint Commissioners in a district wide promulgation declared the *janmis* to be the absolute owners of land and the *kanamdars* as "lessees" who could be evicted by the former on expiry of their leases. The tenurial redefinition of the rights of the *janmi* and the *kanamdars* proved to be an institutional change of crucial importance in determining the subsequent course of agrarian relations in colonial Malabar.

The centralizing colonial regime had to eliminate the multiplicity of local centres of political authority. Stripped of their extra-economic prerogatives, the erstwhile local potentates approximated notionally, to landlords in the Western sense of the term.

The immediate implication of redefining the *janmi* as the owner of the soil or

the landlord was that the colonial state forfeited its claim to the absolute ownership of all land in its territories. The recognition of private ownership in land also forced the government to relinquish claims over waste land.

The proclamation of 1793 provided the juridical basis for transforming traditional tenurial relations. Juridically contract replaced custom as the regulator of agrarian relations. The new tenurial status bestowed on the *janmis* and the *kanamdars* did not have any immediate political repercussions. The severely depressed state of the agrarian economy during the first fifty years of colonial rule in Malabar substantially lowered the returns from agriculture. This state of the economy postponed the articulation of the new contradictions which the 1793 tenurial revision introduced into Malabar's agrarian relations.

The impossibly high revenue demand provoked general resistance to British rule throughout Malabar in the early part of 1803.

After some initial hesitation all the important Rajas of North Malabar submitted to a drastic restriction of their traditional privileges and recognized the sovereignty of the English Company.

In the first decade of British rule in Malabar land revenue constituted more than 85 per cent of the total revenue of the district. Local level political configurations rather than considerations of political economy appear to have been the crucial determinants of the mode and extent of state intervention in Malabar's agrarian relations.

Similarly tenurial redefinitions and the determination of rent were made by reaching a consensus with the principal landed magnates. In spite of the well known defects of this arrangement it did ensure an increasing trend in revenue collections. The old local ruling groups in their new role as subordinate revenue officials were permitted a number of economic perquisites which helped them retain and consolidate their superior economic status. The Government's failure to change the revenue personnel and its avowed policy of employing precolonial land magnates coupled with the fact that the revenue collections were made without difficulty helped to introduce a marked inertia in the revenue administration.

Easy realization of an increasing land revenue, the need to placate the erstwhile ruling groups and the absence of any serious general outward political discontent combined to discourage the British Government from initiating any radical change in its land revenue policy till the first half of the 19th century. The repercussions of this policy of limited intervention were to be felt in the latter half of the century when the cumulative agrarian contradictions which had been growing found expression in various kinds of landlord vs. tenant struggles. The vertical spread of colonial administration in Malabar terminated at the level of landlords. Attempts to penetrate deeper were neither felt necessary nor were they possible.

The first forty years of British rule saw land revenue collection increase by

thirty per cent in nominal terms. The increase in real terms in the revenue was of an even greater order.¹¹ The escalation of revenue extraction of the magnitude described above coupled with the tenurial and administrative changes effected by the early colonial government in Malabar had significant and wide ranging repercussions for the district's agrarian economy.

The price data available from the 1720s up to the 1850s provide some indication of the long term trends in agricultural prices in Malabar. It suggests a price curve which rose up to the end of the eighteenth century and subsequently declined. Pepper prices slumped also because of changes in the world market.[Nightingale, 1970 #311@p.44-47 Article by John Scurges Bastin]

The price decline described above for agricultural products also extended to wages, transport costs, and land values.(Sullivan 1849) During an examination of "different Namboodiris of Manjerry and other principal inhabitants" in 1815 they stated, "Formerly the price (of land) was higher. It used to be *ara kal* and *kal Palisha*, or interest (meaning 10/16 and 1/4 per cent for money lent, or 80 and 40 years purchase). At present *arra palisha* is with difficulty procurable for the 2 in 10 of the Parroms (meaning 5 per cent or 20 years purchase)."¹²

The land prices like agricultural product prices exhibit a steep fall from the late pre-British period to 1791 and then show a small sluggish increase. All available evidence suggests a secular fall in prices since the turn of the century.

