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**ECONOMIC LIFE  
IN A MALABAR VILLAGE**

**Study in Indian Rural Economic Organization**

BY

**S. SUBBARAMA AIYAR, M.A., Dip. Econ.**

*Gokhale Prizeman*

*Research Scholar, University of Madras  
or Lecturer in Economics, Madras Christian College*

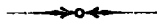
WITH

**A FOREWORD**

BY

**GILBERT SLATER, M.A., D.Sc.**

*Professor of Indian Economics, University of Madras (1916-21)*



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To  
My Gurus  
E. M. M.  
and  
G. S.

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## FOREWORD.

**I**T was in January 1916, when I took up my duties as Professor of Indian Economics in the University of Madras, that I first made the acquaintance of Mr. S. Subbarama Iyer, then an under-graduate student in the Madras Christian College. He was perhaps the most conspicuous of those who took up with enthusiasm my suggestion that the study of Indian Economics should begin in the Indian villages, and that each student should set himself to master the economic facts and to study the economic problems of his own village during his University vacations. Since then I have followed with interest Mr. Subbarama Iyer's career and have noted the unflinching diligence and enthusiasm with which he has pursued this line of investigation.

The part of India to which Mr. Subbarama Iyer belongs by birth, though by descent he belongs to the Tamil country on the other side of India, is one of extraordinary beauty and interest. The tropical sun and the unflinching rains of the south-west monsoon make Malabar a natural garden of extraordinary fertility. The little State of Cochin which occupies a central position on the south-west coast, dividing Travancore on the south from British Malabar on the north, with an area of only 1,479 square miles, of which much is rugged and rocky hill-side, and a good deal is unexploited jungle, yet has a population of 900,000, although it is destitute of mining industries and large scale manufacture, and even its port, the town of Cochin, is outside the State and in British territory. Practically the whole of this dense population may be described as being either directly, or at one remove only, dependent on agriculture. And yet the visitor sees no obvious evidence of any meticulous care to cultivate every possible cultivable plot.

To the sociologist the Malabar country is a veritable museum. Even more than that of other parts of India,

Malabar social life has a property analogous to that of the sands of Egypt, of retaining free from decay every ancient custom which has ever existed there. I remember, for example, visiting a Nair house in the town of Trichur. Inside the house I was received by an young lady highly educated in English, French and Music, and made the acquaintance of a twelve-year old boy studying Algebra with a tutor. In the garden outside there was a cobra shrine to which still a Nambudri Brahman came regularly to do *puja* to the cobras, perpetuating one of the most ancient and primitive forms of religious observances to be found on the face of the earth. It is impossible in Malabar, if it is possible anywhere, to disentangle the economic, religious and sociological aspects of the life of the people, and reserve each aspect for special study. Thus one of the dominant facts, both from the economic and from the sociological point of view in Malabar, is the *Marumakkattayam* system of inheritance. Its origin appears obvious. When first in those countries which were the earliest pioneers in settled industry and civilization, Egypt, Babylonia and India, human beings endeavoured to supplement the precarious spoils of the chase by growing crops of wheat or rice, it was the women who dug and hoed the land. The most ancient law of inheritance is that man's tools are inherited by boys and woman's tools by girls. Hence cultivated land as woman's tool, among those pioneers in agriculture who entered the agricultural stage direct from the hunting stage and not through an intermediate pastoral stage, naturally passed from mother to daughter. With increase of population the relative importance of agriculture increased, and that of hunting decreased, until the stage was reached in which property in cultivated land was the important form of property, and this was owned by families based on kinship on the mother's side.

In Babylonia and in Egypt this institution, which has been given the question-begged name of *Matriarchate*, disappeared under the influence of conquest by or war against

