Chapter VI

FROM MILITARIST-FEUDAL TO COLONIAL-FEUDAL ECONOMY

(1)

We have seen in earlier chapters that the Empire of the Cheras and the Empire of the Perumals were artificial efforts to create a centralised administration and that they failed to stabilise themselves because of their very artificiality. We have also seen that what made those earlier efforts artificial was the absence of the economic basis for such a centralised administration in those earlier days—the need for common irrigation as in other parts of India—which however was, in the later centuries, compensated for by the creation of a national market. It was on the soil of this national market that the petty feudal chieftains of Kerala were, one by one, being devoured and bigger kingdoms set up.

The establishment of British rule reacted on this process in a peculiar way. On the one hand, it accelerated the creation of the national market and made the biggest transformation in the mode of production, i.e., it replaced the production of articles mainly for one's own use by production for the market. On the other hand, it prevented the natural development from the production of commodities to capitalist production—production of commodities on the basis of modern large-scale industry and the application of modern science to agriculture. The result is that, while production as a whole has taken gigantic strides forward, this advance of production has not made those fundamental changes in the social order that usually accompany the capitalist transformation of a country's economy.

This can be seen from the fact that, even after a century and a half of British rule, Kerala still has a predominantly agrarian economy. The prosperity and poverty of individuals

and families are even today judged on the basis of how much land they own, as they used to be judged in pre-British days.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, 1173 families (out of a total of 1 lakh families whose family budgets were investigated into) had an annual income of Rs. 1200 and above. Out of these 1173 families, however, there are 520 families whose means of livelihood are the professions, i.e., occupations which are not productive in the scientific sense of the term. Out of the remaining 653 families, 325 are those whose main source of income is land.

According to the same survey, there are 20,199 families with an annual income of below Rs. 60. 11,353 of these are absolutely landless. In the next income group (Rs. 60 to Rs.120), there are 38,992 families of which 17,533 are landless. Thus the two lowest income groups (which together constitute 60% of the total families) have 56.8% and 44.9% respectively with absolutely no land. On the other hand, in the two highest income groups—that above Rs. 3600 and that between Rs. 2400 and Rs. 3600—8% (15 families out of 181) and 15% (23 out of 183) alone are absolutely landless.

Furthermore, in the 4 lowest income groups (those below Rs. 300 per year) together, 43% (38, 877 families out of 90,152) are landless while in the 4 highest income groups (those above Rs. 1,200) only 16 per cent (190 families out of 1,173) are landless.

According to an earlier (1931) survey, the total national income of Travancore is just over Rs. 20 crores of which over 50 per cent (Rs. 10½ crores), is income from land (including wages of agricultural labourers, rent of landlords, interest on capital and profit of cultivation). When it is borne in mind that the balance includes the income of professionals and such other categories as are not productive in the scientific sense of the term, it becomes clear that the main source of national income is agriculture.

Figures for such over-all economic conditions are not available for the other parts of Kerala—Cochin and Malabar. In 1936, however, the Government of Cochin conducted a survey of some typical villages in the State. Figures collected in the course of this survey show that in the case of the rural economy of Cochin, agriculture plays a predominant role.

For example, the total assets of all the families in Anthikkad village are valued at Rs. 12,58,788. Out of this, Rs. 7,13,946 or 56.7 per cent is the value of land itself. Similarly, the villages of Chundal, Eruttempadi, Pattancheri, Venganallur, Vallivattom and Tiruvazhiyad have 63.7 per cent, 53.7 per cent, 42.5 per cent, 54.2 per cent, 66.7 per cent, 62.4 per cent respectively of their total assets in the form of value of land. Adding up the figures of all these 7 villages, we find that 55.4 per cent of the total assets (Rs. 40,59,704 out of Rs. 73,68,753) is value of land.

This is not all. There are other items that should be taken into account—the value of buildings, improvements on land, agricultural implements, and amounts lent out. Some of these items are solely and directly related to land (value of improvements on land and value of agricultural implements) while others are also almost entirely connected with land (e.g., the major part of amounts lent out is the indebtedness of either cultivators or landlords). It will therefore be reasonable to include these also in the category of assets based on land. All these together constitute 91.4 per cent, 95.9 per cent, 85.3 per cent, 90 per cent, 92.8 per cent, 93.6 per cent and 95.3 per cent respectively in the above villages.

It may thus be taken that no less than 90 per cent of the total assets of an average village in Cochin is directly or indirectly related to agriculture. If it is borne in mind that even such instruments of production as the handloom, other implements of artisans (carpenter, smith, fisherman, boatman, etc.), as well as the assets of some of the small industrial establishments that exist in the village, are included in the balance, it will be seen that, in the villages of Cochin, it is agriculture that dominates over other forms of economic activity.

The inclusion of urban areas will of course relieve this domination of land to a certain extent. But it would not alter the picture basically. For, apart from the two textile mills and one large scale Oil-Soap Works (Tatas), most of the industrial establishments in Cochin are of small or medium size. It would therefore be correct to say that even if the rural and urban areas are added together, it is agriculture that dominates over other forms of economic activity.

(2)

The domination of land over economy as a whole does not however mean that land plays the same role in economy

as it did in pre-British days. Land has, on the other hand, undergone a big transformation.