The sudden rapid increase in real land revenue demand coupled with an increase in the prices of commodities such as salt and tobacco and a fall in the prices of agricultural produce significantly decreased the returns to the producer. The intervention of the colonial state in Malabar's economy was responsible to a very great extent for the lowering of prices in the district and retarding the demand for the factors of agricultural production. While Malabar's export revenues from its lucrative spices decreased, the Government land revenue collections, customs and *sayer* duties increased. The increase in taxes meant that a greater part of the available social surplus was being absorbed by the State. This by itself need not have caused a general deflationary condition. However, instead of returning the taxes thus collected into circulation, the collections were remitted out of the district treasuries. "Formerly in several of the districts, revenue was seldom remitted to the Presidency, and all of it returned to circulation. But later, as there was no occasion for the retention of money in the district treasuries, most of it was sent to Madras." (Sarada Raju 1941)

Another deflationary stimulus came from the decreasing share of spices in Malabar's export trade. Large scale issue of Bills by the Court of Directors for making

¹¹ Between 1806/10 and 1831/35 the deflated land revenue collection increased by 50 per cent.

¹² Further Examination of different Namboodiris of Manjerry and other Principal Inhabitants on the 28th of April 1815.

payments to the Madras Presidency after 1819-20 below the bullion rate of exchange led to a further shrinking of bullion imports.¹³

The depression of the 1830s and '40s was relatively less severe in Malabar compared to the Tamil districts. The slighter intensity of the Depression can be explained only in terms of the already highly depressed state of the district's economy.

Thus, it appears that the early colonial period was one of partial demonetization, a general slump in the demand for land and low wages. These years also saw Malabar being economically more closely integrated with the rest of the Madras Presidency.

Agrarian Economy and Relations mid-19th century to the mid-20th century

Malabar's recovery from the 1830s depression and the subsequent secular rise in agricultural product prices contributed significantly in translating the juridical tenurial arrangements made at the beginning of the century into a changed configuration of agrarian class power.

The rising agricultural prices provided a strong economic incentive to the *janmis* to increase their share of the produce at the cost of the tenants. Though the *janmi* was legally declared the absolute owner of his holdings as early as 1805 this did not lead to any immediate reordering of agrarian class forces for two main reasons. First, the *janmis* had to wait till the twelve year lease periods with their tenants expired before they could exercise their newly acquired power of distraint. Second, the increased real burden of revenue caused by very low prices at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the lack of demand for agricultural land as evidenced by the depressed state of the land market also discouraged the *janmis* from making an immediate attempt to exercise their newfound legal powers.

An increase in price therefore meant a lightening of the real tax burden on the revenue paying classes. While the price rise made agriculture a profitable venture, repeated enquiries into "actual rents" brought the various contesting agrarian groups face to face, exacerbating the latent tensions in the Malabar countryside.

This conjuncture of rising prices, the legal redistribution of property rights and the existing hierarchy of land and social controlling rights in Malabar led to a situation where the rent revenue gap greatly widened. A widening of the rent-revenue difference meant that the socially and economically powerful groups in the countryside greatly benefited from the new economic political situation at the cost of the weaker rent paying tenants and sub-tenants. There was a marked increase in litigation connected with land control and rising distraints and rent enhancements. [Madras, #313@para 259] An analysis of rent roll data shows a marked increase in the inequality of distribution of *pattas* and assessment between 1849 and 1866.

13 Clementson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

While on the one hand we find increasing inequality in the distribution of holdings and a significant increase in dwarf holdings, on the other hand certain apparently small but significant tendencies appear to be at work. Table 1 gives the caste-wise distribution of *janmis* in 1803 and 1887.

