

Global Capital and Peripheral Labour

The history and political economy
of plantation workers in India

Ravi Raman



Routledge Contemporary South Asia

Global Capital and Peripheral Labour

This book presents a historical account of plantations in India in the context of the modern world economy. The analysis centres on both the history and the contemporary political economy, thereby showing how history can assist in explaining contemporary conditions and trends.

Based on extensive archival research, the book interprets the dynamics of plantation capitalism by focusing on the work, life and struggle of the Dalits on plantations in colonial and post-colonial South India. It argues that these elements of plantation life were fashioned by the specific characteristics of the workers' location within the capitalist world-economy, the then prevailing local social structure and the scheme of disciplining to which the workers were subjected. Critiquing and drawing insights from two dominant historiographic traditions – Subaltern Studies and the World Systems approach – the author focuses on labour and economic development problems, demonstrating the practical utility of the theory and its limitations as a guide to historical research. Treating the relations among various social forces – the planting communities, the oppressed communities (Dalits in India), the regional and national state, and the Imperial regime, this book fills a gap in academic literature on capitalism, economic development and globalization.

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Preface

Amongst my earliest childhood experiences is one that has left an indelible mark on my mind: the memory of a small boy, clutching his mother's hand, his mind filled with trepidation as he crossed the Anjarakandy spices-plantation on his way to his ancestral home. The cinnamon-scented breeze did little to waft away his fear. As I grew up, so did it slowly register in my consciousness that it was through the usurping of our little villages that the first plantation in southern India – the Anjarakandy Randethara plantation – was set up by the East India Company, as was the case with plantations everywhere in the colonies. I gradually came to see plantations for what they were – symbols of colonisation, disruption of village after 'peaceful' village and exploitation of the people therein. Perhaps it was inevitable that I should have chosen plantations as the focal point of my research endeavour. And in this venture of mine, which I may call a passion, I have been offered three major fellowships at varying points of time, first at the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) by the ICSSR, followed by the Charles Wallace India fellowship at the Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford and the Hallsworth Fellowship at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, UK.

I have received invaluable help in the preparation of my manuscript from distinguished scholars at these institutes, three of whom I wish to thank specially. While at the CDS, K. P. Kannan, with whom I worked as an ICSSR doctoral scholar, provided unstinting support throughout my work. Barbara Harriss-White at the Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford offered continuous support and made valuable comments on an earlier draft. Special thanks are due to K. T. Rammohan with whom I have debated many theoretical concepts and who has helped me out of many a tight spot during the conceptualisation of my arguments. I also greatly value my discussions with the late Salim Balakrishnan, particularly on the Indian social structure.

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Ravi Raman
London

Abbreviations

AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
APA	Anaimalai Planters' Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CSF	Cover System File
CTPA	Central Travancore Planters' Association
DAT	Directorate of Archives Thiruvananthapuram
ESASI	Estate Staff Association of South India
ESUSI	Estate Staff Union of South India
GBM	General Body Meeting
GoI	Government of India
GoK	Government of Kerala
GoM	Government of Madras
GoT	Government of Travancore
HREEA	High Range Estate Employees' Association
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
IOL & R	India Office Library & Records, London
KDHP	Kanan Devan Hills Produce Company
KDHPCL	Kanan Devan Hills Plantation Company Private Limited
LMS	London Missionary Society
MLCP	Madras Legislative Council Proceedings
NNR	Native Newspaper Reports
MPBEC	Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee
PTCLA	Proceedings of the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly
PTSCSC	Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Chitra State Council
RAK	Regional Archives Kozhikode
RCL	Royal Commission on Labour
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SS	Subaltern Studies
TLRM	Travancore Land Revenue Manual
TNA	Tamil Nadu Archives
UPASI	United Planters' Association of Southern India
WS	World System Analysis
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1 Peripheral labour

Theoretical premises

This study follows the work, life and struggle of plantation workers in southern India as they emerged from the mid-nineteenth century. It situates the plantation labour at multiple locations: as subject people in the workplace, the local social structure and the world-capitalist economy. While working within an analytical grid constituted by political economy as inspired by historical anthropology, it also seeks to critically engage with two important historiographic traditions – the *Subaltern Studies* (SS)¹ and the *World System Analysis* (WS).² It views through this analytics the historical and contemporary conditions that contributed to and sustained the life world and the multiple peripherality of the plantation workers through a century and a half.

The present work attempts to highlight the fact that the accumulating classes on the one hand and the pauperised working masses on the other represent but one facet of the colonial and post-colonial plantation systems in the Indian south. The study notes that the plantation workers, though hailing from different regions, speaking varied languages, sharing different cultures and following distinctive customs, shared a common social origin: they mostly belonged to the historically oppressed castes, the Dalits³ and the other backward communities, who were the most economically and socially downtrodden sections of the local agrarian society. Most of the workers were women, with the energies of the entire household being directed towards the accumulation of surplus for metropolitan capital and, subsequently, Indian big capital. The plantations thus represented a system wherein labouring women, men and children were reined in by the patriarchs of class, caste/race and gender. Accumulation has thus not been merely economic; apart from being patriarchal, it is racial-cum-caste hegemonic (or *brahmanical*) as well. As a corollary of the above processes, whenever the metropolis was faced with a crisis, the planter class spared no means to transfer it to the peripheral labouring households, but in periods of prosperity, they refused to share their fortune with the actual producers of the surplus – as the planters flourished, so was the process of the immiserisation of labour accentuated. This is not to say that the workers were sheer subjects of domination. They did resist such domination though the resistance did not develop in a unilinear way. Their historical consciousness was fluid/flexible, contextual and multivalent. The plantation workplace thus becomes a structural situation within the larger world economy wherein worker families with multiple social identities and embodying a heterogeneous motley of experiences from various parts of the plains were drawn to the hostile highlands where they lived together and waged a shared struggle for livelihood and *transverse solidarity*.⁴

1.1 Peripheral labour: Critiquing the *Subaltern Studies*

Peripheral labour, as this study on the contemporary history of plantations in the Indian south seeks to establish, is characterised by subordination at multiple levels: class, caste and gender. Its status is thus similar to that of the Gramscian political-cultural ‘subaltern’ in the *Subaltern Studies*. However, the subaltern theorists to date have, by and large, ignored the undercurrents that play within the capitalist world economy to create and sustain these very subalterns. The brilliance of E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class*, which is in the best of radical historiographic traditions, being a ‘history from below’⁵ and credited with having focused on the cultural expressions of the workers in preference to economic reductionism is perhaps a shade dimmed by just such a lapse. The influence of world events such as the American and French revolutions on the English working class, as Perry Anderson notes,⁶ has remained unacknowledged in this work. While James Scott does situate the rebellion and subsistence crises as outcomes of the interaction of historical forces such as population growth, the coercive state and the world market in his *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, he appears to distance himself from this ‘procedure’, while sustaining his interest in peasant resistance, in his succeeding work, *The Weapons of the Weak*. This, however, has the effect of largely undermining the dimension of intensified world capitalism and the consequent unequal (global) power relations since the 1970s in explaining resistance, including the ‘local class relations’ and the ‘infrapolitics’ that he explores.⁷ It must also be pointed out that though the SS owe a great deal to these studies which sought to engage with the ‘lived lives’ of the common people, as also to Thompson’s work, no effort has been made to overcome the other limitations.⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890-1940*,⁹ another much-hailed SS work, could have been vastly illuminating had it viewed ‘protest and authority’ as integral to the interactive forces of local social relations and world processes. Instead, while elaborating on the nature of the industry with its changing structural traits – the widening of the market, prosperity, crisis and so on – Chakrabarty dissociates the workers’ consciousness from material relations, situating it entirely within the confines of hierarchical relations and primordial loyalties. As Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook point out,¹⁰ the SS thus invites upon itself the criticism that it denies the subalterns the ability to present themselves as victims of class exploitation. There also appears to be a ‘turnaround from the issue of the subaltern’s agency’.¹¹ Within the non-Marxist perspective, access to resources and (world) markets are the defining attributes of agency as opposed to the domination/resistance paradigm of the SS, an argument that is yet to draw a response from the SS.¹² Viewed in isolation, the life world of the subaltern is distanced from the mosaic of global events and material conditions. Considering the impact of global political-economic events and world market processes on local production relations and historical consciousness, this is a serious omission.

The WS approach, systematized and elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein and his collaborators does provide us an entry point into such a historical exploration, but the WS scholars too, by their own admission, have failed ‘to come to terms fully with the meaning of the struggles of working people’.¹³ With capital being central to analysis, their analysis misses out the social complexities of capital–labour relations in general, as well as the agency of peripheral labour strategies of resistance and survival.¹⁴ Although recent works¹⁵ within the WS literature acknowledge the

significance of social aspects and institutions, these enquiries are largely confined to building an empirical database towards understanding the dynamics of labour unrest, in total negation of the large number of material and non-material factors that operate as interactive forces. As critical sub-identities of the working class such as caste, gender and ethnicity began to be incorporated in the SS, particularly with the intervention by Spivak,¹⁶ the WS scholars also acknowledged, even if belatedly, the necessity of going beyond 'households',¹⁷ labour and capital and brought in issues such as racial inequality and the women's movement.¹⁸ Both traditions leave much ground uncovered in their exploration of how colonial and post-colonial global capital interacted with the state and the local social structure through the mediation of caste, race, gender and the manner in which such identities were skillfully adapted to intensify the forms of accumulation through an intensified labour process.

Yet another area that the SS does address, but the WS fails to acknowledge, is the disciplining of workers by the authority of capital, a subject matter of Chakrabarty's *Rethinking Working-Class History*. The concept of work at capitalist sites embraces more than just the tasks to be performed or specific outputs to be realised. It also denotes the regulation of work time, and the expectation of precision and regularity in action. The production process thus necessitates the authority of capital as exercised through the hierarchy of organisation, all of it meant to assure a disciplined workforce.¹⁹ Such controls include de-skilling, segmented markets, centralisation of decision-making, differential wage rates and the imposition of ever new relations of production. Studies undertaken by sociologists and anthropologists have revealed 'how an ethnically segmented hierarchy of work effectively divides the workforce'²⁰ and have illustrated this through the case of immigrant labour from Latin America in the United States.²¹ The flexible accumulation of neo-liberal globalisation hunts for ever cheaper sources of labour, which permit greater control and extraction of surplus. The gendered roles and ethnic identities of the pools of cheap and docile labourers²² suit their interests to perfection. In the following text we shall see how by the mid-nineteenth century depressed-caste migrants from the 'labour catchment areas' were herded together, coerced and disciplined in the southern Indian plantations 'risking death, disease and the alteration if not destruction of all social ties like family and kinship'²³ to satiate the accumulation imperative of global capital.

With the brilliant exposition by Michel Foucault on the gradual permeation of the modes of control and disciplining through social institutions such as schools, the military, hospitals, prisons and factories since the eighteenth century,²⁴ scholarship on labour produced yet another series of studies focusing on a new way of narrating control and coercion. Punishing the workers by the infliction of bodily pain is one such means of disciplining. Robbing them of their identity in terms of habits, culture and traditions is another. The multiple strategies employed for the accumulation of labouring bodies are as crucial as those deployed to further the process of accumulation of capital.²⁵ Overarching and reinforcing such a scheme of disciplining was the authority of capital as derived from race, class and caste, an aspect to which the SS and labour historians have made critical contributions.²⁶ Yet, how forceful and deep-rooted such coercion was in the service of capital – first of the metropolitan and then internationally linked pan-Indian capital – does not become a subject of their enquiry. Further, though the overall shift in emphasis to discourse analysis inspired by Edward

4 *Peripheral labour: Theoretical premises*

Said and Michel Foucault gave the SS a linguistic flavour, it has been critiqued as rather ‘un-Foucauldian’.²⁷ This epistemological shift to the realm of ‘production of meaning’ and ‘culturalism’ largely at the hands of the ‘late’ subalterns, have led to the ‘decline of the subaltern in subaltern studies’ and thereby defeats the very purpose of the SS project as Sumit Sarkar points out in his *Writing Social History*.²⁸ He extends his critique to the work, *The Nation and its Fragments* by Partha Chatterjee, a pioneer of the SS project, for his failure to explore women’s struggles and the anti-brahmanical movements. Chatterjee’s *The Politics of the Governed* has also been criticised for its failure to acknowledge the multiple forms of coercion/violence,²⁹ though he does agree that both ‘negotiation and contestation’ could be methods of struggle; however, any attempt at privileging one over the other may well undermine the totality of subaltern strategies.³⁰

While the Latin American³¹ and African projects SS³² carry forward with the Geertzian ‘thick description’ and ethnographic conceptualisation, holding that ‘culture, power, and material resources are of equal importance’ in understanding agency and resistance,³³ the south Asian SS, through a privileging of cultural differences alone, banish both material differences and their causes from their discourse. The subaltern theorists are exhorted time and again to return to the issues of class, inequality and exploitation, and to acknowledge the fact that ‘class is the form of subalternity that structures the others’³⁴ and that caste is as important as class; however, it appears that no parallel effort has been made to situate the class/caste construct, with its gender forms, within the larger world economy. As Dalit women constitute the bulk of the tea plantation labour force and are structurally located within the larger capitalist world economy, most of these critiques offer valuable insights into the complex inter-relationships between these women (and men too) and their colonial and post-colonial production structures, as will be found in the subsequent chapters.

Asian labour historiography, which has simultaneously been part of as well as outside of the SS, with most of its work being on Indian labour history, has thus far borne witness to two major epistemological shifts, the third one being long overdue.³⁵ The first was a merging of trade union history with the realm of social history, which left in its wake a body of literature on colonial and post-colonial production systems. It took another two decades or so for labour historians to specifically realise that labour was not an undifferentiated category, but rather composed of multiple identities such as caste, class and gender; this caused the second shift in writings on labour.³⁶ As Sabyasachi Bhattacharya queries: Where and how do we go from here in this present era of neo-liberal globalisation?³⁷ The answer to this would in fact constitute the third shift, one which, however, is yet to begin. It would call for the execution of yet another body of scholarship on labour in South Asia, characterised by an agenda of ‘global labour history’ a project critiqued and aspired to from within the capitalist world economy.³⁸ It would mandate the inclusion of comparative labour landscapes and identities as interactive forces within global processes with a portrayal of the history of labour not only as a component of present history, but also as a vital and integral part of ‘people’s history’³⁹ – bringing to mind Ranajit Guha’s category of ‘the people’ which is synonymous with the subalterns.⁴⁰

Perhaps one way of making the genealogy of labour – ‘a history of the present on behalf of future possibilities’⁴¹ – effective and relevant to these contemporary times of neo-liberal globalisation, and thereby avoiding the deficiencies of the SS and the WS itself, would be to situate local labour with all its social constituent features

within the larger world economy,⁴² and global capital, in its turn, within the historically evolved local social structure. More specifically, an understanding of global capitalism and its local variants would require a focusing on specific workplace configurations/constellations and the specific hierarchies of relations of domination/subordination – ‘historically, structurally and spatially’.⁴³ This would in turn require a complete reconstitution of pre-existing theoretical categories and analytical tools, particularly the formula that locates the *global* in the *local* and vice versa. By exploring the work, life and struggle of what we call ‘peripheral’ labour in the colonial and post-colonial tea plantations of the Indian south, we attempt just such an exercise, in the expectation of at least a partial success, considering the fact that many areas of labour requiring a global approach have not been revisited from this standpoint. Further, the spatio-temporal and political-economic flexibilities in capital–labour relations, largely explained by the process of accumulation as transformative phases/moments in contemporary history, have been studied through a rethinking and renovating of the foundational WS categories: hence ‘peripheries’ become *peripheries within peripheries* and ‘global commodity chain’ turns into the *global commodity chain trap* as we proceed further in this analysis.

1.2 Situating the peripheries within peripheries

As the WS theory demonstrates, the status of the periphery in terms of its development and class relations, is largely structured and conditioned by virtue of its position in the broader capitalist system. However, it must be asserted that the term ‘periphery’ as a homogenous category is more academic than real. No periphery could be considered a homogenous entity, either in terms of its response to changing world market relations or in terms of its impact on peripheral constituents – two aspects not adequately addressed by the WS. As pointed out by critics, the categories of WS as adopted by many scholars fail to capture adequately either the ‘the complexity of diverse processes’ or the ‘events of history’; further, the world-system scholars often conflate theory with total history/generalisation,⁴⁴ all to the effect of obscuring the ‘local fields of power’ or the local distinctiveness.⁴⁵ While deriving insights from such critiques, what is important for us is to view that there could exist, and there do exist, a plenitude of peripheries within the periphery/peripheries, making it necessary and plausible to construct a new WS category called the ‘periphery within periphery’. This would, first of all, overcome the lack of expansiveness of the “periphery” within the WS construct, towards its deeper layers of social relations. Secondly, it would also, qualify as a more politically realistic category and would possess far more explanatory power in the understanding of the historical constituents of the regions incorporated into the world capitalist system, the nature of their interaction and their consequences as a continuum. Apart from the constitution of the paired set of centre-periphery (and semi-periphery), the periphery requests further qualification, deconstruction and decomposition in order to capture the inherently hierarchic social relations and dynamics over time. This would uncover the hidden layers of meaning in the existing categorisation and engage with a major terrain of debate on globalisation that has so far been left untrodden: the impact of the global order in its varying phases of history on the historically disadvantaged communities in stratified social structures across the countries, particularly with regard to their livelihood and the possibilities of fresh forms of historical consciousness.

To explain further, a reformulation of the original WS category of periphery as 'periphery within periphery' is called for in light of the fact that the WS fails to give adequate thought to the composition of the peripheries, particularly in terms of class, caste and gender, the interaction among these constituents in relation to global capital and the manner in which they are manipulated to suit the interests of capital. Global capital, though essentially uniform in its basic tenets as regards global accumulation, is heterogeneous in its operational premises. This owes chiefly to the 'particularities' and the complexities of the pre-existing socio-cultural constitutions in the periphery. More than/apart from cross-border spatial hierarchies, namely the geographical and trans-local spatial hierarchies, it is the way in which the social and cultural hierarchies within the nation-state gets integrated with the global unequal relations that provide a more comprehensive approach to the understanding of the processes of pre-existing labour relations, and the colonial and post-colonial transformations. This can be explained further in the context of peripheral labour. In the colonial period, metropolitan-oriented production systems sought out the cheapest segments of peripheral labour. Slave labour was just such a one as in the case of the Caribbean plantations and the African mines.⁴⁶ Further, capitalism the world over has always enjoyed the added advantage of sourcing migrants from those regions subordinate to the core. These regions were then doubly exploited as sources of cheap food for that very labour; they were then subjected to varying forms of exploitation with its attendant forms of ethnic diversification, hierarchy, segregation, patronage and so on, as has been explored in studies by Ann Stoler and Jan Breman on South-East Asia.⁴⁷ This is particularly true with respect to a socially stratified society and culture like India as is evident from this study on plantation Dalits.

With the abolition of slavery in colonial India in 1843, a kind of indenture system peculiar to the region came to exist in its place. As the abolition of slavery and the emergence of plantations coincided with each other in the south, the planters were in a position to recruit the ex-slaves, and the labour power of Dalit women and children was particularly sought because these formed yet cheaper sources of labour. Colonialism, however, was not the Dalits' first experience of alien rule or of subjugation. They had been, through centuries, subjected to the social oppression inherent to the caste system. Thus, production and social identities such as caste and gender are organically linked: the Dalits, as already noted, represented the most economically and socially oppressed sections of the local society, and were victims of the upper-caste Hindu system; colonial capital, on its part, engaged the Dalits in much the same manner of subordination as their former masters. By mobilising and controlling cheap Dalit labour power, particularly women in the context of plantations, the existing caste hierarchy proved beneficial to global accumulation.

It should further be understood that global capital might combine free and unfree labour, the latter with pre-capitalist/feudal/semi-feudal links, very often to externalise part of the cost of reproduction and also to exercise the authority of capital. It is also possible, again as a necessity rather than as an anomaly,⁴⁸ that at a later stage in its development, capital could disengage labour from its pre-capitalist/feudal past and hold it 'captive' at its work sites, captive in the sense that they could be made permanently available, having been disarticulated from whatever meagre sources of

livelihood were available in the pre-existing modes; capital deploys strategies of disciplining non-wage forms of unfree labour, and eventually the unfree labour itself becomes capital in disguise.⁴⁹ Capitalism could then go a step further, assuring a continuous reproduction of labour for the production of commodities, by making the entire family functionally geared to meet the express purpose of accumulation. This it could achieve through the sequestering of entire households as units of production/exploitation at the work sites. Patriarchal forms of production and reproduction are hence interlocked with capitalism.⁵⁰ Neither can the labour process be isolated from the family, nor could either of these be divorced from the capitalist mode of production governed by global capital. The free or unfree labour relations and the varying degrees of bondedness are 'not a static phenomenon'⁵¹ with new relations probably replacing existing ones or one particular form of relation being transformed into another, partly as defined and structured by capital, and partly, to quote Jonathan Parry, because 'Labour does not merely respond to the strategy of the employers; its organisation is at least in part an independent product of its own ideological and material concerns'.⁵² Labour relations are thus subject to mutations and multiple processes and do not fit into any single category, nor can they be explored by any single analytical tool through their long transformative trajectories. One could extend this train of thought – the concept of spatio-temporal flexibilities of labour relations being mediated through global and local authorities – further by taking into account yet another instrument of the WS approach, the 'commodity chain', and contextually grounding and thereby illuminating it further, with reference to the 'peripheries within peripheries'.

1.3 The commodity chain trap?

Having defined the commodity chain as a 'network of labour and production processes whose result is a finished commodity',⁵³ the WS scholars have explored its various dimensions through the study of a wide range of commodities like cocaine, coffee, garments, tourism, apparel, electronics and automobiles, to cite a few. The notion of a 'commodity chain', in its original conception, represents a row of nodes connected by a series of transactions, in other words, the whole range of activities involved in the design, production and marketing of a product. The four dimensions of the GCCs are the input–output structure, the concerned region/geographical territory, governance and the institutional framework that implements national and international policies that affect the process of globalisation at each stage in the commodity chain.⁵⁴ Following Hopkins and Wallerstein, and the reformulated versions of Gereffi, the GCC scholars have widely adopted the two governance strategies of producer- and buyer-driven commodity chains, the former concentrated in capital and technology-intensive industries and the latter being found in labour-intensive consumer goods industries. A third type of commodity chain which is 'international trader-driven' was proposed by Gibbon in 2001. This chain is operated by multinational trading houses.⁵⁵ Sectors like the diamond industry are co-ordinated or controlled by a small number of direct producers while others like rubber are co-ordinated by industrial end-users, and others again by vertically integrated MNCs who are both producers and global-branded traders, tea being one among them.

Until now, two streams of studies have broadly been brought out by GCC analysts: (i) those focusing on the sources of economic surplus generated through the production of commodities in the peripheries and their subsequent route to the core, and (ii) those that dwell on the possibilities of upgrading the periphery, particularly with respect to technological advancement, restructuring and governance, which in turn would result in a halter of the surplus drain to a significant degree. A third set of studies is thus long overdue, in order that a critical understanding of the political-economic questions involved is reached with labour being accorded a central position and in the knowledge that the functioning of each node in the GCC bases itself on a specific social division of labour and on the multiple processes taking place in spatio-temporal dimensions. As Henderson *et al.* have pointed out 'hardly any work has been done . . . [on] households, states and the reproduction of labour power from within a GCCs perspective'.⁵⁶ Similarly, in their critique of GCC, Bernstein and Campling argue that 'relations between capitals' have been accorded a central place to the effect that the 'social relations and dynamics' of production and the question of the conditions of labour or patterns of accumulation or the overall effects of global food production are sidelined,⁵⁷ save in a few instances.⁵⁸ While we share the above concerns, we would also like to enrich the exploration given the fact that though the ultimate logic of capitalism is accumulation, the actual mechanisms of such accumulation differ in keeping with the 'particularities' and diversities of the social structures through which they operate: the *peripheries within peripheries*, as conceived in this study. It is in fact the peripherality at multiple levels – peripheral to the local social structure, peripheral in terms of gender, peripheral to world economy and so on – that sets the plantation worker apart from, say, jute workers as conceived and contextualised in the SS tradition and the labouring poor in the commodity chain literature. It is the complexities of labour relations that necessitates and validates the renovation of foundational categories/tools of the WS school in the context of plantation labour.

Viewed from a world-historical perspective, the commodity chain actually in operation reflects not just the hierarchy of occupational tasks between the advanced West and its peripheries, but also the 'socially embedded'⁵⁹ and historically hierarchised relations of production along the GCC. Second, this social hierarchy has been reproduced over generations without any significant form of socio-economic mobility within or outside the plantations,⁶⁰ the current generation of workers being the descendants of the late nineteenth century outcastes and ex-slaves (depressed castes). Third, the changes that have been taking place in the composition and structure of capital were confined to 'relations between capitals' without any favourable change in the basic nature of the labour process and thus the pattern of global accumulation. The intrapolation of caste and gender identities into class has serious implications for the exercise of the authority of capital. If capital found it easy to mobilise as much labour as possible during normal times, to keep the GCC moving full swing, it was also in a position to manoeuvre the workers in such a manner as to transfer the periodic metropolitan crises to them, squeezing them further in its drive to accumulate more. In adopting this perspective, we attempt to weave in a liberatory politics into the concept of the commodity chain, seeking to free the labouring poor from the stranglehold of what could be termed the 'Commodity Chain Trap/Global Commodity Chain Trap' (CCT/GCCT).⁶¹ While the concept of a GCCT signifies, to a certain extent, the self-same processes as the commodity chain, it holds within it

the historical continuity of the 'development of underdevelopment' and the exploitative labour practices in the periphery. However, there are certain transformative phases of accumulation and crisis,⁶² during which these very crises are shifted on to peripheral labour, thus leading to a situation which we prefer to characterise as the CCT/GCCT.

Global capital (and local capital too) possesses a remarkable skill in manoeuvring labour relations, innovating and practising new ways of organising labour to fit its varying designs for global and local accumulation. It may include diverse ways of exploitation such as lengthening of the working day, technological intensification, out-manoeuvring of state institutions, increased flexibilisation, employment of ever more 'nimble fingers', outright violation of livelihood rights and so on, as usual modes of disciplining and exploitation. Prominent among these methods is 'lean production' which implies a continuous search for marginal improvements in the cost of production by 'stressing' and 'readjusting' of the production system and, above all, the labour process. The lean production chain as elaborated by Kim Moody, involves multiple flexibilities: functional (deployment and multi-tasking), numerical (downsizing) and time-related (scheduling or casualisation and part time employment of temporary workers), the ultimate aim being an overall reduction of the workforce and thereby the cost of production.⁶³ The 'fragmentation' of labour with far-reaching consequences in terms of the struggle for livelihood and social reproduction,⁶⁴ curtailing of agency formation, 'transverse solidarity'⁶⁵ and resistance could also be possible negative outcomes. In other words, this spatio-temporal flexibility operates dually at the local site of production and on a global level in keeping with the logic of capital accumulation, which in turn amplifies the GCCT. In so doing, not only are the costs transferred along the production chain down to the weakest link, but the crises inherent to capitalist accumulation is transferred as well, reminiscent of various historical phases: outright dispossession of worker families during the Depression of the 1930s repeats itself with new modes of labour control in the neo-liberal crisis of today.

While exploring how an injury to one is an *injury to all*, Moody draws our attention to not just 'de-proletarianisation' alone, but 'underproletarianisation'⁶⁶ or yet another form, 'flexibilisation' of present-day labour. It also implies that the historically evolving relations of labour involves, as Antunes points out, the 'heterogeneity, complexity and fragmentation of labour' to form, in a restricted sense, Gorz's neo-proletariat.⁶⁷ While some workers are expelled from the production process to form the neo-liberal reserve army of labour, others are converted into casual and readily disposable labour including what Jan Breman would call, "footloose labour",⁶⁸ and still others are retained as a gentrified labour force, thus weaving a new web of labour relations, one that is unfree, disorganised and de-proletarianised – the outcome of neo-liberal rationalities. Contrary to the neoclassical version of unfree labour, which has been critically exposed by Brass,⁶⁹ neither a physical/geographical movement nor a wage and/or non-wage labour relation makes labour free in such contexts. As labour gradually became fragmented, numerically lean and strategically weak, capital is freed of any further compulsion to compromise the bargaining power of labour, and in this the latter is well served by the neo-liberal state as part of its own neo-liberal agenda. The emerging neo-liberal power block is thus the progeny of another happy union of the state and capital, which has been witnessed even in states otherwise governed, at least in nominal terms, by the social democrats. All this would

imply that a deft manipulation by global capital and the international trade regime in its varying phases of accumulation, combined with misgovernance, ensnares a significant size of the direct producers/workers in the GCCT, leaving them helplessly trapped in the absence of effective resistance and counter strategies.

It is not the continuum of social immobility or restricted mobility over varying geographic and temporal scales, or even the absence of sites of employment, that alone pose challenges to the livelihood sustainability of the worker families. It is also the fragmentation of the workers and the associated weakening of their historical consciousness that lead us to reinforce the notion of a GCCT. In order to understand this, we need to look beyond the lowest nodes in the production chain and train our attention on the connectedness across nodes, the differential and profound impact of varying phases of accumulation and the impact it has had on the historical consciousness of the workers. While explaining lean production, Moody rightly pointed out that the historical consciousness of the workers is far more than just a 'shared immiserisation' but rather a fragmentation of the labour unity, with workers competing amongst themselves for jobs, a decline in trade union membership, the disappearance of trade unions themselves and the virtual ineffectiveness of the few that remain. It is a complex intermingling of social structures and their interaction with the global forces, which weakens peripheral labour both socially and politically, with neither an organic solidarity within the working class nor any significant degree of *transverse solidarity* across different production segments, workplaces, social agencies, activists and so on. This is not to undermine the kinds of resistance or imagined forms of alternative work organisation that the workers might construct, as they do quite often, but the effectiveness of such alternative forms of articulation is often not powerful enough to counter the larger hegemonic social structures or to build an 'anti-systemic' bloc.

The study is undertaken at a time when starvation deaths, protest suicides, chronic malnutrition and massive repression of the new-found visibility of the plantation workers by the state-capital coalition have come to characterise the 'closed', 'abandoned' and 'locked out' estates in India – the grim fallout of what Harvey would call 'accumulation by dispossession'.⁷⁰ The study is thus set in a period within which the possibilities and limits of alternative work organisation were charted by these 'disposable workers'/'neo-liberal disposessions' in that 'old imperial' asset⁷¹ of the British colony, the tea estate. While the more recent tragedies have their origins in and are increasingly attributed to the neo-liberal process of globalisation, plantation history, as evolved from the mid-nineteenth century, is replete with such examples in its varying phases of incorporation, accumulation/dispossession and shifting relations of production. The neo-liberal global regime skilfully manipulated the lives of these workers and their families, with changing forms of labour relations, labour deployment and other capitalist practices. The post-colonial state on its part could only display its ineffectiveness, being rendered all the more vulnerable and weak by the impact of its subjugation to global neo-liberalism. European capital was partly replaced by a class of home-grown sahibs, primarily belonging to the comprador pan-Indian capital with a lineage of commercial castes/communities – the Parsis, the Marwaris, the Baniyas, the Chettiars and the Syrian Christians – in the post-colonial phase with their business origins primarily in finance and trade rather than

production. The study attempts to counter-face the changing forms of relations of exploitation, the multiple processes of labour relations mediated/unmediated by the colonial and post-colonial state, and the new found (in)visibility of plantation workers in terms of mobilisation and resistance/non-resistance as part of their coping strategies. Instead of mapping the dualism of free/unfree labour relations and adding intermediate states, this being the current trend among the 'continuing debates'⁷² wherefrom fresh historical navigation has been called for,⁷³ we address the multiple processes of hegemonic labour relations involving 'deproletarianisation', 'underproletarianisation' and 'flexibilisation'. We also probe into the many organisational forms that go into the 'heterogeneity, the complexity and the fragmentation'⁷⁴ of labour, to the effect of intensifying the multiple peripheralities⁶³ that constitute the totality of *peripheral labour*.

This renovation of pre-existing WS analytics acquires significance in the light of contemporary theoretical innovations that have been taking place, leading to a situation of ground-level contexts. Moreover, as James Ferguson reminds, the fresh challenges that arise with the passage of time require of us the application of renewed methods.⁷⁵ Allen, M.J., for instance, has carved out and defined 'contested peripheries' as border zones where different systems intersect,⁷⁶ – formally defined by the WS theorists as 'a peripheral region for which one or more core regions compete'.⁷⁷ Yet another renovation in the WS category has been in connection with the emerging peripheries within the metropolis, and the consequent extrusion of a mass of 'new untouchables' in the global cities, a phenomenon often categorised as an increased 'peripheralisation of labour'.⁷⁸ The political geographers and anthropologists have earlier emphasized the significance of the local specificities within the larger global relations.⁷⁹ Similarly the GCC has also been theoretically improved, moving from the binary taxonomy of producer- and buyer-driven to the international trader-driven, as has already been pointed out. Yet, no effort has so far been made to bring in the centrality of labour with its complexities of relationships between colonialism, post-colonial neo-liberalism and social identities in the commodity chain analysis as has been attempted in this study on colonial and post-colonial plantations. Further, no attempt has so far been made to incorporate the interplay of power relations, the process of disciplining and the pattern of global accumulation by situating the nodal relations of production both within the workplace and the larger world economy, neither in the past nor in the present. This is done by renovating the pre-existing WS categories (and analytics) which are employed not as impermeable constructs in themselves, but by stretching the concept of globalisation to embrace the idea of its distinctive historical forms, and how patterns of globalisation in terms of socio-economic relations have varied over time and how they interact with the existing 'hierarchical and inequalitarian relations', one of the critical concerns of the SS tradition.

An attempt has thus been made to intervene in the existing discourse on the long-term trajectories of capital–labour relations/transformations and the workers' search for an identity. This informs the theoretical argument that globalisation can be construed, to quote Anthony Giddens, 'as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'.⁸⁰ While the 'intensification of world-wide social relations' implies the pervasiveness of capitalist penetration, the 'local

happenings', such as declining wages, nominal or real or both, increasing feminisation of labour, suppression of resistance or intensification of labour at multiple levels are certainly central to the process of deepening capitalist integration.

Reflecting upon this commonplace reality, however, opens the way to more important questions such as: Under what historical conditions such accumulation takes place? What are the changing mechanisms of capitalist accumulation at the local level in relation to changes in the world economy? How does the working class orchestrate its resistance/negotiate for its very livelihood? The life world of the workers – historically specific and structured – is understood primarily through an engagement with broad social forces such as peripheral labour and global capital, in this case Dalit labour and white capital, as epistemological requirements, the latter followed by pan-Indian, caste/race-hegemonic capital in the post-Independence phase. More importantly, the study brings to light how class, caste and gender were deftly manipulated to further accumulation, giving rise to the hypothesis that global accumulation has not merely been economic, it also has been *brahmanical* and patriarchal, thriving on the traditional caste hierarchy, built on the strength of labour from the lowest rungs of the social ladder and augmented by feudal and capitalist practices as modes of labour control and organisation. An appropriate sequence would seem to be a historical investigation of the structure and dynamics of capital, material relations of production, changing mechanisms of expropriation and the way in which labour is alienated, on to their every day forms of livelihood struggles in this south Indian part of the world economy. It allows us to understand the life world within the immediate contradiction between capital and labour on the one hand, and the diverse social relations and the 'matrix of domination' embedded in caste, race, class and gender in 'relational forms' that permeate one another within the larger world economy on the other. Further, we emphasise disciplining as a crucial variable in capitalist accumulation. Our examination of the workers' resistance and their 'counter-hegemonic'/'anti-systemic' struggles and movements, the possibilities of alternative work arrangements, including the Gramscian factory councils, and transverse solidarity in the new millennium⁸¹ and also the workers' new forms of subjection to neo-liberal regime is also set against these theoretical premises. The ethnography of the commodity chain trap, as understood in this study, thus captures the processes of production, abandonment, closure/re-organisation through which multiple production relations evolve, to the effect that the workers as a whole are subject to a process of gradual political and social attrition. To quote Watts, 'a sensitivity to space, and to time, reveals that there are a multiplicity of capitalisms contained within the brittle edges of capitalist laws of motion and within the inner contradiction of the capital-labour relations'.⁸² What is important is to recognise the fact that capitalism has always combined flexibilities and inflexibilities, and what may be emerging now are 'permutations of each rather than a simple trend towards greater flexibility alone', a variety of combinations, a broader awareness of new forms of the division of labour and new ways of organising those divisions.⁸³ If *peripheries within peripheries* are a historically evolved/geopolitically constructed social-structural relation, then the *global commodity chain trap* is a state of being, in terms of materiality, ideology and praxis, an integrative outcome of world-systemic and local processes. Such an approach is politically meaningful, particularly when situated within the context of the vast amount of plantation literature the world over.

1.4 Plantation literature on South Asia: Overview

Over the last couple of decades, economic historians and social anthropologists have done much painstaking work on the theme of plantation production systems in the colonies. Geographically, these studies chiefly centre around the American south, the Caribbean islands and the vast south Asian peripheries – Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and India. Some of these studies have attempted, though not always explicitly stated so, to analyse the dynamics of the closely linked problematique of the ‘development of underdevelopment’ in colonial plantation economies, within the larger context of the origin and expansion of the capitalist world economy. Beckford,⁸⁴ for instance, pursuing a neo-Marxist framework in analysing various plantation economies and societies the world over, has argued that the plantations in the colonies were not agents of development as claimed by the modernisation theorists, but rather were ‘tributaries of imperialist expansion’. De Silva⁸⁵ (1982) and Eric Meyer⁸⁶ have offered an extensive criticism of the dualist interpretations of Snodgrass for whom the Sri Lankan plantation economy was in the nature of a foreign ‘enclave’. While De Silva explains that it is not the lack of links between the two sectors which is responsible for the stagnation of the traditional sector, but the lack of dynamism of the plantation economy itself; Meyer explores the close interaction between the village and the plantation/modern sector. Asoka Bandarage⁸⁷ (1983) has also attempted to ‘expose the empirical invalidity and theoretical inadequacy’ of the dualist thesis and explains how the plantation sector in Sri Lanka ‘developed at the expense of village agriculture and peasant subsistence’; the plantation–village nexus finds a place in Kooiman’s works, too.⁸⁸ However, neither the question of the capital–labour conflict nor the workers’ search for a social making as linked to the world capitalist system figures prominently in these studies. Kurian again, on Sri Lankan plantations, explores how the Tamil workers were subjected to labour control and patriarchy,⁸⁹ one of the themes we also explore in the present study. Studies on plantations in Malaysia are largely confined to rubber; by placing plantations within the larger WS perspective, Selvaratnam has exploded the myth of plantations as ‘autonomous realities’; however, the study would have been more comprehensive had it made an adequate integration of local labour relations into the analysis, an issue largely covered in an early study by Ravindra Jain.⁹⁰ The recent studies⁹¹ on Malaysian and Southeast Asian plantations open up the question of labour and how their conditions still ‘remain anachronistic’, despite the economic significance of the sector in both colonial and post-colonial situations.

Though many of the other works on colonial plantations do not necessarily fall within the purview of the WS analysis, they have been of help in understanding plantation economies and their communities, particularly their anthropological and socio-economic life within the context of specific plantation systems. Breman,⁹² for instance, unravelled the horrific experiences of social organisation on the tobacco plantations in the Dutch colony of Sumatra. Class relations were organised along racist lines into white planters and Asian workers, and the latter remained trapped in a system that was internally repressive and exploitative. Stoler⁹³ has argued that the change in the legal status of the workers made no difference at all in their conditions of work; the distinction drawn between ‘indentured’ and ‘free wage’ labour marked neither the exit from a pre-capitalist system nor the entry into a capitalist one. In colonial plantations in East Africa, the dichotomy between freedom and slavery was largely farcical even with the

alleged transformation of labour systems. Capital brought about a 'deproletarianisation' in the sense that the freedom of choice of labour in selling and exchanging its labour power stood curtailed. It is this unfreedom inherent in capital-labour relations that led to its being called the 'new wage slavery'.

Studies relating to the plantations in India, though begun in the early 1930s, have mostly confined themselves to the tea planting regions of north-west Asia with an emphasis on north Bengal and Assam with the major exception being Griffiths,⁹⁴ which, however, falls within what one would call official history. Indian labour historiography has, of late, turned to the exploration of the complex interplay among the workers, discipline and power, particularly on the plantations of the north-east. However, some of the work done on north Bengal and the north-east,⁹⁵ though meticulous with regard to empirical fine graining, attempting to study the tea plantations in terms of their political economy, have not been able to capture the dynamic relations as multiple relations that yet form part of totality as they have not been able to place them in a well-defined theoretical framework. Moreover, these studies, by and large, do not treat capital-labour contradictions as integral to world-scale economic and political processes, and the consequences thereof. While the social (anthropological) aspects of the plantation working class such as caste and gender issues, too, do find a place in the study done by Bhowmik,⁹⁶ he has not placed it in the context of the national and world economies. And in those studies that do take into account national political events, such as the exhaustive study by Guha,⁹⁷ world historical events and social aspects such as caste and gender have largely remained outside the purview of enquiry. In a recent contribution, Behal⁹⁸ illustrates how during colonialism, and in collaboration with the Indian tea association, the tea planters of the Assam valley succeeded in a systematic domination, disciplining and control of the workers by a combination of strategies such as the immobilisation of labour within the plantation complex, once the workers had arrived there, and the restrictions on their contacts with the outside world. While he also explains how these strategies were applied in their day-to-day lives, as they were aimed at prevention of the formation of collective labour organisations, it would have been more illuminating had it been looked at from a theoretical perspective – issues and concerns that form a significant part of the exercise done here in this study also. Regrettably, none of the studies cited above have touched upon the plantation scenario of southern India. It is also surprising that issues such as those of plantation Dalits in the colonial and post-colonial plantations – one of the most oppressed groups as this study has attempted to reveal – have been largely left out by the SS collective (1982–2005), save the one by Kaushik Ghosh, which, however, could not locate the significance of the world capitalist economy in the construction of either aboriginality or the 'coolie-nation'.⁹⁹

Despite the fact that plantations form a vital segment of the post-1850 colonial project in southern India, as in the case of north and north-eastern counterpart, no systematic investigation of the plantation sector has been undertaken, save Uma Devi¹⁰⁰ and Paul Baak¹⁰¹ and with the former being confined to rubber alone, and crucial issues such as capital-labour relations are not touched upon. Though claiming to be inspired by the works of WS analysts like Wallerstein, in many instances, Baak fails to perceive the inextricable links between the plantation periphery and world capitalism; he thus misses the dynamics of (global) capital-labour relations in plantations. Further, the question of gender finds no place in a study on a labour-intensive enterprise that relies on women in no insignificant manner. No substantial work, either in history or the

present, has been found on the south Indian tea, leaving a major gap in its articulation particularly comparing the vast historical scholarship on the north and north-eastern plantations. Such particularities as the hegemony of metropolitan capital, acting in concert with the colonial state(s), the patriarchal structures of accumulation and the workers' resistance to the authority of capital in their social making in the past as well as the present era of globalisation and the wider coverage of south Indian region make the study a viable case in point. Moreover, the present study has attempted to go beyond pre-existing conceptual categories by a critical and reflexive look at the historical and contemporary conditions that contributed and sustained the predicaments of the plantation Dalits. We have also attempted to generate a dialogue with the two important streams of thought – the SS and the WS – which in turn help *sharpen* our critical understanding of what we broadly refer to as '*peripheral labour*'. Unlike the majority of studies on the plantations of the north and the north-east, we have also extrapolated our arguments to engage with the present, while keeping track of the long-term transformations in capital–labour relations.

1.5 Geographical and political 'inner boundaries' of the study: The Indian south

The 'outer' boundary delineated by the WS analysts encompasses the economic scenario of the world as a whole – the past five centuries have seen the secular expansion of these outer boundaries, such that there now exist no arenas 'external' to the world economy. Thus the problem of the 'either/or of external and internal' has been rendered meaningless. The 'inner' boundaries, which have expanded or contracted in accordance with cyclical trends in the world economy more closely correspond, for instance, to a variety of producing regions; the regions incorporated into the world economy may be viewed as unit(s) of peripherality, and mapped geographically and politically. The plantations in southern India are found strewn over the higher parts of the peninsula with tea nestling among the higher reaches of the Western Ghats (see Map 1). The important tea planting regions/districts are Nilgiris including Coonnor and Anaimalais (in present-day Tamil Nadu), Peerumedu, Munnar and Wayanad (in present-day Kerala), with an average elevation of 6,000 feet above sea level; coffee in the Indian south is grown in Wayanad (Kerala), Kodagu (Coorg), Chikmangaluru (both in Karnataka state) and in the Nilgiris, Kodaikanal and Yercaud (Tamil Nadu); rubber is found almost exclusively in Kerala. All these regions were reconstructed and integrated with the world market almost simultaneously, in and around the mid-nineteenth century, but through differential political-administrative routes.

Until the formation of states based on linguistic features in 1956 – after nearly a decade of Indian independence in 1947 – the aforesaid planting regions were mostly under direct colonial rule as in the case of Wayanad, Nilgiris and the Anaimalais in the Madras Presidency, while other areas such as Peerumedu and Munnar, in the princely state of Travancore, were, for all practical means, under indirect rule. Thus the planting regions were both under colonial and indirect colonial regimes – the 'native states' with the defining feature of the rule of the chief, his control over defined boundaries, legislation and the administration duly recognised by the supreme authority of the British paramount power. In most of the cases, the difference between the directly ruled and native states was in degree rather than content, as native states were quite anxious

and eager to play a facilitative role in expanding the European plantation enterprises, introducing labour laws and providing fiscal support, largely at the direction of the imperial regime, with occasional refits, which, however, did not harm the British capital but only helped expand it further, as we would see in the subsequent chapters.

1.6 A word on availability/non-availability of research material

In contrast to the plantation literature available on the north and north-east plantations, as revealed in the review of literature, published material on the plantations in the Indian south is rare. Further, it is a sad fact that many of the rare records related to the pioneer plantations kept by UPASI – the united front of the planters' associations in southern India formed in 1893 – were destroyed in a fire in 1982, before the present researcher had turned his attention on the subject. Another disappointing aspect was the non-availability of records relating to the earlier planters' associations. For instance, the records of the Wayanad Planters' Association, the first of its kind in southern India which were kept in their Meppadi Club, Wayanad until the early 1980s, were completely destroyed as they were regarded to be of no further use. Had such thoughtless man-made destruction not been indulged in, one would have gained access to a rich source of research material. Yet another major setback came in the form of an outright refusal of permission to go through the records kept by the Association of Planters of Kerala (APK), Ernakulam. Although the authorities of APK had allowed access to their records to this researcher until the mid 1980s, permission was denied at this point. The author is aware of the limitations imposed by the above-mentioned facts.

Yet, the study draws from a wide range of primary and secondary source materials. Primary sources largely based on what is called 'multi-sited ethnography',¹⁰² which includes interviews and conversations with workers and their representatives at varying work sites and spatial locations, have helped fill up the gaps in the secondary data referred to as below. The secondary sources include (1) colonial records largely in manuscripts available in the various archives and libraries such as the India Office & Records, London; Guildhall Library London and the Glasgow University Archives, Glasgow; Tamil Nadu Archives, Madras; the Regional Archives, Kozhikode and the State Secretariat Cellar, Thiruvananthapuram; (2) minutes and proceedings of various planters' associations, which were made available in places such as UPASI, Coonoor; the Anaimalai Planters' Office, Valparai; CTPA, Vandiperiyar and the High Range Club, Munnar; (3) documents and balance sheets of certain coastal trading and planting companies; (4) documents of the Communist Party and (5) autobiographies and biographies of social activists; personal diaries, documents and the biographies of social activists; leaflets and magazines of both employers' and employees' associations. In addition, consultations with local level activists, leaders of political parties and trade unionists of yesteryears, as well as those of today, have been extremely helpful.

1.7 Organisation of the study

The study is organised in eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2, *Periphery in the making*, contains historical processes of the advent of the planting industry, primarily coffee and tea, to the south Indian region of south-west Asia, and

its increasing participation in the world division of labour. The role of the colonial state in shoring up capitalist production, its efforts to effect an integration of the planting periphery through the process of strengthening the GCC and the consequent fall-out with respect to the ecology of the region are examined separately in three sections: (1) Colonial plantations as incorporation, (2) Geographical violence as incorporation and (3) Global Tea Commodity Chain. In Chapter 3, *Capital(s) in conflict and consensus: The British plantocracy versus the provincial bourgeoisie* we take a closer look at the economic and political processes of incorporation in terms of the hegemony, structure and dynamics of global capital in the plantation sector, and its position of dominance with respect to nascent local capital. The political embeddedness of the GCC, the impediments to the entry of local capital and the historical context of its initiation into the plantation sector are also examined in two sections: (1) *Structure and dynamics* and (2) *Sources of conflict: Global capital versus provincial/local capital*. Chapter 4, *Plantation worker-families: Sources, social origins and gender divisions*, provides a study of the sources of labour and its mobilisation to the plantations. It provides an account of the systems of recruitment employed and the abuses associated with it in the first section, *Sourcing from deep periphery: Social origins*. The second section, *Social composition and gender divisions* is an analysis of the social and gender compositions of the workforce which examines how the social origins and gender divisions of the plantation workforce, with an emphasis on low-caste women and children, proved to facilitate global accumulation along the socially hierarchised GCC. Chapter 5, *Slaves reborn? The Disciplinary-punishment regime* deals with the manner in which the colonial state, the colonial bureaucracy and the European planters combined in effect to form part of the same class – the class that disciplined the workers/Dalits through colonial legality and non-legal multiple oppressions, including sexual harassment, as functional to labour regime and global capital accumulation. These aspects are analysed in two sections: (1) *Estate as patriarchal site* and (2) *'State within state'*. Chapter 6, *Global Accumulation, Local Immiserisation*, comprises an analysis of the changing modes of imperialist exploitation and immiserisation of labour as a dialectical process. While the conditions of living and the reproduction of labour are examined in the first section, *Aspects of reproduction*, how the crises in the metropolis worsened the same is explored in the second section, *Crisis relayed, benefits retained*. Whenever the metropolis was faced with crisis, global capital spared no means to transfer it to the peripheral labouring households; but in periods of prosperity they refused to share their fortune with the actual producers of the surplus; as the planters flourished, so was the process of the immiserisation of labour accentuated. The plantation workers' resistance and the consequent class processes were influenced and conditioned primarily by global and national politico-economic processes. The outcome of these was, however, conditioned by differentiated strategies of domination on the one hand and the complexities of identities of labour such as class, caste and gender on the other as analysed in Chapter 7, *Identities, historical consciousness and conflicts*. The workers' search for a political identity that encompassed multiple structures of identities, which manifested as conflicts and struggles, is also analysed in two sections: (1) *Belated subaltern consciousness* and (2) *Planter–communist interface*. Chapter 8, *The Post-colonial state: Re-alignment in power relations?* comprises five subheads namely *Pulling down the communist state*; *Shift of hegemony, the new masters and surplus drain: Neo-liberalism, the new trade regime and the crisis*; *Relaying the crisis*:

The materiality of commodity chain trap and the *subaltern unionism, militancy, alternatives*. This chapter comprises an analysis of capital–labour conflict and multiple oppressions in the post-colonial/post-Independence phase; it also examines the immediate effects of the neo-liberal reforms during which the capital deploys various strategies to counter the global production crisis including the transfer of crisis down to the lower segments of commodity chain. Chapter 9, *Colonial legacy and neo-liberal predicaments: Concluding remarks*, further reflects on how the globalisation process accentuates the periodic systemic crises in the *peripheries within peripheries*, broadly looking at the emerging global trade regime and the new strategies adopted by global capital and how the labouring masses continued to remain entrapped in the larger world capitalist system and resist/non-resist it all, as part of their livelihood struggles and their search for a ‘web of life’ and beyond it, a political social formation.

2 Periphery in the making

The insidious advance of metropolitan capital into the high ranges of southern India brought in its wake the gradual peripheralisation of the region and its increasing participation in the global division of labour. And even as the tea-bush came to be a ubiquitous sight along the entire Western Ghats, the process of the incorporation of the region into the world economy had begun. It is this dynamics of events *and the way in which the local economies were drawn into the global capitalist relations* that we have attempted to trace in this chapter: in the first part, we focus on the historical development of plantations at a time when the planters were being wooed by the colonial State. In the second part of the chapter, we follow the commodity flow from the periphery to the core, with an emphasis on the changes brought about in the transport infrastructure – both inland and oceanic – in the process of reaching out to the world market. In the third part, we have attempted to analyse the drastic changes in the ecological productivity system, with the loss of the sources of livelihood of the indigenous people that accompanied the entire process of the production and transport of tea.

I COLONIAL PLANTATIONS AS INCORPORATION

2.1 Integration with the world economy

The Indian sub-continent in Asia was the major eastern theatre of trade wars among the then Imperial powers: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and the English. Finally the English were to emerge successful.¹ The history of the trade and trade wars of these early years and the establishment of the colonial State has been well documented, though with variations among historians save, perhaps, in one aspect: the fact that trade was followed by the flag. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British conquest of southern India was complete,² and the former was ready to apply the economic squeeze through the subordinate integration of the region to the world capitalist system, then reigned by the English.

Five years after the annexation of Malabar, in 1792, the East India Company had appropriated a large area in the Anjarakandy village(s) for the setting up of a spices plantation.³ The objectives of the investment were clearly expounded in the Imperial records – to ensure constant supplies of coffee, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, cassava, sugarcane, cotton, sandalwood and such products as from time immemorial formed

the valuable articles of exchange between Malabar and the distant nations. Positioned as it was on the banks of the Anjarakandy river, the advantage of an easy transport of plantation produce to the Thalassery port must surely not have been lost on the colonisers.

The East India Company leased out the estate to Murdoch Brown, who had proposed the investment, for a period of 99 years and granted him the following rights: (i) the possession of lands which he had already cleared or purchased on behalf of the company, extending over 459 acres, (ii) the right to clear and occupy all wastelands within the adjacent five *desam* of the *amsam* and (iii) the right to purchase land from the landlords around, which came up to 918 acres.⁴ Backed by the judiciary and the police, Mr Brown uprooted the local tenants and usurped the landed property of the populace and in no time his plantation had grown from an initial size of 200 acres to a massive 3,000 acres.⁵ This was to be the prototype of modern industrial plantations in India. It was also the antecedent to the practice of a superimposition of a capitalist mode of production using slave labour and other depressed-caste people on the pre-existing mode of production, largely feudal, thus deforming and shattering the latter. This was also the beginning of the process of incorporation of a traditional village economy in southern India, into the dynamics of the world economy.

2.2 Imperial resolution as privatisation of property rights

The Imperial Crown continued to respond favourably to the prosperity and enhanced accumulation of European capitalists in Europe and India. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the colonial government occupied itself with two major concerns: (i) an enquiry into and a detailed survey of the biotic resources of the various colonies of the empire and (ii) a quest to establish the means by which these resources could be rendered accessible to the European capitalists for further capital accumulation. The Imperial Botanical Conference held at London in 1824, was a historical context with the botanists themselves 'enlightening the world of commerce'.⁶ The same year an Imperial Resolution was passed by the Court of Directors asking the Madras government to make forest-lands available to the Europeans for the proposed commercial ventures:

The extension of the export trade of India is an object of the highest importance both to England and to India, and the introduction of a new branch of trade, such as that in question (*cultivation of coffee*) may eventually become, would be a great national benefit. The speculation appears therefore, to be one which is in a high degree worthy of the support of Government. From the nature of the case it is indispensably necessary that those who undertake it should have an assured tenure in the lands appropriated to the cultivation for a considerable period of time, *whatever may be the tenurial conditions pre-existing*; and, although it is to be expected and desired that the natives will before long enter on the speculation and be guided by the example set to them in the conduct of it, yet to its early and successful introduction on a large scale it appears to be essentially requisite to allow scope to European enterprise and intelligence⁷ (emphasis added).

Forest-lands in southern India were owned either by the State or, if privately owned, by the landlords, mostly upper-caste Hindus. The communities that largely occupied these lands were the various tribes who considered them their communal property, not meant for sale but to be utilised as a means of subsistence through the customary practice of cultivation.⁸ As part of the process of commodification of land, some of the most fertile areas were branded 'wastelands' – a euphemism that legitimised the sequestering of these lands by the Europeans who had been quick to spot their commercial value. As the development of capitalist plantations pre-supposed absolute property rights, and the fixing of tenure and land as a commodity, the colonial State(s) began to drastically alter the hitherto existing property relations.⁹ This was to mean ownership with 'quiritary' rights, a phenomenon which was emerging in the cash-crop regions of the world,¹⁰ accelerating the process of commercialisation of agriculture.

In southern India, the organised fashioning of plantation-based colonialism was made even simpler by the *1824 Resolution*. The inevitable result was an acceleration of the sweeping transition of the periphery: forest-lands which were officially labelled as 'wastelands' were first made available to the European planters as free grants; large-scale forest plunder was virtually legalised and land was increasingly appropriated; tribals were displaced; workers were recruited and made captive; plantations were thus established, first with coffee (punctuated by a transient involvement with cinchona and gold) which later gave way to tea which opened a whole new chapter of colonial endeavour. Thus were created the export-crop-producing peripheries: Mysore and Coorg (presently in Karnataka), Nilgiris and Anaimalai (in Tamil Nadu) and Wayanad in Malabar, and the high ranges of Travancore (present-day northern and southern Kerala respectively). These were the regions agronomically suited to quality production, accessible to the 'labour catchment areas', closer to the rice-producing centres, and, above all, in places which could be linked up to strategic seaports, akin to other planting regions in Asia.¹¹

2.3 The 'coffee-era'

It would only be appropriate to argue that the coffee-era was ushered in by the Imperial Resolution of 1824: it was in the same year that W. Huxham started planting coffee on a commercial basis in Pathanapuram, east of Kollam in Travancore.¹² Other early ventures were undertaken by G. Fischer in the Shevaroy hills in the late 1820s, Cannon in Mysore and by other Europeans in Wayanad in the 1830s, and in Coorg and Nilgiris in 1842 and 1846 respectively.¹³ The establishment of the Wayanad Coffee Plantation in 1841 by a well-developed metropolitan merchant capital called Parry & Co., which had until then been involved in trading in imported coffee,¹⁴ marked the penetration of organised metropolitan capital into the planting sector in southern India. By the mid-nineteenth century coffee estates had sprung up along the summits and slopes of the Western Ghats, from the north of Mysore down to Kanyakumari. During the next two decades, coffee spread over to 14,613 acres in Wayanad and 13,500 acres in Nilgiris. Consequently the value of export of coffee from southern India increased by 35 per cent from 1855–6 to 1882–3,¹⁵ an aspect which will be dealt with later. By the mid-1860s coffee-curing factories were established in the port towns of the Malabar Coast, particularly in Thalasseri and Kozhikode, and later in Coimbatore and Mangalore. But the 'coffee-era' in India was put to an end by two major events: the large-scale

destruction of crops by leaf disease and the glut of coffee in the world market, both of which occurred in the 1870s.

The leaf disease, *Hemileia vastatrix*, which practically wiped out the entire crop in Sri Lanka in the early 1870s, had its disastrous effects on coffee plantations in southern India as well.¹⁶ The effect was such that many planters in India and Sri Lanka gave up coffee cultivation altogether. During the years 1879–88, not less than 2,155 acres of coffee were abandoned in Travancore alone, thus releasing large tracts of land for tea. Coupled with this natural calamity, large quantities of coffee were dumped in the world market by the world's largest coffee producer Brazil, with a resulting fall in prices. By the mid-1880s, coffee became cheaper in the world market which in turn put an end to coffee cultivation as a profitable enterprise in the colonies. By 1898, the coffee industry in the colonies began to suffer losses at a faster rate, due to a sharp fall in prices coupled with accumulated stocks such as had never before been seen; the price index of coffee declined from 100 in 1876 to 83 in 1884, and further to 58 in 1907.¹⁷

The crop dependence on an external market – more than 95 per cent of coffee being meant for export – left the planters, particularly the local growers in southern India, helpless in the face of this market crisis. The decline of the coffee industry even caused depopulation in certain planting taluks. The author of the Nilgiris District Gazetteer, for instance, noted that between 1891 and 1901, the population of the Guddalur taluk had shrunk by nearly 17 per cent, primarily owing to the decline of coffee plantations.¹⁸ Though the situation began to improve later, especially during the political turmoil in Brazil,¹⁹ the industry was left with a 'permanent scar'.

2.4 Lure of cinchona and the gold rush

Since 1633, when cinchona – from the bark of which quinine, the anti-malarial drug is extracted – was introduced into Europe from South America, colonial interests turned to its commercial cultivation. However, it was not suited to the temperate climate of Europe, and was taken to India and Indonesia instead. With the widespread devastation of coffee by leaf disease on the one hand and an increase in prices being fetched by cinchona on the other, the private planters soon turned to the latter crop. A few of the coffee estates in Nilgiris and Wayanad were converted into cinchona plantations. However, the market glut in Java and Sri Lanka and the consequent drop in prices from 9.12 pence per lb in 1880 to 1.12 pence in 1888 forced the cinchona planters either to abandon their plantations or to turn to a third crop, namely, tea.²⁰

Another factor that contributed to the decline and ruin of the coffee industry was the discovery of gold in the Nilgiris–Wayanad region in 1868 by a body of miners from Australia.²¹ The gold rush began with the formation of the Alfa Gold Mining Company in Wayanad in 1874. No fewer than 44 gold-mining companies had come up in Mysore and Nilgiris–Wayanad by the late 1870s.²² The gold rush ravaged these regions with a loss of thousands of acres of coffee: 'there was not a single estate which had not suffered either from its owner having been lured with the gold-fever or the upkeep of coffee'. Like the cinchona boom, the race for gold was also of a very short duration. By the mid-1880s the gold-mining enterprises in southern India had almost collapsed. All the aforesaid factors in combination had contributed to the deterioration of the coffee estates in southern India, which released not only land but labour too. This, in

turn, precipitated a progressive and steady rise in tea cultivation, which had already made its entry by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

2.5 Tea: The new Imperial asset

Tea – *Camellia sinensis* – was introduced to India in the 1830s, again under the colonial initiative. When the East India Company lost its monopoly trade in tea with China – a monopoly that it had enjoyed for roughly two centuries until 1834 – the company had taken vigorous steps to establish an alternative source of supply of tea from India. A committee was set up by Lord William Bentinck to study the possibilities of cultivating tea in this country.²³ In its report in 1834, the committee recommended the cultivation of tea in North-East India – a region which had already been suggested to the East India Company by the botanist Sir Joseph Banks, half-a-century earlier – and in Nilgiris and the Western Ghats in southern India. Of the 42,000 plants reared in 1836, from the seeds imported from China, nearly 200 were planted in the hills of Coorg, Mysore and Nilgiris, and the remaining were equally distributed between Assam and the North-West Himalayas. Within six months after its planting in the southern hills, it was reported that ‘the experiment had completely failed, and that with the exception of a few plants on the Nilgiris hills and in the lower country, the rest had withered away’.²⁴

It was only a decade later that the Coonoor Tea Estate was opened; this was in 1854 and it was followed by the Thaishola Estate in 1859. This was the time when Chinese prisoners were being brought to Nilgiris; local legend has it that it was these Chinese prisoners who had assisted the planters in the opening of the Thaishola and Dunsandle estates, guiding them in the organised planting and manufacturing of tea.²⁵ In 1865, tea was mentioned for the first time with respect to southern India in the statement on the *Moral and Material Progress of India*, and it was reported that in the Madras plantations, there were then about 13,000 plants, some of which had flowered; and that a supply of fresh, good seed would soon be available to the public at a fair price. It was also reported that many plants had been distributed to the local people of Nilgiris, free of cost, and that others had been sold to the planters at three-and-a-half pence each.²⁶ By the mid-1870s there were 3,142 acres under tea in Nilgiris alone – representing the highest grown tea in the world – of which nearly half matured with a yield of 156 lbs per acre. It was also in Nilgiris that a group of six persons from China had come in the latter days of the East India Company to help establish the tea industry, one of whom repaired to the high ranges of Travancore to raise an estate there.²⁷

Tea was first planted in Travancore as an experimental crop in the State gardens in Peerumedu in 1864, along with coffee and cinchona.²⁸ Henry Baker, son of Rev. Henry Baker – who established the Church Mission Society for the first time in Travancore – is said to have opened the Twyford estate in Peerumedu.²⁹ It was around the same time that J. D. Munro, the grandson of the British diplomatic representative to the Court of Travancore, opened up estates near Peerumedu, which were retained by his family throughout the colonial period. In the early 1870s, a group of Scottish planters opened tea estates in Asambumalai with the money they had made from plantations in Sri Lanka; the Merchiston, Ponnudi, Bon Accord and Bracmore estates thus came up by the mid-1870s.³⁰ The North Travancore Land Planting and Agricultural Society formed by the consortium of British investors in 1879, with 215 square miles of land

bought up³¹ – the details of which are examined later – eventually became the Kanan Devan empire marking what was the beginning of a higher level of subordinate integration of the princely state to the world economy. This was followed by the floating of two major sterling companies: the Travancore Tea Estates Co. and the Southern India Tea Estates, both with businesses in Sri Lankan plantations, which commenced operations in the 1890s with the acquisition of a few estates like Glen Mary and Westerton in Vandiperiyar, which had been opened up in the 1870s. John Ajoo, one of the six men from China, provided the necessary expertise for the opening of a 13-acre estate in Munnar, which later came to be known as ‘Chinaman’s Field.’³² The Stagbrook Rubber and Tea Estates Co. Ltd., the Peerumedu Tea Co. Ltd. and the Malayalam Plantations were some of the other estates that began operating at the start of the twentieth century.³³

Tea planting commenced in Wayanad, still later on the Ibex Lodge Hill, in 1864, and in 1870 on the Perinthotti estate, the latter by Parry & Co. who had been the pioneers in the organised coffee business in Wayanad, and in the Oucherlony Valley in 1875 with a few acres of China hybrid.³⁴ When coffee was ruined by leaf disease, and the rush for gold had ceased – massive investments having turned to a few oz of gold dust³⁵ – Wayanad gradually emerged as one of the leading tea regions in southern India. By that time, the Governor of Madras had come to anticipate English colonisation in Wayanad to the fullest extent. To quote him:

that the Europeans should organise and direct the labour of the country and provide the capital, skill and enterprise necessary for the success of important undertakings. There are only two obstacles to the formation of strong English settlement in Wayanad in this sense – the want of roads and the great difficulty of obtaining a secure title to land.³⁶

Tea came a little later to Anaimalai – by the close of the nineteenth century – but spread fast, and the area soon earned the name ‘Kenya of the south’. The entry of European commercial ventures into Anaimalai was facilitated by H. Cleghorn, the Conservator of Forests who made an expedition to the region in 1858. After the expedition, he reported:

the result of our excursion was not without interest. Some curious botanical novelties were found; the timber resources of the district were ascertained, and a large tract of our country, suitable for coffee culture, was traversed, which will doubtless be the scene of future colonisation *at any cost*.³⁷ (emphasis added).

Following this account of the expedition, the planters began to appear on the scene; the first European application for land was made in 1864 for the Carnatic Coffee Company. A large patch of land, its actual acreage not being given even so much as a mention, was sold to the company ‘freehold’. However, coffee was found to be unsuitable to the region and the company went into liquidation in its attempt to raise the crop there.³⁸ A few tea planters from Sri Lanka, who had also brought along Sinhalese fellers, opened up estates towards the close of the nineteenth century; these came to be known as the Stanmore Group. However, even in 1900, the area under coffee was higher than that under the competing crops, viz. tea and cardamom, with 1,155 acres

in tea and 843 acres in cardamom. It was by the first quarter of the twentieth century that metropolitan capital began to be increasingly channelled into tea cultivation in these regions. This venture went on to flourish significantly. By the year 1911, there were 10,000 acres under tea, which was expanded by around 1,000 acres annually, leading to the creation of a planting district with a total area of around 37,000 acres.³⁹ Tea found its way to Nelliampathy a little later, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, following the abandoning of coffee and the subsequent abortive experiments in lemon grass oil.⁴⁰

In all these planting regions, the tea industry took advantage of the failure of coffee that had occurred in the mid-1870s, thus marking the end of the coffee-era and the founding of a vast tea empire: while the indices of quantity of coffee exported and the value therein declined from 120 to 107 and 201 to 163 respectively, from the year 1875–6 to 1882–3, tea exported and the value realised increased from 712 to 1,824 and 811 to 1,828 respectively during the same period. The replacement of coffee by tea was more perceptible in the case of Travancore: the value of tea exported from the State increased by 88 per cent as against a decline in coffee by 40 per cent during the period from 1891–2 to 1899–1900. Further, the value of tea exported amounted to nearly 11 per cent of the total value of export from the State in the mid-1890s.⁴¹

The ever-increasing expansion of tea as against a drastic decline in the area under coffee was all the more significant since it occurred in the face of the Depression from the middle of the 1890s when the rate of increase in the supply of tea had outstripped the rate of increase in demand, a situation which lasted till 1907.⁴² By this time Britain had been progressively reducing its dependence on China by nurturing tea within its colonies.⁴³

2.6 Appropriation of lands

The frenzied rush to open up large tracts of land for tea and the pouring in of foreign capital were prompted primarily by an adherence to a liberal land policy by the various state governments: there were three major gateways of appropriation of land resources – both private and open – and of conversion of the same into closed and private property in keeping with the essence of the Imperial Resolution that we have already cited.

2.6.1 Land at throw-away prices

For purposes of assessment, the land in southern India was divided into three broad categories: (a) wetlands where paddy was the predominant crop, (b) garden-lands where coconut, arecanut, palmyra, jackfruit, etc. were grown and (c) wastelands, lands other than wetlands and garden-lands, where plantation crops such as coffee, tea, rubber, cardamom and other cash crops were grown. Wastelands normally include all lands other than those assigned under the zamindari or ryotwary systems of land tenure, with forests predominating.

In order to woo the European planters, the various colonial rulers provided unlimited land at throwaway prices, often without any price at all. Tax fixed was very low and even this was not paid promptly. For instance, in places like Wayanad, Nilgiris and Coorg many of the European planters were free holders.⁴⁴ European families wielding an influence over the Forest Conservators also managed to acquire lands free of cost.⁴⁵

The planters were required to meet the cost of demarcation and survey alone, and the lands were free of assessments for five years in Nilgiris, four years in Coorg and three years in Wayanad, after which they were assessed at a mere rupees two per acre; in Mysore, it was fixed at just Re 1 as a 'permanent settlement' for 30 years.⁴⁶ Grasslands were liable to an assessment of eight annas per acre from the date of appropriation. On the Shevaroy hills, lands were assessed at a rate of Re 1 per acre from the date they were taken up.⁴⁷ The auction system of land sale, through which lands at a ridiculously low rate of just Re 1 per acre were made available, was introduced in Travancore;⁴⁸ this rate of exchange was maintained until 1874 when it was raised to rupees ten per acre. The annual rent was fixed as follows: for the first eight years, the lessee had to pay eight annas (equal to half-a-rupee) per acre; from the ninth year, the rate was rupees 1.50 and from the twelfth year, rupees two⁴⁹ as against the money rate of assessments per acre of wetlands in Travancore, which was around rupees two, and in Malabar it was twelve annas to as high as rupees six. As noted by one of the pioneer European planters in 1892, there was no other place in India or Sri Lanka where such facilities existed for the acquisition of planting land as in Travancore.⁵⁰ Around this time, the assessment rates for garden-lands in Malabar hovered at around rupees one to seven per acre as against four annas to rupees two per acre for dry lands.⁵¹ In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the planters were allowed to apply for 'several contiguous lots' though each lot was not to exceed 500 acres; the upset price was 'merely the cost of survey and of the erection of durable boundary marks'; these lands were subject to an annual assessment of only rupees two per acre.⁵²

When the wasteland rules came into force in the Madras Presidency in 1863, the annual assessment was fixed at rupees two per acre for forest-lands and Re 1 for grasslands utilised for the cultivation of coffee. But in Nilgiris, the planters were not required to pay anything at all for their lands until they started bearing crop. In 1874 the concession was extended to tea plantations as well, and in 1904 to all special products of economic importance as specified by the government.⁵³ Even when an increase in land tax for plantations was suggested, it was to be below the average of the land tax on corresponding cultivation in the plains; further, certain remissions on land assessments were given to the planters including some for those new forests opened up for other cash crops such as rubber.⁵⁴ As against such huge concessions to the planters, the assessments for the peasants in the Madras Presidency remained some of the highest in India, with half of the net produce going to the State exchequer (see Sections 2.7 and 4.1).

The resettlement of land revenue took place in Malabar in 1929: the assessments on garden-lands were maintained at the previous levels, the rates on dry lands being raised by a bare minimum while there was a drastic increase in the rates on wetlands – from Rupees (Rs) 0-12-0 and Rs 6-0-0 per acre to Rs 0-14-0 and Rs 7-2-0.⁵⁵ In Travancore too, when the planters were paying rupee one per acre as land tax in 1910, or in certain cases even as meagre a sum as two paise, the paddy farmers of Nanchilnadu were taxed at as high a rate as rupees twelve per acre.⁵⁶

2.6.2 Land as concession: The case of the world's largest plantation

There were innumerable instances of the granting of evergreen forests across the Western Ghats to European planters as 'concessions'. Such concessions were very often made ignoring the opinions of experts who warned that the forest area concerned

should not be allotted for planting as it would distort the sustainable eco-system in the region – an area of concern that still vexes the environmentalists of today, and which is dealt with in the next section. What is more, the allotment of evergreen forests for planting was actually encouraged, provided they went into European hands. Of the large number of such land leases quite a few were granted for 99 years, whether explicitly or otherwise.

The Ouchterlony Valley concession in the mid-1850s was the earliest such instance. The Valley, lying below the western wall of the Nilgiris plateau, comprised an area of not less than 40 square miles – an area of unbroken forest, with plentiful rain, fertile soil, and rich in flora and fauna. The ownership right over the land was claimed by the Nilambur *Thirumulpad*. In 1845, James Ouchterlony, a European judge in Udthagamandalam, obtained a lease of the eastern half of the Valley for the sum of Rs 1,500 and a rental of Rs 200 per annum.⁵⁷ In 1857, he managed to obtain a second lease to the west of the Valley, again on favourable terms. In another instance, ‘ten square miles’ of a deciduous jungle belt, lying within the limits of Pathanapuram and Sengottai *taluks*, was granted under pressure to Mr Huxham who had already been occupying part of the same without authorisation. It was initially granted for a period of 50 years on the understanding that the lease could be extended again for another 50 years, thus making the total lease period a long century.⁵⁸ The ownership was later transferred to M/s. Binny & Co. of Madras in 1857, and from them to another overseas firm who were to pay an annual rent of Rs 100 per square mile of land under cultivation. In 1912, the lease was converted into a free hold and the rent was fixed at as low a rate as Re 1 per acre.

The Kanan Devan Hills, previously known as the Kanan Devan Anchanatu Mala, was sold to J. D. Munro by Punhatil Koyikal Kerala Varma Valiya Raja in 1877 through the first Poonjar concession which was executed on the 11th of July; this was followed by a second Poonjar concession on 26 July 1879, which was another agreement between Munro and the Poonjar chief. As acquisition of land by Europeans was subject to government sanction, Munro had filed an application through his attorney, Mr H. G. Turner, even before the 1st Poonjar Agreement, which was later ratified by the Travancore government after much discussion and consultation with the British Resident. As part of the land transfer, the government first took over the area from the Punhatil Raja in exchange for certain paddy lands in central Travancore. The sale was made for an outright price of Rs 5,000 and was subject to an annual rent of Rs 3,000 from the seventh year onwards after the bearing of crop. The two concessions altogether comprised about 215 square miles,⁵⁹ more than 1.37 lakh acres, equivalent to nearly one-seventh of the net cultivated area of the princely state. This vast tract of land, now in the Devikulam *taluk* of Idukki district in Kerala, was later transferred in favour of the North Travancore Land Planting and Agricultural Society Ltd.⁶⁰ The grant was again transferred from the Society to the North and South Sylhet Company, a subsidiary of the Scottish-based Finlay Muir & Company, popularly known as James Finlay & Company. The fact that the Kanan Devan concession constituted an equivalent of one-seventh of the net cultivated area and nearly one-tenth of the total forests of Travancore⁶¹ amply testifies to the extent to which the princely state under indirect colonial rule was subordinate to the Imperial power.

Two of the most important elements of the terms and conditions of the agreement between the State and James Finlay & Company, who owned the Kanan Devan

Plantations, were as follows: (i) An assessment of one-half of a British rupee on every acre of land which was opened up for cultivation or otherwise excluding grasslands, and (ii) two annas and eight paise (equivalent to 0.15 rupees) per annum for every acre of grassland brought under cultivation or taken for homesteads, farmsteads, shooting reserves or for the grazing of cattle or for any other purpose.⁶²

While noting the necessity of imposing a basic tax on all lands occupied by the company, it was reported in 1946, just a year before Independence:

the rate of assessment imposed on the land which was 68 years old is very light as compared to the assessment on similar lands ... The grantees have been enjoying immunity in regard to land assessment for a very large area ... The KDHP Company by refusing to put the land unoccupied to any use what so ever, escapes assessment.⁶³

The Kanan Devan concession was by far the most historic concession that had ever been made not only in southern India but also in the country as a whole. The company's ownership over such vast tracts of land made it the biggest tea plantation in the world, a single company owning more than 1.36 lakh acres as an integrated block till the early 1970s; with a lesser area than previously, it remains the world's single largest integrated plantation even to this day under the new mode of ownership (see Chapter 9).

2.6.3 Large-scale encroachments

Another mode of appropriation of open resources resorted to by the planters was a large-scale encroachment of both public and private lands. Such encroachments were often legitimised by the State with a view to the maximisation of revenue from these lands. In Travancore, for example, when one European planter grabbed 114 acres of forest-land, the State, instead of evicting or imposing a penalty on him or at least warning him, informed him that though the lands adjoining most of the encroachments had been sold at an average value of Rs 20–35, the government was disposed to grant him the same as a matter of concern at Rs 10 per acre.⁶⁴ W. Rees, the British political agent, while on his tour to Devikulam in 1896, commented that one planter had complained of a delay in getting a *patta* (title) for some land near Mettu, but that it seemed to be due to his having taken more than the extent for which he had applied.⁶⁵ The encroachments were so blatant and widespread that the Revenue Officers were hard put to distinguish between actually granted lands and encroachments.⁶⁶

In the process of encroachment, many foreign firms and individual planters continued to hold land without proper title deeds, and the absence of such documents often proved to be a hindrance to the disposal of these lands at a later stage. For instance, by 1914, Parry & Co. decided to sell their plantations in Wayanad, but they found it very difficult to find a buyer mainly owing to their inability to provide appropriate title deeds and survey details. The firm could not sell off its lands in Wayanad once and for all until the year 1942.⁶⁷ However, by this time, the land policies of the various state governments had converged with the acceptance of a policy of maximum land revenue, which in turn tended to regularise encroachments subject to the payment of a meagre sum as penalty. In 1934, for instance, the Travancore government decided to regularise the encroachments at a penalty of Rs 100 per acre and a yearly assessment

of Rs 3 per acre with retrospective effect from the date of occupation.⁶⁸ Forest plunder was virtually legalised consequent on such stipulations and land encroachments continued on a mounting scale; cases of encroachments of villages in part or even wholly by the planters were not uncommon, often sparking off conflicts between the planters and the local populace.⁶⁹

2.7 Fiscal incentives: Taxes on production and trade

The colonial State was quick to fall in with the wishes of the planters, enclosing the lands they pointed out, even tampering with the export–import policies to the further detriment of the peasant economy. Import duty on paddy, for instance, was not imposed in the Madras Presidency until 1935, and even after its introduction in that year, it did not refer to paddy as such; further, the action taken by the State was not effective in checking either the imports or the fall in local prices which often made paddy cultivation a losing proposition.⁷⁰ The Travancore State was further pressurised into withdrawing in 1865 the import duty on paddy imposed earlier by it: this was at a time when the planters had begun to make their presence felt in the high ranges. Moreover, the rapid commercialisation of agriculture with a bias towards cash crops led to a decrease in the proportion of area under food crops: the area under food crops as a percentage of the net cropped area in Nilgiris and Malabar, for instance, declined from 39 and 75 per cent in the early 1890s to 21 and 60 per cent respectively in the late 1930s; the situation in Travancore was no better as it had to be content with less than half of the net cropped area being under food crops by the early 1940s.⁷¹ The inevitable outcome was a shortage of food grains and a consequent increase in external dependence. For instance, Travancore, once a net exporter of its staple food rice, had turned into a net importer of the same by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁷² In spite of the fact that Malabar was the second largest producer of rice in the Madras Presidency, next only to Thanjavur, it also became a net importer of paddy from the mid-nineteenth century. In both the provinces the fall in rice production was compensated for only by an increased import of rice from Burma (present-day Myanmar).⁷³ The imported rice provided the planters with cheap food for their workers and aided the former in keeping wages at a minimum (see Chapter 6). All the more encouraging were the exclusive instructions given by the colonial authorities for waiving import duties on those ‘boxes and postal parcels arriving to the planters as it should be left to the honour of the planter to declare any dutiable articles’.⁷⁴

Further, as against the removal of import duty on paddy in Travancore, the export duty on coffee was as low as 5 per cent *ad valorem* in 1875, which greatly favoured the plantation sector. It was further reduced to 2.5 per cent in 1877 and at a later stage it was reverted to the former modest rate of 5 per cent; Mysore, too, favoured the planters by lowering the excise tax.⁷⁵ With the combined efforts of the various planters’ associations in India and the Anti-Tea Duty League, London, the customs duty levied on the import of tea into Britain and other countries was kept at minimum – 5 d. per lb – until 1916. Though an export duty was first introduced in 1916, the planters succeeded in having it abolished by the year 1927. Furthermore, the planters were given the added protection of income tax exemptions until the early 1920s,⁷⁶ after which they were nominally taxed, in spite of the fact that they continued to accumulate huge profits.