It is of course true, as we have already seen, that, unlike other parts of India, in Kerala land had started developing as private property even in pre-British days. But this development of proprietary interests in land was taking place within the framework of a predominantly natural economy. The major part of what was produced on land was being consumed within the village or in the neighbouring villages while the major part of consumption goods was locally-produced. This order of natural economy received a shattering blow from the British rulers and, as a consequence thereof, land is no more being used for the production of goods used by the producer himself, but for the production of commodities.

Take rice, 4 or 5 centuries ago, Kerala was self-sufficient with regard to this primary and most essential need of human life. Today, however, local production is less than 50 per cent of consumption, nearly 60 per cent of the local needs being supplied from abroad. No other province in India is so deficit as regards food as Kerala.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the average annual import of rice during the 7 years 1050 to 1056 Malayalam Era (1874-5 to 1880-1 A.D.) was to the value of Rs. 12,11,611. This grew in the next 5 decades to Rs. 15,00,380; Rs. 24,70,120; Rs. 52,22,378; Rs. 141,61,305; and Rs. 264,20,189 respectively. Leaving for the moment the last two decades (1911-12 to 1930-31) as those falling in the period of the First World War and after, it is to be noted that the value of rice imported per year rose, in the course of 37 years (1874-75 to 1910-11) from Rs. 12,11,611 to Rs. 52,22,378, i.e. more than a four-fold increase.

Just as in the case of rice, so in the case of other consumption goods, imports have grown tremendously. According to the same publication, 37.5 per cent of imports into Travancore in the year 1113 Malayalam Era (1937-38) consisted of foodgrains. The import of cloth, kerosene and tobacco account for 11 per cent, 7 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, thus adding up to 59.2 per cent for the most essential consumption goods. (It is of course true that these import figures include imports from other parts of India but that does not affect the generalisation made here, since this qualification would apply to total imports also. Besides, the major part of foodgrains imported consists of Burma and Siam rice.)

Along with this increase in the imports of rice and other essential consumption goods, there has also taken place an increase in the exports of certain commodities. For example:

—The export of coffee in 1029 Malayalam Era (1853-54 A.D.) was to the value of Rs. 6,553. It grew to Rs. 37,370 in the next 8 years and to Rs. 1,87,875 in the next 76 years.

—There was no export of rubber, tea or cardamom in 1029 Malayalam Era (1853-54 A.D.). But by the year 1113 (1937-38), these commodities were exported to the value of Rs. 74,89,464; Rs. 2,25,61,823 and Rs. 33,01,502 respectively.

—The export of cocoanut oil rose from Rs. 1,27,395 in 1853-4 to Rs. 1,34,649 in 1861-62 and to Rs. 59,51,499 in 1937-38. Similarly, the export of coir rose from Rs. 92,427 to Rs. 5,93,926 and Rs. 1,64,10,624 in the same period.

Furthermore, just as 59.2 per cent of the imports into Travancore in 1937-38 consisted of essential consumption goods, so did 65.1 per cent of that year's exports consist of raw materials or semi-manufactured goods made out of the cash crops produced in Kerala. (Exact figures are: tea—23.9 per cent; rubber—8 per cent; other plantation products—4.5 per cent; coir—17.4 per cent; cocoanut oil—6.3 per cent; copra and other cocoanut produce—5.8 per cent. Thus, plantations account for 36.4 per cent of Travancore's exports while a further 29.5 per cent is made up by cocoanut produce.)

Such increases in the exports of these commodities have been based on tremendous changes in the pattern of agriculture—increase in acreage under and in the volume of production of cash crops.

The rapidity with which the cultivation of certain cash crops is increasing can be seen from the following extracts from the *Travancore State Manual:*

"According to official estimates, the area under cocoanut cultivation in 1934-35, was 5,66,590 acres which was about 50 per cent higher than what it was 16 years previously. This is rather an under-estimate." (Vol. III, p. 351).

"The first clearing for coffee in Travancore was made by D. Munro in the Rope Estate in 1862." (Ibid., p. 370).

"Tea is a very important plantation crop in Travancore. Although the tea bush has been cultivated for over a century in Northern India, it is only within comparatively recent times that it has been introduced into Southern India. It is difficult to say where tea was first planted in South India. But, if Travancore cannot actually claim this distinction for certain, at all events it was flourishing in this State within a very few years of its first introduction in the South." (Ibid., p. 372)

The *State Manual* also points out that, while the acreage under paddy in 1936-37 was 6,63,184, cocoanut was a close second to it with its 5,77,418 acres. The three plantation crops of rubber (97,125 acres), tea (77,726 acres) and coffee (6,279 acres) together constitute more than ¼ of the acreage under paddy. The acreage under cocoanut, sugarcane, rubber, tea, coffee, pepper and ginger together is 8,16,335 which is 123 per cent of the acreage under paddy (6,63,184).

There is one crop which is partly a food and partly an industrial crop—tapioca. Part of it is used as food (this is the staple food of the poor people and is taken in place of vegetables by even the upper classes; its use as food increased enormously during the war and famine) while a part of it is made into starch and exported to Bombay and other industrial centres for industrial use. Even if the whole of this is considered as used for food, acreage under food crops (paddy and tapioca together) will be only 10,86,876, i.e., 2,70,541 more than the major cash crops.