Table 1. Caste-wise break up of *janmis* in Malabar

Caste	1803		1887	
	No.	%age	No.	%age
Nambudiri	37	35.92	217	24.08
Upper/Intermediary castes	11	10.67	69	7.66
Nayars	46	44.66	411	45.62
Mapillas	8	7.79	92	10.21
Tiyas	1	0.96	112	12.43
Total	103	100.00	901	100.00

Source: Panikkar 1977.

The above table suggests a decrease in the land control of the traditional land controlling upper castes, a small gain by the Nayars (traditionally associated with the *kanam* tenure) and a significant entry of cultivating groups such as the Mapillas and Tiyas into the *janmi* tenurial category. These trends point to a subtle but significant shift in the composition of Malabar's land controlling rural elite. However, even if we assume that the above table based on point estimates and differing samples is correct, it would be erroneous to assume on its basis a general increase in the land control of the lower castes. What we could possibly infer from it is the ability of the most prosperous members of the traditional non-*janmi* castes to acquire *janmam* tenure during the nineteenth century.

As prices and productivity increased throughout the late nineteenth century up to the second decade of the twentieth century all classes tried to maximize their share in the increased returns leading to a sharpening of conflict. The *janmis* resorted to evictions and later on overleases in the 1890s and early twentieth century to replace a tenant with another willing to pay a higher rent. (Panikkar 1982) The number of registered *melcharths* increased from 2816 in 1906 to 3407 in 1911.¹⁴ The *melcharth* appears to have become the preferred mechanism of removing a tenant especially after the Government introduced curbs on eviction.

The *patta* statistics also suggest that (despite some recent claims to the contrary)

¹⁴ Revenue Dept G.O. No. 3094, dated 12 October 1912.

that the Malabar agrarian economy was not dominated by small peasant production.¹⁵ Malabar's landholding structure, in contrast to the 'dry' districts of the Presidency, was characterized by the continued dominance of large landholders. Small *pattas* under Rs10, medium *pattas* between Rs 10 and Rs 50 and large *pattas* of over Rs 100 accounted for roughly 15, 21 and 24 percent of the cultivated area in 1904-05.¹⁶

Despite the continued dominance of large holdings, from the 1920s we find a trend towards easier access to land as suggested by the population to *patta* ratios.

Table 2. Population To *Patta* Ratio

1891	12.7	1936	14.5
1904	14.6	1941	09.1
1911	15.5	1951	10.7
1921	14.1		

Source: Rent Rolls and Census.

Small farm proliferation and some disengagement of large holders especially from wet cultivation is evident in the course of the 20th century.

Table 3. Distribution of holdings by *patta* classes
(Percentage of total cultivated acreage)

	1904-05		1929-30	
	Dry	Wet	Dry	Wet
Under Rs 10	19.9	7.89	19.47	10.36
Rs 10-50	20.97	21.52	20.44	21.33
Above Rs 50	59.14	70.59	60.09	68.31

Source: 'Statement showing rent roll for Malabar for Fasli 1320' in D-R Files D1071/Rev:1911 dated 11/10/1911; Madras Land Revenue Settlement Report, 1928-29 to 1938-39, Statement No. 20.

Small farm proliferation occurred not during the boom years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century but after agricultural prices started falling in the '20s. Further,

15 cf. Dilip Menon, *Caste, nationalism and communism in south India: Malabar 1900-1948*, Cambridge, 1994. According to Menon, Malabar was part of a larger south Indian economy based on "independent market-oriented small farmers rather than of agrarian dependents under the sway of rural magnates." (p.22)

16 See rent roll of government land for *fasli* 1315 in SAMP, 1904-05, Appendix II.

the sharp increase in land revenue demand at the time of the Resettlement further lowered the already falling returns from agriculture.

State Response to Threats of Agrarian Unrest

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed recurrent Mapilla violence. British officials vigorously debated on the nature of Mapilla “outrages,” attributing varying significance to agrarian discontent, poverty and fanaticism.