While pointing out the tax-paying tree crops of Thiruvananthapuram such as coconut, areca, palmyra, jackfruit and in some districts tamarind and laurd, the Dewan K. Krishnaswamy Rao refutes the 'impression' among the European planters that the expenses of farming and working cash crops like tea and coffee are a great deal more than the cultivation of the above-enumerated tree crops. The Dewan was fully aware of the fact that the land tax and duty on plantation segment were extremely low. In contrast to the tax-bearing 'durable' trees in Travancore such as coconut, palmyra, areca-nut and jackfruit, coffee and tea were taxed by the area, and this, to quote the Dewan:

[The] assessment on *tea and coffee* is very low compared to the tax on other trees such as *coconut and arecanut* an acre of coffee pays 12 annas while the same extent of land planted with coconuts would give the government 21 1/2 Rs at 300 trees to an acre and a tax of 2 chuckrams on each tree. The produce of the coconut tree pays in addition an export duty of 5% whether as fruit, or oil and coir, while coffee pays only 2.5% on a tariff valuation determined at less than half the market value. The duty thus virtually amounts to only 1 per cent. Thus while an acre of coffee pays government only 2 Rs a year in tax and duty, that extent of coconut cultivation brings into the treasury no less than 30 Rs from the same sources, not taking into account the double duty on coir and oil, but reckoning only the fruit as exported at the tariff valuation of 30 Rs per 1000.⁷⁷

Regarding the futility of the argument that coconut is a much longer-lived tree than coffee, the Dewan reminds that, 'by the time a garden of coconut trees comes into bearing in 12 years, the coffee has recovered all its outlay by the produce of 6 or 7 years' while in the case of tea it takes only 3–4 years. This was in addition to the 'generous and sympathetic attitude'⁷⁸ that the Europeans met with all throughout from the State, the details of which are given in Chapter 3.

2.8 Of over-acquisition and what it means

It has been observed throughout colonial plantation economies that vast tracts of land were generally acquired at low prices, far in excess of the required minimum for viable plantations. In certain cases the planters acquired more land than they had capital to invest in. In both the cases, what prompted the planters to acquire more than the minimum requirement of land could possibly be the desire to maintain the plantation as a single contiguous unit, to have additional land for speculative businesses, to control the right of way to other nearby areas and/or to keep prospective competitors out of the enterprise. All these factors, either singly or in combination led to over-acquisition and thus under-utilisation of plantation land as in other colonies the world over.⁷⁹

The case of tea plantations in southern India was in no way different. An applicant was not forbidden to acquire land even if he had no means to cultivate it. The process of over-acquisition was in fact accelerated by the wasteland rules and the readiness of the State to legitimise encroachments on whatever scale they went on. In certain planting regions large tracts of land were sold out to individual planters and companies. At times, neither grantees nor the individual company had any idea of the area leased in; they then indulged in speculation by selling the grants to merchant capital to raise plantations. In the first half of the twentieth century, around half of the total area

owned by these companies remained virtually uncultivated,⁸⁰ thus forming a major source of speculation and/or timber production, which were both socially and ecologically damaging as discussed later.

Whenever the local authorities refused to comply with the wishes of the planters, the former were dealt with badly. While on a tour of the high ranges in 1907, for instance, the Dewan of Travancore was approached by some European planters demanding more land, roads and judicial facilities. The Dewan, however, did not accept these demands. This quite predictably annoyed the Europeans, one of whom is reported to have followed the Dewan on horseback in an attempt to obstruct his tour.⁸¹ Though a police case was filed against the offending planter, nothing came of it as the planter refused to submit himself to the law of the land.⁸² Further, any attempts at imposing restrictions on the release of land by the local rulers were thwarted by the planters. For instance, it was quite common for the planters to purchase lands from local landlords in addition to land acquired through the State. The Government of Travancore, by a notification, demanded the sanction of such purchases from the State. To quote:

... the Europeans and Americans residing in Travancore are expected ... to obtain the sanction of the *Sirkar* in every instance of purchasing or otherwise acquiring landed property.⁸³

Imperial reply, routed through the Government of India, was to the effect that Europeans would be placed under 'no disabilities in the matter of acquiring land',⁸⁴ the said autonomy of the princely State thus proved to be a myth. It was also specified that persons whose residence in the State was authorised should not be subjected to formalities in matters other than those imposed by the general law of the country, thus removing all hurdles in the planters' way. Having once succumbed to the planters' will, the State found itself at a loss to recover even an iota of what it had earlier gifted away.⁸⁵

2.9 Research, processing technology and development

This is an area of endeavour that is integral to the sustenance and expansion of global capital today, just as the colonial State had recognised back in the early days of the planting industry. However, it was the improvement of crops and their protection from various diseases that received the maximum attention and financial aid. While enormous grants were made in aid of the establishment of various research stations, the only such investments in relation to workers' health were those made in favour of the institutes to combat malaria, which again were directed towards ensuring a steady supply of labour.⁸⁶ Four experimental stations were established in Tenmalai, Peerumedu, Mooply and Siddapur, towards which the State made substantial contributions. Along with such experimental stations, the United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI) also developed a Scientific Department whose function was never hampered by financial constraints as the various governments continued to contribute to its work without demur⁸⁷ thus unclogging the channels of growth in the plantation sector through centralised research activities. Apart from efforts made towards crop improvement, research aimed at the betterment of processing technology was also launched, though on a limited scale.

As processing of the plucked leaves needs to be done with a minimum of delay, the setting up of factories in the estates became all the more important. Tea leaves undergo two basic methods of processing, depending on whether green or black tea is to be produced. The green, or unfermented, tea is first subjected to steaming or roasting, followed by rolling or twisting, after which it is dried. The process differs for black tea in that the green leaf is first withered in troughs, or partially dried under controlled conditions of temperature and humidity, after which it is cut or rolled in order to break up the leaf so that a greater exposure to air is achieved. This is then followed by fermentation during which the exposed surfaces of the leaf pieces undergo oxidation thus giving them their distinctive flavour and black colour. The tea is then dried in fluidised-bed dryers, cleansed of stalk and fibre by an electrostatic machine and sorted into various commercial grades. The processing of black tea is done in two ways: in the orthodox process the tea is rolled against a cutting table, while in the cut, tear and curl (CTC) process the tea is rolled between two rollers in which it is 'crushed, torn and curled' to extract the juice from the cells. The orthodox process produces larger pieces, which retain the delicate flavour better, and is generally used for higher quality loose teas.

Electrical power had reached the estates by the early twentieth century, leading to a sweeping change in the functioning of the factories. The initiative for this modernisation was taken up by James Finlay & Company with the construction of a hydroelectric power house at Pallivasal in the year 1900, and then at Periakanal in 1910. With the leasing out of water from the Munnar River by the State to the Finlay-owned Kanan Devan Hills Produce Company (KDHP) for 30 years from 1910, the Munnar Valley Electric Works with a total capacity of 375 kW was started by the company, which ultimately monopolised the generation of hydroelectric power from Pallivasal;⁸⁸ power from this station was transmitted to other factories. It was the second such power station to be established in India, and the first of its kind to be utilised in connection with the manufacturing of tea.⁸⁹ By the 1940s, the original lease agreement was renewed and the Pallivasal Hydroelectric Scheme sponsored jointly by the State and the KDHP became operational,⁹⁰ and was instrumental in effecting a massive growth in the plantation sector in the high ranges of Travancore. Various hydroelectric projects like the Pykara Power Project in Nilgiris-Wayanad⁹¹ that tapped the water resources of the Western Ghats also came up; the big companies were quick to open up processing units based on electrical power. The big companies set up their own factories to capitalise on.⁹²

All the aforesaid factors combined to encourage a significant growth in the area under tea and the output therein, without much interruption even during the Depression years, 1929–32 or Wars, the implications will be analysed in Chapter 6. A massive spatial expansion of tea plantation monoculture occurred in Anaimalai during 1915–25 followed by a similar process in Nilgiris and Travancore. In area and area plucked, Travancore was ahead of Malabar throughout the period, but in output it lagged behind in the period 1925–35. Travancore continued to remain the largest planting district in southern India with around half of its area under tea. This was followed by Nilgiris with one-quarter of the share of tea plantations, and the remaining lay almost equally distributed between Wayanad and Anaimalai in the districts of Malabar and Coimbatore respectively. The regional variations in the growth and development of plantations are often explained in terms of the favourable land policies followed by the

respective local states or the better transport facilities that were set up by the same.⁹³ It would also be appropriate to point out that tea plantations had spread to as many areas as possible. The production of tea thus increased in magnitude; the final product was then marketed in more than a dozen grades, differing in size, style and density; this was accompanied by advances in transport and marketing systems, as discussed briefly in the next section.

2.10 Roads, railways and ports as incorporation

Not content with the favourable land and taxation measures, the colonial State further proceeded to expand the transport network facilitating the movement of plantation produce to the world market. Head-load workers, mules and animal carts, even camels on certain occasions, formed the early modes of transport in the planting regions; these were gradually complemented by ropeways, monorail and tramways carrying the final products from the plantations to the ports.⁹⁴ The plantation products from southern India moved westward through the ports of Tuticorin and Madras, and those along the Malabar coast which had a centuries-old tradition of trade in spices with Europe.⁹⁵ The huge investments in transport infrastructure – railways, roads, canals, bridges and ports – in turn hastened the process of integration of the planting regions with the world economy. Apart from meeting the requirements of the Imperial Army, the elaborate transport arrangements made by the British government in colonial India were intended primarily to facilitate the channelling of raw materials from the colonies to the core, and the shipping back of cheap manufactured goods to the peripheries. With the establishment of new shipping ports along the western coast and an increased co-ordination among the existing ones, a wide network of roads and railways was laid linking them to the sources of the raw materials. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, rail and roadways starting from the port towns of Bombay, Calcutta, Chennai [Madras] and Karachi were operating, linking them to the hinterlands, thus reinforcing the hegemony of the European core in trade and commerce.

It had been precisely with this kind of hegemony in mind that the Court of Directors had invested a huge amount of nearly Rs 2 lakhs in a road linking Madikeri,⁹⁶ the capital of Coorg, which was gradually emerging as a coffee centre, to the port city of Mangalore. The roads from Chennai to northern Selam and the others from the western boundary of Mysore to Mangalore via Coorg built by the early 1840s proved to be of immense significance in terms of both military and commercial interests,⁹⁷ the latter owing to the fact that these areas were the origin of a variety of hill produce and comprised a region gradually emerging as the major coffee producer in southern India. In the early 1840s, the Governor of the Madras Presidency took particular interest in the development of water transport and the opening up of the planting regions of Wayanad and Nilgiris. The Governor, Lord Tweeddale, was anxious to set things moving:

In consequence of a want of communication either by road or by water, much of the produce of the interior parts above the ghats is sent to Chennai for export, whereas if the ghats were opened and the means of communication made possible large districts would be enabled to send their produce by a quick and a cheap route.⁹⁸

Within no time, the track linking Wayanad with the Malabar coast, particularly to the ports of Kozhikode and Thalasseri, and passing through the Thamarasseri Ghat was made in proper order. In 1880, when the 'gold rush' in Wayanad was at its height, it was proposed to run a railway line from Beppoor, which was expected to become a good harbour, to Gudallur and then on to Mysore.⁹⁹ This plan made for the benefit of the planters and the gold companies – more than a dozen of which had mushroomed there within no time – however, failed to materialise.

2.11 Public Works Department and the planters' roads

The colonial State helped to increase commodity production by contributing considerable amounts to the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, hospitals, and other such infrastructural facilities like research and development centres. These were the earliest manifestations of State capitalism in the planting regions. In fact, the entire system of communication in the planting regions had been designed so as 'to transport the rich commercial crops of the state like pepper, ginger, cardamom, rubber and tea to the nearest harbour by the cheapest and safest route of exportation'. The opening up of roads was also intended to allow an easy influx of labour.¹⁰⁰ The establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) by the mid-nineteenth century – in 1848 in Madras, and in 1860 in Travancore – facilitated the construction of ghat roads on a massive scale. The ghat roads were maintained either by the PWD or by the District Board. Many of the roads constructed at the request of the planters came to be known as planters' roads. Moreover, the Road Board was particular in using the term 'planting districts' with reference to those districts where there were European planters.¹⁰¹

One of the first high-range roads constructed by the PWD in Travancore was the Ghat Road from Kottayam towards the State frontier near Guddalur via Peerumedu. This cart track to Peerumedu was completed in 1871 and was then extended to the frontier in 1884.¹⁰² By the turn of the century, bridle paths and cart tracks connecting Munnar with the low country to the west in Tamil Nadu and to the east in Travancore were increasingly being constructed.¹⁰³ Nearly half of the revenue from sale of lands and export duties in Travancore was spent on survey, roads, etc. in the planting region after the formation of the PWD.¹⁰⁴ The proportion of State expenditure on PWD roads increased from one-quarter to one-half during the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ More roads were constructed by the first quarter of the twentieth century, as it was often cited that the inaccessibility of these regions acted as the major hindrance to the migration of local labour to the plantations, more so from the Tamil countryside.¹⁰⁶ The Kozhikode–Mysore road and the Thalasseri–Coorg road, which were the main outlets from the important planting regions to the west-coast ports, were maintained by the PWD from 1900 and 1903 respectively, with an average annual cost of maintenance worth Rs 2,712; this was in addition to the Rs 1,14,920 being spent for roads in Wayanad alone.¹⁰⁷

The State followed a discriminatory policy favouring the European planters over the local planters even in its subsidisation of roads in the planting region; the vernacular press did not fail to sound a dissenting note in this matter.¹⁰⁸ In certain cases, the villagers themselves expressed their resentment by refusing to provide food for the planters who had come with plans to encroach on their lands. One such case is worth

mentioning. In the formative years of the Kanan Devan plantations, the then General Manager, his wife and some workers set forth to trace a route to establish a cart track to Coimbatore through the Anjanad pass. On their way from Talayar to Marayoor where they stayed overnight, they were unable to procure any food from the villagers who were irate over the fact that a road linking up with the plantations was to be cut through their paddy fields. To quote the manager, 'even after offering Re 1 per measure of rice, nothing could be done and the poor coolies had to move on to the next camp without proper food'.¹⁰⁹ During the next day and night, in the nearby village Mattupetty too, they could not obtain food, but only water – that too with great difficulty.

In the 1870s, the entire cost of construction of roads in the planting districts was paid by the government, and by the close of the nineteenth century the Travancore government was also meeting the cost of maintenance of these roads. In 1896, W. Rees observed with regard to the new roads being constructed towards the high ranges that the direction in which aid should be given should be determined chiefly by administrative and political considerations.¹¹⁰ The immediate outcome of this was the sanction of finance from the Travancore State to construct a road from Devikulam to the low country. The Neriamangalam–Pallivasal road thus constructed not only gave a boost to the existing planting business but was also instrumental in the spread of the planting enterprises, particularly rubber to the lowlands.¹¹¹

By the 1930s, a wide network of roads spread out from the planting regions to the port towns, passing through the deltas, and facilitating the movement of produce and labour. When the State Transport Service in Travancore was inaugurated in February 1938, the Department ordered the purchase of more than a dozen lorries to transport the tea produced in the Kanan Devan Plantations to the Kochi port, at a flat rate of four annas per ton per mile. Rice and other provisions for the estates were transported on the way back, thus assuring a return haulage. Such was the eagerness of the State to be of assistance to the planters that it even prohibited the running of lorries and buses down the ghat road, from Munnar to Neriamangalam and back, or any portion thereof in the specified hours of the transport of estate produce and provisions.¹¹²

In places like Anaimalai where all the tea plantations were owned by Europeans, the cost of maintaining the planters' roads and the ghat roads was considerably high. For instance, the total cost of maintenance of such roads was worked out at Rs 63,950 in the years 1937–9. The contribution towards the same by the Anaimalai Planters' Association, for whose benefit the roads were being constructed and maintained, was abysmally low, a little over two per cent. Instead, tolls at the rate of 12 annas (equivalent to 0.75 rupees) per cart were collected by the European planters from the public.¹¹³ More and more forests were cleared in Anaimalai in the 1930s, largely in view of improved road accessibility it offered to Coimbatore and towards the Kochi port, the latter being achieved through the construction of a ghat road in 1937. The road cess levied by the government in the planting regions was objected to by the planters. They used to 'threaten' the State, warning it that their produce would be diverted along other routes if their roads were not properly maintained.¹¹⁴ The planters' associations demanded the construction of new roads as well as a further improvement of transport systems through their respective legislative councils. The UPASI too, approached the state governments concerned with the problem of increasing difficulties as regards transport of crops and foodstuffs demanding increased, improved and more rapid methods of transport in the form of both roads and railways.¹¹⁵

2.12 Rail connections

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the construction of railways began to 'invade every continent', financed from Europe as an effective instrument of expansion of the world economy centred in London.¹¹⁶ As in other colonies, in India too, railways penetrated to the most interior parts, integrating the sources of raw materials and labour with the markets, 'under the pressure of British merchants, manufacturers and investors to assist in the exploitation of the resources', as the 'nationalists' rightly put it.¹¹⁷ The development of ports and harbours and the construction of railways to the seacoast figured prominently in the planters' annual meetings. In the annual general meeting of the UPASI in 1900, it was suggested that 'a safe harbour on the west coast is more urgently needed than an improvement of light houses round the coast of India'.¹¹⁸ However, depending on the produce to be exported, planters were divided in their opinion with regard to a demand for a modern west-coast harbour: while the coffee planters from north Mysore voted for the development of the Mangalore port, those from south Mysore and Coorg favoured Thalasseri, those from Nilgiris-Wayanad preferred Kozhikode and those from Travancore obviously opted for the port of Kochi,¹¹⁹ then the third-largest port in southern India; the last was finally to emerge as a modern harbour with deep water facilities.¹²⁰

The initiative taken by the planters to integrate and consolidate the planting regions through rail roads began with the erection of monorail and ropeways in which the Kanan Devan Plantation took the lead: a monorail tramway came up in 1899, which was replaced by a 2 ft gauge steam train in 1909.¹²¹ The Great South Indian Railway, the predecessor of the present-day Southern Railways, began to operate in 1861; railroads linking up planting regions, too, began to crystallise at a faster rate. The Nilgiri Railway Co., registered in 1885, ran a rail service from Mettupalayam to Coonoor, from where it was later extended to Udhagamandalam.¹²² The two major rail routes of importance from the port town of Madras – towards Coimbatore and Thirunelveli – pass across regions producing a wide variety of produce such as rice, castor and gingelly seeds, cotton, bamboo mats and, above all, form the 'labour catchment areas' of southern India. Though it was initially suggested that the line to Thirunelveli be extended to Thiruvananthapuram via Aramboly and Nagercoil, this was abandoned in favour of an extension via Cherkottai to Kollam as the latter would pass through the planting regions. The importance of the railway line from Thirunelveli to Kollam via Cherkottai, particularly in furthering the interests of the planting community, was expressed in the following words:

... there is a large area of unbroken virgin forest land amounting to about 10,000 acres near the line of railway, which is well suited for tea cultivation. The estates already opened up in this district are amongst the best yielding in the country, and if over production does not seriously curtail extension, a large area would probably be brought under cultivation.¹²³

The Thirunelveli-Kollam line was finally opened in 1904 at an average cost of Rs 2 lakhs per mile.¹²⁴ The line was extended to Thiruvananthapuram in 1910, which helped to open up hitherto inaccessible hinterlands still further for the expansion of plantations. This was followed by the extension of the railway line from Thiruchirappalli to

Bodinayakanur by 1929; thus the integrated transport system helped the planters to bring up loads of rice for the workers and plantation inputs like manure, machinery and so on to the estates on their return after unloading manufactured tea.

Apart from the usual *Unjel* postal service in the high ranges, the Imperial Postal Line between Kottayam and Peerumedu became operational from 1878 in accordance with the demands of the planters.¹²⁵ When the first post office was started in Munnar in 1892, Mr Turner, one of the original shareholders of the Kanan Devan Plantations, arranged with each of his friends to have post cards mailed in his name so that the authorities would keep the post office open.¹²⁶ Further, the UPASI took particular interest in the setting up of a communication network working to get the cost of constructing public telegraph lines to the planting regions reduced.¹²⁷

II GEOGRAPHICAL VIOLENCE AS INCORPORATION

2.13 Of people, nature and sequestration

Man-made ecological disaster is global in character: it has its origins in the birth of capitalist expansion.¹²⁸ The land rush, described in the first section, and the very process of the development of plantations had damaging effects on the ecology of the entire Western Ghats and on the sources of community livelihood of the indigenous tribes. Most of these monoculture plantations were established on lands previously occupied by deciduous, unbroken, evergreen forests, rich in natural resources. A few of the related issues require further scrutiny.

Endowed with adequate rainfall and an ideal temperature, the Western Ghats were cloaked in luxuriant forests which had many unique features such as a massive range of biodiversity with hundreds of species as against the four or five chief species and six or eight less-abundant ones that are seen in European forests.¹²⁹ Moreover, a large number of rivers criss-cross these lands making the peninsula most fertile and forming the life support system of a large number of tribes.

Prior to the advent of plantations to the upper and lower slopes of the Western Ghats, the indigenous people such as the *Muthuvars*, *Vellalas*, *Naikers*, *Kurichiars* and *Kurumbars* were wont to sustain a diversified cropping pattern which included crops such as rice, wheat, potatoes, garlic and chillies, and fruits such as jackfruit, mango, orange and lime. J. D. Munro, who had established no less than ten estates on the hills of Peerumedu, noted on his tour to the high ranges of Travancore in 1877, that the *Vellalas* were engaged in cultivation and had laid out their lands to the best advantage in terraces well-irrigated by the streams from above.¹³⁰ In Nilgiris, the indigenous tribe, the *Thodars*, lived in consonance with the general climatic cycle of the hills and its grassland growth. For centuries, they had nurtured their natural habitat, taking from it only the barest minimum required for survival, showing a great concern for the preservation of their ecological environment: trees were not cut, undergrowth was not disturbed, *cholas* or *pockets of jungle* were protected.¹³¹ It was this harmonious and peaceful existence of the indigenous people that the Europeans disturbed in their pursuit of commercial gain.

In the days before the arrival of colonialism there had not been any official move to regulate the control of forest resources. Neither was there any need for such legislation,

forests being considered public property, particularly belonging to the indigenous peoples whose rights over the resources remained uncontested for as long as anyone could remember. As colonial penetration began to be felt, a new branch of trade of Imperial interest was created – trade in timber and plantations – which necessitated the systematic capitalisation of nature: a well-defined administrative structure with exploitative rules and regulations was developed; the Forest Department was created in 1865 and the Indian Forest Act was implemented in 1878. Forest resources were identified extensively and surveyed, demarcated and reserved; grazing was prohibited; shifting cultivation was forbidden, and planters were encouraged to convert diversified forestry into a monoculture plantation; whenever prospects of a lucrative business in certain trees were recognised, the latter were classified as ‘royal’; these included teak and sandalwood; the state also reserved exclusive rights over certain species, even when they were grown on private lands, all this having the effect of depriving the indigenous communities of their traditional means of living, and of destroying the ecologically productive systems therein.¹³²

In the early years, the local State had recognised the ownership rights of the natives over grazing lands; subsequently, it changed its position, arguing that they could have only grazing rights, thus encroaching on their lands without paying any compensation. In those regions where a grazing fee was stipulated, the tribes could not meet it for obvious reasons. In Travancore, grazing fee in the high ranges was first introduced with the intention of realising finance to construct roads and canals. The local people were thus not only alienated from their homes, but also were expected to subsidise the propertied class. The colonial bureaucracy was vociferous in its condemnation of the activities of the local peasants and the tribals, particularly that of shifting cultivation. The indigenous people who lived in complete harmony with their forest habitat were blamed for the destruction of wood and for ecological degradation as a whole, a clear indication of the distortion of history by the European invaders. With respect to the *Badagars* in Nilgiris, it was once reported:

There can be little doubt that throughout the country now occupied by the *Badagas*, *cholas* were formerly far more numerous and extensive than at present and that the *Badagas* had done immense destruction among them even before the first Europeans come to the hills.¹³³

As against the placing of restrictions on the use of common property resources by the local populace, including grazing, the planters had no compunctions regarding the encroachments that they themselves made. These remained unquestioned, even legitimised, either in the name of revenue or in the name of development of the region. As stated earlier, forests were reserved for the express purpose of a systematic exploitation, and, as a part of it, shifting cultivation was either banned or restricted, and other rights – grazing and pasturing, cutting of grass, gathering of leaves, hunting, fishing and so on – were regulated. To Bourdillon, the Conservator of Forests in Travancore, shifting cultivation was ‘wasteful’ and thus ‘objectionable’ and was to be ‘condemned’;¹³⁴ Cleghorn, the Conservator of Forests in Dakshin Kanara described it as ‘a rude system of culture’ and a ‘wasteful and barbarous system’;¹³⁵ and continued to maintain that it had serious effects on climate and soil fertility. Shifting cultivation was thus abolished in Mysore in 1848 and, a year after this, restrictions were imposed

in Dakshin Kanara which included a substantial increase in the rate of assessments – from eight annas to Re 1 in 1860 – forcing the tribals to work as wage labour under landlords or to offer themselves for recruitment to plantations.¹³⁶ Shifting cultivation was also a subject of interest to the Marine Board which in turn took the view that teak was ‘devastated’ on account of lands being used for shifting cultivation.

The Conservator of Forests of the Kanara district, H. Cleghorn, wrote in 1861:

In the beginning of the century, an immense, almost unbroken forest covered the Western Ghats, from near the watershed to the most elevated ridges – left to nature, thinly peopled, abounding in wild animals, and all the higher portions without exception covered with timber. Now the passing traveller, looking down from the higher peaks of Coorg or Malabar, conceives that an inextinguishable forest lies below him; but as he descends the ghats, he finds that the best timber has been cut away, and that the wood contractor is felling in more remote localities . . . Now the axe of the coffee planter and of the *kumri* cultivator have made extensive and often wanton-havoc, devastating a large portion of the area of the primeval forest. The former is encouraged as endeavouring to rescue the soil for legitimate purposes; but the squatter... is punished and repressed.¹³⁷

Having once prepared the groundwork for the exploitation of the luxuriant forests, the colonial State then proceeded to capitalise on their hold over these lands – felling of trees for timber, banning of shifting cultivation and encouragement of monoculture plantation then followed. The first half of the century also continued to witness an ever-increasing export of all kinds of timber from southern India.¹³⁸

It is interesting to note that when prices of timber plummeted in Europe in 1891, it was not the Bombay market alone that was affected, the forest revenue in every division declined simultaneously,¹³⁹ so integrated was it to the world economy, indeed. The innumerable rivers and backwaters in these regions made the transport of timber cheap and easy, ‘logs are dragged by elephants to the depot on the coast, or are railed by means of forest tramways’, and transported to the Malabar coast, where a large number of depots and cart centres had emerged. Timber from the natural teak forests was used for ship building and thus exported to the Bombay dockyard;¹⁴⁰ it was also transhipped to countries like Britain, the United States, Germany and France, bringing more and more export earnings to the State. Blackwood for furniture and firewood for fuel were also exported.

In order to retain its garden freshness, tea must be packed in wooden chests – tea in the chest is usually the best – as soon as it has been processed, as chests provide protection from moisture, loss of flavour and absorption of extraneous smells. Further, it takes months together to be sold; thus chests were required for storage of tea. These chests were made from plywood, providing the planters with yet another reason for the ruthless felling of trees.

2.14 Looming ecological crisis

Even during colonial times, the effects of the denudation of forests had been reported as causing the ‘drying up of streams, the flooding of rivers, and the destruction of the soil on mountainsides by the rapid descent of floodwater no longer arrested in its

course by vegetation'. The Famine Commission in 1880, while highlighting these issues, remarked on the importance of protecting the forests and extending the system of village forests in the wake of drought and famine.¹⁴¹ Within a period of six years, the Travancore State was forced to accept the Periyar dam project proposed by the Madras government, and thereby it had to lease out not less than 8,000 acres of forests for 999 years; these forests were submerged.¹⁴² Within another two years, the State further leased out 10 per cent of its forests to James Finlay & Company, for raising of tea monoculture; these forests too were razed to the ground as stated earlier. In fact, the peasants themselves began to air their complaints as their paddy and garden cultivation were being seriously affected by the lack of drainage resulting from the fast changes taking place in the otherwise virgin forests; the impact of deforestation on the local commodity system was also highlighted; their concern and trepidation find expression in the following words:

In former times, when the uplands surrounding the fields were *jungly*, the periodical rains would wash down large quantities of alluvium which greatly enhanced the productive capacity of soils ... but at present owing to the break up and loosening of the earth on the uplands for the purposes of plantation, the rains bring down and deposit in the fields below immense quantities of sand and silt instead of any fertilising matter. These deposits hamper cultivation and very often entail considerable labour for their removal.¹⁴³

Besides the silting of lowlands, the loss of forests led to floods during the rainy season and the drying up of rivers in the summers.¹⁴⁴ Natural springs and associated water sources were destroyed, inflicting permanent injuries on the ecology of the region. In the process of forest harvesting, lands once cleared for coffee or tea were abandoned soon after they were found less suited to the crop; valuable species were wiped out not only in the cleared areas but also in the surrounding regions. That the setting up of plantations was integral to the establishment of colonialism is a generally accepted fact, exploitative relations between capital and labour being a clear indicator of this – this is a theme focused on in the forthcoming chapters – but the fact remains that it had its disastrous effects on the natural resources so vital to the livelihood of the local populace.

To quote a forest expert who made these remarks as early as in 1894:

Having ruined one block of valuable forests, he hastens to ruin another . . . The ignorant and careless planter not only ruins the land actually cultivated by him but frequently damages the surrounding forest as well by allowing the fire from his felling to extend into it by which number of trees are scorched and killed and others seriously injured.¹⁴⁵

Some of the ecological problems due to such massive deforestation were highlighted in the case of Wayanad also:

The whole of the Wayanad at one time must have been covered with dense forests but the central portions have been most extensively denuded for coffee and other cultivation. The Ghats forming the Western boundary were, and to a great extent

still are, covered with the most magnificent evergreen forests, these latter within the last few years have been felled ruthlessly by European and native planters for coffee. The damage thus done to the water supply of kavery (river) has been immense.¹⁴⁶

W. S. S. Mackay who was the General Manager of the KDHP for a considerable period of time, and who himself was responsible for the destruction of forests had to admit, to quote:

... the early planters were sometime careless in their attitude to preservation, but in those days the evergreen jungles were so vast that few contemplated their appreciable reduction. Yet in many tea producing countries, this occurred in an amazingly short space of time ... In Ceylon[Sri Lanka], between 1827 and 1877, the coffee clearances created a record in the rapidity with which a great natural forest cover can be laid low. In India too, vast areas were cleared for tea plantations ... with the Guderale clearance [as part of the KDHP expansion project] of 1888, there began the development ... of destruction.¹⁴⁷

In Coorg, where coffee began to be cultivated in the languishing thick forests in the middle of the 1850s, hundreds of thousands of acres were cleared of forests. When a Commissioner was appointed in 1868 to investigate into the ravages of the *borer* (a pest) in coffee plantations, he reported that indiscriminate forest destruction was already augmenting soil erosion at a rapid rate. A drier climate and recurrent failures of drainage, as also the imbalances in the fauna, largely explained the proliferation of the pest. To quote Bourdillon, the Travancore Forest Conservator:

Much of the land planted was steep, and the heavy rain washed the soil away, other parts were exposed to wind, or contained poor soil ... the leaf disease was a result rather than a cause ...¹⁴⁸

It was not the fast-spreading plantations alone that robbed communities of their means of living, besides destroying the eco-productivity system, the roads and railways constructed in tune with the planters' interests contributed their own share. However, such schemes were looked upon with great resentment by the local populace before the road from Chenkottai to Thiruvananthapuram, which passes through Palode and gives access to Vithura, was built; one ryot responded:

Before Chenkottai road was cut *Venga*, *Kongu* and *Tembara* were so abundant that we could not see the sky for the branches of the trees, but now we cannot get any of these woods, they have all been cut down and taken away to Thiruvananthapuram.¹⁴⁹

With rainfall aplenty and a suitable climate, the Western Ghats have a luxuriant range of biodiversity, but certain species endemic to these regions came under the threat of extinction or even became extinct owing to large-scale forest destruction for monoculture plantation, roads, mining, dams, hydroelectric projects, etc. Some of these species were used for food and medicinal purposes, and the destruction of the

same was caused by the destabilising effect of deforestation on their delicate natural habitats.¹⁵⁰ Apart from this, valuable animal species fauna such as ibex, deer, bison, wild boar, panther, tiger and elephants also fell victim to the massive felling by the planters. Besides, the Game Preservation Association – an association of planters and the managerial staff for sports for Europeans which had been in existence for many years, but was organised in 1928 with the recognition of the state – helped not to sustain the system but to worsen the situation. The entire high range was divided into many shooting zones where shooting huts were built to make game. Often the planters' strength was measured in the number of animals they had killed, and the trophies adorned the walls of their bungalows.¹⁵¹

III GLOBAL COMMODITY CHAIN

2.15 Commodity flow: From the periphery to the core

The three significant nodes of the tea-value chain are plucking tea leaf or production of leaf, processing (made tea) and trade. Each of these nodes comprises several operations. In production of leaf, for instance, these involve planting, weeding and plucking, the last being a year-round operation. As mentioned earlier, processing involves operations at various stages, making tea available as a highly differentiated product through packaging and branding aimed at different markets with resultant disparate levels of surplus generation. Changes in organisation – in terms of labour and technology – have been sought at various loci of production and trade, largely in response to the changes in the global economy. The ancient Chinese style of processing was replaced by the centrifugal rolling machine in the 1860s. The Jackson-Marshall double-acting roller, which was introduced by the beginning of the twentieth century, ultimately gave way to the CTC machine in the early 1930s.¹⁵² The process of drying and sorting, too, went through a few changes.¹⁵³ The crushing, sorting and withering done by the CTC method was found to be more efficient and the tea produced was of a better quality than that processed by the traditional methods.

Trade, both domestic and international, involves the various segments of marketing, quality, brand names and so on. Until recently, tea has been primarily a plantation crop, and the entire tea chain has traditionally been controlled by a few oligarchic firms, the managing agents in the colonial period and a few MNCs in the late post-colonial phase as is seen today. As there was no item of trade that these managing agents hesitated to engage in, there was neither a division between production and distribution nor any distinction between trade and marketing. The major managing agents who were involved in production, control and trading of south Indian tea in the colonial period included James Finlay & Company, Harrisons & Crosfield, Aspinwall & Company, Darragh Smail & Company, Peirce Leslie & Company, etc. As discussed in detail in the next chapter, they were replaced by Tata Tea and Unilever in the late post-Independence phase, who continue to dominate the scene today (see Chapters 8 and 9). In almost all these cases, the major tea companies sourced their tea either from their own plantations or through the auctions – first the London auction¹⁵⁴ where Assam tea was first sold in 1838, and later through auction centres opened up in south India in Kochi in 1947 followed by Coonoor in 1963 and Coimbatore in 1980. The role of the MNCs

in tea trade was further strengthened when tea began to be marketed in tea bags or as instant tea both within the domestic economy as well as in the advanced countries which offered a ready market for the same. As Talbot has pointed out, the tea chain thus combined the features of a vertically integrated producer-driven governance structure with those of the international trader-driven structure, with the tea brokers handling the sales of tea from plantation companies to the manufacturers.¹⁵⁵ The functioning of each node in the tea chain based itself on a specific social division of labour and on gender specificities. The commodity chain thus formed reflects not just social embedding,¹⁵⁶ but a stratified social hierarchy, particularly in terms of caste and gender: the former outcaste women workers concentrated at the basic production/plucking site, and men, largely upper caste, working in the processing factories, with the further economically and socially advanced sections being involved in trade and marketing. The hierarchised social embedding thus involves the relations of domination, often based on gender, race or caste, aspects that are explained in the succeeding chapters.

2.16 Cornering the global market

The last quarter of the nineteenth century thus witnessed a continuous increase in the volume of trade in tea from southern India: the value of export of tea from the Madras Presidency, for instance, increased from Rs 17,883 in 1870–1 to Rs 3,29,057 in 1882–3.¹⁵⁷ The first half of the twentieth century was no different in this respect: the value of tea exported increased from Rs 173.76 lakhs in 1915–6 to Rs 406.54 lakhs in 1936–7 and further to Rs 512.89 lakhs in 1940–1. Over the years, tea from southern India increased its share not only in the total sea-borne trade of the Madras Presidency but also in the world tea trade save for a decline during the Depression years. The increased flow of tea in quantity through the ports from southern India to London and then to the rest of the world began, with tea from the former contributing an ever-increasing share. The share of southern India in the global tea trade also registered an increase from 5.50 per cent in 1930–4 to nearly 8 per cent during the period 1940–4.¹⁵⁸ British imperialism had the advantage of re-exporting tea to no fewer than 35 foreign countries even as early as the 1880s. More than 80 per cent of the tea exported from southern India moved to Britain, from where, after meeting the local demand, it was re-exported to other countries such as Germany, Canada, the United States, Holland and Russia.¹⁵⁹ The colonial States financed international exhibitions at Paris, France, and at St. Louis, USA, for the exhibition of plantation produce.¹⁶⁰

The sea has ever been a powerful environmental context in the history of human cultures, and the expansion of the world economy.¹⁶¹ By the time global capital began its penetration into southern India with the resultant tea production, oceanic trade had undergone significant changes: the Navigation Laws were beginning to be relaxed; companies with huge investments in the shipping industry were floated with more regularity, connecting with railways and minimising demurrage; fuel-efficient iron-screw steamers were being used;¹⁶² these and other developments occurred in the mid and late nineteenth century while the far-east route still remained under the monopoly of British capital.¹⁶³

The European Managing Agents controlling the planting industry in southern India lost no time in acquiring agencies in many shipping companies: The Peirce Leslie & Company, the Clan Line, Rotterdam Lyod, Hamburg-Amerika, the East

Asiatic Company, the Hansa line, the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company Ltd, etc.¹⁶⁴ Capital expansion from Europe further necessitated the construction of a railway line across the isthmus of Panama in 1855 and the opening of the Suez canal in 1869; the latter took 4,000 miles off the sea route from Britain to Calcutta.¹⁶⁵ By this time, the handling of tea had already been 'completely revolutionised' at the Port of London, and the Tilbury Docks.¹⁶⁶ Further, the formation of the *Malabar Coast Chartering Coalition* in 1876 engaged in the overseas trade in hill produce including pepper, coffee and tea achieved 'best results in lowering rates of freight from the coast'.¹⁶⁷

Tea had been sold by way of auction sales since the early part of the eighteenth century. The auctioning became more organised with the setting up of Commercial Sale Rooms in Mincing Lane and the East India House handling the bulk of the business. A turning point in the history of the world tea trade came with the entry of tea from India at the London auction sales on 10 January 1939, sounding the death knell for Chinese monopoly in tea. Thenceforth, sweeping changes began to take place in the world tea trade: the licensing of tea retailers was abolished in 1869, thus displacing about 1,94,000 persons who had been running the marketing business as a 'cottage industry';¹⁶⁸ tea merchants like Arthur Brooke and those hitherto involved in other businesses like Lipton and Ty-phoo entered the market, consolidating their base by forming the Tea Brokers' Association in 1889.¹⁶⁹ About 80–85 per cent of all the tea sold at the London auctions was bought up by a handful of blenders and distributors who had acquired a powerful hold over the global tea trade through the practice of integrated marketing and financial networking.¹⁷⁰

The expansion of the local market for tea was but a logical sequence of the expansion of the world market: aggressive campaigns aimed at widening and capturing the local market were thus launched. In this the metropolitan Andrew Yule & Company took the lead, being later joined by Parry & Co. Planters were persuaded to contribute to the campaign either in terms of money or with tea on the assurance that tea from southern India would be distributed in southern India alone. In one of the most calculated moves of the planting community to create a taste for tea among the local populace, the UPASI introduced a new gimmick in 1902 – it proposed to hold a lottery for all those who purchased tea.¹⁷¹ The Chairman of the UPASI was highly enthusiastic over this new ploy to increase sales:

I cannot imagine a scheme better calculated to tempt the lower classes of natives to invest one pie in tea. Having bought it they will certainly use it, will soon acquire a taste for it, and require no incentive to make further purchases.¹⁷²

During the Depression years and in the years that followed there was a spurt in the home-demand which increased by more than 200 per cent during the one-and-a-half decades from 1931. By the year 1930, Brooke Bond & Company Ltd were claiming that their 'little red vans' served 1,90,000 tea shops the world over,¹⁷³ a brokerage and buying concentration that it has preserved to this day with its 22 distinct brands of tea and coffee being marketed in 52 countries in the world. In spite of stiff competition from the other market leaders such as Lipton and the Tatas, its Red label remains the largest-selling leaf tea in India now.¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the Lipton tea business was acquired by Unilever in a number of separate transactions, starting with the purchase of

the US and Canadian Lipton business in 1938 and completed in 1972 when Unilever bought the remainder of the global Lipton business; its control over Brooke Bond began in 1984. With the Tatas acquiring first James Finlay and then Tetley in 2000 – the details of which will be examined in Chapters 8 and 9 – the group has become the second largest tea corporate in the world, second only to Unilever competing for their hegemonic positions in the global tea commodity chain. What is more interesting for us to highlight in this context is that while Tata Tea and Unilever compete for their hegemonic positions in the international tea commodity chain during the current neo-liberal phase, the worker-families, those who struggle for their livelihood as discussed in the succeeding chapters, render the originally visualised commodity chain categories ahistorical, to a great extent.

2.17 Summing-up

The history of tea plantations in India reads much like the history of capitalism the world over. World capitalism grew out of the reprehensible trend exhibited by the industrialised West to breach national boundaries, wresting control of foreign lands and sucking them dry of their prosperity. The East India Company made its first major investment in southern India in the spices plantation in Anjarakandy in 1797, five years after the annexation of Malabar. Other European coastal trading companies took the cue, now in coffee and tea, and soon the virgin hills and forests of Nilgiris and Anaimalai of present-day Tamil Nadu, and Munnar, Peerumedu, Vandiperiyar and Wayanad in Kerala were incorporated into the world capitalist economy. The periphery – the region meant to produce raw materials essential to the core in Europe – had to undergo sweeping changes: hitherto existing property relations were redefined; forest plunder was virtually legalised and indigenous people were forcibly evicted so as to build up private empires.

Vast tracts of forest-lands were transferred to the planters as free grants, or were given away at nominal prices. The Kanan Devan tea plantation, Tata Tea of today, known as the largest integrated plantation in the world, to cite one example, was created in just such a manner. Thousands of acres of lands were literally gifted to the English- and Scottish-based metropolitan capital in the late nineteenth century at minimal rates. Apart from being pampered by suitable land policies, the planters were heavily favoured by fiscal policies such as tax and duty concessions. And while the new arrivals prospered, the paddy-based peasant economy suffered, buckling under the combined pressures of enhanced land revenue, inadequate infrastructural facilities and other discriminative policies of the state – a sad commentary that is echoed even to this day at a degree no lesser than in the past. Evidence pertaining to comparative rates of assessment, import/export duty on paddy vis-à-vis plantation crops and the setting up of roads and other infrastructural facilities in planting regions shows that both the land and fiscal policies of the state were highly discriminatory, favouring the plantations at the expense of the peasant economy, akin to the practice in other plantation economies of the world. The eco-system of the entire region was shattered with the unthinking destruction of forests, and the consequent drying up of natural springs and reservoirs. The looming ecological crisis that we now fight against thus had its beginnings decades back when the creation of plantations started off a process of land degradation through deforestation in an ecologically fragile topography. Monoculture plantations thus emerged not only as an exploitative system in which

capital and labour interface, an aspect that forms the ‘problematic’ of this study, but also as a destructive enterprise – destructive to the livelihood and natural environment of the local populace with the expansion of the colonial tea enterprise south Indian tea captured its share of world market. The global tea commodity chain encompassed multiple nodes and operations, the lowermost nodes being the most socially embedded and historically hierarchised. What is of greater interest is the fact that while corporate capital manoeuvred for a position of supremacy within the international tea commodity chain, the worker-families, those who struggled for their livelihood as discussed in the succeeding chapters, rendered the originally visualised world system categories and tools ahistorical to a great extent as they became *peripheries within peripheries* immured within the *commodity chain trap*.

3 Structure, dynamics and the hegemony of European capital

In this chapter, we attempt to explore the structure and dynamics of planting capital with respect to two major themes: the rise of global capital in terms of economic and political power and its attitude towards, and power relations with, nascent local capital. The plantation sector exemplifies the hegemony of European-based global capital in terms of economic and political power; the local nascent capital largely aligned itself with global capital and operated from a subordinated status with respect to the latter. However, there were occasions when the emerging provincial bourgeoisie was locked in an open conflict with global capital and attempted to defend its interests. Further, there were varying historical contexts such as the World Depression of the 1930s and the national economic policy changes in the post-colonial period, in which the provincial bourgeoisie made inroads, to a very limited extent, into the plantation business first as junior partners and collaborators within global power relations¹ with some of them continuing later as independent capital in their own right. While the structure, size and growth of European capital with the associated hegemony within the larger political relations are explored in the first section, the sources of conflict and the historical contexts in which local capital entered into plantation affairs is dealt with in the second section.

3.1 From proprietorship to global capital: Late nineteenth-century scenario

Jenks, the author of *The Migration of British Capital*, has rightly remarked:

English politicians had promised English businessmen an income on behalf of the Indian ryot. And drawing hope largely from the promise something like one hundred and fifty million pounds of British capital were invested in India between 1834 and 1969. Capital continued to move to India at the rate of about five million pounds a year during the seventies. About seventy-five million went into railways by 1870 . . . An estimated amount of twenty million had been ventured upon private account on tea plantations, jute mills, banks both by means of shares and deposits, shipping and mercantile establishments.²

The principal form of ownership in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was proprietary and this trend continued into the coffee era: in 1850, for instance, there was 1 European planter in Travancore, while there were 14 in 1869 and 32 in 1880. In

1840, there were 12 European planters in Wayanad, their number increasing to about 55 in 1896. The first European coffee estate was opened in Kodagu in 1854; by 1895, there were 130 of them.³ And while in 1856 there were only 7 European planters in Mysore, their number increased to more than 300 in 1890–1.⁴ Rice, the compiler of the Mysore Gazetteer, observed that European planters had settled in an almost continuous chain of estates from the southwest of Shimoga to the southernmost limits of Manjarabad, not to mention Kodagu and Wayanad beyond. Missionaries and their descendants, civil servants and colonial bureaucrats – of different nationalities but all from Europe – were the pioneering proprietors.⁵

In the early years of coffee, the presence of local capital was quite significant, particularly in places like Mysore and Kodagu.⁶ While wooing European capital, the Crown Prince of Travancore and the Dewan did not miss having their share, opening coffee plantations themselves.⁷ By the mid-1880s, when tea began to replace coffee, many of the early proprietary concerns were taken over by corporate capital and managing agents. The reasons for the early demise of the former were many: unlike in the case of coffee, the scale of operations of these proprietary units was too small for them to withstand the recurrent financial shocks that rocked the tea industry; a large working capital was required to meet the wages and advances necessary for the smooth functioning of the estates, and the international trade involved necessitated frequent shipping facilities, market opportunities and the like which were beyond the scope of these concerns,⁸ thus allowing the managing agencies to intervene.

By the year 1895, there were about 56 sterling tea companies in India with a paid-up capital of more than Rs 69 million, producing about 58.5 million lbs of tea.⁹ By 1900, the capital invested in joint-stock tea companies in India was about Rs 1,600 million of which Rs 1,380 million was registered in London, and only the remaining in India.¹⁰ During 1909–10, the total British capital invested in plantations (coffee, tea and rubber) in India and Sri Lanka amounted to a sum of Rs 24.2 million.¹¹ The flow of overseas capital into the plantations in southern India was also sizeable. This is reflected in the total value of tea and coffee estates in southern India, almost all of them based on foreign capital, which worked out to Rs 200 million by the year 1896.¹² The annual working expense alone amounted to nearly Rs 34.2 million. Within a period of two years, 1895–7, four giant sterling companies came up in Travancore alone, two each incorporated in England and Scotland with a paid-up capital of 24.47 lakhs of rupees, and with the Scottish capital taking the lead.¹³ (see Table 3.1). Such a massive inflow of foreign capital into the planting sector in Travancore made it the largest tea planting region in southern India by the turn of the century, with nearly 9,500 acres under cultivation, as against 6,797 acres in the whole of the Madras Presidency.¹⁴

3.2 The managing agency system and predominance of English merchant capital

British capital had an effective monopoly in all exploitative economic activities such as trading, banking, shipping, exchange and insurance, and in plantations. Through the managing agency system, the British merchant capital did ‘promote, control and to a considerable extent finance various industrial companies all over the colonies’. These

Table 3.1 British capital in the major tea companies in Princely Travancore in the late nineteenth century

<i>Year floated</i>	<i>Name of the company</i>	<i>Nationality/country incorporated</i>	<i>Capital (rupees in thousands)</i>	
			<i>Authorised</i>	<i>Paid-up</i>
1895	South Indian Tea Estate Co. Ltd	England	72	72
1896	Travancore Tea Estate Co. Ltd	England	250	165
1897	Kanan Devan Hills Produce Co. Ltd	Scotland	1,500	1,300
1898	The Anglo American Co. Ltd	Scotland	1,250	910

Source: Data from Government of Travancore. *Statistics of Travancore*, 1930–1, pp. 228–9.

agencies ran companies that bought agricultural products, coir, timber, spices, etc. and shipped them to London from where they were re-exported to cater to European needs.¹⁵ They ‘rarely hold substantial investments in the operating companies and ownership often is virtually divorced from control’. The managing agents often had an opposite number in England, bearing a name different from that of their counterpart in India, which took care of the pre-requisites for capital accumulation: the London money market and the commodity market all over the world, with the periphery being the supplier of raw materials and providing a market for the manufactured products of the core.

Plantations were set up either by individual planters who then approached managing agency houses for financial help, or by the business firms themselves. The latter either took up planting as their maiden venture, or, as often was the case, turned to tea after having first established themselves in other fields.¹⁶ Duncan Brothers & Co., Williamson Magor & Co., Alex Lawrie & Co. and Davenport & Co. were examples of the first type of business. The latter type included Andrew Yule & Co., James Finlay & Co.,¹⁷ Harrisons & Crosfield,¹⁸ Aspinwall & Co., Darragh Smail & Co. and Peirce Leslie & Co.,¹⁹ the last being associated with not less than 41 planting companies as managing agents, treasurers and secretaries, many of them having been floated by the company itself. This second group of companies had begun their activities in southern India by the middle of the nineteenth century, trading in hill produce such as timber and spices and in other agricultural produce such as coir and coffee.

There was no item of trade, howsoever it was, which the coastal firms hesitated to engage themselves in: Peirce Leslie & Co., for instance, had a hold over nearly 50 articles of trade in its century-long history of business in India.²⁰ By the turn of the century, they virtually monopolised control over the production and export of tea (and other plantation products such as rubber). Peirce Leslie & Co. held a monopoly over imports as well, the composition of which included cement, iron and steel, chemical fertilizers, matches, bar soaps, piece goods and even

over-used newspapers.²¹ The commercial pursuits of Parry & Co. were diversified and included indigo, cotton, sugar, spirits, coffee, engineering, pottery, insurance, shipping, fertilizer and so on.²² Another such enterprise was that of the Volkart Brothers.²³ Though the major initial investments of these companies in terms of both land and labour were made in coffee, with the emergence of tea by the late nineteenth century, they gravitated towards the tea empire instead. With the opening up of the Suez Canal in 1869, the European hold over ocean trade was further consolidated, adding a fresh maritime dimension to colonial expansionism. The managing agency houses and other trading companies capitalised on this breakthrough in ocean transport, aided in their efforts by low freight cost and a greatly abbreviated voyage.

By 1876, when their overseas business was booming, these coastal firms joined hands to acquire the requisite paraphernalia for further economic expansion. Thus was formed the *Malabar Coast Chartering Coalition*, which handled hill produce that was channelled through the centuries-old ports of Kozhikode, Beppur, Thalassery and Mangalore.²⁴ The managing agency houses thus functioned as major importers and suppliers of inputs for the plantation sector on behalf of the absentee owner, quite as any merchant capital in any other sector would. Eventually the coastal firms came to hold agencies for European shipping companies such as the British-Indian Steam Navigation Company and the Asiatic Steam Navigation Company Ltd.²⁵ By this time the planters' associations, which had their beginnings in the 1850s, became more consolidated, ultimately forming a united front, namely the *United Planters' Association of Southern India* (UPASI) in 1893 (see Section 3.5); however, the coastal firms were not given membership until 1919, the economic and political facets of which are examined later on in this chapter.

A system of amalgamation of smaller companies into larger ones controlled by the managing agencies was then followed, and a specific move was made to muster control over the planting side of the business as well. Thus a vertically integrated system of production, distribution and marketing was created, eventually leading to the concentration of ownership, the degree of the concentration being reflected in the number of companies owned and managed, the control over capital and, particularly, the interlocking of boards of directors.²⁶ This concentration of ownership was engineered by managing agents who took upon themselves multiple responsibilities such as those of producer, banker, shipper, broker, distributor and so on. The closure of the Indian mints and the appreciation of the rupee in terms of sterling exchange in the early 1890s were to bring ruin on individual planters; however, the big managing agencies, with their hegemony over finance and the world market, gained maximally out of this.²⁷ Beginning their operations from the middle of the nineteenth century, the British foreign exchange banks, the Presidency Banks and other joint-stock banks,²⁸ so integral to the industrial and commercial hegemony, had evinced a substantial interest in the planting industry. Their control over the organised money market, both at home and overseas, led them to a position of control over the internal finance and all export–import transactions.²⁹ 'Formal or informal links' among these commercial interests³⁰ were widespread enough to sustain their economic hegemony. Many of the chairmen and directors of these exchange banks, all from Europe, functioned in similar capacities in the various managing agency

houses. James Finlay & Co. and Harrisons & Crosfield, the two giants controlling more than 69 per cent of tea in southern India in the early 1920s, were typical examples of such interlocking directorships. John Muir, for example, was the chairman of the James Finlay Group, the director of the Liverpool & London Insurance Company and of Lloyd Shipping Agencies and, above all, the director of Grindlays Bank.

These merchant capitalists were very much global in the sense that they had business interests in many other parts of the world, both in plantations and in the non-plantation sector. Certain companies such as the English-based Brooke Bond and the Scottish-based James Finlay & Company operated in plantations, merchant banking, manufacturing of foodstuffs, international finance and so on in Africa, North America, Australia and the United Kingdom.³¹ For instance, the James Finlay Group, with their companies like Amalgamated, Anglo-American, Consolidated and Kanan Devans in southern India – all of which came to be known as the *Kanan Devan Plantations* – altogether accounted for more than 134 lakh acres of land used, with half a rupee per annum on every acre of land, and emerged as the single largest integrated plantation in the world. James Finlay also bought nearly 23,000 acres of land in East Africa in 1925 for as low a price as pound 60 with a yearly rental of 200,³² about 40 per cent of the total being in Kenya, while Brooke Bond controlled another 40 per cent. By the turn of the century, many of these business concerns held sway over such wide-ranging activities as production, processing, distribution and marketing, bridging national frontiers while sustaining the core-periphery hierarchy.

The planting class in southern India was faced with one setback after another, beginning with the leaf disease that ravaged the coffee estates, which coincided with a decline in coffee prices and an accumulation of stock towards the end of the nineteenth century. Close upon this followed a depression, when supplies of tea outstripped the demand; neither the tea nor the coffee industry was to recover until 1907. The very same year, Arbuthnot & Co. – the major financier and banker of the European planters, which was entrusted with the entire funds of UPASI – collapsed.³³ However, far from being devastated by these successive blows, the European planting community actually went on to consolidate its hegemony.

Of the total of 48 tea establishments in the Madras Presidency in 1911, all except two were owned by Europeans, and even of the two owned by local capital, one was managed by a European firm. During the next decade, global capital expanded its control, coming to own a total of 128 tea plantations as against 46 in 1911. Another development that occurred during the decade 1911–21 was a decline in the total number of coffee establishments as against an increase in European ownership from 39 per cent in 1911 to 64 per cent in 1921 (Table 3.2). Considering the above-mentioned fact in conjunction with the phenomenal growth in European-owned tea establishments, we may come to the conclusion that various developments – conversion of coffee into tea, consolidation of smaller units into bigger ones, an increasing control of both coffee and tea, control over fiscal resources and infrastructure network – favouring the concentration³⁴ and hegemony of global capital were simultaneously taking place in the planting sector. This was being made easily possible as the industry, by that time, had entered into a new phase of increased centralisation of capital.

Table 3.2 Increasing concentration of global capital in Madras Presidency, 1911–21

Year	Crop	Number of establishments	Owned by		Managed by	
			Europeans	Indians	Europeans	Indians
1911	Tea	48	46	2	47	1
	Coffee	125	49	76	103	22
	Others	30	21	—	—	—
	Total	203	172	—	—	23
1921	Tea	131	128	4	124	7
	Coffee	118	70	40	70	40
	Others	35	21	14	27	8
	Total	284	219	55	221	53

Source: Data from Census of India, Madras, for the year 1911, Vol. XII, Pt. 11, p. 226 and for the year 1921, Vol. XII, Pt. 11, p. 262.

3.3 From concentration to centralisation: Further hegemony of British capital

Though the managing agency houses and the British Corporate interests as a whole had made their presence felt with the advent of coffee itself, the accentuation of the process of centralisation of capital in the industry occurred after the 1920s. For instance, the sterling company Malayalam Plantations Ltd, floated in England in 1921, bought the assets of a number of smaller companies producing both tea and rubber in Travancore and Wayanad; the Mooply Valley Tea Co. Ltd, Wallardie Tea Estates Ltd, Wayanad Tea Co. Ltd; Malayalam Rubber & Produce Co. Ltd were the estates acquired by the UK incorporated Malayalam Plantations Ltd. In Wayanad, even big firms such as Parry & Co. sold their estates to the East India Tea Produce Company, which finally went into the hands of Malayalam Plantations Ltd. With the amalgamation of these estates along with the Harrisons & Crosfield properties in Kochi, the Malayalam Plantations Ltd became one of the leading planting companies to be quoted in the London Stock Exchange.³⁵

The James Finlay Tea Association also increased its assets and trading profits by amalgamating certain tea estates and reigned in the field. Other tea companies such as Cochin Malabar Estates Ltd, Savamalai Ltd and Chembra Peak Estates Ltd were incorporated into the then leading managing agencies such as Peirce Leslie & Company during the period 1930–2.³⁶ In 1926, Brooke Bond, the world's largest tea company, approached the Travancore government with a proposal for the opening up of extensive areas for tea plantations, but it later left for Annaimalai to open up new estates there as well as to buy up existing ones. It is worth noting that the increased centralisation of capital in plantations in the early 1920s also coincided with the short-lived postwar boom when capital export from England to both India and Sri Lanka was at a maximum.

The number of joint-stock companies incorporated overseas but operating in the tea planting sector of southern India increased from 16 in 1920 to 28 in 1930–1. Their paid-up capital went up from Rs 9.4 lakhs in 1920–1 to Rs 13.3 lakhs in 1927–8 and further to Rs 15.3 lakhs in 1930–1. The *Royal Commission on Labour* (RCL) made the following observations regarding the ownership and control of tea plantations: (i) about 90 per cent of the plantations in North India and nearly all those 'plantations in South India (and Burma too) are controlled and managed by Europeans; the Kodagu,

Table 3.3 Number of sterling and joint-stock tea companies and paid-up capital, 1931–2 to 1949–50

Year	Sterling companies		Joint-stock companies	
	Number	Paid-up capital (rupees in thousands)	Number	Paid-up capital (rupees in thousands)
1931–2	19	35.00	28	1,300.80
1939–40	21	1,341.10	38	16,268.00
1942–3	25	365.90	44	15,293.20
1949–50	14	16,037.40	63	42,441.90

Source: Data from Government of India. *Joint-Stock Companies in British India and in the Indian States*, for the relevant years.

where coffee is grown, is the only exception'; and (ii) plantations managed by Indians are not only 'much fewer, but generally smaller in size' than those controlled and managed by Europeans.³⁷ Factors such as exceptionally favourable prices for south Indian tea in Mincing Lane with an increase in the average declared value of export of tea by more than 80 per cent over the years 1920–1 to 1929–30 and the expectations of a further increase in demand for tea in Europe might have been the reasons for the accentuated process of centralisation of capital. The number of sterling tea companies in southern India as a whole and the paid-up capital therein also increased after the 1930s: the former increased from 19 in 1931–2 to 25 in 1942–3 and the paid-up capital from Rs 35,008 to Rs 3,65,936 (Table 3.3). Though the number of sterling companies declined thenceforth, the total paid-up capital increased enormously, touching more than Rs 16 million. Joint-stock companies also continued to spring up: from 28 companies with a paid-up capital of more than 13 lakhs of rupees in 1931–2, the number increased to 63 with more than 42.4 lakhs of rupees in 1949–50. It may be pointed out that there was never a sign of a diversion of foreign capital from the planting sector either during the Depression or during the Second World War. In the 1930s, the total number of sterling companies as well as the joint-stock companies increased and so, too, did the paid-up capital of both. In the 1940s, the number of joint-stock companies and their paid-up capital increased, but in the case of sterling companies, though the number of concerns decreased, the amount of paid-up capital went up enormously, reflecting the concentration of ownership in the hands of a few. Interestingly, these were also the situations in which local capital made its small entry (see Sections 3.7 and 3.8), thus marking the increased penetration of capital into the planting sector. However, this gap was filled by an increase in the fresh flow of paid-up capital into the plantations, thus leading to sustenance of the hegemony by global capital which was now in fewer hands.

3.4 The political presence

The European planters who dominated the plantation periphery of southern India lost no time in organising themselves cohesively enough to wield hegemony over the working class and political power over the State. The origin of such organisations in southern India preceded similar developments in north and north-eastern India, where too, the Europeans reigned supreme.³⁸ The Travancore Planters' Association³⁹ and the

Mysore Association were established in 1855 and in the 1860s⁴⁰ respectively by the early coffee growers. Planters belonging to both these organisations were predominantly English. In 1874, another organisation comprising both coffee and tea planters came up, again in Travancore, with its area of work in Peerumedu.⁴¹ This came to be known as the Peerumedu Planters' Association; the Kanan Devan Hills Produce Association was formed a decade later in 1888.⁴²

In the spring of 1877, a planters' conference was held for the first time at Mananthawady to seek the support of the Government of India and to press for such legislation as would help widen the scope and profitability of planting ventures.⁴³ The chief thrust of their arguments was towards (a) securing of protection for advances paid to *kanganies* for labour recruitment and (b) providing for the extradition of both *kanganies* and labourers from British India in the event of a breach of contract (see Section 4.5). With these aims in mind, the planters requested an extension of the Act XIII of 1859 to cover contracts involving planters, *kanganies* and workers. The planters claimed to have earned the support of powerful colonial officials like William Logan, the collector of Malabar. Logan, in fact, maintained the view that the Breach of Contract Act should be enlarged and amended to meet the requirements of the planting industry; the employers should be liable for punishment for breaches of contract no less than the labourers.⁴⁴

In March, 1892, the various district planters' associations of Wayanad, Kodagu, North Mysore, Travancore, Sevaroymalai and Kalagherymalai, which had begun to spring up in the years since the mid-nineteenth century, jointly presented a memorandum to the Imperial Government seeking to regulate relations between employer and worker with the focus on legislative amendments and the Breach of Contract Act. However, the Governor was of the opinion that the prevailing laws were strong enough to protect the industry in common with other industries and that further legislation was not required.⁴⁵ The State was prompted to take such a stand, due probably to the general mood of protest against the Act as it had just then been imposed on the Presidency towns as well as in the tea districts of Assam. The Governor's reply was to the effect that to make a breach of contract a penal offence was something that was out of harmony with the general principles of legislation accepted by civilised governments. This response of the State, in the words of the planters, was 'abrupt and discourteous'.⁴⁶

This was enough to arouse the indignation of the planters, and their resentment culminated in the first conference of the representatives of all the planters' associations of southern India on 28 August 1893 on the initiative of Digby T. Brett, chairman of the *North Mysore Planters' Association*. At this conference, George Romilly, the representative of the Wayanad planting industry, registered his perceptions on the apathy of the government thus:

It seems to me extraordinary in the face of this expressed opinion, coming as it does from the Secretary of State, from the Government of India, from the Madras Government and from the majority of the Madras Presidency Magistrates, that Act XIII of 1859 is not suited to the requirements of planters, that we should still be denied any redress. That the planting industry is very seriously crippled by being exposed to this protected robbery by contractors is an undoubted fact. For the planter, there is the loss of contract for labour. For the cooly, there is the loss of the money that should have gone to him in wages, but instead goes to enrich the fraudulent contractor. But besides there is the feeling of insecurity and distrust of

the Indian Government that prevents English capital being invested in the planting enterprise in India and drives it instead to the less fertile field of Sri Lanka.⁴⁷

Local planters also sent their delegates to the conference. This led to the formation of UPASI.⁴⁸ By 1896, there were 14 planters' associations spread over the entire planting regions of southern India with a total membership of 466; the largest of these was the *Nilgiri Planters' Association* with a membership of 70 and the smallest was that of the Lower Pulneys with a membership of 15 only. Of the 14 planters' associations, only two were composed of local planters, both of them in Mysore, with a total membership of 59.⁴⁹ The local planters' associations mostly appeared to be in a 'dormant condition' leaving the European planters to consolidate their power by the turn of the century.

The local associations, though gradually becoming ineffective and inactive, echoed the views articulated by the European planters with respect to legal action on the labour question and related matters. M. N. Subbaiya and Srinivasa Rao, representing the South and North *Mysore Native Planters' Associations* respectively, expressed concern over the 'weakness of the law' which called for drastic amendments.⁵⁰ The planters, both foreign and local, undeterred by the discouraging attitude of the colonial officials in this particular issue, pressed ahead, now as a united force, with their demands such as those for the combined provision of compulsory registration and the extradition of workers guilty of breaches of contracts, as it was argued that unless this was done the workers as well as the *kanganies* could go across the frontier and thus could not be made accountable. The issue of extradition was particularly important to the planters in the 'native' states – Travancore, Kochi and Mysore – as they were only under indirect rule, and as such the Act was not applicable in these regions.⁵¹

The newly formed united front – UPASI – though suffering an initial set-back in its failure to induce the State to accede to its demand to widen the scope of the Breach of Contract Act and issues related with extradition,⁵² later came to have quite a perceptible influence in these matters. We may cite a few instances to highlight the political hegemony generated by the newly formed organisation of the European planters. In the very next year following the formation of UPASI, G. Romilly of the *Wayanad Planters' Association* was appointed as the planting member to the Madras Legislative Council in response to the planters' demand. He was then succeeded by G. L. Acworth from 1900 to 1904, in whose tenure the Madras Planters' Labour Act was passed, and J. A. Richardson from 1919 to 1922 who, along with the former, had been earlier elected to the Travancore Legislative Council in 1910.⁵³ J. R. Vincent, A. Hammond and Edwin Vincent were the representatives of the *Mundakkayam Planters' Association* to the Sree Moolam Assembly from 1910.⁵⁴ At a later stage, planting interests came to be represented in the Central Legislature as well. For instance, in the mid-1940s, F. E. James, political advisor of UPASI, became a member in the Central Legislative Assembly and also Liaison Officer with the Central Government.⁵⁵

The planting community was represented in the various legislative councils as well, viz. the Cochin Legislative Council, the Mysore Legislative Council, the Mysore Representative Assembly and the Travancore Legislative Council by one member each and the Coorg Legislative Council by two members.⁵⁶ The Chairman of the *Central Travancore Planters' Association* (CTPA) acknowledged the fact that neither the central nor the state governments did anything without consulting them in the Assemblies.⁵⁷ The Travancore State patronised the planting community by providing it with the highest number of

seats – forty seven – in the Sri Moolam Assembly during the period from 1905 to 1914:⁵⁸ the under-representation of the depressed castes, from among plantation labour, was originally drawn (see Section 4.6), and the exaggerated representation given to the European planters was the inevitable outcome. Regarding his appointment as member of the Indian Legislative Council from 1932 to 1945 and on the question of political relations, Sir Frederick James, political advisor of UPASI, remarked:

It was a fascinating assignment. The Indian states of Travancore, Kochi and Mysore had strong administrations, wide and capable rulers and outstanding *Dewans*, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Sri. Shanmukham Chetty and Sir Mirza Ismail were giants in those days. They became personal friends of mine and were of great assistance in dealing with legislative and administrative matters affecting the plantation products of the South . . . My files could testify to the lively interest shown in these matters by distinguished *Dewans* who were not always prepared to accept the views of the Government of India, sometimes communicated to them by minor officials of the department concerned.⁵⁹

By this time, the planters and other commercial enterprises in southern India had joined hands with a 'collective consciousness'. Under the Government of India Act of 1909, one seat in the Madras Legislative Council was opened for the Madras Chamber of Commerce, which again was predominantly a European association, and another for the five affiliated chambers – Cocanada, Coimbatore, Thoothukudi, Kochi and Kozhikode⁶⁰ – which permitted close co-operation between the State and the merchant community, besides providing a protective insulation for the planting industry. In 1919, nine European coastal trading firms were enrolled for the first time in UPASI; their representation increased to 32 towards the close of the colonial era. The control of the varied aspects of the tea trade such as financing, production, processing, marketing, shipping, etc. was thus totally integrated on a global level, which in turn promoted the process of increased centralisation of capital.

Before the South African war, the import duty on tea – customs duty on entry into Britain – was 4d. per lb; it was subsequently raised to 6d. as a war tax, and in 1905, it was further increased to 8d. The tea planters, particularly those from India, rose in indignation with UPASI playing a significant role in the protest campaign.⁶¹ The *Anti-Tea Duty League* was responsible for agitating for a reduction in the duty and the British government finally capitulated, reducing the tax to 5d. per lb.⁶²

The power wielded by the planters' lobby was such that they were even exempted from the payment of income tax until the early 1920s and even after this the tax levied was very moderate. Though an export duty was introduced in 1916 this was withdrawn within a decade under pressure from the planting community. UPASI also worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the *Indian Tea Association* (ITA) for the Tea Market Expansion Campaign in America and also had representatives on the Indian Tea Marketing Expansion Board, Calcutta, and the Indian Coffee Cess Committee, Bangalore. It then joined the *Coffee Association* in London but soon transferred its allegiance to the London Chamber of Commerce,⁶³ thus reinforcing its link with the world market. Another significant development which followed was the formation of the South Indian Association in London in January 1918, representing all the sterling companies in southern India, the objective of which was to consolidate the progress

made by planting interests, but it primarily represented sterling companies and gave less importance to the rupee companies.⁶⁴ The south Indian branch of the *European Association*, representing diversified business interests, whose membership rose to 1,330 by the late 1930s, was another catalyst in promoting/consolidating European interests.⁶⁵

Another development which reveals the ideological cohesion with which the planters' interests were being articulated was the founding of a journal with the explicit intention of giving expression to the planters' views. It began with the publication of the *Planting Opinion* in 1895.⁶⁶ Though it was not published by UPASI but by two European brothers in Coonoor, planters were free to utilise space in it; this journal ceased publication in 1902. However, within four years, UPASI was able to bring out the *Planters' Chronicle* beginning from the year 1906, first as a monthly and, by 1910, as a weekly, but later during the Depression, it was published fortnightly and then bi-monthly during the war years.⁶⁷ Planting interests were further articulated through the *Madras Mail* right from its inception in 1892.⁶⁸

During the entire colonial period save the war years when wide powers were used as needs arose, the Government of India was generally reluctant to exercise either directly or indirectly, any legislative or administrative control over the tea industry; it was left to the rationale of the planters to do as they pleased. The fact that UPASI was invited by the Government of India to express its views on matters of body polity especially in the context of the Indian Fiscal Commission, the Indian Economic Enquiry Committee, the Simon Commission on Constitutional Reforms, the Linlithgo Commission on Agriculture and the Royal Commission on Labour⁶⁹ reveal that the planters had made themselves one of the most influential classes in India.

Global capital thus succeeded in consolidating its economic and political power by thwarting every attempt at development by the nascent provincial bourgeoisie. The development of local capital at whatever limited scale it might have been was thus shaped and guided by imperialist interests, which allowed them to function as local allies, albeit in a position of subordination. But they were also ready to share the loot, a fact which will be explained further in the next chapter. Though local capital was fairly successful in its new ventures such as rubber, it did not receive much backing from the European-dominated tea growers' UPASI.⁷⁰ In brief, what the Royal Commission on Labour had observed on the structure of the planting industry in 1931 remained true in spirit throughout the succeeding decades up to Independence and still later to the reorganisation of states in the Indian Union in 1956: that almost all the plantations in southern India were controlled and managed by global capital, the degree of concentration, in fact, being higher in southern India than that in the north-eastern regions.

II SOURCES OF CONFLICT: GLOBAL CAPITAL VERSUS PROVINCIAL/LOCAL CAPITAL

The involvement of local capital in the planting industry was confined to coffee; their role in tea was not very significant, particularly in the early years, in spite of the advice professed by the local press urging them to turn to tea even at the expense of coffee and rice cultivation.⁷¹ Of the coffee-growing areas of southern India, Mysore boasted the

largest number of locally owned coffee plantations with about 27,180 estates spread over an area of 96,814 acres in 1890. By 1893, there were nearly 16,000 locally owned coffee plantations in South Mysore alone.⁷² The mid-1890s saw the burgeoning of locally owned coffee estates in Mysore which came to be higher in number only rather than in the area owned by the Europeans, with only 41 per cent being owned by the former, while the latter had 59 per cent under their control. The estates owned by the latter were considerably larger in size and hence occupied a greater share of the area. Kodagu was another region where coffee estates owned by local planters far exceeded the European-owned plantations in number. Locally owned plantations also came up in Annaimalai as early as in 1845; in fact the first estate here was opened up by a south Indian.⁷³ With the rapid penetration of global capital, the Minister for Agriculture who visited Annaimalai in 1939 was to report that 'not a cent of land was in the possession of any Indian'.⁷⁴ In the Agasthyamudi in Travancore, there were about 29 local planters: most of them were shanargal,⁷⁵ the nadargal of today. In Peerumedu, estates were jointly owned by the locals and Europeans. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, there were at least 30 locally owned plantations in Travancore, but all of small size except in two or three cases.⁷⁶

But unlike in Mysore, Kodagu and Annaimalai, the pioneers of Travancore were often those who had a prior experience of working in the coffee estates of Sri Lanka as supervisors, or even as labourers and sometimes as labour recruiters. P. D. Devasagayam, one of the pioneering local planters in Travancore, had served many planters in Sri Lanka as *kangany* and had later risen to the post of manager during his stint in Sri Lanka from 1844 to 1859. In 1859, he returned to Travancore to invest his savings in coffee planting. His request for the opening up of 60 acres of forest land in Agasthyamudi was granted by the *Dewan* in 1861.⁷⁷ He named it the 'Victoria Estate' to which was added the Joaja Estate and the lower Victoria Estate, the three together spreading over a 50-acres' tract. In spite of such ambitious endeavours on the part of a few Indians, not many plantations were established in Travancore at that time. For instance, as Samuel Mateer remarked, 'Few if any, *Sudras* or *Brahmins*, nor indeed, Syrian Christians, availed themselves of the opening which the coffee enterprise afforded'.⁷⁸

In contrast to this, however, Jeffrey observes that several Syrian Christians, with their background of missionary-sponsored English education, had been in a position to take up jobs on the plantations, and, in some cases, had opened coffee estates on their own account.⁷⁹ Syrian Christians educated by the Mission proved to be of service to the European planters as overseers and managers and also as members of their confidential staff. Further their missionary activities were substantial particularly in the coffee era.⁸⁰ Another community which had made its presence felt in the ownership of plantations was the *Nattukottai Chettiargal*, originally belonging to Chettinad in Tamil country, who with their surplus raised from banking extended their interests to various business ventures including plantations and trade in rice both abroad and within India.⁸¹

3.5 Impediments to the growth of provincial/local capital

Private investments in plantations by the provincial bourgeoisie suffered from many a handicap: a low command over land, limited availability of capital and foreign exchange, international tea cartels, a narrow market for their products and, above all, the racial bias against non-whites which worked to keep them out of the world trade. Apart

from being placed on an inferior scale to the Europeans with respect to control over land, the indigenous planters also found themselves totally dependent on the European coastal firms for purposes of shipping and marketing of their products. The European planters, in contrast, marketed their produce through their own agents and brokers in London. The former, having to bear the additional cost of marketing through the coastal firms, were hence always at a disadvantage. Over and above the direct cost for such marketing, they also had to meet the expenses of freight, insurance and commission charges.⁸² The commission charge alone was one-and-a-half per cent of the sales proceeds, and the local planters had to rely on overseas firms for their internal finance. Some of them were even forced to entrust the coastal firms with the entire management of their small estates, particularly during the Great Depression.⁸³

Another important impediment to the growth of private investments in local plantations was the lack of adequate finances to compete against the control of the organised money market by the Europeans. The tea export-import industry was totally in the hands of the British with 99 per cent of the value of non-Indian tea exports and nearly 89 per cent of the value of Indian tea exports being financed by them. The internal market too was under British control which was but inevitable, as three-quarters of the total produce belonged to non-Indian companies.⁸⁴ The loans and advances provided by the Presidency Banks to the Indian industrial businesses were low as the former were heavily biased in favour of European concerns.⁸⁵ The situation remained thus even after the amalgamation of these concerns into the Imperial Bank of India in 1921. And even then the money advanced by the Bank was not meant for planting concerns. In the mid-1920s, for instance, though the Bank advanced substantial amounts to Indian industrial concerns in Madras, it was largely in favour of cotton, rice and oil mills, printing presses and sugar factories.⁸⁶ In the larger context of the colonial economy too, the industrial, fiscal, monetary and regulatory policies followed by the colonial state were preferential to European capital and discriminatory against the emerging local/south Indian capital.

The nascent local capital, like the emerging Indian big capital, had thus to contest and struggle against the 'racial arrogance' of British/European capital to make its presence felt on the business front. When the European planters formed the Indian Tea Association in 1881, some Calcutta-based planters founded the *Indian Tea Planters' Association*; the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry formed in 1927 was again a response to the British Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry formed in 1920. Among the plantations in southern India, it was in coffee that the influence of the local planters' associations began to be felt, with the formation of the *Mysore Planters' Association*, the *Coorg Indian Planters' Association* and the *Indian Planters' Association*, Chikamangalur.⁸⁷

Some of these general problems in the way of expansion of private investments in plantations by the provincial Indians could be explained further by taking Travancore as a case in point. In the first place, the Europeans had the decided advantage of applying to the state for land through their British Resident whereas the locals were to apply for the same to the *Dewan* and, in later years, to the Chief Secretary.⁸⁸ While the former were dealt with more favourably, the latter were generally given a step-motherly treatment. The British Resident often exercised a direct influence in making land available to the Europeans. The particular interest taken by the British Resident of Travancore in making the State a party to the concession of the Kanan Devan Hills to Messrs. Munro

and H. G. Turner in the late nineteenth century is proof enough of this.⁸⁹ In another instance, during the first decade of the twentieth century, the Travancore State was forced to grant 1,000 acres of land to one European planter in submission to pressure from the Resident.⁹⁰ Acknowledging the same, the Resident wrote to the *Dewan*:

I wrote at once to thank you for your prompt action in this case for considerations given to my advice. I am confident that the *Durbar* has arrived at a very wise decision. I presume that my letter will not be referred to in the proceedings of the *Durbar* . . . It is very desirable to keep such correspondence confidential between the *Dewan* and the Resident.⁹¹

Second, requests from local planters for more land were very often rejected on the plea that the same was meant to be auctioned off in convenient blocks to competent bidders. In cases of contests between local and European planters for such lands, which was a common occurrence, the former seldom managed to hold their ground. And when the local planters made a representation to the Travancore government stating that they were being forced to pay higher prices for land,⁹² the State, far from striking a supportive attitude, instead urged them to earn as much revenue as possible by way of selling the same to overseas planting companies.

The European planters' discriminatory approach towards local capital was frankly evident in their dealings with the latter. This element of racial bias was obvious in their refusal of membership to the local planters in either their planters' associations or their various planters' clubs. In 1900, even a request for membership to the High Range Club, Munnar from the English Resident on behalf of the *Maharaja* of Travancore and Kochi was curtly rejected. It was hinted that the *Maharaja* would be welcome only as a distinguished visitor to the club; moreover, he was not to bring any of his retinue along. The *Maharaja* of Travancore, however, exhibiting an abject servitude to the Europeans, actually hosted annual dinners for these very planters and their wives, in yet another of the many extravaganzas indulged in by the monarch. This was also true with respect to certain powerful clubs where the members were expected to be either European or 'British in everything but colour'.⁹³ Except in the first year of its formation when two local planters' representatives had been invited to their meeting, UPASI remained an exclusively European organisation until the late 1930s.⁹⁴ The absence of the local representatives in the larger organisations such as UPASI was further curtailed when, during Depression, the organisations entered into new agreements, as discussed in Section 3.6.

3.6 International tea cartel: Further constraints for the local capital

Following upon a crash in prices owing to the overproduction of tea during the Great Depression of the late 1920s, an international agreement was reached among the tea producers' associations in India (38 per cent), Ceylon (25 per cent) and the Dutch East Indies (17 per cent) to reduce output by 3–15 per cent of past production. However, this agreement arrived at in 1930 was not binding on the members whose co-operation was entirely voluntary with no penalties for non-compliance. The agreements lost its strength quickly with planters in Java and Sumatra persisting with their former levels of production, leading to a further fall in prices in 1931 and 1932.

While the plantations in India were consistent in reducing output in both 1930 and 1933, those in Ceylon were slower to comply and did so only in 1933, when export quotas were enforced for half the year. The introduction of an import duty of 4d. per lb on tea by Britain, with a preference of 2d. for tea from its colonies, affected the demand for tea from Java and Sumatra, and when Britain abandoned the gold standard in September 1931, sterling was devalued vis-à-vis the guilder, impacting further on the competitiveness of teas from Java and Sumatra. Efforts to develop alternative markets for tea by the Dutch proved unsuccessful and this, too, favoured the market for tea from the British colonies, viz. India and Ceylon. The International Tea Agreement was signed in 1933 in London in which all the signatories agreed to a reduction in exports by 15 per cent of the maximum attained in any of the years from 1929 to 1932. For more details, see, Bishnupriya Gupta, 'The International Tea Cartel During the Great Depression, 1929–1933', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol 61, No 1, March 2001, pp.144–159. Though individual firms were assigned specific export quotas, it was the overall reduction among all firms that was taken into consideration. The Indian Tea Control Act was passed in November 1933 to cover a ten-year period and it made reduction in exports obligatory. The export quotas were subject to annual revision depending on the state of the market and they were legally binding in each of the participating countries with expansion of acreage being restricted to a maximum of 0.5 per cent per year. This was followed by an Interim Producers' Agreement, which remained in force until a new International Agreement came into force in 1950 and expired in March 1955. No new agreements have come into force since then and it is largely the FAO Intergovernmental Group on Tea that functions as the world commodity board for tea. As local capital began to penetrate increasingly into rubber plantations, the European-dominated UPASI, which had earlier protested against the state intervention in rubber cultivation,⁹⁵ proved to be largely 'useless'.⁹⁶ Given the fact that the imperialist capital was able to take control of lands, railroads, fiscal resources and regional politics, it could easily keep the local capital out of the plantation business; Indians were also consistently kept out of the planters' clubs, a dozen or so having been formed in the planting regions by the turn of the century, and playing a not very insignificant role in plantation affairs.