Similarly, in Malabar, the total acreage under paddy in the year 1937-38 was 8,64,825. The three cash crops of cocoanut, arecanut and pepper alone together come to 5,32,787 acres, i.e., nearly 2|3 of the acreage under paddy. If to this is added the acreage under other cash crops as well as the big plantations (tea, coffee, oranges, etc.) in Wynaad (which are as large and extensive as the plantations in Travancore), the total acreage under cash crops in Malabar will come to nearly 50 per cent of the total land under cultivation (Figures for Malabar are taken from the 1940 *Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee*).

It is thus clear that agriculture in Kerala is directed towards the production of cash crops that are to be sold in the world market and that only the barest minimum of goods are produced for the purpose of local consumption. Every peasant is today dependent on the conditions of the world market in a two-fold way: he has to buy commodities produced abroad; he has to sell his produce abroad.

(3)

The substitution of natural economy by commodity economy has naturally meant the growth of certain strata of society which were either totally absent or very insignificant in the old days.

Writing in 1820, Ward and Corner said in their *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*: "Subsistence is almost entirely derived from agricultural labour, nor do the temptations of commerce attract even the wealthier classes from rural pursuits which are most esteemed, the handicraft professions being abandoned to the lower ranks."

Today, however, a large section of people has grown up whose main source of livelihood is trade, transport, etc. For instance, the 1831 Economic Census of Travancore shows that, while the biggest section of "persons following different occupations" among the earners is still "agricultural labour", the next biggest section is "Trade". (2,63,385 and 1,20,293). It also shows that, while those employed in the production of primary commodities (i.e. agricultural labour, estate 'coolies', unskilled labourers, persons employed in the exploitation of minerals and fishermen) add up to a total of 4,28,321, those who take up tertiary occupations (i.e., transport, trade, fish trade, public administration, professions and liberal arts) add up to a total of 2,41,935. This 2,41,935 employed on tertiary occupations is 40,276 more than those engaged in secondary occupations (industries) which is 201,659. Trade, transport, professions and arts have thus become a far bigger force today than they were over a century ago.

A change has also taken place in the very character of agricultural labour and handicrafts: while the semi-serf agricultural labourers in pre-British days were tied to particular plots of land and their masters, while each of the handicraftsmen was tied to a particular village where he had to work and whose inhabitants had to feed him, the British brought about, although to a limited extent, production relations based on wage-labour and capital.

It has already been shown how the cultivation of food crops has been and is being replaced by the cultivation of cash crops. This has naturaly led to the growth of capitalist farms.

The most developed form of these capitalist farms is the plantation — tea, rubber, coffee, cardamom, lemon grass etc. According to the Travancore Depression Enquiry Committee, the acreage under rubber is 61,986; tea, 74,618; cardamom, 30,000 and lemon grass, 12,000—a total of 178,604 acres. This out of a total cultivated area of 21,97,000 acres works out to 1/12 of the total. Moreover, the total paid-up capital of plantations working in Travancore is, according to the Administrative Report, over Rs 10 crores.

Such figures could not be collected for Cochin or Malabar but more or less the same picture obtains there also. In fact, one whole taluk (out of 9) in Malabar is full of plantations.

There is another type of cultivation which also involves large scale employment of wage-labour and capital. This is called *Kol* and *Kayal*. The peculiarity of this is that it requires the employment of a large amount of labour and capital for draining the land of water. (This was done in the old days through hundreds of wheels worked by human labour. This method has now been replaced by the use of Diesel engines.) The area under this mode of cultivation in Cochin is, according to the Cochin Agrarian Reforms Committee, 18,761 acres. This is 9 per cent of the total land under paddy (2,06,000 acres). As for Travancore, the *Kuttanad* area (the most extensive area of *Kayal* cultivation in Travancore) alone comes to 1,67,176 acres — nearly 25 per cent of the total land under paddy (7,01,306 acres) and 7½ per cent of the total acreage under cultivation (21,97,000 acres).

Wage-labour-capital relations are however not confined to plantations or *Kol-Kayal* cultivation alone. A major portion of cocoanut farms on the coastal areas is under the direct possession of the owner who employs labourers during the seasons in which some work is to be carried out. Similarly, a good portion of land under such cash crops as tapioca, bananas etc., is also cultivated through wage-labour.

Apart from these areas of land under capitalist cultivation, there are also a large number of rural industries where capitalist relations have developed. The most widespread of these industries is coir making. Tens of thousands of people, mainly women, are employed in soaking the outer cover (not the shell) in water, taking it out when sufficiently soaked, beating it and taking the fibre out and spinning it into yarn. These are employed by some capitalist who buys the cocoanut, employs labour and makes profit out of the business. Similarly, there are other industries like drying the cocoanut kernel so as to make it into copra, fishing, rowing of boats (country craft) etc. It is out of these rural industries that the comparatively modern industries like the coir factories, oil mills, fisheries, motor and steamboats etc. have grown up. For every urban factory in these industries, there are thousands of men, women and children employed in the villages to carry out the earlier processes.

For example, in 7 of the 8 villages surveyed in Cochin in 1936 (I could not get the report of the eighth village) the percentage of agricultural labour to total families is 39.1, 38.7, 59.3, 64.4, 54.7, 41.7 and 72.9 respectively. Again, as per the 1931 Census, the percentage of agricultural labourers to the total population who depend on land as their means of livelihood is 42.9, 61 and 37.9 respectively in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. These census figures however exclude several categories of rural wage-labourers like fishermen, boatmen, plantation labourers, labourers employed in rural industries etc. There is no doubt that, if all these are added to the figures of those who are strictly called agricultural labourers, the percentage of wage-labourers to total population will be far higher.