Alarmed by the spread of the Mapilla “outrages” to North Malabar, the failure of repressive measures and by this latest ominous warning of large scale agrarian unrest the Government decided to refer the petition to Wigram, the District Judge of South Malabar and Logan, the District Magistrate. Both of them opined that while there was no immediate threat of an uprising, agrarian discontent was undoubtedly the root cause of these outbreaks. In response to these views the Government appointed William Logan, the Collector of Malabar, as Commissioner to enquire into land tenures, tenancy rights, landlord exploitation and the problem of acquiring land for mosques and graves by the Mapillas. Logan reached the conclusion that though the *kanamdar* may have lost out substantially to the *janmi* because of a misrepresentation of his status in precolonial Malabar by the British administration, the person who needed State protection most was the actual cultivator. Marumakkatayam was sought to be so amended that all adults could dispose of their property at will.

In January 1884 a Special Commission was appointed to look into the whole question of tenures and suggest to the Government the lines on which legislative action was to be taken after Logan’s Report was circulated during 1883. In July 1884, the Commission submitted two of the four acts – a draft “Malabar Marriage and Succession Act” for Hindus, following the Marumakkatayam Law and a draft “Places of Public Worship Act” dealing with numbers 7 and 8 of Logan’s proposals.

The first attempt at state intervention in agrarian relations in Malabar by the British after their initial tenurial redefinitions was the Malabar Compensation for Tenants’ Improvement Act of 1887 (hereafter referred to as MCTIA of 1887 or Act I of 1887). This act was aimed to secure to tenants the full market value of the improvements made by them from the landlords at the time of eviction, and to check increasing evictions.

The next phase of tenancy reform, especially in the post Mappilla Revolt period was carried out under strong *kanamdar* pressure. The movement for agrarian reform was spearheaded by the Western-educated and relatively well off *kanamdars*. The tenancy question became a major demand in all varieties of political activity after 1900. Finally in October 1929 the Madras Legislative Council passed the Bill and in December 1930 the Viceroy gave his assent, bringing into force the Malabar Tenancy Act XIV of 1930 which virtually conceded all the demands of the *kanamdars*.

However, the Act did not benefit the poorer *verumpattom* tenants who were in most cases the actual cultivators of the soil. The interests of this section of the peasantry was taken up in the post-1930 period under left wing leadership, providing immediate prolegomena to the wide ranging radical reforms in independent Kerala.

The composition of agrarian classes changed substantially between 1911 and 1951. The number of "Cultivating Landowners" sharply increased at the cost of "Tenants" and "Rent Receivers." "Agricultural Labour" showed a small increase. This phenomenon may be explained as a cumulative result of land reforms, the partitioning of Nayar *taravads*, increased tenant resistance to landlord rackrenting and the move away from the agricultural sector into services by many of the erstwhile rent receivers. In Malabar we see that the caste hierarchy varied significantly between the garden cropped North and the wet paddy cultivating south. The caste was less rigid in the North compared to the South. This may have been due the reduced need as well as inability of the land controlling groups in the North to maintain as pronounced a ritual distance with the inferior castes. The lower labour inputs into garden production, the absence of marked peaks in the demand for labour coupled with the *janmi's* weaker economic hold over his under-tenants may have combined to making the North relatively less inequitable than the South.

The period immediately preceding the 1930 Act clearly shows these various forces at work. It has already been seen how in the garden-dominated North the *janmi-kanamdar* relation was politically, socially and economically less unequal than in the South. In this context when agricultural product prices increased sharply in the period between the War and Depression all tenurial classes would have tried to increase their land resources. Table 3 below suggests that in the wet paddy dominated *taluks* the

Table 4. CHANGES IN LANDHOLDING OF DIFFERENT TENURIAL GROUPS

Taluk Dominant crop	%age change in extent of land cultivated by		
	Janmis	Kanamdars	Kuzhikanamdars
Kottayam Garden	+ 6.02	+ 11.21	+ 13.96
Kurum- Garden branad	+ 1.61	+ 5.25	+ 5.26
Palghat Paddy	+14.21	- 2.41	-
Walla- Paddy vanad	+11.88	+ 8.55	-
Chira- Paddy kkal	+17.08	+ 3.58	- 7.56