3.7 Provincial bourgeoisie on protest: Brooke Bond defeated

While the colonial State was making an all-out effort to win-over European capital often under imperialist pressure and many a time of its own volition, the local aspirants, who were sidelined in the process, looked on with barely suppressed resentment. Their annoyance later found expression through the regional press and by other means; a few such instances may be cited. In 1903, the Madras government attempted to strike a deal over the Chenai Nair forests of Malabar with certain foreign firms. The forest was already being relentlessly plundered by the State for fuel and timber, the latter specifically for the railways. When overseas firms approached the State for the purpose of buying up this forest with a view to its commercial exploitation, the Madras-based Desabakthan criticised the very idea of such a trade with foreign firms and suggested that the 'natives' should be given preference in the acquisition of such lands.⁹⁷

In 1926, Brooke Bond, the world's largest tea company, presented a proposal to the Travancore government according to which it agreed to allot 400 acres of lands for tea cultivation by the local people out of every 1,000 acres granted to it. The detailed

proposal ran thus: in each 1,000-acre unit granted to them by the State, the company would own 600 acres and the remaining 400 acres would be split up into small blocks and be made available to the small holders. The company would have a factory on its 600 acres, big enough to process the tea produced by the 1,000 acres together.⁹⁸ The small holder would be supplied with the requisite packages of raw material: tea seed, technical expertise and finance. The company would also undertake to manufacture tea for the small holder although he was free to sell it wherever he liked; the company was itself willing to purchase the same.

The State reacted very favourably to the proposal and contemplated the granting of not less than 25,000 acres of forest lands to the company. Notwithstanding the fact that 'native' participation was assured, public protest against the proposal came in from all quarters; peoples' representatives in the legislature, including the *Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee*⁹⁹ and all those who resented the idea of sharing a piece of their precious homeland with a European giant joined the agitation, vehemently objecting to further grants of land to any European.¹⁰⁰ The public agitation against the proposal continued, gathering further momentum when the planting community itself took the lead. Even the European-dominated CTPA was forced to speak out against the proposal: this was perhaps the first major instance of intra-class competition in the planting history of southern India. The association expressed the view that:

... it is not in the best interest of Peerumedu district or the state that any very extensive grant such as the concession contemplated, should be made to one firm of capitalists but considers that the majority of available land suitable for tea should be reserved for the gradual and progressive expansion of tea planting by Travancorean Companies and individuals who have already taken a part in the development of the States and vested interests therein.¹⁰¹

The State, on the contrary, continued to support the proposal and pleaded in favour of giving lands to Europeans. The views of the State were expressed by the Chief Secretary as follows:

We should realise that our eyes were opened only by the Europeans. The very fact that these lands are fit for cultivation and they could be cultivated profitably, we came to know only as a result of the enterprise and the energy of the European planter. And even today, we owe to him, a deep debt of gratitude for opening up of these parts of the country. It is the European planter that showed us the value of these lands and it is he that lavishly spent his money on these lands and in the opening of a number of roads in that part of the country which we all of us Indians are now using. Therefore it would not be grateful on our part if we now resolve in this (legislative) house, that in future that registry of lands should not be made under any circumstances, in favour of foreigners . . . that would be a suicidal policy.¹⁰²

However, it was the provincial bourgeoisie who emerged victorious with the Brooke Bond Company being forced to back out of the scheme in the wake of widespread public protest; however, it might also have been due to the onset of the Depression.

The local demand to keep the European planters at bay also brought to the fore issues related to the development of the local people and State expenditure on plantations and other aspects. Countries like Malaysia were cited as examples of the consequences of the penetration of European capital, which included an arrest of the development of the local economy with a marginalisation of the indigenous people.¹⁰³ In 1860, for instance, the *Malayala Manorama* noted that even as the Government incurred heavy expenditure to meet the demands of the planters, not a fraction of this amount found its way back to the State exchequer; the planters were even exempted from paying income tax. The paper further declared that it was the foreigners who stood to gain commercially from the plantations. The overall income derived from the plantations by the State was much smaller than the agricultural income generated in certain *taluks* of the state. This was in spite of the fact that not even a tenth of the amount spent by the State for the planting community was being spent for the development of some of the *taluks* taken together.¹⁰⁴ The irony of history however lies elsewhere: the Manorama group itself later diversified its commercial interests through banking, plantations and the press, and the surplus thus generated from Kerala was later reinvested elsewhere in Tamil country making it one of the world's leading global capitals in the tyres and tubes sector.¹⁰⁵

3.8 Entry of pan Indian capital: Two historical contexts

The two major historical contexts in which the local nascent bourgeoisie made its comparatively small entry into the European-controlled planting industry were (i) the Depression in the world metropolis in the early 1930s and (ii) the crisis of confidence in the colonial empires caused by the Second World War of the early 1940s.

A few such planting ventures that took shape during these two specific periods may be cited. The Syrian Christian business families in Travancore such as *Kandathil* and *Chalakupuzhi* – led by K. C. Mammen Mappilai¹⁰⁶ and C. P. Matthen¹⁰⁷ respectively – began their businesses from a small base in trading and plantations in the early years of the twentieth century. They were able to expand their capital base in plantations in the 1930s as well as diversify their business into insurance, banking and agro-processing activities. Another classic case of a humble beginning in plantations in the 1930s, which later grew into an all-India capital, was that of A. V. Thomas and Company. A. V. Thomas, a *nadar* Christian from the Thirunelveli region of Tamil country, registered his company in 1935 with an issued capital of Rs 50,000 after buying up a few tea and rubber estates from Europeans in Travancore.¹⁰⁸ The Cottanad Plantations Ltd in Wayanad, Devan Tea and Produce Co. Ltd in Mysore, Mamalay Tea estates, Devikulam Estates Ltd and the Woodland Estates Ltd are other examples of major planting companies that came up in the mid-1930s under the control of the provincial bourgeoisie. The groundwork for the establishment of many of these planting companies was laid in the wake of the Depression, the actual registration taking place a little later. The local capital would have expanded its base further but for the International Tea Regulation Act which came into effect in 1933, restricting both the quota of exports and the areas for fresh cultivation.

Some of these already established firms then entered into a phase of phenomenal growth in the years following the World War. A. V. Thomas and Company, for instance, had seven prominent planting companies under their control by the early 1940s, again bought from Europeans, and its paid-up capital went up from a meagre Rs 50,000 at

the time of registration in 1935 to more than Rs 33 lakhs in 1941.¹⁰⁹ Other new major Indian-owned planting companies that came up during the war years were the Blue Mountain Estates Ltd, in Nilgiris, the South Indian Tea Estate Co., Ltd, the Talayar Tea Company Ltd, etc. with their estates situated in various parts of southern India; this increase in Indian-owned companies coincided with a considerable influx of Indian membership into UPASI, largely accruing from the sale of 'moderate-sized sterling companies to Indians'.¹¹⁰

The European domination of the tea industry in southern India was slow in waning even in the post-independence phase. A dozen or more overseas companies still operated in this region at the time of independence and still later during the reorganisation of the states in 1956. The actual process of a dilution of foreign capital was evident only by the 1970s, when a gradual transfer of ownership to Indian big capital was effected. Sweeping changes that occurred during these years – the abolition of the managing agency system, the passing of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), 1973 and the move towards the institution of land reforms – resulted in an acceleration of the decline in foreign investments in the plantation sector. However, rather than the provincial/local capital, it was the big Indian sharks who next devoured the plantations of southern India. The KDHP was appropriated by the Tatas from James Finlay & Company;¹¹¹ Tata Tea came to be the single largest integrated plantation in the world. The Jay Shree Tea & Industries Ltd of the Birlas, formed in 1945 still holds a considerable portion of estates in southern India.¹¹² The second largest plantation in India owned by Harrisons and Crosfield went into the hands of the RPG Enterprises, which still has a sizeable share of foreign equity; the latest in this series is the transfer of the Thalappuzha Estate to Assambrooke. With the gradual decrease in the colonial presence, the tea plantations of southern India went slowly but surely into the hands of pan-Indian capital but remained integrated with the global commodity chain. With the passing of the FERA, foreign companies were to Indianise their assets with at least 60 per cent local equity participation, save tea, which had the advantage of retaining 74 per cent. The structural changes that followed, however, were more beneficial to pan-Indian capital than the local capital, with corporate magnates such as Tata Tea and RPG Enterprises emerging as partners in the global tea commodity chain (see Chapter 9). With corporate capital adopting new mechanisms such as the employee buyout in the case of Tata Tea, and other planting companies evolving their own coping strategies, the present era of globalisation is characterised by new forms of ownership and diverse forms of accumulation.

3.9 Summing up

By the close of the nineteenth century, what had been predominantly proprietary concerns in the plantation sector gave way to monopolistically controlled global capital. The European coastal-trading companies became increasingly involved in the plantation economy as managing agents, performing the multiple functions of producer, banker, shipper, broker and distributor. This was done through the mechanism of interlocking of directorships of the managing agencies involved in a wide variety of economic activities. This merchant capital was global in every sense, either owning or managing widely varied business interests across the continents with a substantial degree of capital concentration in each. This was but a prelude to the increased centralisation of capital which became evident in southern India by the 1920s. And while the

actual number of sterling companies involved in the industry registered a fall, capital investment continued uninterrupted even during the Depression. Moreover, the existing companies had a higher amount of paid-up capital. The planters went ahead to consolidate their economic and political power by forming their own associations and assimilating into a powerful united front – the United Planters Association of Southern India in 1893. The influence wielded by this association was such that the State was forced to court European capital in every possible manner; it even assured the admission of planters' representatives to the various legislative councils and assemblies. The growth of local capital, on the other hand, was greatly hampered by the lack of land resources, shortage of capital and foreign exchange and inadequate shipping facilities. The racial bias that existed further prejudiced its position and south Indian capital allied itself with the global capital but in a subordinate manner. The latter, on the other hand, left no stone unturned in its efforts to perpetuate its monopoly in the plantation sector. However, there was a transient phase of expansion of local capital in the 1930s and the 1940s when the metropolis was in a crisis/turmoil due to the Depression and the Second World War respectively. The opportunity was not lost on the indigenous business interests as south Indian capital slowly penetrated the plantation sector; however, their success was curtailed by the operation of international tea cartels. By the 1970s, though foreign capital began to depart from India in search of new peripheries such as Africa, it was not the local planters that benefited from it but rather pan-Indian capital, which began to adopt new strategies of labour management and accumulation. They have been further built upon in this contemporary era of neoliberal globalisation.

4 Plantation worker-families

Sources, social origins and gender divisions

When capitalist plantation production first made in-roads into southern India in the mid-nineteenth century, it necessitated a mass of labour which had been made ‘free’ in a double sense: free of any means of subsistence and free to sell their labour power. This was, in fact, the process of proletarianisation – the capitalist process which increases the dependence of the poor, for survival, on wage labour. It involves a simultaneous loosening of the pre-capitalist extra-economic subjugation and an increasing control of power over means of production by the capitalists. It has been our endeavour to trace the sources of plantation labour and to explore the nature of its mobilisation to the effect of making the workers captive in the sense that they were trapped in the plantations with their families having been disarticulated from the pre-existing sources of living. This will be discussed in the first section of this chapter while the social composition of the workforce with regard to gender and caste will be dealt with in the second section.

I SOURCING FROM DEEP PERIPHERY: SOCIAL ORIGINS

The only large-scale plantation in southern India, on which the slaves as such were to work, was the Anjarakandy spices plantation run by the East India Company. After assuming charge as overseer of the plantation, Murdoch Brown, in an application to the President and Commissioner of Malabar, stated that he was greatly constrained by the supply of labour. Accordingly, Brown had purchased about 45 *Pulayar* women and children whom he had found ‘very useful’ on his estate.¹ From the evidence collected by T. H. Baber, the Judge and Magistrate of north Malabar, it appears that the children employed on Brown’s plantations were in fact kidnapped: they were forcibly taken away from their relatives at midnight, clothes were thrust into their mouths and they were carried to Alappuzha where Assin Ally, the agent secretly employed by Brown resided; from there they were taken to Mayyazhi. In order to avoid any chances of identification, they were removed of their *kudumas* or such other distinguishing marks of their respective castes, and were disguised as *Mappila* children and given *Mappila* names.²

Slavery was legally abolished by the mid-nineteenth century; soil slaves were theoretically liberated to become ‘free men’.³ However, neither did this lead to the emergence of a free-labour market nor were these ex-slaves employed on the plantations. Quite a few of them continued to be attached to the land and entered another phase of

slavery in indentured form with their old masters, with little departure from the old *adima* relationships;⁴ it was largely the remainder that could be recruited for work on the plantations: a new labour market – a market for wage labour – was thus opened up from where the metropolitan capital began to source cheap labour for their investments in the colonies the world over.⁵

Those who had entered a second phase of slavery as attached labour continued to remain thus for many years, pledging themselves to cater to the needs of the prevailing wet-rice cultivation under their former masters. In the last nineteenth century, the major slave castes (*Pallar*, *Paraiyar*, *Cherumar*, *Malar*, *Holeyar*, etc.) constituted 12–20 per cent of the total population in the Madras Presidency,⁶ and continued to exist as agricultural labourers in the decades to come, thus displaying the continuance of the congruence between caste and class with caste remaining the ‘very part of the material reality’ of the society.⁷ However, they were free to leave their landlords during the off seasons in the plains. But the workers could move up the hills and work there for a specific period only after paying back their debts to their masters and moneylenders. For this and for meeting other expenses they would make use of the advances received from the *kanganies*, the details of which are explained later. In certain regions, however, the ex-slaves even resorted to desertion in their bid to work for cash wages on the plantations.⁸ The landlords, however, were adamant in their efforts to retain their hold on these ex-slaves, not wanting to lose control over them permanently.⁹ In certain cases, the landlords simply did not allow the wives to accompany their husbands when going to the estates as they might have feared that if the wives went along, the men would never return. In Malabar, for instance, the landlords provided the women with huts and allowed their men to go to work on plantations on condition that they return in time for rice cultivation.¹⁰ In Travancore, the upper-caste Hindu landlords complained against the planters taking away their *Pulayar* – the hitherto rice slaves – without their consent.¹¹ With respect to one such case – concerning the *Cherumar* of Malabar who were geographically closer to the Wayanad plantations – one European planter wrote:

these men practically paedial slaves, they are attached to the soil and are completely in the power of these landlords. Without his permission the *Cherumar* dare not leave their squalid estate, for the Malabar land owner fears that if once he loses a hold over them, he will never regain it.¹²

4.1 Dispossessed tribesmen, peasants and tenants

Even after the abolition of slavery, tribals were transacted along with the lands they lived on.¹³ The spread of plantations precipitated the process of pauperisation with the tribals being evicted from their own homelands and the small peasantry buckling under the pressure of adverse government legislations such as an increase in land revenue; they were then inevitably drawn to the plantations which seemed to promise them a better life. In the 1890s, Samuel Mateer, an Anglican Church missionary reported:

As soon as the planters’ axe is heard, the hill kings pack their traps and desert their homes to establish themselves in another valley. In this way, they have been driven from hill to hill and from valley to valley, until some have found now safe resting place in the dense jungles of the low lands of Travancore.¹⁴

The tribesmen, violently detached from their communal property and exploited to the maximum by 'every peon and policeman', formed a major source of labour supply for the early plantations. Various tribes – the *Kanikkars* and *Muthuvas* of Travancore; the *Badagas*, *Irular* and *Thodar* of Nilgiris; and the *Naicker*, *Paniyar* and *Kurumbas* of Wayanad – whose rights over the primeval forests had been recognised for ages, were the first to be threatened by the upcoming plantations.¹⁵

As Samuel Mateer would have us believe, these indigenous people simply could not resist the 'onward march of a superior race'.¹⁶ Though a few of these tribes even sought employment on plantations of their own accord they were largely disinclined to work for the Europeans.¹⁷ Ironically, they were often labelled thieves and planters were warned against employing them;¹⁸ it was also alleged that Muslim traders coming to the hills received stolen crop from these tribes.¹⁹ Those who were either unwilling to work for the planters or could not be accommodated in the plantation workforce were driven further and further away. As we closely follow them we see that the planters, backed by the State, were ultimately successful in creating a workforce out of even these groups who had been initially averse to such employment.

When the *Kanikkar* in Travancore applied to the State requesting the registration of some of their lands, the State declined on the grounds that it formed part of a big tract of land already applied for by a planter. In fact the white planter made the applications only much later.²⁰ The Travancore government also laid restrictions on the practice of shifting cultivation followed by the various tribes by bringing wastelands in hilly tracts under compulsory registration (See Section 2.6). Those tribals who had been making a living collecting cardamom from the wild were denied their very source of livelihood owing to the State's monopoly over the same.²¹ The KDHP, the largest plantation not only in southern India but also in the whole world, was built by banishing the local tribal community, the *Muthuvar*, from their traditional pasture. Some of the *Muthuvar* strongly resented this; yet others approached the *Sirkar* with their grievances.²² As in the case of Travancore, in the early 1840s, one of the pioneering planters in Nilgiris suggested that the movement of the *Thodar* be restricted and that the shifting cultivation of various other tribes be curbed.²³ While the *Badagas* were reduced to becoming potato cultivators,²⁴ the condition of the *Thodar* further deteriorated. The process of encroachment and usurpation of the entire Nilgiris region by the Europeans in terms of men and capital destroyed the socio-economic fabric of all these tribes, to the extent that they were dispossessed of their communal property and deprived of even a means of bare subsistence. They were not as such available for the plantations, yet were still maintained, writes the anthropologist A. Ayyappan, as 'specimens for anthropological studies and also as a show for sightseers visiting Nilgiris'.²⁵

The depeasantisation and dispossession of tenants by the landlords and the State through a series of pro-Imperial policies added to the ranks of the landless agricultural labourers ready to be recruited to the plantations. The material base of the peasantry in the colonies was progressively undermined through the employment of tactics such as an increase in land revenue and changes in the mode of tax payment. In the case of the Caribbean countries, for instance, the entire peasantry was uprooted so as to provide labour for the sugar plantations.²⁶ In 1868, the Government of Bengal increased land revenue with this intention, but it did not have the desired effect.²⁷ However, the nature of such policies and the consequences thereof differed from region to region.²⁸ In various parts of the Madras Presidency, cultivators degenerated into a

position of 'insolvent cottierism' resulting from rack renting, extortionate renewal of fees and inadequate compensation for improvements. Southern India, particularly the Madras Presidency, was by far the most heavily taxed presidency in India since the mid-eighteenth century: for every 1,00,000 of the population, the land revenue was Rs 10,05,455 in Bengal, Rs 16,71,965 in Bombay and Rs 23,12,465 in Madras, 130 and 38 per cent higher than the former two states respectively.²⁹ In 1829, it was reported by the Malabar Assistant Collector that the garden lands of the poor were being assessed so high that they were unable to pay the rent out of the *pattam* or net rent without the sale of some of their household furniture.³⁰ These assessments remained in force throughout the century.

In almost all the districts, revenue settlements introduced since the mid-nineteenth century held that the collection would be half of the net produce in addition to certain other compulsory payments. This invariably resulted in an accumulation of arrears of revenue for the collection of which coercive procedures were employed.³¹ The estimated value of property sold to meet the arrears increased from Rs 12,461 to a stupendous sum of Rs 4,52,789 during the same period. And when the famine broke out in 1876, the demand for revenue continued to mount; in the two years 1879–81, the property of nearly 2,78,000 persons were sold to pay off arrears and in 1891–2 the property of 1,26,704 persons were sold to meet arrears.³²

As caste hierarchy coincided with economic power, with the lands being in the hands of the upper-caste Hindus, the Dalits and such other low-caste people who laboured on these lands were invariably under threat of eviction.³³ There was a rapid increase in the rate of eviction of tenants in Malabar, for instance, between 1860 and 1869. The average annual number of suits for eviction had risen from 2,039 in the five years, ending in 1866, to 4,983 in the four years, ending in 1880. The average annual number of persons against whom decrees for eviction were issued annually rose from 1,891 to 8,355 in the same period.³⁴ The number of suits instituted in the civil courts in Malabar for the eviction of *kanam* tenants during 1916–20 was around 11,000.³⁵ The situation in the princely states was in no way more encouraging: the substitution of tax-in-kind by money payment, and a declining trend in the price of paddy eroded the material base of the paddy-based peasantry, leading many to the status of landless labourers.³⁶ Such a massive scale of depeasantisation invariably resulted in a swelling of the ranks of labour force, which was contingent upon the requirements of metropolitan capital.

4.2 Migrants from misfortune-ridden areas

Migrants, 'the light infantry of industrial capital', hailing from villages affected by famine and other natural calamities constituted another major source of plantation labour. By the mid-nineteenth century, there was an outpouring of depressed-caste migrants from the 'labour catchment areas' in various parts of Tamil country, Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and the Konkan Coast: the threat to subsistence was the major reason behind this push.³⁷ To quote Chakravarty:

They moved out, risking death, disease, being cheated and the alteration if not destruction of all social ties like family and kinship. They were lured by the immediate gain of one blanket, one change of clothes per year, and two rationed meals per day.³⁸

The droughts or famines which frequently broke in various parts of India and particularly the famine of 1876–8 had their disastrous effects on seven out of twenty-one districts of the Madras Presidency.³⁹ Scenes of thousands of famine-hit coolies lying dead in the jungles and the plains, and people dying of starvation in other places were not uncommon.⁴⁰ The breaking out of famine and pestilence, and their utter poverty pushed the *Paraiyar* and other depressed-castes out of their villages into the hills;⁴¹ many of them who had been converted to Christianity secured employment in the hills with the help of missionaries;⁴² others, encouraged and supported by the missionaries, migrated both within the country as well as to overseas plantations.⁴³ In 1877, for instance, from the dry, non-irrigated areas of famine-hit Mysore, nearly 3,50,000 persons desperately searching for employment migrated to the tea plantations in Nilgiris and Wayanad as well as to the coffee estates of Mysore, all of which acted as unofficial famine-release agencies.⁴⁴ As estimated by the Famine Commissioner in 1881, in normal times, 1,50,000 labourers of Mysore origin out-migrated annually to the neighbouring planting areas of Malabar and Kodagu. During times of famine, the plantations proved to be haven for the potential workers who were assured of both food and shelter, apart from wages; however, these were nominal as the workers soon found out (Chapter 6). As per the report of the Collector of Nilgiris, four-fifths of the estate workers in Wayanad, Nilgiris and Kodagu were from Mysore by the year 1865. Not less than 30,000 people from Mysore worked in Wayanad alone in 1877.⁴⁵ Since the Census of 1866–7, in 1871 the increase in population in Wayanad was registered at around 123 per cent, this being explained by the influx of workers to the newly opened coffee plantations.⁴⁶

The movement of Mysore-based labour to the plantation belt gradually waned with the end of the famine causing a shortage of labour even in Mysore.⁴⁷ The planters were then compelled to recruit workers from the already emerged ‘labour catchment areas’ of Salem, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Thirunelveli, Thiruchirappalli, Tanjavur and Coimbatore.⁴⁸ The *Planters’ Inquiry Committee* of 1896 provided the following tabular statement (Table 4.1), summarising the labour recruitment position in southern India in the late nineteenth century.

Table 4.1 Labour recruitment position in southern India, 1896 (in percentage)

<i>Planting region</i>	<i>Local labour</i>	<i>Labour from British India</i>	<i>Labour from Mysore</i>	<i>Total</i>
Wayanad	20	54	26	100
Nilgiris	17	45	38	100
Madurai	86	14	–	100
Thirunelveli	80	20	–	100
Kodagu	20	53	27	100
Mysore	37	63	–	100
Travancore	20	60	20	100
Kochi	4	96	–	100

Source: Data from *Report of the Southern India Planter’s Inquiry Committee*, Appendix IX, p. 94. (For Nilgiris and Mysore, the figures have been rounded off to the nearest per cent.)

4.3 Early twentieth century: Labour still plentiful

It has been revealed that even as the nineteenth century drew to a close, a pool of pauperised masses had already begun forming in the southern Indian countryside, which had the potential to serve as an unending source of labour, including that of women workers, for the newly founded plantations. The process of pauperisation of the peasants, tenants and the tribals continued without let-up, even as more natural calamities dogged the unfortunate workers. In 1900, the *Kerala Patrika* commented, 'when the government raised the tax, the *jennimar* increase the rent and the tenants have to bear the double burden'.⁴⁹ The *Kerala Shobhini* reported in 1903 that the tenants continued to be reduced to 'mere paupers owing to the exaction and suppression of the landlords'.⁵⁰ The hardships of the ryots continued to pile up as they were made to part with an ever-increasing share of their already meagre surplus for the upkeep of the state apparatus.⁵¹

Squeezed out by an expanding population – which grew by more than 19 per cent in the Madras Presidency in the first four decades of the twentieth century⁵² – and beckoned by the 'alluring' plantations, migrant labour poured into the planting regions well into the twentieth century. A remarkable study on internal migration in India during 1901–31 reveals certain specific features in relation to plantations: (1) that the movement of the population was consistently westward, i.e. from Madras to Mysore and to Travancore-Kochi and (2) that there was a high proportion of females in the stream of migration, far outnumbering males in Travancore-Kochi as against the general pattern of males outnumbering females.⁵³ The migration to Travancore increased from 10 to 67 thousand during the first 30-year period.⁵⁴ In addition, there was also a movement of population from the coastal areas and midlands of Travancore to the highlands. Migration to the Malabar region of the Western Ghats was accelerated in the second quarter of the twentieth century, all leading to an increase in the density of population in the planting regions.⁵⁵ The mean density of population per square miles in Nilgiris which stood at 103 in 1891 increased to 172 in 1931; in the Cardamom Hills, it increased from 3 in 1875 to 22 in 1901, and in the Peerumedu-Devikulam region it stood at 94 in 1931.⁵⁶ The population in the high ranges of Travancore increased by 136 per cent during 1881–91, 47 per cent during 1891–01, 85 per cent during 1901–11 and 42 per cent during 1911–21. During 1921–31 there was an 85 per cent increase in population in the high ranges as against an increase in population by 27 per cent in the whole of Travancore. Further, more than 86 per cent of the population in the high ranges in 1931 was constituted by migrants from the nearby Tamil districts.⁵⁷

The excess pressure of population on land and the drastic increase in the average sale price of such lands in those regions from which labour was chiefly recruited led to a fresh migration of workers to the plantations in the early twentieth century too.⁵⁸ The heavy pressure on land was further aggravated by the high frequency of bad seasons which mandated curtailing of farming operations, this in turn induced the workers to seek employment elsewhere; the planters were quick to capitalise on this. The drought of the 1920s, with the consequent economic distress, and the changes in the cropping pattern resulting in an increase in the prices of staple food like rice with the inevitable pauperisation of the peasantry further facilitated the supply of labour to plantations – which became more abundant than it had been in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁹ The living conditions of the workers who had migrated to overseas

plantations were reported by the regional press to be deplorable⁶⁰ and it was suggested that further emigration to the plantations of Assam and overseas should stop; this provided a fresh source of labour to the plantations in southern India. The postwar scarcity of food grains and the consequent rise in prices led to an increase in wages after years of stagnation; the Kanan Devan planters in their annual general meeting in May 1923 thus reported that 'labour is plentiful', owing to the increase in wages.⁶¹

Further, the many riots among the people, particularly the clashes between the upper castes and the oppressed also forced the latter to move up the hills. For example, the encounters between the *Nayanmar* and the *Pulayar* in Travancore in the early twentieth century served to uproot the latter and, in a way, freed them to move up the hills or to emigrate to Sri Lanka. The social fighter of the *Pulayar* and their representative in the Sri Moolam Assembly, Ayyankali, also favoured the idea of the recruitment of *Pulayar* families to the plantations.⁶² Evidence suggests that workers from Malabar were encouraged to emigrate overseas (to plantations and other ventures) where they were assured of a society devoid of casteism.⁶³ It was also reported to the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1931 that the intense caste oppression suffered by the low castes in the Madras Presidency was one of the reasons that forced them to migrate to the plantations, thus making their recruitment an easy task.⁶⁴ The *Mappilamar* of Malabar who had to revolt against the agrarian oppression perpetuated by the feudal lords and the British had to inevitably seek work on the estates. The colonial officials capitalised on the situation encouraging them to migrate to the plantations, both within and outside the country; they were also employed in road and railway construction.⁶⁵ The planters found the Dalits and other low castes fairly satisfactory in their work and, their staple food being tapioca and 'kanji water', very cheap to employ, thus allowing the former to extract maximum surplus.

By this time, the planters had unearthed a new source of labour – the militant tribes which the British labelled *criminal*⁶⁶ – who had been forcibly sent to the plantations in Anaimalai, Nilgiris and Wayanad. In 1916, 1,000 members of the *criminal tribes* were employed in the estates of Anaimalai alone;⁶⁷ in 1920 another 5,000 *Piramalai kallar* were sent to the plantations as part of their 'rehabilitation'.⁶⁸ Many of these *criminal tribes* were members of the *kallar* community who had provided military services in the villages in exchange for grants of lands prior to the British rule; this only goes to show how colonialism had wiped out customary relations and had manipulated the same for the express purpose of surplus extraction. In employing the *criminal tribes*, the planters had a double advantage: in addition to having a new source of labour, they were often in a position to insist that the government should provide help such as the setting up of police outposts and the meeting of the cost of landing them in the estates, though the latter suggestion was not accepted.⁶⁹

In brief, villages with good rains and better cultivation, plenty of employment with reasonably better wages and a ready availability of food made recruitment of labour difficult.⁷⁰ Rather, villages that suffered most in terms of hikes in land revenue, famine and other natural calamities, caste oppression, etc. contributed most to the plantations, revealing the movement of the depressed classes to be essentially a 'strategy of survival',⁷¹ which, however, later turned out to be far less satisfactory than they expected which shall be explained later. Perhaps the shortage of labour in the plantations was felt only during the Second World War; this is largely attributed to the widespread war service recruitment from throughout the countryside, a collusive deal

between the planters and war-recruiting agencies being initiated, for the benefit of both.⁷² It was said that the higher wages in the Tamil districts and the availability of rice at low prices, 'an ugly factor' in planters' diction, made recruitment difficult in the mid-1940s.⁷³

The sources of plantation labour in the twentieth century remained much the same as in the nineteenth century – the three linguistic regions, viz. Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam (see Map 2). Planters still continued to capitalise on the masses of famine-stricken workers just as in the olden days, the latter finding some degree of relief from their hardships on the plantations. In 1910, for instance, a sub-Collector in the Tamparam tract observed 'We are near famine conditions after a five years drought. It would have been famine long before this but for the lucky proximity of the Sri Lanka and Travancore planters' estates'.⁷⁴ When the workers of the plantations in Wayanad were asked at the Mananthavady hospital as they were admitted there after having fallen ill, why they had come to suffer there in malaria and die, they answered that their choice was between death by starvation at home and death by disease here.⁷⁵

4.4 The system of recruitment

In the initial stages of the development of coffee plantations, the planters themselves went down the hills in search of labour over and above the dispossessed tribes readily available therein. There was also a move to initiate the import of Chinese labour in the early days of the planting industry, but the planters had to content themselves with six persons from China who came to Nilgiris to advise them on tea planting and manufacturing;⁷⁶ some of the planters also brought over a few Sinhalese labourers.⁷⁷

The planters also requested the help of European agencies like M/s Matheson & Company in the recruitment of labour for their plantations.⁷⁸ However, unlike the plantations in north and north-eastern India where the involvement of agency houses in the recruitment of labour was decisive, the role of these firms was not very significant in the case of southern India. In 1894, the Government of Madras drafted a Bill licensing labour suppliers but this was later abandoned. The Planters' Inquiry Committee recommended the registration of labour suppliers for both inland and emigrant labour in 1896. In their efforts to collect more labour, the Kanan Devan Company opened a Labour Recruitment Office at Thiruchirappalli in 1902.⁷⁹ However, all such efforts to mobilise sufficient labour proved to be in vain. The planters then resorted to a systematic recruitment of workers with the help of intermediaries, popularly known as *kanganies* or *maistries*, remarkably similar to the jobbers in other plantations of Southeast Asia, who performed a dual function: that of recruiters in the villages and of supervisors on the estates. The *kanganies* were chosen from the same districts and villages as the labourers who were to be recruited; they spoke the same language and shared a common social background with these labourers. Just as the planters calculated, this common bond aided the *kanganies* in controlling the workers both in the villages as well as in their workplace. The rich landlords, with their considerable feudal influence, also recruited persons from their villages and sent them to the estates.⁸⁰ And in certain other cases, the workers themselves came to the estates without the help of intermediaries, forming estate gangs, eligible to get the commission which would otherwise have gone to the intermediaries. Though such different varieties of recruitment existed, it was the *kangany*-led system which was in vogue at all times.

Initially, two major recruitment systems, both functioning through the *kanganies*, prevailed: recruitment of indentured labour and free recruitment. Under the indenture system, a labourer was bound by a penal contract to serve on a particular plantation for a specified period.⁸¹ By the late 1920s, this system was gradually replaced by the so-called 'free recruitment' system under which the workers were not bound by any written agreement. This in no way meant that the 'free labourer' had any choice margin open to him. The difference between these two systems was very subtle as the 'coolie remained, by and large, a coolie: the extra-embodied in the income differential did not accrue to him';⁸² moreover, the non-indentured workers remained in bondage even when they came to be settled on plantations as resident labour, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.5 How did the *kangany* system function?

The *kanganies* first entered into contracts with the planters agreeing to supply a given number of workers for a given period of time at a specified rate per head. The contracts were either verbal or registered, and in some places like Travancore, a verbal agreement was supplemented by a promissory note executed by the maistry. With the lump sum money as advance from the planters, the *kangany* would then go down the hills. The *kangany* would first try to mobilise his own family members and relatives, then those around but belonging to his caste. Once such sources had been tapped, he would then proceed to the remaining pool of the labouring poor, scouring the entire countryside. The worker and/or the household of the family received the advance from the *kanganies*, often getting the pronotes signed and then, entering into contract (usually for nine months), followed them to the plantations. Some of these aspects may be explained further.

The first European planter, Murdoch Brown, himself had recognised the merits inherent in employing whole families instead of individual workers. To quote Brown:

Labourers of this description (with family) are indeed of far greater use and consequently of much more value to the Company than those that come without families who serves until they had laid up little money and then go away.⁸³

However, the family-based recruitment was not very common in the coffee era. It was with the coming of tea that the family as a unit began to find a place on the estates, the plucking and the round-the-year work characteristic of tea necessitating the employment of women, which in turn had a stabilising effect on their families in large numbers. In 1931, the *Royal Commission on Labour* stated thus: 'Factories ask for individuals: plantations want families'.⁸⁴

In most cases, the entire family: husband, wife as well as children were encouraged to come up the hills. Such a move had many advantages especially for a tea planter; it assured a permanently settled women workforce, and hence a continuous source of reproduction of labour: a study done on 121 estates in Travancore reveals that the average rate of reproduction kept on increasing from 1.73 to 5.9 in consonance with the duration of stay of families in the estates.⁸⁵ In addition to an adherence to the traditional patriarchal family values, it also ensured cheap labour for the planters as the worker-family, having once settled on the estate, could not then find alternative

employment very easily; these factors further aided the planters in the exercise of the authority of capital (see Section 5.3).

Advances not only aided in the mobilisation of sufficient labour but also helped to moor the workers to capital; it was a common practice followed by the employers within India and in other colonies.⁸⁶ The origin of the system of advance payment and the increase in the amounts of advance paid have their historical reasons.⁸⁷ These low-caste workers were, by and large, tied to their local superiors – a system under which they were obliged to work for food and shelter. In order to meet their other basic expenses as well as the expenses for social ceremonies such as marriages, the workers were paid an advance on condition that they work on the land to repay the debt. In addition to this, the workers were also forced into deeper debts by the village moneylenders. Both the feudal landlords and the village moneylenders – who belonged to the *Nattukkottai Chettiar*, *Multani*, *Marwari*, *Kallidaikurichi Brahmins*⁸⁸ and other such upper castes, as well as the Muslims – charged prohibitively high interest rates, and they often used many a ploy to prevent the workers from repaying the advances in full,⁸⁹ thus deliberately holding them in a state of perpetual indebtedness.

Such forms of servitude continued to exist even many years after the abolition of slavery under a different system of suppression, now called the indenture system; serfs such as the *Jithedas*, *Holeyas* and *Madigas* in Mysore; *Jummat* in Kodagu; *Panchamas* in Tamil districts; *Cherumas* and *Pulayas* in Malabar and Travancore, etc. were housed and fed while they rendered their services only to the landowners concerned, remaining chained to the system of advances. In order to secure labour for the plantations, the planters had to break these contracts. This could be accomplished only by paying off the debts through a fresh advance, thus inducing the prospective workers to break the bondage with their villages and to bind themselves to the planters instead.⁹⁰ It was a transfer of bondage from the feudal relations of production to a capitalist one. Though the advance money received from the *kanganies* served to release them from their old masters and facilitated transport to their new destination, this amount was ultimately deducted from their wages. This was a tactic that was employed uniformly both in times of abundance and scarcity. It was in fact the 'practice of making the worker pay for the cost of his own recruitment'.⁹¹

The labourers were thus indentured to a particular estate for a particular time period for 'fixed' wages. This indenture kind of labour contract brought the following benefits to the planters: (1) they were assured of an adequate 'quota' of labour under their command to keep their estate operating uninterruptedly, (2) bargaining for increases in wage payment could be foreclosed. With respect to the workforce, this marked the beginning of a new phase: released from the fetters and chains of slavery and the bondedness of feudalism they embarked on a stage of debt peonage; with the receipt of an advance from the *kangany*, the workers' 'doom was sealed', and s/he would remain indebted to the *kangany*/planter for life.⁹² The *kangany* was paid an advance for every worker he undertook to bring, the average rate varying from region to region from Rs 5 to 20 and Rs 50 to 200 for an individual worker and a family consisting of 8 to 10 members respectively. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were about 12,430 *kanganies* all over southern India with an average number of 25 workers each;⁹³ labour suppliers, mainly *kanganies*, numbered somewhere between 17,000 and 20,000 in 1930.⁹⁴ In certain situations, the average worker gang consisted of 200–250

members. *Kanganies* with recruitments of as high as 500 coming up the hills were not uncommon in the early twentieth century.⁹⁵

The *kanganies* who went as recruiters to the villages would reappear on the estates as supervisors. They formed the lowest rung in the plantation hierarchy with the Superintendents and Managers at the top; the latter were invariably of European origin. The *kanganies* had to work under the direct supervision of the Superintendent. In brief, the *kanganies* commanded labour, but by the same process of relations of production, they in turn were commanded by the planter class. The *kangany* was not free to transfer the labour force that he had already allotted to a particular estate to another, even though he could often fetch a higher commission from the latter. Rarely was it possible for him to break the colonial code of relations. He was entitled to receive earnings at two levels: (1) 10–15 per cent of the earnings of the workers as commission for his function as labour supplier,⁹⁶ i.e. for collecting and exchanging labour in the feudal-colonial market, and (2) daily wages equivalent to a worker's wage for his function as labour supervisor, i.e. for supervising the labour force in accordance with the interests of the planter class.

Certain *kanganies* managed to earn a respectable income from this dual function, the size of which was directly related to the size of the workforce that each of them recruited and brought under supervision. Instances of *kanganies/maistries* becoming prosperous, coming to own landed property in their home villages, even marrying their children off well and constructing reasonably comfortable houses were reported even in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁷

4.6 Abusive tactics

Many abusive tactics were practised by the *kanganies* and the planter too, and their methods of recruitment were as fraudulent as those that were used in the recruitment of emigrant labourers for overseas plantations. Both the planters as well as the workers had their own separate versions of abuses by the *kanganies*. The former were primarily taxed over the question of violation of advance-based contracts, while the latter often found themselves victims of empty promises.

The *kangany* proceeded from one village to another, visiting fairs and other festive places where he would paint a rosy picture of the life on the hills: higher (money) wages, better housing and proper medical care. All forms of persuasion and coercion were employed to cajole the workers into migrating to the plantations. The poor workers often fell prey to these ploys, only to be cheated of the advance money promised to them, the *kanganies* often siphoning away this advance amount entrusted to them by the planters. In other instances, the workers received less than the amount claimed to have been decided on: the *kanganies* got the workers to sign for a greater amount of advance than they were actually paid.⁹⁸ While the adults were offered drinks to coax them into signing the work contracts, the children were pampered with sweets and other delectables.⁹⁹ Such forms of enticement/kidnapping continued well into the early twentieth century just as in the case of Brown's exploits with respect to Anjarakandy cinnamon plantations in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ In certain planting regions and in their neighbouring places, other unique systems of recruitment were in existence, often sustained in the shadow of traditional beliefs, rituals and customs.¹⁰¹

Rarely could one come across a planter who did not harbour a grouse with respect to the *kanganies*. The advance amount of rupees lost by the planters on account of violation of contracts by the *kanganies* often ran into lakhs of rupees and this was even more pronounced in the princely states when compared to British. The average loss incurred by the planters in the late nineteenth century in the princely states was nearly rupees seven per acre as against two-thirds of a rupee per acre by the planters in the Madras Presidency and Kodagu. The *Madras Mail* reported that more than 13 lakhs of rupees had been written off by the planters in southern India during 1891–5.¹⁰² One major intention behind the conduct of the first *Planters' Inquiry* in 1896 was to investigate into the nature of these recruitment systems and to identify the associated malpractices. In the case of advances, many a planter admitted to finding it an objectionable practice, yet they defended it on the grounds of 'absolute necessity'.¹⁰³

Specific instances of violation of advance-based contracts were numerous; one such example may be cited in the words of a planter:

The other day, a *maistry* to whom rupees 1,500 had been advanced by my writer, brought 60 Tamil coolies to this estate. They settled down comfortably and turned out to work at once. The *maistry*, however quietly told my writer that unless he was given rupees 1,000 not only would the remainder of his gang that were to come be stopped from doing so but that the coolies already brought would be taken elsewhere. My writer naturally objected to this . . . the following day the *maistry* had disappeared leaving instructions to his coolies to follow him to Kodagu, which they promptly did the next day. My writer and self immediately started off to the *taluk chuchery* and on our way passed 20 absconding coolies, but no amount of persuasion would induce them to return.¹⁰⁴

In some cases, the *kanganies* and their workers entered another estate under different names in violation of their previous contracts. To quote one planter, 'at least one of them got himself written off as dead and lay "doggo" for fifteen years to avoid proceedings. When the great demand for labour, and increased wages occurred he bobbed up again under a different name'.¹⁰⁵ In order to identify the absconding *kanganies* the planters used to advertise in their official organ. One such advertisement which appeared in the *Planting Opinion* in 1903 makes interesting reading:

Planters are advised not to give employment or an advance to bring coolies to one Narain *Maistry* of the *Pallar* caste, son of Chendara of Kulloomudday village, Coimbatore district, as he is under an advance of rupees 200 on a stamped agreement to the undersigned to work . . . with 30 coolies came to work on the 17th June and absconded on twenty June after receiving the usual weekly rice money. The personal description of Narain is as follows: short slim, straight nose prominent eyes, dark specked countenance, wears a silver anklet on right leg and dresses in a scarlet soldier's jacket.¹⁰⁶

The planters were equally responsible for the fraudulent practices in the recruitment system and particularly so in cases of the crimping and enticing of labour from

one estate to another. Planters even resorted to crimping of labour from overseas estates, often offering a higher amount of advances as bait. One such case may be quoted – a planter's letter to an agent in Sri Lanka, seeking labour to work on his estate in Wayanad reads:

I shall send you a cheque for rupees 500/- in a day or two. In receipt of it, please bring over forty coolies as soon as possible. . . . when you bring up the coolies to the estate, I will give you another rupees 500/- and you can return to your country, and bring up more. Please note, at least half of the labour, women especially must have received some training in Sri Lanka.¹⁰⁷

In order to contain the abuses of the recruitment system and to realise a disciplined labour force, the *UPASI* formed the Labour Department in 1914. The major objectives of the Department were to minimise the risk of losses in advances to labour suppliers, to persuade defaulters to return to the estates or to refund their dues, to unearth the prospects of setting up new recruiting centres and to assist the authorities in tracing defaulters served warrants under the Breach of Contract Act. The further subjugation of the workers through the realisation of these objectives formed the essence of what the planters chose to call the 'Labour Rules'.¹⁰⁸

The Labour Department opened six territorial divisions, maintaining as many as 98 recruiting agents spreading from south Anantapur to Cape Comorin (now known as Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu). The Labour Department had a wider reach than the Tea Districts Labour Association in Assam and the Ceylon Labour Commission, which were merely recruiting and forwarding organisations. It was also in the same period that the Imperial Government found it suitable to appoint a Labour Commissioner through whom it could source cheap labour for the colonial plantations. The implementation of the Indian Emigration Act of 1922 being the major task of the Labour Commissioner, the colonial authorities succeeded in sourcing and exporting a large body of people, again from among the Dalits;¹⁰⁹ the *kanganies*, however, continued to play a crucial role in the recruitment of labour. The Labour Department of *UPASI* was involved in the settling of disputes between the *kanganies* and labour as well as inter-labour disputes.¹¹⁰ The abuses in the recruitment and mobilisation of labour continued until Independence when the obnoxious *kangany* system was finally abolished despite resistance from the newly formed 'trade union' of the *kanganies*; the existing *kanganies* assumed new roles in the changed circumstances.¹¹¹

II SOCIAL COMPOSITION AND GENDER DIVISIONS

Now the size, growth and the composition of the workforce over the years are analysed so as to get a picture of the changing structure of the plantation working class in southern India. Unlike other industries, both traditional and modern, where women are considered 'supplementary' to men, tea has a distinct character of its own: in spite of employing a bisexual workforce, it is the plucking done by the women that is the key operation. The social background of these workers is also distinctive in that they are drawn from the most backward and underprivileged sections of society. Some of these aspects are further examined here under Sections 4.7 and 4.8.

4.7 Size and growth of plantation workforce

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there were more than 3.1 lakh workers employed in coffee and tea plantations taken together in southern India (Table 4.2). As the area under coffee was much higher than that under tea – 2,83,406 acres of coffee as against 16,277 acres of tea¹¹² – the majority of the workers were also employed in coffee. However, the proportion of permanent labour was higher in tea, 57 per cent as against 41 per cent in coffee.¹¹³

We have seen in the first part of Chapter 2 that the growth in area under tea in southern India by the first quarter of the twentieth century was impressive, growing from a meagre 16,277 acres in 1895 to 52,609 acres in 1910, and further to 1,01,169 acres in 1925, registering more than a 521 per cent increase over the years. The increase in employment as shown in Table 4.3 was more than proportionate to the increase in area: from 11,880 workers employed in 1895 the number increased to 1,09,464 in 1925, registering an 821 per cent rise. The growth in employment remained high (52 per cent), still later, but was less than proportionate to the growth in area under tea (62 per cent) during the period from 1925 to 1950.¹¹⁴ Tea factories and the employment therein also registered an increase during these years. The number of tea factories as well as the employment of labour in the Madras Presidency, for instance, increased from 46 and 1,538 in 1924 to 61 and 2,205 in 1927 and to 85 and 2,810 in 1936; by the late 1930s, there were 74 tea factories in Travancore employing not less than 2,500 workers.¹¹⁵ Other changes were the change in sex ratio and in caste-ethnic composition, to which we now turn.

Table 4.2 Employment in plantations, 1895

<i>Region</i>	<i>Workers</i>
Tamil country	79,653
Kodagu	73,880
Mysore	1,39,010
Travancore-Kochi	17,914
Total	3,10,457

Source: Data from *Agricultural Statistics of British India 1891–95*, Calcutta: Department of Revenue and Agriculture, pp. 351 and 355.

Table 4.3 Employment in tea in southern India, 1920–50

<i>Year</i>	<i>Permanent labour (a)</i>	<i>Temporary labour (b)</i>	<i>Total (c)</i>	<i>Total all India (d)</i>	<i>% of c – d</i>
1925	99,417	10,047	1,09,464	8,25,187	13.26
1930	1,41,420	9,689	1,51,109	9,22,695	16.38
1935	1,41,258	7,313	1,48,571	8,99,039	16.53
1940	1,42,187	7,198	1,49,385	9,18,176	16.27
1945	1,45,227	8,842	1,54,069	8,04,237	19.18
1950	1,56,634	9,345	1,65,979	10,33,090	16.10

Source: Worked out from *Indian Tea Statistics*, various years. Figures for an earlier year are available but are not used as they appear to be statistically incorrect.

In the coffee-era, too, women had been employed in plantations but had never been considered a major source of labour. It could have been due to a variety of reasons: the difficulties in getting them mobilised owing to social taboos, the planters' gender prejudice against women's physical capabilities, the missionaries' fear of the sin of sexual contact with others as in the case of slave women in Caribbean plantations and so on. It was with the large-scale cultivation of tea that migration became a 'family affair' and the consequent family-based recruitment with the employment of women and children resulted in a favourable sex ratio in the planting regions.¹¹⁶ Parents themselves offered their own grown-up daughters for work on the estates.¹¹⁷

The proportion of women workers to the total employment continued to increase in the first half of the twentieth century especially in the wake of the increased centralisation of capital, which in turn necessitated a large mass of resident workforce. By the early 1930s, women and children came to constitute 52 per cent of the workforce on the plantations, 16 per cent in factories and 25 per cent in mines.¹¹⁸ In the southern plantations, the number of female workers per thousand males increased from 580 to 639 over the years 1911–21. Even among the most conservative communities like the Muslims, the women went out for work on the estates; of every 1,000 Muslim workers, 329 were women.¹¹⁹ The *Labour Investigation Committee* of 1944, headed by D. V. Rege, also reveals that an increasing number of women were entering the workforce in the plantations in southern India. Besides an increase in the proportion of women, the latter actually outnumbered their male counterparts by the mid-1940s (Table 4.4), a situation that remains so even today (see Chapter 8).

It was in tea that the proportion of women workers was the highest, being 47 per cent in 1944 as against 40 and 24 per cent in coffee and rubber plantations respectively. This was largely facilitated through the process of internal migration of workers within southern India in which, too, women outnumbered males, as explained earlier. The increasing predominance of women in the plantations was also reflected in an increasingly favourable sex ratio in the planting regions such as Nilgiris and Kodagu and in the high ranges of Travancore. During the period 1901–51, it increased from 801 to 830 in Nilgiris, and from 840 to 920 and 834 to 909 in Kodagu and Travancore respectively (Table 4.5). In Travancore, the proportion of female workers in tea per thousand was 504 as against 388 for males in 1941. Further, the proportion of females in the age group of 15–20 in the high ranges of Travancore was higher than that in the remaining parts of the state,¹²⁰ resultant of the 'youthful girls' employed to extract the maximum amount of work. Any increase in the sex ratio in favour of women not only yielded more but also cost less as women commanded lower wages as shall be discussed later in Sections 6.2 and 6.3.

Table 4.4 Proportion of women and child labour in tea in southern India (in percentage)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Child labour</i>
1911	59.47	30.74	9.69
1921	57.74	32.79	9.47
1944	42.00	47.00	11.00

Source: For the years 1911 and 1921, Census of India, 1911 and 1921, *Madras*, Vols. XII: 267; XIII: 262 respectively. For the year 1944, *Rege Committee Report*, p. 119.

Table 4.5 Sex-ratio in planting regions (females/1,000 males)

Year	Tea regions		Coffee region Kodagu
	Nilgiris	Travancore	
1901	801	834	840
1921	831	851	868
1931	803	834	842
1941	827	875	858
1951	830	909	920

Sources: Data from Folke, S. *Evolution of Plantations, Migration, and Population Growth in Nilgiri and Coorg* (South India), Paper Presented in the 21st *International Geographical Congress*, 1968, p. 40; Census of India, 1971, *District Census Hand Book*, Idukky District, series 9, Pt. X, p. 7.

Table 4.6 Comparative evidence of birth rates, 1942–59

Year	Estates Southern India	Madras Presidency	Indians on Sri Lankan Estates	Emigrant Controller Reports	All-India Abstract
1942	37.0 ^a	33.81 ^b	NA	20.64	29.3
1943	33.9 ^a	31.12 ^b	NA	25.94	25.9
1946	32.0	29.39 ^b	41.6	30.60	28.3
1950	52	—	37.3	23.88	24.9
1951	55.0	—	38.6	35.73	—
1952	53.0	—	33.5	33.78	—

Source: ^aGoI. *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, Report I – Tea, New Delhi: Government Press, 1956, Annexure XLVIII-D, p. 689.

^b*Rege Committee Report*, p. 170; Krishnanswami, *Rural Problems in Madras* (monograph), Madras: Government Press, p. 17.

With the ratio of women workers settling on plantations on the rise, the birth rates on these estates went up significantly. As is evident from Table 4.6, the birth rate on these plantations in southern India was significantly higher than the average birth rate in the Madras Presidency as a whole. Further, it reached as high as 55.0 in the early 1950s as against 37.3 and 23.88 on Sri Lankan estates and among emigrants to overseas plantations. This high birth rate was in spite of the absence of proper facilities for childbearing, while the hard labour extracted from the women even during pregnancy was hardly conducive for the attainment of a higher fertility rate. Each new arrival was welcomed by both planter and family alike; the family saw in every new child a potential wage earner who could help supplement the paltry family income.¹²¹ Does this also indicate an eagerness on the part of the planters of southern India to specifically court high birth rates and hence a high proportion of child population? It would seem so, for an extra child meant an extra hand on the estate, but one which commanded only meagre wages. Accordingly, the planters even paid the woman worker a bonus for every child born;¹²² however, in the event of the death of the child, for no fault of the worker, the amount was actually debited from her account; the bonus initially paid

thus turned out to be a burden in the face of the high infant mortality on the plantations which was as high as 260 in 1921.¹²³

One of the 'most shameful' aspects of industrialisation in Britain was the exploitation of little children, commented E. P. Thompson;¹²⁴ this came to be one of the means of surplus appropriation from the colonies as well.¹²⁵ Children were assigned the work of hoeing and weeding which they did under the supervision of the adult members; they were also employed in tea factories.¹²⁶ The various planters' associations throughout India admitted the same to the *Royal Commission on Labour*;¹²⁷ however, the planters legitimised it on the grounds that the children earned more than just their food and clothing.¹²⁸ The children continued with the tasks assigned to them until the age of 12 or 13, upon which they were considered for regular work; they were treated as adults as and when they proved themselves capable of executing certain minimum prescribed tasks: male children were considered men only if they could prune a 100 bushes, whereas female children were considered women only when they became capable of plucking leaves.

Official estimates put child labour in plantations at 10–11 per cent of the total labour force as shown in Table 4.4. There is every chance of this being a gross underestimation. The International Labour Organisation defines any non-adult worker, i.e. one below the age of 18, as a child labourer. Considering this, employment of adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 years, and of children, and those between the ages of 12 and 16 years, in fact, constitute child labour.¹²⁹ The official estimate quoted above ignores these sections of workers thus projecting the idea that the employment of children below 10 years alone was undesirable. This could well-nigh be the colonial perception of child labour. But how could one explain the Plantation Labour Act 1951, the first of its kind in the post-Independence phase to regulate employment and living conditions of workers, which permitted the employment of children above the age of 12 years as permanent labour. Paradoxically enough, the Plantation Labour Act simply accepted child labour as integral to the plantation production system and went ahead to make regulations instead of abolishing it.¹³⁰

4.8 Socially hierarchised global commodity chain: Dalit women and children

Tea plantations being one of the most sweated industries as we shall see in the following chapters, it was the Dalits who shouldered the major burden of work on these estates. This is evident from the fact that the depressed castes as a single group constituted the majority of the population in the planting regions. For instance, in Nilgiris they formed 47 per cent of the Hindu population in 1871 as against 16 per cent in the Madras Presidency as a whole. In 1893, the percentage of depressed castes in Nilgiris went up to 50 per cent.¹³¹ Given the fact that the Dalits constituted hardly 14 per cent of the population of the Madras Presidency in 1921, they remained over-represented on the estates, constituting more than one-third of the workforce.¹³² The other low-caste groups too were over-represented: for instance, the *Thiyyas* and *Nadanmar* who constituted around 1.55 per cent each of the population formed 2 per cent of the estate workforce; the *Badagas* who formed less than 1 per cent of the general population were also over-represented in the estate workforce, of which they formed 5 per cent. The two major religious groups, the Muslims and the Christians, possibly in the form

of converted 'castes', constituting 6.5 and 3 per cent respectively of the population were the others who were over-represented on the estates: the former with nearly 9 per cent and the latter with almost double that number.¹³³ This again could be an underestimation as the majority of those coming under the Census category of 'Others' may have most probably been drawn from among the other Dalits and backward communities. The occupational background of most of these castes was either that of traditional landless labourers, specifically agrestic women slaves (rice slaves) or of artisans from ruined crafts and other traditional occupations such as toddy tapping and weaving. Though the four major non-Brahmin upper-caste Hindus (*Vellalas*, *Nairs*, *Baliya* and *Kapu*) constituted nearly 16 per cent of the general population in the Madras Presidency, they formed less than 5 per cent of the plantation workforce; the *Brahmins* who formed 3.5 per cent of the population did not appear on the estates at all. The planters in other regions also drew upon such low castes as the *Pulayar*, *Paraiyar* and *Pallar* and other tribal groups; in places like Peerumedu-Devikulam, more than one-third of them were from the Tamil countryside in 1931.¹³⁴

In general, a good number of upper-caste Hindus managed to get relatively better jobs such as those of clerks and accountants (*kanakkapillai*); however, some of them also served as butlers, cooks and dog keepers in the bungalows and on the estates.¹³⁵ As a rule, the occupational hierarchy within the workforce also worked in tandem with the caste hierarchy in the traditional villages; the relatively dominant castes were lesser in number, but in 'higher' positions, while the lower castes, though larger in number, occupied the lowest positions in the occupational systems, largely as the field labour force. The plantation workers were thus chiefly drawn from among the outcastes, tribal groups and other depressed communities like the *adi-Dravidas/Karnatakars*, *Vaniyas*, *Pulayas*, *Cherumas*, *Ezhavas/Thiyyas*, etc. who were beyond the pale of the *chathurvarnya*¹³⁶ – broadly the Dalits and backward communities; they also included 'half-starved *Mappilas*'¹³⁷ and the *puthu-Christianigal* (converted/neo-Christians) who were all to be sweated for global accumulation.

The commodity chain thus formed reflects not just the pattern of social embedding, but also the stratified social hierarchy, particularly in terms of caste and gender; the former outcast men were engaged in opening up the forests and clearing them for planting, outcaste women workers were concentrated at the basic production/plucking site, and men, largely upper caste, worked in the processing factories, with the further economically and socially advanced sections being involved in the higher nodes of the commodity chain such as trade and marketing. The hierarchy thus involved the relations of domination, often based on gender, race and caste, and the implications of the same, particularly in terms of hegemony and disciplining in the labour process. This also represents a situation in which caste and class converged, the overwhelming majority of the workers belonging to the depressed castes. It is also a unique situation in the sense that in spite of a convergence of caste and class, it appears that the workers were not subjected to the dual burden of caste and class exploitation as intensively as in the plains.¹³⁸ The caste composition of the workforce is in itself an elucidation of the reason for the large-scale migration/recruitment of the Dalits and backward communities to the plantations. It was an absurdly simple task to persuade these low caste people, who had been mutely bearing the atrocities of the oppressor castes for centuries, to seek better employment elsewhere. Had it not been so, their own leaders such as Ayyankali in Travancore would not have exhorted them to accept the 'freedom

and dignity of labour' offered by a life on the plantations.¹³⁹ To quote R. Srinivasan, a representative of the lower castes in the Madras Legislative Council, 'they were able to get better treatment and better wages than they are able to get under the *mirasidars* and *zamindars* in southern districts'.¹⁴⁰ Another member, R. Veerain, the nominated representative of the Dalits said, to quote:

... whenever we take up this labour problem, there comes also the question of untouchability and as long as they remain in their own places they will have to suffer from this ... But if they go to the tea plantations, I do not think that there is any untouchability to trouble them.¹⁴¹

The complexities of the caste structure in the plains thus do not seem to have been reflected as such in the caste-class reality on the plantations. However, the fact that the lives of the Dalits and the other backward communities in the plains had been full of hardships and utter misery brooks no argument – so intense was the degree of oppression they had had to suffer at the hands of the upper-caste Hindus.¹⁴² But did the shift to the plantation scenario really improve the lot of these masses? Judging from the experiences they underwent at the hands of the European planter, it would seem that what had actually transpired was only a change of masters. This will be taken up in the forthcoming chapter.

4.9 Summing-up

As the plantations flourished and expanded, so did the processes of pauperisation and immiserisation gain root: tribals were robbed of forests that were their homes and sources of livelihood, and peasants were squeezed under the burden of increased land revenue. These hapless and displaced people were the first to form the workforce in the newly set up plantations. Those tribals whose primordial consciousness rebelled against the idea of labouring on estates were forced into the hinterlands, their economic base and their very sense of cultural identity being threatened. The cash paid by the planters to the ex-slaves was incentive enough for them to break their age-old ties and bondage to their traditional masters and to make themselves available for the plantations. Another major source of plantation labour was constituted by the tenants and labourers of the plains who were released in the off seasons to move up the hills. Refugees and survivors of natural calamities that often devastated the villages of southern India formed the most pathetic of all the sources of plantation labour within the country and in the distant colonies as well. Though the workers on the plantations thus came from regions different in language and culture, most of them had a common social origin: they belonged to the most-despised sections of the rural masses, particularly the Dalit group whose immediate ancestors had been slaves or the untouchables only a few decades back. The presence of the Dalits and backward castes – primarily women and children – was greatly out of proportion to their presence in the general population, the reverse was true of the upper-caste Hindus, very few of whom were reduced to seeking employment on plantations. This also reflects a situation in which the global tea commodity chain was not only socially embedded but also hierarchised with the concentration of erstwhile outcastes and backward communities forming the backbone of the lower nodes of commodity chain. This common background of

the plantation masses on the production sites ought to have helped the workers forge a common class identity but this was not to be, for obvious reasons (Chapter 7). The recruitment and organisation of plantation labour was done through ‘institutionalised intermediaries’ called *kanganies*, remarkably similar to the ‘jobbers’ on plantations the world over. They thus appeared in dual roles: as recruiters in the villages, who then reappeared as supervisors on the estates, earning a double income in the process. In addition to enticing the workers with promises that were more imaginary than real, coercion and brute force were used unhesitatingly to mobilise the workers and to retain them as resident captive labour, directly under the sway of planter capital, with limited opportunities of out-migration, as we shall see later. The unsavoury aspects of the *kangany*-led recruitment system notwithstanding, the *kanganies* proved to be an indispensable link in the labour market – the first such labour market that emerged in the economy – transferring workers held in feudal bondage to another form of slavery in the plantations: the patriarchal structure of global accumulation.

5 Slaves reborn?

The disciplinary-punishment regime

I ESTATE AS A PATRIARCHAL SITE

Once mobilised from their place to the workplace, which lay spread over vast tracts of hilly area, the large bodies of workers had to be controlled and disciplined. Disciplining of the workforce in the production sites forms the essence of capitalist relations and this discipline is enforced through different means such as technical subordination, supervision and 'precision'. The *adivasi* men and other outcaste male workers from the lowlands were put to the work of grounding the forests, preparing the land and planting the seedlings; Dalit women were put to the work of plucking and weeding. Work on the estates was chiefly manual in nature with a bare minimum of technological intervention, the workers learning their job by doing it; the *kanganies* or job recruiters often doubled as supervisors, hence the workers' subordination to the plantation hierarchy commenced with the initial acceptance of the contract. The workers laboured under the hawk-like gaze of the supervisor, the personification of the 'authority of capital'¹ and the performance of each worker was judged in terms of precision:

Time measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects, a time of good quality throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise. Precision and application are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time.²

These aspects may be examined as follows:

At the workplace, the workers were confronted with a racial pyramid, viz. the white managers, the superintendent and the visiting agent as the representative of the absentee owner at the top;³ the supervisory staff consisting of a group of functionaries such as factory assistants, clerks, the watch-and-ward and the *kangany* in the middle; and the mass of workers, the ones directly involved in the process of production, at the bottom. While the capitalist-managerial class on plantations was composed of European estate owners, Anglo-Indians or local *savarna* administrators and foremen of intermediary castes, the workers were almost entirely low castes and women thus exhibiting a strong resemblance to the larger social milieu that the latter existed in.

To streamline the wide variety of work practices, the workers had to be segmented and organised. First, the workers, the adult males and females, and children even at the age of seven to eight were divided into three groups: permanent labour in the gardens and in the factories, permanent labour outside the fields and temporary labour. Second,

the work pattern was segmented into plucking, pruning, weeding, etc. in the field and withering, cutting, rolling, drying and sorting in the factories. The work of plucking leaves was largely assigned to women; men were also involved in plucking, particularly in times of shortage of women labourers.⁴ However, men were generally given work which required 'physical exertion' such as pruning, draining, forking and other such jobs as were involved in the maintenance and upkeep of the estate. The sexual division of labour was organised in such a manner as to award men the monopoly over certain specialised and 'prestigious' work in tea factories, while women predominated as field labour for plucking. This sexual division of labour was not all the time permanent except in the case of plucking; and even in the case of plucking men were often involved in the early years but they were gradually replaced by women. Sometimes, female labourers were employed for loading and other work which required manual strength.⁵ Children were given work such as hoeing, removing creepers and parasites from the bushes and so on. Father, mother and children working together in the same fields was not an uncommon sight; they worked barefoot, defenceless against the elements, not even the children being exempted from work in times of bad weather.⁶ The women on their part fetched their children on their way back home after a full and exhausting day in the fields and then would begin the next phase of their toil – cooking, cleaning and managing their families and homes. Thus the plantations represented a system of hierarchical control where labouring women (and men too) were hegemonised by the patriarchs of class, caste and gender.

5.1 Socially/hierarchically embedded labour process

The labour process on the plantations was arduous and exhausting. Work was extracted from the labourers with a machine-like precision; any fault detected being dealt with severely. The most exacting of these rules was related to time: the estate gong/siren signalled the time for everything that the workers did. They rose from bed at 4.30 or 5 a.m., gathered for their daily roll-call and inspection⁷ at 6 to 6.30 a.m., and then it was a hard day's toil up to 5 p.m. However, time limits were often stretched to suit the planter, and workers were generally forced to work beyond the stipulated hours.

In the production fields – the lower and the critical node of the socially hierarchised global tea-commodity chain – workers were put to work, each of them being allotted lines of bushes to be plucked. These lines were straight and continuous up and down, and were specially designed to ensure that no bush in the field was missed. It was a 'ready method of apportioning tasks': a pruner was assigned a task of pruning a certain number of bushes, 80–100 bushes in Nilgiri and 120–140 bushes in Anaimalai for example. Moreover, this system of tea planting facilitated the immediate detection of culprits whenever bad work was done.⁸ It was the planters' contention that only 'close control over plucking' would ensure the production of quality tea.⁹

However, the labour process in the fields remained centred around very simple tools; often no tools were used at all as in the case of plucking.¹⁰ With stable and above all plentiful labour, the planters preferred to preserve customary methods of production save the processing of tea where a little mechanisation had taken place. In the factories, the ancient Chinese style of processing was initially followed wherein tea leaf was alternately hand rolled and dried in a hot pan. Hand rolling went out of vogue in 1867 when the centrifugal rolling machine was introduced. The planting

industry took another 40 years to replace this centrifugal machine with the Jackson-Marshall double-acting roller which ultimately gave way to the CTC machine in the early 1930s,¹¹ a method which did not undergo any significant changes since then at least during the colonial period. In spite of the resemblance that the tea plantations bear to industry in terms of organisation and centralised supervision, the tempo of technological changes thus has been relatively low save for a few advances confined to processing which employed the barest minimum of labour. The planters did little to increase the productivity of field labour, exhibiting a great reluctance to introduce new tools and equipment – the value of the capital invested in labour in the form of recruitment and housing was liable to be lost by a labour-saving technical alternative.¹² How could capital succeed in adhering to its policy of ceaseless accumulation over and above a spatial expansion of plantations as such? If production is possible with accumulated men/women, technology embodied in machines as a means of either efficiency or control becomes a non-issue, the issue being how to discipline these accumulated men/women and to restructure the organisation of labour.

5.2 Engaging and disengaging with feudal past

Until the late 1920s, the workers went to their villages ‘almost en masse’ once the work on the estates was over, ready for another ‘circular migration’. This was primarily due to various reasons such as their bondage with the ‘superior natives’ and the cheapness of food in the villages¹³ as also due to the fact that they had left their wives and families behind as explained earlier. By the late 1920s, however, there occurred three important developments: an increased centralisation of capital (see Section 3.4); the repeal of penal legislations, as shall be explained later in this chapter; and an increased ‘pull’ on labour from the fast-expanding rubber plantations, wherein the workforce expanded by more than 25 per cent from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s.¹⁴ These developments in effect necessitated a resident labour force aiming at an enhanced amount of profit by exercising new modes of labour control. The planters succeeded in bringing a considerable number of families to the plantations, creating a women workforce, which was increasingly made captive, a process that was already being realised among the north-eastern plantations.¹⁵

The consequences of the system of maintaining resident labour households in a compound-setting were far-reaching and many. First and foremost among these was the fact that the creation of a settled workforce meant disengagement of labour from its feudal past, contrary to the one of engaging in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The income from the villages had proved to be of advantage to the planters who had until then been required to meet only part of the cost of reproduction of the workers.¹⁶ The workers lost their dual existence or what may be termed ‘their amphibian character’ – with one foot on the hills and the other foot on the plains – once they became resident. As the workers settled down on the estates with their families in the wake of an increased centralisation of capital, the relationship between the workers’ place of origin and the workplace in terms of labour market and levels of living snapped, i.e. the workers’ earnings from the outside/non-capitalist sector, wherefrom they used to meet part of their cost of reproduction, were either reduced or wiped out.

Besides, with the workers thus resident and captive with very little opportunities for out-migration, the planters could easily abstain from the market forces determining

wages, thus enabling them to continue with their low-wage policy. One of the reasons why the planters were able to keep the wages on plantations stagnant at a low level for a considerably longer period could be attributed to this (see Chapter 6). Another consequence of the policy of employing resident labour was that it allowed the planters to continue to impose some kind of territoriality – the workers' identification with the estate in turn limited their self-realisation at all levels, economic, social and political and helped the planter to control and discipline the workforce even further.¹⁷

5.3 Disciplining the Dalits/punishments: Hard as nails

Work on the estates proceeded with clockwork regularity, the workers often labouring on empty stomachs. Any instance of default was punished with the awarding of half-name – meaning half pay for the day's work or even total pay-cuts.¹⁸ Other forms of fines and deductions were also indulged in. Apart from such economic forms of disciplining, they were also subjected to a great deal of socio-cultural restrictions. The use of *chappals* and umbrellas was frowned upon, exactly as in the plains where the low castes were not allowed the use of such accessories. Even at the end of an exhausting day of work, the labourers were not free to relax as they wished – they were denied all access to country liquor, even toddy – and they thus went without either a smoke or a drink.¹⁹ The planters emerged successful in resisting the opening of liquor shops in some of the planting regions/districts such as Anaimalai. Apart from the threat that liquor posed to discipline among the workers, there was also the fear that their competitors would beat them at their own game and entice away their workers to other estates.²⁰

The European planters were generally 'inhuman and cruel' in their treatment of the workers. Even tying the workers up and brutally thrashing them, a practice akin to the punishment meted out in the Assam Plantations and in other colonies was not beyond them.²¹ When one worker died, another would appear in the same name.²² This was chiefly due to the fact that plantation workers under colonialism were not expected to have names, but were meant to act as 'depersonalised agents' for capital accumulation.²³ Cases against workers if at all 'registered' were never proved. When one such case was reported to the District Magistrate in Munnar in 1903, the verdict given went in favour of the planter concerned.²⁴

Other coercive punishments were equally barbaric; the European planters themselves confessed to such ruthless punishments. Offending workers were punished by lowering them into shallow, muddy water while they choked and struggled for breath. This form of punishment called 'ducking' was viewed as the masterpiece of plantation craft²⁵ in dealing with troublesome workers. Even the children were not spared and were often subjected to 'corporal punishment' in this drive to extract maximum work, the Kanan Devan Plantations being notorious for such practices.²⁶ We find the observations made by Michel Foucault on the birth of the disciplinary regime in Europe equally relevant and applicable in the Indian colonial context particularly with respect to the plantations.

To quote:

Torture is a technique; it is not an extreme expression of lawless rage. To be torture, punishment must obey three principal criteria: first, it must produce a certain degree of pain, which may be measured exactly, or at least calculated, compared

and hierarchised . . . it is calculated according to detailed rules: the number of lashes of the whip, the positioning of the branding iron . . . torture forms part of a ritual. It is an element in the liturgy of punishment and meets two demands. It must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy. In the 'excesses' of torture, a whole economy of power is invested. The tortured body is first inscribed in the legal ceremonial that must produce, open for all to see, the truth of the crime.²⁷

The workers were 'herded like cattle into ill-constructed ramshackle buildings'²⁸ and the planters often kept them under constant watch and ward, thwarting any attempt at escaping by night. Rods and whips were freely used on those who dared to run away and were unlucky enough to be caught in this attempt.²⁹ They were often captured and brought back, at times with the help of trained dogs.³⁰ The *kanganies/maistries* too played their role in keeping the workers in bondage. In the words of a European planter based in Anaimalai, the workers, to quote:

were in fact slaves, and were treated as such by their *maistries*, whose only concern was how much money they could pocket before they died on them. It is a fact that this type of *maistry* used to lock his coolies in the lines in the evening and only let them out to work next morning, irrespective of whether they were sick or well. Mohammedan *maistries* with Hindu coolies were the worst in this respect.³¹

Those workers who dared to question their employers or to claim their rights were severely chastised. Even so, many a protest was registered by the long-suffering workers. In Anaimalai, large numbers of workers deserted the plantations in the late 1920s; and on their way to freedom, quite a few met with death on the road.³² The first groups to desert were the tribals, marking the gradual awakening of class consciousness among the workers (see Section 7.5). Desertion of workers in large numbers – in one instance as many as 160 – was reported from the Kanan Devan Plantations, and those caught were severely punished³³ or were sent to prison.³⁴ Once the workers decamped, their *kangany* was left with no option but to follow suit, again in absolute secrecy.

Any worker who left the plantation premises without prior permission was invariably labelled an absconder: this included any attempt on the part of the workers to seek better employment elsewhere. If such workers were caught working on other estates, it was the workers themselves who were held liable for punishment,³⁵ not the *kanganies* or the planters, whose intolerable practices had been responsible for driving them away in the first place. They were punished by illegal policing and whipping not only by their former employees, but also by their new masters. It goes without saying that the condition of the workers from southern India and their inhuman subsistence on overseas plantations such as those in the West Indies, north-eastern Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Mauritius were deplorable to the extreme.³⁶

Language is to rule; not attempting to learn a language also helps to rule. The European planters deliberately maintained a language barrier between themselves and the workers; this was another tactic that they employed to extract maximum work from the labourers. It was their contention that knowledge of the vernacular language would give the workers access to the planters who would then be forced to heed their petty

grievances and their family problems and troubles.³⁷ Neither did the planters attempt to reach out to the workers nor were the latter permitted to communicate among themselves. They were denied all opportunity to mingle with workers from other estates, and outsiders were prohibited entry into the plantations.

The estates themselves were situated in splendid isolation. This helped the planters to keep the workers in even greater isolation; punishments and cruelties were perpetuated with casual ease under such conditions. Often, on their way back home, they were blackmailed into parting with whatever little money they might have earned.³⁸ And, what is more, they were stopped from attending even the funeral rites of their near and dear ones.³⁹ In such an atmosphere of intense segregation where the workers were totally cut off from the outside world, the development of trade unionism was greatly hampered (see Section 7.4).

As in the case of the tea plantations in Assam, in places like Wayanad and Nilgiri, the difficulty in recruiting sufficient labour, both men and women, to the foreign-owned estates was often attributed to the widespread ill-treatment of the workers. *Swadesamitran*, the Madras based newspaper, reported:

We do not see why the Indian coolies should be treated as slaves by the Anglo-Indian planters . . . Both the Anglo-Indian and the English people at home had turned a deaf ear to all our cries about the condition of the Indian coolies and deny the very existence of such a state of things . . . Why should the European planters in Malabar and Wayanad alone find it difficult to secure coolies for their plantations, if only they treat the coolies properly seeing that thousands of poor Indians are annually emigrating to Ceylon, Mauritius and other foreign countries, in search of labour? What necessity will there be in that case for subjecting the poor coolies to unnecessary and severe restrictions?⁴⁰

5.4 Sexual threat, social ostracism, alien diseases

On plantations, the world over, sexual exploitation was common whether the women were employed as slave labour or indentured labour. This, in fact, was one of the most 'distinctive characteristics' of certain plantation societies. Industrial labour from India and the Pacific Islands in the nineteenth century constituted the 'new system of slavery' for men and of sexual exploitation and prostitution for women.⁴¹ In the colonial overseas plantations, sexual murders occurred in protest against such exploitation; these were attributed to mere jealousy to put it in colonial language. Workers, particularly the Tamil workers in Malaya, protested against the molestation of their women: in certain other plantations, these protests took the form of suicide.⁴²

The maltreatment of the women workers who constituted more than half of the total workforce on the plantations in southern India was in no measure lesser than that towards the men; at times they were subjected to 'secret punishments'.⁴³ What else could have been the nature of these punishments, which the planters sought to keep secret from the male workforce, other than sexual abuse? In fact there was an added dimension to it – the women workers were often forced to sell their flesh. Women from northern Kerala, known for their beauty and charm were brought to the estates to cater to the needs of the European personnel;⁴⁴ they might also have been forced to live as concubines of the European planters. But neither the colonial records nor any related

literature reveals whether the women workers were driven to this out of compulsion or simply as a means of survival. The white managers were not encouraged to bring their families along, nor were they permitted to visit their homeland very frequently, a code of relations akin to that on the plantations of colonies like Sumatra.⁴⁵ The resultant emotional and sexual deprivation that they suffered often drove them to acts of brutality and sexual abuse of the women workers. The sexual harassment of daughters, sisters and wives before their helpless menfolk was also shamelessly indulged in.⁴⁶

Concubinage was a legitimised part of the colonialist way of life. Besides bringing women from distant places, good-looking workers or their young daughters were often employed as domestic servants; sexual malpractices were indulged in under this cover. The involvement of European planters with local women resulted in an occasional marriage but such alliances were viewed with contempt and sarcasm. In one such case in Munnar, a European was 'ostracised' by the wives of fellow planters who were mostly in the dark about the doings of their own husbands; few, if indeed any, 'were aware of their own husbands' coffee coloured progeny at school in the plains'.⁴⁷

Venereal diseases had been virtually unknown among the local populace before the advent of the Europeans. But soon the people were confronted with this terrible malady, *parangipunnu*, the etiology of the term being self-evident.⁴⁸ Cases of syphilis and other venereal diseases were reported as early as the 1860s in Nilgiri.⁴⁹ Though the Tamil word for venereal diseases – *megha noi* – did exist, it was the term VD, an acronym of the English usage that became the accepted word among the workers. The situation in the high ranges of Travancore was worse, venereal diseases among the workers as well as the Europeans having become 'rampant by the 1920s': no less than 11 such cases among the Europeans had been privately treated at the Munnar General Hospital in a single year.⁵⁰ In the countryside, the large number of 'regimental brothels' set up throughout the country, including Kannur, Wellington, Thiruchirappalli, Bellary and Madras in southern India,⁵¹ became centres of acute venereal diseases, the worst prize that colonialism gifted to the local populace. Though these brothels were primarily meant for the European military personnel, it served the interests of the planting community as well, particularly those of the young European assistants.

II 'STATE WITHIN STATE?'

5.5 Chain of anti-labour rules

In colonial India, 'administration and exploitation went hand-in-hand' and the plantation sector was no exception to this rule. The coercive apparatus of the colonial State was extensively used to keep labour under control and to exploit the workers mercilessly. The State was all the time willing to remove any practical difficulties faced by the planting community, even to the extent of modifying some of the existing rules and regulations in its haste to weigh in on the authority of capital. The judiciary, backed by a series of Acts and Regulations, and the police, backed by the colonial bureaucracy, were the two major means through which the planters sustained their hegemony. As is well known, in the wider context, the British established a powerful colonial bureaucracy and a uniform Indian Penal code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Evidence Act to bring the entire civilian society under the Imperial legal system.⁵²

5.6 From Breach of Contract Act (1859) to Madras Planters' Labour Act (1903)

As the workers were indentured to a particular estate for a fixed period of time for specified wages, breaches of contract were punishable by criminal law. The earliest instance of the exercise of coercive power by the European master class came in the form of the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act VIII passed in 1859. This was in response to the demands of the Calcutta Traders' Association and similar business interests. It was first proposed to limit the Act to Presidency towns alone but it was later extended to other districts of the Presidency as well. The Act made any breach of contract – including all contracts and agreements whether by deed, in writing or by word – a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment.⁵³

The employers were allowed to choose between the options of either demanding fulfilment of the said contract or repayment of the money advanced. Besides the power embodied in the Breach of Contract Act, other provisions for enforcing labour contracts were contained in the Indian Penal Code, and the Madras Act V of 1866.⁵⁴ Though the Act was for the benefit of employers in general, it was the European planter class all over the country which used it to the greatest advantage. The planters in the Princely States also made use of the provisions of the Indian Penal Code and other rules corresponding to the Breach of Contract Act.⁵⁵ The cases under the Breach of Contract Act were instituted at three levels, viz. cases by planters against workers, cases by planters against *kanganies* and cases by *kanganies* against workers.