Another indication of this tendency is the growth of Joint Stock Companies regarding which the *Travancore State Manual* says:

> "A large portion of the trade of the country is run by commercial corporations registered under Company Law. The necessity for legalising the incorporation, regulation and winding up of trading companies and other associations arose in Travancore in 1063 Malayalam Era (1887-8 A.D.) The immediate necessity arose out of the formation of a joint stock company to set up a paper mill at Punalur to utilise a great deal of raw material which was being wasted. Incidentally it was thought necessary to encourage the combination of capital and skill in industrial and other undertakings which were too much for the individual. Regulation I of 1063 was, therefore, passed to enable the promotion of joint stock enterprise. The Regulation merely enacted that the Indian Companies Act of 1882, as amended by Act VI of 1887, shall *mutatis mutandis* come into force in Travancore. The above regulation was repealed by the existing Regulation of 1092 M.E. (1916-7) as the provisions of the earlier Regulation were found insufficient to meet the present requirements. This was followed by a boom in company formations." (Vol. III, p. 666)

The statistics given in the *State Manual* show that, in the 10-year period 1102-1111 M.E. (1926-7 to 1935-6), the total number of Joint Stock Companies in operation rose from 152 to 390, while their paid-up capital rose from Rs. 84,81,341 to Rs. 1,87,58,898. It should be noted that this increase to more than double the number and paid-up capital of joint stock companies was taking place at a time which includes the whole period of the world economic crisis of 1929-32.

It is significant that it was in this period that the Indian business community in Travancore was organising itself: the Alleppey Chamber of Commerce was started in 1929, the South-Travancore Chamber of Commerce in 1935 and the Trivandrum Chamber at about the same time. These three Chambers of Commerce represent the Indian business community in three main areas of Travancore, as distinct from the Travancore Chamber of Commerce which, though formally open to both European and Indian businessmen, is really dominated by the Europeans.

While it is thus clear that Kerala was also developing its own bourgeoisie, it should be noted that it was developing in the conditions of colonial economy, i.e., in the conditions under which "real industrialisation of the colonial country, in particular the building up of a flourishing engineering industry, which might make possible the independent development of the productive forces of the country, is not accelerated but, on the contrary, is hindered by the metropolis." (Communist International, *Colonial Thesis*, p. 15) Only 7 per cent of those who are counted as being engaged in industries—24,511 out of 3,51,076—are factory workers in Travancore, the rest being engaged in cottage industries. (*State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 42.)

It is also to be noted that, out of 390 joint stock companies registered in Travancore and functioning in 1111 M.E.

(1935-36), 244 come under the category of Banking and Loan, 26 under Insurance and 1 under Nidhis and Chit associations —a total of 271 engaged in money-lending. Seven others are engaged in transit and transport and 5 in trading, while 38 are engaged in plantation work, thus leaving only 69 companies which may have anything to do with manufacture proper. Even out of these, 13 relate to "printing, publishing and stationery", 3 are classified as "miscellaneous", leaving 53 companies engaged in industrial production proper. Only one out of these 53 is a cotton mill, another is a paper mill, a third is a rice mill, a fourth is an oil mill and a fifth is a sugar company. 38 out of the rest come under the category of "Other Trading and Manufacturing"—which, as the name implies, has very little to do with manufacture—leaving only 10 (Engineering 4, Public Service 1, Building Materials 5). (*State Manual* Vol. III, p. 667)

The statistics of joint stock companies given in the administration Report for the year 1119 (1943-44) shows that, out of the 436 companies registered in Travancore with a total paid-up capital of Rs. 502 lakhs, 138 companies with a total paid-up capital of Rs. 63 lakhs are engaged in moneylending, 18 companies with Rs. 7 lakhs in transport, 89 companies with Rs. 282 lakhs in plantations. This means that 56.1 per cent of the companies with 70.1 per cent of the paid-up capital are engaged in those lines of production that have got nothing to do with industries. The balance of 30 per cent of the paid-up capital of joint stock companies is devoted to all those trading and manufacturing operations that are being carried on. It will thus be clear that only a very small percentage of the total capital of joint stock companies is used for industrial production.

Another aspect of a colonial economy is also evident from the Administration Report—a major part of the country's economy is controlled by the foreigners, mainly British. For example, there are 21 plantation companies registered outside India and functioning in Travancore, the total paid-up capital of which is Rs. 7,70,22,558; while there are 89 companies registered in Travancore with a paid-up capital of Rs. 2,82,00,000. 73.3 per cent of the total paid-up capital of plantation companies is thus foreign, mainly British. Similarly, according to the Depression Committee, out of a total area of land under plantation crops of 1,84,604 acres, 31,000 acres alone are held by local planters, thus leaving 5|6 of the total plantation

acreage under the British. British capitalists also control 60 per cent of the coir industry in Travancore. As a matter of fact, it will not be an exaggeration to say that it is a few British firms like Pierce Leslie & Co., Harrison & Crossfields, Kannan Devan, Commonwealth Trust etc., and the Swiss Volkart Brothers which dominate the plantation and such other industries as have developed in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

(4)

This colonial character of the economy as a whole—the very low development of industries proper as well as the domination of British capital in all those fields of activity that can be called capitaliststic—leaves the indigenous bourgeoisie no other field for the investment of capital than land. All those who are able to make savings are forced to invest them in loans to peasants or landlords, in the acquisition of rights on land mortgages or even in land purchase. This in its turn has led to a gigantic transformation in the character of landed property itself; i.e., it has become a commodity that can be bought and sold like any other commodity.