Source: Computed on the basis of figures in *The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, Vol. I, 1927-28*, p. 150.

extent of land cultivated by the *janmis* increased at a much faster rate than that of the *kanamdars* (including sub-*kanamdars*) as opposed to the garden cropped *taluks*. In Palghat, which was characterized by the maximum level of inequality during the entire colonial period, *kanamdar* cultivated lands actually registered a decrease while that of the *janmis* increased greatly.

The period till the setting in of the Depression also shows an increasing number of applications under the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, the majority of them being under Section 22 dealing with the "Tenant's right to apply to court for execution of renewal deed." The volume of litigation was much greater in North Malabar than in the South.¹⁷ Thus we see clear evidence of a battle between different agrarian groups over the now increased returns from agriculture.

The litigation which mainly involved *janmi-kanamdar* problems declined all over Malabar from 1933 onwards when the Depression began to take effect. The higher number of litigations in North Malabar may be due to the *kanamdars* in the North being less servile and therefore more vocal than their counterparts in the South. The results of the litigations interestingly show a large number of cases being disposed of in favour of the defendant in the North and for the plaintiff in the South. Who benefited most from the increased returns was not decided so much by the exogenous forces of the market, but by the antecedent strength of the different agrarian groups. From the 1930s onwards one finds a district wide increase in the *kanamdars'* influence both in politics as well as in their control over the material resources.

These manifestations of the difference in the relative power of the landlords and the tenants in the North and the South is largely explainable in terms of the prevailing tenurial practices and the dominant crop regimes on which these systems were premised. The tenurial arrangements in North Malabar differed in two major respects from those in the South. The *kanam* amount in the South was invariably nominal and consequently the *kanam* was in the nature of a lease, unlike in North Malabar where *kanam* amounts were substantial, mostly mortgages for securing amounts advanced as loans, essentially mortgages with possession.¹⁸ This points to the lower economic strength of the *janmis* in the North. North Malabar unlike the South had a much larger number of self-cultivating farmers. While the *janmi* considered it an honour to have a number of *kanam* tenants under him, in the North it was only as a last resort that a *janmi* leased out his lands on *kanam*.¹⁹ Further the *kuzhikanam* tenure which guaranteed the cultivator some fixity of tenure and lower rent obligations was absent in the

17 *M.T.C. Report*, vol.I, p. 102.

18 "What is called a *kanam* in South Malabar is a tenure, but *kanam* as tenure is unknown in North Malabar. *Kanam* in North Malabar is nothing but mortgage. In South Malabar, generally the tenants approach the *janmis* for renewal or for lease of a *kanam*, but in North Malabar the *janmi* when he is need of money goes in search of a moneyed man to borrow money on the security of his property." *Malabar Tenancy Committee, Report*, 1947, p. 24.

19 *Ibid.*

paddy growing South. The lower rent burden and the greater fixity of tenure were probably designed as an incentive to undertake the heavy initial investments which had a long gestation period. During the years of steeply increasing prices in the immediately pre and post War periods we find that while the cultivated area expanded rapidly, capital inputs into agriculture declined both in absolute and relative terms. The steep climb in prices from 1910-11 stopped in 1919 to begin a period of marked decline reaching its nadir in 1933-34. For the district as a whole between 1891-92 and 1936 the inequality in the social distribution of landed property stagnated at a high level. The MCTIA of 1887 and of 1900 do not seem to have ameliorated or even arrested the increasing inequality index between 1891-92 and 1920-21. The magnitude of this increase was lower in the garden cropped North than in the paddy producing Southern *taluks*.