The largest number of cases instituted and convicted were in Nilgiri, followed by Malabar and Travancore. It also shows that there was much disparity between the number of cases instituted and those convicted, indicating quite clearly that many of the cases had been filed under false pretexts. The problem of extradition might have, of course, proved an effective dampener, urging the planters to rid themselves of the cases without convicting the 'culprits'.

Besides the power exercised through the Breach of Contract Act, the planters also made use of the Civil Courts to discipline labour. The *kanganies*, too, filed cases against workers through the Civil Courts. In Travancore and Nilgiri, where tea dominated, the number of such cases instituted successfully was considerably high. The planters and the *kanganies* of Nilgiri won 137 out of 153 cases filed, and 25–30 per cent of the amount claimed was appropriated. The corresponding figures with respect to Travancore were 24 out of 52, with 50 per cent of the amount in six cases.⁵⁶

The planters continued to press for further amendments in the existing Acts in their quest for greater power over labour control; they particularly sought the introduction of an extradition procedure to get around the constraints put forth by the political geography. The necessity for either radical changes in the existing Acts or the passing of a fresh Act was strongly put forward by the planter class, and the colonial State responded positively. In 1877, for example, the Government of Madras had stated:

... planting industry in Wayanad is suffering from a substantial grievance in the absence of a simple and complete remedy as regards breaches of contract caused by desertion of labourers or fraudulent practices on the part of the *maistries*.

Government are therefore now disposed to give the planters all the assistance in their power consistent with adequate protection to their employees.⁵⁷

In 1894, the Planting Member of the Madras Legislative Council prepared a Draft Estates Labour Bill which aimed at a further subjugation of the workers. The colonial authorities did not press for the passing of the Bill; however, an Enquiry Committee was appointed in 1896 with the consent of the Viceroy. The Committee comprised wholly of Europeans with specifically the Resident in Mysore as Chairman and two members, one nominated by the Madras government and the other nominated by the planters' associations. The Committee highlighted the necessity of persisting with the prevailing systems, and emphasised the importance of the services rendered by the *maistries*. It also pressed the State for further amendments in the existing rules and regulations; the various planters' associations continued to emphasise the relevance of such regulations, particularly on extradition.⁵⁸ The final outcome was the passing of an Act in 1903, namely the Madras Planters' Labour Act, largely based on the Assam Labour and Emigration Act of 1901.⁵⁹ By this time, the already existing Coffee Stealing Prevention Act (1878) was in force, making workers and *maistries* found in possession of freshly picked coffee liable to punishment.⁶⁰

The Act helped the planters in general to close their tentacles around the workers. Under the provisions of the Act, every labour contract was to be in writing and for a term not exceeding one year. No contract was valid if it were drawn on a person below the age of 16, or on a woman without the consent of her guardian. The provisions of the Act may be further elaborated.⁶¹

There were two major sets of provisions in the Act, namely, sections 23 and 24, the nature of offence being defaults by *maistries*, and sections 28 and 30, the nature of offence being defaults by workers. Any *maistry* who failed to account for the money advanced to him by a planter for his contract to supply labour was punishable with imprisonment for a term extending to three months or with a fine not exceeding Rs 500, or with both. Under section 28, any labourer who without a valid reason absented himself from work, or neglected or refused to work would forfeit his wages for the days of absence, and, in addition, was liable to pay the planter four annas for each such day and could be imprisoned for non-payment for a term not exceeding seven days. It was specified under section 30 that desertion of any worker from any estate was punishable with imprisonment for a term extending up to one month, or with a fine not exceeding Rs 50, or with both. There were provisions in the Act which spelt out a penalty for those planters, too, who compelled labourers to work, ill-used them and withheld their wages or obstructed inspections or enquiries. The Act protected the workers to the extent that every planter was to provide his labourers with basic amenities such as housing, drinking water, sanitary arrangements and medical facilities which, as shown later, was something that never materialised. The Magistrate concerned or any other authorised person could inspect an estate, demanding the remedy of any shortcomings in such facilities within a stated period which, again, proved to be a farce.

The Madras Planters' Labour Act was anti-labour to the core. Ignoring the plight of the workers, it actually undermined the interests of the working class. This naturally aroused public indignation. Typical of this was the banner of protest raised by various local newspapers – *Swadesamitran* from Madras, *Kerala Patrika* from Malabar and

Nadegannady from Mysore – which exposed the misdeeds of the planters and the *kanganies*. According to the Kottayam-based *Manorama*, the Act ‘has made the position of the labourers worse than that of slaves’.⁶²

To quote *Nadegannady* in 1903:

From the time the coolie signs the contract of services to the time of the expiry of the term, he is completely at the mercy of his rich and powerful master who may have him sentenced to three months imprisonment on the charges of negligence in work or of absconding from it. Another hardship is that the months spent in jail are not included in the term of the contract. The European masters, if guilty, are on the other hand given only nominal punishment. The officers who are to enforce the provisions of the Act, the planters, the persons who drafted the Bill and those who revised it are all Europeans.⁶³

One missionary echoes much the same view when he notes:

Under the Act, the planter gets a warrant against a man, and has him arrested and brought to some hill station miles away from his home, where the unfortunate man has no help whatever, and he is punished. It is quite common for a *maistry* to forge so as to capture someone against whom he has a grudge. The village *Munsiff* often tests such agreements on payment of a small honorarium without requiring the presence of the party.⁶⁴

More than 150 amendments to the Bill were proposed in the Madras Legislative Assembly; none in favour of labour was approved. Even the reciprocal obligation that labourers also should be given the right to recover from the planter the wages wrongfully withheld was rejected by the planting community.⁶⁵

In spite of strongly dissenting views from the public against the Madras Planters’ Labour Act, the Travancore State stuck to it steadfastly, and proceeded with the introduction of a ‘carbon copy’ of the same in the state.⁶⁶ In other regions, such as Kodagu and Mysore, similar anti-labour legislations were already in force.⁶⁷ Even so the planters’ thirst for an absolute control over the workers remained unsatiated. Many of them demanded the retention of the existing Breach of Contract Act even after the passing of the Madras Planters’ Labour Act because it provided an additional clause for extradition from British territory. The concurrent implementation of the two Acts by these planters gave the latter an unprecedented power over their labour. The Annual General Meeting of the UPASI held the same year had much to discuss regarding the labour question and its control. The Chairman, after clarifying the possibilities of exercising control over labour through the Act, lost no time in acknowledging the government. He said:

The Madras Planters’ Labour Bill is a distinct matter for congratulation. The labour troubles of the planter in South India brought to the notice of the Government of India, and it is gratifying that we not only obtained its ear, but a practical result in the shape of the Bill now before us. Our success is in a great measure due to the sympathetic attitude of the Government of Fort St. George throughout the negotiations . . .⁶⁸

Table 5.1 Prosecutions made under Madras Planters' Labour Act, 1903

Year	Nilgiri		Wayanad	
	Defaults of <i>maistry</i>	Defaults of <i>labour</i>	Defaults of <i>maistry</i>	Defaults of <i>labour</i>
1912	70	1,025	376	665
1913	120	1,528	333	1,119
1914	74	1,049	303	NA
1919	218	3,228	457	1,964
1920	317	2,571	267	1,660
1921	144	1,814	242	11

Source: Data from Tamil Nadu Archives (TNA), Madras, Judl, GO No. 1073/1915, 14 May 1915; Law (General), 585/1921, 14 June 1921; 719/1922, 17 March 1922.

5.7 Planters, police and prosecutions

Prosecutions under the Madras Planters' Labour Act became widespread. In Nilgiri, more than 1,000 cases were being filed against the workers every year on an average; in 1919 the number was as high as 3,228. The number of cases filed against the workers in Wayanad was also quite high, around 2,000 in the year 1919.⁶⁹ Cases against defaulting *maistries* were more in Wayanad than in Nilgiri (Table 5.1).

Significant differences in the execution of cases in various years are worth noting. In 1919, for instance, the number of prosecutions was very high. The reason cited is quite interesting. It would be appropriate to note here that in times of famine, which ravaged the southern Indian countryside quite often, the colonial bureaucracy always complained of an increased 'crime rate' among the local populace. The European Collector in Nilgiri stated in his records: 'The year 1919 was a special one for labourers as some estate authorities were slow in increasing the wages of the coolies in proportion to the rise in the price of foodstuffs. Consequently the number of prosecutions in 1919 was large'.⁷⁰ Ironically, the workers were prosecuted by the planter class for reasons generated by the self-same class. In 1921, the outbreak of the *Mappila* rebellion made the planters reluctant to execute cases quite as freely as before. When the revolt broke out, it affected almost all the planting regions due to the specific reason that the rebel areas generally supplied sufficient labour from the Muslim communities to the European estates. 'On account of the revolt', wrote the European District Magistrate of Malabar, 'the estate Superintendents did not file as many complaints as they would have otherwise filed'.⁷¹

Three aspects in relation to prosecutions under the Madras Planters' Labour Act are worth noting.⁷²

- 1 Though the Madras Planters' Labour Act was legally implemented in those places where the Breach of Contract Act was abolished, in effect, the planters combined the two which gave them, 'a statutory control over their labour which was not enjoyed by any other employer of labour in the Madras Presidency'.
- 2 In certain cases, the Magistrates, acting in tune with the interests of the planters, executed punishments for periods in excess of that allowed by the Planters' Act.

Table 5.2 Management-wise details of cases filed in Wayanad

<i>Year</i>	<i>European</i>	<i>Indian</i>
1914	297	94
1920	1,202	162
1921	1,694	233

Source: Data from TNA, Law (General), for the year 1914, 1973/1915, 14 May 1915. For the year 1920, Law (General), 585/1921, 14 June 1921 and for the year 1921, Law (General), 719/1922, 17 March 1922.

- 3 The cruelty of the planters towards the workers found full expression through the practice of 'rigorous punishment'.⁷³ The accused were imprisoned, beaten up brutally and even denied food; in stark contrast, Europeans who were detained in prisons on rare occasions, were fed on wholesome diets. European prisoners in the prison of Udhagamandalam were provided with a diet of mutton, beef, bread and potatoes.⁷⁴

Obviously, it was the European planter who controlled the land and labour in plantations and it was also he who filed a larger number of cases than his Indian counterpart. Certain European-owned estates in Nilgiri such as Glenvas, Mango Range, Arapetta and Chundale filed as many as 100 cases in certain years. Of the total number of cases filed in Wayanad in 1914, 76 per cent was moved by the Europeans and only the rest by Indian owners. By the early 1920s not only did the total number of cases filed increase, but the percentage of cases filed by the European planters also went up to 88 per cent (see Table 5.2).

When the Labour Department of UPASI began assisting in the settling of cases against workers from the year 1914, the number of cases rose at an alarming rate. This central agency helped to unify the planters through a monopolistic structure of control, enabling them to get labour at cheap rates and also to control it effectively. It also precluded the possibility of a competitive determination of wage rates in the labour market. UPASI also made a representation to the Madras government seeking a change in the existing procedure followed for the execution of warrants. The immediate reason behind such a move by UPASI was the large number of warrants that remained unserved.⁷⁵ Finally, a consensus was reached among the colonial administrators, which obviously went in favour of the planter class: it was decided that warrants should thenceforth be 'issued and endorsed to the police through the Labour Department', the latter undertaking to furnish correct information to the police about the whereabouts of the warranties. This was intended to enable the police to execute the cases without delay or missing, and thus the proportion of cases settled increased enormously: it rose from 45 per cent in 1916 to as high as 89 per cent in 1922.⁷⁶

The Breach of Contract Act was not repealed until 1926, neither was the Madras Planters' Labour Act until 1929, nor the Coorg Labour Act until 1931.⁷⁷ The planters in Travancore successfully persisted with the penal legislations until 1935 after which the vestiges of the penal contracts finally ceased to exist, that too without much of a protest from the planter class. This apparent lack of concern on the part of the planters clearly indicates the advantageous position realised by them through

the many internal changes that they had brought about over the years. By that time the process of disengagement with the past and the transformation of temporary workers into a permanent captive workforce was fast taking place and the planters were sanguine in the knowledge that the workers were now completely in their clutches.

Yet the question remains: Has the repealing of the penal code and its related colonial code of relations ever given rise to an era satisfactory to labour? Has it ever resulted in the creation of a free labour? Absolutely not. The colonial system of production and the larger political structure within which the worker had to function remained undisturbed. On the one hand, the workers, by and large, remained unaware of the fact that they could no longer be subjugated by such oppressive Acts; neither did the authorities care to keep the workers informed of their changed situation.⁷⁸ On the other, the planters in certain regions continued to assign the work of apprehending workers who deserted the estates. To quote one woman worker, who testified before the *Royal Commission on Labour* in 1931:

If I ran away before the completion of my term of agreement a warrant would be issued and the police would come and collect the money. Many people have come to the tea garden from my village and they all say so. I have seen the police come to the village and take back people. That was one or two years ago.⁷⁹

From the year 1904 onwards, the planters resorted to the maintenance of cavalry units in almost all the planting regions. The Southern Provinces Mounted Rifles with its headquarters at Munnar, Kozhikode, Thirunelveli and Bezwada functioned as the planters' own private army and helped in the maintenance of law and order and internal security; it also served the Imperial powers as and when required as in the quelling of revolts such as the *Mappila* rebellion of 1921.⁸⁰ As time passed they were equipped with better weapons and artillery only to help them further terrorise the planting regions.⁸¹

The State, too, actively participated in enforcing the various rules by establishing a wide network of police and armed forces, a system which was then centralised by the British government; the police in turn mutely followed the instructions of the colonial bureaucracy. The setting up of police stations at the request of the planters, increased deployment of police in planting regions, providing for the personal services of planters and so on were some of the means by which such a network was established; this was over and above the organising of the judiciary in various centres.

The police was largely occupied with pursuing runaway coolies who were duly arrested and produced before the Magistrate. As early as the 1860s, the Inspector General of Police suggested that either the police are freed from this irksome duty or that the planters be made to pay for their services, but neither demand was heeded.⁸² A considerable number of warrants continued to be issued and workers were continually brought back by the police to be tried. Not less than 1,400 such cases were executed in Mysore State alone in the period 1891–5.⁸³ For a smooth functioning of this system, an extensive network of police stations and outposts were set up in the planting regions as well as in places from where the labour was sourced. Consequent upon this, the planting regions, though thinly populated, came to be amongst the most heavily policed in rural Madras. The Nilgiri district was a particular case in

point. With a total area of less than a 1,000 square miles, it had 13 police stations for 1,00,000 people by the year 1880. By 1910, Nilgiri had 436 policemen in a ratio of 1 for every 259 inhabitants and for every 2.2 square miles.⁸⁴ As against this, in the plains district of Thiruchirappalli there was only 1 policeman to every 1,604 inhabitants and every 4 square miles. The other planting regions such as Wayanad and Anaimalai were also 'disproportionately heavily policed',⁸⁵ the former with a substantial share of European policemen.

Occasionally, the services of the police were provided for individual planters by the State for which the former was required to pay a prescribed amount. The payment was often prompt. In one incident in Travancore, the police was sent to a Scottish-Indian company in Agasthyamudi, which owed the State a sum of Rs 240. With respect to such dues outstanding, the *Dewan* suggested that in future payment in advance might be insisted upon.⁸⁶ In spite of such slackness on the part of the planters, the colonial authorities introduced fresh measures in their favour. For instance, in Mysore it was agreed that an Inspector of Police would visit the house of each of the European planters once a month to hear complaints, if any.⁸⁷ The planters' associations even offered rewards to the police for the detection of culprits and thefts of plantation produce⁸⁸ and the police in turn happily acknowledged the receipt of such rewards though they had earlier been subjected to the wrath of the planters for their 'neglect, torpidity and misconduct'.⁸⁹ The rewards, either in cash or as ornaments, for their 'meritorious services'⁹⁰ were attractive enough to induce the police to arrest innocents on false charges of desertion. In 1926, for instance, the Police arrested a Dalit woman in Madurai and sent her for trial to Gudalur. When she was found to be the wrong person, she was sent home at the expense of the State.⁹¹ When the 'criminal tribes' began to be employed by the estates, the UPASI insisted on a 'cut and dried' scheme which would include the establishment of police outposts and police help for the supervision of workers.⁹²

The entire judiciary continued to be structured with a view to the creation of a situation wherein the Europeans 'should not have reason to complain of a difficulty in obtaining legal redress'. The various District Magistrates who had been authorised by the colonial State to report on the work and living conditions of the workers rarely fulfilled their jobs. For instance, of the 19 registered tea factories in Nilgiri district only one in 1924, five in 1925 and two in 1926 had been inspected by the Divisional Magistrate, leaving the majority of factories without any official examination.⁹³ In the case of Travancore, it was reported that Magistrates 'never came' into the picture at all. And whenever they were to send reports to their respective governments, they invariably continued to project a wholly satisfactory treatment of the workers on the estates. On the altogether rare occasions when they did attempt an honest appraisal, they were suitably chastised. One particular incident is worth citing: in 1913, a worker was sentenced to three months imprisonment for having enticed away the young son of a labourer in Peerumedu. In passing his judgement, P. Raman Thampi, the Sessions Judge commented on the pitiable conditions in which the plantation worker existed – they were ill-paid and underfed. This particular worker was driven by the lure of a sum of money promised to him by a *kangany* in return for a couple of new recruits; the money thus earned would help him pay his way back home. Much to the consternation of the colonial authorities, the Judge proclaimed 'slave traffic is carried on with helpless children and credulous adults

to their doom'.⁹⁴ Rebukes and sharp criticism rained down upon the well-meaning Judge who was finally brought to his knees in retribution.

The Labour Commissioner was another authority who was expected to provide a true picture; but he, too, proved to be no exception. As Shiv Rao, the then President of the Madras Labour Union evidenced before the RCL, there had not been in his 15 years of experience even a single instance of a government official visiting the estates and making an honest attempt to assess the living conditions of the plantation workers.⁹⁵ Even when the RCL was appointed to look into plantation matters, the workers found themselves unable to speak out, the planters having taken the help of the police in their bid to silence them. Moreover, trade union organisers like Ramaswami Ayyangar were obstructed in their efforts to collect authentic information on the conditions of labour on plantations.⁹⁶

Further, the State blindly accepted the often-fabricated reports of the colonial officialdom in spite of repeated attempts made by certain members of the Legislative Council to refute such claims. The latter maintained that the workers were ill-treated on the estates and declared that an enquiry was essential. The authorities turned a deaf ear to such pleas and thwarted attempts by the legislative members to set up any enquiries pertaining to conditions of labour on plantations. For instance, in 1915, Mr Rao Bahadur Kesava Pillai raised the issue of the ill-treatment of workers on plantations in the Madras Legislative Council and asked the government to appoint necessary bodies to protect their interests. The government pointed out that the Magistrates of the various districts were to look after such matters and that they had not been informed of any such cases; the District Magistrate of Nilgiri, in fact, stated that the workers were being treated well.⁹⁷ This was also the case when the question of the distressed workers came up in the Madras Legislative Council in 1924. Mr Chidamber Nadar cited that a large number of workers who had left the Anaimalai plantations were in a desperate condition on the roads and requested the government to appoint an Inquiry Committee to deal with the problem. However, the Home Minister was not desirous of appointing an authority as he was convinced that the planters' association itself had taken steps to take the coolies back to hospital. The member then reminded the Minister of the fact that leaving the issue to planting agents instead of employing government officials, would not be of much use, as the former would only be 'too eager to turn back the distressed coolies to their depots rather than taking the trouble of hospitalising the workers'; planters all over the world have been uniformly guilty of disregarding the law.⁹⁸ They never lost an opportunity to proclaim their racial supremacy: to quote Mackay, the General Manager of KDHP, 'We were a State within a State; we were law and order; we were everything . . .'⁹⁹

Capturing the entire scenario, what the *Indian Patriot* stated with respect to the high ranges in Travancore, was equally true with regard to the other planting regions:

There have been cases repeatedly of planters being accused of grave offences against natives of the country. The State Government is helpless to protect its own subjects against Europeans through its police and judiciary, and a large European population, not amenable to local authority and perfectly independent of it, must constitute a grave danger both politically and administratively. We have heard that no native can venture to hold up an umbrella, nor a native officer can go there on horseback, without fear of being molested.¹⁰⁰

5.8 Summing-up

In spite of the fact that slavery had been abolished by the mid-eighteenth century, workers on plantations found themselves no better off than slaves and bondsmen. The distinction drawn between slavery and the actual conditions of work that existed on plantations was so subtle as to escape the comprehension of the harassed workers – so intensive and painful was the ill-treatment meted out to them. The colonial code of relations maintained on plantations the world over was followed in every detail in southern India too. The patriarchal relations of the larger society were faithfully re-grafted onto the plantations. The worker-family was deftly weaned away, or dis-engaged from its feudal bondage to be held in a compound-setting for the capitalist labour process. The workers had to suffer the most horrific kinds of abuses: they were often badly beaten up, women were sexually abused and hitherto unknown diseases became rampant. Runaways were caught by the police if not by the trained dogs of the planters. A very systematic method of punishment and chastisement was practised on the estates to ensure discipline among workers, precision in work and the extraction of a maximal surplus. The state machinery was manipulated to suit colonial interests: atrocities perpetrated in the name of the Breach of Contract Act (1859) and the Madras Planters' Labour Act (1903) are telling evidence of the same. Labourers working against capitalist interests were subjected to rigorous punishment or had to forfeit their hard-earned wages or both. Planting regions came to be heavily policed, thus helping the planters to rule with a ruthless hand. Goaded by the incentives offered by the State, the police often resorted to unwarranted arrests and illegal detentions. The colonial State looked on in approval at these measures; the dissenting voices of the peoples' representatives were completely ignored.

6 Global accumulation, local immiserisation

We may now turn to Marx's historical statement: the advance of capitalist production is characterised by accumulation of wealth at one pole and deprivation and misery at the other.¹ 'How much more coherent and useful the voluminous literature of recent years on poverty and related questions would be if it had started from this solid foundation' proclaims Paul M. Sweezy.² In keeping with this perspective, some aspects of the accumulation of capital and the immiserisation of labour as a dialectical process are analysed in this chapter. The analysis is presented in two sections. In the first section, the conditions of subsistence and reproduction of labour power in terms of earnings and levels of living are explored. In the second section, the changing mechanisms of exploitation in tandem with the changes in the capitalist world system are examined; the volume of accumulation thus realised and the forms of its repatriation are also examined in this section.

I ASPECTS OF REPRODUCTION

6.1 Wages, earnings and levels of living

Any analysis of the cost of reproduction – the maintenance and renewal – of labour power primarily necessitates an investigation into various aspects such as wage and non-wage payment, health and medical care, housing and accommodation and other basic facilities.

There were two systems of wage payment in the plantations, viz. based on time-rate and piece-rate, both made largely in cash but also in kind. The work of harvesting such as plucking of tea was paid for on a piece-rate basis while other works such as weeding and pruning were paid on a time-rate basis. Though the principle behind time-wages was related to the number of hours of work, which often extended for up to 10–12 hours, it was customarily governed by the amount of work labourers were expected to finish to earn their daily wages. Thus on the tea plantations, a pruner was expected to prune a certain minimum number of bushes; similarly a weeder was to have covered a predetermined area and so on. Different tasks were fixed according to the type of work, tasks for the same work often varied from region to region and even from estate to estate. For instance, in the mid-1940s, a day's job of pruning tea bushes in Nilgiri varied from 80 to 100 bushes, while in Anaimalai it was about 140 bushes and in Thiruvithamkur it was as high as 180 bushes.³

Piece-wage, though literally covering the rate of wage per piece was, in practice, the rate for every minute that the worker could labour. In the process of fixing a minimum piece to be realised for a day's wage, the planter in effect ensured that not a single minute's work yielded less than the complementary part of the wage it claimed. This system of wages which was statutorily recognised in France and England in the early nineteenth century was thus primarily intended to work as a lever for the lengthening of the working day and the reduction of the wage bill. This was also the 'most appropriate wage system for the capitalists' in the colonies particularly those involved in mines and plantations⁴; it also formed the predominant system of wage payment in the emerging agro-industries such as coir and cashew.⁵ Wages were settled only at the end of the year save on a few estates where monthly settlements were practised; the workers were paid a paltry sum, known as *chelavukasu*, every weekend until then to meet their daily expenses. Under this system of annual payment, the weekly earnings were credited and the *chelavukasu* was debited on the check roll.⁶ In most cases workers were required to buy their rice from the estates; this was often poor in quality and dear in price.⁷ Often the cost of the goods thus purchased was deducted from what was due to the worker, thus forming, in effect, wages in kind.⁸ Further, the balance was carried forward for disbursement at the end of the contract. In certain estates, *chits* or credit-slips were issued by the *kangany* which enabled the workers to purchase supplies from provision stores on credit. The *chit* in fact represented part of the wages due to the worker; a similar system was reported to have been followed in the early phase of the development of the coir industry too.⁹

6.2 Wages in the late nineteenth century:

A prolonged stagnation

As family budget figures with respect to plantations in southern India are hard to come by, we have had to depend on the scant evidence on wage and non-wage earnings of the workers. Even so, an analysis of the reproduction of labour in the different phases of capitalist development is possible. Reproduction of labour during the early phase of accumulation was characterised by the engaging of the modes of production, and in the post-twenties phase by the centralisation of capital and a disengagement of modes of production. Subsistence of labour during the Depression and in the post-Depression phase will also be analysed in this section. Knowing that the workers in the plains received low wages, part of it in kind, the planters initially offered higher wages in cash as a bait to attract more workers from the plains to the estates. So we find that the wage rate in the tea plantations in Wayanad, Nilgiri and Thiruvithamkur in the early 1880s varied from four annas to four annas six paise,¹⁰ as against from two to three annas in the plains.¹¹ Skilled labour in the factories earned a little higher. As we have seen earlier, though the workers were forced out of their peasant hinterlands owing to pauperisation, this increase in wages offered by the estates further legitimised the workers' advent into the hills.

The wages in the plains, however, did not remain stagnant at least in certain regions: the average rate of monthly agricultural wages in Madurai and Thiruchirappalli, the two major recruiting centres for instance, increased from Rs 3-8-0 and 4-0-0 in 1880 to Rs 4-14-0 and 6-4-2 in 1892.¹² In Thiruvithamkur, the agricultural wages in the plains almost doubled during the period from 1881 to 1895.¹³ Consequent upon a stiff

competition for labour: among the planters within the sub-continent, planters outside the sub-continent such as Ceylon and the Strait Settlements, the local landlords and the state-sponsored road and railway construction works, with the first group proving to be the strongest,¹⁴ the wages moved up, though nominally. In spite of this 'bidding against one another',¹⁵ the planters being in a highly advantageous position were able to keep the wage rate in plantations under check. This was largely due to the relatively low wages in the plains, the increasing pauperisation of the village folk, as also due to the increased import of paddy by the State; besides, the planters themselves collected paddy by opening rice mills in the same regions wherefrom they recruited their workers.¹⁶ The wages in the estates remained relatively high but stagnant for about 15 years by which time the wages in the two major modes of production had almost equalised. At this point, only a further increase in wages in plantations could further attract labour, particularly from the local areas. The planters in general finally did resort to it after having kept the wage rate constant for nearly one and a half decades right from the early 1880s (Table 6.1). This stagnation in wages coupled with an increase in the prices of food grains – often as high as 500 per cent¹⁷ – had the effect of depressed real wages particularly with respect to rice. Even so, the planters persisted with their efforts to decrease wages even further. A Mysore-based planter who also held considerable land in Scotland in fact suggested to his fellow planters that the wages and advances should be reduced further to meet the 'difficulties of the times'.¹⁸ However, in times of labour shortage, the planters were forced to raise the wages offered to the workers,¹⁹ but they generally sought absolute unanimity among themselves to abstain from raising the current daily wages to all categories of workers.²⁰ Since the wage data for the plantations in the early twentieth century are limited, we focus mainly on the two available reports, namely, the Planters' Enquiry Committee of 1896 and the Rege Committee Report of 1946.²¹

Table 6.1 Daily wages (in annas and paise) in plantations in southern India, 1880–96

	1880–95				1896					
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Children	
	Annas	Paise	Annas	Paise	Annas	Paise	Annas	Paise	Annas	Paise
Nilgiri	3–4		2	9	3–5		2–3		1–2	
Wayanad			4		2	8	4		2–3	1–2
Anaimalai	4		2		6	4	2		6	1–2
Kodagu			3–4		2	6	4	6	2–3	1–2
Mysore			3		8	2	4		2–3	1–2
Thiruvithamkur										
(i) Tamil workers			4	6	3	4–5	3	6	2–3	
(ii) Malayali workers	4		6	–	4	6				
Kochi	5		4		5	3		1–2		

Note and Source: While the figures for the year 1896 alone are given in the *Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee*, Madras, 1896, p. 89, the author has relied on references with respect to the stagnation in wages for about 15 years preceding 1896 to compute the above table.

However, this particular phase of development of the plantations had the unique feature of maintaining a multiplicity of relations of production. Almost all the workers met part of the requirements of reproduction of labour through other modes of production, primarily peasant and tribal, as there was a regular circular flow of workers from the non-estate regions to the estates and back (see Section 5.3). As the planters had to meet only a part of the cost of reproduction of labour, they could keep wages low and could indulge in an intensification of the exploitation of labour. This had an added dimension with respect to women: except when paid on a piece-rate basis for work like harvesting, women and children were not paid the same wages as men. In 1896, for instance, in the plantations in Nilgiri, Wayanad, Anaimalai, Kodagu and Mysore, women and children were paid two to three annas and one to two annas respectively, the male workers being paid four to five annas, i.e. 50–75 and 25–40 per cent more than women and children respectively. Wage differences based on gender were common in Thiruvithamkur and Kochi also but, in both these regions, the wages were slightly higher than in the other planting regions.²² Considering the fact that tea plantations employed more women workers, their lower pay had its ill-effects on family earnings, which we would examine later.

6.3 Wages in the twentieth century: Rise and fall

There was a universal demand for an increase in wages all over the world by the 1920s, following the postwar scarcity of goods and the consequent increase in the cost of living. The prices of food grains alone shot up by as much as 93 per cent all over India; the situation in the planting regions was still worse. The wages on plantations were to increase, but by an anna only by the early 1920s, which hardly helped the workers meet their daily requirements. The wage rate on plantations – six annas on an average – was lower than what the agricultural labourers received in the lowlands – seven to eight annas,²³ sometimes even twelve annas, if one goes by the Quinquennial Wage Census,²⁴ in those districts wherefrom they were to be recruited to the plantations.

The Secretary of State for India himself had to admit: as the prices rose remarkably high, many an increase of wages which look all right on paper proves to have in fact little influence in easing the hard lot of the labourers.²⁵ This was a period during which the process of disengagement from the villages had taken place – as part of the centralisation of capital as explained in Chapter 4 – and the workers had come to depend solely on the earnings from the estates. Individual workers were given seven measures of rice and four annas a week for buying provisions in the late 1920s at time when the average cost of living per person in the planting areas was about two annas per day. As most of the women pluckers did not make more than two annas a day and the price of rice alone was two annas per seer, the workers could not afford even a little meat, dal or oil, leaving them to subsist on a highly inadequate diet.

The large-scale retrenchment of labour and the cuts in wages during the Depression of the early 1930s worsened the living conditions of the workers. The swelling ranks of redundant labour in the south Indian villages owing to internal unemployment and the deployment of Tamil labourers from Sri Lankan plantations further reduced the earning opportunities of the retrenched estate workers. Even when the Depression came to an end in the mid-1930s, the planters continued to stick to the reduced wages. During this period, one of the pioneering workers' unions in Anaimalai made it clear

that throughout these years, the quality of rice supplied to the workers had been poor, and that the advance given for food and provisions had been too meagre for the proper maintenance of a family in the hills.²⁶

In the 1940s, the Labour Investigation Committee also observed that during the war years, the cost of living of plantation workers in southern India had registered an increase by 100 per cent, whereas the wages had gone up only by 50 per cent. In almost all the planting regions an increase in wages was delayed till the fag end of the war and, even then, was prompted only by an apprehension on the part of the planters that they stood the risk of losing their labour. Allowing a hike in wages and also a wartime bonus in 1943, the *Anaimalai Planters' Association* admitted that, to quote, the 'time had come, if we were to retain our best labour',²⁷ to implement a wartime bonus of Rs 10 per head and an increase of pay as temporary and permanent proposals respectively. However, the *UPASI* continued to stick to the view that workers were available in plenty and that any further increase in wages, especially in the context of high unemployment and repatriation from Sri Lanka, would only increase 'discontent, disorder and anarchy'.²⁸ The low wages paid to the workers irrespective of the increased cost of living was further rationalised by the planters on the grounds that an increase in wages would only lead to absenteeism – absence of workers from their scheduled work. *UPASI* even opined that an increase in wages by 100 per cent would lead to absenteeism by 50 per cent.²⁹

The system of annual payment of wages persisted in the 1940s, with low weekly payments, adding to the workers' woes; this was in spite of the objections raised by the *Royal Commission on Labour*³⁰ and the Labour Investigation Committee.³¹ Further, instead of paying wages directly to the workers, the planters continued to dispense them through the *kanganies*.³² Evidence also suggests that the supply of food items to workers during the war years and in the following years was completely disrupted making it not only irregular but also lesser in quantity.³³ During the war years, the workers were fed cheap and non-protective foodstuffs; this was particularly so when Burma fell into the hands of the Japanese, jeopardising rice supplies to the Indian sub-continent. In the place of their staple food rice, the metropolitan planters and their local allies supplied horse gram and tapioca; at times their diet comprised 'everything edible which could be obtained'.³⁴ It was cruelly paradoxical that this coincided with the large-scale transfer of food items from various parts of India to Britain to fill her animal lards.³⁵

6.4 Family budget, indebtedness and debt trap

The low wages and increased cost of living coupled with the associated evils of the Depression and the World Wars pushed the helpless workers into a state of greater suffering and misery. We may examine the family budget details given in the Report of the Labour Bureau, 1948, the first of its kind pertaining to south Indian plantations. We would focus on those families, which constituted more than 80 per cent of the total families surveyed in the tea plantations of the Madras Presidency. Some of the findings are summarised in Table 6.2. It may be inferred that the average weekly wage earnings of a family lagged far behind its average weekly expenditure. Second, even after having added the money value of various concessions, none of these families could balance their daily budgets. However, it must be noted that these values cannot be taken as a template for any longer period.

Table 6.2 Earnings vs. expenditure in southern India, 1948

Weekly income	Number of families	Average weekly income from estates									Average expenditure		
		Wages			Money value			Concessions					
		Rs	Annas	Paise	Rs	Annas	Paise	Rs	Annas	Paise	Rs	Annas	Paise
Rs 5 and below 10	103	4	3	2	3	13	1	8	0	3	9	6	1
Rs 10 and below 15	119	6	6	11	5	1	5	11	8	4	11	8	5

Source: This tabular statement is compiled from Tables VII and VIII of the Labour Bureau, *Report on an Enquiry into the Cost and Standard of Living of Plantation Workers in South India*, New Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1948, pp. 11–12.

In almost all the cases, wages formed the sole income of these workers as they were denied any piece of land which would have helped them to combine wage-work with subsistence production. Unlike the case of the Brahmaputra Valley where one could find at least stray instances of land being given to time-expired tea estate labourers, in southern India, we do not have any such instances to cite. The planters argued that they had no land to provide the workers with.³⁶ But this was just another hoax: they possessed large tracts of land – around half of the area owned – that remained uncultivated, meant either for speculation or for fuel production or for a variety of other uses (see Section 2.8). Other activities such as collection of forest produce, grazing, hunting and so on were also curtailed owing to the rapid expansion of monoculture-plantations as well as due to legal restrictions, save on a few estates where the workers were allowed to rear their own cattle.³⁷ But in spite of all these extra efforts, the weekly earnings from such sources remained meagre revealing the double victory scored by the planter class: the workers were made to depend solely on the plantations for their livelihood and, consequently, family labour was expended regularly.

Inevitably, the workers were barred from any kind of economic or social mobility, and whatever little chances they were given to move higher up the social ladder, for instance, by becoming supervisors in the factories, were usually grabbed by the male upper-caste Hindus.³⁸ Above all, under the actually existing system, with fringe benefits being almost non-existent, the workers were being paid for the number of hours they worked or the number of pieces they produced individually; if they were unable to work owing to sickness or fatigue, income from the planter ceased abruptly³⁹ thus making their lives even more miserable.

It is not the fact that the family earnings from the estates fell short of family maintenance that was the only cause of concern. The total earnings from all sources, i.e. from estate and non-estate work could not save the majority of the families in any significant manner. This led the workers directly into a debt trap. The average amount of loans taken by the workers from the *kanganies* came to about Rs 45 a year; many of the workers were in debt outstanding to the *kanganies* for 10–15 years and in amounts ranging from Rs 50 to Rs 300.⁴⁰ In certain cases, it was found that their debts were often in excess of the credit balanced in the check roll. In the promissory notes, the interest specified for such loans was 25 per cent, though it was argued that the workers never paid the same.

The Government of Madras reported to the *Royal Commission on Labour* that the indebtedness of the workers was heavy, especially on plantations, and that 75 per cent of their wages was taken away by the moneylenders on pay days.⁴¹ In most of the cases, the workers were paid only the balance, if any, after deducting the debt outstanding. Such practices left the poor worker with little money to meet his daily expenses.

The workers remained indebted to both the *kanganies* as well as the merchants. In almost all the estates, either the *kanganies/maistrimar* or their relatives ran provision stores and compelled workers to buy from these shops,⁴² thus posing another threat to their paltry incomes.⁴³ It has been estimated that the workers owed more than 61 per cent of their debts to the *kanganies*, the rest being to the shopkeepers. Though the workers had been freed from debt bondage in their villages by the payment of an advance, they found themselves caught in another form of bondage and had to work until these new contracts were over. At times, workers even used to run away from the estates in a desperate bid to escape their debts.⁴⁴

Workers were more often found to be relatively debt-free wherever wage payments were being made on a weekly or monthly basis.⁴⁵ It is also true that the *kanganies* themselves were at times indebted to the planters. But the planters recovered such debts through legal means. On certain estates, it was decided that the labour supplier would be paid a 15 per cent commission on the workers' earnings if he was out of debt and only 10 per cent if he were in debt.⁴⁶ On the whole, the low earnings and mounting debts with ever-accumulating interests forced the workers to lead totally impoverished lives with a consequent deterioration of their general health and levels of living.

6.5 Health status and mortality

The early years in the plantations were fraught with danger as many workers fell prey to illness and destitution and even died; often vultures and dogs fed on the workers' carcasses.⁴⁷ Deaths among workers either on their way to an estate or on their way back home were not unusual; the journey to the estates was a treacherous one, often taking over a week's time.⁴⁸ In 1896, the Superintendent of Police in Malabar, for instance, stated that the mortality on the road among workers returning to Malabar from the hills of Kodagu was fearful.⁴⁹ It was also reported that within the previous two years, 109 destitutes had been picked up from the road dead or in such a condition as necessitated them being taken to hospital. On an average, 44 workers died in a year in the hospital at Gudalur alone. Within 12 months from February 1876 onwards, not less than 46 workers who had been discharged from the estates of Wayanad had to be rescued from the roads in a state of collapse; ten among them were in a fatal condition. In 1894, it was reported that not less than 1,061 workers had been found dead or dying on the Thalasseri-Kodagu road in the space of three years.⁵⁰ Workers dying on their way back home was commonplace in the early twentieth century too, the deaths during the exodus from the Anaimalai plantations in the year 1924 being a classic example;⁵¹ such tragedies continued to occur even later on.⁵² Further, the defenceless workers also fell prey to attacks from wild animals and became victims of floods while the planters led well-protected lives.⁵³

The health status of the plantation workers is further examined under three headings: (i) poverty and malnutrition; (ii) malaria, cholera and other dreadful diseases and (iii) poor medical facilities.

6.5.1 Poverty and malnutrition

There were inadequacies in every aspect of the health of the workers. In the early years of planting, the workers often had to make do with rather meagre food consisting mainly of small helpings of kanji (porridge) and bajra. This was often supplemented with tapioca, sweet potato and such other tubers as were available. However, it was also the practice among workers in the late nineteenth century to report for work carrying their own food for a week's time, returning to their villages from time-to-time to replenish their supplies.⁵⁴ Not only were the workers given grossly insufficient rations by the planters but in addition they were spoken of in a highly derogatory fashion by the latter. To quote:

... the low caste Malayali will eat like the lesser white ant (a destructive insect which eats without coming to the surface) he will keep in his line and devour in a day or two a whole weeks' rice ... but the periods of depletion and starvation from which they suffer seem to have produced an internal system resembling that of the camel without the endurance of that useful animal.⁵⁵

The situation of having to work for long hard hours on empty stomachs prevailed even as late as the 1930s. Many of the workers toiled for such long hours – some of them would be still at work at 6–7 p.m. – without food or drink. Reading together the separate evidences provided by two women workers before the *Royal Commission on Labour*:

I come to work at 7 in the morning and leave at 5 in the evening. I neither take any food nor drink water between this period ... If we want water we have to go long way to get it ... We do not get anything to drink in the course of the day. We are not allowed to go anywhere to drink. When the basket is full, we go to the factory ... I cannot drink water even in the factory. The *maistry* or the Assistant Manager will scold us if we go. If we get very thirsty in spite of scolding we go and drink water.⁵⁶

Even with both husband and wife earning wages, the workers seldom ate two square meals a day, particularly in families with dependent children.⁵⁷ How far a worker on the plantations was underfed is evident from the daily food consumption details given in Table 6.3.

Workers' health on plantations continued to present a sorry spectacle in the succeeding decades, too. To quote the Rege Committee of the mid-1940s:

Boiled rice with a little *dal* and occasionally little vegetable form the chief diet. The majority of workers feed only twice a day. In the evening after returning from work, they prepare rice and eat it and what is left over is put in cold water to serve as their morning meal before they go out for work. Very few workers take any food at mid-day. Some, however, boil tea and drink it without milk or sugar. Milk, ghee and sugar do not form part of the diet of the workers. Fish and meat are indulged in any rare occasions.⁵⁸

A study conducted by the Nutrition Research Laboratories, Coonoor in the late 1940s also reveals the magnitude of the impoverishment among tea plantation

Table 6.3 Daily food intake of tea workers in Nilgiri, 1930

Items	Quantity in ounces	In grams		
		Proteins	Fats	Carbohydrates
Polished rice	8.0	14.3	1.0	208.7
Ragi	12.0	33.4	5.5	280.2
Dal	1.0	6.5	1.0	16.2
Onion	0.5	0.2	—	1.5
Vegetables	1.0	0.7	—	8.2
Vegetable oil	0.5	—	14.0	—
Mutton	0.5	3.0	1.0	—

Source: Brevet-Colonel R. McCarrison, Director, Nutritional Research Laboratories, *Coonoor Memorandum on the Relation of Food to the Physical Efficiency of Indian Workers in Royal Commission on Labour (RCL)*, Written Evidence, Vol. VII, Pt. I, p. 236.

Note: Total calorie value = 2,303; standard calorie value required for a hard working man = 3,200–3,500: Calorie gap 39 per cent.

workers. Clinical evidence of a poor nutritional status was reflected in the high incidence of chronic vitamin deficiencies; *thiamine* and *riboflavin* deficiencies were common among the children. Worm infestations were also very common and most of the children were grossly underweight. The characteristic diseases of the underfed and overworked such as tuberculosis were rampant. Analysing the probable reasons for this state of affairs, the then Director of the Nutrition Research Laboratories said:

The diets of plantation labour in south India are extremely poor both in quality and quantity since I do not possess the information concerning the daily wages of these labourers, I cannot give any opinion, whether this dietary deficiency is due to the inability of the labourers to purchase foodstuffs in adequate quantities. One should not be surprised, however, if that was not the only consideration in making the diets so poor all round. It is quite possible that the present low level at which cereals have been rationed, and the difficulty and high cost of obtaining substitute foods may be other major contributory causes for the poor dietaries.⁵⁹

The vitamin content, particularly of Vitamins A and C, and the caloric value of the proteins and fats that constituted the workers' diet were too meagre to meet the daily requirements of a worker engaged in hard physical labour, thus giving birth to what could be termed 'plantation sickness' as in the case of the sugarcane plantations in the Brazilian North and the rubber plantations in the Amazon Basin.⁶⁰ The workers on tea plantations were worse off in comparison with their brethren in the remaining sectors outside the estates: of the many categories of workers, tea workers ranked topmost with respect to the calorie-gap (Table 6.4).

A high rate of absenteeism – nearly 18 per cent – owing to ill-health was also common on the plantations, thus completing the 'vicious cycle of poverty'. The planters on their part rejected this argument, attributing it to mere idleness on the part of the workers. Another grave consequence of the severe degree of malnutrition and poor

Table 6.4 Daily calorie intake and dietary deficiency among various categories of workers in Nilgiri, 1930

Category	Calorie value	Calorie gap (%)
Tea workers	2,303	38.95
Carpenters	2,923	9.48
Mechanics	3,060	4.58
Kanarese workers	3,000	6.67

Source: Worked out from *RCL*, Written Evidence, Vol. VII, Pt. I, pp. 236–7.

health that existed on the plantations was the high infant mortality rate, which was as high as 260 in 1921.⁶¹ The large number of deaths due to fevers reported in the official records itself is an indication of the abject poverty in which these workers existed. The term ‘fever’ in colonial records everywhere was only a convenient term that encompassed the effects of semi-starvation, poverty and other consequences of ill-health as described by Dutt with respect to the industrial working class.⁶² And those who returned to their villages were often in a ‘diseased and emaciated condition’, the best years of their youth having being spent on the estates; they ultimately turned out to be a ‘burden’ to their kith and kin for the rest of their lives.⁶³

6.5.2 *Malaria, cholera and other dreadful diseases*

Plantations all over India were the breeding grounds of malaria – a problem of ‘Imperial magnitude’⁶⁴ – which often inflicted a heavy casualty. The ‘aggregations of tropical labour’, to use epidemiologists’ language, the crowded houses in lines and an unhygienic environment increased the risk of the spread of diseases such as malaria, pneumonia and plague, which caused many deaths among the workers. The magnitude of the mortality thus caused is reflected in the words of an early European planter who, in 1881, related his experience in Anaimalai:

A great number of Tamils came up . . . miserable famine – stricken wretches, thin and weak. They had been too suddenly exposed to the deadly air of our jungle, and half of them had died in less than a month. On one side of the Bungalow Hill stream, there was a living population above ground and on the other an almost equally large population underground.⁶⁵

The situation was hardly different with respect to the Servarayan of the nineteenth century:

The difficulty of obtaining coolies during the feverish months is not surprising when one sees the little attention generally paid to their health and comfort; a wretched hovel is erected often down in some valley amidst weedy coffee plantations and dense jungle, the very hot-bed of fever, few escape, some die every year, consequently the dreaded Shevroymalai are only resorted to by the starving cooly when all prospects of employment have failed.⁶⁶

There were many instances where 'sick families have been turned out to die simply because they were too sick to work'. Out of many such cases, one is worth describing; it is based on the evidence provided by a worker from Kochi who had survived just such an ordeal. About seven workers who had contracted malaria were sent off by the planter as they could not work on the estate. When they were found in a bad condition in the nearby village, the police and the public took them to the nearest hospital where the medical officer found all the workers in a 'highly emaciated state, anaemic and unable to move about'. Of the seven workers admitted in the hospital, four died within a week.⁶⁷ The planters turned a blind eye on such goings-on, maintaining that it was the responsibility of the *maistrimar* or the workers to care for their brethren.⁶⁸

Most of the planting regions in southern India were 'hyper-endemic' with respect to malaria.⁶⁹ When Dr. Ross visited certain estates in southern India in 1896, he found that at least 80 per cent of the labourers had enlarged spleens.⁷⁰ In Wayanad, over 90 per cent of the children had enlarged spleens in those years.⁷¹ The disease proved to be such a scourge that the houses of malaria-stricken workers were even set on fire in some cases.⁷² With the outbreak of malaria and other such diseases, many workers decamped to their native villages in large numbers. In such situations, the anxious attempts of the planters and the *kanganies* to persuade them to return or to procure sufficient labour proved to be in vain.

Even with these developments, the rate of deaths per 1,000 population in Wayanad due to relapsing fever was 26 as against the district average of 8.1 in the early 1920s. The District Gazetteer of Nilgiri also noted that relapsing fever continued to affect the entire district causing distress and loss of life among the labouring class. In 1924 alone, there were 7,119 attacks and 1,746 deaths in the rural areas of the region. 'The cholera was even more serious', wrote one planter on the south Indian hills, 'and many coolies died of it though it did not spread rapidly, but contented itself with a few victims each week'.⁷³ With respect to Anaimalai, the pioneer planter Congrieve reported in 1898, '... only building on the estate was full of dead bodies ... there were five or six dead in the house and they had been there for a week';⁷⁴ the house was finally filled with grass and brushwood and burnt down. Nearly 162 persons died of cholera in Anaimalai within three years from the year 1934.⁷⁵

As it became a major hindrance in the way of labour supply and land colonisation, the planters found it essential to combat malaria on the hills. The Indian Tea and Produce Company formed the Wayanad Medical Association, the first of its kind in the planting districts of southern India,⁷⁶ but no concrete steps were taken for the control of the disease. The establishment of the Ross Institute, Meppadi, in 1930 was a major step towards the control of malaria on tea estates; later a research centre was opened up in Anaimalai also under the auspices of the Ross Institute.⁷⁷ The anti-malaria measures taken by this institute led to a striking decrease in the incidence of malaria and thus made the availability of labour easier. By 1938, a research unit of the Malaria Institute of India was also set up in Wayanad. There were thus three anti-malaria organisations in Wayanad: the Ross Institute, Meppadi, the Malaria Institute of India, Sultan Bathery, and the Madras Rural Malaria Unit at Kalpetta. The average monthly incidence of malaria which had stood at 99 per 1,000 prior to 1926 began to drop consequent on the anti-larval measures that were taken, namely, by reducing excess water around the plantations and worker's line houses;⁷⁸ the planters thus succeeded to a large extent in retaining the workers on the estates.

Plague – one of the most dreadful of all diseases, feared even to this day – first appeared in 1896–7 in Devikulam-Munnar and in the other planting districts in 1903–4, taking a toll of 191 and 64 lives in Nilgiri and Kodagu respectively. It spread rapidly among the workers, estate after estate reporting cases of death due to plague. The planters were requested to take necessary precautions.⁷⁹ In the subsequent years it kept away, until in 1906 it resurfaced, though claiming a lesser toll of 78 this time.⁸⁰ Several deaths were reported from the planting regions, especially from the Devikulam-Munnar area, during the plague which occurred in the mid-1920s and 1930s.⁸¹ However, far from being concerned over either the famine or the plague and the threat to the workers' lives, the planters were in truth exercised over the adverse effects the latter might have had on their international trade. They were actually worried over the fact that goods such as tea exported from pestilence-ridden India were likely to be shunned by the European market, and, moreover, 'a market once lost, or even partially deserted, is not easily regained'.⁸²

6.5.3 Poor medical facilities

Local newspapers continually complained against the hardships suffered by the workers on the tea and coffee estates for lack of proper medical care.⁸³ Medical centres were conspicuous by their absence, and wherever they did exist were frequently overcrowded, with patients lying on the floors between the beds, while the estate doctors had as many as a hundred or even double this number of outpatients to deal with. On certain estates, the compounder, as per the instructions of the planters, chose a 'medical coolie' from among the workers themselves to help him in his work. It was the medical coolie's job to fetch the medicines and to deliver them at the 'lines' where the workers resided.⁸⁴ Besides the dispensing of medicines, the medical coolie would also diagnose diseases on his own and report them to the compounder; such instances of playing with the lives of human beings was indulged in to an alarming extent in European-owned estates such as the Malayalam Plantations. The workers' unions were to argue at a later stage that such practices should be 'manned properly'.⁸⁵

It is quite interesting to note the way in which the European planters themselves doctored their workers using castor oil, blue gum oil, Dover's powder, quinine, etc. To quote one such planter doctor:

I have always found that the usual doses given by the pharmacopoeia are ridiculously inadequate. My reading is to just double the doses; the effects are naturally a great deal quicker, and moreover have a salutary tendency in preventing coolies shamming sick.⁸⁶

It was often stated that the status of health care provided to workers on Indian-owned estates was just as shabby, or even worse, than that on European-owned plantations. Based on his visit to an estate in Wayanad in 1926, the Joint Magistrate wrote thus:

I think that only the threat of closure of the estates will move them to take any effective action in the matter. They should be forced to spend a proportion of their annual profits, which are reported to be enormous, on such improvements. It is disgraceful that these should be allowed to avoid the responsibility for the health

of their coolies by the payment of the miserable amount of rupees 3 a month to the Local Fund Dispensary, and still more disgraceful that this payment should be four months in arrears at the present moment.⁸⁷

Though hospitals had been opened up in the planting regions much earlier, say in the beginning of the twentieth century with the State aid, the health facilities provided still remained quite inadequate. Apart from the Public Health Department in the Madras Presidency, a Planters' District Health Officer was appointed, whose responsibility it was to give advice on health work on plantations in the Madras province.⁸⁸ Workers on tea estates being predominantly women, the hospitals, at whatever level they were organised, needed women doctors. The hospital attendance of the women workers was thin owing to the lack of lady doctors in these hospitals.⁸⁹ Another deficiency in the medical care offered to women workers was with regard to maternity benefits. When the Maternity Benefit Bill was taken up for discussion at the 32nd annual general meeting of the *UPASI* in 1925, the planters objected to the original idea of the government that local government should pay women employees the benefits accrued to them based on the Act, the cost of which was to be met by the collection made by the government from the employers of the women. The planters argued that the State did not have the necessary establishments for this in the planting districts and that the employers should hence be made responsible for the payment of such benefits, being subjected to penalties for any omission. In its memorandum submitted to the *Royal Commission on Labour*, the Government of Madras stated that on some estates in Anaimalai, female workers were given free food for one month before and one month after confinement. On some other estates the maternity allowance of Rs 3 was paid, and the mother was fed at the expense of the estate for three weeks and looked after for a few days by a woman paid by the estate. On other estates maternity allowances ranging from Rs 3 to 5 were paid. On yet other estates free food was provided for the women for two weeks before and three weeks after confinement. As late as in 1939, the Government of Madras was to recommend that the planters in Nilgiri and Wayanad should also pay bonuses and bear the charges of providing free food to mothers as part of maternity benefits. But the *UPASI* again strongly protested against such recommendations accusing the government of not consulting them prior to taking such a decision; following this the recommendations were kept pending indefinitely.⁹⁰ The report of the Labour Officer, Pollachi, even after two years of Independence, in 1949, would be sufficient to highlight the attitude of the planters with regard to the health care of the workers:

Labourers whose health is broken down in the estate are sent out by the *kanganies* so that the employers are not troubled in providing treatment for them. Thus the employers are able to keep labour cost and welfare expenditure in the estate very low and are free from all trouble connected with labour management.⁹¹

6.6 Housing and accommodation

Housing conditions on almost all the estates were equally deplorable. In the early years, there was hardly any arrangement for accommodating those who came up the hills. The condition had not improved even in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Facilities for accommodation were poor even on the estates owned by the world's largest tea company, Brooke Bond. The Labour Commissioner, Madras, after his tour of the tea estates in Nilgiri and Wayanad in 1939, reported thus:

The kitchen was itself allotted to one or more families as quarters. In one kitchen room 5 feet by 10 feet, two couples (related) and two children were put up. They put up a small shed of broken tins in front. In another kitchen room of same dimensions, a couple and a child were living.⁹²

One worker in his memorandum to the then Labour Minister V. V. Giri, later to become President of India, who was on a tour to the planting districts, wrote:

Accommodation is very mysterious and precarious. To put it plainly, in a small room of 12' times 10', two families with a minimum of six members in each family are driven into one room, which the estate authorities think is more than sufficient for their coolies simply because we are coolies and Indians.⁹³

He also pointed out that as soon as the minister's visit had been intimated, the estate authorities had taken every precaution to clear certain things and, above all, had even directed their workers to give a 'good opinion' if questioned.⁹⁴ It was also reported that in certain estates, a single room was being allotted to two or more couples which had serious consequences on their health and morale. To quote the Minister for Agriculture who visited the Anaimalai estates in 1937, '... living together in almost what may be termed promiscuity though only even a few cases has a very blighting effect on the moral condition of labour'.⁹⁵

Most of the houses were constructed without 'plinths or drains, on sites lying on the banks of the streams running through the estates thus objectionable as regards malarial infections'.⁹⁶ The workers depended on the streams for water supply save on a few estates which had common wells and streams which, of course, were situated far away from the workers' lines. Worse, the water was found unfit for drinking because of lack of proper filtration and chlorination. The pollution of the streams by dirty waste-water drained out by the tea factories was an added problem.⁹⁷

6.7 The darkness of illiteracy

The workers toiled hard at their respective jobs, oblivious of the time of day, at times, even failing to turn up to collect their own wages.⁹⁸ They were illiterate and ignorant to the extent that they were not aware of even the total amount of wages they themselves earned each day. A century later, the situation had hardly improved; to quote a female labourer who spoke before the *Royal Commission on Labour*: 'I do not know how much I earn everyday',⁹⁹ a situation often compensated for by bribing the estate writers to obtain correct information.¹⁰⁰ With a low level of literacy at around 1 per cent,¹⁰¹ these unlettered men and women lived in a state of isolation with little or no correspondence with their brethren in the villages.¹⁰² The planters by and large did not subscribe to the idea of running night schools for adults,¹⁰³ and the workers were thus denied any chance whatsoever to educate themselves.

With the older generation of workers living in such a state of illiteracy, the planters made no move to improve the lot of the young ones growing up on their estates either. The few schools that did exist¹⁰⁴ were mostly run by foreign missionaries. Regular classes were conducted only in the afternoons. Apart from the obvious benefit to the estate owners who gained in terms of extra labour, the workers themselves preferred to have the children work in the mornings in an effort to augment their paltry incomes. While the children of the workers in other industries were given industrial scholarships, the same was denied to those in the plantations.¹⁰⁵ Most of the schools opened up in the estates offered only education at the lower primary level. Moreover, the children of the salaried working class were given preference over those of the labourers. The parents on their part were unwilling to send their children to school, more due to grave economic constraints than anything else, and this often made most educational ventures unsuccessful.¹⁰⁶ As the planting industry with its policy of absolute exploitation remained technically backward, continuing to depend on unskilled labour, the planters too were disinclined to take any serious initiative towards providing a specialised education for the workers.¹⁰⁷ Had there been even a nascent concern among the planters over their education, these children could have been rescued from the plantations on a massive scale; and when the former did exhibit a little concern for these children it was always with an ulterior motive.¹⁰⁸ The total deprivation and misery of the plantation workers was in sharp contrast to the Europeans in general, and the planters in particular, who amassed huge profits and repatriated the same to their home country while leading a life of luxury in the colonies. And as the workers suffered under the burden of exploitation in their everyday life, every crisis that hit the planter class was unhesitatingly transferred to them. A worsening of the already pathetic plight of the workers then ensued. The extent of the deterioration of their conditions of work and life is explored in the next section.

II CRISIS RELAYED, BENEFITS RETAINED

Crises were inherent to the colonial State system. But the colonial State was powerful enough to transpose such crises to the peripheral working class until the latter acquired enough political power to counter the former. In this section, we bring out the mechanisms of such transfers of metropolitan crises to the local labouring class. In this process, we are led to an understanding of the changing mechanisms of colonial exploitation of labour by placing it in the context of global economic processes. The analysis is confined to the inter-war period which has been divided into two phases: the first phase pertains to the onset of the Depression, i.e. 1929–32, while the second phase encompasses the post-Depression years extending up to the end of Second World War, i.e. 1933–45.

6.8 The Great Depression

The metropolitan crisis took the form of the Great Depression that hit the capitalist world towards the close of the 1920s. A fall in demand for tea in the international market was aggravated by over-production and intense competition particularly from

Java and Sumatra. The planting industry of southern India entered a phase of slump. Prices of Indian tea which had been set in 1929 fell still further in 1930 and 1931, and the fall in 1932–3 was almost ‘catastrophic’ with the result that producers all over the world were faced with plummeting prices and accumulated stocks. The area under tea and its output began to increase in almost all the tea producing countries, particularly in the Netherlands and the East Indies, leading to an accumulated stock, with prices moving in the opposite direction: ‘clean common’ was selling at 8.5 d. per lb as against 1 s. 1.5 d. and 1 s. 5 d. during the Depression.¹⁰⁹ By this time tea was brought under international regulation: the planters began to operate in accordance with the export quotas allotted.

Over this period the high quality tea produced in many of the regions of southern India, which was meant exclusively for export, was hit harder than the lower grades. This took on a greater significance in places like Thiruvithamkur where generally better varieties of tea were being produced.¹¹⁰ However, the Depression of the 1930s had ‘no apparent effect’ on the growth of the tea industry in southern India.¹¹¹ This was revealed by the fact that, quite contrary to expectations, the total area under tea and the net tea output increased from 1.36 lakh acres and 25,758 tons to 1.53 lakh acres and 27,264 tons, respectively, during the Depression years, specifically from 1929 to 1932.¹¹²

6.9 Large-scale retrenchment, intensification

The metropolitan crisis that had its impact on the tea industry was promptly transferred to the local labouring classes in every possible manner. To begin with, a large number of workers were retrenched; this was followed by an intensification of labour and a slashing of the already meagre wages. These were the immediate means resorted to by the colonial capital to relay the unavoidable crisis to the masses just as the capitalists did elsewhere in the world periphery under adverse conditions. These aspects are analysed in further detail.

Table 6.5 reveals that over 12 per cent of the total workers, numbering more than 20,000 were retrenched from the tea plantations of southern India during the period 1929–32 as against 8 per cent from the tea plantations of India as a whole. In Thiruvithamkur and Malabar, the number of workers thrown out of work amounted to 22,444 and 2,345 respectively. Thiruvithamkur seemed to be the worst-hit with respect to the layoff, with a fall in total employment by nearly 30 per cent over the period 1929–32 as against 18 per cent in Malabar.

Table 6.5 Labour displacement, 1929–32

<i>Year</i>	<i>Malabar</i>	<i>Thiruvithamkur</i>	<i>Nilgiri</i>	<i>Southern India</i>	<i>All India</i>
1920	12,832	75,627	6,380	1,51,277	9,30,472
1930	13,206	71,850	3,208	1,74,961	9,22,695
1931	11,277	64,897	4,261	1,37,359	8,77,491
1932	10,487	51,183	3,911	1,33,597	8,59,713

Source: Worked out from *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.

To quote the *Travancore Economic Depression Enquiry Committee*:

The census figures show that the number of persons employed on rubber and tea estates in normal times would be somewhere about 1,50,000. Even if we suppose that only 50 per cent of these have disbanded probably the proportion is much more 7,500 men must have been thrown out of employment from the estates in Thiruvithamkur alone on the tea estates, all over Thiruvithamkur, more than one-third of the labour force is paid off to reduce work and cost of production.¹¹³

It was the male workers who bore the brunt of this form of victimisation;¹¹⁴ on certain estates, the planters substituted women and children for the largest section of male workers. The displacement of the male worker was accompanied by an outright cut in wages by not less than an anna per day, drastically affecting total family incomes. Women thus had the 'advantaged' position within the plantation labour market which referred to identify them with the reserve army of labour.¹¹⁵ As women's wages were lower, the substitution of women for men was normally preferred. A further cut in the already low wages helped the planters to extract surplus to the same extent and to retain it, that too, without much resistance and thus to run the plantations with more and more female labour.

With the onset of the Depression the workers were driven out of the plantations more by force of circumstance than anything else. The tragedy of the situation lay in the fact that many of these workers could not go back to their places of origin, their ties with their villages, kin or relations having been irretrievably lost during the earlier phase of disengagement (see Section 5.3). They were left with no option but to distance themselves from the mainstream and to originate new settlements; Upasipuram, in the district of Thirunelveli is just one such village which was born in the wake of the Depression.¹¹⁶

The Depression Enquiry Committee portrayed the drastic reduction in the size of the workforce as an attempt at reducing the scale of operations on plantations. On the contrary, there was an actual expansion in the production process which was then forced on a reduced number of workers. This expansion of production occurred both in terms of area under cultivation and the area actually plucked resulting in an increase in the total volume of output as we have explained earlier. The area actually plucked increased by 30 per cent between 1929 and 1932, and cultivated land registered an increase by 6 per cent.¹¹⁷

In the absence of any technological advancement, an increase in area under cultivation and production could possibly be realised only by an intensification of the existing labour force. This is shown by the sharp contrast between the displacement of labour on the one hand and the increase in productivity on the other, which obviously was the result of an intensification of labour. The intensification indices, in our case, both the land-labour ratio and output-labour ratio increased, the former from 0.95 to 1.11 and the latter from 0.42 to 0.52 during the period 1929-32 in southern India as a whole (Table 6.6). In other words, when the employment level declined by more than 13 per cent, land per unit of labour and output per unit of labour rose by nearly 17 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. How the increased extraction of work helped the planters to depress the cost of production would be analysed while dealing with the post-Depression phase.

Along with the intensification of labour and low levels of employment, a further pinch on the already meagre wages was made during the Depression years to guard

Table 6.6 Indices of intensification

Year	Land-labour ratio	Output-labour ratio
1929	0.95	0.16
1932	1.12	0.20

Source: Computed from the *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.

against any fall in profit. Wage cuts by an anna were widely indulged in; certain planters even went to the extent of cutting wages by two annas; a 10 per cent cut was also made in the remuneration paid to the salaried class, but this was soon lifted.¹¹⁸ As the slashing of wages was coupled with the continuous repatriation of labour from other plantation countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia to the south Indian countryside,¹¹⁹ the plantation sector came to have a buyer's market as regards labour. This greatly assisted the planters in keeping the wages down to a bare minimum even after the economy recovered in the post-Depression period.

6.10 Post-Depression and the Imperial War (1933–46)

The planting industry of southern India revived soon after the Depression. The entire post-Depression phase saw the tea planters prosper, characterised as it was by an appreciable growth of the industry, a steady increase in prices and, above all, the existence of reserves of an unemployed army of labour in almost all the villages in southern India, waiting to be tapped. The recovery of the tea industry soon after the end of the Depression in the 1930s has been attributed to the International Tea Regulation Act of 1933, which was aimed at balancing demand and supply at an improved price level. This was done by restricting both the quotas and areas for fresh planting and with the introduction of Imperial Preferences on tea imports from India and Sri Lanka (see Chapter 3). The Act, however, in turn had the effect of depriving the local/south Indian capital of an opportunity to promote its interests in the industry, as had been made explicit by the contemporary local press.¹²⁰

Tea again became a controlled commodity, now due to the increased demand owing to Second World War. The London auction was closed from September 1939 onwards; the Ministry of Food became the sole purchaser of all tea; but the planters were rewarded with an increased price for their tea. The growth of the industry at large was evidenced by the expansion in area under tea, and the increased volume of output. The average annual exports of tea from southern India also continued to increase during the post-Depression phase. For instance, annual exports of tea from the ports of Madras and Thiruvithamkur alone, increased from 51 million lbs during the period 1934–5 to 1938–9 to 61 million lbs during the period 1943–4, followed by a marginal decline until 1945–6.¹²¹ Internal demand for tea also increased during this period and the Internal Sales Restriction Scheme was given up in 1943 on request from the planters. When the entire tea trade had come under the control of the British Government in the early 1940s, all auction sales with export rights were suspended with effect from 15 September 1942 onwards, and block purchases were made by the British Ministry of Food on behalf of all Allied and certain neutral countries.¹²²

As the industry recovered from the slump of the early 1930s the planters began providing re-employment of labour and it was easy for them to recruit from the already pooled reserves in almost all the villages in southern India where labour was 'plentiful and clamouring for work'.¹²³ The total employment on the tea plantations of southern India increased from 1.39 lakhs in 1933 to 1.47 lakhs on the eve of the war and to 1.56 lakhs by the end of the war. Though there was a great pressure from the colonial authorities to recruit labour for defence during Second World War, particularly from places like Malabar, the planters were able to maintain the required level of employment throughout the entire period, and even succeeded in stepping up production at the command of the British Ministry of Food. This was to a certain extent achieved by plucking tea which had been 'restored', i.e. left unplucked during the pre-war period of regulation. The industry thus fulfilled the wartime obligation of producing sufficient tea for India as well as meeting the needs of Britain and her Allies.¹²⁴

6.11 New exploitative practices continued: Intensification, fines, surplus drain

The major question now relates to the continuing exploitative relationships on plantations and their various 'isotopes'. To begin with, we focus on wages. In spite of an increase in area under cultivation, output and prices of tea, the producers in southern India, Sri Lanka, Java and Sumatra were producing tea at average costs ranging from 8 d. to 10 d. per lb, but the prices realised, with an added incentive of 2.5–4 d. as bonus, were as high as 18–23 d. by the close of the 1940s; however, the wage rates tended to remain at the reduced level of the Depression years until 1944 in the plantations of central Thiruvithamkur, Nilgiri, Wayanad, Malabar and Mysore. Money wages remained stagnant for about 14 years (1930–43) in these planting regions at five to six annas for men and three to four annas for women. These were precisely the same wage rates of the Depression years. It was only in the mid-1940s that the workers were given an increase in wages, but this, too, was barely sufficient to meet their minimum needs.¹²⁵

In general, the planters never bothered to revert to the pre-Depression wages even when the price of tea had increased during the war years. The planters of Thiruvithamkur and Anaimalai were reluctant to offer the pre-Depression wages, which were seven and five annas for men and women respectively, until 1939. These wages were again kept constant throughout the war period.¹²⁶ This was quite possible for them as the redundant labour in the 'labour market' as a result of the previous crisis exceeded the demand for labour caused by the recovery, the outcome being stability in wages at a relatively low level. In certain places like Kodagu, the wage rates went down further by an anna from the reduced level of the Depression years in 1936, and regained their original position only in the late 1930s and in the early 1940s. Even then they still remained lower than those in the non-capitalist sector outside the plantations.¹²⁷

We also note that of the total value created by the worker in the production process, a steadily decreasing fraction was paid to him for his labour, with a proportionate increase in the transfer of relative surplus value to the coffers of monopoly capital. This could be explained in terms of the labourers' share in the total product. It has been found that the wage-productivity ratio in the tea plantations of southern India as a whole continued to fall after the mid-1930s: it fell to 0.75 in 1939 and further down to 0.40 in 1943, disclosing the fact that the rate of exploitation had doubled within a

Table 6.7 Trends in the index of wages to productivity (base 1934 = 100), 1934–46

Year	Nilgiri	Thiruvithamkur	Malabar	S. India
1934	100	100	100	100
1935	85	101	93	95
1936	74	95	83	85
1937	62	78	71	71
1938	59	88	70	75
1939	56	78	66	75
1940	43	74	62	61
1941	39	53	46	46
1942	39	48	44	44
1943	35	47	31	40
1944	42	58	58	51
1945	41	58	58	51
1946	46	49	62	48

Source: (i) *Indian Tea Statistics*, various issues; (ii) Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India*, Simla: Government of India, 1946, pp. 114 and 136–7.

Note: The ratio is computed from the indices of productivity of labour in value terms and weighted wage rates. The latter were worked out by accommodating the difference in wage rates and proportion of employment based on sexual division of labour.

decade (Table 6.7). The increase in wage rates in certain places like Thiruvithamkur towards the close of the 1930s was too meagre to influence the weakening wage–productivity ratio. Again, another increase in wage rates in certain other regions by the mid-1940s helped keep the share of labour constant for only a year; it then dropped off with respect to southern India as a whole.

In the post-Depression years too, planters in general, and those among them who were forced to offer slightly higher wages in particular, were eager to introduce a policy which would eventually force the workers to expend more labour power by a progressive increase in the task assigned to them. This would have kept per unit cost of output either constant or lower. An example of this may be cited here. There was an increase in wage rates by an anna in 1939 in the tea estates of Anaimalai coincident with an increase in employment. This added expenditure due to the increase in wage rate should have escalated the operation-wise cost structure of the estates. Instead, we observe a decline in the cost of field operations such as pruning, forking and weeding.¹²⁸

This would have been due to the fact that the increase in wages was accompanied by a proportionate or more than proportionate increase in the ‘tasks’ allotted to each worker. It may be noted that ‘lengthening the working day’ by increasing the size of tasks was free of any gender bias as one could see that pruning was being done by males, whereas forking was done by both men and women, and weeding by women alone. Evidence also suggests that the workers complained against the increase in workload that accompanied every increase in wages as early as in 1939; but the practice persisted with the planters and continues even to this day.¹²⁹ Further, those who worked overtime on the estates were at times paid only half the usual daily rate.¹³⁰

In capitalist production relations, punishments ‘resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages’. These were freely indulged in by the planters, giving an edge

to the already intolerable exploitation of the workers, particularly in the post-Depression years. Almost all the estates, for example, effected a deduction from the weight of green leaf plucked on the basis of 25 per cent of the out-turn of manufactured tea, presuming that 4 lbs of green leaf would produce 1 lb of manufactured tea, and the managing agents concerned insisted that each estate should show this out-turn. Often, deductions were made even beyond what was necessary to assure the 25 per cent out-turn. As always, the planters had a ready justification for this unfair practice that they persisted with. It was their contention that (i) leaf plucked during the rainy season weighed more than they did in summer on account of being wet, and (ii) the workers themselves dipped boxes of leaf in water in a surreptitious bid to increase the actual weight.¹³¹ Both these arguments may be shown to be unacceptable – first, these deductions were made all the year round, even during summer, and second, a uniform deduction from the wages of all labourers on the charge of alleged manipulation of the weight of leaf cannot logically be considered a preventive measure against such practices.

An additional deduction was made from the leaf collected by women employees. This was purportedly to meet the wage cost of women looking after children in crèches, and that of women employed in factories to pick stalk and coarse leaf from manufactured tea, as well as that of children employed in removing stalks sticking out unevenly on the bushes plucked in the fields. It was argued that had the plucking been done meticulously enough in the first place, the necessity of employing such women and children would not have arisen. Further, during the war years, each plucker was required to throw a handful of the leaves she plucked everyday as her contribution towards the war fund. These mounds of leaves thus formed the symbol of exploitation in the name of war; the women had also to suffer the agony of being separated from their men who were forced to join the war.

Reading the two sets of figures together, i.e. the net profit per acre and the wage share in value added at the two points in time, we may conclude that the rate of increase in profit was about four times the rate of fall in the wage share in value added (Table 6.8). In brief, the adverse wage–productivity ratio and the further skewness in wage share in value added combined with fines and deductions reflect the inevitable

Table 6.8 Net profit per acre (Rs.) and wage share in value added in southern India

<i>Year</i>	<i>Net profit per acre</i>		<i>Wage share in value added</i>	
	<i>x</i>	<i>y</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>y</i>
1939	98.79	95.71	0.45	0.46
1946	185.38	185.44	0.35	0.30
% change	+87.65	+138.68	–22.32	–34.78

Sources: Computed from figures in (1) *Plantation Inquiry Commission* 1956: 811–812; (2) *Indian Tea Statistics*, for 1939 and 1946; (3) *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 114, 131; Raman, K. R. 'Labour under imperial hegemony: The case of tea plantations in South India, 1914–46' in *The South Indian Economy: Agrarian Change, Industrial Structure, and State Policy, c.1914–1947*, Eds S. Bhattacharya et al., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 260.

Note: Wage rate was converted into weighted index by accommodating the difference in wages and proportion of employment based on the sexual division of labour. x = average for 14 companies having interest in tea only; y = average for 8 companies having interests besides tea.

fallout of colonial exploitative practices which resulted in the siphoning off of a higher share of the profits by the metropolitan bourgeoisie to the detriment of the actual producers, even in times of higher profits; the continuous increase in the price of basic necessities in the war period had worsened the daily life of the workers as we have already explained in the previous section.

What emerges from the foregoing analysis is the fact that whenever the metropolitan centres of imperialism were in crisis, the planter capitalists spared no effort in transferring this crisis to the local labouring class; but in periods of prosperity they refused to share their fortunes with the actual producers of the surplus, i.e. workers were deprived of even a fair share of the increased prosperity. Further, global capital sought to accumulate profit by absolute rather than relative exploitation, i.e. by lengthening the already long working hours or by tightening labour control rather than by an increase in organic capital, or in managerial skill.

We have some information regarding the profits reaped by the planting community – a form of surplus value – although we do not know much about its repatriation. The earliest reliable evidence of profits generated in the tea planting industry in India was for the year 1895. It was reported that 56 sterling tea companies in India had made a profit of 5.38 million pounds in the year 1895. One sterling company in southern India alone – the Southern India Tea Estate Co. Ltd with an authorised capital of £40,000 – made a net profit of £1,176 in 1896 and paid a dividend of 15 per cent.¹³² In the year 1900, planting companies all over India made larger profits, as high as Rs 500–600 million, all of which were being drained annually from the planting sector in India.

The planting companies in southern India reaped fabulous profits and made high dividend pay-offs particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, the James Finlay group floated in England and operating in southern India declared a 25 per cent dividend during the years 1926–35.¹³³ Companies such as the Malayalam Plantations Ltd and the Travancore Rubber Company Ltd, the latter owning both tea and rubber plantations, declared a higher percentage in the mid-1920s. During the period from 1932–33 to 1935–36, these two companies increased their profits by 956 and 247 percentages respectively. Profit repatriation of some companies was nearly two-thirds of ordinary capital; to highlight this point, we may cite the case of four major planting companies in southern India (see Table 6.9).

The wartime boom of the early 1940s secured very high profits for the tea industry. The increase in the net profit per acre in southern India was remarkable (Table 6.10). The per acre net profit of 14 tea producing companies increased by more than 87 per cent during the period 1939–46, while that of 8 companies having interests besides tea increased by 13.68 per cent during the same period. Certain overseas companies such as Harrisons and Crosfield made a net profit of more than Rs 3,41,000 in one single year 1943, the highest recorded in the history of the company.¹³⁴ The increase in the gross profit to total capital employed and the dividend as percentage of profit in the tea industry in India as a whole during the Second World War is significant and this trend continued so even after Independence. This is borne out by which explains the percentage of gross profit on total capital employed in the industry in India during 1939–46 and still later up to 1954. It was the wartime demand for tea and the consequent increase in export at a higher unit

Table 6.9 Profits and profit repatriation (£) in 1925, selected companies

<i>Names of the company</i>	<i>Issued capital</i>	<i>Profits</i>	<i>Profit repatriation</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>
Kanan Devan Hills Produce Co. Ltd (1897)	13,00,000	4,09,578	2,76,750	21.29	50.20
Stanmore Estates Ltd (1913)	1,20,000	42,410	27,000	22.50	65.30
Travancore Tea Estates Ltd	1,65,000	65,012	43,500	26.36	66.80
Travancore Rubber Co. Ltd (1907)	79,911	52,961	39,956	50.00	66.20

Source: Computed from Tea and Rubber Share Brokers' Association. *Tea Producing Companies: Official Guide for Investors in Tea Shares*, Mincing Lane, London, 1928.

Note: a = Profit repatriation as a percentage of the issued capital; b = percentage of profit on ordinary capital after meeting prior charges. The sum total of the dividends paid on both ordinary and preference shares has been taken as the index of profit repatriation. In brackets, the year of establishment.

Table 6.10 Net profit per acre (Rs) in southern India, 1939–54

<i>Year</i>	<i>Profit before taxation</i>		<i>Profit after taxation</i>	
	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>
1939	98.71	95.71	61.33	65.00
1946	185.38	228.44	111.84	133.37
1950	354.07	334.76	163.92	166.75
1951	436.98	435.37	183.94	221.89
1952	143.98	226.50	69.69	131.88
1953	350.19	433.00	170.99	163.51
1954	691.59	1000.00	336.61	641.12

Source: GoI. *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, Report I – *Tea*, New Delhi: Government Press, 1956, pp. 811–12.

Note: a= Companies having tea interests only; b= companies having other interests besides tea.

price and the new modes of exploitation pursued by the planters that facilitated the increased generation of profit during the years 1939–46.

It may be noted that the profit figures shown in themselves could be an under-estimation in view of the fact that there existed various methods of hiding actual profits such as the issuing of bonus shares and new shares at a fraction of their market value, distribution of share holdings in other companies, paying up of uncalled capital out of profit or by the holding of shares in another company.¹³⁵ Given the fact that many prosperous companies and corporations, tea companies being no exception, frequently adopted such methods, the profit figures that we analyse could, in reality, be much below the actual profit realised. This was also the case with dividends.

Given the low technology and relatively import-free nature of tea production, dividend payments constitute a major form of payment to the parent company and thereby a prominent means of drain of surplus.¹³⁶ A countrywide study reveals that during the period 1922–7, the average rate of dividends declared on ordinary shares in certain tea companies with either overseas or domestic bases stood at the highest range of 20–35 per cent.¹³⁷ At a later period, the dividend as percentage of profit was as high as 91 with respect to sterling companies and 122 with respect to rupee companies, while it was 106 with respect to rupee companies partly Indian and partly non-Indian.

It may be noted that dividends declared by certain firms bore no relation to the profits earned but were dictated by the financial needs of the holding company in London. This tendency became stronger in the immediate post-1947 phase when foreign firms were busy laying out schemes to drain away as much surplus as possible. Stanmore Ltd, a subsidiary of Brooke Bond in Anaimalai, for instance, paid a dividend of 87 per cent in 1951 and 72.5 per cent in 1953.¹³⁸ The dividends declared were highest in the year 1951, the year in which the Plantation Labour Act was passed, yet the planter class succeeded in postponing its implementation until 1954, arguing in terms of the financial difficulties of the plantation enterprise.

There is another face to the accumulation of profits in plantations and its repatriation – the high remuneration paid to managing agents and directors as also to the European supervisory staff members in the sterling companies.¹³⁹ The commission as percentage of gross profit paid to staff in the sterling companies increased from 3.39 in 1939 to 5.95 in 1954. The percentage of commission paid to managing agents and directors as related to gross profit also rose significantly from 8 per cent in 1939 to 54 per cent in 1952 in the case of sterling companies. The remuneration paid to managing agents and directors of the sterling companies in India, for instance increased from Rs 27.7 lakhs in 1939 to Rs 45.3 lakhs in 1946 and further to Rs 119 lakhs in 1953, the bulk of which was repatriated.