According to the *Travancore State Manual*, the total value of cultivated land in Travancore (21,97,000 acres) is Rs. 140,99 lakhs. At the same time, land transfers took place at the followihg rates in the following periods:

Period	Value of land sold Rs.	Value of land mortgaged Rs.	Value of land Hypothecated Rs.	Total Rs.
1917-18 to 1919-20	193 lakhs	144 lakhs	218 lakhs	555 lakhs
1920-21 to 1924-25	221 lakhs	164 lakhs	234 lakhs	619 lakhs
1925-26 to 1930-31	303 lakhs	153 lakhs	298 lakhs	754 lakhs
1931-32 to 1933-34	172 lakhs	103 lakhs	192 lakhs	467 lakhs
Total	889 lakhs	564 lakhs	942 lakhs	2,395 lakhs

This means that, for the 16-year period as a whole, land transfers per year averaged about Rs. 149.9 lakhs. In other words, more than 1 per cent of the total cultivated land (whose value, as stated above, is Rs. 140,99 lakhs) is changing hands every year.

Similarly, in Cochin (whose total cultivated land is 5,09,564 acres) sale of land alone (i.e. excluding mortgages and hypothecations) was valued at an average of 7,351 acres valued at Rs. 35.4 lakhs per year in the war years of 1942-46. (Sivaswamy Committee Report)

It is also remarkable that the argument advanced in the majority report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee in 1940 against reducing the rate of rent from 2|3 to 1|2 was that such a reduction would not enable the landlord to get a reasonable return on his investment at the prevailing rates in the land market.

All this shows that the sale and purchase of land has become as regular a process as the sale and purchase of any other commodity.

It has also led to the imposition of a new burden on the peasantry—the burden of indebtedness.

According to the figures collected for the Banking Committee of 1951, the total agrarian indebtedness of Travancore is Rs. 20 to 25 crores. This would mean that a minimum of Rs. 3 crores (being calculated at 15 per cent on Rs. 20 crores) goes every year to the moneylender as interest; this out of a total value of agricultural produce of Rs. 10½ crores works out to 1/3 of the gross agricultural produce. In reality, however, it is far more than this, since the rate of 15 per cent of interest is an under-estimate rather than an over-estimate.

No such figures are available for either Cochin or Malabar. But it was calculated in one of the Minutes of Dissent to the 1940 Malabar Tenancy Committe's Report, that the agrarian indebtedness of Malabar would be about Rs. 15 crores. Interest on this at 15 per cent will amount to Rs. 2¼ crores. This works out to more than 25 per cent of the value of a year's agricultural produce (Rs. 7 crores).

The 1936 Survey into the conditions of some villages in Cochin showed that the total value of land in 7 villages (at market rates) was Rs. 40,59,704 while the debts secured on those lands alone (i. e. excluding loans borrowed by peasants on documents with no security on lands) came to Rs. 8,00,903. In other words, 20 per cent of the total value of land in these villages is the liability of these lands to the moneylender.

All these figures lead us to a reasonable assumption that no less than 30 per cent of a year's agricultural produce is

the tribute levied by the usurer on the land. Part of it may be drawn from the share which the landlord collects by way of rent and may not therefore be a direct burden on the cultivator, but part is certainly an additional burden (over and above the landlord's rent) on the peasant. It is significant that, in Travancore where the share of the landlord is comparatively less, almost five times the amount collected by the landlord is collected by the moneylender (rent is Rs. 117 lakhs, interest is over Rs. 3 crores).

(5)

An extremely significant development that took place in the period of British rule was the transformation of the jenmis from a real ruling class to a class of rent receivers—parasites in every sense of the term.

We have seen in an earlier chapter that the jenmis of pre-British days were an organic part of the then prevailing socio-political set-up. The state machinery of those days was based on the social order whose foundation lay in the ownership, as proprietor, of certain patches of land—each of the Rajas, Desavazhis, Naduvazhis, etc., having his own lands, a fixed share of the produce of which was paid as his share. It was because of this system of payment in kind in the form of a share of the agricultural produce that Kerala upto the period of Tippu Sultan had not heard of the custom of the government levying land revenue.

A peculiarity of this system was that nobody was a proprietor of land in the modern sense of the term, i.e., nobody could do with the land as he pleased. There was a regular code of relations as between the jenmi, the kanamdar, the verumpatamdar, etc. This code of relations did of course give very wide power to the jenmi who could interfere with the personal and domestic affairs of all his tenants. The jenmi however had no right to evict any of his tenants, so long as they paid the jenmi's share of the produce and otherwise obeyed him. Nor would any jenmi dream of increasing the rent due to him, as enhancement of rent would not be countenanced by society. Hence, while the tenants were very much under the feudal domination of the jenmi, the degree of economic exploitation to which they were subjected was extremely limited.

It was to this system that the British rulers dealt a heavy blow. In the name of restoring order in the land, they did two things:

1) They made the land revenue, first imposed by Tippu Sultan, a permanent institution, every square-inch of land being subjected to it. How heavy this burden is can be seen from the fact that while the rate of land revenue in Malabar and Cochin varies today and varied in Travancore till recently from Re. 1 or so to Rs. 9 per acre, the average rate of rent collected by zamindars in permanently settled Bengal is only Rs. 3-8 and that in U.P. Rs. 5-8. The government's revenue demands here are, in other words, as heavy as those of the zamindar's for rent.