The Depression hit the Malabar cultivator, especially the wet paddy farmer, hard. The fall in rice prices was greater compared with that of garden produce. The drastically lowered returns from agriculture manifested itself in a liquidation of capital stock. When the price fall of the order of 100 per cent is compared with the wage decrease it appears that the agricultural labour suffered relatively less than the landowning farmers. The Resettlement of the district in 1930 and the consequent increase in the revenue burden coupled with the depressed state of the economy to further worsen the plight of the small cultivator.

The changes in agrarian relations in the one and a half centuries beginning in 1800 were marked by distinct phases. The early years of Company rule experienced a general depression. The recovery from the depression in the 1850s was accompanied by extreme *janmi* exploitation and pockets of militant peasant resistance. Heightened agrarian tensions forced the State to intervene to check the *janmis*. The result was the passing of some minimalist legislation, and the consequent rise of the well-to-do *kanamdars*. Kanamdars could take advantage of protective legislation in areas where *janmi* power was relatively weaker. These were generally in the garden dominated Northern *taluks*. The Depression was marked by some disengagement of large holders from wet cultivation, easier access to land and the entry of militant organized peasant resistance to landlordism. Combined with this the breakup of large Nayar *taravads* also contributed to the decline of landlordism, though not to very significant extent in the Malabar region. This period also witnessed a significant movement of population away from the agrarian sector.

The three sets of genealogies reproduced in the Appendix, albeit from a village in Cochin, are fairly representative of the changes over time in Nayar *taravads* that differed in terms of class or economic status. While Taravad A was older and wealthier, B and C were of more modest means. With a generational depth of six generations, these family records go back to the 1830s. The inferences made on the basis of these

records are based entirely on M.D. Chandrika's dissertation of 1971. (Chandrika 1971)

While generations 1 (1860s to the 1880s) was exclusively employed in the management of property and cultivation and in the local raja's army, generations 2 and 3 also continued with largely the same occupations. It is with generations 4 and 5 (that is after the 1940s) that there is a marked shift to more modern occupations such as urban professions. Similarly, in terms of education also we find that traditional schooling was predominant in the first 2 generations. From generation 3 onwards there is steady increase in the number attending modern schools and studying up to High School and even University. An interesting finding here is that the richest *taravad* was slower than the two poorer *taravads* in taking to modern education.

Table 5. Intergeneration Distribution of Property Transactions in Four Taravads

Generation	Transaction	Taravad 1	Taravad 2	Taravad 3	Taravad 4
1	Partition				a
	Mortgaging				
	Selling				
	Purchasing				
	Building House				
	Pooling of Resources				
	Giving Property to Wife and Children				
2	Partition	a		a	a
	Mortgaging				1f
	Selling			1m	
	Purchasing			1m	1f
	Building House				1f
	Pooling of Resources				1f
	Giving Property to Wife and Children				
3	Partition	ab	a	Abcde+4	b
	Mortgaging	2		3m+1f	2m
	Selling	2	1f	3m+4f	2m

	Purchasing	1f		3f	
	Building House			3f	
	Pooling of Resources				
	Giving Property to Wife and Children				
4	Partition	bc	a	bcde	b
	Mortgaging	4f		1f	
	Selling	4f	1f	3m	
	Purchasing	1m	1m	1m	1m+1f
	Building House	1m		3m+2f	2f
	Pooling of Resources Giving Property to Wife and Children	2m	1m	6m+7f	2m+2f
5	Partition	c	a		1
	Mortgaging	2f			2f
	Selling	1f	2f		2f
	Purchasing	1f			1f
	Building House	1m+1f	1f		1f
	Pooling of Resources	2f			1f
	Giving Property to Wife and Children	13/2f	1/5f		

Source: [Chandrika, 1971 #301@Table 15]

In the above table, selling usually followed a period of mortgaging. The pooling of resources by a man and a woman to set up a new house or the giving of property to children was clearly a latter-day development. Similarly, partitioning also became more frequent from the 1920s.