The postwar boom aided the overseas European firms engaged in oil, mining and plantations in the accumulation of enormous profits.¹⁴⁰ The studies regarding the accumulation of profits by the plantation sector and its repatriation since Independence conducted by the Reserve Bank of India are also worth citing: plantations alone were responsible for over 27 per cent of the total liabilities payable abroad.¹⁴¹ This amounted to Rs 10.16 crores. Another study done by the RBI in 1953 also brought out the fact that tea plantations had realised huge profits after taxes, amounting to Rs 12.71 crores and were responsible for more than a third of the total liability payable abroad with respect to foreign business investments.¹⁴² According to the *Taxation Enquiry Commission Report*, the direct investments by foreign concerns in tea in India amounted to Rs 63.67 crores in 1953 and the profit realised was Rs 12.83 crores or 20.1 per cent of the total direct investment. It means that profits equal to direct investments were realised every five years and were promptly repatriated. During the five-year period 1946–51, tea topped all the 17 industries excluding the match industry in terms of net profits after tax in relation to net worth.¹⁴³ The plantation sector as a whole, for instance, distributed/repatriated 69 per cent of its net profits over the years 1956–61;¹⁴⁴ still later during 1970–4, the net capital outflow from the plantation sector on an average worked out to Rs 33.4 million per year;¹⁴⁵ behind such huge profit accumulation which was promptly repatriated, lay the sweat and blood of the plantation labourer, an aspect that has been already explained.

6.12 Summing-up

The true nature of capitalism is one that can hardly be obscured. The success of a capitalist economy is measured in terms of capital accumulation which in turn is impossible without an associated deterioration in the living conditions of the workers: a bitter truth that has been laid bare by the plantation economy in southern India. Put up in ramshackle buildings in the most unhygienic of surroundings, the illiterate workers eked out a living on the estates, dogged as they were by malaria, cholera and the plague. And while they tottered under the twin-burden of wage stagnation and indebtedness, mechanisms of labour exploitation and the filtering away of wealth took on new dimensions with the expansion of the global economy and the further centralisation of capital. And through it all, the surplus generated through the sweat and toil of the workers was repatriated to be accumulated in the core, leaving no share of it to the peripheries. Whenever there was a crisis in the metropolis, the same was transferred to the labouring poor, whereas prosperity was never shared with the workers. The fate of the peripheral labour thus was primarily determined by its position in the world capitalist system and the way in which capital manoeuvres labour. The economic Depression of the 1930s, for instance, was passed on to the labour who met with cuts in wages and large-scale retrenchment along with an intensification of labour: fewer workers were employed while the workload on each was greatly increased. On the other hand the increased returns in terms of capital accumulation and repatriation of surplus seen in the post-Depression phase were reflected in the planter-worker relations but in the form of a reduced share in total income: the wage-productivity ratio further worsened. While capitalist enterprise sufficiently constrained by labour unions and state legislations has led to improved living and working conditions of labourers in many parts of the world, the quality of life and the conditions of living in the plantations in the Indian south as explored in this chapter left much to be desired.

7 Identities, historical consciousness and conflicts

There is an apparent paradox in capitalist development: the proletariat is supplied with weapons to fight by the capitalists themselves. Marx and Engels described it thus: the bourgeoisie in all its battles is compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help and thus to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, i.e. it furnishes the proletariat with arms to fight the bourgeoisie.¹

A modest attempt is made here to review the formation of the working class and its search for an identity against the backdrop of global and national politico-economic processes; it may also be juxtaposed with the planters' attempts to stifle the protesting voice of the worker. The deeply rooted caste system in India, with its emphasis on status rather than on contract had resulted in an ambivalent consciousness among the people regarding class. This was especially true of the labourers whose belated awakening of a class consciousness is analysed later on in terms of primordial ascribes such as caste, religion and linguistic origin and also in terms of territoriality. This ambivalence was further compounded by the migratory character of the workforce.

In contrast to the organised manner in which the planters' interests were being projected, the workers on the plantations remained unorganised for about a century from their entry into the economic space created by the plantations. Even as late as 1944, the Labour Investigation Committee had to report that the workers remained 'unorganised, illiterate, and helpless',² with even the few small unions that existed being powerless, and often being forced to fall in with the wishes of the European managers.³ While the planters began organising themselves from the 1860s, even managing to acquire a political presence, the workers had to wait until the late 1930s to find the ability to articulate their demands in a concrete and systematic manner. In spite of the fact that a large number of trade unions had come into existence in various parts of southern India in the first quarter of the twentieth century – the *Madras Labour Union* in 1918,⁴ and the *Travancore Labour Association* in 1922,⁵ for instance which did have a few plantation workers as its members – trade union formation among the plantation workers was delayed due to obvious reasons.

I BELATED DEVELOPMENT OF SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Plantation labour in India has the unique feature of remaining the most heterogeneous labouring class in existence: heterogeneous in terms of caste, religion, language and culture. Apart from such primordial ties and loyalties which kept the workers apart,

other problems that served to distract them were the low levels of living and its associated poverty, which directed their attentions towards merely eking out an existence, widespread illiteracy, which prevented them from articulating their legitimate demands, and inadequate transportation facilities in the high ranges which kept the workers from coming together as a cohesive unit. All these factors worked against the growth of trade unionism among the plantation workers. A few of these aspects may be explained further.

The migratory character of the workforce and the nature of its recruitment stood in the way of the formation of a clear-cut sense of class identity. This lack of a feeling of brotherhood among the workers gnawed away at the weak bonds among them and was effective in keeping them a disgruntled but totally disorganised lot. Many a time, the feudal social structure in the plains permitted the men alone to leave for the hills, their women and children being provided shelter on condition that the former return to the plains every year to work in the fields. The impermanence of the workforce thus created benefited the planters in two ways – besides being relieved of the burden of meeting the entire cost of reproduction of labour (as analysed in Chapter 6), the planters were also insulated against the threat of a united workforce. But this situation did not last for long as the unsettled nature of the labour force persisted only until the increasing centralisation of capital necessitated a relatively permanent captivity particularly of women labour. Global capital in its pursuit of further expansion had no option but to provide the workers with a permanent premise by settling them on the estates, which in turn helped to unite these workers – a lucid illustration of the unavoidable irony of history.

7.1 Conflicting identities: Religion, caste and culture

Religious heterogeneity and the traditional caste structure among the Hindus had their reflection on the labour class in terms of conflicting identities. Around 85 per cent of the workers belonged to the numerous Hindu sub-castes (*jati*), popularly known as *varna-salam* or *kulam* among the labourers; 9 per cent were Muslims and the remaining 6 per cent Christians.⁶ The converted Christians on plantations, though generally regarded as inferior to the elite Syrian Christians, had the benefit of having their own places of worship in or near the estates they worked on. This was greatly facilitated by the activities of the European missionaries and the pioneering planters themselves, the former skilfully combining the humanitarian work of evangelism with the commercial venture of planting: they had their chapels and churches by the mid-eighteenth century itself. The Church Missionary Society had its Tamil pastor in Peerumedu and ran a mission for Tamil workers as early as in 1888 and the first Church sponsored by the planters there was built in 1909.⁷ Among the 'Hindus', owing to the very nature of their religion characterised by its internal divisions into numerous sub-castes, a conscious demand for a common place of worship and religious instruction was neither required nor did it arise; they were content with worshipping their own separate Gods and Goddesses and celebrating their own small festivals propitiating estate deities.⁸ However, the Muslims came in for a great deal of neglect in terms of their religion; their requests for the recognition of their festivals such as Bakrid, Muharram and Ramzan went unheeded. They were greatly exercised over the lack of facilities for a religious education of their younger generation. In one of their memoranda submitted to the Government of Madras, they said, to quote:

We beg you to arrange with the planters for those facilities [of religious education] without loss of time, as we are afraid that they may grow up uncivilized and ignorant of their religion.⁹

Divide and rule was the policy adopted by the British ruling class in the Indian Empire. Moreover, their policy was conditioned by their awareness of the deep cleavages within the larger social structure. There were even instances of the European planters following the Imperial policy of divide and rule in their private empires by playing up these religious differences among the workers to keep them in a state of disunity, but this could not be persisted with for long. In the early years, workers were, in certain cases, housed in accordance with their castes with the workers living in *Ezhava layam*, *Pulaya layam* and so on; field work was also often allotted in a similar manner; inter-caste mixing was looked upon with disfavour.¹⁰ The heterogeneity of caste and religion acted as an effective deterrent to the process of class formation among the workers, often leading to outbreaks of violence among the various communities. On the plantations in Wayanad and Anaimalai, for instance, violence erupted with clashes between the Muslims and the rest of the labourers.¹¹ The estate workforce had a heterogeneous composition with Tamil, Malayali and Kannada labourers working shoulder to shoulder, though in a segmented work pattern, speaking different languages but all of Dravidian origin in contrast to the Indo-Aryan languages that had many similarities to Sanskrit. The most common languages spoken on the estates were Tamil and Malayalam; Tulu and Telugu were also spoken.¹² But later, with the increasing penetration of capital such differences in caste, religion and language began to hold very little significance as more and more workers settled down on the estates. They lived in identical barrack-like living rooms, regardless of caste, forced to work towards the 'rationalised goal of capital accumulation', like their counterparts in Sri Lanka.¹³ The workers thus found themselves congregating to form a single oppressed group, with a shared history of the past and the exploitative experiences of the present.¹⁴

7.2 Differential wages, divided workforce

Divided as they were in caste, language and culture, the birth of a class identity among the workers was not an easy process. Such primordial ascribes were intensified by the deliberate policy adopted by the planters which discriminated among the workers, labelling them 'good and bad, idle or industrious' and treating them accordingly¹⁵ when it came to fixing wages. For instance, there existed a marked disparity in the wages paid in the different planting regions, among the estates in each of these regions and even among different linguistic groups on individual estates: in the Kanan Devan estates of Travancore, the Tamil workers were paid 4 annas and 5 paise as against 3.5 annas paid to their Malayali counterparts during the last decade of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Such inter-linguistic wage differences prevailed in the early twentieth century as well – it was justified on the grounds that the productivity of the Tamil workers was higher than that of the labourers from Kerala; further, Tamil workers were considered 'intelligent and honest'.¹⁷

In addition to the problem of inter-linguistic differences in wages there was the added irritant of a difference in wages between the sexes. Sensing the material advantages inherent in the traditional patriarchal system, the European planters were quick

to regraft the differential wage structure in the plains to the newly formed estates: women workers were paid around half the wages for males during the 1890s and this difference persisted well into the twentieth century: in the 1890s, men were getting 3–4 annas as against 2 annas for women in the major planting districts,¹⁸ and in the 1930s and 1940s, the men were paid 6–7 annas and women were given only 4–5 annas per day;¹⁹ this differential in wage rates based on gender held true in all the plantations in southern India. Another clever move made by the management to keep the workers disunited was the introduction of the piece-rated wage system. Here, once the usual allotted task was completed, each worker was allowed to pluck any amount of extra leaves for extra wages. This kind of independence within dependence encouraged the already hard-driven workers to earn as much extra wages as possible at an individual level, which only helped the planters in their efforts to worsen the pre-existing incohesiveness among the workers.

7.3 Isolationism, territorial and political

There were ‘only six places on the long, weary trek of forty five miles where the planter could obtain fire to light his cheroot’,²⁰ such was the remoteness of the Kottayam–Peerumedu ghat road and it speaks volumes of the desolation and isolation of the plantation terrain. This helped the planters to impose their own version of territoriality,²¹ and the workers’ identification with the estates for all forms of self-realisation – economic, social and political – effectively inhibited the growth of a search for a class identity. All means of oppression, harassment and persecution were adopted against those who sought to initiate any kind of solidarity among the workers. Neither was it in the interests of the planters to permit the workers to come into contact with radical or revolutionary ideas. Therefore, measures were adopted by the planters to confine the labourers within their estates and to prohibit them from communicating with outside persons or agencies. One such measure was the absolute denial of entry into the plantations of outside ‘agitators’ as the planters chose to call them, which according to the *Royal Commission on Labour* was ‘short-sighted and unwise’.²² The planters’ ‘watch and ward’ maintained a close vigilance, not only stopping the workers from going out to meet the agitators but also preventing the outsiders from coming in. The warning on their signboards ‘trespassers will be prosecuted’ was often followed to the letter. When at the instigation of these outsiders the workers engaged in disputes over genuine problems such as a demand for a hike in wages, the planters merely brushed it aside saying ‘outsiders had no business interfering in such affairs’; the District Magistrates and other such officials too, were of much the same view.²³

Even eminent political activists belonging to the Congress Party were prevented from entering the estates and those who did try to do so were checked by the exercising of the planters’ private property rights. The planters were adamant in their decision to keep these *khadi*-clad outsiders away even from adjoining public property even as late as 1937.²⁴ They were not permitted to enter such areas for even the most genuine of reasons; outsiders were sometimes even severely manhandled. It is interesting to note that V. V. Giri himself was prevented from entering a European estate in Anaimalai. While he was on a tour to this area, the planters put up bars across the road and did not allow him to proceed and he was forced to return.²⁵ In another context, the planters moved the State to get him to leave off touring the estates; the management

deliberately prevented the workers from meeting the Minister. One worker explains the position thus:

The labourers had all been eagerly waiting at Padallur . . . when the car passed out of our sight, we were left broken-hearted. Mr. Riyan [the Manager] . . . did his best to avoid the audience at Padallur lest the atrocities would have been brought to light, to his very face.²⁶

Even the children of the workers came under the harsh scrutiny of the planters, who were unsparing in their efforts to drive out all thoughts of trade unionism from their collective consciousness. In 1936, four students of the James-Finlay-owned Munnar High School were expelled allegedly for having visited plague-infested areas. However, the school records showed that they had been punished for having gone to see Mahatma Gandhi;²⁷ even as late as in 1954, children with anti-British leanings were identified and caned by their teachers.²⁸

The *kanganies* played no small role in assisting the planters to keep the workers off trade unionism. They often confronted those workers who showed leanings towards trade unionism with the threat of sending them away from the estates. Though it was admitted that at certain places the *kanganies* themselves helped the workers to form unions, on most occasions they acted as a major hindrance to both the growth and proper functioning of the latter.²⁹ To quote the Labour Commissioner, Pollachi:

Kangany system has been the greatest impediment to the growth of proper trade unionism among the plantation labour . . . they (planters) use every means in their power to curb the growth of trade unionism. The employers find *kanganies* very good tools in their hands to break up labour organisations . . . The *kanganies* are not only afraid to join trade unions but are ready to do anything in breaking the trade unionism. If any of his labourers is found very active (in trade unionism), the *kangany* sends him back to his village. . . . Realising this the trade union leaders were agitating for a long time for the abolition of *kangany* system.³⁰

Often the only avenue of 'escape' for the workers short of desertion was the weekly market – *shandy/chantha* – which was set up either in the heart of the planting region or in its neighbourhood. Here, more than the lure of the various goods put up for sale, it was the opportunity to meet fellow workers from other estates that largely attracted the labourers.³¹ These market places proved to be convenient venues for the holding of meetings and gatherings, and in most cases it was here in these nerve centres that the first stirrings of the trade union movement began. But there was always an element of risk. There were instances of workers being penalised even for taking the liberty of smoking a *beedi* in these markets.³² It is no small wonder then that when a working class of such a complex and diverse composition met with such stiff resistance from the planters, the development of trade unions in the plantations was relatively delayed.

The tardy development of trade unions – quite common in working class history – however, should not be equated with a delay in the development of a working class consciousness. Else, we would be guilty of equating working class history with that of trade union history, the dangers involved in the same being immense.³³ The workers

did indulge in protests, both individually as well as collectively, often quite spontaneously and, at times, with whatever little cooperation that they could realise amongst themselves, against the metropolitan controlled production regime, or what Burawoy calls, 'colonial despotism'.³⁴

7.4 Subaltern outbursts

The earliest of these protests occurred on the very first plantation itself – the Anjarakandy Cinnamon Plantation set up in 1797 with the investment of the East India Company (see Section 2.1). The illegal usurpation of property involved made the local populace suspicious of the motives behind the attempts of Brown to raise the plantation. Brown was unable to collect the requisite amount of pepper vines to start his plantation even after offering an increased price owing to the lack of cooperation from the local inhabitants.³⁵ To protect his property he had to engage a special watch and ward. In spite of this, during the Pazhassi revolts, a major portion of the estate was destroyed by the rebels to whom it was the very embodiment of colonialism. Francis Buchanan, after his visit to the estate in the first decade of the nineteenth century, reported that 'the plantation has been molested by Nairs and the eastern part of it has fallen in their hands so that for the protection of what remains, it has been necessary to station an European officer with a company of sepoy's at Brown's house'.³⁶ The workers on the estate also fought against the discrimination in wage rates for local labour and labour from distant places. In 1799, they threatened to go on strike demanding an increase in wages, equal to that paid to the workers who came from Thalassery and Mayyazhi. Brown was forced to yield though he later succeeded in reducing the wages again with the support of the colonial administration.

There were many other instances of the workers hitting back against their masters, owing to the combined reasons of 'material deprivation and the lack of a decent human treatment'.³⁷ In 1859, in Wayanad, an estate writer was stopped by a few *maistrimar* and workers, who asserted that his habit of preparing false accounts was improper. They threatened to strike him and break his head.³⁸ A similar incident occurred in 1905.³⁹ Whether this was consequent on the workers getting drunk as alleged by the planters is not known, nor is it relevant. What is more significant is that they were driven to these acts by a rankling spirit of antagonism. In one of the Kanan Devan estates, the workers found the behaviour of the European Manager so overbearing that they were forced to retaliate, beating him up badly. In a similar incident, rubber estate workers hurled their European Manager into a barrel of latex.⁴⁰ As late as in 1941, a European planter was attacked by a number of workers in his estate and was severely injured.⁴¹

The local carters, too, were constantly at loggerheads with the planters. In one instance of defiance, local bullock owners refused to transport the produce from an estate in Wayanad, resulting in the complete spoilage of an entire season's crops.⁴² This was in retaliation to the prosecution of some of them for a breach of contract the previous year. In Anaimalai too, the movement of goods from the lowlands to the planting regions was affected with the headload workers refusing to work at the wage rates fixed by the planters.⁴³ In Travancore, it was the carters' complaint that adequate water and fodder were not being provided for their animals along the tedious and isolated route to and from the hills; the planters on their part were dissatisfied with the carters,

accusing them of making too slow a journey. A carters' strike was the inevitable fallout of this tussle just as in the case of the tiff between planters and the carters plying the Kottayam–Thiruvananthapuram road that occurred in 1912.⁴⁴

In 1929, nearly 700 workers on the Achur estate in Wayanad struck work over the issue of accidents on a bridge in the estate. The estate was divided into two by the Achur River which was crossed by a suspension bridge. Leaf from the northern side of the river was brought across the bridge to the factory on the southern side. On 12 July 1929, the bridge gave way owing to overcrowding and one worker was drowned. The planter made a cursory attempt at repairing the bridge, but the workers struck work for two days until the matter was settled through the intervention of the police who instructed that the bridge be set in proper order.⁴⁵

As Moore points out, 'throughout the centuries one of the common man's most frequent and effective responses to oppression has been flight'.⁴⁶ In plantations, the workers were fenced in within the compounds of the estates even after the repeal of the indenture system in 1915, and hence they were forced to resort to desertion,⁴⁷ a hard and tortuous road to escape. Desertion was reported right from the beginning of the plantations in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Whenever the workers left the estates of their own will, the planters termed it 'absconding' and hence punishable by law. Desertion, which came to be one of the commonest forms of protests in the colonial enterprises – 'hidden transcript', yet, 'practical resistance'⁴⁹ – became rampant in the plantations in southern India in the early twentieth century.⁵⁰ The reasons often cited were the ill-treatment of the workers by the employers, poor rationing and the harsh weather in the hills. Once caught, they were driven back to the estates, or jailed (see Chapter 5).

Whenever such expressions of collective protest could not find a way out, the workers often let loose their anger through other means. One European Manager who had earlier taken disciplinary action against a skilled worker was stabbed in the back by the latter by a hunting knife. Another case is also worth revealing: a worker in Dakshin Kanara cut his own left arm causing severe bleeding when his European employer, in spite of repeated requests, refused to pay him his wages. 'Weapons of the Weak'⁵¹ thus took the form of blood-letting and self-immolation. This was in fact an individualised form of coercing the planters to respect workers' rights, a confrontation with the authorities, closely resembling the 'infrapolitics' described by Scott. It was also a warning to the planters to be prompt in paying wages, at least in the future. But this small act of protest only brought more misfortune on the hapless worker who was arrested by the local police on the charge of attempted suicide.⁵² In another instance, a European planter in Munnar was attacked by his own workers who resented his autocratic behavior. One is led to suspect that scores of such sporadic incidents of labour protest must have occurred, but documentary evidence regarding this is scant just as in the case of the organised strikes that were beginning to surface: of the 'principal strikes' that occurred in various parts of the Madras Presidency during the year 1921, none was on plantations.⁵³

With the outbreak of the imperialist World War in 1914, capitalist development in India was accelerated for further colonial exploitation, the major offshoot of this being the growth of industries such as cotton spinning and weaving mills, jute factories and railways besides plantations. In plantations, the workforce swelled to more than 8.25 lakhs by the mid-1920s, of which 12–13 per cent was concentrated in southern India.⁵⁴ An intensification of colonial exploitation was achieved through a process of speeding up of work and the lengthening of working hours. However, a proportionate

increase in wages did not occur in any of the plantations until 1918. The postwar rise in prices, particularly those of foodstuffs and cloth, unleashed a wave of discontent among the workers. In India, the prices of food grains alone went up by more than 90 per cent; in the planting regions it was as high as 102 per cent. In the north-east, the non-cooperators boycotted the markets run by the planters and instead formed an alternative market⁵⁵ which in effect helped not only to bring the workers out of the plantations but also to sow the seeds of resistance among them. This was also the time when the workers on the Assam tea plantations were engaged in riots and strikes including the well-known Chargola Exodus; they were driven to it largely due to economic grievances and the inhuman treatment at the hands of their employers.⁵⁶

When the bazaar merchants in Anaimalai in southern India abruptly stopped the usual supply of rice and other items to the workers, probably in expectation of a further rise in prices, the labourers boycotted work on the estates itself. Not less than 500 workers, including women, incensed at this denial of their basic 'right to food', struck work. They did not return to their jobs until the merchants resumed the supplies the next day;⁵⁷ the workers were also beginning to get around their problems of conflicting identities, slowly but surely articulating their protests in one voice. History is replete with instances of such rural protests in market places during these years, which in turn reveal the gradual crystallisation of a spirit of resistance and the beginning of a continuous 'murmur of protests' among the deprived workers and peasants, particularly among the low castes.⁵⁸

By this time workers at large had begun to organise themselves drawing inspiration from the working class movements that were beginning to grow all over the world, as also by the success of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. The birth of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920 to coordinate the workers' activities was a major breakthrough in the history of the trade union movement in India; a fresh interest in the socio-economic and political conditions of the workers was generated and the labour organisations in various segments began to surface.⁵⁹ This roughly coincided with the eye-opening visit of the British Trade Union members to the plantations of Assam, which laid bare the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated therein.⁶⁰ The uncompromising struggle led by stalwarts like C. W. Andrews and Gandhiji against the indentured system of labour on overseas plantations and the consequent abolition of the system⁶¹ gave a fresh impetus to the working class movement all over the colonies and particularly to the workers on plantations.

The intervention of Gandhiji in Indian national politics after his arrival from South Africa helped to transform the freedom struggle into a movement from below. His modest beginning with the Champaran Campaign against the British indigo planters in Bihar and the Bardoli Sathyagraha in Gujarat against anti-peasant revenue settlements⁶² unearthed the possibility of a political mobilisation of peasants and workers. It was in fact a belated development in the Congress perspective as many of the prominent Congress spokesmen and radicals had been either indifferent or sometimes even hostile towards any attempts at improving the worker's conditions of living.⁶³ Even Gandhiji may be held guilty of an obsequiousness to capital; in the context of the Assam tea workers' struggle in 1921, Gandhiji declared the Congress' willingness to 'regulate relations between capital and labour' rather than attempting to drive away foreign capital as such.⁶⁴ Congress leaders of national stature, however, began to increasingly intervene in the agrarian sector and for the cause of labour as a part of the

freedom struggle. Mrs Annie Bessant, the English theosophist – who was considered to have British leanings by communist functionaries – for instance, visited Nilgiri in August 1917 to infuse the spirit of nationalism and of the Home Rule Campaign. The workers from nearby plantations visited her and sought her advice and help in fulfilling their demands.⁶⁵ She in her turn drew the attention of the planters and the State to the pathetic plight of the workers, strongly appealing to the former for an amelioration of their hardships. Her public speeches and articles in *New India* greatly encouraged the workers who in turn pledged to support the freedom struggle. *Swaraj* for the workers began to mean two things: freedom from Britain and freedom from the European planters. And when Mrs Bessant was released from jail, after being detained for promoting the Home Rule Campaign, the planters were anxious to register their protest, claiming that her release was an event that would adversely affect their interests.⁶⁶

7.5 Political-social space and search for an identity

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, political and social reform movements had begun to take shape under the leadership of Sri Narayana Guru (1855–1928), whose teachings were of a spiritual nature, and Ayyankali (1843–1941) who led a more militant movement in the Malayalam-speaking regions. The struggle for civil rights such as the right to travel and the right to education, which would give the underprivileged a vertical social mobility, soon took on a new edge with interventions and struggles that looked askance at the existing hierarchical order.⁶⁷ As an inevitable historical development following the breast-cloth agitation led by Shanar women for the right to cover their breasts, the first ever agricultural workers' strike in southern India was called by Ayyankali in 1907; with women participating in large numbers demanded the right to education of the Pulayar who were barred entry to educational institutions.⁶⁸ The social awakening among the low castes in the Tamil countryside also went on to attain newer heights. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, who had participated earlier in the Vaikom struggle – the fight by the low castes for the right to enter temples – and who also cultivated close links with the labour movements of Travancore, spearheaded the Self-Respect Movement among the non-Brahmins. These various streams of protests and struggles expressed the common aspirations of the depressed in a society that had remained stultified by feudal values. Such aspirations were also expressed through movements such as the Vaikom sathyagraham which gained further momentum in the early decades of the twentieth century. Further, the 1920s saw the gradual emergence of various peoples' movements that served to heighten anti-imperialist, anti-feudal feelings – large sections of the rural masses increasingly participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement,⁶⁹ the Khilafat Movement,⁷⁰ the *Mappila* revolt and finally with a broad alliance of the major depressed communities they fought for democratic rights such as universal adult suffrage and political representation;⁷¹ without the influence of such path-breaking movements a sufficient radicalisation of the low-caste peasants and workers would not have been possible. Some of these movements such as the *Mappila* revolt had a direct impact on the plantations.

The *Mappila* rebellion which had been brewing in Malabar since the mid-nineteenth century remained smouldering until its fiery culmination in 1921 – its repercussions were to be felt even in the isolated planting regions.⁷² It was a massive show of defiance against the gross inequalities in agrarian relations sustained by the Hindu landlords and

legitimised by the British Crown. The *Khilafat* movement – an attempt at moulding a pan-Indian Islam identity among the Muslims of India who were otherwise segregated along linguistic, cultural and social lines – gave a boost to the *Mappila* revolt. The European planters and managers on the tea and rubber estates often came under attack from the rebel mappilas. In one instance, a European manager on the Poonoor estate in Tamarasserri was stripped of his own clothes and then released wearing only an ordinary cloth used by Hindus. The rebels resorted to varying forms of violence which at times stretched to murder.⁷³ The force and fury of this uprising is reflected in the following telegram message sent by the Viceroy to the Secretary of State for India in 1921:

On 25th *Mappilas* attacked Punur Estate and attempted life of Tippetts' Manager who has miraculous escape. Mob murdered Eaton of Pullengoda Estate and burnt bungalow. Mrs Eaton safe. Kerala Rubber Estate reported attacked; bungalows, factory, dispensary burnt and cash and property looted. Managers believed to have escaped.⁷⁴

Another telegram sent on the same day reads, 'Emergency issue arms, ammunition to Planter units. Auxiliary Force being ordered'. The planters were thus quick to comprehend the seriousness of the situation. In 1921, when the Magistrate was asked to report on the reason for the fewer number of cases filed and executed against the workers on plantations, he attributed it to the Muslim revolts. In fact, when the plantation workers made attempts to organise themselves at a later stage, the authorities, with the Muslim rebellion still fresh in their minds, viewed these developments with due caution and circumspection.

By the 1920s, as yet another significant development, there was a veritable resurrection of the various ethnic identities of the Dalit population from among whom the plantation workforce originated throughout southern India. The *Pulayyas* of central Travancore staking a claim to the *Chera* lineage demanded that their caste title be changed to *Cheramar*, in imagined reminiscence of their ancient glory.⁷⁵ The *Paraiyyar*, too, sought a change of name to *Sambavar* in their attempt at fashioning an identity of their own. The *Panchamar* – literally the fifth caste, but outside of the *varna* order – in the Madras province, too, demanded a change of name in 1921, bringing them on par with the non-*Brahmins*, and thus came to be called *adi-Dravidas* – a simple effort to regain their original identity.⁷⁶ Other non-*Brahmins* including the Dalits involved in the Self-Respect Movement also demanded an equal status. There was thus a deliberate effort on the part of the Dalit groups and other backward communities to forge their identities and thus to liberate themselves from the burden of an upper-caste Hindu/Brahmanical hegemony. Meanwhile, the political representatives of the Dalits began to be nominated to the various Legislative Councils as part of the provisions of the Montague–Chelmsford Reforms.⁷⁷

The colonial State was also forced to concede some of the demands of the workers such as the repeal of anti-labour legislations, notably the Breach of Contract Act and the passing of the Indian Trade Union Act both of which occurred in 1926. This, however, did not make much of an impact on production relations, neither with respect to labour relations nor with respect to material life. It is but a sad truth that the workers were kept in the dark regarding the repeal of such penal contracts.⁷⁸ Further, the Dalits soon came to realise that the Labour Commissioner who had been appointed to look

into their welfare was too pre-occupied with seeking out sources of cheap labour for recruitment to colonial plantations the world over. In spite of their conscious efforts to place their presence in the social domain, both the material and political interests of the Dalits and backward communities continued to be neglected,⁷⁹ while socially concerned individuals gradually took upon themselves the hard task of organising the workers. The initiative taken by N. S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, an advocate by profession and the then Labour Union President, Coimbatore, was a valiant attempt at bringing the workers together on a common platform.⁸⁰ He initiated a meeting of the plantation workers of Anaimalai in the late 1920s, the first of its kind in south India.⁸¹ The State, however, took it as a law-and-order problem, calling it a 'monster meeting', and, describing it as 'provocative', insisted that the 'agitation' be suppressed. The District Magistrate took it up under criminal procedures and issued the following order preventing Ayyangar from holding the meeting:

... these labourers are of all castes and creeds and there has apparently been no local demand on the part of any considerable body of labourers for the agitation of this gentleman which is thrust upon them from outside. The floating population of labourers includes a considerable number of *Mappilas*, who have had experience and suffered from agitation of the kind in their own country, and the police report indicates a strong probability that this class of labour may actively resent the agitation thus introduced into the planting area, so much so that the security and life of the Governor may be difficult to safe-guard. The report further represents that a considerable proportion of the employees on the plateau are definitely opposed to agitation of this kind, and in the excitement of the moment may lose control of themselves and precipitate a serious riot.⁸²

7.6 1930s: The Depression, the Civil Disobedience and a fresh search for an identity

The 1930s witnessed a massive economic and political upheaval with the Great Depression precipitating the fall of the British empire on a global level, and the latter losing its hold on the brightest jewel in its crown in the wake of a fresh impetus to the freedom struggle in the form of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1931. The two developments worked together to consolidate the workers' sense of class identity: the Depression driving them to great economic hardships and the freedom struggle instilling in them a new sense of political awareness. This was also the time when the peasant economy in various parts of India was witnessing certain effective forms of protest such as grain looting, refusal to pay rents, formation of armed gangs and physical liquidation of oppressive tenants;⁸³ the planters and miners, too, had to face the wrath of the irate workers, both in India and in other colonies.⁸⁴

The Depression hit the workers hard as they had to withstand a double blow: large scale retrenchment and a fall in the already low wages. More than 40,000 workers were thrown out of job from the tea plantations in southern India – a 24 per cent displacement.⁸⁵ Workers were retrenched from rubber and coffee estates, too. Those retained on the estates had to work for lower wages. In certain estates, wage cuts of up to 20 per cent were implemented, severely affecting the real income of the workers. Since non-plantation agriculture and industries had also been hit by the Depression, the retrenched

workers from the plantations had practically no outlet. The mass of unemployed workers on the estates swelled as the Depression intensified. The Depression thus resulted in the building up of an industrial reserve army which was kept in misery in order to be always at the disposal of capital. This instigated the workers to resist, now with fresh forms of violence including stabbing of the European managers which the British Resident was to admit as being a direct fallout of the economic impact of the Depression.⁸⁶

The initiative to organise the workers was taken up by a communist fellow-traveller who later turned into a priest. It was under the leadership of George Kakkadan that the workers in and around Mundakkayam, the rubber plantation belt, came together for the first time in the history of south Indian plantations. The workers' union thus formed in the early 1930s was called the *Sanmargodaya Coolivela Sangham* (Workers' Collective for Goodness).⁸⁷ But, we do not have any evidence to suggest that this organisation had been registered as a trade union. Besides, very little information regarding the activities or the objectives of the *Sangham* could be obtained even from Kakkadan's memoirs.⁸⁸ Since the Union is said to have emerged in the early 1930s, its possible backdrop could have been the massive displacement of labour from the estates due to the Depression and to some extent the freedom movement which was by then gathering momentum. As we have observed in Chapter 6, the planters had sought to shift the crisis of the metropolitan capital to the shoulders of the workers, thus provoking a strong reaction from the latter. This short-lived union might have kindled the flames of hope for the first time among the plantation workers all over southern India.

Changes were fast taking place in Nilgiri, Wayanad and Anaimalai, the latter with the active support of the Pollachi Taluk Congress Committee.⁸⁹ However, until the mid-1930s, that is, even a decade after the passing of the Trade Unions Act in 1926, plantations remained free of workers' unions.⁹⁰ Of the 10 registered trade unions in the Madras Presidency in 1931, not one was that of plantation workers. By the year 1936–7, the number of registered trade unions increased to 14, but again, none of them were related to plantations.⁹¹ The Congress ministers began to intervene in some measure in this context to settle disputes on the estates. The planters often gave false assurances to the ministers, which were then promptly forgotten with the latter's departure.⁹² A turning point in the history of the trade union movement among plantation workers was the formation of the Anaimalai Workers' Union in the late 1930s. Though the union was not registered, its continuous efforts led to an enquiry by the Madras government in 1938 into the conditions of labour on the plantations in Anaimalai.⁹³ This was the first enquiry of its kind in southern India and, what is more, was instituted under pressure from an embryonic workers' union. It brought to light the miserable conditions of work and the shoddy living conditions of the workers, though nothing constructive was done to modify the same. Though the workers on the plantations became increasingly alert and ebullient within the larger politico-economic context, they continued to remain the mute producers of wealth, the wealth that was not being used even for the benefit of their country.

II PLANTER–COMMUNIST INTERFACE

The birth of informal trade unions, however small, in planting was a development of significance; the message conveyed was that the old edifice was no longer stable. Though they remained outside the structure of registered trade unions, the increasing

mobilisation of the workers greatly unsettled the planters. They became increasingly aware of the changing situation, particularly with respect to the interest taken by the Communists in organising the workers. The Communists began to evince an interest in the conditions of the plantation workers roughly around the same period. In the second All-Kerala Thozhilali Sammelanam (Kerala Workers' Meeting) held in 1937 at Thrissur under the leadership of veteran communists P. Krishna Pillai, N. C. Sekhar, R. Sugathan and A. K. Gopalan, the latter recognised that of all the workers it was the plantation workers who suffered the most⁹⁴ as the European estates were 'centres of inhuman slave labour and white exploitation';⁹⁵ a decision was taken to organise a committee to study and report on the conditions of estate workers.⁹⁶

Within a year of the above meeting but about 16 years after its formation, the *Travancore Labour Association*, largely an association of low-caste workers in the foreign-dominated coir industry, convened a meeting at Mundakkayam on 30 January 1938.⁹⁷ The public meeting discussed at length problems faced by labour in both tea and rubber plantations. It was also decided to form a plantation workers' association and an office was set up on the very same day.⁹⁸ These developments may rightly be considered a sequel and a significant step towards transverse solidarity across subaltern workplaces, delayed though it may have been, to the formation of the *Sanmargodaya Coolivela Sangham*, by Kakkanadan. Much before the Communist leaders in southern India had begun planning to organise the plantation workers, the planters became increasingly aware of the threat involved in the same. They made haste to convince the RCL that 'a trade union movement amongst our very illiterate labour would do more harm than good', and went even as far as to declare that 'we are quite willing to develop on welfare lines without legislation'.⁹⁹ The Communist presence as such left the planters highly perturbed; while speaking at the 42nd Annual General Meeting of the UPASI in August 1935, F. E. James, Planting Member in the Central Legislature conveyed this message to his fellow participants, to quote:

It is essential that we should now concentrate more fully on certain outstanding problems which are now emerging and which affect our community as well as India generally . . . In the first place, there is the emergence of radical movements, such as communism . . . [which] may strike out in any part of the country.¹⁰⁰

The planters' annoyance was also extended to the Congress presence in the plantations. They viewed as 'utter nonsense' the labourers' accusation, who by this time had organised under Congress leadership, that they were cruel and arrogant imperialist exploiters 'who give no houses, no medical attention or other comforts to labourers'.¹⁰¹ While 'admiring' the principles of leaders like Gandhiji and Sri Rajagopalachari, they found it difficult to understand, to quote:

why small cliques of agitators parading under a Congress flag should be at liberty to disseminate in the Coimbatore district the most utter false hoods about us and why they should be allowed to come to the hills and make efforts to ensure unhappiness and strife among the best labourers in southern India.¹⁰²

While discussing the question of the formal registration of trade unions before the Travancore Sri Chitra State Council in 1937, the absence of a labour representative in

the Council was noted. Upon this the planter representative declaimed, 'I represent employers of about 2 lakhs of Indians, and I am here on behalf of those 2 lakh of Indians . . . after working for nearly thirty years among labourers, I know the inside of their minds very well'.¹⁰³ However, before long, it became clear that the continued existence of the plantation system itself would be questioned if it persisted with the labour practices of the early period. Though unregistered, the rapid formation of workers' unions forced UPASI to continue to treat it as a 'major subject' and to lay down rules and regulations forbidding union members from indulging in trade union activities on the employers' property, and to extract pledges on the part of the unions to stick to peaceful methods of protest and not to encourage class war in any form.¹⁰⁴ Over and above this, UPASI proceeded to consolidate its strength as a ruling force. It issued instructions to all member planters to desist from dealing with labour problems independently. They were also advised to get in touch with the District Planters' Association concerned as soon as any labour trouble threatened. UPASI also constituted welfare committees on two of the eastern estates, on lines similar to those in northern India, in a tactical move to mollify the workers. With the increasing threat of workers' protests and agitations, UPASI began to equip itself on a larger scale, particularly by reorganising the Labour Advisory Committee into the South Indian Estate Labour Relations Organisation, but little did the worker benefit from it; obviously enough, it was not intended for it either.

7.7 War, freedom struggle and emergence of unions

With the outbreak of Second World War, there was a general scramble for labour of all kinds as the British had to meet not only the increased demand for tea¹⁰⁵ but were also required to provide unskilled labour for defence purposes, most of which was sent to frontier regions¹⁰⁶ to build strategic roads and airstrips as in the case of their north-eastern counterparts.¹⁰⁷ The postwar rise in prices of foodstuffs as also the scarcity of food proved sufficient reason to annoy the workers. By this time the workers also had come to realise the necessity of registering their unions; the first registered trade union among the plantation workers in southern India was the High Range Thottam Thozhilali Union, registered in 1938 in Travancore.¹⁰⁸ The largest number of factories registered under the Travancore Factories Act was in tea, with 89 factories in all in 1941, giving birth to the Estate Factory Workers' Union.¹⁰⁹ Trade unions emerged in Wayanad and Nilgiri more or less at the same time, close upon the heels of trade union formation in Anaimalai on the eve of the Second World War. By this time, more and more plantation workers, particularly women, had begun to join registered trade unions. In 1939, a committee was constituted in Wayanad for the formation of the Wayanad Tea Workers' Organisation under Comrade Rama Warriar. By the mid-1940s, the Wayanad Estate Workers' Union, the Tea Estate Labour Union and the Nilgiri District Workers Union were formed.¹¹⁰ The Tea Estates Labour Union, Wayanad, passed a resolution in 1939 requesting the Madras government to extend the law passed by it with respect to living conditions including the weekly payment of wages to the Anaimalai plantations.¹¹¹ An enquiry into the pitiable conditions of tea workers in Wayanad, similar to the one conducted in Anaimalai was also requested. In both these places, the freedom struggle and the formation of trade unions went hand-in-hand: by the late 1930s and early 1940s, the freedom struggle had gained momentum and so also did the trade union struggle against the imperialists. In Nilgiri, for instance, freedom fighters like Raman

Nair and Ramaswamy launched the sathyagraha movement in the early 1940s.¹¹² They conducted several meetings on the various estates in which the workers extended their solidarity to the national cause en masse. This was in spite of the European planters' threat of dire consequences were they to support the sathyagraha movement. 'Workers' meetings' were conducted on various estates and they threatened to boycott work if the planters attempted to use coercive means to contain their nationalistic feelings and their spirit of trade unionism.

The European planters lodged complaints with the government against Raman Nair and Ramaswamy for inciting the plantation workers. They also reported that these leaders were involved in a conspiracy to topple the government. Raman Nair was arrested in 1942 and imprisoned in an asylum. After his release in 1943, he again approached the estate workers with the intention of forming a labour union in Nilgiri.¹¹³ The other Congress leaders like R. S. Sundaram, G. Ramanujam, K. Kamaraj, Kumaraswamy, who later became a martyr of the struggle, and N. G. Ramaswamy, wanted by the British government to be prosecuted for anti-imperialist activities, carried on the work of both the freedom struggle as well as of the organisation of plantation workers, the outcome being the formation of the Nilgiri District Estate Workers' Union in 1946 affiliated to the INTUC.¹¹⁴ This union, along with the Workers' Union in Wayanad, submitted detailed memoranda to V. V. Giri, the then Minister for Industries and Labour, for the improvement of the living conditions of the labourers; a similar one was submitted to him by the Anaimalai Plantation Workers' Union. In his report, Giri made this clear: trade union organisations have come to stay in this country and the more the planters resist the idea the greater will be the force with which such organisations will develop.¹¹⁵

7.8 Planters, the communists and the state

The plantation periphery witnessed the formation of the first Communist-led union relatively late, though the Communists had begun to intervene in matters relating to the plantation sector towards the end of the 1930s itself as explained earlier. In fact, Communist-led unions on European-owned plantations gradually took shape under a heavy shroud of secrecy. The Communist loyalists who had come from the plains to the high ranges first organised nuclear Action Committees on various estates.¹¹⁶ So much caution was exercised by them that these committees were not aware of each other's existence. However, efforts were made to enrol village teachers, freedom fighters and such others who commanded a general social acceptance to generate new forms of solidarity. Quite often, school premises proved useful as meeting places. Needless to say, the planters themselves were completely in the dark with respect to these developments. The transition of these action committees into full-fledged trade unions took place very rapidly, soon making their presence felt in no uncertain terms. The agrarian movements in the plains, under the socialist wing of the Congress, inspired the workers to articulate their protests and opened up the immense possibilities of the labourers joining hands against all sorts of exploitation and oppression.

A new phase in the development of trade unionism in the plantations of southern India began with the formation of the first left-wing trade union, viz. the All Travancore Estate Workers' Union (ATEWU), organised by the veteran Communists R. Sugathan and T. V. Thomas, who had already made a major contribution

in the organisation of cashew and coir workers in Alappuzha. The ATEWU blazed the trail which other Communist-led unions were to follow eventually. The union spread its activities throughout Travancore with nearly a dozen branches between Kulasekharam and Vandiperiyar.¹¹⁷ It was a significant presence judging by the fact that it was invited to attend the meeting called by the Travancore government in 1946 on the question of the granting of bonus to the workers; workers in traditional industries such as coir and plantations were being granted bonuses for the first time in India.¹¹⁸ In 1948, many of the leaders of this union were arrested and in 1949 the union along with other pro-Communist unions was banned by the Travancore government led by the Dewan, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar.¹¹⁹

Proscribing a union does not weed the movement out but rather gives it new vigour and strength, as was evident from the ever-widening base of the banned union and the emergence of an even larger number of trade unions under various political camps – particularly under the Congress and the Communists – throughout the planting regions in southern India by the late 1940s and early 1950s. Initially, many of the unions remained aloof from all-India organisations.¹²⁰ By the late 1940s, workers' unions came up in Wayanad and Nilgiri under the influence and auspices of the ATEWU. However, workers numbering nearly 20,000, constituting not less than 30 per cent of the total workforce in the plantations of southern India employed by the tea empire of the Kanan Devan Plantations had not yet been enrolled in any of the existing unions. Another glaring omission on the part of the trade unionists was their inability to organise the women workers; nor did they recognise the potential for revolt in these women, which had been revealed on many occasions in the colonial and post-colonial phases.¹²¹ It was with the formations of the *High Range Estate Employees' Association* (HREEA) in September 1951, Peerumedu Thottam Thozhilali Union, the High Range Estate Labour Union and later the Devikulam Estate Workers' Union in 1957 that these workers came under the Communist umbrella.¹²² The Communists also succeeded in organising the tea factory workers, particularly those employed by Brooke Bond in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.¹²³ But the workers largely had to content themselves with economistic struggles¹²⁴ devoid of any significant social or political complexion; at times, even these economistic struggles met with failure. Larger issues such as the collective ownership of plantations, granting of land for cultivation and empowerment of the workforce failed to figure on their agenda. While answering the questions of the *Royal Commission on Labour* regarding the implementation of labour legislations regulating working hours, wages, housing, etc. planters' representatives maintained that such queries were quite unnecessary, falsely claiming that they had always been doing the needful. Further, the planters continued to opine that any intervention would disturb the 'paternal' relations between master and worker.¹²⁵ Thus, except in Kochi where the Plantation Labour Rules had been in force since May Day, 1937, there were no regulations beneficial to labour in any other part of the country until the early 1950s.

In fact, it was in the post-Independence period, and more specifically in 1951, that the first comprehensive package of labour legislation with social welfare measures – the Plantation Labour Act – was passed, the genealogy of which may be traced to radical trade unionism as well as the interventions made by the Rege Committee and the International Labour Organisation, and a year later, in 1952, minimum wages were also fixed for the plantation workers.¹²⁶ But the Plantation Labour Act was

implemented only three years later in 1954 in deference to the interests of corporate capital; and even then it fell short of expectations as government studies themselves reveal.¹²⁷ When the Maternity Benefit Act was finally taking shape in the early 1950s, the planters decided to approach the various governments to hold up the same until the prices of tea improved.¹²⁸ The post-Independence legislation was also commented upon by the planters as something which had 'retarded productive efficiency, discipline and good will'.¹²⁹ Finding themselves confronted by an increasing number of protective measures for labour particularly with respect to money wages and maternity benefits, the planters quickly abolished other 'benefits' enjoyed by the workers to compensate their losses. But now the workers did not hesitate to hit back; they even became martyrs in their fight for justice and the counter-suppression of the same by the planters as well as the State: in the Pasumalai estate in Peerumedu, for instance, the white planter even went as far as to stop giving rice to the workers; instead he fed them on tapioca. The workers protested demanding a minimum of 200 grams of rice and 25 paise per week. The emerging movement for a just cause was crushed and three workers were killed on the spot in police firing on 22 April 1952.¹³⁰

Gaining strength from the increased cohesiveness awarded by a 'common' banner in the post-State reorganisation phase after 1956, the various unions organised numerous strikes and agitations against the still European-dominated planter class.

Yet, the failure of the collective consciousness of the worker to coalesce into a strong force was largely due to the fact that the mobilising hand behind them was essentially that of the upper-caste Hindus with whom the workers failed to identify themselves, as was the case with the rest of the working class in India. In the south, trade union organisers like T.V. Thomas, Rosamma Punnoose, C.A. Kurian (*savarna* Christian), B. K. Nair and Prakkulam Bhasi in Travancore, Raman Nair and Rama Warriar (*savarna* Hindus) in Nilgiri and Wayanad, and Ramaswami Ayyangar (a Tamil *Brahmanan*) in Anaimalai, though of different political persuasions, were all upper castes and hence alien. There was even an instance in the Kanan Devan Plantations in the early 1950s, when a caste-Hindu trade union leader went to great lengths to curry favour with the European planter, scheduling the workers' strike in accordance with the planters' wish much to the latter's contempt.¹³¹ Their social origins and the middle-class background of these leaders set them apart from the workers who were drawn from the most backward classes and castes, keeping the former in a state of alienation from the masses, a fact that has not yet found recognition with the Communists. This restricted vision was shared by even the master Marxist theoretician E. M. S. Namboodiripad; while speaking of the Communal Award as modified by the Poona Pact, he said:

... this led to the diversion of the people's attention from the objective of full independence to the mundane issues of upliftment of the Harijans [Dalits].¹³²

The Communists erred in missing the significance of primordial loyalties such as religion and caste in building a sense of solidarity among the workers and in their struggle for material and social benefits; this was as true with respect to the advanced West as in the case of the peripheral regions.¹³³ The small sporadic outbursts on isolated plantations often die out without ever reaching the political mainstream; not to speak of the more drawn-out and protracted struggles.¹³⁴ With the kind of severe oppression and misery that the workers were being subjected to, the objective conditions for an

awakening of the subaltern consciousness were ripe. Yet, any manifestation of this kind of an arousal failed to materialise, even the leaders of the Dalits themselves being sidetracked by their obsession with caste issues, rather than attempting to unleash the combined power of caste and class. No significant efforts were made to rally Dalit workers across work operations or to transcend the divisions among the Dalits on the plantations and other labouring poor in the non-plantation sector, which, if pursued with diligence, would have helped forge a more intensive transverse solidarity.

7.9 Summing-up

An analysis of the conjunctures of the classes in the colonial plantations – the concrete reality of the concrete situation – highlights the fact that the internal class processes of peripheral labour were influenced and conditioned by global and national economic and political forces, intertwined as they were with the local social structures. This emphasises the necessity of placing the workers' search for a class identity and the development of agency as the outcome of the interactive processes of global and local hierarchical relations. Right from the beginning, plantation workers sought means of protest and defiance both individually and collectively, much prior to the formation of trade unions on the estates. The conventional tendency to equate working class consciousness and agency with trade unionism thus makes little sense. The postwar crisis and rise in prices of foodstuffs, in conjunction with the fervour of the nationalistic struggle helped bring the workers together in a cohesive manner. The political-social reform movements and the peasant struggles in the plains such as the *Mappila* rebellion added further fuel to the already brewing discontent among the workers. In the 1930s, the fallout of the economic Depression manifesting in the form of wage cuts and large-scale retrenchment acted as a catalyst in the process of agency formation and trade union activities. The freedom struggle which took a fresh turn with the Civil Disobedience Movement gave an added impetus to trade union formation which took a concrete form by the late 1930s. The Second World War brought prosperity to the planters, as wars generally do to a section of the propertied class.¹³⁵ But, by this time the truth had dawned on the workers: while any crisis in the core was faithfully transferred to them, they were even more faithfully ignored in times of prosperity. A large number of workers, particularly women, were increasingly involved in the trade unions and expressed their agency by the eve of Independence, though they were splintered into different groups owing allegiance to the various political camps. Moreover, they had to satisfy themselves with economic struggles; while this helped develop their historical consciousness, it hardly made any significant structural changes in their historically evolved unequal relations. The belated development of trade unions was primarily due to the isolated nature of the plantation workers' existence, as also due to the divisive influence of such primordial ascribes as caste, religion and linguistic differences. The workers came from regions different in language and culture; nevertheless most of them had a common social origin: they were mainly Dalits, and backward communities, all falling outside the *Chathurvarnya*. This common background ought to have helped them forge a common class identity as is now seen in the Indian countryside with the Dalits, backwards and other economically underprivileged classes joining hands in a common struggle. Though the workers entered into a phase of

class struggle by partly transcending the age-old cultural divisions and propelled by a momentous history of radical trade unionism in the post-Independence phase, especially in newly formed Kerala under Communist rule, this too ended up in class collaboration as the mainstream political organisations could not follow a politics of class and remained trapped within the boundaries of the traditional social and political structure.

8 The Post-colonial State

Re-alignment in Power Relations?

When W. S. S. Mackay, general manager of the James Finlay-owned Kanan Devan Plantations (1925–46) remarked that the planters were a ‘state within a state’, they were law and order, and they were everything, right up to the Second World War (see Chapter 5), he would not have imagined that it would remain so even in the post-colonial phase. The plantations remained a system wherein labouring families were exploited and hegemonised by the patriarchs of fragmented social identities. Occupying as they did a peripheral position in the capitalist plantations, the workers remained peripheral to the capitalist world economy and the local social structure and their fate was determined by the complex interactive processes therein. More importantly, at least in the immediate post-Independence phase, the hegemony of global capital continued to hold sway over the newly carved out states when it re-appeared within new power relations in the post-neo-liberal phase. The plantation worker-families saw little change in their living conditions, and their history continued to be a story of servitude and misery despite the fact that this was also the period of radical trade unionism on the plantations. The overarching presence of global capital was felt nowhere else more keenly than in the state of Kerala, when the first Communist regime came into effect in 1957 after the linguistic re-organisation of Indian states in 1956; in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, too, violence on plantations reached unprecedented levels implying that Independence brought little change to the workers save for the passing of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, which again was more thwarted than abided by. With the passage of time, the plantation sector has come to represent multiple relations of production: while some workers in certain estates and planting companies managed to escape further immiserisation, the majority entered the new millennium in an impoverished state.

8.1 Pulling down the communist regime

Perhaps the most crucial agenda of the communists in the state that proved to be a threat to European interests was the question of nationalisation of foreign-owned plantations in the state. The undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) had put forward the issue in its election manifesto, but it was in Kerala that an attempt was actually made to implement it. A. K. Gopalan, the Parliament member of the CPI from Kerala, moved a resolution on 14 December 1956 in the Lok Sabha to the effect that the dominant position of British capital within the tea industry had proved detrimental to national interests and, hence, the foreign-owned tea industry should be nationalised forthwith. He highlighted the question of drain of surplus from the state to Britain, as also the poor living

conditions of workers under foreign-owned plantations. The argument for nationalisation was thus for the benefit of the country as a whole, he asserted. When the resolution was taken up again in March 1957, his proposal met with stiff resistance from Congress members and was eventually voted out. Though the first Communist ministry in Kerala, too, led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad and which came to power in 1957, persisted in its conviction that nationalisation of foreign-owned plantations was essential for the development of the state economy, it was unable to work out a fitting political solution. The idea of nationalisation thus remained unfulfilled, but its mere mention was sufficient threat to British capital in the planting sector in post-colonial India.

Then followed the question of land reforms, over which the European and provincial planters won yet another victory. Anticipating stiff resistance from such forces as well as from the opposition, and drawing on lessons learnt in the context of nationalisation of plantations, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill (1957) (and the subsequent phases of land reforms) virtually exempted the plantations, including the foreign/British-owned ones, from ceiling provisions, creating a persistent cause for land conflicts. This allowed the Finlay-owned KDHP to continue to retain its integrated territory until the passing of the Kanan Devan Hills (Resumption of Lands) Act in 1971. It was only in 1974 that the state could legally confiscate all the remaining lands leaving 57,192 acres of tea as a compact block 'on the same terms and conditions as enjoyed hitherto'. However, within a couple of years, in 1976, Finlay entered into a new agreement with the pan Indian capital, the Tata Group, to form Tata-Finlay, a joint venture which had started back in the mid-1960s; Tatas went on to take over the former in 1983 to become Tata-Tea. More recently, Tatas acquired the UK-based Tetley, thus establishing its presence in the global tea market while re-organizing its control over the estates in the Indian south (see next chapter).

Yet another case won by global capital, as opposed to the workers, was with respect to the workers' strike on the Kanan Devan plantations in October 1958 demanding an increase in wages, bonus and an improvement in living conditions, the first two being the major rallying points. It was the Board at home in the UK that refused to pay the bonus and they chose to ignore entirely the agreement reached at the tripartite conference in the local state in the mid-1940s. The strike, organised by a joint committee of the trade unions, but later coming to be largely led by the Communist unions and sponsored by the State¹, demanded a revision of wages and bonus payments. It was a protracted struggle, which was often militant in character – instances of violence and sabotage were many and the workers, armed with sticks and knives indulged in the burning of estate properties, and arson. In the police firing that ensued, two communists were killed – Pappammal, a Dalit teenager, and Hussain Rawther, a fifty-year-old Muslim worker. Clearly, not only did Independence fail to bring any significant change to the situation on the plantations, but the social democratic government that came into power did very little to protect the workers' interests.

The Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru even suggested that E. M. S. Namboodiripad had supported the strike and had welcomed the resulting fall in foreign exchange. James Finlay succeeded in persuading the British Deputy High Commissioner to intervene in the 'local' strike through the Prime Minister. William Roy, the visiting agent of the Kanan Devan Company, travelled to Delhi and personally explained what was happening in the high ranges during the strike. The Nehru government pressurised the 'Communist' State into calling off the strike; the workers had to withdraw their struggle in October at the behest of the Kanan Devan hegemony which worked through

a complicated economic and political network. The workers stood to lose at all levels: apart from the martyred lives, they also lost their wages for the days they had gone on strike; and what is more, in place of the 25 per cent bonus they had demanded, they were granted only 4 to 5 per cent. To quote the Chairman of the Kanan Devan Planters' Association (as recorded in the minutes of the annual general meeting, 23 May 1959):

I am glad to say that this Association provided an adequate organisation for the action, which was taken at that time. Our local policy and tactics were agreed upon. . . .

By this time, religious forces, caste organisations and the local Congress began to intensify the 'Liberation struggle' against the Communist state, particularly in protest against the education reforms of the newly formed Communist government.² George Soutar, the acting General Manager approached the Prime Minister Nehru, through the offices of the President of UPASI, M. M. Varghese, accompanied by W. C. Roy (field manager of the KDHP); to quote he 'convinced the Central government that Namboodiripad's government in Kerala must be terminated',³ and so 28 months after it assumed office, the President of India exercised his powers under the constitution and the Ministry was dismissed on 31 July 1959, and a caretaker administration under a Governor of state installed. Referring to this turn of events in his memoirs, Col. Mackay succinctly stated, to quote, '... it was here (in the High Ranges) that Namboodiripad met "his Waterloo"'.⁴

8.2 Shift of hegemony, the new masters and surplus drain

As noted earlier, the end of colonialism did not mark the end of colonial capital in the tea sector, neither in terms of the hegemony of global capital nor in terms of workers' subordination and their poor levels of subsistence. Until the late 1970s global capital continued to dominate the scene, with ever higher profits being repatriated, leaving little behind for re-investment. In the 1970s, the planting companies in the Indian south witnessed three important changes, which could best be described as a mixed blessing. First, the Government of India abolished the managing agency system, which had the effect of restricting the activities of foreign capital in the tea sector. Some of the firms responded to this development by disengaging themselves from the state and migrating to other world peripheries such as East Africa.⁵ Second, it was from 1970 onwards that land reforms in the state began to make themselves felt, but with plantations being exempted from ceiling provisions, all the tea companies continued to keep vast areas of land under their control, including fallow lands. Third, the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) required that foreign capital be Indianised by 26 per cent. But, tea companies were again accorded a preferential treatment, being considered on par with high-technology and export-oriented industries, for which a foreign participation of 74 per cent was allowed. Yet, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, foreign capital in the tea sector gave way to pan-Indian capital: as mentioned earlier, the Kanan Devan Plantations were taken over from James Finlay & Company by Tatas. By the new millennium, Tata Tea had become the world's second largest branded tea company, the Tetley Group, while simultaneously relinquishing control over the lower nodes of the global commodity chain by effecting the world's largest employee buyout in 2005 (the implications are explored in the next chapter); it is now the second largest tea multinational in the

world, second only to Unilever. Hindustan Lever, an Indian subsidiary of Unilever, had in its turn acquired Lipton in 1972 and Brooke Bond in 1984 thus expanding its estates in south India and Assam. In 1989 Harrisons and Crosfield sold their property to the R. P. Goenka-owned RPG Enterprises which had begun its global acquisition back in 1950 by acquiring two British trading houses, namely, Duncan brothers and Octavius Steel. The Birla-owned Jay Shree Tea & Industries Ltd continued to retain its property in south India, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and the Dooars in West Bengal; many small sterling companies such as Ponmudi Tea Estates, Travancore Tea Company, Bombay Burmah Trading Company and so on were bought by small and big Indian capital which often had no previous background in plantations per se: while the Ponmudi Estate was bought by an individual entrepreneur from Kerala, the RBT group (Ram Bahadur Thakur Company Ltd.), for instance, entered into the south Indian plantation periphery from mining in Bihar. In the wake of the post-1990s' neo-liberalisation, the Government of India permitted a 100 per cent FDI in tea in a throwback to the colonial era.

The transfer of hegemony from European capital to European/pan-Indian capital could have been blocked, and the plantations could have been brought under public ownership or under new forms of organisation such as workers' co-operatives, had there been a conscious intention to do so. Though local capital operated in a position of subordinate integration with global capital, at least in the past, it also strove to prevent the latter from gaining further concentration in the planting sector. The successful barring of the entry of Brooke Bond, the world's largest tea multinational, to Travancore (see chapter 3) despite its hold over the remaining parts of southern India, is an example worth quoting. It implies that local capital, big or small, while forced to play a subordinate role to global capital, did make attempts to cartograph an identity of its own. However, in the post-colonial phase, local capital was again sidelined, reduced as it were to the status of spectator, to watch the transfer of ownership from giant European companies to Indian big capital, largely in the wake of the FERA. Even the Communist Party in Kerala went back on its earlier promise of nationalisation of plantations, a policy which later earned accolades for the neighbouring Sri Lankan government, on assumption of power. The Left government attributed this sudden change of policy to, country-wide constitutional hurdles; the Party could have sought a political solution to these hurdles, which, however, it did not. It is thus a negative comment on the Communist Party in the country which went back on a significant promise on its election manifesto.

The massive concentration of land in the hands of the plantation companies – a colonial legacy of over-acquisition – warrants the redistribution of the same at least in small patches to the worker who had been labouring on it for over a century and a half without ever being able to call it her own. These lands have outlived the lease periods for which they had been granted, but the planting companies continue to own the same, paying nominal sums as taxes as in the colonial period; in spite of recommendations to increase the assessment rates, no substantive revisions have been made. While State-owned plantations remit as much as Rs 1,800 per hectare of land as tax, corporate giants like Tata Tea are required to pay a mere Rs 50, or even Rs 5.33 as in the case of A. V. Thomas and Company;⁶ the situation in Tamil Nadu is no different.⁷ Though the government was forced to address this issue and attempted to revise the plantation taxes under the Kerala Grants and Lease (Modification of Rights) Act, 1980, this move was defeated by the corporate capital and also by the domestic planter-lobby that survived from the colonial period, and which was now being represented in the legislature by the largely

Christian-dominated political parties, namely, the three factions of the Kerala Congress. These were political offshoots of the Indian National Congress, one of which invariably shared in the State governance, whether it was led by the Congress or the Marxists.

Land reforms, even in the state of Kerala where it is said to have been most effectively implemented owing to a leftist political climate, have failed to yield any benefit to plantation workers or to the tribals on whose property these estates were built, for, plantations were exempted from ceiling provisions.⁸ Had the State confiscated the surplus land alone of the corporate plantation companies, an area equivalent to that already declared surplus could have been mobilised. A hesitant government was finally induced to act by the workers, and the acquisition of half the Kanan Devan lands was ordered. But to date this land has not been redistributed as noted above.⁹ Further, vast lands illegally occupied by the other plantation companies have come to light, chiefly owing to the new struggles launched by the landless workers in the state as in the case of Chengara in Kerala: nearly 3000 Dalit families forcefully entered the lands illegally controlled by Harrisons Malayalam and continue to wage their struggle for land and livelihood. Though the struggle invited the wrath of the plantation workers, rubber tappers in this case, who themselves are landless, which has thus thwarted the potential for a renewed transverse solidarity among the subalterns, the agency unleashed by the landless Dalits has helped unmask the land control by corporate capital and the failure of the otherwise celebrated land reforms in the state.

There are those who would argue that the fragmentation of the larger estates following the implementation of land reforms would curb the economies of scale, thus proving detrimental to the national economy as a whole. Again, it is the contention of a few Marxist academic scholars that it would be impossible to effect a movement of the rice-producing tenant farmers and agricultural labourers from the lowlands to the highlands to take up small holder production crops that were totally alien to them.¹⁰ Clearly, these are but weak justifications for the dropping of such a significant piece of legislation. Evidence from the world over suggests that the size of a tea plantation has no major bearing on its productivity; small-scale plantations can be grown as efficiently as large holdings; small holder rubber cultivation has also been successful in various parts of Asia. The second argument only reveals the absolute lack of a sense of history on the part of its propounders – the movement of small peasants and landless labourers from the plains to the highlands in search of a means of livelihood has been clearly documented, for instance, during the Depression of the 1930s and during the postwar famine.¹¹ By denying access to land resources and stalling any favourable change in the ownership of plantation empires in the immediate post-colonial phase, what really did transpire was the perpetuation of the planter Raj, which brought the otherwise powerful states down on their knees. In the context of globalisation, the ruling class has increasingly been an ally to capitalist expansion: the Government of India, Ministry of Commerce has recently suggested to the Government of Kerala that it should restore to the planters the surplus lands earlier acquired from them. The Inquiry Commission constituted in 1994 to suggest welfare measures for the plantation workers in Kerala, too, favoured the planter class, directing the state government to restore these lands to the planters themselves.¹² The latest in the series of succumbing to the interests of planting oligarchic corporations is the permitting of cent per cent foreign equity in plantation corporations all over again in the wake of post-1990s neo-liberal reforms, the hegemony of global capital being thus legally re-instated.

While the basic characteristic of capital–labour relations remains exploitative, as it has been since colonial times, the tea plantation sector has become more complex over the last three decades owing to a variety of factors such as mergers and acquisitions, re-composition of capital and forward integration and also due to the emergence of small cultivators and the parallel development of workers' organisations. In terms of the scale and range of activities of the current plantation business, the firms involved in global tea production chain could be divided into four categories following Clairmont and Cavanagh: first, the integrated tea manufacturers with a stake in all the nodes along the entire value chain – the 'mega-conglomerates whose operations span plantations, trading and blending';¹³ second, those trading giants that have vertically integrated backwards into plantations with significant holdings in shipping, insurance and banking; third, a set of planting companies, largely regional and local, with stakes in certain nodes alone, and that in the lower segments of the value chain and, lastly, those non-integrated small grower estates with no significant stakes in any of the nodes along the supply chain and who also employ largely temporary or seasonal labour but no permanent resident labour. While Tata Tea in the country belongs to the first category, Harrisons and Crosfield, now Harrisons Malayalam belongs to the second, and firms such as the Bombay-Burma Trading Company¹⁴ and Ram Bahadur Thakur and Company (RBT) fall into the third category. Apart from these relatively dominant entities, small tea growers have had a significant presence in south India in recent times, particularly in regions like the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. Their access to the world tea market is limited, forcing them to depend on intermediaries such as the Bought Leaf Factories for the marketing of their produce. These factories form a new entrepreneurial class in the plantation sector of today; they do not own the estates, but procure green leaf from the growers, which they process and then sell either at auctions or directly to corporate entities. These emergent complexities have wider implications for labour relations and the pattern of plantation-based accumulation. The control commanded by the first two sets of corporate giants over the entire hierarchy of nodes in the global tea commodity chain helps the former offset the loss in value in one node by an increase in value in others. There are also remarkable similarities among them in terms of the organisation of labour: they continue to retain the resident labour handed down by the colonial production systems but on a smaller scale and the workers are engaged in round-the-year production cycles.

A fall in auction prices of tea, at either the regional or national level, does not make a significant dent in the profitability of any of the firms in the first two categories, as they possess the power to keep the value realisation in the other nodes such as retail marketing unchanged. And this is exactly what has happened in India: even as the auction prices declined from Rs 73.39 per kg in 1998 to 47.32 in 2002, the retail prices of branded tea have gone up to Rs 144 a kg for Tata Tea and Rs 200 for Red Label, the product of Brooke Bond. The buyers, brokers and traders take away more than two-thirds of the retail prices as profit. Thus the packed tea segment acts as a buffer for losses in the lower segments. And around 98 per cent of the packaged tea market in India is under the direct control of Brooke Bond, now Unilever, as also about half the remainder of India's tea market. At a global level too, four MNCs – Unilever/Brooke Bond, Cadbury Schweppes, Associated British Food/Tinning and Tata Tea – control the tea business. The growing presence of Indian corporate capital in the plantations in southern India has much the same effect as that of foreign capital: the pan-Indian

tea companies mostly persist with low-tech plantation production operations, while continuing to extract surplus at a breath-taking pace.¹⁵

8.3 Neo-liberalism, the new trade regime and the crisis

A fundamental shift towards an integrated and co-ordinated international division of labour in production and trade has become a major feature of the current process of neo-liberalism and economic globalisation. As part of the same process, the tea industry in Asia in general and India in particular, has spread out on two intersecting planes: by the opening up of the borders for free trade in response to WTO ruling, and by the refusal of local capital to adapt to the new challenges, 'with the state(s) playing a Janus-faced role in this conflict'. Tea being the globally integrated commodity that it is, three major shifts and continuities in the production and international trade scenario – both internal and external factors but closely interconnected with each other within the larger world capitalist economy – have impacted heavily upon the Indian tea industry.

First, there is an excess supply of tea in the world and the Indian markets owing to factors such as a continuous increase in production at a rate that outstrips consumption, and a fall in exports, both leading to an accumulated net tea stock in the market. This overproduction was largely the result of the enhanced production of tropical crops such as tea (coffee, rubber, etc.) as a 'systemic effect' of structural adjustment programmes, the construction of a 'comparative advantage' by globalising agencies such as the World Bank, as well as the strategies of lead firms in buyer-driven chains for those commodities.¹⁶ Though tea is cultivated in more than 36 countries in the world, it has remained the trade monopoly of a few. An estimate in 2000 revealed that five countries, namely India, China, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Indonesia, together accounted for over 80 per cent of the world's tea production. While India, China and Sri Lanka have been the leading producers since colonial times, African countries like Kenya and Tanzania have stepped up their tea production considerably since the mid-1980s; a further surge in production has been registered since the 1990s.¹⁷ Having committed itself to the Structural Adjustment Programmes designed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, governments in countries like Kenya prioritised coffee and tea production at the expense of food security, turning the country into the fourth largest exporter of tea in the world.¹⁸ This burgeoning growth in world tea production and the persistent over-supply of tea in the world market since the mid-1990s¹⁹ has been largely responsible for the devastating price crash in the tea market, but rather than curbing production, many countries try to compensate for the resultant losses through a further expansion of tea cultivation to boost their export volumes. The production of tea in India, for instance, increased from 754 million kilograms in 1995 to 846 in 2000 and then to 928 in 2004 and further to 982 in 2006.²⁰

Second, the domestic consumption of tea increased, but at a lower rate, and the total export of tea declined for quite a long period since the mid-1990s, altogether leading to a massive hike in accumulated net stock. Considering the significant size of tea produced by unregistered small tea gardens all over India, the actual net stock would be much higher than the official figures. The calculations of the federal government and the Tea Board went wrong on many counts particularly in the subsidisation of production through the offering of huge incentives; the UPASI, with the support of the Tea Board, for instance, offered subsidies even for the conversion of vegetable

production into tea in the Nilgiris, paralleling developments in Kenya as mentioned earlier. The government was also helpless in the face of a fall in exports to the Soviet Union which was originally governed by a special bilateral trading arrangement called the rupee trading system, which allowed payments in non-convertible currency. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a termination of this system and by the mid-1990s, an Indo-Russian treaty mandated the conduct of all bilateral trading agreements on a hard currency basis and tea exports suffered the most from this new arrangement.²¹

Third, and much in keeping with the factors explained above, the major change in the international tea trade regime that affected the Indian tea industry was the fact that South Asian countries had agreed to function in accordance with the WTO regime and the SAARC agreements. A dismantling of quantitative restrictions and a move in favour of 'tariffication' meant fresh competition for the hitherto protected local capital. Quantitative restrictions were lifted with effect from 1 April 2000, and this, along with the introduction of tariffication, ushered in strong competition for local capital which had until then enjoyed a monopoly over the domestic market. The WTO member nations had to reduce import duty by 24 per cent of the existing rates, by the year 2005. Meanwhile, India, the largest producer and consumer of tea in the world has had to be content with an import tariff of 75 per cent until recently. It has now increased to 100, but is still far below the bound rate of 150 per cent as applicable to processed agricultural commodities. The tea imports to India increased from a mere 1 million kilogram in 1995 to 13.43 million kilograms in 2000 and to nearly 24 million kilograms in 2006, the major sources being Vietnam, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The influx of inferior quality tea into India, particularly from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, has pushed tea prices down further. The tea that finds its way to India through imports comes at very cheap rates; the unit value of imported tea during 2001 was Rs 55.72 per kg in 2000 and dropped to Rs 45 in 2002.

The regional free trade treaty signed among the SAARC countries have already led to higher levels of import penetration into the hitherto protected domestic market; the bilateral free trade treaty – the Indo-Sri Lankan Free Trade Treaty – is a case in point.²² The global recession in demand for tea has further led to accumulated stock, all this together precipitating a crisis in the tea industry of southern India. In contrast, Sri Lanka has gained much from the new trade regime: more exports to neighbouring India and the rest of the world have given it an edge over the other tea producing countries. The geographical proximity of Sri Lanka with its highest export ratio – as high as 90 per cent – is further reason why the tea industry in south India has become more vulnerable. Un-level playing fields have thus opened up even for those countries who are otherwise equal in the larger capitalist world economy, and countries such as Vietnam, Kenya and China are now in a position to supply tea in the world market including the Russian market at much lesser prices putting the Indian tea industry under strain, the burden of which is quickly transferred to the worker-families as has always been the historical precedent. There have also been instances of rejection of Indian tea, although on a small scale, on account of sanitary and phytosanitary measures under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. Planting circles in India – particularly the United Planters Association of South – view the tea crisis to be most severe in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The persistent downward pressure on both trade and prices of Indian tea in general and in the south Indian states has been tremendous: there has been a 30–35 per cent decline since 1998, reminiscent of the K-wave deflationary leg

of the Great Depression, simultaneously calling for altogether different commodity agreements.

While it is true that the ASEAN-India Pact, slated to become operative in 2010, would be detrimental to the interests of the plantation sector, we do maintain a critical perspective on regional trade regimes. First of all, while the neoliberal agenda is quite clear with respect to the WTO as it would result in an accentuation of the unequal relations between the global south and the north, this Pact is largely among the south and south-east Asian countries which could well be conceived as one of the possible alternatives to hegemonic agreements such as the WTO. This is despite the fact that there are strong elements of the WTO agenda within the ASEAN strategies. Second, most of the ASEAN countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are poor nations and both India and the ASEAN partners stand to benefit if they follow a route other than the US neo-colonial plunder, which, however, depends on how they re-articulate regional trade regimes and how equitably they share the benefits with their people. Given the fact that the neo-liberal Indian state has consistently been pro-US and disregards its subnational interests and people therein – the states are not even consulted before such agreements are signed – the geopolitical consequences could be much more serious than expected; the economic consequences would be more marked in states such as Kerala that are partly dependent on plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber. The larger implications of the agreement cannot be seen in black and white, rather a comprehensive understanding would reveal the different shades of grey in terms of its differential impact on the various social sections and the role of the state in altering the power relations apart from acting as mid-wife to corporate interests.

The continued buying concentration in the hands of a few brokers, who also hold significant shares in the hierarchy of nodes from plucking to retail marketing, still decides the auction prices. In South India, for instance, around 8 broking firms and 50–60 buyers control the entire auction in Cochin and Coonoor, where the tea comes from hundreds of growers, including both small and big capital. They succeed in perpetuating their hegemony over the market by combining all the nodes in the supply chain, right from production to retail marketing. The control over the entire supply chain through such a buying concentration determines the monopoly-driven prices, which hardly reflects the parity/non-parity of supply and demand. This is the true picture in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where even after the tea crisis has been reflected in the decline in auction prices, there is no sign of a decline in the retail prices of tea; the big oligopolistic corporate formations still manage to reap high profits. Further, it has also been pointed out that some sort of ‘cartelisation within the auction system can easily manoeuvre the auction price’²³ towards the prices settled outside the auction system – just as in the case of Bought Leaf Factories, which either way is unfavourable to the small and tiny growers. Cartels operating on the auction floors among a handful of powerful brokers acting on behalf of corporate capital discourage the smaller brokers from participating and thereby reduce competition and consequently the price; the liberalisation of the auction system²⁴ has hardly improved such production and marketing arrangements; the bargaining power of the workers is further compromised in such situations as the norms of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 do not largely apply in such cases, thus leading to a worsening of the workers’ living conditions.

8.4 Relaying the crisis: The materiality of commodity chain trap

The response to the crisis in the tea sector, which was exacerbated by globalisation, the mis-governance of estates and cartelisation, has varied in accordance with the size of the capital involved, and thereby the size of the plantation itself, as also with the nature of capital involved – whether it is run by corporate capital or individual proprietors. The big plantations run by corporate global capital have resorted to an increased intensification of labour, rather than an outright closure or the retrenchment of workers. The workers would obviously have to go along with such intensification measures as they have absolutely no other means of livelihood to turn to. But those companies with limited control over the critical nodes of the production chain, including those whose estates are becoming increasingly non-viable due to the new trade regime and their own mis-governance, often go to the extent of closing down the estates, with the workers being left with no means of subsistence. It is true that the post-colonial welfare state failed to deliver anything resembling an effective buffering mediation before the contemporary crisis emerged in the plantation sector. Interestingly enough, those estates which continue to function seem to totally neglect the welfare provisions that are legally due to the workers as per the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. For instance, the Act, which has been implemented since 1954 after a series of amendments, is at present applicable to those tea plantations (as well as coffee, rubber and cardamom estates) which admeasure five hectares or more and in which 15 or more persons are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding 12 months. It covers certain welfare measures for the worker-families; however, an evaluation of the same shows, the performance to be discouraging, as explained below; so also the wage-structure and the conditions of living of the workers leave much to be desired.

As early as in 1978 the Plantation Enquiry Committee of Kerala had observed a steady reduction of permanent employment and an ever increasing casualisation of labour on plantations. The Union Ministry of Labour conducted a study on the working and living conditions of plantation workers in three southern states, viz. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in 1984, three decades after the implementation of the Act. This has been a sufficiently long period for effecting the desired improvements in the living conditions of the workers. While the Act has undoubtedly conferred certain benefits on the intended beneficiaries, its overall performance has been far from satisfactory, especially in terms of casualisation of labour, wages and incomes and social amenities. On the whole, both the reports provide ample evidence of the fact that many estates remained outside the purview of the PL Act and hence failed to provide their workers with most of the statutory facilities. Considering the fact that both the actual wage rates and percentage increase in wages over and above the notified minimum wages are relatively higher in Tamil Nadu than in Kerala, and that there was also a progressive increase in the number of households with every higher income group, it appears that as far as wage settlements and income of the plantation households are concerned, the workers of Tamil Nadu have gained much. But by the late 1990s, both the states refused to acknowledge the workers' rights to a decent living as is evident

from the large number of closure and abandonment of estates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the post-neo-liberal phase.

While the Labour Investigation Committee (1946) noted that in south India, child labour formed nearly 10 per cent of the total workforce, informal enquires made by the Union Ministry of Labour (1984) does give evidence of it, at least in Tamil Nadu, implying that nearly four decades of independence have not succeeded in ameliorating the problem of child labour on plantations. The crisis that hit the estates in the post-neo-liberal phase had its own impact on child labour with a higher drop-out ratio among estate schools, particularly those that are in proximity with abandoned or closed estates. In Tamil Nadu, crèches for children replaced their daily drink of milk with a paltry allowance for every child, thus defeating their very purpose and thwarting the good intentions of the PL Act. There is obviously a need to re-draft the PL Act, and while such demands are being articulated as part of the new imageries of resistance in plantations in the north-east, no such indications are seen in south India; the possibilities for such articulations too grow weaker with the gradual decline of trade union interventions in the state.

Another aspect of plantation labour that merits consideration is the relation maintained between money wages and the rising cost of living; this is particularly significant in light of the fact that the consumer price index, on which adjustments of costs of living are based, pertains to the associated production centres rather than the highlands, where it is much higher. The real wages in the plantations are thus not all that real. The perpetual state of indebtedness among plantation workers with their negative savings leaving them in the exploitative clutches of grocers, goldsmiths and usurious moneylenders has also been brought out by the study done by the Union Ministry of Labour (1984). The credit needs of the plantation workers are still almost entirely met by moneylenders and hence the cost of credit is prohibitively high. In many cases, fresh loans are taken mainly to liquidate old ones and to meet the basic need for food; loans in kind are gradually becoming prevalent on the estates. The study also revealed that the social amenities provided to the workers are far from satisfactory, and are particularly poor with respect to the provision of medical facilities. In most areas, water supply was available only for specified hours, and at times it was found unfit for drinking for want of adequate filtration and chlorination.

When a Dalit woman in the Indian south plucks 16 kg of green leaf, it equates with the production of around 3.5 to 4 kg of processed tea. The price it fetches as branded tea in the retail nodes comes up to around Rs 150–200 (with an average of Rs 175). Of this, the woman worker earns only Rs 76. It implies that hardly 10–12 per cent of the retail price accrues to the direct producer, the lion's share of the value generated in the chain going to the upper nodes in the profit hierarchy. This briefly explains the distribution of income and surplus along the lower segment of the tea commodity chain wherein the poor woman worker struggles to live. Further, the wage share in value added, too, keeps declining. The available empirical evidence suggests that there was either stagnation or a declining tendency of wage (and salaries) share in value added with respect to big companies like Tata Tea²⁵ until the re-composition of its capital (see next chapter). It is also to be noted that in another node of the tea commodity chain wherein men workers predominate, and where the processing takes place, the wage share in value added in the tea processing factories in India as a whole has kept declining from the mid-1990s.