pastoral tribes; and in fact it is an unstable institution, which can only last under conditions of undisturbed equilibrium. But Malabar is peculiarly protected by mountains, jungles and the sea, and until the Portuguese came was exempt from foreign conquest. Hence in Malabar we find still living a vigorous form of social organization which perished in Egypt and Babylonia thousands of years ago. To what extent does it deserve to be called *Matriarchate*? The term we find is not altogether inappropriate. The titular head of the family or *Tarvad* is the eldest woman, but the actual administration of the family property is in the hands of some male member of the family, usually the eldest man. The women enjoy a high degree of freedom and social equality with men. The young Nair girls, who is married by her mother usually at the age of 12 to some stranger who may be paid a rupee for taking part in the ceremony, ordinarily never sees her titular husband again, but is entitled to bestow her favours upon any one of the lovers who court her for as long as she pleases, and when she chooses is free to transfer her affections to another, subject only to the rules that she must be content with one mate at a time, and the favoured lovers must all be either of her own caste or of a higher caste. All her children, whatever their paternity, are entitled to maintenance from the family property, and her daughters transmit the same right to their children. Naturally therefore in their very bearing the Nair women evince an exceptional spirit of independence and self-respect; naturally also they show exceptional readiness to avail themselves of new facilities for education.

Economically the *Marumakkattayam* system of inheritance tends to a high rate of natural increase, and to the multiplication of a class of young men who may be described as very poor gentlemen. The family tends to increase in numbers in excess of the resources of the family property, but the young men are not trained to labour, and if they have to labour they prefer to do so far away from their



native villages. Hence the Malayali is scattered over India, occupying a great variety of positions, from high offices of State to service in the cheap refreshment rooms known as "coffee hotels".

Another institution also of fundamental importance, both economically and sociologically, is the intense demarcation of castes which prevails in Malabar and the fact that those who by their manual labour mainly support the population are untouchables. The fact that the caste system is more highly developed and is more rigid in Malabar than in any other part of India, is, by the way, a convincing though disregarded disproof of the common theory that caste arose through successive conquests of the Indian plains by invaders penetrating through the north-west passes.

Though naturally protected against foreign conquest or dominance, Malabar is also very fairly situated for commercial contact with the rest of the world. The backwaters and the regularity of the winds, which during several months in a year give Malabar a sheltered shore, combined with a great abundance of fish, made this coast, like that of Norway, and the Greek and Malaysian archipelagos, one of the world's schools for the first elements of navigation; and the Cromlechs and Kist-Vaens of Cochin show that contact by sea-trade with distant countries long preceded the first dawn of history. Perhaps there has never been a time ever since in which there has not been some sort of trade by sea between Malabar and Mesopotamia. The Palghat gap again, between the high tablelands of the Nilgiris on the north and the Palnis on the south, gives an easy means of communication with the Karnatic plains. Among the sociological legacies of this ancient intercourse is the church of the Syrian Christians, who claim that their church was founded by the Apostle Thomas, and there is good evidence to show that it must at least be nearly as ancient as this claim would assert; and the community of Jews of Cochin who were settled there at a still earlier period, though their tradition that their

settlement took place in the days of king Solomon can hardly be accepted.

The pepper of Malabar has been for centuries one of the great stimulants to European mercantile enterprise ; and to-day harbour works are in progress, which will enable ocean-going ships to sail over the bar and enter the great sheltered harbour that lies between the towns of Cochin and Ernaculam. But while thus in touch with the trade and civilization of the world, Malabar still has, in such castes as the *Nayadis*, some of the most savage and primitive folk in the world ; and the *Veddahs* of Travancore, like those of Ceylon, nest like birds in the trees.

Hence society in Malabar is extraordinarily complex, and this complexity is reproduced, as Mr. Subbarama Iyer has shown, even in individual villages.

The essential economic problem of this country may perhaps be stated paradoxically as resulting from the fact that there is little recognition among the people of such a thing as an economic problem. One caste, it is true, has recognized in its institution the economic aspect of life, and solved the economic problem in a very efficient way. The Nambudri Brahmans exercise social domination over other castes ; they also hold definite rights of ownership over the land ; they effectively guard against impoverishment by the rigid rule that only the eldest son in each family may marry. The younger sons court Nair women, and their children are maintained by the Nair *Tarvads*. But so far as the other castes are concerned they live according to hereditary customs and by their hereditary occupations, taking little care for the morrow ; and when they become too numerous for support even by the extreme bounty of Nature in their own land, they betake themselves to other countries, near or distant, to sink or swim in the current of existence. But age-long custom is giving way under the pressure of present-day necessity and external influences. *Tarvads* frequently break up. There is a tendency for

Nairs to enter into permanent monogamous marriages. Many a Nair father insists upon leaving property to his own sons and himself providing for their future ; and even the depressed and untouchable castes are now beginning to insist on being treated as human beings and to claim access to schools and markets, and to the unrestricted use of the public roads. The past of Malabar is full of mystery ; but the future is equally full of interest and uncertainty.