All these correlate remarkably closely to the macro changes that we have discussed. Political economic change in Malabar's agrarian economy thus emerges as a prime explanatory factor in explaining the changes in matrilineal inheritance and family practices.

Another factor was the close association between the Nayar-led tenancy movement against the *janmis* or landlords and its trenchant critique of the Nayar marriage practices. The latter was seen as a Brahmin device to subordinate the Nayars. Here we

see caste, social practices and tenurial contradictions, if not class contradictions, in operation. The majority of the Nambudiris, former chieftains and Nayar aristocracy were against any change in marriage customs. (Madras) Interestingly, North Malabar Nayars were against legislation while those from South Malabar supported legislating change. (Madras) This regional divide possibly arose because the North Malabar Nayars did not have to reckon with a powerful local Brahmin presence.

One aspect that we have not yet explored is the relationship between demographic growth in Malabar and the Nayar *taravad*. The Nayar *taravad* in the colonial period was predominantly based on agricultural income. Whatever other revenues it had from trade and miscellaneous extra-economic privileges had been lost by the nineteenth century. In this context increasing population pressure on a *taravad* with a limited quantity of cultivable land was a major strain.

The following table gives the population growth rates for the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

Table 6. Malabar Population, Rates of Growth

YEAR	Total Population	Annual Compound Rate of Growth (per cent)
1821	907575	N.A.
1827	1022195	2.00
1837	1165791	1.32
1851	1514909	1.89
1856	1602914	1.14
1861	1709081	1.29
1866	1856378	1.67
1871	2261250	4.03
1881	2365035	0.45
1891	2641928	1.11
1901	2790281	0.55
1911	3015119	0.78
1921	3098871	0.27
1931	3533944	1.32
1941	3929425	1.07
1951	4758342	1.90

Sources: (1874), Census, (Ward 1828).

Assuming the proportion of Nayars to have held roughly constant as a proportion of the total population, the secular rise in population at a rate faster than the expansion of cultivated area would have resulted in increasing pressure on the limited resources of

the *taravad*. In the face of this general Malthusian problem, the progressive move away from wet land and the more adverse impact of the Depression on the substantial farmer cumulated to severely affect the big *taravads*. One symptom of this was the increasing restlessness of the younger members of the *taravad* who increasingly resented and revolted against *karnavan* control. However, the revolt of the younger members of the *taravad* can by no means be seen as an exclusively Malthusian outcome. With Malabar being gripped by new political ideologies of change and growing modern education, a narrowing resource base and frequent cases of dictatorial and venal *karnvans*, it was most unsurprising that the younger Nayar men started chafing at this system.

Table 7. Change in Household Size

YEAR	Persons per house	
	Madras	West Madras Division
1891	5.3	5.7
1901	5.3	5.7
1911	5.3	5.6
1921	5.1	5.4
1931	5.1	5.6
1941	5.1	5.6
1951	5.3	6.1 ^a

Sources: Census of India, 1931, Madras, v. 14, Part I, p. 51; Census of India, 1941, v.2, Madras, p.5.

^aRefers to rural population, Census of India, 1951, Madras, v. 3, Part I, p. 15.

Notwithstanding this increase, a slightly decreasing trend is seen from 1891 to 1941. Given a rising population this suggests a trend towards the setting up of more households. Ethnographic studies also support the census information. Kathleen Gough’s study of changing household structure in a village in central Kerala between 1948-49 and 1964 suggests a decrease in complexity but only a slight decrease in size. Gough found that the average size of households decreased from 6.8 members in 1949 to 6.4 members in 1964. (Gough 1965) She also found greater reliance on individual occupations to be associated with the tendency to live in nuclear households or in simpler kinds of joint households. (Gough 1965)

The increase in the partitioning of Nayar *taravads* and the move away from agriculture towards the service sector appears to have been responsible for this phenomenon. This brings us to another factor which could have stimulated the postponement of marriage – the move away from agriculture towards the service sector. The agrarian population of Malabar constituted roughly sixty percent of the total population till the

1930s. By 1951 this declined to about fifty one percent. Interestingly, the decline in agricultural occupations was offset not by an increase in trade, industry or commerce but in the residual census category of 'Others.' This points to a marked increase in the service sector, an area which has not received any scholarly attention. This shift in the district's occupational structure acted as a catalyst in the break-up of the Nayar *taravad* and the demand for the abolition of matriliney. With the decline of landlord run large wet paddy cultivation, there was a trend towards the greater use of casual wage labour in place of tied labour.

