

## Land Relations and Economic Consequences : The Case of Malabar 1836 - 1880

V. P. Raghavan

This paper attempts to examine the land tenure policies pursued by the colonial rulers in Malabar during the period between 1836 and 1880 and their impact economy of the region.

The district of Malabar forming the northern part of modern Kerala state was an economically backward region in the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Conquered by the British in 1792, Malabar fell under the colonial yoke which lasted till the attainment of Independence in 1947.

The land tenure systems that prevailed in Malabar over centuries were unique in many respects. The absolute owners of land in Malabar were the landlords called *jermis*.

Under the traditional agrarian system of Malabar, the *jermis* who held land for themselves were letting out to others for cultivation after keeping a small portion as household farms. The peculiarity of tenurial systems in Malabar lies in the existence of a large chain of intermediaries between the owners of land and the cultivating tenants.

The traditional system of land tenures in Malabar worked in perfect order. The *jermis*, the *kanakkaran* and the actual cultivator were three classes connected with the land tenure system. The customary order was determined by the mutually agreed equation called *kana-jerma-maryada* the unwritten laws of the agrarian relations in the country.

The traditional system of land tenures in Malabar received a great shock when the British rulers introduced their edition of land revenue administration. Since the British were more concerned with raising the land revenue, the *jermis* were armed with more rights and powers. They recognised the *jermis* absolute ownership right in land as sacrosanct relegating the *kanakkars* to a place of a mere mortgagee or leasee.

As the *jermis* became a powerful and privileged class, they began to evict the tenants with the intention to earn higher rent by means of renewal of the *kanam* tenure.

The colonial policy recognising *jermis* as the absolute owners of the land and the wrong interpretation given to the various tenures by the British Courts and Administrations had an adverse impact on the agrarian economy of Malabar.

One of the major consequences of the colonial land tenure policy was that it legalised feudal land relations and made *jermisa* powerful