GILBERT SLATER.

## PREFACE.

**T**HIS book aims at describing the essential features of economic life in rural Malabar. Dr. Harold Mann has familiarized us with the method of making an intensive survey of the economic conditions of a single village. A similar survey, with some modifications, of a typical village, Nelluvaya in the northern-most Taluk of the Cochin State, where paddy is the principal crop of cultivation, is embodied in this volume.

Too much emphasis, however, should not be laid on the conditions of a particular village however typical it may appear to be for some purposes. It is well-known that in India locality is not the unifying bond of organization, but kinship and caste with which is associated occupation as well. Again, it is not true that the "village system", as loosely used by some writers, was at any time economically self-sufficient; inter-village and, in some cases, inter-provincial movements of goods were quite well-known. A village producing paddy, for instance, may depend on other neighbouring villages for cloth, oil, chillies, salt and other articles of necessaries, comforts and luxuries of life which were usually produced by hereditary castes of workers who tended to congregate in convenient centres of trade from where peddlers used to go round hawking the commodities from door to door.

It is necessary, therefore, to take a wider sweep in our investigations and naturally attention is mainly paid to conditions in the Cochin State in which our village is situated. But the general description, in all essential points, applies to conditions in the rest of Malabar. In several parts of Travancore, the southern Taluks of the Cochin State and in the fringe of the coast of "British" Malabar, where coconut is the principal crop of cultivation and facilities for fishing abound, conditions of production are somewhat different, but the general facts of economic life here described are of equal applicability.

That there is a fundamental unity in Indian civilization is sufficiently established. It remains to point out that in the policy of open-door that Malabar kept from the beginning as regards foreign commerce and intercourse long before the English East India Company was started, the way in which the diverse castes, creeds and races never import for the most part their social and religious differences into spheres of economic relationship, and, at the present time, in its preponderance of agriculture, the recent decay of some indigenous industries, the consequent pressure of the population on the soil and the unique opportunity that this affords for a few big landlords and temple-estates to rack-rent their tenants, the unequal distribution of village resources brought about by this fact as well as by the collection of Government *kists* which are mostly spent on a highly centralized administrative machinery, the extreme dependence of the rural classes on imported commodities and the consequent withdrawal of funds from rural areas to export and import centres and even to places outside India, the low earning capacity of the majority of the people and their consequent inability to make savings, the comparative absence of institutions for facilitating investment in rural industries—in these features of its past and present economic situation, Malabar is an epitome of India.

It is with great pleasure and gratitude I acknowledge the assistance I received from Dr. Gilbert Slater who contributes a Foreword to this volume. This work, undertaken in fact at his suggestion, had the benefit of his perusal and criticism at every stage of its progress. I have also to acknowledge with gratitude the help I received from Mr. I. Raman Menon, Director of Agriculture, Cochin State, who made valuable suggestions in the chapter on "Crops, Cultivation. Vegetation". I am solely responsible, however, for the subject-matter and its arrangement, comments and criticisms as embodied in this volume.

S. SUBBARAMA IYER.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IV.

I am indebted to Mr. I. Raman Menon, Superintendent of Agriculture, Cochin, for the following note :—

There are no scientific names for the several varieties of paddy met with in the State or for the matter of fact in any other Province.

I would give the following general classification :—

(a) Wild paddy found growing in ponds and marshes.

(b) Cultivated paddy varieties.

The second set comprises the following :—

(1) Hill paddy (*Modan*, *Puravka*) sown in dry lands or hills with the monsoon and harvested in September-October.

(2) Wet land paddy—Wet land paddy may roughly be divided into two main classes :—

(a) Those sown with the monsoon and harvested in August to October (*Viruppu*).

(b) Those sown with the monsoon or later and harvested in December to February (*Mundakan*).

*Viruppu* varieties are also suitable for sowing in *Puncha* or *Kole* lands (sown in December to February and harvested in April-May).

The above classification of varieties of paddy is based on the duration of growth.