Table 8. Caste-wise Child Woman Ratio

	1891	1921
Nambudiri	526	569
Cheruman	618	590
Tiyan	626	609
Parayan	659	639

Source: Census, 1891, 1921.

These estimates suggest a weakly correlated relationship between fertility on the one hand and occupation and property inheritance, on the other. Fertility exhibited some congruence with landholding patterns, caste and inheritance rules.

In terms of the sectoral movement, population engaged in agricultural occupations increased by about 33 per cent while that in non-agricultural occupations increased by 96.5 per cent between 1911 and 1951. Interestingly, the decline in agricultural population is offset not by an increase in those in trade, commerce or industry, but by residual census class of "Other services."

It has very often been argued in social sciences that economic development and modernisation have resulted in the decline of matriliney. Kathleen Gough for instance held the Nayar's incorporation into capitalist market economy and the growth of a landmarket as the main explanatory factors in the decline of matriliney in Malabar. [Gough, 1961] Fuller, based on his study of Ramankara village in Travancore disputes this. According him Gough's explanation of decline is erroneous – "if the entry of land into the market was determinant, why did *taravads* in Malabar persist as joint-property holders for so much longer than those in Travancore, when land entered the market in Malabar seventy years before it did in Travancore?" [Fuller, 1976 #276@146]

These two influential scholars in many ways represent the methodological limitations of conventional anthropology in describing historical processes. Ramanakara, Walluvanad or Ernad have been described and classified in minute ethnographical

detail by their respective authors. Unfortunately the moment they leave their little ethnographic havens, they forget that the explanations they are advancing either refer to scale of historical generalisation that is not helpful in understanding the questions posed any more clearly. Gough's example of the land market and Fuller's rejection of it is a case in point. As we have shown above, in Malabar, though land became a marketable commodity legally, the land market was the least developed of all the factor markets.²⁰ Further, the behaviour of the land market varied greatly between garden and paddy lands.²¹ Population increase, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, is another significant factor that has not been looked at in detail.

More significantly, the marked occupational shift away from agriculture (Varghese 1970) and the trend towards garden cropping from wet paddy cultivation have been missed by all the anthropological observers.

Leaving the confines of economic explanatory variables, which no one today would argue can wholly explain any process of social and cultural change, it is surprising that anthropologists have been reticent in exploring the Nayar-led tenancy agitations, especially when the Madras Government themselves associated tenurial reform with Nayar marriage practices. Only a carefully and detailed historical reconstruction of colonial Malabar can offer any substantive explanations for the decline of matriliney.

CONCLUSION

This paper has emphasised political economy as a significant explanatory variable. The above pages were an attempt to historicize the specificities of change that had been ignored in the shorthand of anthropological explanations. The focus on political economy is not to suggest that other changes were not important. Reasons of space and competence have been the chief reasons for limiting the scope of this essay.

Thus, spatially, socially and temporally variegated matriliney that was perceived to have been used to subordinate the Nayars to the Nambudris had become anachronistic with the rapid changes in economy and polity in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Having said that it should be emphasised that matriliney in real terms did provide a basis for the Nayar woman's security and independence. Unfortunately, to use a currently popular phrase, the decline of matriliney may be viewed as 'collateral damage' in the region's battle against class and caste oppression and integration into the wider national economy and polity.

20 G.O. No. 873 Mis. dated 1.5.1929, Revenue.

21 B.O.R. Pgs. No.80 (Press) dated 17.10.1930.

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