The situation is quite the worst on the estates that have been victims of poor governance and those that were bought with the intent of making quick profits. Having acquired

these estates from the Europeans, primarily from Scottish capital, the local planters have been pre-occupied with the generation of surplus that is quickly channelled into their private coffers; no effort is made to invest in the nurture of these lands; no attempts at rejuvenation are in evidence, leading to a steady decline in productivity. The tea bushes are old, often more than 75–100 years, which is much longer than the economic age of tea bushes of around 50–60 years, and are affected by pestilence and disease, with hardly any replanting being done at all. In such estates the neo-liberal trade regime had its own aggravating effects. Combined with the burden of bank loans to be repaid, the small growers have in many instances deserted their workers and estates; many of these estates have even been mortgaged to the concerned banks. This kind of mismanagement or even total abandonment of estates has occurred many a time in southern India, much to the consternation of the hard-driven workers; neither has any attempt been made by the government to take over the management of the same.²⁶ Though the managements had shown great proficiency in collecting the Provident Fund emoluments from the workers, they made no attempt to repay the workers their dues once the estates were closed.²⁷ Neither the state nor the trade unions have intervened on behalf of the workers and no attempt was made to repay the arrears amounting to millions of rupees.

The Annual Report 2004–05 of the Tea Board of India revealed that a total of 118 tea estates were closed across the country between the years 2000–2005 affecting nearly 70,000 workers. There are 13 abandoned tea estates in Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal, while 10–14 tea estates and more than half a dozen factories have been closed down in Kerala; in Tamil Nadu, too, around half a dozen tea estates have been closed or abandoned. Some other estates have totally dispensed with permanent labour, exclusively employing reserve armies of casual labour instead. The majority of the estates that remained closed/abandoned in Kerala belong to the Peerumedu Tea Company, MMJ Plantations, Vagamon, Pullikanam Estate, Haileyburia Estates and the RBT Group 11 (Granby, Mount, Tungamullay, Pasumullay, Koliikanam); four tea estates in the Ponmudi region, namely, Bonacaud, Ponmudi, Barmore and Invarcode tea estates have also closed down, some of them having a much longer history of closure. Even the Priyadarshini Tea Estate in Wayanad – a joint project opened up in 1984 by the Central and the state Governments to rehabilitate the bonded tribal worker-families – has remained closed since 2005. The trade union leaders confirmed that more than 23,000 workers have been thrown out of employment in Kerala as a whole with their families left struggling in abject starvation and poverty.²⁸ With the crisis weighing most heavily on their day-to-day lives, the workers seek salvation in many ways: committing suicide, turning to prostitution and so on. Meanwhile, their levels of living plummet further. On the plantations that have been abandoned/closed, the electricity supply has been cut off in the worker lines, and the supply of drinking water has been stopped altogether. Though the present crisis is not as severe as that of the Depression of the 1930s, the anti-labour measures taken to tide over the present one are appalling.

To quote a third generation Tamil worker on an estate: 'I used to hope until recently. But I have lost such hopes. No one is going to get back jobs. The management says that it is running in loss. They cannot open the estate. Nobody is there to take care of us . . . where is the state, the trade union leaders?'²⁹ As the tea workers are born, raised, schooled and employed on the estates, a crisis such as this leaves them helpless, and unable to find employment elsewhere. With the non-plantation sector witnessing a decline in employment opportunities, again as an off-shoot of neo-liberal employment

politics, the worker-families are left with limited possibilities to out-migrate. The relative seclusion of the plantation industry, with very few forward and backward linkages, is a historic feature shared by many colonial/post-colonial planting regions and one that severely restricts the workers' options for alternative means of livelihood. Those workers who choose to leave in search of work often end up in the distant fish processing factories of Maharashtra or Gujarat³⁰ or in apparel factories in Tirupur, road construction or domestic work, with women again being vulnerable in terms of wages, and often being forced into sex-work. There are those who have returned to the plantations to accept whatever little employment is available therein, under whatever conditions as may exist.

Jobless and burdened by debt, the defenceless workers are often driven to suicide. Those children who go to school without the prescribed uniforms or books, 'face humiliation', the shocking death of Velankanni, a ninth class student, on the Ram Bahadur Thakur Tea Company in Peerumedu, being a case in point. Unable to comply with the headmaster's orders to come to school in a new uniform instead of her torn one, Velankanni hanged herself in her parents' workhouse in October 2002. The estate had been closed for the previous few years leaving the worker-families destitute. A materialist-ontological narrative from Velankanni's mother Mariyammal, a Tamil migrant woman who had been a tea plucker for decades together – would suffice to bring home the utter tragedy of the situation. To quote:

*... we, my husband and I were away for my eye treatment. We were shattered to hear that our daughter, Velankanny hanged herself when she found that we could not afford to buy her a set of school uniform in spite of repeated warnings from her school authorities. She was only 14 years: as recounted to the media by Velankanny's mother, a dalit by caste.*³¹

The suicide of 14-year-old Velankanni is the tenth such incident in the south Indian plantation periphery since the dawn of the twenty-first century. There were many such instances, particularly since the advent of neo-liberal globalisation: *Chudala, a middle-aged woman worker, hanged herself to escape poverty . . . Mathai, a former cooli, took poison when he could not buy medicine . . .*³² The high rates of suicides, particularly among women in Gudalur in Tamil Nadu, primarily a tea growing region where estates remain closed are often attributed to problems related to the tea sector such as stress, work pressure, abuse by family, family problems and sexual harassment at the workplace.³³ The situation in the north-east, particularly in West-Bengal which is under a communist regime, is still worse. As recently as in 2007, Reuters reported that over 700 workers have died of starvation and malnutrition in the closed tea estates of Jalpaiguri, a situation that the Supreme Court of India declared 'alarming'.³⁴ Workers in closed estates were reported to be 'eating wild grass, leaves and rats to survive'.³⁵

8.5 Subaltern unionism, militancy, alternatives

However, the current complexion of the colonially evolved plantations is not only pockmarked by such repetitive incidents of tragedy, but also leavened by instances of revolt, both individual and collective: for instance, in Kerala, workers, men, women and children, all half-starved, resisted the selling of a closed estate to an outsider. In

Tamil Nadu, where the material conditions of plantation labour worsened as all forms of political mobilisation were curtailed by the State, with its armed police compounding the repression by planting capital, worker unionism often became radical. One example is worth citing. The Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation, founded in 1863 and one of the oldest Rupee companies in India had acquired forest land in 1929 on a 99-year lease from private feudal landlords. Though the company had initially honoured the provisions of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, the situation began to deteriorate in the post-neo-liberal phase as has been the case with respect to many other estates in India. The main grievance of the estate workers related to the non-implementation of the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, in its true spirit: barely half of the employees had been provided houses, one worker said, and those that were allotted were of poor quality and not fully fit for occupation. 'Most of the houses are old and dilapidated, unfit for living during the monsoon,' said another. A woman worker said, 'There are cases where five families are forced to live in a single house.' Apart from a lack of clean drinking water the workers also faced problems relating to medical care and working conditions.³⁶ The workers complained that medical facilities provided were inadequate and that not all of them were provided free medical service. Temporary workers were not considered eligible for medical care when they were off duty. Even dependent children above the age of eight were excluded from the scheme. 'The medicines are expensive and if we go to the plains for treatment, we do not get full reimbursement,' said a worker. Their complaints to the supervisors went unheeded. They also complained of favouritism in attending to the workers' needs and that there was no provision for the cultivation of garden crops for daily consumption. Given the fact that the land once cultivated with tea or such other plantation crops is unfit for the growing of food crops, this further limits their possibilities of raising food produce within the plantations, raising yet another livelihood issue.

The management was of the view that the estate colonies are essentially private housing colonies and not public places. Thus they are bound by rules and regulations of employment and prevailing standing orders. The workers' benefits accrue according to contractual obligations. Under the Plantation Labour Act, there is no provision for kitchen gardens or cattle rearing facilities for the workers. Moreover, the managements insisted that plantations were not public spaces where outsiders could come and speak on behalf of the workers, a colonial strategy that was challenged by the workers through their everyday resistance, and now voiced by the newly formed Dalit trade union, the *Puthiya Tamizhakam Tea Estate Workers Union* (new Tamilhood); the resistance-movement drew the support of established unions as well.³⁷ With the failure of various rounds of conciliation talks for the revision of wages with the planting company and the state, and against the various penalisation measures which the labour unions labelled 'new bondedness', the workers staged a demonstration before the Tirunelveli Collectorate in June 1999; over 600 of them were arrested and sent to the Tiruchi jail. This led to yet another massive demonstration on 23 July 1999 with the support of the established unions like the INTUC and AITUC. However, the police resorted to violence to control the mass protest, and 17 of the workers, almost all Dalits, were killed, including two women and a child,³⁸ most of them drowning in the nearby lake when they panicked as the police opened fire: this horrific event came to be called the Tirunelveli massacre. The leaders of the struggle likened it to the brutal killings at Jallianwallabagh by the British.³⁹

Yet, plantation workers, at least in certain regions, engage in resistance and continually protest against the transfer of ownership of closed estates, organising meetings against the apathy of both the planters and the State and, more importantly, initiating imaginative forms of alternative production organisations with the active support of socially concerned activists from both within the estate (closed, abandoned or locked out) and outside it, but not the traditional party-led trade unions. A few examples are worth citing.⁴⁰ After years of closure and abandonment, the workers of the Mahavir Tea Plantation Company decided to take control of Kerala's Bonacaud plantations and thus in March 2006, twenty one representatives from the three divisions in the plantations took charge and production began to be organised under Garden/Estate Committees. However, the trade union leaders were against the idea of the labourers taking over, and the new form of workers' production arrangements, leading to frequent conflicts. The women now receive a price of between Rs 4.40 and 5.00 per kg; in certain cases income sharing is also being practised among women who pool the leaves plucked each day and find markets for it both locally and in distant places. Such experiments are also being made on their estates in Gudalur in Tamil Nadu which have remained closed since the mid-1990s. Workers run most the operations and earn their living, but in contrast to Bonacaud or Ponnudi⁴¹, they are assisted by the unions. Workers on the closed estates owned by the RBT group have formed small groups both with and without the support of the traditional trade unions and manage to pluck leaves and sell them to earn between Rs 2 and 7 per kg (depending on the season). Some of them also work outside the plantations to earn a living. But none of this helps them out of their state of impoverishment. This would pose fresh questions when the takeover of the closed and abandoned estates in Wayanad in Kerala are explored by new trade union initiatives.⁴² In most cases, it is not just the planter capital but also the party-led trade unions that have let the workers down; the state, too, has been largely ineffective in its efforts to ameliorate the situation save a few exceptions by way of offering subsidised food supplies and free medical services.⁴³

8.6 Summing up

Starvation deaths, protest suicides, chronic malnutrition and so on, which were rather unfamiliar language in the post-colonial south Indian plantation periphery, have now become commonplace, particularly amid the current neo-liberal age of globalisation. The little difference that was expected from the implementation of the Plantations Labour Act by the post-colonial welfare state(s) has failed to materialise and any small material gain in terms of wages and living conditions was soon wiped out as the global economy entered into its neo-liberal phase. Tragedies pile up, one upon the other, rocking the 'old imperial asset' of the British colony, and the situation did not change with the transfer of ownership from the hands of global players to Indian big capital, who themselves, in turn, have now gained global stature. Though these calamities are largely attributed to the ongoing neo-liberal capitalist globalisation, other reasons such as mis-governance, absence of upgrading, continuous surplus drain and lack of re-investment, an absence of creative resistance on the part of worker-families and so on, too, are held equally responsible for the present crisis. In the post-1990s neo-liberal phase, a large number of tea estates in the south Indian states – particularly in Kerala

and Tamil Nadu – have either closed down or been abandoned and thousands of worker-families have been pushed out of work. Thus the conclusion that one infers from the study is that the benevolent provisions of welfare legislation, realised through a wave of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles, are repeatedly thwarted through subtle means by the planter capitalists, leading to the further marginalisation of the proletariat. While a few trade unions, with the involvement of women workers and those who were otherwise involved in social movement activism, do show signs of resilience in the face of the current crisis and have come up with alternative forms of work organization, there has generally been an erosion in the strength of the collectives in terms of their bargaining power in general and their political identity in particular. The current trend towards neo-liberal reforms further jeopardises any attempt at a worker-oriented political state nor has there been an emergence of a transverse solidarity that works towards this end.

9 Colonial legacy and neo-liberal predicaments

Concluding remarks

The life-world of the plantation workers in the colonised Indian south, as well as in the post-colonial situation, presents five major facets as explored in the preceding chapters. The binality of the accumulating classes and the pauperised masses formed but one facet of the plantation system. The worker-families came from many different parts of south India, each with its own language, culture and custom; however, they shared a common social origin in that they were largely the Dalits – the most economically and socially deprived of the local populace. The majority of the workforce consisted of first-generation agrarian slaves who had been set free in the mid-nineteenth century with the abolition of slavery. And most of the workers were Dalit women, with the entire family being engaged in work directed towards the accumulation of greater surplus for metropolitan capital, subsequently Indian big capital. The plantations thus presented the picture of a labouring class composed of women, men and their children that was hegemonised by the patriarchs of class, race and caste; the global tea commodity chain was thus not merely socially embedded but historically hierarchised as well.

In other words world accumulation is both patriarchal and race-cum-caste hegemonic (or *brahmanical*), feeding as it does on the remnants of the traditional caste hierarchy, and augmented by feudal and capitalist practices as modes of labour control and organisation. By virtue of their position in the capitalist plantations, the plantation workers were also peripheral to the capitalist world system and their fate was primarily determined by this disadvantaged position and the way in which capital manoeuvred labour, with local social structures playing their part. Throughout the historical/contemporary phases of incorporation and accumulation, capital has found ways to transfer its periodic crises to the workers, whereas the surplus generated in times of plenty has failed to retrace this path. Labour, on its part, has shown an immense capacity for resilience in times of crises; but the current phase of neo-liberalisation is witness to a socially and politically weakened workforce that gives under the strain of capitalist practices. Today, plantations present a picture of totality, which in reality enfolds a multitude of labour relations, living practices and disjointed fragments characterised by multiple peripherality.

In terms of theoretical premises, the plantation worker has ever been subject to subordination at multiple levels, those of class, caste and gender. Her/his status is thus no different from that of the 'subaltern' in the *Subaltern Studies* except for the fact that subaltern theorists to date, by and large, have ignored the capitalist world economy in the construction of the subaltern classes. We have instead, attempted to locate the Dalit

worker/the 'subaltern' within the interstices of the material reality of the workplace and the capitalist worldeconomy; but unlike the WS theorists, we have sought to lay significant emphasis on the specificities of local society and on multiple identities such as caste and gender in defining the nature of the plantation life-world and the logic of plantation-based global accumulation. Further, the WS categories/tools are appropriately modified to take into account changing labour relations and the social dynamics of accumulation to form a coherent analytics, the peripheries thus turning into 'peripheries within peripheries' and the global commodity chain into the 'global commodity chain trap'.

Having presented a summary at the end of each chapter, we do not intend to dwell on our observations at length here; instead, we shall try to reflect on some of the historical events as related to the present-day domain of plantations and the society, nurtured in the womb of the capitalist world economy. We are in fact trying to elicit the lessons learnt from the colonial experience, with a view to understanding the consequences of present-day globalisation and the challenges faced by the labouring poor on the plantations.

As has been evident from the preceding chapters, the history of tea plantations in the Indian south reads much like the history of plantation regimes in North Bengal and Assam within colonial India, and other European overseas colonies. Yet, the plantation-based incorporation/accumulation in the Indian south followed various overlapping phases such as proprietorship, the concentration and later centralisation of European capital, its subsequent partial departure, and the gradual ascendancy of pan-Indian and local capital but within the larger tea regime. Along with the massive expansion in plantation acreage and production under its monopoly, planting capital became a very powerful business and political lobby within the colonial and post-colonial polity, its influential relations helping it forge a powerful united front, the United Planters Association of Southern India, which came to be a decisive player in the politics of the region(s) ever since its formation in the late nineteenth century. In all these phases, the colonial State favoured planters and plantation companies, altering property relations by providing vast expanses of forest and non-forest lands at extremely cheap and throw-away prices, offering fiscal policies such as tax and duty concessions, building infrastructure for transporting plantation products to overseas markets and for mobilisation of labour from nearby catchment areas, and legislating labour laws to help planters control and discipline their labour force with the express purpose of accumulation.

The planters recruited their labour force from amongst the most marginal classes and the lowest castes in the hierarchy of South Indian agrarian society. Worsening living conditions in the plains, and the process of pauperisation of the tribals through the usurping of their forest tracts and of the poor peasants who were burdened by land revenue, assured a steady supply of labour for the plantations. Recruitment of labour was largely effected by *kanganies*, largely from the intermediate castes, who took advances from the planters to recruit and transport labour to the plantations and then helped planters to 'manage' and discipline them. The colonial code of relations mingled with the patriarchal relations of the larger society to create a form of bondage that was again repressive, with the European planters and their managers occupying the highest position in the plantation hierarchy. In the middle were the hegemonic caste clerks (upper-caste Hindus/savarna Christians) and accountants, followed by the

kanganies/maistries who assisted planters in the extraction of labour on a day-to-day basis and supervised and controlled labour both at the workplace and in their dwelling places.

Each of the phases of plantation-based incorporation/accumulation held important connotations for long-term capital–labour relations, again with varying overlapping features, which could be summarised as follows: (i) origins – migration/mobilisation of plantation labour; (ii) disengaged, disciplined and settled workforce; (iii) patriarchal structures and labour processes – though the mobilisation for plantation employment helped to ‘free’ the agrarian labour force from ‘feudal’ bondage, life on the plantations often turned out to be another form of bondage, the workers being subjected to disciplining, punishment and ill-treatment; (iv) labour resistance both at the point of production and in the market place, all of these being integral to the world historical processes and (v) the birth of new modes of labour relations and global integration, with the established trade unions being confronted with a multiplicity of production relations, a weakening solidarity and the social-structural barriers put up by both world capitalist relations and local social structure.

Crucial to the true nature of global capitalism as typified by enclave plantations was the fact that every crisis in the metropolis was transferred to the labouring poor, whereas prosperity was never shared with the workers. The economic Depression of the 1930s, for instance, was passed onto the labourers who met with cuts in wages and large-scale retrenchment along with an intensification of labour: fewer workers were employed while the workload on each planting operation was greatly increased. On the other hand, the increased returns in terms of capital accumulation and repatriation of surplus seen in the post-Depression phase was reflected in the planter–worker relations but in the form of a reduced share, a trend that has been perpetuated in the current era of neo-liberal globalisation which we shall soon turn to.

9.1 New masters, old/new practices and strategies

The formal end of colonialism did not mark the exit of colonial capital in the tea sector, either in terms of the hegemony of global capital or in terms of workers’ subordination and their poor levels of subsistence, particularly in the early phase. Despite the fact that local capital operated in a position of subordinate integration with global capital, at least in history, it strove to prevent the latter from gaining further concentration in the planting sector. However, in the post-colonial phase too, local capital was sidelined with multinationals dominating the scene until the 1970s, after which they were replaced by pan-Indian capital. The planting companies in India in general, and those in south India in particular, witnessed three important changes since the 1970s, namely, the abolition of the managing agency system, the passing of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act in 1973 and imminent land reforms. But the tea companies were again accorded a preferential treatment, being considered on par with high-technology and export-oriented industries, for which a foreign participation of 74 per cent was allowed; they were also exempted from ceiling provisions, and all the tea companies continued to keep vast areas of land under their control, including fallow lands. Some of the foreign companies responded to the post-Independence developments by disengaging themselves from the State and migrating to other world

peripheries such as East Africa, while others continued to remain in the plantation sector until the early 1980s after which ownership passed largely into the hands of Indian big capital.

Following the post-1990s' neo-liberal regime, the tea industry was permitted 100 per cent FDI; the post-colonial bleeding process thus continues unabated.¹ However, it is now the pan-Indian corporate capital that dominates the plantation sector in south India, functioning in much the same manner as colonial capital: while the surplus drain continues with no evidence of reinvestments in the plantation sector, metropolitan crises are consistently transferred to the worker-families whose lives remain one of hardship and misery.

In recent years of neo-liberal globalisation, the tea plantations in India have been confronted with major challenges, all divergent yet interconnected within the larger world capitalist economy: the massive over-production and the subsequent accumulation of exported tea in the world market; the imposition of global and regional trade agreements; reconstitution of capital and shedding of unfavourable and addition of favourable nodes to the value chain; the continuing mis-governance of estates; and the transfer of the ensuing crisis in the larger tea economy onto the local labouring poor as a strategy/tactic to tide over the crisis. In terms of a response to the current recession capital – big and medium – and the small growers respond differently, depending on whether the plantations are run by corporate capital or individual proprietors, or as noted earlier, whether they are integrated across the nodes or not. Corporate capital have first of all resorted to a policy of labour rationalisation – lean production, broadly defined – under which the ultimate objective would be to introduce modern employment practices in this traditional sector. It would include voluntary retirement, the increasing employment of flexible labour, a further feminisation of the workforce, introduction of modern technology and so on. The mechanisation of almost all the planting operations – replanting, plucking and processing – has become widespread, particularly in the context of large-scale financial and fiscal support from the federal government and the Tea Board, in alliance with the various planters' associations. The automation of factories, conversion of CTC factories to orthodox systems and computerisation of offices have all been integral to this process; the move to shear plucking had been made to a limited extent around this period as well. This is in addition to an increase in workload intensification, in preference to immediate closure or retrenchment of workers. The worker families, who were the direct producers of the surplus often had to be content with declining share of wages in value added. Yet another step envisaged by corporate capital has been the de-linking of production and marketing in such a manner as to dissociate themselves from the management of plantations altogether, the classic case being the formation of Kanan Devan Hills Plantation Company Private Limited (KDHPCL) in 2005.

9.2 The politics of employee buyout: Birth of KDHPCL

In response to both the challenges and opportunities offered by neo-liberal globalisation, as well as regional politics, Tata Tea reconstituted its ownership and 'handed over' the world's single largest integrated plantations, spreading over 58,741.82 acres in Kerala, to its employees in what has come to be known as the world's biggest employee buyout. Tata has pursued similar strategies with respect to its north Indian plantation

operations in Assam and West Bengal. A critical enquiry into the dynamics of this transition, particularly in terms of the time, nature and composition of this transfer of ownership, reveals an arrangement that appears to be as much to the workers' advantage as it is to Tata Tea which is in contrast to most other employee buyout strategies.² However, it must be borne in mind that this particular case of an employee buyout applies to only 10–13 per cent of the plantation workforce in south India and a mere 1.6 per cent of the plantation workforce in India,³ which means that the great majority of plantation workers remain untouched by this new development.

It was in 2005, when world commodity prices, particularly that of tropical tea, began to plummet under the global trade regime in a drastic manner, that Tata Tea had ventured to unbundle or transfer its properties including all fixtures such as factories, offices and bungalows, to the newly floated company called the Kanan Devan Hills Plantation Company Private Limited (KDHPCL). It was also the time when corporate capital had come to realise that it was tea bags and instant tea that were high in demand in the fast expanding Western market. Tata also recognised that though opportunities abounded in the new era of globalisation, particularly with respect to new value-added forward integration, it was not without its own challenges. It has already capitalised on these opportunities through the acquisition of one of the world's largest tea companies, the UK-based Tetley, thus making its dominant presence felt in the world tea market; it has also made several acquisitions including Good Earth Corporation and the Eight O'Clock Coffee Co, both in the US and the Joekels Tea Packers Pvt Ltd in South Africa, JEMCA in the Czech Republic and so on as part of becoming a global branded beverage.

Owning vast tea empires in Kerala, West Bengal and Assam, Tata Tea has nevertheless been in a rather uncomfortable position with regard to governance strategies and its projected commitment to corporate social responsibility⁴ over the last decade or so. While it was challenged in Kerala for its alleged illegal occupation of state lands, which have always been under threat from this otherwise land-scarce state,⁵ in Assam, it was accused of funding militants, and of draining away the state's resources. Tata had originally planned to hand over all its assets in Kerala as well as in Assam to its workers; however, it did not give up its estates in Darjeeling and continued to capitalise on the brand name and the quality of Darjeeling tea. Tea sales from Kerala and Assam have suffered as a result of international competition and the influx of tea from Sri Lanka and Vietnam, while Darjeeling tea remains an uncontested brand; this probably explains Tata's reluctance to sever ties with the latter; Tata has also retained a few estates in Kerala and more importantly, its traditional brand name, 'Kanan Devan' while re-composing its properties in the state.

Whether the changed relations truly benefit the thousands of workers themselves – both in their role as 'owners' of the new company and as workers – remains to be seen as it is early days yet. However, it must be pointed out that Tata was not ready to part with the entire ownership as it continues to hold nearly one-fifth of the shares in the new venture. Though the workers who numbered nearly 13,000 and the salaried staff together hold 68 per cent of the total equity the distribution of equities has largely gone in favour of the latter. The remaining shares are almost equally distributed between yet another section of former Tata-Tea employees and a welfare trust, largely sponsored by the Tatas. In other words, the distribution of power in terms of ownership is still heavily in favour of the hegemonic classes. In raising the working capital too, Tata played the role of financial capitalist

by offering US\$ 7 million to the equities as loan with an interest of as high as 8.5 per cent; the remaining working capital was raised through the issue of new equities – US\$ 3 million from employees and US\$ 5.5 million from the commercial banks. While Tata is assured of the interest accruing from such a big loan and the dividends from its single largest equity, the amount that goes to the workers in the form of dividends – around 10 to 14 per cent as it declared over the last three years – would be marginal. Perhaps the most retrogressive part of the arrangement is the fact that most of the workers were forced to raise money through commercial loans to buy their share of the company stock; the expected benefits from the employee buy-out are thus likely to be on a much smaller scale than predicted.⁶

It is equally important to look at the new scenario in terms of the labour process and the exploitation of labour itself, including the self-exploitation implicit in the new arrangements. As a prelude to its strategies for self-preservation, Tata had succeeded in downsizing its labour force by offering voluntary retirement services to its salaried staff and workers a year before the transfer of 'ownership' and control. With a drastic cut in both the workforce and the managerial staff, the workload has intensified for the rest of the workers. This kind of lean production strategy would have not been possible if there had not been a change in ownership, given the fact that the trade unions would have objected to such further intensification of labour. With the new worker-owners who are fewer in number and themselves responsible for production, and the increased rate of shear plucking with productivity-linked incentives, KDHPCL has been in a position to reduce its cost of production of tea by increasing the average labour productivity by around 25-30 per cent⁷ resulting in profits for the new company and distribution of dividends. Though Tata is not bound by any agreement to buy produce from KDHPCL or vice versa, it is pointed out that a significant portion of the tea produced by the latter winds up in the hands of Tata Tea which in effect means the company would continue to acquire tea at a lower price from the farm gate. With the intensification of labour, the new company now produces tea at a lower cost which in turn allows Tata and also other multinationals to buy the tea at a low price. However, what is of significance here is that the buying concentration in the auction centres and the oligopolistic control of the world tea market would spell doom for many employee and co-operative ventures; the production segment commands the lowest profit margin and the retail segment the highest in the profit hierarchy along the value chain. Considering the heavy cost in terms of loss of work and the extra burden on the remaining workforce particularly under the new generation of managers, and with the trade unions being rendered virtually redundant, this margin of profit or the dividends cannot be considered noteworthy. The process of partial transfer of its property to multiple stakeholders including the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group, Infrastructure Leasing and Finance Services (ILFS) and Globally Managed Services (GMS) in the newly formed Amalgamated Plantations P Ltd for the estates of Assam and West Bengal presents an even more dismal picture, as Tata's global hegemonic forces retain the majority of the equities, leaving the workers with hardly 15–20 per cent.

This is not to undermine the potential of what Gramsci had imagined while arguing for workers' factory councils in 1919–20 when there was a massive displacement of labour by corporate entities.⁸ Workers' councils obviously would provide an answer to the neo-liberal agenda of world capitalism. While the reconstitution of Tata Tea with an ingredient of employee buy-out is a major event of contemporary importance as it

does provide a degree of flexibility to historical developments, it is too early to predict its potential to strengthen the transverse solidarity among and to define the economic and political rights of peripheral labour as a whole.

9.3 Capital deserts labour?

Very often the worker-families find themselves faced by 'closures', 'lock-outs' and the 'suspension of work' in estates run by regional and local capital and individual proprietary concerns, all to the effect of further weakening – socially, economically and politically – the bargaining power of the most crucial of nodes in the global commodity chain. Having siphoned off all available surplus, many of the pan-Indian and regional/local capital have shown a tendency towards the virtual 'abandonment' of their estates leaving the workers in the lurch, a trend that has been in evidence since colonial times. Further, globalisation and the structural adjustment programmes leave no room for the small and medium units of capital to wield any perceptible influence on the price, the net effect being that their private solutions remain confined to the cost component – massive displacement of labour, replacement of men by still cheaper women labour and the employment of a hire and fire form of flexible labour. It is but an irony of history that while the colonial period saw workers subjected to inhuman treatment for deserting the estates to escape the daily torture, it is now the small and medium sized capital/companies, who 'desert' their own estates, partly due to the onslaught of globalisation, including the regime restructuring from above, and partly as a result of divestment of whatever surplus is generated and their own mis-governance.

While some workers are expelled from the production process to form the neo-liberal reserve army of labour, others are converted into casual and readily disposable labour, and still others are retained as a gentrified labour force, thus weaving a new web of labour relations, one that is unfree, informal, disorganised and deproletarianised – the outcome of neo-liberal rationalities. Given the fact that the employment outside the plantation sector is weak and restricted, whatever little possibility exists is capitalised on: responding to an advertisement for unmarried teenage girls, women from one of the estates in Kerala have left either for distant shrimp processing or apparel factories to be caught up in yet another global commodity chain. There are often reports of these girls having returned to the estates on realising that they were further peripheralised in their new situation. After decades of settled life in the estates, the plantations are now left with a new generation of migrants destined to labour under ever unfavourable relations of power.

Having borne the brunt of the crisis, women in certain plantation peripheries have become sex workers;⁹ the emerging estate tourism in the high ranges, as part of neo-liberalism, provides tacit approval for the same. The high rates of suicides among women in the planting regions themselves are often attributed to many complex reasons including work pressure and sexual abuse at the work sites. The school drop-out rate is on the rise in the estates; children are driven towards hazardous jobs like quarrying in their struggle for existence; some children in the plantation belts of Kerala have sought refuge in schools in neighbouring Tamil Nadu leading to the virtual 'closure' of schools back home. As has already been pointed out, with the present crisis weighing most heavily on the worker-families, they seek 'redemption' in many ways, sometimes

even taking their own lives. Some workers on the closed and abandoned tea estates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu have committed suicide; numerous deaths due to starvation and malnutrition in the abandoned estates of south India, West Bengal and Assam have been reported in the media: the re-integration of India into the world economy has, in contrast to the liberal and the non-Marxist position, only further reduced the access of the subalterns to both the market as well as resources.

Yet, the worker-families, with their women at the forefront, continue to engage in resistance, too, in an attempt at stalling the transfer of ownership of closed estates and to press the State into action. In some other cases, the estates were first shared among the old and new unions which represented around three or four political parties¹⁰ with each union being then allotted a certain number of plants, or a certain part of the estate, which was then divided among the workers of that particular union. With the state expected to withdraw from the public sphere as part of the structural adjustment programme, the workers, particularly on the abandoned and closed estates, made attempts at forming 'estate committees', 'joint-action committees', 'garden committees', 'co-operative production units' and so on, broadly reminiscent of Gramscian workers' councils. Yet, the survival of such forms of livelihood, constituting a 'web of life',¹¹ is still determined by the dictates of global capitalism: it is not surprising to see the rejection of unbranded tea while global brands penetrate even to the remotest corners of the world market.

Contemporary plantation capitalism signifies a case wherein the worker gets 'deproletarianised', without winning the freedom either to withdraw from selling his/her labour/or to move away, even spatially, if he/she wishes to do so, there being hardly any possibility for an out-migration. Labour is thus constrained in its ability to commodify itself, both in and out of the immediate workplace, confronted by the challenges posed by a commodity chain, fashioned and operated by global capital through its myriad ways of production relations/strategies and practices of accumulation. It implies that the actually existing world capitalism has produced not only a relative but also an absolute immiserisation of the periphery, which once again proves Marx prophetic: deepening global capitalism drives the subalterns more and more peripherally. As opposed to the core production workers who are protected by secure wage relations, the 'neo-proletariat' in the world peripheries is characterised by flexibilised wage relations, increased wage dependence, welfare retrenchment, employment insecurity and fragmented identity. With the gradual conversion of the state – even those governed by social democratic regimes¹² – into an organ of neo-liberal change, the workers' interests are likely to be further marginalised and their multiple peripherality reproduced.

9.4 Subaltern solidarity: Resilience, collusion or capitulation?

Though the workers entered into a phase of class struggle backed by a momentous history of radical trade unionism in the late colonial phase and in the immediate post-Independence phase, especially in newly formed Kerala under Communist rule, this too ended up in class collaboration. The Party could not follow even a politics of class and remained trapped within the boundaries of the traditional social and political structure, constrained by social-institutional structures apart from the structural barriers of the capitalist workplace and the capitalist world economy. While the structural

location of labour in the capitalist world economy contributed to its positioning as a class in itself, the commonly assumed transition to being a class for itself could hardly be a linear process. The history of the trade union movement shows a general tendency to glorify trade unions for effecting this transition and to concomitantly despise the workers and the 'traditional social structures' for the belatedness of the same. Thus the question why the trade unions, rather than hastily pursuing the construction of a pure class organisation, did not perceive caste/community as a fact of Indian social life and hence did not try to build a militant subaltern consciousness which would have helped a better delivery of class objectives itself does not appear to have figured in the discussions.

That the workers were unable to wrest any degree of control over their own lives comes as no surprise, for, they were either led in their search for self-empowerment by the upper-caste/class/social sections or by the established political parties, both with their own shortcomings in terms of representation. Though belonging to different political camps, these leaders, by and large, belonged to the hegemonic castes both socially and economically and by that coin were all 'outsiders'. This gulf that separated the toiling masses from their elitist leaders inevitably led to a situation where, to quote Asok Sen: the culture of *homo heirarchicus* prevailed over the ideology of *homo equalis*,¹³ a fact that has not yet found recognition with the Communists. At times the situation deteriorated to one of an unspoken collaboration between the planters and the leaders of the workers – there were instances of certain leaders going on strike in accordance with the convenience of the planter class asking 'So, on what day do you want us to start the strike, Sir?'.¹⁴ This chasm of cultural disparity and the social distance between the political leaders and the masses they represent has only widened with time; many of its leaders belong to dominant social sections, to overcome this very real hurdle in the way of the development of a broad-based working class movement and their self-representation. The rules that are applicable to a class society thus become null and void in the Indian context where either caste rules over class or class and caste converge as in the case of the vast masses.

Further the trade union movement does not appear to have evolved any specific agenda regarding the gender specificities of the plantation working class, which was constituted mostly by women. It was not their sheer numbers alone by which these women could have given able support to the trade union movement; their potential for revolt would have greatly augmented the struggle against the capitalist forces, as evidenced by their involvement in various forms of protests. One Dalit woman even declared: 'these union leaders can afford to ignore our concerns, as they have always been so, as they all made enough during the heyday of plantations . . .'.¹⁵ She meant that even those from the political left treat them as comrades in terms of membership alone; as for the rest, including the question of collective empowerment, they adopt 'masculinist cultures';¹⁶ trade unions themselves have become 'greedy institutions'¹⁷ as has come to be the general pattern across the continents, and the majority of unions continue to be highly centralised and hierarchised with the leaderships barely concerned about the expectations of the worker-families. The social-institutional barriers in the way of self-representation in terms of non-class identities such as gender and caste still persist and capital (and the state) has succeeded in fragmenting the workers and bringing to nought a long tradition

of trade union politics in the plantations. Fragmented agents can only generate a fragmented politics and in this process, it is corporate capital and the neo-liberal state that stand to gain.

It is worth noting that some sections of the workers have resorted to radical trade unionism evoking new imageries of solidarity and protests, but, such events have been witnessed largely in the north-eastern plantations. In West Bengal wherein the communist regime has put the colonial masters to shame – the recent starvation deaths in the estates of Jalpaiguri have no parallels in history – there are signs of a building up of solidarity among the equally oppressed working classes across production segments. Yet another imaginative movement was initiated by the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA), which launched a series of agitations in early 2006 demanding drastic alterations in welfare and power relations.¹⁸ Such signs are not seen in the Indian south, save a few, wherein the regeneration of a combined Dalit politics with the resilience of new social trade unionism spreads the message that the articulation of material interests in terms of identity signifies something far more than 'false consciousness' as it is often portrayed.

The Left would do well to view caste/race/ethnicity/gender as a binding factor rather than a deterrent in the way of the realisation of an identity among the workers. This is amply borne out by peasant and working class history the world over, wherein many instances of a community consciousness moulded through the agency of religion, race and caste may be seen. Available evidence, however, suggests that the plantations by and large remained exempt from workers' protests exclusively articulated on the basis of such primordial ties and loyalties. Ironically, the Dalit leaders, too, had their own preoccupations, concentrating their efforts solely on the liberation of their people from the oppression of a caste-ridden society; the political-social reform movements that otherwise kindled the hopes of carving an identity from among those whose forefathers had only a few decades back been slaves did not have any radical socio-political dimension among the plantation workers, rather it seemed indifferent to the abject exploitation of the workers under neo-liberal conditions. Had there been a concerted effort on the part of such progressive forces to link up directly with such plucked-out groups, the plantation-based Dalit social/political formations would have sufficiently radicalised to the effect that not only their immediate material interests were met but also the larger political concerns were addressed. It also implies that any agenda for the renewal of solidarity and 'agency' in the plantations should address not only the structural barriers imposed by the capitalist world economy but also the barriers from within as related to the locally specific structural-institutional constraints. Perhaps the greatest failing on the part of the workers' unions and the mainstream political organisations has been their inability to capitalise enough on the resilience of the Dalit landless workers and other marginalised social sections – who have launched new forms of movements – to construct a transverse solidarity, all of whom share a common social identity in terms of caste, resources and power.

Strikingly hierarchised and gendered, embedded within the larger capitalist world economy and caught between a caste-ridden, gender-biased trade unionism and the Indian replicas of the shorts-clad European planters, the plantation worker-families have now reached an impasse. In place of a strengthening democratic system and an improvement in the levels of living, what is apparent is an accentuation and further

immiserisation of the peripheries, with each worker becoming increasingly trapped within the global commodity chain. Yet, the struggle by plantation worker-families to renew agency through transverse solidarity continues to smoulder, even as they continue to pluck grief in the tea gardens of south India. Critical scholarship is gradually awakening to the truth that the *commodity chain trap* ensnares not just plantation workers but peripheral labour the world over.

Glossary

A. Glossary of the names of places*

Colonial Diction

Local diction is used in the text

Anaimalais
Ashambo hills
Beypore
Calicut
Cape Comerin
Coorg
Ceylon
Mahe
Nilgiris
Pirmedi
Quilon
Ramnad
Salem
Shencottai
Shevaroy hills
South Canara
Tellicherry
Tuticorin
Tinnelveli
Travancore
Trichinoppalli
Wynad

Local Diction

Anaimalai
Asambumalai
Beppur
Kozhikode
Kanyakumari
Kodagu
Sri Lanka
Mayyazhi
Nilgiri
Peerumedu
Kollam
Ramanathapuram
Selam
Sengottai
Servarayan hills
Dakshin Kanara
Thalasseri
Thoothukudi
Thirunelveli
Thiruvithamkur
Thiruchirappalli
Wayanad

*While the colonial and local dictions are interchangeable, we have largely employed the latter in the text except where quotes appear.

B. Glossary of Terms

adi-Dravidas	formerly known as Panchamar/low caste (now scheduled caste)
Ayyankar	honorific title of Tamil Brahmins of the vaishnavite sect
beedi	indigenous cigarette

<i>chaturvarna</i>	the Hindu classical division of society into the four <i>varna</i> orders, viz. <i>Brahmins</i> , <i>Kshatriyas</i> , <i>Vaisyas</i> and <i>Sudras</i>
chettiyar	honorific title adopted usually by trading caste
ganja	narcotic
jati	endogamous caste groups
jenmi	landlord in Malabar
kanji	thin porridge made of rice
kapu	low-caste, cowherds in Telugu village
khadi	handwoven cloth and symbol of Indian nationalism
maistry	foreman/contractor
nambudiris	the indigenous Brahmin of the west coast
nair	the predominant upper Hindu caste
pallar	low caste/tillers of the soil
paniyal	field labourer
pulayas	agricultural slave caste in Malabar (now scheduled caste)
ragi	an important cereal crop
ryot	cultivator/small peasant
shandy	local market generally held once a week (<i>Sandhai</i> in Tamil, <i>Chantha</i> in Malayalam)
sirkar	the state
tahsildar	a revenue officer in charge of a taluk
taluk	subdivision of district
varna	the Hindu classical division of society into four orders, viz. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras
vellalas	agricultural/trader class in Tamil country
<i>savarnas</i>	caste-Hindus
<i>zamindar</i>	landlord/land holder

C. Glossary of Currency with Conversion Rates

anna	previously used British coin
British Rupee (Rs)	16 anna = 1 rupee
British Pound (£)	20 shilling = 240 pence
chukram	previously used Thiruvithamkur rupee; 1 chukram = 6.74 pie; 28.5 chukram = 1 rupee
pence	British pound
pie/paisa (ps)	British rupee = 1/12 of an anna

Notes

Chapter 1

- 1 With an epistemological emphasis on the rescue and expression of hitherto silenced/ ignored/subordinated/excluded forms of ideological utterance, the SS had made an impressive start in the early 80s, critiquing the master narrative of history and thereby national historiography itself. Simultaneously engaging with working class history and drawing insights from Gramsci, it is argued that subordinated people do not experience their life passively, but rather negotiate their positions in society, acting autonomously, and not being led by any non-subaltern elite group. See the 12-volume *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–2002, first six edited by Ranajit Guha, 7th volume by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, the 8th by David Arnold and David Hardiman, 9th by Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 10th by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu, 11th by Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jaganathan and the 12th by Shail Mayaram, MSS Pandian and Ajay Skaria, the latter published by Permanent Black and Ravi Dayal, New Delhi, 2005; also see Guha, R., *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983. For an impressive collection of early and late critiques of the SS, see David Ludden, *Reading subaltern studies: critical history, contested meaning and the globalization of South Asia*, London: Anthem, 2002.
- 2 It was in the context of a renewed interest in development processes in the post-Second World War phase that the economic and political implications of the development of industrial capitalism in Europe for regions outside it received scholarly attention. Maurice Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946), Baran's *Political Economy of Growth*, published in 1957, and later with Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital* (1968), opened an exciting world of debate on the question of development in the peripheries which was later theorised by the *Dependency School* as the 'development of underdevelopment', see Frank, A. G. *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971. Also see Amin, S. *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, trans. Brian Pearce, 2 Vols, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974. With the elaboration of the Frank-Sweezy conceptualisation, the WS perspective has laid bare this process of an expanding capitalist world economy characterised by an axial division of labour with the differential specificity of ceaseless accumulation. The uneven impacts are characterised by the core and its peripheries and those states/nations/social classes which dominate the world economy are termed hegemonic. For major contributions see particularly Wallerstein, I. *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York: Academic Press, 1976; *The Capitalist World-Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750*, New York: Academic Press,

- 1980; *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840s*, New York: Academic Press, 1988; Chase-Dunn, C. and Hall, T. D. *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems*, London: Westview Press, 1997; Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills. (Eds) *The world system: five hundred years or five thousand?*, London: Routledge, 1993. Wallerstein positions himself in the context of the recent upsurge in WS scholarship, see Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World-Systems Analysis', *Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, 1998, pp. 103-12.
- 3 The most 'impure' among the untouchable castes/*varnas* – the present-day Scheduled Castes/Tribes and the 'depressed classes' of the colonial Censuses – are now often referred to as the Dalits; the word, originating in the Hebrew, means 'crushed' or oppressed. In India, caste, *jati*, forms the basis of social stratification with its basic tenet of a social division of labour and hierarchy combined with an inequity in power and wealth. The religious notion of hierarchy embodied in the *chaturvarnya*, the four *varnas* of *Brahmin*, *Kshathriya*, *Vaisya* and *Shudra*, under the hegemonical frame of brahminism/Hinduism, and those outside the *varna* order, broadly the *adivasis*, the Dalits and the other backward communities or the OBCs, represent the Hindu caste system. The Dalits form the lowest of the low in the hierarchical order and those above them yet outside the *chaturvarnya* belong to the other backward communities. Among the extensive literature that deals with the caste system in India, see particularly Dumont, L. *Homo Hierarchicus*, London: Paladin, 1972; Weber, M. *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, trans. by Gerth, H. and Martin Dale, D. 1958, reprinted, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996; Leach, E. R. *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan* (hereafter *Aspects of Caste*), London: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Ambedkar, B. R. [The] *Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*, New Delhi: Amrit Book Co, 1948. For recent articulations, see Robb, P. (Ed.) *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993; Bayly, S. *Caste, Society and Politics in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Ilaiah, K. *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, Calcutta: Samya, 1996; Fuller, C. J. *Caste Today*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Dirks, N. B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001; Shah, G. (Ed.) *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*, New Delhi: Sage, 2001; Thorat, S. and Umakant (Eds) *Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context*, New Delhi: Rawat, 2004.
 - 4 *Transverse Solidarity* (TS) as explored here denotes a collective agency amid the social realm of differences and implies shared subject positions across production segments and workplaces largely based on and akin to what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call 'chains of equivalence'. Yet, we prefer to use the term TS as we find the Laclavian notion of *equivalence* limiting in certain ways. For instance, the notion of *equivalence* suggests the state of being equal in value, function and meaning which may not be a realistic assumption at all historical junctures; further, it undermines the possibilities and limits of solidarities and homogenises them despite their varying trajectories towards a collective ideology, see Ravi Raman, K., 'Transverse Solidarity: Water, Power and Resistance' (hereafter *Transverse Solidarity*), *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2010, forthcoming; Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985. While the constituents of TS represent the oppressed and the marginalized as in Hardt, M. and Negri, A. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Penguin: New York, 2004, TS as conceived here does not 'assume away the state', see Corbridge, S. 'Countering Empire', *Antipode*, 2003, pp. 184-9; Kapferer, B. 'New formations of power, the oligarchic-corporate state, and anthropological ideological discourse', *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2005, pp. 285-99.

- 5 Relevant here is the critique offered by Arif Dirlik that the SS represent the Indian historiography of the 1970s when it was spearheaded by social historians such as E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, see Dirlik, A. *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Boulder, Co., Westview Press, 1997. Chakrabarty, however, argues that Dirlik 'misjudges' the scenario, see Chakrabarty, D. *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 3–37.
- 6 To quote Anderson:

Their significance – especially that of the French Revolution – is incomparably greater for the political formation of the English working class, than say, popular attitudes towards crime. . . . An apparent procedural bias excludes them: since social revolutions abroad cannot be entered as self-activity of the working class in England, they fall outside the historical accounting given of these years.

Arguments within English Marxism, London: Verso, 1976, pp. 36–37.
- 7 See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977; *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985 and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. Also see the contributions, In *Focus: Moral Economies, State Spaces, and Categorical Violence: Anthropological Engagements with the Work of James Scott*, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 107, No. 3, 2005 and particularly the articles by Sivaramakrishnan, K., 'Some Intellectual Genealogies for the Concept of Everyday Resistance', pp. 346–55 and Marc Edelman, 'Bringing the moral Economy back in . . . to the Study of 21st Century Transnational Peasant Movements', 331–45.
- 8 For an extensive critique from varying positions, see Timothy Mitchell, 'Everyday Metaphors of Power', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 19, 1991, pp. 545–77; Brass, T. 'Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the, Re-Emergence of a, Post-, Modernized Middle Peasant', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1991, pp. 173–205.
- 9 Chakrabarty, D. *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- 10 See O'Hanlon, R. and Washbrook, D. 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 34, No. 1, January 1992, p. 166 (pp. 141–67); Washbrook, D. 'Orientalism and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Eds. R. W. Winks and A. Low, Vol. 5, *Historiography*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 596–611, 1999; also see Vinay Lal, 'Subalterns in the Academy: The Hegemony of History' in *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 186–230; Brass, T. 'Moral Economists, Subalterns, New Social Movements and the (Re-)Emergence of a (Post-)Modernized (Middle) Peasant', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1991, pp. 173–205; Brass, T. *Peasant, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth*, London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers.
- 11 For a detailed and cogent survey of the critique, see Bahl, V. 'Relevance, or Irrelevance of Subaltern Studies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 3, 7 June 1997, pp. 1333–44; 'Situating and Rethinking Subaltern Studies for Writing Working Class History', in *History after the Three Worlds: Post-Eurocentric Historiographies*, Eds A. Dirlik, V. Bahl and P. Gran, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000.
- 12 For a powerful articulation of this perspective, see Roy T, *Rethinking Economic Change in India: Labour and Livelihood*, Routledge London, 2005, pp.165–77.
- 13 See Bergquist, C. (Ed.), *Labour in the Capitalist World-Economy*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984; Silver, B. J. 'Labour Unrest and World-Systems Analysis: Premises,

- Concepts, and Measurement', *Review*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Winter 1995, pp. 7–34; Wallerstein, I. (Ed.) *Labor in the World Social Structure*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1983.
- 14 Wallerstein's world-system perspective had earlier been generated a fresh debate on the transition of feudalism to world capitalism, and emphasizes the primacy of exchange relations versus production relations, referring to them as neo-Smithian, see Brenner, R., 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in pre-Industrial Europe,' *Past and Present* No. 70 (Feb. 1976), pp. 30–74, and 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism,' *New Left Review*, July–Aug 1977, pp. 25–92; Paul M Sweezy, Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Georges Lefebvre, Kohachiro Takahashi, Giuliano Procacci, John Merrington, Eric Hobsbawm (introduction: Rodney Hilton)(Eds) *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, London: New Left Books, 1978.
 - 15 Silver, B. J. *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization Since 1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; for a critical appraisal, see Moody, K. 'Workers of the World', *New Left Review*, Vol. 27, May–June 2004.
 - 16 For a critical intervention focusing on the question of gender and caste, issues which have of late begun to be incorporated, see Spivak, G. C. 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' in Ed. R. Guha, *SS IV*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 330–63; 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Eds Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, London: Macmillan 1988, pp. 271–313. Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1), 1988, pp. 189–224; Bagchi, A. K. 'Working Class Consciousness', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 July 1996; Ilaiah, K. 'Productive Labour, Consciousness and History: The Dalitbahujan Alternative' in *Subaltern Studies*, Eds S. Amin and D. Chakrabarty, Vol. 9, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 165–200, 1996.
 - 17 See Ward, K. 'Reconceptualising World-System Theory to Include Women', in *Theory on Feminism/Feminism on Theory*, Ed. P. England, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, pp. 43–68, 1993; but there are exceptions, see Forsythe, A. E. and Poberto, 'Gender Relations in the World Economy: Competition in the Textile Industry, 1850–1900', in *Racism, Sexism, and the World System*, Eds Joan Smith et al., New York: Greenwood, 1988, pp. 64–89, 1988; for a recent analysis, see Dunaway, W. A. 'The Double Register of History: Situating the Forgotten Woman and Her Household in Capitalist Commodity Chains', *Journal of World-systems Research*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 2–29.
 - 18 See Martin, W. J. 'Still Partners and Still Dissident After All These Years? Wallerstein, World Revolutions, and the World-System Perspective', *Journal of World-Systems Analysis*, Vol. 3, Summer/Fall, 2000, pp. 234–63.
 - 19 A large number of studies have been inspired by Braverman's intervention on labour process and much advancement has been made in the exploration of the modes of control and labour under capital, see Braverman, H. *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*; foreword by Paul M. Sweezy, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974; Social Structures of Accumulation School originally led by David Gordon and Michael Reich in 1982 has explored a wide variety of control and coercion in varying work practices, see Gordon, D. M., Weisskopf, T. E. and Bowles, S. *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labour in the United States*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982.; Kotz, D. M., McDonough, T. and Reich, M. *Social Structures of Accumulation: The Political Economy of Growth and Crisis*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994; also see Barbara Harriss-White, *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
 - 20 Striffler, S. and Moberg, M. (Eds) *Banana Wars: Power, Production, and History in the Americas*, London: Duke University Press, 2003; also see Ortiz, S. 'Laboring in the Factories and in the Fields', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31, 2002, pp. 395–417.

- 21 Griffiths, D. Kissam, E. *Working Poor: Farmworkers in the United States*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995; Flink, D. *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the rural Midwest*, Chapel Hill: University N. C. Press, 1998.
- 22 For a discussion see, Ortiz, op. cit; Nash, J., *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- 23 For details, see Chakrabarty, L. 'Emergence of an Industrial Labour in a Dual Economy, British India, 1882—1920', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, No. 3, 1978, pp. 249—328.
- 24 See Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (translated from the French version by Alan Sheridan), London: Penguin Books, 1977, pp. 135—230.
- 25 Also see Thompson, E. P. 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in *Essays in Social History*, Eds. M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout, London: Clarendon Press, pp. 39—77, 1974, originally published in *Past and Present*, 37, 1967, pp. 56—97.
- 26 For a theoretical-empirical exploration see Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History* op. cit.; for a detailed empirical understanding, see Behal, R. P. 'Power Structure, Discipline, and Labour in Assam Tea Plantations Under Colonial Rule', *IRSH*, Vol. 51, 2006, pp. 143—72.
- 27 Parthasarathi, P. 'The State of Indian Social History', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2003, pp. 47—54.
- 28 Sarkar, S. 'The Decline of the Subaltern in *Subaltern Studies*', in *Writing Social History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 82—108; Ahmad, A. in *Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London: Verso, 1992. Vinay Lal, 'Subalterns in the Academy: The Hegemony of History' in *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 186—230.
- 29 Ghosh, K. 'Between Global Flows and Local Dams: Indigeness, Locality, and the Transnational Sphere in Jharkhand, India', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2006, pp. 501—34. While the larger history of developmentalism in both the colonial and post-colonial phases witnessed multiple displacements and 'violent repressions' by the state as one of its most contested phenomena, Chatterjee's premises on an 'alternate modernity' became questionable for Ghosh; he also extends his argument to yet another scholar, Tania Li, whose 'version of governmentality makes invisible the memories and contemporary acts of coercion' as is the case with Chatterjee; see Li, T. 'Beyond the State and "Failed" Schemes', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 107, No. 3, pp. 383—94.
- 30 For one such recent struggle against the state and corporate capital, see Raman, K. R. 'Transverse Solidarity', op cit.; also see fn 4 above.
- 31 A proliferation of studies on 'resistance and hegemony which came to monopolise the anthropological imagination' celebrating 'ethnographies of everyday resistance' began to illuminate the worker-community resistance by the late 1980s and early 1990s, taking into account both cultural artifacts and the material dimensions of counter discourses expressed through negotiation and resistance; see Mallon, F. E. 'The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 99 No. 5, 1994, pp. 1491—515; also see Ed. Ileana Rodriguez, *The Latin American Studies Reader*, Durham and London: The Duke University Press, 2001.
- 32 Ranger, T. 'Power, Religion and Community: The Matobo Case' in *Subaltern Studies VII*, Eds P. Chatterjee and G. Pandey, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 221—46, 1993; Cooper, F. 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African history', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 95, pp. 1516—45.
- 33 See Berry, S. *No Condition is Permanent*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, p. 13; also see Hall, S. 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', in *Culture, Globalization and the World-system*, Ed. A. D. King, Binghamton: State University of New York Press, pp. 41—68, 1991; A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (Eds) *Culture, Power, Place*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997; Mitchell, 'Everyday Metaphors of Power' op. cit., Comaroff, J. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.

- 34 Beverley, J. *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 166, 1999.
- 35 Ravi Raman, K., 'Of Peripheral Labour: Trajectories of Dalit Labour in the Plantations in Southern India', *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, Vol 47, No. 3, 2004.
- 36 While a detailed review of the development of the Indian labour history and other major works are seen in Bhattacharya, S. 'Introduction', in *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*, Eds. Rana P. Behal and Marcel van der Linden, Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, (earlier published as supplement to *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 51, 2006), pp. 7–19, the readers are particularly directed to look at the following works: Sen, S. 'Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal', *Gender and History*, Vol. 5, 1993, pp. 269–301; Sen, S. *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Basu, A. *Two Faces of Protests: Contrasting Modes of Women's Activism*, Berkeley, CA, 1992; Fernandes, L. *Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills*, Philadelphia, PA, 1997; see de Haan, A. *Unsettled Settlers: Migrant Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Calcutta*, Hilversum, 1994.
- 37 See S. Bhattacharya, op. cit.; see particularly, van der Linden, M. 'Editorial', *IRSH*, Supplement 1, 1993, pp. 163–73; Katznelson, I. 'The Bourgeois' Dimensions: A Provocation about Institutions, Politics, and the Future of Labour History', *International Labour and Working Class History*, Vol. 46, 1994, pp. 7–32.
- 38 See van der Linden, M. 'Global Labor History and "the Modern World-System": Thoughts at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fernand Braudel Centre', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 46, 2001, pp. 423–59.
- 39 S. Bhattacharya, op. cit.; Willem van Schendel, 'Stretching labour Historiography: Pointers from South Asia' in Behal and Linden op. cit., pp. 229–61.
- 40 For a critical appraisal of Guha's usage and also its position in a larger political perspective, see Beverley, op. cit., pp. 87–92.
- 41 John J. Stuhr, *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience, and Community*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. ix.
- 42 Two major studies on labour in India taking into account the world capitalist economy are Chandavarkar, R. *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and The State in India, c. 1850–1950*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 and Joshi, C. *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories*, London: Anthem, 2005; also see Bhattacharya, S. 'International Flows of Unfree Labour', in *Globalization under Hegemony: the Changing World Economy*, Ed. K. S. Jomo, New Delhi, 2006.
- 43 Political geographers, largely inspired by the work of Harvey, 1989, advanced the notion of spatialities and its relevance, particularly in understanding the social structures of accumulation; see Roseberry, W. 'Understanding Capitalism – Historically, Structurally, Spatially' in *Locating Capitalism in Time and Space*, Ed. D. Nugent, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 61–79, 2002; also see Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, op. cit.
- 44 See Boles, E. E. 'Critiques of World-Systems Analysis and Alternatives: Unequal Exchange and Three Forms of Class Struggle in the Japan-US Silk Network, 1880–1890', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Vol. VIII, No. 11, pp. 150–212, Spring 2002; D. Tomich, 'World of Capital/Worlds of Labor: A Global Perspective' in *Reworking Class*, John R. Hall (Ed), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- 45 See William Roseberry, *Anthropologies of Histories, Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989; Philip McMichael, 'World-Systems Analysis, Globalization, and Incorporated Comparison', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Special Issue: Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein - Part 11, Vol. VI, No. 3, Fall/Winter, 2000; For an early critique opening up the debate from a historical-anthropologist, see Sidney W. Mintz, 'The So-called World System: Local Initiative and Local Response', *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 2, pp. 253–70, 1977.

- 46 The relationship between capitalism and slavery has been explored extensively in Genovese, E. D. *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (hereafter *The World the Slaves Made*), London: Andre Deutsch, 1975 and *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966. In contrast to the slave-based production in the Atlantic plantations, the plantations in India sourced wage labour. It is possible to emphasise a creation of different kinds of wage workers with the advent of colonialism in several forms of 'unfree labour' without discounting the possible existence of wage workers during the pre-colonial days. Further, 'free' and 'unfree' forms of labour do constitute the world capitalist economy in historically specific situations, see Wallerstein, I. *The Capitalist World-Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 149.
- 47 See Ann L. Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1985; Breman, J. *Taming the Coolie Beast: The Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in South East Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- 48 For contrasting views, and also for a comparative analysis of capitalist production processes, see Miles, R. T. *Capitalism and Unfree Labour: Anomaly or Necessity?*, London: Tavistock Publications, 1987.
- 49 Prakash, G. 'Colonialism, Capitalism and the Discourse of Freedom' in Amin and van der Linden, op. cit., pp. 9–25.
- 50 There is extensive literature on patriarchy and capitalism, and for the initial path-breaking analysis, see Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism', *Capital and Class*, No. 8, Summer 1979; Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, London, Zed, 1986; for 'class-patriarchal relations' within the world-system analysis, see Boles, E. E. 'Critiques of World-Systems', op. cit.
- 51 The continuing debates and the expanding literature confirms this notion of 'changeability', but for an understanding of who it benefits and how capitalist practices continue to gain out of such changes, see Patnaik, U. and Dingwaney, M. (Eds) *Chains of Servitude; Bondage and Slavery in India*, Madras: Sangam Books, 1985; Ramachandran, V. K. *Wage labour and Unfreedom in Agriculture: An Indian Case Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990; also see ref 72.
- 52 Parry, J. 'Introduction', in *The Worlds of Indian Labour*, Eds J. Parry, J. Breman and K. Kapadia, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999.
- 53 Hopkins, T. K. and Wallerstein, I. 'Commodity Chains in the World Economy Prior to 1800', *Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1986.
- 54 Gereffi, G. and Korzeniewicz, M. 'Commodity Chains and Footwear Exports in the Semiperiphery', in *Semiperipheral States in the World Economy*, Ed. W. G. Martin, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1990; also see Gereffi, G. and Korzeniewicz, M. (Eds) *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994; Gereffi, G., 'and R. Kaplinsky (Eds) *The Value of Value Chain: Spreading the Gains from Globalisation*, Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex; Gereffi, G. 'International Trade and Industrial Up-Grading in the Apparel Commodity Chain', *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 1999, pp. 37–70. See the various commodity-centred studies as follows: Kaplinsky, R. *Globalisation and Trade Policy Reform: Whither the Automobile Components Sector in South Africa*, Institute of Development Studies, 1999; Lee, Naeyound and Jeffrey Cason, 'Automobile Commodity Chains in the NICs: A comparison of South Korea, Mexico and Brazil' in Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, op. cit.; Rabat, E. and Eun Mee, 'Where is the Chain in Commodity Chains? The Service Sector Nexus', in Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994, op. cit.; Raikes, P., Michael, F. and Stephano, P. 'Global Commodity Chain Analysis and the French Filiere Approach: Comparison and Critique', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2000, pp. 390–417; Rammohan, K. T. and Sundaresan, R. 'Socially Embedding the Commodity Chain: An

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- 55 Gibbon, P. 'Upgrading primary production: A Global Commodity Chain Approach', *World Development*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2001, pp. 345–63.
 - 56 Henderson, J., Dicken, P., Hess, M., Coe, N. and Wai-Chung Yeung, H. 'Global Production Networks and the Analysis of Economic Development', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 2002, pp. 436–64.
 - 57 Bernstein, H. and Campling, L. 'Commodity Studies and Commodity Fetishism 1: Trading Down' and 'Commodity Studies and Commodity Fetishism 11: 'Profits with Principles'? *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 6, No. 2 and 3, April and July 2006, pp. 239–64 and 414–47 respectively; Dolan, Catherine and Kirsty Sutherland, 2002, 'Gender and Employment in the Kenya Horticulture Value Chain'. <http://www.gapresearch.org/production/FinalDraft.pdf>.
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 - 59 The social embeddedness of global commodity chain was explicit in the original proponents of the commodity chain concept, Gereffi *et al.*, op. cit., and for them the networks involved are 'situationally specific, socially constructed, and locally integrated, underscoring the social embeddedness of economic organization'. In the context of business networks, Granovetter, 1985, has argued much earlier that the economic activity is embedded in social relationships in each society; for an explicit case of 'socially embedding the commodity chain', see, Rammohan and Sundaresan, op. cit.
 - 60 The mobility implied here consists of all forms of mobility – vertical, horizontal and spatial. By vertical mobility, we mean a change in both social and economic status, horizontal mobility implies a change in occupation alone without any change in social status and spatial mobility implies a change in location with or without change in status.

- 61 See Ravi Raman, K. 'Commodity Chain Trap? Struggling Lives in Kerala's Tea Plantations', in *Industrial Economy: Nodes and Linkages, CUSAT*, Eds Rajasenan and G. de Groot, Cochin, pp. 125–48, 2006. Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the *International Labour History Conference*, VVGNLI, New Delhi, 18–20 March 2004 and at the School of Management, University of Kochi, 2003.
- 62 This often synchronises with the Kondratief waves, implying that the capitalist world economy alternated between periods of high and low sectoral growth with consequent up-swings and down-swings every 50–60 years. Nikolai Dmitriyevich Kondratiev, 1892–1938, was a Russian economist who observed such trends; see his book *The Major Economic Cycles*, 1925, alongside other works written in the same decade. J. van Gelderen, 1891–1940, and Samuel de Wolff, two Dutch scholars had made the same observation in 1913. Kondratiev's ideas were taken up by Joseph Schumpeter in the 1930s and extensively adopted by the world system theorists explaining why capitalist economies have these long waves which in turn was explained in terms of technological innovations, capital investment, war and capitalist crises. There has been a renewed interest in K-wave studies because it appears that the present global crisis is but a repetition of the crisis of the 1930s, as it is true with respect to finance, credit and a host of primary commodities including tea.
- 63 See Moody, K. *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, London: Verso Books, 1988; *Workers in a Lean World*, op. cit.; The usage 'lean production' broadly refers to a 'constant process of stretching one phase of production to the breaking point by reducing the number of workers and/or the mass of materials available, and then recalcitrating the other phases of production process', all meant to reduce resources, including labour, to produce a given product/service, see Moody, K. *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, London: Verso, 1997. For earlier conceptualizations and empirical works, see Price, J. 'Lean Production at Suzuki and Toyota: Historical Perspective' in *Lean Work: Empowerment and Exploitation in the Global Auto Industry*, Ed. S. Babson, Detroit: Wayne State University, 1995; Parker, M. and Slaughter, J. *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participating Programs and Reengineering*, Detroit, Labor Notes, 1994, pp. 67–90.
- 64 See Bernstein, H. 'Land Reform in Southern Africa in World-Historical Perspective', *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 96, pp. 203–26; also see Ricardo Antunes, op. cit.
- 65 Ravi Raman, *Transverse Solidarity*, op. cit.
- 66 Also see Moody, op. cit.; see Ricardo Antunes, op. cit., pp. 117–29.
- 67 Gorz, A. *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, London: Pluto Press, 1982, pp. 66–74, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage Based Society*, London: Blackwell, 1999; also see Negri, A. *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, London: Polity, 1989.
- 68 Jan Breman, *Footloose Labour: Working in India's Informal Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; for a review, see K.P. Kannan and K. Ravi Raman, "Neither Here nor there? Informal Sector Labour", *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, August – September, 1998.
- 69 See particularly, Brass, T. *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree labour*, op. cit.
- 70 Harvey, D. *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. This is equivalent to what Marx describes as the disposable industrial army of labour; for the relevance of the concept to present day neo-liberal globalization, and for a detailed critical appraisal of Harvey, see Arrighi, G. 'Hegemony Unravelling', *New Left Review*, 2 parts, Vol. 32, March–April 2005.
- 71 Notwithstanding the fact that there have been changes taking place in the nature of assets and forms of exploitation, contemporary scholarship on the present era of globalization hardly distinguishes between old and new imperialism as that of

- Britain and the United States. To quote Harvey, 'The American bourgeoisie has, in short, rediscovered what the British bourgeoisie discovered in the last three decades of the nineteenth century . . .'. If this is so, then the 'new imperialism' appears as nothing more than the revisiting of the old, though in a different place and time; see *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; also see Petras, J. and Veltmeyer, H. *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century*, London: Zed Books, 2001; Magdoff, H. *Age of Imperialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969; *Imperialism without Colonies*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003; Hoogvelt, A. *Globalization and the Postcolonial World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001; Castells, M. *End of Millennium*, Blackwell, 1998; Held, D. and McGrew, A. *Globalization/Anti-Globalization*, Oxford: Polity, 2002, pp. 82–3; Krasner, S. D. *Structural Conflict: The Third World Against Global Liberalism*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- 72 In contrast to the view that unfree labour relations reflect underdeveloped labour markets and/or conjoint exploitation in interlocked markets and an incomplete transition to the capitalist mode of production, Brass, in a series of interventions, takes the view that they are compatible with capitalism, comprising part of the capitalists' assault on the autonomy and wages of labour; see Brass, T. 'Class Struggle and Deproletarianisation of Agricultural Labour in Haryana, India' in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1990, pp. 36–67; Brass, T. 'Unfree Labour and Agrarian Change: A Different View,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 April 1995, pp. 697–9; 'Some Observations on Unfree Labour, Capitalist Restructuring and Deproletarianisation' in *Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues*, Eds Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, Bern: Peter Lang Academic Publishers, 1997, pp. 57–76; Brass, T. *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates*, London: Frank Cass, 1999; Brass, T. and Bernstein, H. 'Introduction: Proletarianisation and Deproletarianisation on the Colonial Plantations' in *Plantations, Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia*, Eds E. Valentine Daniel, T. Brass and H. Bernstein, London: Frank Cass, pp. 1–40, 1992. Amin and van der Linden (see S. Amin and M. van der Linden, Eds, 'Peripheral Labour? Studies in the History of Partial Proletarianization', *International Review of Social History*, Suppl. 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) explore a range of intermediate situations in the 'grey zones' to locate peripheral labour. Jan Breman through his conception of neo-bondage not only marks the intermediate state between free and unfree labour, but also asserts that there is a rise in the latter which is quite compatible with capitalist practice; see *Footloose Labour* op. cit. For an early debate on labour relations on plantations, see Sidney Mintz, 'Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?', *Review*, 2, No.1, pp. 81–98; Paula Beignelman, 'The Destruction of Modern Slavery: A Theoretical Issue', *Review*, 2, No.1, pp. 71–80. Also see Ortiz, op. cit; with special reference to south Asia, see Willem van Schendel, op. cit.
- 73 While institutionalists and Marxists, by-and-large, viewed the origin of wage labour in India as the creation of British colonialism, the alternative view does not exclude the existence of wage labour even during the pre-colonial days, along with slave labour, and/or puts emphasis on the basic characteristic identity of slavery as partially commoditised labour and wage labour yet in several unfree forms. For a discussion of the contrasting views, see Prakash, G. 'Introduction: The History and Historiography of Rural Labourers in Colonial India' in *The World of the Rural Labourer in Colonial India*, Ed. Prakash, G., Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–46, 1992. These views only apparently conflict each other.
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- 75 To quote Ferguson, 'New times bring new dangers, and new dangers require new tools for critical analysis', see Ferguson, J. 'Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 107, No. 3, 2005, p. 381.
- 76 Allen, M. J. '*Contested Peripheries*': *Philistia in the Neo-Assyrian World-System*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1997 cited in Cline, E. H. 'Contested Peripheries in World Systems Theory: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley as a Test Case', *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 2000, pp. 8–17.
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- 86 Meyer, E. 'The Plantation System and Village Structure in British Ceylon: Involution or Revolution?' in *Rural South Asia, Linkages, Change and Development*, Ed. P. Robb, London: Curson Press, pp. 23–46, 1983; 'Enclave' Plantations, 'Hemmed-In' Villages and Dualist Representations in Colonial Ceylon' in *Plantations, Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia*, Eds. E. Valentine Daniel, T. Brass and H. Bernstein, London: Frank Cass, pp. 199–228, 1992.
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- 93 Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, op. cit.
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- 95 Behal, R. P. *Some Aspects of the Growth of Tea Plantation Labour Force in Assam*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1983; 'Power Structure, Discipline, and Labour in Assam Tea Plantations under Colonial Rule' (hereafter *Power Structure*) in *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*, Ed. Rana P. Behal and Marcel van der Linden, Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge. Behal with Mohapatra, P. P. 'Tea and Money versus Human Life: The Rise and Fall of Indenture System in Assam Valley Tea Plantations' in *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, Eds E. Valentine Daniel, H. Bernstein and T. Brass, London, 1992; Sen, S. *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Das Gupta, R. *Labour and Working Class in Eastern India: Studies in Colonial History*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1994; 'From Peasants and Tribesmen to Plantation Workers: Colonial Capitalism, Reproduction of Labour Power and Proletarianisation in North East India, 1850–47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1986, pp. PE 2–10; Das Gupta, K. 'Plantation Economy and Land Tenure System in Brahmaputra Valley, 1839–1914', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 29, 16 July 1983, pp. 1280–90; Chatterjee, P. *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001; Guha, A. *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1926–1947* (hereafter *Planter Raj*), New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976.
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- 98 Behal, 'Power Structure', op. cit.
- 99 Kaushik, G. 'A Market for Aboriginality: Primitivism and Race Classification in the Indentured Labour Market in Colonial India', in G. Bhadra, G. Prakash and S. Tharu (Eds) *Subaltern Studies*, X, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 100 Uma Devi, S. *Plantation Economy of the Third World*, Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1989.
- 101 Baak, P. E. *Plantation Production and Political Power: Plantation Development in South West India, 1743–1963*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- 102 While various techniques are commonly employed by anthropologists in conducting a multi-sited ethnography as George Marcus has suggested, we prefer to adopt a synthesis of methods in following the workers through their everyday work, life and struggle as conditioned and impacted upon by the world capitalist system within which their life world is embedded. Further, we also acknowledge the interdisciplinary and reflexive nature of our field work; see George, E. M. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 1995, pp. 95–117; 'Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System' in *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Eds James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 165–93.

Chapter 2

- 1 The story of such trade wars goes back by about five centuries, dating back to the year 1498 when Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese sailor, reached the Malabar coast, returning home with rich cargoes of spices and calicoes. The English were to go on voyage after voyage for another 100 years before they finally reached the Indies as the Europeans called India. For about another century, one spice alone – pepper from the East – constituted nearly one-third of Europe's eastern trade of which the English had the major share; see Hobsbawm, E. *Industry and Empire*, Vol. III, Britain: Penguin Press, 1977, p. 52.
- 2 The decisive battle of Plassey in 1757 marked the beginning of the establishment of a colonial State in the Indian sub-continent. In southern India, the war between Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, who resumed the invasion of Malabar in the 1780s, and the British, the new invaders, broke out in 1790. In the Third Mysore War of 1792, Tipu was killed and Malabar was politically annexed to the British Empire; Selam and Dindigul were also acquired. Seven years later in 1799, the districts of Dakshin Kanara and Coimbatore were brought under the control of the East India Company. In the same year, Tanjavur was acquired from the Maratha Raja; in 1800, the region south of the rivers Krishna and Tungabhadra was ceded; finally in 1801, the Nawab of Arcot conceded the Kanara tracts comprising north and south Arcot, Nellore, Thiruchirapalli, Madurai and Thirunelveli. By this time the British army was 'encamped at the capitals of all great Indian powers', including the princely states; see Chopra, P. N., Ravindran, T. K., Subrahmanian, N. *History of South India 3 Vols*, Vol. III Modern Period, New Delhi: N. Chand & Co. Ltd., 1979, pp. 146–7; Wilks, M., and Hammick, M. *Historical Sketches of the South Indian History* [1817], Vol. IV, rpt. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1980; also see .
- 3 The following details are taken from Buchanan, F. *A Journey from Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Malabar and Canara* (hereafter *Journey*), Vol. II, London: Higginbotham and Co., 1807, pp. 186–8; Logan, W. *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Other Papers of Importance Relating to British Affairs in Malabar*, Pt. III, CLIX [1797], Madras: Government Press, 1951, pp. 286–8, 381–4; Logan, W. *Malabar*, 2 Vols, Madras: Government Press, 1951, Vol. I, pp. 495, 522, 539; Vol. II, pp. cclxix–cclxxi; Nightingale, P. *Trade and Empire in Western India, 1784–1806* (hereafter *Trade and Empire*), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 101–2.
- 4 Innes, C. A. *Madras District Gazetteers: Malabar* (hereafter *Malabar*), Madras: Government Press, 1951, pp. 418–19.
- 5 The plantation was owned and controlled by the East India Company until around 1817, after which it remained the private property of Brown's family. When the original lease was terminated in 1901, the area was registered as the private *janmam* of the lessee's heirs; see Nightingale, *Trade and Empire*, p. 102; Innes, *Malabar*, p. 419.
- 6 Hill, A. W. 'The Best Means of Promoting a Complete Botanical Survey of the Different Parts of the Empire' in *Imperial Botanic Conference*, London, 1924: Report of Proceedings, Cambridge University Press, 1925, as quoted in Adams, W. M. *Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in the Third World*, London: Routledge, p. 25, 1990.
- 7 Quoted in the *Report of the South India Planters' Inquiry Committee* (hereafter *Planters' Inquiry Committee*), Madras: Government of India, 1896, p. 6.
- 8 Some of these issues are elaborated later in this section as also in the second part of the chapter.
- 9 Through the *Pattam* Proclamation of 1865, land in the state of Travancore, for instance, became 'a freely marketable' commodity. Most of the scholars to date, following Varghese, T. C. *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences, Land Tenures in Kerala 1850–1960* (hereafter *Agrarian Change*), Madras: Allied Publishers, 1970, view the 1865 proclamation as an outcome of the progressive policies pursued by an

- enlightened princely government. For a dissenting view and a situation of the legislation in the context of British Indian legislation on land relations, see Ram Mohan, K. T. *Material Processes and Developmentalism: Interpreting Economic Change in Colonial Tiruvitankur, 1800-1945* (hereafter *Material Processes*), Doctoral Thesis submitted to the Centre for Development Studies, 1996, pp. 95-110. The land tenures introduced by the British rule – the *zamindari* and *ryotwary* systems in Bengal and the Madras Presidency respectively – had the effect of allowing land to become private property; see Kumar, D. *Land and Caste in South India* (hereafter *Land and Caste*), London: Cambridge University Press, 1965, p. 78; For an analysis of the commercialisation of agriculture in its historical perspective, see Raj, K. N., Bhattacharya, N., Guha, S. and Padhi, S. *Essays on the Commercialisation of Indian Agriculture*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- 10 This was aimed at increasing the scale of agrarian exploitation, leading to an endless accumulation of capital; see Wallerstein, I. *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840s*, New York: Academic Press, 1989, p. 158.
 - 11 Myrdal, G. *Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, London: Penguin Press, 1972, p. 444.
 - 12 See DAT, Papers Regarding the Ten Square Miles Concession (hereafter *PRTSMC*).
 - 13 See The Imperial Gazetteer: The Indian Empire (hereafter *Imperial Gazetteer*), 25 Vols, Vol. XI, pp. 42-3; Ouchterlony, J. 'A Geographical and Statistical Memoir of a Survey of the Nilgiri Mountains' in *The Hill Ranges of South India*, Ed. J. Shortt, Madras: Asylum Press, pp. 55-60, 1857; Richardson, F. A. *Madras District Gazetteer, Salem, 2 Vols*, Vol. I, Pt. I, Madras: Government Press, 1918, pp. 227-9; see Rao, H. *Mysore Gazetteer* (hereafter *Mysore*), Vol. IV, Bangalore: Government Press, 1929, pp. 147-8.
 - 14 Brown, H. *Parry's of Madras: A Study of British Enterprise in India* (hereafter *Parry's Madras*), Madras: Parry & Co. Ltd., 1954, p. 80.
 - 15 See Maclean, C. D. *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency* (hereafter *Madras Manual*), rpt. New Delhi: Asian Publication House, 1950, p. 336. The figures pertaining to coffee from Wayanad alone, shipped through the Malabar coast increased from a meagre 54 cwts in 1840-1 to 20,946 cwts in 1856-7. For details, see Robinson, W. *Report on the History, Condition and Prospects of the Taluk of Wynad*, Kozhikode: Collectorate Press, 1857, p. 10.
 - 16 The leaf disease *Hemileia vastatrix*, characterised by an orange-red blot on the underside of the leaf, made its first appearance in the coffee plantations in Sri Lanka in the early 1870s. While the disease ruined big estates, small holders were wiped out by its devastating effects. Unlike in Sri Lanka, the industry picked up after a short interval in southern India, but with less vigour.
 - 17 See Wilson Mayne, W. 'The Story of UPASI' in *UPASI 1893-1953*, Ed. S. G. Speer (hereafter *UPASI*), Coonoor: UPASI, 1953, p. 48; Richardson, *Salem*, p. 227.
 - 18 Francis, W. *Madras District Gazetteers, Nilgiris* (hereafter *Nilgiris*), Madras: Government Press, 1908, p. 123.
 - 19 Gadgil, D. R. *The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, 1860-1939* (hereafter *Industrial Evolution*), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 81. The area under and production therein of coffee in southern India increased to 2,83,406 acres and more than 400 lakh lbs in 1895.
 - 20 The first consignment of dry bark from state-owned cinchona plantations in Nilgiris was sent to England in 1871, when it fetched an average price of 2 s. 6.5 d. per lb; the second consignment in 1873 fetched 3 s. 2.25 d. whereas in 1875, the average price realised was 2 s. 1 d. For more details regarding cinchona cultivation in southern India, see Maclean, C. D. *Standing Information Regarding the Official Administration of the Madras Presidency* (hereafter *Standing Information*), Madras: Government Press, 1877, pp. 306-7; Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 158-9; Innes, *Malabar*, Vol. I, p. 226.