2) They so interpreted the system of landlord-tenant relations in Kerala that, in the brief period of a couple of decades, the jenmis were transformed into absolute masters of the land. The customary limitations put on the jenmi were disregarded and he was permitted to evict his tenants as well as enhance his rents as and when he pleased. Efforts were, of course, subsequently made to partially retrieve the situation by means of tenancy legislations but these did not arrest the process of pauperisation of the peasants. For, whatever was achieved through these tenancy legislations benefited only a small stratatum of well-to-do (very often non-cultivating) tenants, thus leaving the large mass of cultivating tenants and sub-tenants.

According to the figures collected by the Malabar Tenancy Committee (1940), 90 per cent of the total cultivated land is owned by non-cultivators and leased out to cultivators. Basing himself on the figures collected by the Committee and calculating on the basis of rates fixed under the provisions of the Tenancy Act in force, one of the members of the Committee in his Minute of Dissent showed that, out of a total of Rs. 700 lakhs worth of a year's agricultural produce, Rs. 250 lakhs go to landlords and Rs. 50 lakhs to Government. Slightly less than 50 per cent of the total produce is thus taken out of the hands of the peasants. It should however be borne in mind that this calculation is made on the basis of rates fixed in the Tenancy Act which are less than the real rates prevailing

at the time. This figure should therefore be considered an under-estimate rather than an over-estimate.

For Cochin as a whole, there are no such figures. But the officer who conducted an Economic Survey of some typical villages in 1936 recorded in every case that, after meeting the cultivation expenses and paying the rent to the landlord, the tenant-cultivator gets absolutely nothing; in many cases he may even run into debt. This was also the report of the officer who investigated on behalf of the Cochin Agrarian Committee of 1948. He said that the proportion of rent fixed generally ranges from one half to three-fourths of the yield while cost of cultivation is about 50 per cent. To the question as to how 50 per cent to 75 per cent of the yield can be collected as rent if the cost of cultivation itself is 50 per cent, this officer answers: 50 per cent as cost of cultivation includes all the items that are part of a scientifically-calculated cost of cultivation (such as seed, manure, wages for hired as well as family labour, fodder for the whole year, interest on and depreciation of capital invested in cattle and implements etc.), while the ordinary peasant includes only seed, wages for hired labour and fodder for the period of agricultural operations. Rent is thus "not only a deduction from the profit but also from elements required for the reproduction of capital." (Marx)

The real position however is far worse than this, as is shown by the figures collected by the Cochin Kisan Sabha (See Table on page 86).

Similarly figures were also collected from two more villages by the Kisan Sabha and submitted to the Agrarian Committee of 1948.

So far as Travancore is concerned, the non-cultivating, rent-receiving landlords collect 11.7 per cent of the total agricultural produce as rent. For, according to the 1931 Economic Census, the total value of a year's agricultural produce is Rs. 10,50 lakhs, out of which Rs. 117 lakhs goes as rent to landlords. It is also remarkable that, while this Rs. 117 lakhs is appropriated by 17.99 per cent landlords, Rs. 161 lakhs goes to 223,689 agricultural labourers as wages and Rs. 713 lakhs to 355,635 owner-cultivators and cultivating tenants. The respective share per capita of landlords' rent, labourers' wages and cultivators' income are thus Rs. 650, Rs. 70 and Rs. 202.

While therefore, the British system of administration made the old militarist-feudal political order defunct and superfluous, while the functions of the Rajas, the Naduvazhis, the Desavaz-

RENT RATES IN PANTALUR VILLAGE

(Names are here omitted. They are given in the original).

No.	Gross produce. Paras of paddy	Rent. Paras of paddy	%of rent to gross produce	Indebtedness
1.	100	90	90	500
2.	250	213	85	200
3.	120	100	86	300
4.	180	168	90	300
5.	350	240	70	3000
6.	400	308	75	400
7.	400	357	80	—
8.	200	148	75	300
9.	240	156	65	435
10.	420	281	62	—
11.	80	56	70	1000
12.	40	28	70	2500
13.	160	150	94	400
14.	240	192	80	125
15.	100	60	60	200
16.	75	54	70	250
17.	720	428	60	—
18.	50	32	67	—
19.	90	60	67	125
20.	88	69	80	300
21.	130	105	90	—
22.	108	96	90	500
23.	75	66	90	35
24.	64	54	84	200

his, etc. were entirely taken over by British civilians, the shares of the produce which these incumbents to administrative offices were receiving in return for the services rendered by them, were greatly increased. They thus became real parasites in the full sense of the term. They however were parasites only in relation to the people of Kerala and not in relation to the British rulers for whom they rendered distinguished service. For, it was through these loyal supporters of their rule that the British could sqeeze the last pie from the hands of the peasants; it was through this continuous exploitation of the peasantry that they could be forced to produce such raw materials as imperialism required; it was through this exploitation and the consequent pauperisation of the rural population that imperialism could get cheap labour for its plantations and mines in all parts of the world as well as cannon fodder in times of war. The proud successors of the Cheras and the Perumals had thus become loyal and obedient agents of an alien rule whose existence is the only reason for their own survival.

(6)

All these transformations in the socio-economic order have led to a steady and continuous pauperisation of our people.