It is found that the duration varies from 2 months to 10 months.

*Navara*.—This can be harvested in 2 months to 75 days from date of sowing and it is possible to grow this type of

paddy with more or less success at any time of the year. Generally it appears as a late *Viruppu* crop as well as a late *Puncha* or *Kole* crop. Sometimes it is taken as a late *Mundakan* crop. Then comes *Cheera* which is a 3 months' crop. This too is generally grown as a *Viruppu* as well as a *Puncha* crop. Occasionally it is grown as a *Mundakan* crop as well. I have also seen it sown and harvested in Thulam (October to November).

There are also varieties of duration varying from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to  $5\frac{1}{2}$  months.

All varieties which are grown as *Mundakan* and harvested from December to February are of durations varying from  $6\frac{1}{2}$  to 10 months.

Thus the whole art consists in finding out the correct type and growing it, in such a way as to get the crop ready for the harvest at a favourable season. The paddy should generally be ready for harvest in months in which the rainfall should be low. *Chingom* and *Kanni* fall between two monsoons and are not generally so rainy as the other rainy months of the two monsoons.

The type of paddy grown depends on the following:—

- (1) Nature of the soil,
- (2) Supply of water, and
- (3) Availability of labour, both at sowing and harvest time.

With a plentiful supply of water and manures one can grow any type of paddy in any type of lands. Except in the Chittur Taluk there is no irrigation scheme of any importance in the State. The ryot depends on the monsoon. The sowing of the 1st crop (*Viruppu*) thus commences soon after a good shower in *Medom* (April-May). He expects his first crop to be ready for harvest before the end of *Kanni* (September-October), so that he may plant his second crop which

should ordinarily be ready for harvest at the end of *Dhanu* (December-January). If the ryot is assured of a plentiful supply of water in *Vrichigom* and *Dhanu* (November-January), he can raise a better crop and thus delay his harvest till the end of *Makaram* (January-February). It will be seen that, in the matter of selection of the types of paddy, the ryot has gained sufficient experience and is generally quite sure of his ground.

Another important matter which governs has action is labour. The cultivation of paddy is generally a very tedious piece of work. It is not possible either to sow or transplant or harvest a large extent and hence he distributes work by selecting proper types of paddy so that his sowing and harvest progress gradually without any hitch.

Long-duration types are sown first in *Medom* (April-May). These are followed by other types which are of less duration and these are again followed by types which could be harvested in the course of 60 to 75 days.

The following table illustrates the whole method :—

Type of Paddy	Date of Sowing	Date of Harvest
Aryan Velutharikaz- hama	} 5½ months ... Medom (Apr.-May)	Kanni (Sept.-Oct.)
Vattan ...		Early in Chingom (Aug.)
Chemvavu ...	4 months ... Medom-Edavom (April-June)	Chingom (middle) (Aug.)
Cheera	... Edavom-Mithunom (May-July)	Chingom-Kanni (Aug.-Oct.)
Navara	... Mithunam-Karki- tagom (June-Aug.)	Kanni (Sept.-Oct.)



## MUNDAKAN (Single Crop and Second Crop).

Sowing in Nursery	Transplantation	Harvest
Chittani, Mesathari, etc. Mithunom (June-July) ..	End of Karkitagom and early in Chingom (Aug.)	Dhanu (Dec.-Jan.)
<b>Second Crop.</b>		
Chemban and Athiyan Karkitagom (July-Aug.)..	Chingom and Kanni (Aug.-Oct.)	Dhanu (Dec.-Jan.)
Cheriyaryan and other short-duration varieties. }	These are sown broad-cast in Kanni (Sept.-Oct.) and harvested in Dhanu (Dec.-Jan.).	

*Navara* also is sown in *Thulam* (October-November) and harvested in Dhanu (December-January).

It may be stated as a general rule that no type of paddy whose duration of growth is less than 3 months is transplanted. It is also the rule that the paddy should be in the nursery for one week for every month of its growing period, *i.e.* to say, if the type is one which takes four months to ripen it should be in the nursery for four weeks. Paddy which is transplanted, will generally be late by one fortnight for harvest.

We have on the West Coast any number of types of paddy to suit our different types of lands and the various conditions. The introduction of foreign varieties has to be done with great care. So far I have not come across with any satisfactory exotic type.