- 21 For details, see Maclean, *Madras Manual*, pp. 309–10.
- 22 Wilkes, J. H. 'The Nilgiri-Wynad', in *UPASI*, pp. 270–73.
- 23 The nativity of tea has been much discussed. Going by the discoveries made by Bruce, C. A. and his brother Robert in the early-nineteenth century, one is led to the conclusion that the 'extensive tea tracts' found in the Upper Assamese forests were probably the remains of tribal planting or wild growth. For a discussion, see Antrobus, H. A. *A History of the Jorehaut Tea Company Ltd., 1859–1946*, London: Argus Press Ltd., n.d., p. 15; Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 35–7; Weatherstone, J. 'Historical Introduction' in *Tea Cultivation to Consumption*, Eds. K. C. Willson and M. N. Clifford, London: Chapman & Hall, 1990, pp. 1–23.
- 24 Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, p. 36.
- 25 They were jailed in two camps, one at Naduvattom and the other in the Thaishola Reserve Forest; see Muthiah, S. *A Planting Century: The First Hundred Years of the United Planters' Association of Southern India 1893–1993* (hereafter *Planting Century*), Madras: East-West Press Ltd., 1993, pp. 134–5. These prisoners were gradually absorbed by the local society. Edgar Thurston thus noted the presence of a 'Chinese–Tamil cross' in this locality, Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, Madras: Government Press, p. 31.
- 26 Cited in Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, p. 157.
- 27 Mackay, W. S. S. 'The Kanan Devans' (hereafter *Kanan Devans*) in *UPASI*, pp. 338–9.
- 28 Nagam Aiya, V. *The Travancore State Manual* (hereafter *Travancore State Manual*), 1906, 3 Vols, Vol. III, rpt. New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1989, p. 71.
- 29 Henry Baker opened the estate with money given by his wife's family; it was called the Twyford Estate after Twyford-in-Berkshire wherefrom the latter family hailed, see Lovatt, H. *A Short History of Peerumedu/Vandiperiyar* (hereafter *Peerumedu/Vandiperiyar*), Vandiperiyar: 1972, p. 9.
- 30 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 56.
- 31 Baig, A. and Henderson, W. *Facets of a Hundred Years Planting: A Centenary of Planting in the Kanan Devan Hills Concession, 1878–1978* (hereafter *Hundred Years Planting*), Munnar: Tata-Finlays, 1978, pp. 1–13; Mackay, 'Kanan Devans' in *UPASI*, pp. 282–345.
- 32 Mackay, 'Kanan Devans' in *UPASI*, pp. 338–9.
- 33 For details with respect to some of the planting companies in Travancore, see Playne, S. *Southern India: its History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources* (hereafter *Southern India*), London: The Foreign and Colonial Publishing Co. Ltd. 1914–15, pp. 541–89.
- 34 Wilkes, 'Nilgiri-Wynad' in *UPASI*, p. 275.
- 35 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 34.
- 36 Smith, H. *Minutes by the Governor of Madras relating to his tour in the south of India between 5th January and 6th March 1860*, Madras: Fort St. George Press, 1860, p. 53.
- 37 Cited in Congrieve, C. R. T. *The Anaimalai* (hereafter *Anaimalai*), n. d., p. 11.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 39 Clark, M. 'The Anaimalais' in *UPASI*, p. 254.
- 40 Hall, A. 'The Nelliampathies' in *UPASI*, pp. 136–47; though tea was introduced in the Shevaroy hills as early as 1850, it did not survive the experimental stage, see Richardson, *Salem*, p. 231.
- 41 Computed from *Travancore Administration Report*, Government Press, various years.
- 42 Kumar Bagchi, A. *Private Investment in India, 1900–39* (hereafter *Private Investment*), Bombay: Orient Longman Ltd., 1975, p. 163.
- 43 In 1876, the consumption of China tea in Britain had amounted to 83 per cent of the total consumption, the balance coming from India. Ten years later, when Sri Lanka entered the market, the percentages of consumption in Britain were 59 per cent from

- China, 38 per cent from India and 3 per cent from Sri Lanka. And in 1894, the figures were 55 per cent from India, 33 per cent from Sri Lanka and only the remaining 12 per cent from China, *Madras Mail*, 'Tea Companies Shares as Investments', 27 July 1895, p. 8; Also see Raghavaiyangar, S. *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency during the Last Forty Years of British Administration* (hereafter *Progress*) [1893], rpt. Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1993, pp. 100–1.
- 44 See Ford, F. *The Wynad and the Planting Industry of Southern India* (hereafter *Wayanad Planting*), Madras: Higginbotham & Co., 1885; *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. XI, p. 42.
 - 45 Lovatt, *Peermade/Vandiperiyar*, p. 9.
 - 46 Rao, *Mysore*, Vol. IV, pp. 147–8.
 - 47 Maclean, *Madras Manual*, pp. 126–7.
 - 48 See the Notification regarding the proposed auction sale of land for coffee cultivation, dated 15 December 1864, and the rules for the sale of wastelands on the hills for coffee and tea cultivation, dated 24 April 1865, in GoT. *Travancore Almanac*, 1871, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1871, pp. 125–36; *Travancore Almanac*, 1879, pp. 69–76; DAT, CSF No. 11629. Also see Baak, P. 'Planters' Lobby in Late Nineteenth Century: Implications for Travancore' (hereafter *Planters' Lobby*), *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, 15 August 1992, pp. 1747–53.
 - 49 For these details see the following documents: GoT. *Travancore Land Revenue Manual* (hereafter *TLRM*), Vol. 3, Auction Sale of Land, Notification dated 8 March 1862, p. 3; Maclean, *Madras Manual*, p. 119; also see Hull, E. C. P. *Coffee Planting in Southern India and Ceylon*, Madras: Higginbotham & Co., 1877.
 - 50 *Madras Mail*, 8 April 1892.
 - 51 Varghese, *Agrarian Change*, p. 83.
 - 52 See GoM. *Rules of the Sale of Waste Land on the Nilgiri Hills* passed by the Governor in Council on 6 May 1863, Madras: Government Press, 1863.
 - 53 For details, see Francis, *Nilgiris*, pp. 263–83; Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, pp. 709–10.
 - 54 Acting Under Secretary, Government of Madras, to the Secretary, UPASI, dated 28 January 1907 in *Correspondence attached to UPASI Proceedings*, 1907, pp. 84–5.
 - 55 Varghese, *Agrarian Change*, p. 84.
 - 56 See Pandian, M. S. S. *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change, Nanchilnadu, 1880–1939* (hereafter *Nanchilnadu*), New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, pp. 88–9; also see *TLRM*, 1915, Vol. IV, p. 773.
 - 57 Wilkes, 'Nilgiri-Wynad' in *UPASI*, p. 266.
 - 58 See *PRTSMC*. Also see Secretariat Cellar, Cover System File, now available at the Directorate of Archives, Thiruvananthapuram (hereafter *DAT, CSF*), Land Revenue, 11247/1906; Velu Pillai, T. K. *The Travancore State Manual* (hereafter *State Manual*), 4 Vols, Vol. IV, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1940, pp. 487–90.
 - 59 For the copy of the original deed, see *TLRM*, 1915, Vol. II, pp. 21–5. Also see Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III, pp. 71–4; Pillai, *State Manual*, Vol. IV, pp. 475–87.
 - 60 The Society began to offer lands to investors proclaiming the suitability of the region for growing plantation crops, besides promoting it as an ideal health resort. In its issue dated 2 July 1881, the London-based weekly, *The Field*, ran an article extolling the virtues of the Kanan Devan Hills as an idyllic region for the raising of plantations; metropolitan capital was thus enticed to the hills of Travancore. See Staplegr Ove, 'The Field', *The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, 'Travel and Colonisation. The Kanan Devan Mountains in South India', July 2, 1881, p. 3.
 - 61 Of the total 6,730 square miles of the geographical area of Travancore, 2,379 square miles or more than half of the geographical area was under forests in the beginning of the nineteenth century; see Ward and Conner, Lieutenants, *Memoir of the Survey of the Travancore and Cochin States*, 2 Vols, Vol. I, 1863, rpt. Thiruvananthapuram: State Editor, Kerala Gazetteers, 1994, p. 3. Nearly 10 per cent of these forests was leased out by the State to a single corporate capital through the Kanan Devan deeds.

- 62 Pillai, *State Manual*, Vol. IV, pp. 475–87. Also see Parameswaran Pillai, *Basic Land Tax*, p. 20.
- 63 Ibid. The lease terms continued to be highly biased in favour of planting companies, and they remain insulated against government policies even now; see Chapter 8.
- 64 DAT, CSF, No. 10107, Dewan to Miss A. Baker, dated 18 April 1890.
- 65 Rees, W. Travel to Devikulam and his notes on the High Range Road, cited in M. Moench, *From Forest to Agroforest: Land-use Dynamics and Crop Successions in the Western Ghats, Kerala, South India* (hereafter *Land-use Dynamics*), Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, 1985.
- 66 GoT, *TLRM*, 1916, notification dated 17 July 1899, p. 1097.
- 67 See Brown, *Parry's Madras*, p. 253; Ramaswami and Muthiah, *Parrys 200: A Saga of Resilience*, New Delhi: East-West Press Ltd., 1988, p. 75.
- 68 GoM, *TLRM*, Vol. II, 1942, p. 55.
- 69 For the large number of encroachments of both private and government lands by the planters and the associated conflicts, see DAT, CSF, Nos 1830, 10657, 11226, 11716.
- 70 See Badri Rao, S. R. N. *Road Rail Transport* (hereafter *Transport*), Madras: Thompson & Co. Ltd. Printers, 1941, pp. 202–3.
- 71 Gol. *Indian Agricultural Statistics*, Calcutta: Manager, Government of India Press, 1893 and 1939, pp. 220–7.
- 72 Pillai, *State Manual*, Vol. III, p. 90.
- 73 The large-scale dumping of rice in various parts of southern India, including Travancore and Malabar from Siam, Indo-China and Myanmar, had the effect of worsening the 'already depressed agricultural situation'. Consequent upon this, the prices of paddy in the state declined by 10–14 per cent over the years 1874–1904; a similar decline in the price of paddy was observed in Malabar, too. The import of rice from Myanmar was cheaper owing to many reasons. The cost of cultivation of rice was lesser in Myanmar than that in southern India. For instance, in 1934, the cost of cultivation of rice in Myanmar was Rs 17 as against 24 in Tanjavur. The cost of transport for the shipping of rice from Myanmar was significantly lower than the transportation of rice by rail from one part of southern India to the other. Though the import of rice from Myanmar to the entire Madras Presidency rarely exceeded 10–15 per cent of the local production, it had a 'steadily depressing effect on local prices'. Combined with the increased land assessments, paddy cultivation, thus, had all of a sudden become unprofitable. See Census of India, 1931, Travancore, Vol. XXVIII, p. 51, 22–3; Rao, *Transport*, pp. 197–8.
- 74 DAT, CSF No. 7408.
- 75 *Halat*, the excise tax on coffee, for instance, was reduced by 85 per cent over the years from 1838–9 to 1849–50; see Rao, *Mysore*, pp. 147–8; Baak, 'Planters' Lobby', p. 1748.
- 76 For a detailed discussion on the evolution of various taxation policies on plantations, see Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 557–76.
- 77 DAT, CSF, No. 115/11800. Also see Baak, *Plantation Production*, p. 126.
- 78 Pinches, H. L. *Tea*, n.d., p. 26; James, F. 'Political Relations' in *UPASI*, pp. 241–2.
- 79 See de Silva, *Underdevelopment*, pp. 274–89.
- 80 Computed from the *Indian Tea Statistics*, various years. Unless otherwise stated, all figures on area, production, employment and prices of tea are from the Indian Tea Statistics of the respective years. Over-acquisition of land was at times indulged in by the planters without a thought towards the means at their disposal. And when government rules were modified to the effect that the planters could acquire land without declaring their means for investment, speculation on land, aiming at the business concerns in London became a common phenomenon. For related arguments, see Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution*, p. 52.

In the post-colonial period too, the planting companies continued to retain large tracts of uncultivated land. When attempts were made to confiscate such lands as in the case

- of the KDHP, the companies often quoted the production capacity of firewood per unit area at low levels as a pretext to retain more land. We do not intend to overlook the fact that the very nature of the plantations, which were built on a large scale, necessitated the acquisition of land for factory sites, labour lines, quarters and bungalows, lands for fuel to make firewood for factories and lands for gardens and pastures for cattle. But the fact remains that the land actually required for these 'ancillaries' formed only an insignificant proportion of the total area leased in, contrary to the usual claims made by the companies; see GoK, *Land Board*, File No. LB, A, 2-5227/71 dated March 29 1974.
- 81 *Malayala Manorama*, 'The Dewan and the Planters', 27 February 1907, p. 2 and 'Dewan's High Range Tour', 6 March 1907, p. 1.
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 Notification of Travancore government, July 1906 in Proceedings of Foreign Department, September 1907, quoted in Nair, R. *Social Consequences of Agrarian Change*, Jaipur: Printwell, 1991, p. 23.
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 When the Travancore government sought the recovery of a mere 2 acres of the 1.37 lakh acres it had leased out to the KDHP, the Company flatly refused to part with the land claiming that those very lands were under experimental crops and that they were too close to their bungalows; see Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, p. 21.
- 86 The three major institutes thus set up were the Ross Institute, Meppadi; the Malaria Institute of India, Sultan Bathery; and the Madras Malaria Unit at Kalpetta. On spread of diseases and mortality on plantations, see Section 6.6.
- 87 UPASI, *Tea Research in South India*, Coonoor: UPASI, n.d., pp. 1-3.
- 88 For details, see Pillai, *State Manual*, p. 300; *Malayala Manorama*, 'Pallivasal Supplement', 15 February 1934-5; Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, p. 19.
- 89 Playne, *Southern India*, p. 559.
- 90 The project was commissioned on 19 March 1940 with a generating capacity of more than 30,000 kW; see Pillai, *State Manual*, p. 300. Also see Mackay, 'Kanan Devans' in *UPASI*, pp. 340-41.
- 91 Among the tea factories it was the Devarshola Estate factory which first cashed in on the power supplied by the Pykara project. Power was brought to Anaimalai by the mid-1930s; see, Congrieve, *Anaimalai*, p. 92.
- 92 The Kanan Devan Plantations had as many as 17 factories spreading over 21 estates by the first decade of the twentieth century.
- 93 Varghese, *Agrarian Change*, p. 116.
- 94 Wilkes, 'Nilgiri-Wynad', in *UPASI*, p. 267.
- 95 Transport of tea produce from Anaimalai was routed via Valparai to Pollachi by bullock cart; from there it went to Coimbatore by rail. Produce from the Kanan Devan estates took a circuitous route to the Thoothukkudy port, being first carted to Munnar, then moving by rail to a nearby station and then again going by roadway and bullock carts to the Ammainaikannur railway station. It was from here that the tea was transported by rail again on the final stretch to Thoothukkudy from where the chests were ferried to the waiting steamers. From the lower planting regions of Travancore, tea from Peerumedu and rubber from Mundakkayam moved westward to Kottayam via bullock carts, head loads and bandy carts and was thence transported by *kettuvallam* to the ports of Alappuzha and Kochi. See Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 68.
- 96 Verghese, K. E. *The Development and Significance of Transport in India, 1834-1882* (hereafter *Development of Transport*), New Delhi: N V Publications, 1976, p. 12.
- 97 A large number of ghat roads were constructed in Wayanad at the time of the political turmoil in Malabar to facilitate the movement of artillery; these later became the traffic routes for the movement of plantation produce and labour to and from the estates. Further, much before the planters had concentrated in the Nilgiris, the Imperial Crown had thought to penetrate the region on two grounds: first as a summer resort and second for military purposes.

- 98 Broughton Papers, Tweedledale to Hobhouse, quoted in Verghese, *Development of Transport*, p. 79.
- 99 Francis, *Nilgiris*, pp. 226–41.
- 100 Bourne, R. *Nilambur Valley Working Plan - Description, History and Statistics*, Vol. I, Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1921, p. 42.
- 101 TNA, Local Self Government, GO No. 752/1923 dated 26 March 1923; DAT, CSF No. 10927/1894. Extract of the statement of Expenditure in connection with 'Planters' Roads' for construction or for repair of various roads.
- 102 Aiya, *Travancore State Manual*, pp. 229–30.
- 103 In the early 1880s, roads were constructed from Munnar down to Talayar and from Marayoor to Chinnar through the village of Mattupetty, for the transportation of both labour and food from the Tamil countryside, upon which the plantation empire thrived even more. For some information, see Abraham Varghese, M. 'Kanan Devan Planters' Association – Organisation of the High Range Plantations' and Mrs Sulochana Unnikrishnan Nair, 'History of High Ranges' in KDHP-Centenary Year, 1888–1988, *Hundred Years of Kanan Devan Planters' Association*, Munnar, 1988, pp. 13–17, pp. 18–27 respectively; *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. p. 13.
- 104 See Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, pp. 90–9.
- 105 Brightsingh, D. *Financial Development in Travancore*, Unpublished PhD thesis submitted to the University of Travancore, 1949, p. 448.
- 106 *Census of India, 1931, Travancore*, Vol. I, p. 87.
- 107 TNA, Local Self Government, 752/1923 dated 26 March 1923.
- 108 See *Malayala Manorama*, 'Thiruvithamkotte Theyilathottangal', Tea Plantations in Travancore, 22 July 1916, p. 2.
- 109 Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, p. 45.
- 110 Cited in Moench, *Land-use Dynamics*, p. 77.
- 111 See *Malayala Manorama*, 'The Dewan of Travancore', Editorial, 14 June 1928, p. 4.
- 112 Cited in Rao, *Road Rail Transport*, pp. 383–4.
- 113 TNA, Development, 108/1939; Report of the Minister for Agriculture who visited the estates in Anaimalai on 24 and 25 October 1937.
- 114 RAK, Seventh Tour of Lord Pentland, Governor of Madras and Malabar, October 15 to November 3 1914, p. 53.
- 115 Discussions were held at the meetings of the various planters' associations, particularly those of the UPASI, pressing for roads and rail connections across the planting regions with an emphasis on the Dindigul–Pollachi–Palakkad, Mysore–Coorg–Thalasseri and Arsikeri–Mangalore railways. See particularly, *UPASI Proceedings*, 1896, pp. 42–7; 1906, p. 109.
- 116 Habakkuk, J. J. and Postan, M. *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* (hereafter *History of Europe*), 8 Vols, Vol. VI, Pt. I, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 256–65.
- 117 For the very same reason, more than 90 per cent of the total capital invested in Indian railways was also British. For the 'nationalist' development perspective in India, see Chandra, B. 'Colonial India, British Versus Indian View of Development', *Review*, Vol. xiv, 1, Winter 1991, p. 109. For a thoughtful analysis of railroad construction as a colonial project, see the various articles in Davis, C. B., Wilburn Jr., K. E. and Robinson, R. E. (Eds.), *Railway Imperialism*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. For an understanding of how the spread of railways and transport systems shattered the parochial nature of the local society, see Srinivas, M. N. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- 118 Mayne, *UPASI*, pp. 27–8. Also see Bristow, R. *Cochin Saga: A History of Foreign Government and Business Adventures in Kerala, South India by Arabs, Romans, Venetians, Dutch and British, Together with the Personal Narrative of the Last Adventurer and an Epilogue*, London: Casell, 1959, pp. 101, 108.
- 119 Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 167–8.

- 120 In the beginning of the twentieth century, tea and pepper exported from the port of Kochi, all from the Travancore region, was second only to coconut products; see Achyuta Menon, *C. The Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1911, pp. 11–12. By the late 1940s, nearly 80 per cent of the tea from Travancore was exported through this port.
- 121 This was further followed by regular passenger and goods services including the transport of mail. In Peerumedu, a few planters formed a syndicate with a view to get around the transport problems they were facing; they started off by importing four lorries from England to carry estate produce, general goods and passengers from Mundakkayam to Peerumedu. Finding it a successful venture, it was widened in scope resulting in the formation of the Mundakkayam-Peerumedu Motor Transport and Aerial Ropeway Co. Ltd; an extensive scheme was also laid down for the setting up of ropeways but this did not materialise. See Playne, *Southern India*, p. 558.
- 122 Playne, 'The Railways in Southern India' in *Southern India*, pp. 529–40; Cox A. R. (Ed.), *Gazetteer of the Coimbatore District*, Vol. II, Madras: Government Press, p. 239, 1933.
- 123 Quoted in Pandian, *Nanchilnadu*, pp. 87–8.
- 124 Hatch, E. G. *Travancore*, London: Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 157.
- 125 DAT, CSF, No. 333/1875 – Establishment of British Postal Line between Kottayam and Peerumedu, various correspondence; *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. XI, p. 14.
- 126 R. Banerji, 'Pioneer Planting', *Finlay's Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1966, p. 9.
- 127 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1912, p. 12
- 128 One of the shortcomings of the WS analysis is its failure to devote due attention to the role of ecological factors in understanding the impact of world capitalism, an aspect of late recognised by the WS protagonists themselves; see Frank, A. G., and Gills, B. K. (Eds.), *The World-System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?*, London: Routledge, pp. 82–3, 92, 305, 1993.
- 129 Bourdillon, T. F. *Report on the Forests of Travancore* (hereafter *Forests of Travancore*), Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1893, p. 11.
- 130 Munro, J. D. 'Account of the High Range', Peerumadu, 1877, in Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, pp. 118–19.
- 131 They migrated from one part of the hills to the other with their herds for pasturing in rhythm with the rainfall patterns. For instance, the western part of the plateau receives its maximum rainfall by the South-West monsoon during December and the regions in the east depend on the North-East monsoon from December to March. Accordingly, the *Thodar* shifted from one part of the plateau to the other depending on the monsoon, grazing their cattle and moving on to new areas. By the time they returned to the first area, it would have been covered with fresh grass: this cycle of migration formed the cycle of their lives. For further discussion, see Francis, *Nilgiris*, pp. 127–9.
- 132 For the implications of such colonial policies on forests, ecology and indigenous communities in India see, Stebbing, E. P. *The Forests of India*, 1923, 4 Vols, rpt. Delhi: Goyal Offset Press, 1982, Vol. I, pp. 68–124; Vol. II, 90–123; Vol. III, 3–29; Vol. VI, 171–97. Gadgil, M. and Guha, R. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992; Pouchepadass, J. 'Colonialism and Environment in India, Comparative Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 August 1995, pp. 2059–67; Tucker, R. P. 'The Depletion of India's Forests under British Imperialism: Planters, Forests, and Peasants in Assam and Kerala' (hereafter *The Depletion*) in *The Ends of the Earth*, Ed. D. Worster, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 118–40, 1994.
- 133 Francis, *Nilgiris*, pp. 208–9.
- 134 Bourdillon, *Forests of Travancore*, pp. 11, 12.
- 135 See Cleghorn, *Forests and Gardens*, pp. 2, 68, 127–43.
- 136 *Ibid.*

- 137 Cleghorn, H. *Forests and Gardens of Southern India* (hereafter *Forests and Gardens*), London: W. H. Allen Publishing Co., 1861, p. 2.
- 138 Break-up of Timber Export in Rupees.

Categories	Year	
	1909–10	1913–14
Teak wood	98,000	2,47,000
Ebony	14,000	10,000
Others	3,61,000	3,81,000
Sandalwood	1,34,000	1,78,000
Total	10,27,000	25,03,100

Source: Data from Tressler, K. 'Industries', in *Southern India*, pp. 628–9.

- 139 Buchi, M. *Colonial Forest Exploitation in the Western Ghats of India: A Case Study of North Canara District*, Pandy Papers in Social Sciences, French Institute, 1990, p. 4. For a discussion of the demand scenario of timber during the post-1850 period in Europe as well as on the response of a peripheral region, Travancore, to it, see Rammohan, *Material Processes*, pp. 96–8.
- 140 *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. XVI, pp. 296–9.
- 141 GoI. Report of the Famine Commission, 1880, Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1880, pp. 178–9.
- 142 For memorandum of understanding on the Periyar Project, see Pillai, *State Manual*, Vol. IV, pp. 402–27.
- 143 Krishnapillai, N. K. 'A Plea for Kanomdars' as quoted in Pandian, *Nanchilnadu*, p. 113.
- 144 Tucker, *The Depletion*, p. 137.
- 145 Morgan, H. R. *Forestry in Southern India*, Madras: Higginbotham & Co., 1884, p. 106.
- 146 Morgan, H. R. 'Wynad', in *Hill Ranges of Southern India*, Ed. J. Shortt, Madras: Higginbotham & Co., 1883, p. 59.
- 147 Mackay, W. S. S. 'Tea and Forestry', *Finlay's Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring, 1965, pp. 16–7.
- 148 Bourdillon, *Forests of Travancore*, p. 4.
- 149 Bourdillon, *Forests of Travancore*, p. 36.
- 150 For details, see Ravi Raman, K. 'Intervention in the Western Ghats: An Enquiry into the Historical Processes of Loss of Biodiversity and Community Sources of Livelihood', paper presented at the Indo-British workshop on Biodiversity: Conservation and Evaluation held at TBGRI, Thiruvananthapuram, 15–17 February 1996.
- 151 In one such organised game shot in 1937, the list of victims reads thus: 13 tigers, 4 panthers, 3 bison, 7 sambhur, 3 ibex, 2 boars, 7 jungle sheep, 5 wild dogs and 1 bear; see Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, pp. 65–6. This was also the time when tanneries flourished in the vicinity of Madras and Thirunelveli, a business which interested both Europeans and Muslim merchants alike, its ecological effects notwithstanding.
- 152 Achaya, K. T. *The Food Industries of British India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 177.
- 153 For instance, trays fitted in a frame and held over burning charcoal were used in the early days. This was followed by Sir Samuel Davidson's patented cylindrical drier in 1869, the updraft drier in 1879, the automatic drier of Gibbs and Bany and Jackson's self-acting steam drier in 1880. A further sophistication was achieved with Jackson's

- Empire drier and Davidson's endless-chain pressure drier both of which were completely automated. Further, mechanical sorters using a rotating cylindrical sieve made the work of sorting much simpler and more uniform. *Ibid.*, pp. 177–8.
- 154 The London Tea Auction was held 300 years ago in 1706. It did not take long for London to become the centre of tea trade as tea from plantations around the world found its way to the city, but with the gradual presence of auction centres in producing countries and decolonisation, the importance of the London auction gradually waned, leading to its closure on 29 June 1998. The Cochin Tea Auction Centre commenced operations on 4 July 1947. With the closure of London Tea Auctions, Cochin became the oldest centre after Calcutta and Colombo in the world, and the first in South India.
- 155 Talbot, J. M. 'Tropical Commodity Chains, Forward Integrating Strategies and International Inequality: Coffee, Cocoa and Tea', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 9, No. 4 2002, pp. 701–34. Thus, the binality of producer- and buyer-driven commodity chain categories becomes inadequate while Gibbon's contribution of an international trade-driven commodity chain gathers significance.
- 156 See Ram Mohan, K. T. and Sundaresan, R. 'Socially Embedding the Commodity Chain: An Exercise in Relation to Coir Yarn Spinning in Southern India', *World Development*, Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 903–23
- 157 Maclean, *Madras Manual*, p. 346.
- 158 These figures were worked out from the following sources: GoI, Statistical Research Branch. *Review of the Trade of India*, Calcutta: Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, various years; *Indian Tea Statistics*, various years; Wickizer, V. D. *Coffee, Tea and Cocoa: An Economic and Political Analysis* (hereafter *Coffee, Tea and Cocoa*), California: Stanford University Press, 1951, p. 204.
- 159 During 1934–5, the re-export of tea from Britain constituted nearly 14 per cent of the total tea imported by the country, which, of course, has declined since then. See Sarkar, G. K. *The World Tea Economy*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 120.
- 160 DAT, CSF No. 10133.
- 161 For a major contribution on this aspect, see Braudel, F. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 1949, rpt. London: Collins, 1972. Also see Chaudhuri, K. N. *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; Panikkar, K. M. *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the Influence of Sea Power on Indian History*, Bombay: George Allen & Unwin, 1971.
- 162 The big business concerns that emerged thus included the Glasgow-based City, Anchor and Glen Lines, the British and Africa Steam Navigation Company and the British India Steam Navigation Company. The Peninsular & Orient, P&O, adopted the screw in 1851; the Hamburg-Amerika line had its screw-propeller steamer in 1856. For details, see Jackson, G. 'The Shipping Industry' in *Transport in Victorian Britain*, Eds Michael J. Freeman and Derek H. Aldcroft, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, pp. 253–83, 1988. Also see Ville, S. P. *English Ship Owning During the Industrial Revolution*, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1987.
- 163 Habakkuk and Postan, *History of Europe*, pp. 246–9.
- 164 Playne, *Southern India*, p. 526.
- 165 Jackson, 'The Shipping Industry', p. 269; Habakkuk and Postan, *History of Europe*, p. 249.
- 166 See Forrest, D. *Tea for the British, the Social and Economic History of a Famous Trade*, London: Chatto and Winds, 1973, pp. 146–7, 256. Also see Finlay's Magazine, 'What Happens to Tea in London?', Vol. 2, No. 4, Summer 1965, pp. 24–5.
- 167 UPASI Proceedings, 1895, p. 102.
- 168 Forrest, D. *The World Tea Trade: A Survey of the Production, Distribution and Consumption of Tea* (hereafter *Tea Trade*), Cambridge: Wodhead-Faulkner, 1985, pp. 130–310.

- 169 This was followed by the formation of the Tea Buying Brokers' Association by a few members of the former association; see Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 665–9.
- 170 *Ibid.*, p. 666.
- 171 Small packets of tea for three pies each were sold in every little Indian village; every packet bore a lottery number on its cover, which the buyer was enjoined to preserve. Lotteries were drawn every month, and prizes of the value of Rs 150 were distributed among the holders of the winning numbers. Even otherwise, the profit expected was the order of 63 per cent. For details, see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1902, p. 9; also see Minutes, *GBM of CTPA*, 20 September 1902 as reported in *Planting Opinion*, Vol. VII, No. 40, 4 October 1902, p. 678.
- 172 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1902, p. 9.
- 173 Forrest, *Tea Trade*, pp. 130–31
- 174 Calcutta Tea Traders' Association, *Tea Digest*, Calcutta: The Statesman Press, 1975, p. 84.

Chapter 3

- 1 We do not enter into the closely related question of the complexities of relationships between Indian capitalism and British colonialism and the associated debate; however, readers are requested to consult the formidable works on this, such as Bayly, C. A. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Washbrook, D. 'Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History, c. 1720–1860', *Modern Asian Studies* 22(1), 1988; Nicholas, B. D. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, pp. 303–315.
- 2 Jenks, L. H. *The Migration of British Capital to 1875*, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1963, p. 225.
- 3 *Planting Opinion*, 'The Labour Question', 12 October 1895, p. 8.
- 4 Robert, H. E. *The Experiences of a Planter in the Jungles of Mysore* (hereafter *Experiences of a Planter*) 2 Vols, London: Chapman & Hall, 1871, Vol. II, p. 18.
- 5 Three generations of descendants of Henry Baker Sr., who had come to India as a missionary in 1814, were engaged in planting activities in Travancore. For the involvement of missionaries in the planting industry see Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, pp. 126, 132–3, 184–7; Lovatt, H. A *Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District* (hereafter *Peerumedu-Vandiperiyar*), Kottayam: C. M. S. Press, 1972, p. 66.
- 6 Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee (hereafter *Planters' Inquiry Committee*), Madras, 1896, p. 8.
- 7 The Crown Prince Vishakhram Tirunal and the Dewan Madhava Rao had taken over the coffee plantation in Agasthyamudi which covered over 150 acres. The estate was managed for them at first by John Cox, missionary turned planter and later by P. D. Devasahayam, who was an adherent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and a successful local planter. Both the Prince and the Dewan had their vested interests in this commercial venture. When it was sold in the 1880s, it brought the Dewan one lakh rupees. In the 1870s, when Ayilyam Tirunal, the reigning Maharaja was prompted to take up the paying proposition of coffee, he had to be told by the Madras Government that the Sirkar could not open coffee estates to enhance its own revenues; see Jeffrey, R. *The Decline of Nayar Dominance, Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847–1908*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House (P) Ltd, 1976, pp. 99–100; Mateer, S. *Native Life in Travancore, 1883* (hereafter *Native Life*), report, New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1991, p. 226; Kooiman, D. *Conversion and Social Equality in India: London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the Nineteenth Century*, Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1979, p. 130.
- 8 Lovatt, *Peerumedu-Vandiperiyar*, p. 7.

- 9 Gow, Wilson & Stanton Ltd, 'Preface' in *Tea Producing Companies of India and Ceylon*, London: A. Southey & Co., 1897.
- 10 Bose, S. K. *Capital and Labour in the Indian Tea Industry*, Bombay: AITUC, 1954, p. 24.
- 11 Palme Dutt, R. *India Today*, Calcutta: Manisha Grandhalaya, 1986, p. 137.
- 12 *Planter's Inquiry Committee*, Madras, 1896, p. 8.
- 13 GoT. *Statistics of Travancore*, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1930–1, pp. 228–9.
- 14 For an excellent treatment of the question of dominance of European enterprises over Indian industry, as explained in terms of economic, social and political tenets, see Bagchi, A. K. *Private Investment in India 1900–1939* (hereafter *Private Investment*), New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1975. His analysis extends to almost all the key industries – cotton, jute, iron and steel, cement, engines, sugar and planting – and it extends from the north to the south of India. Also see Buchanan, D. H. *The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966.
- 15 The managing agency system was a colonial invention, and an institution restricted to India; considerable debate has occurred over its purpose and importance, see Lokanathan, P. S. *Industrial Organisation in India*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1935; Rungta, R. S. *The Rise of Business Corporations in India, 1850–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; Langley, W. K. M. *A Century in Malabar — The History of Peirce Leslie and Co. Ltd. 1862–1962* (hereafter *History of Peirce Leslie*), Madras: Associate Printers, 1962; Brogan, J. *James Finlay and Company Limited*, Glasgow: Jackson Sons & Co., 1951. For those major contributions to the historical development of British multinationals including the managing agents, see Jones, G. (ed.), *British Multinationals: Origins, Management and Performance*, Aldershot: Gower, 1986; Jones, G. and Wale, J. 'Merchants as Business Groups; British Trading Companies in Asia before 1945', *Business History Review*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 1998, pp. 367–408; 'Diversification Strategies of British Trading Companies: Harrisons & Crosfield, c. 1900–1980', *Business History*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1999, pp. 69–101; Jones, C. *International Business in the Nineteenth Century*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1987; Chapman, S. *Merchant Enterprise in Britain from the Industrial Revolution to World War 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Also see Macfadyen, E. 'Managing Agents in the Eastern Plantation Industry' (hereafter *Managing Agents*), *Tropical Agriculture*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1954, pp. 267–71; Janson, C. J. C. 'Might of the Managing Agencies: Control of the Coastal Firms, A Study on Controlled Economic Development: Travancore, 1921–1931', Amsterdam, mimeo, n.d.
- 16 The details that follow have been taken from Bagchi, *Private Investment*, p. 162.
- 17 Readers are requested to consult the James Finlay papers kept in the archives of the University of Glasgow, UK, apart from note 14.
- 18 A few valuable records of Harrisons & Crosfield are kept at the Guildhall Library, London.
- 19 See note 14.
- 20 The original members of the coalition were Peirce Leslie & Co., Stanes Maylor & Co., Hinde & Co., Parry & Co., H. Mann & Co. and Alstons & Co. Those who joined later included Morgan & Co., the Mamally Coffee Works, Chisholm Sons & Co. and Aspinwall & Co.; see Langley, *History of Peirce Leslie*, pp. 16–17, 78.
- 21 The last meant for local shops for wrapping parcels as there were very few local newspapers.
- 22 The course of events beginning from 1788 when Thomas Parry registered as a free merchant in Madras through all the challenging endeavours that he undertook have been studied by Ramaswami, N. S. and Muthiah, S. *Parrys 200: A Saga of Resilience*, New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd, 1988.
- 23 Rambousek, W. H., Vogt, A., Volkart, H. R. and Verlag, I. *Volkart: The History of a World Trading Company*, Winterthur: Volkart Bros. Holding, 1991.

- 24 Langley, *History of Peirce Leslie*, p. 78.
- 25 Playne, S. (compiled). *Southern India, its History, People, Commerce and Industrial Resources* (hereafter *Southern India*), London: The Foreign and Colonial Compiling and Publishing Co. Ltd, 1914–15, p. 526; Tharian George, K. and Michael Tharakan, P. K. 'Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy: The Case of Tea Plantations in Kerala, 1880–1950' (hereafter *Tea in Kerala*), *Studies in History*, 2 (2), 1986, 199–229.
- 26 Bagchi, *Private Investment*, p. 178.
- 27 Bagchi, A. K. 'Contested Hegemonies and Laissez Faire: Controversies over the Monetary Standard in India at the High Noon of the British Empire', *Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1, Winter 1997, p. 58.
- 28 There were three Presidency Banks, viz. the Bank of Madras, the Bank of Bombay and the Bank of Bengal. The Imperial Bank of India was formed in 1921 by a merger of the three Presidency Banks. The Government of India had exercised its influence on the internal money market through the Presidency Banks. Until the formation of the Reserve Bank of India, the Government of India retained various powers including that of note issue. The Presidency Banks catered to the interests of European commerce and trade. See Bagchi, *Private Investment*, pp. 60–62, 165, 171–3.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 171–4.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 For the detailed history of the company, see Brogan, J. *James Finlay and Company Limited*, Glasgow: Jackson Sons & Co., 1951.
- 32 Ibid., p. 108; also see Jeffrey, R. 'Merchant Capital and the End of Empire, James Finlay, Merchant Adventurers', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVII, No. 7, 13 February 1982, pp. 241–8.
- 33 Muthiah, S. *A Planting Century, The First Hundred Years of the United Planters' Association of Southern India, 1893–1993* (hereafter *Planting Century*), Madras: East-West Press Pvt. Ltd, 1993, pp. 215–18.
- 34 Marx points out two distinct processes in the accumulation of capital: the process of increasing concentration through accumulation, which he describes as the concentration of capital, and the process of increasing concentration through competition and credit, which he calls centralisation of capital. Centralisation also occurs through the process of big units of capital swallowing up smaller ones or simply through the process of amalgamation of existing capital; a similar process was set in motion in the planting industry of southern India by the first quarter of the twentieth century. For Marx's perspective, see *Capital*, Vols 1 and 3, Chapters 23 and 15 respectively.
- 35 Langely, *History of Peirce Leslie*, pp. 63–64; also see Ganapathy, M. *Malayalam Plantations: An Era of Planting in South India*, Madras, 1978.
- 36 Langely, *History of Peirce Leslie*, pp. 63–64.
- 37 Government of United Kingdom, *Royal Commission on Labour in India* (hereafter *RCL*), London: Government of United Kingdom, 1931, p. 349.
- 38 The Indian Tea Association, the European planters' association based in Assam was founded only in 1881.
- 39 Usha, J., 'History of the Central Travancore Planters' Association', *The Central Travancore Planters' Association Centenary Souvenir, 1874–1974* (hereafter *History of CTPA*), Kottayam: Santha Press, 1974, p. 7.
- 40 Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 1.
- 41 Joseph, 'History of CTPA', p. 7; Lovatt, *Peerumedu/Vandiperiyar*, p. 23.
- 42 Mackay, 'The Kanan Devans' (hereafter *Kanan Devans*) in *UPASI*, p. 287.
- 43 Percival, G., *History of the Indian Tea Industry* (hereafter *Indian Tea*), London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967, p. 538.
- 44 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 37–39.
- 45 Mayne, *UPASI*, pp. 4–5.
- 46 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1894, p. 4.
- 47 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1894, pp. 6–7.

- 48 The UPASI was formally inaugurated only at the second meeting of the planters' conference in August 1894 at Bangalore. The first conference was attended by 25 delegates, 23 of them Europeans. Two members representing M/s Binny and Company and the Kolar Mining Board each also participated, expressing a common concern with regard to the labour question. By enrolling British firms at a later stage, UPASI became an integrated body of the owners of plantations, firms, companies and corporations with planting interests. See Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 6.
- 49 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 4.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 51 To quote G. K. Martin from Kodagu, 'It is incumbent on us to use strenuous endeavour to obtain the application of the Extradition Act to cases under Act XIII of 1859, and so assist our brethren of Mysore, Travancore and Kochi' in *UPASI Proceedings*, 1894, pp. 10–11.
- 52 When the planters representing their respective associations submitted a memorandum to the Government of Madras seeking legislative amendments regarding the Breach of Contract Act and the question of extradition, the Government stated that further legislation was not required as the existing one itself provided adequate protection. However, the Madras Presidency admitted to the Government of India that the complaint of the planters was not without weight, see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1894, p. 8.
- 53 For details regarding Madras Planters' Labour Act, see Sections 5.6 and 5.7.
- 54 Kershaw, K. L. 'Mundakkayam' in *UPASI*, pp. 224–5.
- 55 James, F. 'Political Relations' in *UPASI*, pp. 240–51.
- 56 Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India* (hereafter *Rege Committee Report*), Simla: Government of India, 1950, p. 183.
- 57 Joseph, E. K. 'Introduction', *Centenary Souvenir*, p. 5.
- 58 DAT, CSF, Political, Nos 198, 1914.
- 59 James, F. 'Political Relations' in *UPASI*, pp. 241–2.
- 60 Brown, H. *Parry's of Madras*, Madras: Parry & Co., 1954, pp. 187–8.
- 61 *UPASI* expressed its protest in strong words. To quote: 'This agitation, as you will readily understand is not a temporary or spasmodic one. We have decided to pursue our campaign until such time as we have educated the electorate and the Government to the economic inequity of taxing such an article as tea, and reduced the burden the industry has to bear to reasonable proportions', *UPASI Proceedings*, 28 to 30 August 1905, p. 23.
- 62 Forrest, D. *Tea for the British, The Social and Economic History of a Famous Trade*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1970, pp. 200–1; Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 166–7.
- 63 Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, pp. 542–3; *Rege Committee Report*, p. 183.
- 64 Kurian, 'Labour Regime', p. 5.
- 65 The *South Indian Bulletin* was the first official organ of the south Indian branch of the *European Association*. Surprisingly, the content of the *Bulletin* seems poor; not much was written on capital/investment not to speak of labour. For some details regarding the membership, see *South Indian Bulletin*, Vol. III, No. 6, June 1938, pp. 37–43.
- 66 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, pp. 291–2.
- 67 Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 61.
- 68 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 226.
- 69 Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 101.
- 70 See *Madras Mail*, 'Why is UPASI Silent?', 18 August 1934, p. 20.
- 71 *Kerala Sanchari*, 19 July 1893, NNR.
- 72 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 8.
- 73 When the pioneer European planter, C. R. T. Congrieve visited Annaimalai in the late nineteenth century he found a coffee plantation growing, owned by one Mr. Ramaswamy Mudaliar; see Congrieve, *Annaimalais*, p. 2.
- 74 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939: Report on Labour and Other Conditions in the Annaimalai Planting district – Report of the Minister of Agriculture who visited the estates on 24 October 25, 1937.

- 75 Kooiman, D. *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the nineteenth Century* (hereafter *Conversion and Social Equality*), Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989, pp. 127–35.
- 76 Ibid., p. 132.
- 77 Ibid., p. 128; Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, pp. 131–2; Mateer, *Native Life*, pp. 226–8.
- 78 Mateer, *Native Life*, p. 236.
- 79 Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance*, pp. 131–4.
- 80 Ibid.; also see Mateer, *Native Life*, p. 236.
- 81 Mahadevan, R. 'The Pattern of Industrial Control in Colonial Madras: Some Critical Observations on the Relative Position of Indian and Foreign Capital, 1930–50' in Arun Ghosh (ed.) *Indian Industrialisation: Structure and Policy Issues*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 336.
- 82 This was a problem faced by the growers of other plantation crops too. The representatives of coffee planters in Kodagu at their meeting on 19 January 1934 at Bangalore discussed the problems faced by the local planters while dealing with the coastal firms. They also emphasised the need for the establishment of curing works within the state.
- 83 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 109.
- 84 Sivaswami, K. G. 'Non-Indian Concentration in the Tea Industry', in *Report of the Plantation Inquiry Commission* (hereafter *Plantation Inquiry Commission*), Pt. I – Tea, Delhi: Government of India Press, 1956, p. 348.
- 85 Bagchi, *Private Investment*, pp. 170–4.
- 86 Ibid., p. 173, fn. 49.
- 87 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 178.
- 88 George and Tharakan, 'Tea in Kerala', p. 218.
- 89 See various correspondence in *PRTSMC and Kanan Devan Papers* compiled by the Government of Kerala, n.d.
- 90 This external pressure was irrespective of whether the land in question was disputed territory or not.
- 91 Quoted by Pandian, M. S. S. *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change, Nanchilnadu, 1880–1939* (hereafter *Nanchilnadu*), New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, p. 81.
- 92 The price of 'waste lands' rose from Rs 25 per acre in 1921 to Rs 50 in 1926 and further to Rs 70 in 1928, *Proceedings of the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly* (hereafter *PSMPA*), 28 February 1928, p. 16. Also see various discussions on the question of local planters having to pay higher prices for land, *PSMPA*, 24 February 1920, 28 February 1922 and 24 February 1924.
- 93 see Muthiah, *Planting Century*, pp. 434–50; Bagchi, *Private Investment*, p. 166.
- 94 Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 202.
- 95 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1906, p. 15.
- 96 *Madras Mail*, 'Why is UPASI Silent?', 18 August 1934, p. 20; *UPASI Proceedings*, 1906, p. 15.
- 97 See Innes, *Malabar*, Vol. I, p. 243. There were a large number of cases in which the local papers expressed their dissenting views.
- 98 For details see *Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Chitra State Council* (hereafter *PTSCSC*), Vol. X, 24 November 1926, pp. 230–3.
- 99 Resolution passed by the *Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee*, Kozhikode, 15 April 1927 as quoted by G. K. Pillai, *Congressum Keralavum*, A History of Congress in Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhat Books, 1986, p. 378. As per this resolution, the government was planning to grant more than two lakhs of acres of forests to Brooke Bond.
- 100 For the discussion, see *PTSCSC*, 8 August 1927, pp. 514–27. Local representatives in the *Sree Moolam Popular Assembly* also raised their voices against the registering of lands in favour of Europeans; it was also argued that more lands should be assigned to Travancoreukar for the cultivation of cardamom. For these discussions, see *PSMPA*, 28 February 1928, p. 16; 26 February 1929, p. 25.

- 101 Joseph, 'History of CTPA', p. 10.
- 102 *PTSCSC*, Vol. XI, 8 August 1927, p. 531.
- 103 While participating in the discussion on the question, G. Raman Menon, Mavelikkara, remarked in the Legislative Council: 'I have had occasion to see in Malaya that the Malay have been greatly pushed to the background because very large blocks of lands have been given to big companies and even Chinese capitals. The indigenous people of the country are going backwards, whereas the foreigners are coming up. I should not like to see the same thing repeated in Travancore', *PTSCSC*, Vol. XI, 8 August 1927, p. 520.
- 104 *Malayala Manorama*, 'Thiruvithamkotte Theyilathottangal', Tea Plantations in Travancore, Editorial, 22 July 1916, p. 2.
- 105 The *Manorama Group* floated the MRF which now leads in the tyres and tubes sector. The inter-related aspects, viz. Malayali capital being reinvested elsewhere and non-Malayali capital appropriating Kerala's splendid raw material at cheap prices are often cited as the major reasons for the state's relative backwardness. An offshoot of such thoughts recently found expression in the seiging of the 'Cochin Stock Exchange', alleging that whatever little surplus was generated in Kerala was being taken away by the Indian/European capital, thus keeping Kerala under neo-colonial control. For the issues involved, see Ram Mohan, K. T. and Ravi Raman, K. 'Of Cochin Stock Exchange and What it Means?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXV, 1, 6 January 1990, pp. 17–19; also see Paul, S. 'Cochin Stock Exchange and Kerala's Development', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXV, 11, 17 March 1990, p. 576.
- 106 For details, see Koshi, M. J. K. C. *Mammen Mappilai: The Man and His Vision*, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Historical Studies, 1976; also see Mahadevan, R. 'Industrial Entrepreneurship in Princely Travancore: 1930–47' in S. Bhattacharya *et al.* (eds) *The South Indian Economy, Agrarian Change, Industrial Structure, and State Policy c. 1914–1947*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 170. For the rise of Syrian Christian planting community in Travancore, particularly in rubber, Baak, *Plantation Production*, pp. 151–62.
- 107 See Matthen, C. P. *I Have Borne Much*, Madras: Ampthill, 1951.
- 108 Hardgrave, R. L. *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu*, Berkeley: University of California, 1969, p. 148.
- 109 Kothari & Sons, *Kothari's Investors Encyclopaedia* (hereafter *Kothari's Encyclopaedia*), Madras: Kothari Enterprises, 1941.
- 110 Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 134.
- 111 The James Finlay Group diluted 60 per cent of its Kanan Devan Plantations with Tatas in 1976. The dilution of ownership continued till 1984 when the entire property of the former was sold to Tatas; it was renamed Tata Tea. See the *Stock Exchange Official Directory*, 'Tata Tea Ltd', Bombay: The Stock Exchange Foundation, 1986.
- 112 Jay Shree Tea & Industries Ltd, *Annual Report*, 31 August 1976–77, p. 2.

Chapter 4

- 1 Banaji, D. R. *Slavery in British India*, Bombay: Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1933, pp. 60–1.
- 2 *Ibid.* Brown also mobilised labour from south Canara (the present day Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka state and places like Taliparamba and Payyanur in Kannur district in Kerala; it was largely the *vettuva pulayar* who were procured from Kannur).
- 3 Slavery was abolished in British India in 1843; in Travancore it was abolished in 1853. Two different interpretations exist with regard to the emergence of plantations and the employment of ex-slaves on these plantations: the abolition of slavery as a means to an end, and, second, as an end in itself, happily coinciding with the beginning of the plantation era. For the first argument see Kurup, K. K. N. 'The Colonial Investment and

- the Abolition of Slavery in South India: A Case Study of Kerala', *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. 2, Pt. I-IV, pp. 196-7; Uma Devi, S. *Plantation Economy of the Third World* (hereafter *Plantation Economy*), Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1989, pp. 70-9; Houstart, F. and Lemerminier, G. 'Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 11, Pt. 1, 1978, pp. 25-43. For the latter argument, see Sreenivas, M. N. *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (hereafter *Religion and Society*), New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1965; Benedicte, H. 'Slavery and Agricultural Bondage in South India', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1-2, 1967, pp. 71-126. However, it should be noted that 'free' and 'unfree' forms of labour do constitute the world capitalist-economy. Further, the colonial State and global capital were shrewd enough to detect a beneficial element in terms of economic interests in the activities of the missionaries which in turn made them support the religious moralism of the latter. Otherwise there would not have been the pressing need for legislative enactments to abolish slavery. For a discussion on related aspects see Kooiman, D. *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, Nos. 8 and 9, 1991, p. 63; *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the Nineteenth Century* (hereafter *Conversion and Social Equality*), Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1989; Baak, *Plantation Production*, pp. 91-4; Cederlof, G. *Bonds Lost: Subordination, Conflict and Mobilization in Rural South India, c. 1900-1970*, Delhi: Manohar, 1997, pp. 34-42.
- 4 Even after the legal abolition of slavery, slaves were 'bought, and sold and hired out', see Logan, W. *Malabar*, Vol. 1 (hereafter *Malabar*) (1889), rpt. Madras: Asian Educational Service, 1989, p. 153. As late as 1892, H. Tremenehere, the Revenue Collector had recommended to the government that the 'Untouchables' called the *panchamar* be freed from serfdom through the provision of land and educational facilities. The new relationships that emerged after legal abolition came to exist in various arrangements under different names, for instance, *pannai* in the Kaveri delta and *padial*, *suvasi*, *siruvedu* and *koottuppayir* in Chingleput. On Chingleput, see Sundari, T. K. *Caste and the Agrarian Structure: A Study of Chingleput District*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1985; on Kaveri delta, Schendel, W. V. *Three Deltas: Accumulation and Poverty in Rural Burma, Bengal and South India*, Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991, pp. 117-18. For the continuation of the *Padiyal* system in the early twentieth century, see Thomas, P. J. and Ramakrishnan, K. C. *Some South Indian Villages: A Resurvey*, Madras: University of Madras, 1940, pp. 174-6.
 - 5 See particularly Tinker, *New Slavery*, pp. 61-115.
 - 6 For further clarifications see Kumar, D. *Land and Caste in South India* (hereafter *Land and Caste*), London: Cambridge University Press, 1965, pp. 49-63.
 - 7 For a comprehensive discussion in its historical perspective, see Omvedt, G. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution, Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 161-89.
 - 8 Sreenivas, *Religion and Society*, p. 19.
 - 9 Ford, F. *The Wayanad and the Planting Industry of Southern India* (hereafter *Wayanad Planting*), Madras: Higginbotham & Co. 1885; also see *Madras Mail*, 'Malabar', 16 May 1896.
 - 10 Logan, *Malabar*, Pt. I, p. 149.
 - 11 When rubber cultivation began in the early twentieth century, in turn leading to an increase in demand for more *Pulaya* labour, low caste, the landlords as also the local press began to voice such complaints. See *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 1907, p. 38.
 - 12 Ford, *Wayanad Planting*, p. 56.
 - 13 Thurston, E. *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (hereafter *Ethnographic Notes*), Pt. II, 1907, rpt. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975, pp. 407-40.

- 14 Mateer, S. *Native Life in Travancore* (hereafter *Native Life*), 1883, rpt. New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1991, p. 66.
- 15 Thurston, E. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, Madras: Government Press, 1909, pp. 61, 68; *Badagas and Irulas of the Nilgiris*; *Paniyas of Malabar*; *A Chinese-Tamil Cross*; *A Cheruman Skull*; *Kuruba or Kurumbas*; *Summary of Results*, Madras: Government Press, 1897, pp. 8–9, 18–19.
- 16 Mateer, *Native Life*, p. 66. We do not intend to reduce the importance of the lead taken by their brethren in their struggle against the Europeans in the Wayanad forests, popularly known as the Pazhassi rebellion or the *Kurichias lahala* and other innumerable instances of tribal revolts from other regions of the world. The *Kurichias* and the Kurumbas of Wayanad revolted against the British policy of collecting land revenue in cash instead of in kind. This was in fact the beginning of the peasant revolt in Malabar in 1812.
- 17 Mateer quotes the case of hillmen who declined to 'herd with coolies and work like common people', *Native Life*, p. 66.
- 18 *Planting Opinion*, 'Thieving Tribes as Coffee Labourers', 9 May 1896; the local papers held a different view and they protested against the Coffee Stealing Bill as it led to a further victimisation of the workers and the local populace.
- 19 Wilkes, J. H. 'The Nilgiri-Wyanad' in *UPASI*, p. 274.
- 20 Cited in Pandian, M. S. S. *The Political Economy of Agrarian Change, Nanchilnadu, 1880-1939* (hereafter *Nanchilnadu*), New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, pp. 79–80.
- 21 For literature regarding the history of cardamom cultivation and also the implications of the monopoly over cardamom, which had previously been collected by tribals from the wild, see Viswanathan, T. P. *Brief History of Cardamom Hill Reserve*, 1978; Sivanandan, P. Narayana, D. and Nair, K. N. 'Land Hunger and Deforestation: Case Study of Cardamom Hills in Kerala', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 13, 1986, pp. 546–50.
- 22 Cited in Baak, P. E. *Plantation Production and Political Power: Plantation Development in South West India, 1743–1963* (hereafter *Plantation Production*), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 98.
- 23 Ouchterlony, J. 'A Geographical and Statistical Memoir of a Survey of the Nilgiri Mountains' in *The Hill Ranges of South India*, Ed. J. Shortt, Madras: Asylum Press, pp. 55–60, 1857.
- 24 Tamil Nadu Archives (hereafter *TNA*), Development, GO No 1821, 1924: Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Madras, to Secretary to the Govt. of Madras, dated 28 June 1924.
- 25 Aiyyappan, A. *Report on the Socio-economic Conditions of Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras* (hereafter *Socio-economic Conditions of Tribes*), Madras: Government Press, 1948, p. 125.
- 26 Mandle, J. R. 'The Plantation Economy: An Essay in Definition', *Science and Society*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1972, p. 57.
- 27 Guha, A. *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1926–1947*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976, p. 14.
- 28 With respect to northern India, see Das Gupta, R. 'From Peasants and Tribesmen to Plantation Workers: Colonial Capitalism, Reproduction of Labour Power and Proletarianisation in North East India, 1850–47', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 1986, pp. PE2–10; Das Gupta, K. 'Plantation Economy and Land Tenure System in Brahmaputra Valley, 1839–1914' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 29, 16 July 1983, pp. 1280–90.
- 29 Sarada Raju, A. *Economic Conditions in the Madras Presidency, 1800–1850* (hereafter *Economic Conditions*), Madras: Madras University Press, 1974, p. 50.
- 30 See Neale, W. C. *Economic Change in Rural India, Land Tenure and Reform, 1800–1955*, New Haven: Kennikat Press, 1962, p. 69.

- 31 The arrears of revenue increased from Rs 2,71,192 in 1885–6 to Rs 25,08,606 in 1872–3, see Kumar, D. *Land and Caste*, pp. 93–6.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 The land-owning castes included the *Brahmins, Vellalas, Reddy, Kapu*, etc. of the Madras Presidency and the *Nayanmar* and *Syrian Christians* in Travancore. For a discussion on the concentration of lands in the hands of upper-caste Hindus and Hindu temples in Travancore, Kochi and Malabar, see Varghese, T. C. *Agrarian Change*, pp. 185–98; for a comprehensive analysis with respect to the Madras Presidency, see Kumar, D. *Land and Caste*; for the perpetuation of the relationship between land and caste, see Thorner, D. *The Agrarian Prospect in India*, Madras: Allied Publishers, 1976, pp. 14–17, 36–40; Alexander, K. C. *Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur*, Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1975, pp. 16–19.
- 34 Cited in Panikkar, K. N. *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836–1921*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 41.
- 35 Innes, C.A. *Malabar District Gazetteers, Malabar*, Vol. 1 Madras: Government Press, 1915, p. 231. Eviction suits filed still later during this period were also significantly high: 4,490 in 1921 and 5,111 in 1926, see Government of Madras. *Malabar Tenancy Committee Report*, 1927, Vol. II, Madras: Government Press, 1929, p. 29.
- 36 With respect to Travancore, see Pandian, *Nanchilnadu*, pp. 68–72; Uma Devi, S. *Plantation Economy of the Third World*, Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1989, pp. 65–8.
- 37 For details, see Chakravorthy, L. 'Emergence of an Industrial Labour in a Dual Economy, British India, 1882–1920' (hereafter *Industrial Labour in a dual Economy*), *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, No. 3, 1978, pp. 249–328.
- 38 Ibid., p. 226.
- 39 Shanmugha Sundaram, V. *Economic Conditions in the Presidency of Madras with Special Reference to the Great Famine of 1876–78*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Madras, 1964, p. 44.
- 40 Such instances were cited in Arnold, L. *On the Indian Hills*, p. 284; *Madras Mail*, 'The Plantation Inquiry Commission', 17 June 1896, p. 7.
- 41 Manickam, S. *The Social Setting of Christian Conversion in South India*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977, p. 87; also see, Lovatt, H. *A Short History of the Peermade/Vandiperiyar District*, Kottayam: C. M. S. Press, 1972, p. 12.
- 42 For a similar case in Dooars in West Bengal, see Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, p. 58.
- 43 A search for a means of livelihood led the south Indians to move not only to nearby countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Burma, Myanmar, but also to distant colonies like British Guyana, Mauritius, Trinidad, Jamaica, Fiji, etc. Emigration from the Madras Presidency during the famine years could be gauged from the following figures:

Year	Emigrants
1875–6	98,258
1876–7	1,97,979
1877–8	1,69,089
1878–9	1,17,148
1880–1	88,386
1881–2	59,954

Source: Cited in Sha, P. *Emigration of Indian Labour, 1834–1900*, Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1970, p. 73. For a discussion on emigration from southern India, see Ferguson, J. *Ceylon in 1883: The Leading Crown Colony of the British Empire*, London: Sampson Low, 1883, p. 83; Kumar, D. *Land and Caste*, pp. 128–43; Tinker, *New Slavery*, pp. 175–235; Vertovec, S. 'Indian Indentured Migration to the Caribbean' and Thiara, R. K. 'Indian Indenture Workers in Mauritius, Natal and Fiji' in *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*, Ed. R. Cohen, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 57–62 and 63–8 respectively.

- 44 Daniel Moore, J. 'Plantation Labour in Mysore, 1871–1941: A Historical Approach to Migration Analysis' in *The Census in British India, New Perspectives*, Ed. G. Barrier, Delhi: Manohar, p. 6, 1981.
- 45 Cited in Moore, 'Plantation Labour', *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
- 46 GoM. *Report of the Census of the Madras Presidency*, 1871, Vol. I, Madras: Government Press, 1874, p. 346.
- 47 The planting regions of Mysore such as Chikmagalur, Shimoga and Mudgeri themselves began to rope in labour of outside origin for its plantations during the period from 1921 to 1931, see *Census of India, Mysore*, Vol. XII, 1931, p. 30.
- 48 The population in the Madras Presidency increased by 43 per cent during the period from 1851 to 1871 as against 57 per cent in Nilgiri, see *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881*, pp. 54–5. *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 10–11; Nicholson, F. A. *Madras District Manual, Coimbatore*, 2 Vols, Vol. II, Madras: Government Press, 1898, pp. 11, 306.
- 49 *Kerala Patrika*, 20 January 1900, p. 29; 9 July 1903, NNR.
- 50 *Kerala Shobhini*, 18 May 1903, NNR.
- 51 *Mathrubhumi*, 30 September 1931, NNR.
- 52 The population in the Madras Presidency increased from 38,199,000 in 1901 to 49,341,000 in 1941. Her population in 1871 stood at 31,221,000. See *Census of India*, Madras, various years.
- 53 Zachariah, K. C. *A Historical Study on Internal Migration in the Indian Subcontinent, 1901–31*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1964, pp. 280–9.
- 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 217–18.
- 55 For details regarding the migration from Travancore to the mid and highlands of Malabar, see Michael Tharakan, P. K. 'Dimensions and Characteristics of the Migration of Farmers from Travancore to Malabar, 1930–50', *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. 5, Pt. 2, June, 1978, pp. 287–9.
- 56 *Census of India, Madras*, 1931, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1, p. 49; *Census of India, Travancore*, 1901, Report, Vol. XXVI, p. 32; *Travancore*, 1931, Vol. XXVIII, Report, Pt. I, p. 8.
- 57 *Census of India, Travancore*, 1931, Vol. XXVIII, Report, Pt. I, pp. 22, 38 and 41. In Kodagu, the decrease in the natural population during 1921–31 was made up by an increase in the immigrants, from 33,937 to 38,718 during the same period; see *Census of India, Coorg*, 1931, Vol. XIII, p. 9.
- 58 The number of persons dependent on 1,000 acres of actually cultivated land in the labour recruiting districts such as Thirucharappalli, Selem and Madurai was 1,584, 1,823 and 1,591 respectively as against the Presidency average of 1,293 in 1930. The average sale price of land both wet and dry had doubled during the decennium 1910–20, and the rising trend persisted in the following years as well. For details, see RCL, Written Evidence of P. Audiah Naidu, pp. 255–306.
- 59 RCL, Written Evidence, p. 155; RCL, Oral Evidence, p. 214.
- 60 *Swadeshmitran*, 24 May 1922; *Mathrubhumi*, 27 May 1931, NNR.
- 61 Minutes, *GBM of KDP*, 26 May 1923, pp. 52–3.
- 62 GoM. *Report of the Ceylon Labour Commissioner for 1914 and 1915*, Recruiting of Travancore Pulaya Coolies, Madras: Government Press, 1915, p. 14.
- 63 For some details see Narayanan, K. S. 'Teendalvairi' [Against Untouchability], Kozhikode, 1927, as cited in Menon, D. *Communism in Malabar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 15.
- 64 RCL, Written Evidence, p. 199.
- 65 See Hitchcock, R. H. *Peasant Revolt in Malabar: A History of the Malabar Rebellion 1921* with an Introduction by Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. (hereafter *Malabar Rebellion*), New Delhi: Usha Publications, 1983, p. 176.
- 66 TNA, Rev. GO No. 271, 1920, dated 2 February 1920.

- 67 TNA, Judl. GO No. 1077, 1915: Employment of Criminal Tribes, dated 15 May 1915; also see Judl. GO No. 2256, 1915: Despatch Abstract: Criminal Tribes Act, GO No. 1048, 1915; GO Nos. 1016, 1915.
- 68 Arnold, D. *Police Power Vs Colonial Rule in Madras, 1859–1947*, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 153. The Salvation Army too tried to send them for military services or as workers in the plantations of Assam; see Radhakrishna, M. 'Surveillance and Settlements Under the Criminal Tribes Act in Madras', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1992, pp. 171–98.
- 69 TNA, Judicial, GO No. 1521/1915: *Despatch Abstract: Criminal Tribes*, dated 2 July 1915.
- 70 See RCL, Written Evidence of Rajaiah D. Paul, Vol. 11, Pt. 1, pp. 297–301.
- 71 See Breman, J. *Of Peasants, Migrants and Paupers: Rural Labour Circulation and Capitalist Production in Western India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985; Rothermund, D. 'A Survey of Rural Migration and Land Reclamation in India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 4, 1977, pp. 230–42; Omvedt, G. 'Migration in Colonial India: The Articulation of Feudalism and Capitalism by the Colonial State', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 7, 1980, pp. 185–212; Bates, C. and Carter, M. 'Tribal Migration in India and Beyond' in *Rural Labour in Colonial India*, Ed. Prakash, pp. 205–47.
- 72 The Kanan Devan planters alone were 9,000 workers short of the normal requirement; they in turn sought the close co-operation of the war-recruiting agencies. See Minutes, *Annual General Meeting of Kanan Devan Planters Association* (hereafter *AGM of KDPA*), 9 June 1945, p. 162.
- 73 Minutes, *Annual General Meeting of Central Travancore Planters Association*, 1943, p. 144.
- 74 Cited in Christopher Baker, J. *An Indian Rural Economy, 1880–1955: The Tamil Country Side*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 79.
- 75 Interview with Kumarasami, Wayanad, 2 February 1988.
- 76 Mackay, 'The Kanan Devans' in *UPASI*, pp. 228–39.
- 77 Planting Opinion, 'Ceylon Planters in Wayanad', Vol. VI, 23 April 1898, pp. 245–6. The planters in Wayanad sought the possibilities of recruitment of labour from Sri Lanka at a later period too, which might have been in view of the latter's experience in tea cultivation rather than due to a shortage of labour; see *Planting Opinion*, Vol. IV, No. 17, 6 May 1899, pp. 340–41.
- 78 *Planting Opinion*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 12 October 1895, p. 8. Further, the planters also encouraged the conduct of essay competitions on the question of labour to explore fresh ideas for labour recruitment. See *Planting Opinion*, Vol. IV, No. 4, 8 January 1899, p. 84.
- 79 Baig, A. and Henderson, W. *A Centenary of Planting in the Kanan Devan Hills Concession, 1878–1978*, Munnar: Tata-Finlay Ltd. 1978, p. 20.
- 80 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 12–13.
- 81 The indenture system of recruitment was one which became a major subject of discussion, after the abolition of slavery, in the colonies. Abuses were reported from various parts of the world till its final repeal in 1918. For a critical discussion see Tinker, *New Slavery*, pp. 288–333.
- 82 Chakravarthy, L. 'Emergence of an Industrial Labour in a Dual Economy', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, No. 3, 1978, p. 277.
- 83 Cited in Ushakumari, T. S. An Experiment in Plantation by the East India Company (mimeo, n. d), p. 22.
- 84 *Royal Commission on Labour*, Report, p. 350.
- 85 See *Census of India, Travancore*, 1931, Vol. XXVIII, Pt. I, p. 84.
- 86 With respect to the railway construction workers in India, see Kerr, *Railways of the Raj*, pp. 85–126; with respect to the sugar factories of Gujarat, Breman, J. 'Seasonal Migration and Co-operative Capitalism', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1,

- 1978, pp. 41–70; also see Marglin, S. A. 'What Do Bosses Do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production in the Division of Labour' in *Radical Political Economy: Explorations in Alternative Economic Analysis*, Ed. V. D. Lippit, New York: M. E. Sharp, pp. 19–59, 1996.
- 87 See *Planting Opinion*, 'The Reason and Origin of Advances', Vol. 23, November 1895, pp. 9–10.
- 88 Krishnaswamy, *Rural Problems*, p. 362; Raju, *Economic Conditions*, p. 136.
- 89 The interest rate charged was to the tune of 24–36 per cent in Malabar; see Evidence, by M. Giriappa, Deputy Registrar, Kozhikode, in *The Madras Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee*, Written Evidence, 7 Vols, Vol. II, Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1930, p. 6, Vol. IV, p. 553. For the various dimensions of rural credit in the Tamil countryside see Raju, *Economic Conditions*, pp. 133–45.
- 90 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 17–23.
- 91 Government of United Kingdom, Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (hereafter *RCL, Report*), London: His Majesty's Office, 1931, p. 236. In the larger context of colonialism similar forces were in operation in various parts of the world, with the colonies themselves bearing the cost of their own colonisation.
- 92 One such case is worth citing: in 1926, in the Devarshola Estate, Gudalur, a *kangany* named Govinda Swamy gave rupees 25 as loan to some of the workers on the estate. The workers could not repay the loan within the stipulated time and consequently they became bonded permanently in the same estate. See Subramaniyan, A. *Working Class Movement in Tea Plantations in Nilgiris* (hereafter *Working Class Movement in Tea*), Madras: Mimeo, 1989, p. 24.
- 93 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 8.
- 94 Correspondence attached to *UPASI Proceedings*, 1899, pp. 150–1.
- 95 Interview with Kumarasami, Wayanad, 2 February 1988.
- 96 *RCL*, Oral Evidence of J. E. Samson, Manager, Panchamalai Estate, p. 339.
- 97 Meiliora, S. 'Tamil Labour in Mysore', Letter to the Editor, *Madras Mail*, 9 May 1896, p. 7.
- 98 One worker for instance, evidenced before the *Royal Commission on Labour* that:
- I got rupees 27/- from the *maistry* at Pollachi . . . the *maistry* said that unless I said I got rupees 37/- my name would not be enrolled on the garden register. I trusted that the *maistry* would give me rupees 10 more. If I want to go back . . . the Maistry would ask me to pay rupees 37 plus the cost of the blankets.
- However, the *maistry* denied this and when the worker was again interviewed by the *RCL*, he stated that the *maistry* denied everything he said to him. *RCL*, Oral Evidences of Chinnaswami, worker, and Pattakaran, *maistry*, pp. 377–80. Similar claims and counter-claims among the planters and the salaried staff members, the latter largely Indian, were also not uncommon. For one such case see RAK, *Inward Letters in the Magisterial Department*, Gaccopard to the Magistrate of Malabar, dated 1 October 1863.
- 99 Evidence suggests that the workers were paid advances not merely to meet their travel costs or to meet their urgent needs but also to buy themselves a drink or two, see *Census of India, Travancore*, 1921, Vol. XXV, Pt. 1, pp. 156–7, virtually enticing them to the plantations. That children were often bribed with sweets in an attempt to decoy them was a fact that was confirmed by interviews with Ibrahim, Wayanad, dated 5 March 1990 and Dr Daniel, Coimbatore, dated 20 September 1991; 10 January 1992.
- 100 Banaji, *Slavery in British India*, pp. 60–1.
- 101 In Wayanad, for instance, a peculiar kind of recruitment was practiced with the co-operation of the landlords. The venue was the Valliyoorkavu *Bhagavati* temple, 5 km east of Mananthavady. When temples all over Kerala remained closed to

- untouchables, the gates of this temple alone were thrown open to them by the feudal landlords; but this was done with an ulterior motive. Those landlords who required labour for their paddy fields would select their workers from among the tribals who assembled at the temple during the festival days in May every year. In certain cases, a *Paniyar* family would be paid rupees 30 as advance. With the payment of the advance, the tribals were obliged to work for the landlords for one year until the next festival season. This practice of gathering able-bodied tribal men and women in one place in a group was exploited by the European planters too with the help of the feudal landlords and the *kanganies*. After paying around rupees 10 and 5 for men and women respectively, the *kanganies* would take them to the estates. But before leaving, they were first taken to the temple deity and were made to take an oath in the name of Valliyoorkavu *Amman* that they would work on the estates without protest until the festival came around in the following year; the earlier contract would then be renewed in accordance with the master's whims. See Aiyappan, *Socio-economic Conditions*, p. 100.
- 102 The amount of advances paid and the proportion of irrecoverable amounts as calculated by the planters could be gauged from the following statement: The fact that a majority of the workers on the estates in the princely states belonged to British territory and hence were immune to legal action once they escaped to the latter, owing to certain legal restrictions, helped this particular group in no small measure. Also see, *Madras Mail*, 'Labour Laws on Plantations', 23 July 1895, p. 3.
 - 103 See *Madras Mail*, 'The North Mysore Planters' Association', 1 April 1896, p. 8.
 - 104 *Madras Mail*, 28 April 1896, p. 5.
 - 105 Unwin, R. 'The Labour' in *UPASI*, p. 168.
 - 106 *Planting Opinion*, 'Absconding Maistries', Vol. 11, No. 13, 26 June 1897, p. 39.
 - 107 Acting Secretary, Labour Federation of Sri Lanka, to Secretary *UPASI*, dated 13 September 1899 in 'Correspondence' attached to *UPASI Proceedings*, 1899, pp. 150–1. Apart from individual planters, agents from Sri Lanka also 'enticed away' the workers who were already under contract; see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1908, p. 7 and pp. 41–63.
 - 108 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1926, pp. 117–18.
 - 109 In 1931 for instance, one-half of all emigrants from the Madras Presidency was from the depressed castes, see *Census of India*, 1931, Vol. XIV, *Madras*, Pt. I, p. 344.
 - 110 Interview with Ramasamy, Valparai, 10 June 1991.
 - 111 By the early 1950s the question of abolition of the *kangany* system was being widely discussed in planting circles. In resisting such a sudden abolition without adequate compensation, the *kanganies* came to organise themselves – the *Estate Kanganies Union of Travancore* and the *Malabar District Estate Labour Contract Maistri Union* were such examples. The *kangany* system was legally abolished after the state reformulation in 1956, in the Madras Presidency in 1958 and in Keralam in 1962. Most of the *kanganies* were later absorbed as supervisors on the estates. For the discussion leading to the abolishing of the *kangany* system, see Gazette, K. *Report of the Committee for Enquiry into the Kangany System*, No. 14, dated 20 October 1959.
 - 112 GoI. *Agricultural Statistics of British India, 1891–95*, Calcutta: Department of Revenue and Agriculture, 1897, pp. 351, 355.
 - 113 *Ibid.*
 - 114 *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.
 - 115 GoT. *The Travancore Directory*, Pt. II, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1938, pp. 503–12.
 - 116 For the implications with respect to Sri Lankan plantations, see Meyer, E. 'The Plantation System and Village Structure in British Ceylon: Involution or Revolution?' In *Rural South Asia, Linkages, Change and Development*, Ed. P. Robb, London: Curson Press, p. 43, 1983.
 - 117 A European managing director in one of the estates in Coonoor evidenced before the *Royal Commission on Labour* that their best preference was for widows as they were never likely to leave the estate again. RCL, Oral Evidence of L. L. Porter, Managing

- Director, Nonesuch Tea Estates Company, p. 312. It might also have crossed the planters' minds that it would be more economical to employ widows rather than married couples whose rearing cost they themselves would have had to meet.
- 118 Mukherjee, R. K. *The Indian Working Class*, Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1951, pp. 92–4.
- 119 *Census of India, 1921, Madras*, Vol. XIII, Pt. I, pp. 219–21.
- 120 For more details regarding the age composition and proportion of women, see *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 120–2.
- 121 For the need for an extra child as an economic necessity, see the pioneering arguments by Susan George, *How the Other Half Dies, the Real Reasons for World Hunger?* New York: Penguin Books, 1981, pp. 59–61.
- 122 RCL, Oral Evidence of J. E. Sampson, p. 345.
- 123 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 171. For more details on mortality on plantations, see Section 6.6.
- 124 Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 349.
- 125 In the Caribbean colonies, for instance, when it was found difficult to acquire adequate imported labour, planters often employed the children of the people imported earlier. See Thompson, E. cited in Beckword, *Persistent Poverty*, and p. 59.
- 126 *Madras Mail*, 'South Indian Planters' in Conference', 20 August 1925, p. 11.
- 127 RCL, Oral Evidence, pp. 203, 320, 462; also see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1904, p. 29.
- 128 *Planting Opinion*, 'Labour in Travancore', 1 February 1896, pp. 18–19.
- 129 See Bowmik, S. 'Plantation Labour Act and Child Labour', *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *Child Labour*), Vol. XXVII, 17 October 1992, pp. 2287–9.
- 130 Moreover, the minimum age for employment in unorganised sectors such as *beedi*, cigar, carpet, glass and matches is 14 years, two years higher than the stipulated minimum for the plantations. The plantation industry thus enjoys the dubious distinction of being the only industry in the organised sector which legally permits the employment of child labour. See Bowmik, 'Child Labour', pp. 2287–9.
- 131 For a discussion, see Evans, B. 'Constructing a Plantation Labour Force: The Plantation-Village Nexus in South India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2, April–June 1995, pp. 155–76.
- 132 The figures on the caste-wise break-up of plantation workers are worked out from the *Census of India, 1921, Madras*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 324.
- 133 Jeffrey would have us know that the missionary educated Syrian Christians and *Nadar* converts had the advantage of being offered new opportunities by merchants and planters, Jeffrey, R. *The Decline of Nayar Dominance, Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847–1908*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House (P) Ltd. 1976, pp. 50–2.
- 134 For details, see *Census of India, 1931, Travancore*, Vol. XII, Pt. 2, pp. 154–63; also see *Census of India, 1931, Madras*, Vol. XIV, Pt. I, pp. 345–9.
- 135 Those belonging to the castes of *Vannan* and *Naasuvar* and *Pariyari* sought the job of washerman and barber respectively; the *Chakkiliyas* took up the work of scavenging, but instances of such a caste-based allotment of work were few, with the bulk of these groups engaging themselves in the general category of field labourers. Interview with Thankayyan, Wayanad, 20 May 1991.
- 136 See footnote number 2 in Chapter 1.
- 137 *Madras Mail*, 'Is the Wayanad Healthy?' 8 May 1896, p. 5; also see Venkatesaiya, S. 'Coffee in Mysore' and Kershaw, 'Mundakkayam', both in *UPASI*, pp. 190, 225 respectively.
- 138 This does not mean that the workers were free of caste divisions on the plantations; the planters themselves made use of these in the early years, which in turn hampered the growth of a sense of class identity among the workers. In Sri Lanka too, the European planters deliberately played up differences in castes among the workers in their attempt to keep them under control, see Brass, T. and Bernstein, H. 'Introduction: Proletarianisation and Deproletarianisation on the Colonial Plantations' in *Plantations*,

- Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia*, Eds E. Valentine Daniel, T. Brass and H. Bernstein, London: Frank Cass, pp. 1–40, 1992.
- 139 Tamil Nadu Archives, *Report of the Ceylon Labour Commissioner for 1914 and 1915: Recruiting of Travancore Pulaya Coolies*, Madras: Government Press, 1915, p. 14.
- 140 *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, Madras*, Vol. 21, November–December 1924, p. 937.
- 141 *Ibid.*, p. 988.
- 142 For specific details, see Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes*, pp. 407–40.

Chapter 5

- 1 Karl, M. *Capital*, Vol. I, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, pp. 450, 459–90, 549–51.
- 2 Michael, F. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (hereafter *Discipline and Punish*) [Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan], London: Penguin Books, 1977, p. 151.
- 3 Macfadye, E. 'Managing Agents in the Eastern Plantation Industry', *Tropical Agriculture*, Vol. 31, No. 4, October 1954, p. 270.
- 4 For evidence of the existence of men pluckers as late as in the 1950s, see *Minutes of the General Body Meeting of the Kanan Devan Planters' Association* (hereafter *Minutes, GBM of KDPA*), 17 April 1953, p. 82.
- 5 In drawing a distinction between 'heavy work' and 'light work' even when the women worked as hard as the men and under equally exacting conditions, the planters succeeded in devaluing women's labour, in dividing the working class and above all in exploiting the labour of two full workers while paying the wage of one or one-half; this forms a major argument in Reddock's analysis on women workers in Trinidad and Tobago; see Reddock, E. R. *Women, Labour and Struggle in twenty century Trinidad and Tobago, 1898–1960*, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1984, pp. 175–83.
- 6 *Royal Commission on Labour*, Oral Evidence of Palani Ammal, a woman worker, p. 375.
- 7 In the words of Foucault, 'an ostentatious form of examination', in *Discipline and Punish*, p. 188. For an interesting analysis of agronomic discipline on Sri Lankan tea plantations using Foucaultian methodology, see Daniel, E. V. 'Tea Talk: Violent Measures in the Discursive Practices of Sri Lanka's Estate Tamils', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 3, July 1993, pp. 568–600.
- 8 Pinches, H. L. *Tea*, Coonoor: UPASI, 1924, p. 32.
- 9 Even after Independence, the planters held the view that to achieve maximum productivity and the production of quality tea, close control over supervision was required. For one such view, see Kothari, D. C. 'Plantation Industries as Fields of Investments', *Supplement to Capital*, 17 July 1952, p. 68.
- 10 Of late a few estates have been attempting to introduce plucking machines, a post-1990 development, see Section 8.2.
- 11 Achaya, K. T. *The Food Industries of British India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 177.
- 12 de Silva, S. B. D. *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, pp. 289–300.
- 13 Hull, E. C. P. *Coffee Planting in Southern India and Ceylon*, Madras: Higginbothams & Co., 1877, pp. 72–3.
- 14 Government of India. *Indian Rubber Statistics*, Calcutta: Manager of Publications, 1925 and 1939.
- 15 Contextually, it is worth noting certain characteristic differences in the size of labour in tea in southern India and that of Assam in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The average number of workers per acre of tea was 1.37 in southern India as against 1.22 to 1.68 in upper Assam. The proportion of workers permanently employed throughout the year in southern Indian tea was about 57 per cent as against nearly 91 per cent in the

Assam plantations. While the annual immigration to southern Indian plantations was about four-fifths of the total labour force, it was only one-tenth in Assam, see *Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee*, Madras, 1896, p. 9; plantations in southern India thus had the disadvantage of more non-permanent labour, which induced the planters here to seek a more stable workforce by making them resident and captive.

- 16 Myrdal, G. *Asian Drama: An Enquiry into the Poverty of Nations*, London: Penguin Press, 1972, p. 106. For a theoretical understanding of the question of reproduction in both capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, see Meillassoux, C. *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- 17 To what extent the class formation of the workers was hampered on account of this is dealt with in Sections 7.1 and 7.2.
- 18 Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India* (hereafter *Rege Committee Report*), Simla: Government of India, 1946, p. 140.
- 19 Imperialism has the dubious history of having put an entire nation to sleep – as the English did in China through opium. Liquor and narcotics were cleverly employed by the planters to discipline the worker. There were instances of liquor being forced on the workers to extract work in the north-eastern plantations; on the contrary, in other instances as in southern India, they were deprived of all access to liquor in the drive to enforce discipline among them.

To quote, Foucault:

... constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract; it is a question of constituting a totally useful time: it is expressly forbidden during work to amuse one's companions by gestures or in any other way, to play at any game whatsoever, to eat, to sleep, to tell stories and comedies: and even during the meal-break, 'there will be no telling of stories, adventures or other such talk that distracts the workers from their work'; it is expressly forbidden for any worker, under any pretext, to bring wine into the manufactory and to drink in the workshops.

See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 150–1.