The 150 years of British rule were years in which, first the poor peasant, then the middle peasant, then again the rich peasant and sections of the landlords lost their proprietory rights on the land and had to leave their country in search of jobs in all parts of India as well as in such foreign lands as Burma, Malaya, Ceylon, etc. A good chunk of the Indian labourers in Ceylon, Burma and Malaya are drawn from among the Malayalees; so do a gook chunk of the Malayalee middle class go out as clerks all over India and the industrial proletariat of Coimbatore, Madras, Bombay etc., also contain their own quota of Malayalees. It will not be an exaggeration to say that, for every 12 Malayalees living in Kerala, one is an emigrant in various parts of India and the rest of the world.

While this process was originally confined to the peasant and other toiling classes, the years of the First World War have also brought several families of big landlords into it. The inflation of the First World War and the immediate postwar years put a tremendous amount of money in the hands of these big landlords and they used it for lending to medium and small landlords or for buying their lands outright. Since however there was not sufficient money in their hands to buy all that was available, many of these landlords borrowed a good portion of their requirements at rates of interest that paid in those days of high prices of agricultural commodities. The crash of 1929 shattered all their hopes of making a profit on borrowed capital; not only did the land, bought with borrowed capital, fail to yield any profits but interest on borrowed capital began to eat up the rent on lands traditionally owned by them and passed from generation to generation. The process of family budgets getting unbalanced, depending on the usurer not only to pay off past debts, but to meet current expenses as well, mortgaging of land, being forced to sell land, getting insolvent etc. started in the case of big feudal landlords also. The result is that today in the ranks of the emigrant Malayalees seeking jobs outside can be found members of the old feudal landlord families.

Out of this pauperisation of the people, i.e., the pauperisation of the entire peasantry as well as sections of the landlords, has arisen a class of landlords of a new type. These landlords of the new type do not base themselves on the right of "ancient jenmam", since they are not in continuous possession of jenmam rights on their lands, as the landlords of the old type were. They, on the other hand, lay their claim to their lands on the fact that they paid cash to get these rights. This being so, they are also far more stringent than the landlords of the old type in the matter of squeezing rent from their tenants: they would not be satisfied, as the old type of landlords would be, with nominal rents combined with social subservience but would insist on the last pie being paid to them. Many of the old type landlord families have themselves become new type landlords by buying lands and managing them as property on which they have invested their cash for which they insist on as big a return as possible. It is in this way that, while the entire peasantry and sections of the landlords themselves have become pauperised, a section of the old landlords themselves as well as sections of the newly-rich people have become landlords who have a monopoly of possession of land.

This polarisation as between the pauperised majority and the extremely rich minority can be seen in the figures of

families (percentage in the total number of families) classified according to annual family net income in 7 typical villages of Cochin, collected by the Economic Survey Officer in 1936 :

Village	Below Rs. 25	Rs. 26 to 50	Rs. 51 to 100	Rs. 101 to 200	Rs. 201 to 500	Rs. 501 to 1000	Rs. 1001 to 2000	Above Rs. 2000
Antikad	3.8	9.0	35.5	33.3	10.5	1.5	1.1	0.5
Chundal	1.6	9.3	33.9	38.9	12.4	1.2	0.8	0.3
Eruttompadi	2.0	7.3	30.2	39.5	12.7	2.6	0.8	0.6
Pattancheri	0.9	6.1	37.2	41.8	10.8	1.7	0.3	0.1
Venganallur	1.1	10.4	38.7	35.5	11.5	2.0	0.2	—
Vallivattam	1.7	5.9	31.3	46.7	9.8	0.3	0.1	—
Tiruvaliyad	1.0	7.0	35.6	44.2	9.0	1.3	0.4	—

(Difference in all cases between 100 and the total of above figures is accounted for by families with "minus net income").

This shows that :

1. Between 38.9 per cent (in Vallivattam) and 50.2 per cent (Venganallur) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 100 per year per family, or less than Rs. 20 per head per year, or less than 1 anna per head per day.

2. Between 79 per cent (Eruttompadi) and 87.8 per cent (Tiruvaliyad) of families fall in the category of those below Rs. 200 per family per year, or less than Rs. 40 per head per year, or less than 2 annas per head per day.

3. Only a microscopic minority of between 0.4 per cent (Vallivattam) and 5 per cent (Antikad) falls in the category of those with Rs. 500 and above per family per year, or Rs. 100 and above per head per year, or above 4½ annas per head per day.

The following is the classification of the 100,059 families surveyed in Travancore in 1941 according to annual net income per family. (These figures include not only rural areas but also urban areas. It is clear that if the figures relating to urban areas are deducted from these, poverty will be shown to be more intense than is seen here).

Income Group	No. of Families	Percentage
Below Rs. 60 per year	20,199	20.2
Between Rs. 61 and Rs. 120	38,992	39.0
Between Rs. 121 and Rs. 180	18,075	18.0
Between Rs. 181 and Rs. 300	12,886	12.9
Between Rs. 301 and Rs. 480	5,254	5.3
Between Rs. 481 and Rs. 840	2,695	2.7
Between Rs. 841 and Rs. 1,200	787	0.8
Between Rs. 1,201 and Rs. 1,800	558	0.6
Between Rs. 1,801 and Rs. 2,400	251	0.3
Between Rs. 2,401 and Rs. 3,600	183	0.2
Between Rs. 3,601 and Rs. 4,800	66	
Between Rs. 4,801 and Rs. 6,000	40	0.2
Between Rs. 6,001 and Rs. 8,400	23	
Above Rs. 8,400	52	

Thus:

1. 59.2 per cent of families have less than Rs. 120 per year.