The following is a list of pests affecting paddy :—

Common Name	Scientific Name	Nature of Attack
Rice-bug ..	<i>Leptocorisa Varicornis</i> ..	Sucks the grain in its milky stage.
Rice-case-worm ..	<i>Nymphula Depunctalis</i> ..	Attacks growing plants in the young stage.
Rice-stem-borer ..	<i>Schoenobius Bipunctifer</i>	Attacks the flowering stage.
Grass-hopper ..	<i>Hieroglyphus Bania</i> ..	Attacks leaves and flowers.
Rice-beetle ..	<i>Hispa Armigera</i> ..	Attacks leaves.
Leaf-worm ..	<i>Parnara Matheas</i> ..	Attacks leaves.
Swarming caterpillars ..	<i>Spodoptera Mauritia</i> ..	Attacks leaves (very common in Puncha and Kole lands).

All these are more or less serious pests of paddy.



No. 2.—LAND.

No.	HOLDING (OWN)	LAND TAKEN OUT FOR CULTIVATION	GOVERNMENT REVENUE	CROP
	Extent	Extent	Land Revenue	Yield
	Nature of the soil (wet, dry, etc.)	Nature of the soil (wet, dry, etc.)	Water-Cess	Remarks
	Blocks	Blocks	Others	
	Value	Nature of lease	Landlord's Share	
			Tenant's Share	

No. 3.—DEAD STOCK.

No.	Agricultural Implements	Water Lifts	Wells	Other Reservoirs of Water
	Enter the Varieties here	Enter the Varieties here	No.	No.
			Depth	Quantity of Water
			Quantity of Water	Uses
			Uses	Cost
			Cost	No.
			Quantity of Water	Quantity of Water
			Uses	Uses
			Cost	Cost
	Remarks			

No.—4.—LIVE-STOCK.

No.	Cows					She-Bufferaloes					Bullocks	Buffaloes		Sheep, Goats		Figs		Donkeys		Horses		Poultry		Remarks		
	Number	Milking	Non-Milking	Price	Calves	Number	Milking	Non-Milking	Price	Calves	Number	Price	Number	Price	Number	Price	Number	Price	Number	Price	Number	Price	Number		Price	

No. 5.—INCOME AND INDEBTEDNESS.

No.	INCOME					INDEBTEDNESS					REMARKS	
	Earning Members		Occupation	Amount of Annual Income		Total Amount		Security	Rate of Interest	Source of Borrowing		Purpose of Loan
	Men	Women		Kind	Money	Kind	Money					
												Note particularly the amount of temporary loans — in money, food-grains, seed grains, etc. — and their rates of interest.

## Measures and Weights used in Cochin.\*

### I. Measures of Capacity.—

#### DRY MEASURE.

COCHIN.	MADRAS PRESIDENCY.
2 Ollaks = 1 Uri.	41 $\frac{2}{3}$ fluid ounces = 1 Madras
2 Uris = 1 Nali.	Seer.
3 Nalis = 1 Padi.	62 $\frac{1}{2}$ fluid ounces = 1 Madras
4 Nalis = 1 Edangali	Measure.
	(standard) 8 Madras measures =
10 Edangalis = 1 Para.	1 Malabar Para.

*Note.*—1 Edangali contains two rathals of raw rice.

#### LIQUID MEASURE.

4 thavis	= 1 Nali.
4 nalis	= 1 Edangali (standard).
10 edangalis	= 1 Para.
12 edangalis	= 1 Chotana.
25 chotanas	= 1 Candy.

*Note.*—1 Edangali contains 44 ounces of water.

### II. Table of Weights.—

Used in weighing all articles other than gold, silver, precious stones and medicines.

6 $\frac{1}{2}$ rupees weight	= 1 Palani.
6 $\frac{1}{4}$ palams or 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ Rs. weight	= 1 Rathal (standard)
20 rathals	= 1 Thulam.
25 rathals	= 1 Maund.
20 maunds	= 1 Candy.

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\* These are the standards prescribed by the State in Cochin, but there are several varieties of local measures, still in use, in British Malabar, and Travancore, and in different taluks of Cochin itself, all bearing the same names as *Nalis*, *Edangalis*, *Paras*, etc.

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