2. 77.2 per cent have less than Rs. 180 per year.

3. 90.1 per cent have less than Rs. 300 per year.

4. Only a small minority of 4.6 per cent have annual incomes of above Rs. 481 per year.

So much with regard to the annual income of families. Now, let us look at it from another angle — the angle of landholdings.

The 100,059 families in Travancore mentioned above can be classified as follows, according to the area of land they own:

Category	Number	Percentage
No land	40,795	40.8
Below Rs. 500 worth (about ½ acre) of land	36,969	37.0
Rs. 500-1,000 worth (½ to 1 acre) of land	8,985	9.0
Rs. 1,000-4,000 worth (1 to 4 acres) of land	9,601	9.6
Above Rs. 4,000 worth (4 acres) of land	3,709	3.7
Total	100,059	

Thus,

1. Those with absolutely no land or very little (less than 1 acre) land constitute 86.8 per cent of the total.

2. Those who have land above 4 acres constitute only 3.7 per cent.

It should also be noted that:

1. Families with less than Rs. 60 as annual income and less than Rs. 500 worth (½ acre) of land are 20,199.

2. Those with less than Rs. 120 annual income and less than Rs. 500 worth (½ acre) of land are 55,012.

3. Those with less than Rs. 300 annual income and less than Rs. 1,000 worth (1 acre) of land are 83,259.

4. Those with annual income of above Rs. 300 and land worth above Rs. 4,000 (4 acres) are only 3,211.

As regards Cochin, the 7 villages mentioned above have the following classification of peasants and their percentages:

Village	Below 25 cents	26-50 cents	51 cents to 1 acre	1 to 5 acres	Above 5 acres
Antikad	12.5	12.5	17.7	39.1	18.2
Chundal	20.2	14.4	13.7	32.8	18.9
Eruttompadi	27.8	4.0	2.9	8.1	57.2
Pattancheri	7.9	7.9	17.1	26.3	40.8
Venganallur	21.5	20.5	18.1	22.0	18.1
Vallivattam	10.5	16.5	20.2	41.4	11.4
Tiruvaliyad	42.1	3.5	7.0	15.8	31.6

These figures of classification of peasants will be incomplete if we forget the figures of percentage of landowning (both landlord and tenant) families to total number of families which, in the 7 villages, are respectively, 43.1, 54.4, 30.2, 17.2, 40.3, 43.5 and 16.6. Combining these two sets of figures, we find that:

1. 39.1 per cent, 38.7 per cent, 59.3 per cent, 64.4 per cent, 54.7 per cent, 41.7 per cent and 72.9 per cent of families belong to the category of absolutely landless peasants.
2. Again, out of every 100 families in the above villages, those who have land less than 1 acre constitute 18.5 per cent, 25.9 per cent, 10.5 per cent, 5.6 per cent, 24.0 per cent, 20.7 per cent and 8.3 per cent respectively.
3. Moreover, those with land between 1 acre and 5 acres constitute 16.8 per cent, 17.3 per cent, 2.4 per cent, 4.4 per cent, 8.8 per cent, 17.6 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively; and
4. Those with land above 5 acres constitute only 7.7 per cent, 9.7 per cent, 17.1 per cent, 7 per cent, 7.2 per cent, 4.8 per cent and 5.3 per cent respectively.

It is thus clear that whether you take annual net income per family or the land they own as the criterion of classification, 60 to 80 per cent of the rural population in Cochin and Travancore is proletarian and semi-proletarian. This is the result of the combined exploitation of imperialism, feudal and semi-feudal landlordism and usury.

As against this proletarian and semi-proletarian majority is the small minority of big landlords and other upper class exploiters of this majority.

According to the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore, while 20,199 families out of 100,059 have annual incomes below Rs. 60 and another 38,992 have incomes between Rs. 60 and Rs. 120 (these together may certainly be considered as proletarian), only a very small minority of 1,173 families (1.17 per cent) have incomes above Rs. 1,200 a year. These 1,173 families are classified as follows as per their occupation or means of livelihood:

(1) Landlords: 325 (27.7 per cent of this income group; 0.325 per cent of total population);

(2) Trade and industry (including Banking): 301 (25.7 per cent of this income group; 0.301 per cent of the total population);

(3) Government service and professions: 520 (44.3 per cent of this income group; 0.52 per cent of total population);

(4) Others: 27 (2.5 per cent of this income group; 0.027 per cent of total population).

It is on this thin top stratum of exploiters that the British rulers rely to carry on their rule. It is from their ranks that high Government officials as well as the non-official "professional" classes are drawn. It is with their assistance, as we will see in subsequent chapters, that the British rulers crushed, disrupted or sabotaged the democratic movement of the common, toiling people. For, although it was itself the victim of imperialistic oppression and exploitation, this top stratum of exploiters was too hostile to the interests of the common people to identify itself with the anti-imperialist movement of the entire people; like the rajas, naduvazhis, desavazhis, etc. of the 18th century, their successors of the 20th century—the present-day jenmi, trader, industrial and professional classes—would far rather yield to the blandishments of their imperialist oppressors than unite with the common people to overthrow imperialist domination.