- 20 For details regarding the planters disallowing the opening of liquor shops in the vicinity of the estates, see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1909, p. 17. For the restriction on smoking even at the market place, see Thirumayilai, A. 'An Appeal to all the Employers in the Planting Industry' (hereafter *An Appeal*), *The Plantation Worker*, n. d., p. 5, SIEO office file.
- 21 For the brutal punishments meted out by the planters in other colonies like Sumatra see Breman, *Coolie Beast*, pp. 160–75. We do not have evidence to suggest that the punishments included loss of ears for robbery and burning alive irrespective of gender differences, as reported by Naipaul in his study on eighteenth century Trinidad; see Naipaul, V. S. *The Loss of El Dorado: A History*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1969.
- 22 Krishnan, K. M. *Wayanadum Thottangalum*, Tea Plantations of Wayanad, compiled by Bijili V. Komath, Wayanad: manuscript, 1952, p. 6, courtesy Andalat.
- 23 Post, K. *Revolution, Socialism and Nationalism in Vietnam, an Interrupted Revolution*, 3 Vols, Vol. I, England: Dartmouth, 1989, p. 29.
- 24 *Malayala Manorama*, 'The Devikulam Murder Case', 20 September 1905, p. 2. As the very Judicial Department was but a 'colony' of the Europeans and the upper-caste Hindus, justice to the underprivileged remained a distant dream. It must be pointed out that out of the nine Indians on the High Court Bench of Fort St. George in 1913, six were *Brahmins*, one was a high-caste non-*Brahmin* and two were Muslims. For details, TNA, Public, Ordinary Series, GO No. 1129, 1913, dated 8 September 1913 as cited in Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict*, p. 232.

- 25 Planters who originated such punishments took pride in elaborating on the same for the benefit of their fellow planters. For instance, see Elliot, R. H. *The Experiences of a Planter in the Jungles of Mysore* (hereafter *Experiences of a Planter*), 2 Vols, Vol. II, London: Chabald Constable and Co., 1871, pp. 288–9.
- 26 Rege *Committee Report*, p. 140.
- 27 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 34–5.
- 28 The planters went to great lengths to keep such incidents under covers. It took some socially concerned individuals and the vernacular press to bring these dark secrets out into the open. The Madras-based *Swadesamitran*, the Mysore-based *Nadegannadi* and Kerala-based *Kerala Mitran*, *Manorama*, etc. were some of the local journals and newspapers which articulated these issues. Whenever the press came out with the truth, a public withdrawal of the same was insisted upon by the planters. See *Madras Mail*, 20 August 1925, p. 11. Stories related by those who had actually experienced such travails provide shocking confirmation of such early reports as in the case of their north-eastern counterparts. Interview with Dr Daniel, Coimbatore, 20 September 1991.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Cited in Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, and p. 404.
- 32 Interview with Muniyandi, Valparai, 5 October 1993.
- 33 Baig, A. and Henderson, W. *Facets of a Hundred Years Planting: A Centenary of Planting in the Kanan Devan Hills Concession, 1878–1978*, Munnar: Tata-Finlay, 1978, pp. 19–20.
- 34 TNA, Judl. GO No. 467, 1917.
- 35 Interview with Dr Daniel, 20 September 1991; interview with V. K. Rajamony, *kangany*, Sooryanelli, 20 September 1995.
- 36 See footnote number 21 in this chapter.
- 37 Mackay, W. S. S. *Memoirs Describing His Career as a Tea Plantation Manager in the High Range of Travancore* (hereafter *Memoirs*), India Office Library & Records, London, 1984.
- 38 At the General Body Meeting of the *Wayanad Planters' Association* held on 1 March 1899, it was reported that the *cherumar* from Malabar 'had asked for cheques payable at Kozhikode rather than take cash, as they had been blackmailed on the road', as reported in *Planting Opinion*, 'Wayanad', March. Vol. VI, No. 10, 1 March 1899, p. 184.
- 39 *Royal Commission on Labour* (hereafter *RCL*), Report, pp. 402–3. N. S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar reports one such case to the Royal Commission on Labour where a father could not take his daughter to his father-in-law's funeral, see RCL, Oral Evidence, p. 402; Giri, V. V. *My Life and Times*, 2 Vols, Vol. I, Delhi: Macmillan Company of India Ltd, 1976, pp. 124–5. The workers were not free to attend funerals even into the 1950s, see Minutes, *GBM of KDPA*, 3 August 1955, p. 178.
- 40 *Swadesamitran*, 13 March 1903, NNR.
- 41 Tinker, *New Slavery*, pp. 221–2, 362–3.
- 42 For these details, see Hyam, R. *Empire and Sexuality, The British Experience* (hereafter *Empire and Sexuality*), New York: Manchester University Press, 1990; Ross, R. 'Oppression, Sexuality and Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope', *Historical Reflections*, Vol. VI, 1979, pp. 421–33; Saunders, K. (Ed.) *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*, London: Croom Helm, pp. 98, 107, 148–9, 1984; Genovese, *The World the Slaves Made*, pp. 413–31; Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Grove Press, 1965, p. 125.
- 43 RCL, Written Evidence, p. 201.
- 44 RCL, Written Evidence of N. S. Ramaswamy Ayyangar, p. 253.
- 45 Stoler, A. *Capitalism in Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt 1870–1979*, New York: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 32–5; Breman, J. *Taming the Coolie Beast: The Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in South East Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 191–3.

- 46 Krishnan, *Tea Plantations of Wayanad*, p. 20.
- 47 Mackay, *Memoirs*, op. cit., p. 8.
- 48 From the Persian word *farangi* meaning 'a frank European'. The earliest European invaders – the Portuguese – were referred to by this term, which gradually, over many years of use, became *parangi*; the sores or *punnu* in local Malayalam diction brought by them were called *parangipunnu*. See Gundert *Nighandu*, Dictionary of Herman Gundert, Kottayam: D. C. Books, 1991, p. 628.
- 49 Aiyappan, A. *Report on the Socio-Economic Conditions of Aboriginal Tribes of the Province of Madras*, Madras: Government Press, 1948, p. 125. Also see RCL, Written Evidence, p. 253.
- 50 For details see Mackay, *Memoirs*, p. 9.
- 51 Hyam, R. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, pp. 121–7.
- 52 The Imperial Government was driven to a rehaul of the legal system by the Revolt of 1857. The Indian Penal Code which was originally drafted by the Indian Law Commission with Lord Macaulay playing a pivotal role came into force in its revised form on 1 January 1862. Eventually, other pieces of legislation such as the Criminal Procedure Code also came into operation. For more details regarding the implications of these with respect to plantations in the late nineteenth century, see *Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee* (hereafter *Planters' Inquiry Committee*), Madras, 1896, pp. 23–34.
- 53 Das, R. K. *History of Indian Labour Legislation*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1941, pp. 11–41.
- 54 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 24–33.
- 55 DAT, CSF, 15781, 1878, Nanoo Pillai, Dewan of Travancore, to the Resident in Travancore and Kochi, dated 3 May 1878.
- 56 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 41.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 58 At the GBM of the KDPA, 16 February 1899, it was decided to apply pressure on the government on the question of extradition. To quote one planter:

... extradition into native states is of the first importance to us, it should be made as direct and single as possible, and the controls round about procedure in force in criminal cases avoided – a Labour Act would be of little or no use to us unless extradition is also given.

Quoted in *Planting Opinion*, 'Kanan Devans', Vol. IV, No. 10, 1 March 1899, pp. 184–5.
- 59 For critical treatment of labour legislation with respect to the tea plantations in Assam, see Behal, R. P. 'Power Structure, Discipline, and Labour in Assam Tea Plantations under Colonial Rule', *International Review of Social History*, Supplement, Vol. 51, 2006, pp. 143–72.
- 60 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–75.
- 61 For these details, see the Madras Planters' Labour Act, 1903, Madras: Government Press, 1903; also see Das, *Labour Legislation*, pp. 28–30.
- 62 *Malayala Manorama*, 9 March 1903, NNR.
- 63 *Nadegannady*, 10 February 1903, NNR.
- 64 TNA, Judl. GO No. 3081, 1915: *Indentured Labour*, Views of a Missionary.
- 65 For the planters' justification see *Planters' Chronicle*, March 1907, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 32.
- 66 *The Hindu*, 3 November 1904, NNR.
- 67 For details of various Acts passed in the nineteenth century, see *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, pp. 24–65.
- 68 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1904, p. 6. What is more, the government even assured the planters of further modifications in the Act if genuinely indicated. The *kanganies* who were

- initially annoyed over having to approach the Magistrate for redress soon realised that the Act gave them a greater 'power' over the workers than before. They, too, were thus quite satisfied with this new piece of legislation. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 69 In fact, three years after the implementation of the Act, the cases filed in the court of the sub-Magistrate of Vaithiri alone were 191, of which 125 cases were complaints against *maistries* and the remaining against the workers, see *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 1907, pp. 60–1.
- 70 Law, General, GO No. 585, 1921.
- 71 TNA, Law, General, GO No. 719, 1922.
- 72 The following information was collected from the memorandum submitted to the RCL by the Government of Madras, Madras: Government Press, 1929, p. 36 and TNA, Law, General, GO No. 585, 1921 and 719, 1922.
- 73 Five types of punishments were incorporated in the Indian Penal Code, namely, capital punishment, transportation, forfeiture of property, imposition of fines and imprisonment. There were two kinds of imprisonment: simple and rigorous. Of these the latter was more often resorted to as it was found to be a greater deterrent to further crime than the former. Rigorous imprisonment entailed penal labour, diet cuts and so on. See Jegatheesan, P. *Law and Order in Madras Presidency 1850–1880*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1987, pp. 153–63. The Government Orders in Law, General, make it explicit that workers were subject to 'rigorous punishment'. A general picture of the situation may be obtained from this interview with two aged workers in Anaimalai, interview with Muniyandi and Alagappan, 12 January 1991.
- 74 Cited in David Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge and Penology in Nineteenth Century India' in *Essays in Honour of Ranajith Guha, Subaltern Studies, VIII*, Eds. D. Arnold and D. Hardiman, p. 187.
- 75 Non-service of warrants was a major subject of discussion in the general body meeting of the various planters' associations. With respect to the *Wayanad Planters' Association*, see the Minutes, *GBM of WPA*, dated 8 November 1911, as reported in *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. VI, No. 47, 25 November 1911, p. 723; GBM dated 16 October 1907 in *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. II, No. 18, 19 November 1907, p. 660; GBM dated 10 June 1908 in *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. III, No. 6, 6 July 1908, p. 137; GBM dated 8 October 1913 in *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. VIII, No. 44, 1 November 1913, p. 562. For a similar situation in Anaimalai, see the Minutes, *GBM of APA*, 15 July 1913 in *Planters' Chronicle*, Vol. III, No. 33, 16 August 1913, p. 405.
- 76 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1922, p. 40.
- 77 *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings (hereafter Madras Legislative Council Proceedings)*, Vol. XXXVI, August 1927, p. 359; RCL, Report, p. 355.
- 78 See RCL, Report, p. 415. Thomas, E. F. Collector and District Magistrate, Coimbatore admitted to the RCL that he was unaware of any attempt to convey the message to the workers that such Acts no longer existed.
- 79 RCL, Oral Evidence of Chinnammal, a woman worker in Anaimalai, p. 374.
- 80 For a detailed account of the formation and operations of the various Mounted Rifles in southern India, see 'Veo', 'The Volunteers' in *UPASI*, pp. 433–52.
- 81 It would be foolish on our part to assume that these private armies went out of existence along with direct colonialism. A resurrection of this practice is now evident in the Assam plantations of the 1990s in the form of the Plantation Protection Forces. As in the colonial times, these repressive measures receive full state backing in a manner that puts independent India to shame.
- 82 Cited in Arnold, D. *Police Power Vs Colonial Rule in Madras, 1859–1947* (hereafter *Police Vs Colonial Rule*), Madras: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 155.
- 83 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 90.
- 84 Arnold, *Police Vs Colonial Rule*, p. 156.
- 85 *Ibid.*
- 86 DAT, CSF, GO No. 9651, 1902.

- 87 *Madras Mail*, 'South Mysore Planting Notes', 14 October 1899, p. 7.
- 88 *Madras Mail*, 'Mysore Planting Notes', 1 August 1895, p. 5.
- 89 TNA, Judl. GO No. 262, 1859: J. O. Ouchterlony to Secretary to the Government, Revenue and Police Dept., dated 8 February 1859.
- 90 Such incentives were widely given in the plains largely for identifying the 'culprits' and the benefits went to the colonial officials such as the Magistrates and the Inspector General of Police and Jails. Such rewards amounted to Rs 21,807 in the year 1880–1 alone. See Maclean, *Madras Manual*, p. 204.
- 91 TNA, PWL, GO No. 417, 1927. The workers might have been further handicapped by the very caste composition of the police force, it being heavily biased against them, as in the case of their under-representation in the other public services. The *paraiyar* who constituted a major portion of the Tamil populace as well as a significant chunk of plantation labour, for instance, were grossly under-represented in the police force which was dominated by the upper-caste Hindus; the former constituted only 1.32 per cent of the police force in 1875, which dwindled down to 1 per cent in 1880; the State justified its attempt to keep out these low castes maintaining that they were less 'efficient'. For more details, see Maclean, *Madras Manual*, pp. 190–1; Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict*, pp. 230–44; Jegatheesan, *Law and Order*, p. 57. In one instance, it was reported that, even without an extradition warrant, a local sergeant of the Sri Lankan police arrested three workers on the pretext that they had decamped from an estate in Sri Lanka, see TNA, Judl. GO No. 623–4, 1917: Deputy Magistrate of Ramanathapuram to the Secretary to the Government of Madras, dated 11 February 1917.
- 92 TNA, Judl. GO No. 1521, 1915: Despatch Abstract: *Criminal Tribes*, dated 2 July 1915.
- 93 TNA, Devt. GO No. 839, 1927, Commissioner of Labour, Madras, to the Secretary to the Government of Madras, dated 22 April 1927.
- 94 Cited in Baak, P. E. *Plantation Production and Political Power: Plantation Development in South West India, 1743–1963* (hereafter *Plantation Production*), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 195–7.
- 95 *RCL*, Written Evidence, p. 200.
- 96 The *Royal Commission on Labour* expressed its displeasure over the whole question of the District Magistrate not allowing Ramaswami Ayyangar to convene a meeting of the workers and to collect information to be submitted, *RCL*, Report, pp. 419–20.
- 97 TNA, Judl. GO No. 3081, 1915, *Despatch Abstract*: Legislative Council Questions – dated 9 December 1915.
- 98 See Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution*, pp. 53–4, 286–7. In the larger context, the interests of the Dalits and backward communities in southern India also continued to be ignored, as made clear earlier by M. C. Raja, one of the most powerful Dalit representatives in the Madras Legislative Council. Though, as part of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, Dalit representatives were nominated to the Madras Legislative Council, they were too small in number to be able to influence legislation affecting them in the wider context, not to speak of those on the plantations. See *MLCP*, Vol. XV, 28 November 1923, p. 103.
- 99 Mackay, W. S. S. *Memoirs*, op. cit.; also see Baak, *Plantation Production*, op. cit., p. 187. It is worth noting that the idea of state and 'states within states' became the subject of enquiry in the larger context of oligarchic-state formations. Kapferer, while agreeing with Trouillot on the significance of state effects, parts ways with him on the matter of 'oligarchic-corporate political emergence' that are indeed a new form of state formations; he also contends that many such 'historical antecedents' existed particularly in the northern European colonial context and during imperial expansion, often, assuming state proportions and even functioning as 'states-within-states', see Kapferer, B. 'New formations of power, the oligarchic-corporate state, and anthropological ideological discourse', *Anthropological Theory*, Vol. 5,

- No. 3, 2005, pp. 285–99. Also see Trouillot, M.-R. 'The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2001, pp. 125–38; Ferguson, J. and Gupta, A. 'Spatializing States: Towards an Ethnography of Neo-Liberal Governmentality', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 4, 2002, pp. 981–1002.
- 100 *Indian Patriot*, 4 December 1907, NNR.

Chapter 6

- 1 Marx, K. *Capital*, Vol. 1, see particularly Chapter 25, 'General Law of Capitalist Accumulation', Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, pp. 762–872.
- 2 Sweezy, P. M. 'Foreword' in Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital, The Degradation of Work in the twenty Century*, Thiruvananthapuram: Social Scientist Press, 1979, p. xii.
- 3 Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India* (here after *Rege Committee Report*), Simla: Government of India, 1946, p. 138.
- 4 For a detailed theoretical and practical explanation of the implications of task-oriented work and the internalisation of discipline, see Thompson, E. P. 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in *Essays in Social History*, Eds M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 39–77, 1979.
- 5 Workers in the coir industry maintained the view that wages should be fixed on a time-rate basis instead of the piece-wage system warning that the latter would undermine 'sound labour conditions', see GoT. *Report of the Board of Conciliation of Trade Disputes in the Mats and the Matting Industry* (hereafter *Matting Industry*), Travancore: Government Press, 1939, pp. 53, 91.
- 6 See *Rege Committee Report*, p. 156.
- 7 'Memorandum of the Anaimalai Workers' Union to the Hon'ble Minister of Labour and Agriculture', Coimbatore: Kammavar Achukkudam Ltd, n.d., pp. 6–9.
- 8 Also see *Rege Committee Report*, p. 156.
- 9 Government of Travancore. *Report of the Board of Conciliation of Trade Disputes in the Mats and the Matting Industry*, Thiruvithamkur: Government Press, 1939, p. 99.
- 10 *Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee*, Madras, 1896, p. 89.
- 11 Ibid.; also see DAT, CSF: Wages to Agricultural Labourers in Thiruvithamkur, 1881–1890 – Collection of Statistics for the Use of the Planters' Inquiry Committee, Resident to Dewan Thiruvithamkur, dated 31 August 1896.
- 12 For certain aspects of the movements of wages, see S. Sreenivasa Raghavaaiyyangar, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency During the Last Forty Years of British Administration*, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1993.
- 13 For the agricultural wages of all the *taluks* in Thiruvithamkur as reported by the *Dewan Peishcar* of various divisions during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see DAT, CSF No. 1916. Also see Pillai, *State Manual*; George, T. K. and Michael Tharakan, P. K. 'Penetration of Capital into a Traditional Economy: The Case of Tea Plantations in Kerala, 1880–1950', *Studies in History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1986, p. 211.
- 14 There were a few exceptions to this rule. In certain villages, the local landlords assembled together and, through their combined efforts, prevented a further hike in wages; those who failed to comply with such rules were either fined or expelled from the village, see TNA, Law General, GO No. 402, 1923: *Despatch Abstract*: Depressed Classes – the Labourers – Oppression from Employers.
- 15 This reminds us of Adam Smith whose explanation for the continuous increase in wages was that the amount of capital employed in the production process had

increased steadily and, to quote: people who have great stocks to employ frequently cannot get the number of workmen they want, and therefore bid against one another in order to get as many as they can, which raises the wages of labour, see Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* 1776 rpt. London: Everyman's Library, 1964, pp. 79–80.

- 16 As mentioned in Chapter 2, Thiruvithamkur, a net exporter of paddy turned to a net importer of paddy from the mid-nineteenth century and there was a 'swamp in import of rice from Burma', see *Census of India, 1931, Travancore*, Pt. I, pp. 22–3; Baig, A. and Henderson, W. *Facets of a Hundred Years Planting: A Centenary of Planting in the Kanan Devan Hills Concession, 1878–1978* (hereafter *Facets of a Hundred Years Planting*), Munnar: Tata-Finlay, 1978, p. 20.
- 17 Arnold, D. *Police Power Vs Colonial Rule in Madras, 1859–1947* (hereafter *Police Power*), Madras: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 325. The worker in India had to have a much steeper rise in prices than his counterpart in England. The comparative picture of the changes in price index of food grains reveals this point:

Year	India	Britain
1873	100	111
1894	114	63
1905	117	72
1910	168	78
1914	272	85

Source: Pillai, P. P. *Economic Conditions in India*, London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1928, p. 25 fn.

- 18 *Madras Mail*, Editorial, 'The Future of Coffee Planting', 20 September 1899, p. 8.
- 19 *The United Planters' Association of Southern India*, 1893–1947 Proceedings, 1898, p. 10.
- 20 It was not by accident that the essay on the labour question in the plantations in southern India which expressed similar views went on to win the prize. See Huddleston, M. V. 'The Labour Question: The Past, Present and Future Supply of Labour in the Wayanad', *Planting Opinion*, Vol. IV, No. 13, 1 April 1899, pp. 240–2.
- 21 Though the question of reliability of data may arise, the author prefers to accept these reports as nearly accurate at least with respect to wage figures.
- 22 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 89.
- 23 The details of average wages of agricultural labourers in various districts of the Madras Presidency are available in TNA, Law General, GO No. 446, 1923: *Despatch Abstract: Emigration Ceylon and Malaysia – Average Wages of Agricultural Labourers in the Presidency*.
- 24 Though the official record of rural wages in the Madras Presidency dates back to 1873, it is the *Quinquennial Wage Census* from 1908 onwards that provides us with detailed information about the rates of wages recorded from different *taluks* for most of the main categories of workers. However, such Census figures also suffer from shortcomings, or at least require a critical interpretation based on factors such as rainfall, the availability of labour, migration, rural production relations, etc. For an exploration of the possibilities of using the *Quinquennial Wage Census* and the interpretations that are warranted, see Atchi Reddy, M. 'Agricultural Wages in the Madras Province, 1908–1951', paper presented at the seminar on the *South Indian Economy*, c.1914–45 at the Centre for Development Studies during 25–27 April 1988.
- 25 *Moral and Material Progress of India*, 1920, p. 67.
- 26 Memorandum submitted by the *Anaimalai Workers' Union* to Giri, V. V. Minister for Labour and Industries, dated 17 January 1938 APA Office, Valparai.

- 27 Minutes, *APA*, 15 November 1943, p. 45.
- 28 TNA, Devt. GO No. 1499, 1940 – ‘Extracts from the speech to be delivered by the President’, at Coonoor on 28 July 1939.
- 29 *RCL*, Oral Evidence of the Representatives of the UPASI, p. 202.
- 30 *RCL Report*, pp. 401–2.
- 31 *Rege Committee Report*, op. cit., pp. 157–60.
- 32 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1938: The President Panchayat Board, Vaithiri to the Secretary, Labour and Industry, GoM, dated 28 December 1937.
- 33 TNA, *Fortnightly Reports* for the first half of January 1948, dated 26 January 1948, and June 1948, dated 9 July 1948; *Planters’ Chronicle*, 20 November 1943, p. 478.
- 34 Baig and Henderson, *Hundred Years Planting*, op. cit., p. 40. This being the case of the Kanan Devan plantations which had its own rice mill in Thiruchirappalli, which was kept running round the year milling paddy brought in from surrounding regions; one could imagine the plight of workers on other estates which had no such organised arrangements. For the difficulties in obtaining an adequate rice supply for the rubber estates, see Travancore Information and Listener, Editorial, ‘March of Times’, Vol. III, No. 10, June 1943.
- 35 See Ministry of Food, *How Britain was Fed in War Time – Food Control 1939–45* London, 1946, pp. 8, 14, 65.
- 36 This was the case with the majority of estates, see *RCL*, Oral Evidence, p. 200. However, there were a few exceptions.
- 37 *RCL*, Oral Evidence of Samson, J. E. Manager, Panchamalai Estate, Valparai, p. 350.
- 38 Interview with Azhagappan, Valparai, 10 September 1991.
- 39 TNA, Judl. GO No. 1322, 1900.
- 40 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 162.
- 41 Planters, however, do not subscribe to this view and their representative evidenced to the *RCL* that it was not true. See *RCL*, Oral Evidence of the representatives of UPASI, p. 200.
- 42 In this context, a few remarks on the emergence of markets and townships in the planting regions would be in order. In the early years, there were no public bazaars in the plantation centres. Hence almost all estates used to run their own bazaars, called *shandis*, weekly markets which functioned on Sundays, when the workers got their *chelavukasu*. It was these *shandis* that later became regular markets and then formed townships such as Munnar in Thiruvithamkur and Valparai in Anaimalai. The townships of Munnar and Nilagiri came up by the turn of the century; Valparai came up as late as the 1920s. The planters controlled not only the plantations and the plantations labourers but also the townships. The Planters’ Association concerned used to construct shops and buildings which, in turn, were leased out to the merchants. The Anaimalai Planters’ Association used to collect, for instance, not less than Rs 15,000 a year by way of shop rents, rents on cart stands, tolls, shandy collections and rents on slaughter houses Official Records, *APA*. In townships like Munnar, the KDHP even had its own coins for exchange which affected the *chukram* of the Thiruvithamkur Government which retained but a nominal authority over the townships. The planters did not allow even a public market for rice to emerge in such townships. Instead, it was under their direct control that the market functioned; they controlled everything from salt to opium and *ganja*.
- 43 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939: Labour Legislation in Wayanad Planting Area – suggestions sent by a well-wisher to the Minister, Labour and Industries, GoM.
- 44 Interview with Azhagappan, Valparai, 10 September 1991.
- 45 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 159.
- 46 *RCL*, Oral Evidence of the representatives of UPASI, p. 216.
- 47 Among many such instances one reported by a pioneer planter Elliot, R. is quite revealing: seeing his dogs lying under his table at his residence, he asked his servant boy:

Boy, how is it my dogs look so full and sleep so badly?

- The Sahib's dogs, the boy said: have been hunting in the jungle and found dead coolie. They not want any more dinner for very long time; and the planter admits (*this he said with perfect placidity, as though it were a very ordinary occurrence*. See Elliot, R. H. *The Experiences of a Planter in the Jungles of Mysore*, 2 Vols, Vol. II (hereafter *Experiences of a Planter*), London: Chapman & Hall, 1871, p. 346.
- 48 *Planting Opinion*, 'The Reason and Origin of Advances', No. 23, 1895, pp. 9–10.
- 49 *Planter's Inquiry Committee*, op. cit., p. 15.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 TNA, Law General, GO No. 3017, 1924.
- 52 TNA, PWD and Labour, GO No. 1625–6, 1930.
- 53 These details are collected from the *Fortnightly Report* for the second half of July 1924: 2; *Madras Mail* 18 July 1931; *Paschimatharaka and Kerala Pathaka*, 1 January 1876 NNR; *Planting and Commerce*, Editorial, 'The Elephant Menace in the High Ranges', 23 December 1961, p. 1.
- 54 Congrieve, C. R. T. *The Anaimalais* (hereafter *Anaimalais*), Madras: Associated Printers, n. d, p. 53.
- 55 *Planting Opinion*, 'Labour in Travancore', 1 February 1896, p. 19.
- 56 RCL, Oral Evidence of Chinnammal and Palaniammal, pp. 334, 375 respectively. This was further confirmed in an interview with Rathanamma, a former plantation worker, Sooryanelli, dated 10 September 1995.
- 57 Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India* (hereafter *Rege Committee Report*), Simla: Government of India, 1946, pp. 121, 159.
- 58 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 162.
- 59 Patwardhan, V. N. 'Comments on the Results of the Diet Surveys of Tea, Coffee and Rubber Plantation Labour in South India' in *Report on an Enquiry into the Cost and Standard of Living of Plantation Workers in South India* Labour Bureau: Calcutta, 1948, pp. 102–3; also see Narayanan, R. et al. *Health Status of Tea Plantation Workers with Special Reference to their Occupation*, Bangalore: Institute of Occupational Health and ICMR, 1982.
- 60 de Castro, J. *The Geopolitics of Hunger*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977, pp. 137–255.
- 61 Infant mortality was reported to have declined since then, see *Rege Committee Report*, p. 171.
- 62 Dutt, R. P. *India Today 1940*, Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya P Ltd, 1986, pp. 42–3.
- 63 Krishnaswamy, *Rural Problems*, Madras: Government Press, 1947, p. 33. The RCL had remarked that, in general, the mortality rate among plantation workers was considerably lower than the corresponding figure in the provinces; see RCL, Report, p. 405. In fact, it was lower than the mortality rates in the tea plantations of Assam. This was the period when the tea garden population of Assam was dying at the rate of nearly 10 per cent, cited in Buckingham, J. *Tea-Garden Coolies in Assam*, Calcutta, 1894, p. vi. This, however, cannot be taken as an indication of a better health status on the southern plantations; it is quite possible that the majority of diseases and deaths here went unreported.
- 64 In his inaugural address at the Imperial Conference held in Simla during 12–18 October 1909, Lord Minto, the Viceroy and Governor General of India, characterised malaria as a problem of Imperial magnitude. See, Proceedings of the Imperial Conference on Malaria Simla, 1910 cited in Muraleedharan, V. M. 'Development of Preventive Health Care in the Madras Presidency: The Case of Malaria during the Inter-War Years' in *South Indian Economy*, in Bhattacharya, S. et al. (Eds), *The South Indian Economy: Agrarian Change, Industrial Structures and State Policy in South India 1914–1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 268–92.
- 65 Arnold, L. *On the Indian Hills or Coffee Planting in Southern India* (hereafter *Indian Hills*), London: Sampson Law, 1881, pp. 328–9.

- 66 Hamilton, D. *Report on the Sheveroy Hills* Madras: St. George Press, 1862, p. 6.
- 67 TNA, PWD & Labour, GO No. 1625–6, 1930: *Despatch Abstract*: Labour – Mysore Estates – Bad Treatment of Coolies belonging to British India.
- 68 For such incidents, see Arnold, L. *Indian Hills*, pp. 328–9.
- 69 Ayengar, M. O. T. *Report on Malaria and Filariasis Surveys and Other Investigations 1931–34*, Madras: Government Press, 1936, p. 203; also see Measham, J. E. *The Transmission and Prevention of Malaria on the Tea Estates of Madras Presidency* (hereafter *Prevention of Malaria*), Valparai, 1940.
- 70 *Planters' Chronicle*, 'Control of Malaria', 7 November 1942, p. 472.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Congrieve, *Anaimalais*, p. 99.
- 73 Cited in Arnold, *Police Power vs Colonial Rule*, p. 306.
- 74 Congrieve, *Anaimalais*, p. 99.
- 75 Memorandum on the Anaimalai Hills Planting District Valparai, A. P. A. n.d., p. 4.
- 76 In 1912 Dr. F. Milton, a retired Medical Officer of the Egyptian Government, was appointed as Chief Medical Officer of the Association. He put forward various proposals for malaria control which were accepted by the Boards concerned. The Association also requested the Government for aid, and in 1913, Horne, T. H. Special Malaria Officer of the Presidency was deputed to report on the local malaria conditions. He supported the recommendations of Dr Milton towards the clearance of drainage areas and swamps. A brief survey was carried out at Vaithiri in 1931. See Dr Covell, G. 'Malaria Problems in the Wayanad', Office File *ESASI*, pp. 15–16.
- 77 Clark, M. 'The Anaimalais' in *UPASI*, p. 255.
- 78 Measham, *Prevention of Malaria*, pp. 47–48.
- 79 See *Imperial Gazetteer*, Vol. XI, p. 21. In certain estates, workers were inoculated as a precautionary measure. This caused much alarm among the local populace in Wayanad and elsewhere. The planters also decided to inspect the workers coming into the planting areas to assure that they were plague-free. See *Planting Opinion*, 'Notes', Vol. IV, No. 6, 1 February 1899, p. 117.
- 80 Francis, *Nilgiris*, pp. 253–54.
- 81 DAT, CSF, No. 1620/1928: *Outbreak of Plague in the Devikulam Division during 1927–28*.
- 82 Cited in Catanch, I. J. 'Plague and the Indian Village 1896–1940' in *Rural India: Land, Power and Society Under British Rule*, Ed P. Robb, New York: Curson Press, 1983, p. 218.
- 83 See *Kerala Patrika*, 20 February 1904 NNR.
- 84 He would carry a wooden box for the purpose – there would be six to seven bottles inside the box. Most of the time the bottles would contain medicines of different colours: a medicine of a particular colour was meant to treat a particular disease. The 'medical coolie' was given instructions on their use by the compounder. The poor coolie would often label the bottles accordingly in a feeble attempt to avoid any mix-ups. Thus, there would be a bottle for fever, a bottle for cough, another for vomiting and so on. Armed with these labelled bottles, he would go to the *layam* and call out: 'all those who are ill, come here'. The patients would pull themselves up, stagger towards him and hold open their mouths. They would then receive their medicine – those with fever, from the bottle for fever, those with diarrhoea, from the bottle for diarrhoea. It was not unusual for a patient with fever to receive medicine for cough, and one with cough to receive medicine for diarrhoea. Any number of such mix-ups occurred in Wayanad, see Krishnan, *Wayanadum Thottam Thozhilalikalum*, pp. 34–9.
- 85 Ibid., p. 38.
- 86 *Planting Opinion*, 'Doctoring Coolies', 15 February 1896, p. 9; also see Hall, A. 'The Nelliampathies' in *UPASI*, p. 145.
- 87 *MLCP*, Vol. XXXVI, 28 August 1927, p. 339.
- 88 Ibid., p. 170; *RCL*, Report, p. 417.

- 89 RCL, Oral Evidence of A. B. Chengappa, planter, p. 438.
 90 See Minutes, *GBM of KDPA*, 16 January 1953.
 91 TNA, Labour Officer, Pollachi, 'Report on Kangany system in Plantations', submitted to the Government of Madras, 1948, p. 5.
 92 TNA, Devl. GO No. 3040, 1939: *Despatch Abstract: Labour – Plantations in Nilagiri and Wayanad – Conditions of Labour*, dated 15 December 1939.
 93 Ibid.
 94 p. 6.
 95 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939; also see *Memorandum submitted by the Anaimalais Workers' Union to V. V. Giri, Minister for Labour and Industries*, dated 17 January 1938, p. 2. Even a decade after Independence, the workers continued to live under overcrowded and unhealthy conditions, see the *Report on the Nutritional Diet Survey of Workers in Tea Plantations*, Madras: Department of Statistics, 1959, p. 2; also see TNA, Devt. GO No. 3040, 1989. Married couples were often forced to seek privacy outside the confines of their overcrowded rooms at night, preferring the dampness and chill of the outdoors. Interview with Azhagappan, Valparai, dated 12 October 1989.
 96 RCL, Report, p. 408.
 97 TNA, Devt. GO No. 3040, 1939: *Despatch Abstract: Labour – Plantations in Nilagiri and Wayanad – Conditions of Labour*, dated 15.12.1939.
 98 Elliot, *Experiences of an Indian Planter*, p. 287.
 99 RCL, Oral Evidence of Palaniammal, a woman worker, p. 376.
 100 *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 137–38.
 101 This approximation is derived from the fact that the Dalits as a single group in the Madras Presidency, from among whom the majority of the workers were drawn, remained illiterate for a considerable period, as is evident from the following figures:

Year	% of literates
1901	0.43
1911	0.94
1921	1.36
1931	1.16

Source: *Worked out from the Census of India, 1931, Madras*, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1, pp. 281–2.

- 102 RCL, Report, p. 379.
 103 RCL, Oral Evidence of Rao Bahadur Subbayya and Madappa, A. B. pp. 443 and 451 respectively.
 104 GoM. *Memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour*, Madras: Government Press, 1929, p. 15. A tea factory on the Kanan Devan estates was converted into a school in 1925. There were two part-time estate schools in Nilagiri in 1929, three in Palanimalai and one in Anaimalai.
 105 For details, see TNA, Law General, GO No. 393, 1934.
 106 *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol. XX, October 1924, p. 792.
 107 Technical changes in the industrial production process had far-reaching effects on education; this was evident right from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. See Musgrave, P. W. *Technical Changes, the Labour Force and Education: A Study of the British and German Iron and Steel Industries*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1967, p. 152. One such enquiry into the effects of technical changes in the British and German iron and steel industries on education since the mid-nineteenth century points out that the sudden changes brought about by the various scientific advances had a considerable effect upon the educational system.

- 108 The following conversation between two planter delegates to the Annual General Meeting of the UPASI in 1904, *UPASI Proceedings*, 1904, pp. 28–29 is worth quoting:

Knight: We do supply the necessary schools for Thiruvithamkur the children of our labourers. I think it is only right that we should do so. We want the children of our labourers to be our future labourers, and if we can teach them to read and write their own language, it will rebound to our credit and advantage.

Scot-Skirving: They will then be above north Mysore working as coolies.

Knight: We do it, and our labourers favour the idea.

Scot-Skirving: Yes, that is alright for the present generation.

Knight: We are already employing our labourers' children who have been taught in our schools. We don't keep them always at school.

- 109 There was an accumulated stock of 275 million lb in the British warehouses alone on the eve of the Depression, which was equivalent to six months' supply in the world market, see Forrest, *Tea for the British*, p. 212. The average price of Indian tea per kg realised at the Calcutta auction sales during 1932–3 was rupees 0.71 as against rupee 0.90 in 1931–2 and rupees 1.28 in 1930–1.
- 110 The following figures as quoted by the *Travancore Economic Depression Enquiry Committee Report* (hereafter *Depression Enquiry Committee*), Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1931, pp. 74–76 show the sharp decline in prices of four different grades of tea in Thiruvithamkur:

28 June 1930	28 June 1931
12.00 d	8.50 d
12.00 d	5.75 d
18.75 d	10.12 d
14.00 d	5.80 d

- 111 Percival Griffiths, *History of the Indian Tea Industry* (hereafter *Indian Tea*), London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967, p. 194. Further, within a year of the Depression, the Chairman of the UPASI expressed relief, saying the 'worst is now past', see *UPASI Proceedings*, 1930, p. 29.
- 112 *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.
- 113 *Depression Enquiry Committee*, p. 21.
- 114 Interview with Solomon, P. A. Kottarakkara, dated 5 October 1992.
- 115 Marx distinguishes among the different sections of the reserve army of labour according to their origins: (i) floating having been unemployed recently; (ii) stagnant long term unemployed; and (iii) latent those not previously employed. Even during the Depression, while large numbers of workers were thrown out of employment, women workers were mostly retained.
- 116 *Census of India 1931, Madras*, Vol. XIV, Pt. I, p. 81.
- 117 Worked out from the *Indian Tea Statistics* of the respective years.
- 118 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1934, pp. 97–98. Also see Langely, *History of Peirce Leslie*, p. 97.
- 119 In September 1930 alone, not less than 5,400 south Indian workers were taken to the Nagapattanam Port from Malaysia. Due to mass retrenchment there were still about 25,000 labourers out of work on Malaysian plantations. See *Madras Mail*, 6 and 27 September 1930.
- 120 See *Janmabhumi*, 20 April 1933; Jaya Bharathi, 16 August 1933 NNR.
- 121 *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.
- 122 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 7.
- 123 Mayne, *UPASI*, p. 117.

- 124 Griffiths, *Indian Tea*, p. 203.
- 125 *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 136–37. This was the time when the Public Works Department offered wages of even up to 12 annas a day, see RCL, Oral Evidence, p. 459.
- 126 See the wage figures in *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 136–37.
- 127 See Labour Bureau, *Report on an Enquiry into the Cost and Standard of Living of Plantation Workers in South India*, Calcutta: Manager of Publications, 1948, p. 45.
- 128 *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 137 and 139.
- 129 Ravi Raman, K. 'Plantation Labour: Revisit Required', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 22, 31 May 1986, pp. 960–2.
- 130 *Rege Committee Report*, p. 142.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Gow Wilson and Stanton, *Tea Producing Companies of India and Ceylon Showing the History and Results of those Capitalised in Sterling* London, 1897, pp. 91–2.
- 133 For more details regarding authorised and issued capital, see Tea Producing Companies, *Mincing Lane Tea and Rubber Share Brokers' Association* London, 1937, p. 136.
- 134 *Planters' Chronicle*, 27 February 1943, p. 92.
- 135 Gopal, M. H. 'The Trend of Profits in India 1918–1939', *Sankhya*, Vol. 6, Pt. 3, 1943, p. 274.
- 136 One of the most important indicators of the economic profitability of a concern is the dividends declared, although this may not truly represent all the profits made either. It has been found that, in certain cases, the dividends did not represent all the gains; in other cases they represented more than the actual profit made in a particular year. Still, dividends do indicate the profit performance and the repatriation of the related concerns.
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 Sivaswami, K. G. in *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, Report I – Tea, 1956, pp. 306–10.
- 139 For the following details, see *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, pp. 782–3.
- 140 Barratt, M. *After Imperialism* London, 1963, p. 231.
- 141 Reserve Bank of India (RBI), *India's Annual Liability on Investment Income Account*, RBI Bulletin, February 1952, p. 103.
- 142 *Reserve Bank of India Bulletin*, January 1956, p. 16. For some discussion, see George and Tharakan, *Tea in Kerala*, pp. 227–9.
- 143 Sivaswami in *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, pp. 325–7.
- 144 Kidron, M. *Foreign Investments in India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 309.
- 145 Sivaswami in *Plantation Inquiry Commission*, p. 327.

Chapter 7

- 1 Marx, K. and Engels, F. *Manifesto of the Communist Party in Collected Works*, Vol. VI, 1845–48, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, pp. 490–519. In another context, to quote:

There is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself.

See Marx and Engels, *The First Indian War of Independence*, Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960, p. 91.

- 2 Rege, D. V. *Report on an Enquiry into the Conditions of Labour in Plantations in India*, Simla: Government of India, 1946, pp. 182–3.
- 3 Ibid., p. 183. In the Koney estate in South Travancore, a trade union was reported to be existing with a small membership, but in the event of a dispute the union officials were expected to cooperate with the estate manager.

- 4 Though attempts at a formation of workers' unions were made earlier in the Ahmedabad cotton mills, this was the first systematic attempt towards trade union organisation with a regular membership, Palme, R. Dutt, *India Today*, 1940, Calcutta: Manisha Granthalaya, Pvt., Ltd, 1986, pp. 406–7.
- 5 It was at a meeting convened by P. K. Bava, an Ezhava by birth and an active participant in the Sri Narayana Reform Movement, that the coir industry-based 'Labour Union' was formed on 31 March 1922; this eventually came to be called the *Travancore Labour Association*. Bava was also instrumental in bringing out the *Thozhilali*, The Worker, the first of its kind in southern India; see Govindan, K. C. *Memoirs of an Early Trade Unionist*, Thiruvananthapuram: St. Joseph Press, 1986, pp. 14–15, 23. Also see *Matting Industry*, p. 121. For an understanding of the structure of the coir industry and the class formation of the coir workers, see Isaac, T. *Class Struggle and Industrial Structure: A Study of Coir Weaving Industry in Kerala, 1859–1980*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1984.
- 6 *Census of India, 1921, Madras*, Vol. XIII, Pt. 1, p. 324.
- 7 Mackay, W. S. S. 'The Kanan Devans' in Speer, S. G. *UPASI*, p. 326.
- 8 Further, their strong belief in *karma* – by which the caste-Hindus were able to put an entire nation of depressed castes to sleep – remained unshaken; neither revolutionary ideas nor progressivism were conceivable, see Weber, M., *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York: Free Press, 1958, pp. 118–23.
- 9 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939: The Representation Submitted by the Muslims of the Anaimalai to the Government of Madras dated 26 October 1937.
- 10 Interview with Maniswami, Valparai, dated 10 March 1994.
- 11 Ibid., interview with Ibrahim, Wayanad, dated 5 March 1990.
- 12 According to the Census of India 1931, the break-up on linguistic lines of the population, in percentage, of the Madras Presidency whence the majority of plantation labourers hailed was as follows: 41.11 per cent spoke Tamil, 37.72 per cent were Telugu, 7.54 per cent spoke Malayalam and 3.61 per cent were Kanarese, see *Census of India, 1931, Madras*, Vol. XIV, Pt. 1, p. 219.
- 13 Valentine, D. E. 'Tea Talk: Violent Measures in the Discursive Practices of Sri Lanka's Estate Tamils', *Comparative Study of Society & History*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1993, p. 571.
- 14 Caste distinctions between the low-caste workers and the salaried upper castes were kept alive by the latter. An incident has been quoted wherein an upper-caste *Brahmanan*, while on a visit to his European employee's residence, took care to remain outside on the *verandah*, having learnt from a priest that this would cost him less to remove the pollution he would suffer for having entered a European house, see Mackay, W. S. S. *Memoirs Describing His Career as a Tea Plantation Manager in the High Range of Travancore*, India Office Library & Records, London, 1984 (hereafter *Memoirs*), interview with Blake, D. M., p. 10. In keeping this distance from even one European, these *Brahmins* were actually perpetuating an ideology of purity and pollution that stood between themselves and the workers.
- 15 Elliot, R. H. *The Experiences of a Planter in the Jungles of Mysore*, 2 Vols, Vol. II, London: Chapman & Hall, 1871, p. 278.
- 16 *Planters' Inquiry Committee*, p. 89.
- 17 *Planting Opinion*, 'Labour in Travancore', 1 February 1896, p. 19.
- 18 *Report of the Southern India Planter's Inquiry Committee*, Madras, 1896, p. 89.
- 19 *Rege Committee Report*, pp. 136–7.
- 20 Note by Richardson, F. G. quoted in Nagam, V. A. *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. 3, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1906, p. 72.
- 21 In the context of the Sri Lankan plantations, it was observed that, 'the labourers home is bound up with his job, and both are directly dependent upon the planters . . . the conditions and arrangement of life and recreation, as well as of work fall to a very large extent within the bounds of the territory possessed by the planter, and hence are subject to his authority', cited in de Silva, S. B. D. *The Political Economy of*

- Underdevelopment*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 289. The concept of territoriality has also been explained in a different context by Arnold, D. 'Rebellious Hillmen: The Gudern-Rampa Risings 1839–1924' in *Subaltern Studies I*, Ed. R. Guha, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 88–142, 1982.
- 22 RCL, p. 324.
- 23 TNA, Devt. GO No. 1941, 1939; also see Giri, V. V. *My Life and Times* (hereafter *My Life*), Vol. I, Delhi: Macmillan Company of India Ltd, 1976, p. 129.
- 24 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939, Cotton, A. C., Manager, The Anaimalai Tea Estates Ltd, to the President, Pollachi Taluk Congress Committee, dated 25 August 1937.
- 25 For details, see Rajagopal, K. 'The Planter Then and Now', *The Plantation Worker*, n.d., pp. 6–8, UPASI, Coonoor.
- 26 TNA, Devt. GO No. 3040, 1939: *Memorandum submitted by E. Achuth to V. V. Giri*, dated 7 July 1939.
- 27 As it has been reported in the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly, see *PTCLA*, 9 December 1936, Vol. IX, No. 3, pp. 168–9.
- 28 Thirumayilai, 'An Appeal', p. 5.
- 29 TNA, Devt. GO No. 4855, 1951, note by Krishna Pillai, P. N. Commissioner of Labour, Travancore.
- 30 TNA, *Report on Kangany system in Plantations by the Labour Officer*, Pollachi.
- 31 Similar was the case with the tea workers on the plantations in Bengal, see Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in a Plantation System*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 133.
- 32 Thirumayilai, 'An Appeal', p. 5.
- 33 See Hobsbawm, E. *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984, pp. 1–14.
- 34 Despotism because force prevails over consent; colonialism because one racial group dominates political, legal and economic rights which are denied to the other. See, Burawoy, M. *The Politics of Production*, London: Verso, 1985, p. 226.
- 35 Shakila, H. H. *History of the Randetara Plantations*, MPhil Dissertation submitted to the Department of History, University of Kozhikode, 1980, p. 20.
- 36 Francis, B. *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Malabar and Canara*, Vol. II, London: Higginbotham and Co. 1807, pp. 187–8; Innes, C. A. *Malabar District Gazetteers, Malabar*, Madras: Government Press, 1915, pp. 418–19; also see *Malabar*, Vol. I, 1889, rpt. Madras: Asian Educational Service, 1989, p. 529.
- 37 As in the case of the German working class whose plight has been described by Barrington Moore in his *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (hereafter *Injustice*), Whiteplains: M. E. Sharp, 1978, p. 125.
- 38 RAK. *The statement made by W. Fubugh, the writer in the Coffee Estate belonging to Outchterlony*, dated 7 February 1859.
- 39 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1905, p. 86.
- 40 Ravindran, R. 'Keralathile Thottam Thozhilali Prasthanam', hereafter Thottam Thozhilali, in *Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Golden Jubilee Union Souvenir*, 1972, p. 116.
- 41 TNA, *Fortnightly Report*, dated 18 March 1941, p. 5.
- 42 Shortt, J. *The Hill Ranges of Southern India*, Pt. VI, Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1883, p. 72.
- 43 Congrieve, C. R. T. *The Anaimalais*, Madras: Associated Printers, n.d., pp. 52–3.
- 44 Cited in Muthiah, S. *A Planting Century, The First Hundred Years of the United Planters' Association of Southern India, 1893–1993* (hereafter *Planting Century*), Madras: East-West Press, Pvt, Ltd, 1993, p. 41.
- 45 Indian Factories Act, *Administration Report*, 1929, p. 5.
- 46 Moore, *Injustice*, p. 125.
- 47 GoM. *Report on the Administration of the Police of the Madras Presidency* (hereafter *Police Administration Report*), 1916, Madras: Government Press, 1917, pp. 49–50;

- TNA, Judl. GO No. 523, 1917. Also see *Despatch Abstract: Criminal Tribes – Recording Papers Relating to the Progress Made in the Settlement of Madras Presidency*, dated 5 March 1917.
- 48 In Wayanad, the District Magistrate found it imperative to modify the Breach of Contract Act in the very same year of its passing in 1859 to contain desertion, also see RAK, The Magistrate to the Deputy Registrar, Court of Judiciary, dated 24 June 1859, *Outward Letters written by the Collector of Malabar in the Magisterial Department for the year 1859*.
 - 49 James Scott theorises how the relations between ‘hidden transcript’ and ‘practical resistance’ are dialectic, see Scott, J. C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990, also see Ch 1.
 - 50 Interview with Dr Daniel, Coimbatore, 10 January 1992.
 - 51 Scott, J. C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, London: Yale University Press, 1985.
 - 52 *Madras Mail*, ‘Occasional Notes’, 22 June 1896, p. 4.
 - 53 TNA, Law, General, GO No. 1848, 1921.
 - 54 Worked out from *Indian Tea Statistics*, relevant years.
 - 55 See Amalendu, G. *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1926–1947* (hereafter *Planter Raj*), New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1976, p. 135.
 - 56 *The Hindu*, ‘Assam Tea Gardens, Exodus of Labour: A Lurid Tale’, dated 4 September 1924; also see TNA, Law, General, GO No. 3205, 1924; Guha, *Planter Raj*, pp. 129–33.
 - 57 GoM. *Memorandum Submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour*, Madras: Government Press, 1929, p. 5.
 - 58 With respect to south Indian countryside, see particularly Gough, K. ‘Caste in a Tanjore village’ in *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan*, Ed. E. R. Leach, London: Cambridge University Press, pp. 11–60, 1979. Also see Arnold, D. ‘Looting, Grain Riots and Government Policy in Southern India 1918’, *Past and Present*, No. 84, August 1979, pp. 111–45.
 - 59 Contributions on the history of trade union movements in India include: Mukhtar, A. *Trade Unionism and Labour Disputes in India*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1935; Sharma, G. K. *Labour Movement in India, Its Past and Present*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1971; Ramanujam, *From the Babul Tree: Story of Indian Labour*, Delhi: INTUC, 1967; Sen, S. *Working Class of India, History of Emergence and Movement, 1830–1970*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Co., 1977. On sectoral studies, see Joshi, C. ‘Kanpur Textile Labour: Some Structural Features of Formative Years’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 44–46, November 1981, pp. 1821–38; Chandavarkar, R. *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes in Bombay, 1900–1940*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
 - 60 See Purcell, A. A. and Hallsworth, J. *Report on Labour Conditions in India*, London: Trade Union Congress General Council, 1928.
 - 61 For a comprehensive discussion on the efforts involved and the background to the abolition of the indentured system, see Tinker, H. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1974, pp. 288–333.
 - 62 It has been argued by Rothermund, for instance, that the campaign against the unjust revenue settlement in Bardoli was the beginning of the end of the British-Indian Land Revenue systems. For more details, see Rothermund, D. *The Global Impact of the Great Depression 1929–1939*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 97–101.
 - 63 See Chandra, B. *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership 1880–1905*, Delhi: Peoples’ Publishing House, 1966, p. 330. In reality, the Congress was covertly cultivating a close alliance with big capital, benefiting in terms of both power and wealth, see Bhattacharya, S. ‘Swaraj and the Kamgar: The Indian National Congress and the Bombay Working Class’ in

Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase, Eds R. Sisson and S. Wolpert, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 171–93, 1988.

- 64 See Ministry of Publications. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XX, Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1966, p. 228, originally published in *Young India*, 15 June 1921.
- 65 Heehs, P. *India's Freedom Struggle, 1857–1947, A Short History*, Madras, 1988, p. 80.
- 66 To quote the Secretary's letter to the Madras government:

The Chairman has asked me to protest against the release of Mrs Annie Bessant. I believe it is an understood thing that an Association holds itself aloof from political discussions, but this seems to be an exceptional case and one which may affect our interests very badly. . .

Cited in Muthiah, *Planting Century*, p. 226.

- 67 For the struggles led by the Ezhavar, see Rao, M. S. *Social Movements and Social Transformation: A Study of Two Backward Class Movements in India*, Madras: Macmillan Co. Ltd, 1979, pp. 21–122, Ravindran, T. K. *Asan and Social Revolution in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Historical Society, 1972. On the forms of slavery in Travancore and the struggles led by Ayyankali to uplift the erstwhile agrestic slaves see Chentharasseri, T. P. H. *Ayyankali* [Mal], Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhatham Book House, 1979; Abhimanyu, C. *Ayyankali* [Mal], Thiruvananthapuram: Jawahar Balabhavan Art Press, 1990; Saradamony, K. *Emergence of a Slave Caste: Pulayas of Kerala*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1980; Kusuman, K. K. *Slavery in Travancore*, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Historical Society, 1973; Joseph, M. *Identity, Protest and Social Mobility*, New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1986; Alosysius, G. *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- 68 That Marxist theoreticians and Party leaders have overlooked the workers' struggle led by Ayyankali in 1907 which took place nearly a quarter of a century before the formation of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party in 1935 is quite deplorable. For instances of such a blatant neglect of historical facts, see Namboodiripad, E. M. S. *Communist Prasthanam: Udhbhavavum Valarchayum* [Mal], Communism: Origins and Development, Thiruvananthapuram: Chintha Publishers, 1995; Unniraja, C. 'Karshakaprasthanam' in *Kerala History Association, Kerala Charithram*, Vol. 2, Ernakulam: Government Press, 1974, pp. 153–85.
- 69 The Imperial policies elicited small local protests which went on to culminate in the Non-Cooperation movement, a situation that has been well-documented. With respect to southern India, see Baker, C. 'Non-Cooperation in South India' in *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880–1940*, Eds Baker and Washbrook, Delhi: Macmillan Co., Ltd, pp. 98–149, 1975.
- 70 For literature, see Niemeijer, A. C. *The Khilafat Movement in India, 1919–1924*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972; Minault, G. *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982; Hitchcock, R. H. *Peasant Revolt in Malabar: A History of the Malabar Rebellion 1921* with an Introduction by Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., New Delhi: Usha Publications, 1983 (hereafter Peasant Revolt); Panikkar, K. N. *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar 1836–1921*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- 71 For details, see Ouwerkerk, L. *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921–47*, edited with an Introduction by Dick Kooiman, Delhi: Manohar, 1994, pp. 85–90, Kesavan, C. *Jeevitha Samaram* [Mal] Pt. 1 and 11, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1968, 1971 respectively.
- 72 GoM. *Police Administration Report*, 1921, p. 16; Langely, *History of Peirce Leslie*, p. 93.
- 73 For details, see Hitchcock, *Peasant Revolt*, op. cit; Madhavan Nair, K. *Malabar Kalapam (Malabar Rebellion, Malayalam)*, Calicut, 1987; Gopalan Nair, C. *The Moplah*

- Rebellion, 1921*, Calicut, 1923; Gangadharan, M. *The Malabar Rebellion*, D.C. Press (P) Ltd, Kottayam, 2008, pp. 161–3.
- 74 Quoted in Sukhbir Choudhary, *Mopla Uprising, 1921–23*, Delhi: Agam Prakashan, 1977, pp. 35–6.
- 75 See Sanal Mohan, P. *Dalit Discourse and the Evolving New Self: Contest and Strategies*, No. 13, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, n.d., p. 24.
- 76 See *MLCP*, Vol. IV, 20 January 1922, p. 2051.
- 77 However, the Dalits had to content themselves with only five nominees as against the frank domination of upper-caste Hindus, particularly the *Brahmins*, and Europeans who had 22 and 15 representatives each. For a discussion see Irschick, E. F. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 188–93. Though the *Pulaya* leader Ayyankali was nominated to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha in Travancore as early as 1912, the Dalits and the backward communities were grossly underrepresented – during the period 1922–31 no *Ezhavar* figured in the membership of the Council; among the Muslims and Dalits only one member each was represented, that too, only in one single year during this period, a trend which was countered by what came to be known as the *Nivarthana Prakashobham*, the Abstention Movement, see Kesavan, C. *Jeevitha Samaram* [Mal] Pt. 1 and 11, Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1968, 1971 respectively. The Dalits and other backward communities could have formed a significant presence in the various decision-making bodies if they had had the benefit of Universal Adult Suffrage, which had just then been introduced in Sri Lanka but rejected in India, thus restricting the electorate to the *zamindars*, rich peasants and the urban middle class, see Tomlinson, B. R. *The Indian National Congress and the Raj: 1929–1942, the Penultimate Phase*, New York: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976.
- 78 *RCL*, Oral Evidence, p. 374; also see Section 5.10.
- 79 This was made clear earlier by M. C. Rajah, one of the most powerful representatives of the Dalits in the Madras Legislative Council, see *MLCP*, Vol. XV, 28 November 1923, p. 103.
- 80 By this time the Indian staff of the planting companies in southern India, primarily from Nilgiris had formed the *Estates Staff Association of South India* and had had the association registered under the Societies Act. However, both the President and the Chairman of the association were European personnel; until the formation of the *Estate Staff Union of South India*, ESUSI, in 1947, no significant resistance was registered even by the staff members. Interview with Dr Daniel, 10 January 1987. Dr P. H. Daniel had begun his career as a Medical Officer in the Peria Karamalai group in the early 1940s and was actively involved in the amelioration of the grievances of both the staff and the workers across tea planting districts in the Indian south. He was instrumental in the formation of the first Estate Staff Association of South India (ESASI) formed as early as 1929, the forerunner of ESUSI. see P.H.Daniel, *Plantation Panorama: A survey of Estate Conditions and Organisations of Estate's Staff Since 1930*, Chennai: Asian Printers, 1975.
- 81 The notice that he circulated reads:

To ascertain the grievances of men, women and children working in tea, coffee and other estates on the Anaimalai, to remedy the same a meeting will be held in the *maidan* at Valparai on Sunday the 23rd from 12 to 4 pm. The grievances of *maistrimar* and clerks will be discussed and steps taken. Steps will be taken for ventilating grievances before the *Royal Commission* and secure redress. As this is an important occasion for redressing the grievances of the above said coolies, *maistrimar* and clerks, everybody is requested to attend, without failure. From morning 9 am the undersigned may be interviewed and spoken to by those who wish to do so.

See, *RCL*, Written Evidence, p. 248.

- 82 Ibid. The District Magistrate defended his action by saying that he was not 'swayed' by the planters, see *RCL*, Oral Evidence, Vol. VII, Pt. 2, pp. 372–3, 419–21. However, the close co-operation displayed by the police, the planters and the judiciary during the entire colonial era was sufficient to suppress any sort of political or social awakening among the workers.
- 83 See Christopher, J. B. *The Politics of South India, 1920–37*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1976, pp. 205–8; *An Indian Rural Economy, 1880–1955: The Tamil Countryside*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 249–343; Sen, S. *Peasant Movements in India, Mid-19th Century and Twenty Century*, Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Co., 1982, pp. 61–5.
- 84 With respect to the workers' strikes in the Kolar Gold mines during the 1930s, see Hettne, B. *The Political Economy of Indirect Rule: Mysore 1881–1947*, New Delhi: Ambika Publications, 1978, pp. 162–4; also see Post, K. *Arise Ye Starvelings, The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.
- 85 For more details, see Section 6.11.
- 86 Cited in Baak, P. E. *Plantation Production and Political Power: Plantation Development in South West India, 1743–1963*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 200.
- 87 Ravindran, R. 'Keralathile Thottam Thozhilali Prasthanam', *Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, 1972, p. 116; Govindan, K. C. 'Trade Union Prasthanam Travancoreil' in *Kerala Charithram*, 2 Vols, Vol. II, Ernakulam: Government Press, 1974, pp. 224–5.
- 88 Kakkanadan, G. *Suvisheshavum Communisavum* (Preachings and Communism), Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhatham Publishing Co., 1964.
- 89 TNA, Devt. GO No. 108, 1939, A. C. Cotton, The Manager, Anaimalai Tea Estate Ltd to the Pollachi Taluk Congress Committee, dated 25 August 1937.
- 90 TNA, PW & L, GO No. 497, 1934.
- 91 TNA, Devt, GO No. 1239, 1938.
- 92 We may cite one such incident: when 19 of the workers on a foreign-owned estate in Nilgiri were dismissed in retaliation to a demand for a wage hike, the local Congress Secretary who attempted to initiate a discussion on the matter was stopped even as he walked down the public road leading to the estate. The planter maintained that he had no business interfering in the dispute. However, the planter quickly assured the Labour Minister V. V. Giri that all the dismissed workers would be reinstated but, as expected, the promises failed to materialise. It was the planter who emerged the winner; the State merely approved the suggestion of the District Magistrate that there being no vacancies in the estate concerned, the workers would be wise to seek employment elsewhere, see Minutes, *APA*, 27 October 1937, pp. 19–21.
- 93 TNA, The Enquiry Report in Devt. GO No. 108, 1939 explains the miserable conditions of plantation workers in Anaimalai; useful first-hand information.
- 94 Gopalan, A. K. *Ente Katha* [Mal] [My Story], Kottayam: Sahityaprabavarthaka Co-operative Society Ltd, 1972, p. 42.
- 95 Gopalan, A. K. *Kerala: Past and Present*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1959, p. 46.
- 96 Prakasam, R. *Keralathile Trade Union Prasthanathinte Charithram* (hereafter *Keralathile Trade Union*), Thiruvananthapuram: Swaraj Press, 1979, pp. 75–6. The first All Kerala Thozhilali Sammelanam held at Kozhikode in 1935 had paid no attention to the conditions of living of plantation labour.
- 97 See *PTCLA*, 1 April 1955, Vol. XIII, No. 11, p. 910.
- 98 Interview with P. A. Solomon, Kottarakkara, dated 5 October 1992.
- 99 *RCL*, Oral Evidence, Vol. VII, Pt. 2, p. 217.
- 100 *UPASI Proceedings*, 1935, pp. 11–12.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Minutes, *APA*, 10 January 1938, p. 45.
- 103 See *PTSCS*, 16 March 1937, Vol. X, No. 7, pp. 567 and 569.
- 104 Griffiths, P. *History of the Indian Tea Industry*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967, pp. 407–8.

- 105 When the War broke out, the auction sales of tea were suspended and tea trade came to be a British monopoly. From the year 1942, block purchases were made by the British Ministry of Food on behalf of the United Nations. The planters succeeded in fulfilling war-time obligations by re-employing labour that had been disbanded at the time of the Depression and by including 'restored' leaves – those that had been left unplucked during the prewar regulation period – all without a proper sharing of the war-time prosperity that they enjoyed, see Sections 6.16–6.19.
- 106 Unwin, R. 'The Labour' in UPASI, p. 167.
- 107 Guha, A. *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1926–1947*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1976, p. 293.
- 108 *High Range Estate Employees Association* (hereafter *HREEA Souvenir*), Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1977, p. 7.
- 109 *Census of India*, 1941, Travancore, pp. 96–7. The fact that the first union in *Travancore*, the *Travancore Labour Association*, which later became the *Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union*, came up in 1922 and that the first plantation union was formed only in 1938 clearly reveals how difficult it must have been to organise trade unions in these regions.
- 110 Prabhatham, 'Chayathozhilali Sangham', *Tea Workers' Union*, 28 November 1938, p. 3.
- 111 A resolution to this effect was passed by the Estate Labour Union, Wayanad on 26 March 1939 under the Presidentship of Kunhi Raman, N. V. See TNA, Devt. GO No. 3040, 1939, Despatch Abstract: Labour – Plantations on Nilgiri and the Wayanad – Conditions of Labour dated 15 December 1939.
- 112 Subramanian, A. *Working Class Movement in Tea Plantations in Nilgiri*, Coonoor: referred at UPASI, Madras, 1989, pp. 44–64.
- 113 He was once again served an arrest warrant, this time as part of a criminal case. He fled to Karnataka and escaped arrest. *Ibid.*
- 114 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 115 Giri, *My Life*, p. 127.
- 116 Interview with P. A. Soloman, Kottarakkara, 5 October 1992. Also see Raghavan, P. *Viplavasmaranakal*, *Memoirs of a Revolution*, 5 Vols, Vol. III, p. 133, Vol. IV, p. 62, Vol. V, p. 136, Kottayam: D. C. Books, 1992–6.
- 117 Prakasam, *Keralathile Trade Union*, pp. 131–2; Ravindran, *Thottam Thozhilali*, p. 116.
- 118 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 119 The workers' strikes in various sectors were described by the *Dewan* of Travancore as being part of a 'concerted action by the Communist Party of India'. See *Planters' Chronicle*, 15 September 1946, p. 343.
- 120 Such major workers' unions included the *Nilgiri District Tea Workers' Union* with 250 members, the *Nilgiri District Estate Workers' Union* with 16,500 members and the *Coimbatore District Estate Workers' Union* with 20,000 members. However, they gradually came to identify themselves with labour organisations such as the INTUC, AITUC and the HMS. For details, see TNA, Devt. GO No. 92, 1949.
- 121 See Sections 7.7 and 8.6.
- 122 *High Range Estate Employees' Association*, *HREEA, Souvenir*, Munnar, p. 7. The communist-backed unions began to be strengthened by veteran trade union leaders like Subiah Nadar, Rosamma Punnoose and C. A. Kurian, the latter two going on to become members of the state legislative assembly at varying points in time. With the split in the communist party in 1964 owing to ideological reasons including the Sino-Indian War, to form the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), unions began to sprout within the Left forces: the majority of the workers leaning towards the CPI (AITUC) and the rest pledging allegiance to the CPIM-backed CITU, RSP-backed UTUC and so on. INTUC leads the second largest workers' union in the tea plantations..
- 123 TNA, *Fortnightly Report*, September 1946, p. 2.

- 124 In southern India as a whole, there were nearly 1,500 industrial disputes in the first half of the 1950s, of which more than 40 per cent pertained to the issue of wages and bonuses. The remaining 60 per cent were related to the question of working hours as well as to personal issues. See GoI. *Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission*, Pt. I – Tea, Delhi: Government of India Press, 1956, p. 703.
- 125 Evidence by the various representatives of UPASI, RCL, pp. 194–6, 201–2.
- 126 Various state governments began to constitute Industrial Relations Committees as tri-partite standing bodies, later to become Plantation Labour Committees for industry-wide relations. With respect to such developments, the plantation workers in Travancore and Cochin were far ahead of their brethren elsewhere in the neighbouring regions: they were able to assure a 4 per cent bonus as early as in 1946, and they had Minimum Wages Committee by 1952. As per this the wage rates fixed for men, women and children were Rs 1-11-0, 1-4-3 and 0-13-6 respectively. The minimum piece rate for tea pluckers was fixed at 8 pies per pound of leaf for the first 16 lbs plucked on a day during January to August; and 6 pies for the first 21 lbs during the remaining months, see GoT. *Report of the Minimum Wages Committee for Plantations, Travancore-Cochin*; Nair, K. R. *Industrial Relations in Kerala*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1973, pp. 53, 240–8. However, it must be noted that the difference in wages between men and women was not rectified until the mid-1970s. Though cursory attempts to provide maternity benefits had been made by a few estates, a tangible improvement in the same became evident only under the communist rule in 1957.
- 127 See, GoI. *Study of the Working and Living Conditions of Plantation Labour in South India*, New Delhi: Government Press, 1985. For a review of the same, see Ravi Raman, K. 'Plantation Labour: Revisit Required', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 22, 31 May 1986, pp. 960–2; also see 'Plantation Workers in Kerala: Wage-Productivity Relationship', *Indian Labour Economics Journal Annual*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 4, 1986, pp. 288–306.
- 128 Minutes, *General Body Meeting of Kanan Devan Planters' Association* (hereafter *GBM of KDPA*), 16 January 1953, p. 30.
- 129 Minutes, *Annual General Body Meeting of Kanan Devan Planters' Association* (hereafter *AGM of KDPA*), 5 November 1952, p. 54.
- 130 See Desabhimani, *Peerumedu Thozhilalikalute Nere Lathicharjum Vedeppum*, Shooting and Lathicharge of Workers in Peerumedu, 25 April 1952, p. 1.
- 131 See Mackay, *Memoirs*, p. 23.
- 132 Namboodiripad, E. M. S. *A History of the Indian Freedom Movement*, Thiruvananthapuram: Social Scientist Press, 1986, p. 492. In the modified form, the modification being forced by Gandhiji's 'fast unto death', the Communal Award turned out to be a losing proposition for the depressed castes. While citing the above case, Omvedt explores further the anti-dalit attitude of the communists in her book, *G. Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 161–76.
- 133 With respect to the English working class, see Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 163–241, 427–30, 436–40. With respect to Malabar, see Dhanagare, D. N. *Peasant Movements in India*, Chapter III, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 54–87 and on Travancore, see Kannan, K. P. *Of Rural Proletarian Struggles: Mobilization and Organisation of Rural Workers in South-West India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 91–9.
- 134 Numerous struggles have been waged for the improvement of working conditions, including better housing, woollen blankets often called 'cumbly struggles', wages and bonus and so on. For a ready reference of such struggles in Kerala, see K. Ramachandran Nair, *The History of Trade Union Movement in Kerala*, Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment in association with Manak, New Delhi 2006. The workers of the Ponmudi Tea Estate, the company which has transferred its ownership

to a local planter, have their own sad story to relate. As the estates have almost been abandoned, the workers face rank poverty, many of them having succumbed to hunger or driven to suicide. The struggle still continues. For a brief background note on the struggle, see Ravi Raman, K. 'Planter at Large Labour at Crossroads', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXI, No. 51, 20 December 1986, pp. 2214–15.

- 135 All wars do not necessarily bring prosperity to the propertied class – they may even lose everything, like the propertied classes in Germany or those bombed out of their homes in the UK. I am grateful to one of the reviewers who made this comment on an earlier draft of the monograph.

Chapter 8

- 1 The strike was originally announced by the Communist sponsored Devikulam Estate Workers' Union (DEWU) and the Congress-led South Indian Plantation Labour Union (SIPLU). However, the latter withdrew from the very day that the strike had begun – 4 October – with the tacit arrangement with the management that the demands of the workers would be submitted to adjudication. The DEWU however continued the struggle with the support of the state which by that time rejected the idea of leaving the dispute to adjudication insisting that a direct negotiation between the labour and the management should be reached. The 'violent' struggle (see S. Govinda Menon, *Report on the Enquiry into Matters Arising from the Labour Strike in Munnar*, Trivandrum: Government Press, 1959) was further bolstered by the fact that Rosamma Punnoose, the working President of the DEWU, won the by-election from Devikulam in May 1958, defeating B.K.Nair of the INTUC, to become a member of the first communist ministry in the state. One of the many reasons for her success was the active support of the Tamil workers in the area who also opposed the State Congress idea of merging the southern Tamil regions of Travancore with Tamil Nadu as part of the policy of linguistic re-organisation.
- 2 The developments of such organisations against the Communist government are narrated in Nossiter, T. J. *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation*, London: C. Hurst for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1982; Lieten, G. K. *The First Communist Ministry in Kerala, 1957–9*, Bagchi, K. P. 1982; Namboodiripad, E. M. S. *What Really Happened in Kerala: The Story of the Disruptive Game Played By Right-Wing Communists*. Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1966.
- 3 Mackay, W. S. S. *Memoirs Describing His Career as a Tea Plantation Manager in the High Range of Travancore*, India Office Library & Records, London, 1984 [Memoirs], Interview, D. M. Blake; also see Baak, P. E. *Plantation Production and Political Power: Plantation Development in South West India, 1743–1963*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 187.
- 4 Mackay, *Memoirs*, p. 23. The involvement of the European planter class in the ouster of the communist government must be seen in conjunction with the role played by the CIA, a collusion which clearly points to the imperialist agenda of accentuating the 'liberation struggle' led by the communal and the sectarian forces for de-stabilising the elected left regime. However, the role played by the planter class has been underplayed in almost all studies on the liberation struggle in the state, save Baak, *Plantation Production* op. cit. For the role played by the CIA, see Mullick, B. N. *My Years with Nehru, 1948–64*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1972, pp. 339–40.
- 5 Finlay retained their tea business in the remaining peripheries of the global south such as Kenya, Uganda and Sri Lanka.
- 6 The tax revision under the Kerala Grants and Lease, Modification of Rights, Act, 1980, for instance, languishes in government files while the planters continue to pay the lowest minimum. For details, see the *Report of the Assurance Committee* dated 14 November 1996 under the Chairmanship of Shri Nalakath Soopy, M. L. A.,

- Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1996: *The Seventh Report of the Committee on Environment* chaired by Prof. A. V. Thamarakshan, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1997.
- 7 In Tamil Nadu, according to Board's Standing Orders 15, special rates of Rs 3 per acre for lands under cultivation of coffee/tea etc., and Rs 5 per acre for cardamom shall be payable; irregularities in the estimation and collection of rates under plantation crops are also reported with huge revenues being lost by the State.
 - 8 The general consensus on the success of the land reforms in the state is that it was largely due to the abolition of tenancy and conferment of ownership rights to intermediary as well as to the communist-led mobilisation of tenants and labourers. The state thus was designated progressive and democratic with social justice its chief developmental agenda. In contrast to this dominant perspective, the inadequacies of land reforms in Kerala owing to inadequate ceiling provisions and redistribution of surplus land was also brought out by critical scholarship. For the dominant discourse relating to this, see particularly Ramachandran, V. K. 'On Kerala's Development Achievements' in *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, ed. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 205–356; Franke, R. W. and Chasin, B. H. *Kerala: Development through Radical Reform*, New Delhi: Promilla, 1992. For critiques, see P. Radhakrishnan, 'Land Reforms in Theory and Practice: The Kerala Experience', *Economic and Political Weekly*, XVI (52), 26 December 1981; Ram Mohan, K. T. 'Understanding Kerala: The Tragedy of Radical Scholarship', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 43, No. 7, December 1991, pp. 18–31. It is worth noting that K. R. Gouri, who presented the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill in the first communist ministry, has never lost an opportunity to highlight the limitations of the land reforms in the state, both within legislature and outside it. Bijoy, C R, and K Ravi Raman, 'Muthanga: The Real Story—Adivasi Movement to Recover Land', In *Economic and Political Weekly* May 17, 2003, pp. 1975–1982; Oommen, M.A. *Land Reforms and Socio-Economic Change in Kerala*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1971; Raj, K. N., and Michael Tharakan, 'Agrarian Reforms in Kerala and Its Impact on the Rural Economy: A Preliminary Assessment' in *Agrarian Reforms in Contemporary Developing Countries*, ed. Ghose Ajithkumar, London: Croomhelm, 1983, pp.31–90; Lieten, op. cit.; K Ravi Raman (ed) *Development, Democracy and the State: Critiquing Kerala Model of Development*, London: Routledge, 2010 forthcoming.
 - 9 See Ravi Raman, K. 'Agrarian Questions in a Model State: Case of Kerala', Vol. III, *The Netherlands: Wageningen Agricultural University*, 1995, pp. 1302–16.
 - 10 See Franke and Chasin, op. cit.; also see fn 7 above.
 - 11 Further, small peasants themselves could have grown tea if warranted, considering the fact that small growers'/producers' co-operatives had come up in various planting regions including Nilgiris and the north-east in the post-Independence period, in keeping with the suggestions of the *Plantation Inquiry Commission* of 1956. However, undue State intervention could play havoc with the democratic functioning of such co-operatives.
 - 12 See Government of Kerala. *Report of Justice M. P. Menon Commission of Inquiry, Plantation Industry*, Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1994, pp. 105–6. The move to restore the confiscated lands as suggested by the ruling authorities would have been more of a sound decision had they been allotted to the landless workers rather than the planters – a more eco-friendly and mellow form of cultivation by the labourers would have saved these lands from further devastation.
 - 13 Frederick Clairmont and John Cavanagh, *Merchants of drink: transnational control of world beverages*, Third World Network, Penang, Malaysia, 1988, p. 37.
 - 14 The company is now owned by Wadia group whose business history goes to ship-building and contracts from the British East India Company for building docks and

- ships. For an early history, see Pointon, A. C. *Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation 1863–1963*, Southampton: The Millbrook Press, 1964; Macaulay, R. H. *History of Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation 1864–1910*, London, 1934.
- 15 Tata Tea, for instance, raked in a gross profit of 21 crores from the north and south of India in the year 1986, while in 1996 it rose to 73 crores. Harrisons Malayalam, which still has considerable foreign stakes, took away no less than 23 crores of rupees from the southern planting periphery alone in the year ending 1996.
 - 16 See Bernstein, H. and Campling, L. 'Commodity Studies and Commodity Fetishism 11: 'Profits with Principles'?', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 2006, pp. 414–47.
 - 17 Together, countries like Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania expanded their total area under tea cultivation by more than 130,000 hectares in the early 1990s.
 - 18 For the evaluation of the agrarian sector in Kenya, see World Bank. *The World Bank and the Agricultural Sector in Kenya*, An OED Review No. 18088, Washington, D.C., 1998, see http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSCContentServer/WDSP/IB/1999/06/03/000009265_3980728143820/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf.
 - 19 The global supply of tea which was 2,525 million kilograms in 1995 increased to nearly 3,895 million kilograms in 2007 as against the demand of 2,516 and 3,668 million kilograms.
 - 20 These figures are worked out from the various issues of *Tea Statistics*, Tea Board of India and *Indian Tea Scenario: A Status Paper*, Indian Tea Association, Kolkata, 2004.
 - 21 By the time it lost its Russian market, the Indian tea industry might have manoeuvred for access to the other emerging markets – North Africa, West Asia, etc. – which, however, has not been the case.
 - 22 See Harilal, K. N. and Joseph, K. J. 'India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Accord', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 13, 1999, pp. 750–3.
 - 23 See Roy, A. 'Multinational Capital and the Indian Tea Crisis', *Labour File*, May–June 2003, pp. 37–42; also see John, 'Indian Tea Industry at Crossroads', *Labour File*, May–June 2003, pp. 23–34; A. F. Ferguson & Co. also was of the view that cartelisation in tea auctions due to the dominance of big corporations in the tea trade is one of the reasons for the plantation crisis, the others being tea export and import policy of government, and mismanagement of estates and the siphoning off of money for other businesses at the cost of the tea plantations.
 - 24 Until recently, sale of tea was subject to statutory provisions in the Tea Marketing Control Order, 1984; as per Clause 17, every manufacturer is required to sell a minimum of 70 per cent of bulk tea in India through the country's public tea auction centres. However, the Government of India amended this clause in January 2001 leaving the tea manufacturers free to sell their produce on an individual basis. Later, following the recommendations of A. F. Ferguson & Co. who had been appointed by the Commerce Ministry to study the market structure of tea, the Government of India issued the Tea Marketing Control Order, 2003, with effect from 1 January 2003 which superseded the Tea Marketing Control Order, 1984. Representative bodies of producers such as United Planters' Association of South India, the Indian Tea Association, the Tea Association of India and the Nilgiris Bought Leaf Tea Manufacturers' Association have been campaigning for the amendment of the Order as it comes in the way of those preferring to sell their produce in bulk within the country.
 - 25 See Ravi Raman, K. 'Commodity Chain Trap? Struggling Lives in Kerala's Tea Plantations', in *Industrial Economy: Nodes and Linkages*, Eds D. Rajasenan and G. de Groot, Cochin: CUSAT, 2006, pp. 125–48.
 - 26 The communists of Kerala did not even attempt to form such a co-operative even on the abandoned estate at Ponmudi where the workers have been thrown unceremoniously out of work and have been struggling for survival over the last two decades,

- see Ravi Raman, K. 'Planter at Large Labour at Crossroads', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 21, No. 22, 1986, pp. 2214–15.
- 27 At times retirement benefits are awarded after the death of the workers, interview with Vazhoor Soman, (General Secretary of the High Range Estate Labour Union, AITUC) (22nd March 2007) who claims to have filed nearly 400 cases against the estates on various counts, including the non-payment of retirement benefits to the workers.
 - 28 Interview with C. A. Kurian, General Secretary, All India Federation of Plantation Workers (AITUC), 23 March 2007, Ernakulam. Other studies also revealed high levels of retrenchment from the estates, see Jacob Bose, 'Overall Profile of Closed Tea Gardens in Idukki District, Kerala' in 'Behind Closed and Abandoned Tea Gardens – Status Report of India' (hereafter CEC Report), *Centre for Education and Communication* New Delhi, 2007, pp. 43–61; Sridhar and Santhanam, *Report of Expert Committee on Study of Closed Tea Gardens in the State of Kerala*, Vol 1, April 2003.
 - 29 Interview with A. Salim, Peerumedu-Vandiperiyar, 28 January 2008.
 - 30 Sixty women from one of the estates in Kerala (Chintalar Estate of Peerumedu Tea Company) have left for Gujarat as shrimp processing workers to make a marginal improvement in their income and livelihood. Also see 'Death and Disease Stalk Abandoned Tea Estate Workers in Kerala, Indian Express', 14 October 2002, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/death-and-disease-stalk-abandoned-tea-estate-workers-in-kerala/60449/>. When contacted on their return, one of the women spoke of the appalling work conditions that they had faced in their new work places. Also see Jacob Bose, op. cit.
 - 31 These words were spoken to an audience worldwide through the *Doordarshan*, the national television channel, in early 2003. It was before a unique studio audience that this experience was related. It included planters, trade union leaders and scholars; the author, too, was witness to this exchange.
 - 32 Velu, 67, at RBT, Peerumedu, wanted to discuss many such cases, both on the same estate as well as on nearby estates which he had heard of, interview, dated 16 January 2005.
 - 33 Ullash Kumar, R. K. 'Profile of Closed/Abandoned Tea Gardens in The Niligiris, Tamil Nadu' in CEC Report, op. cit., also see the other studies in the CEC Report, op. cit.
 - 34 Though the Communist Party leaders in West Bengal were quick to respond to this report, it was merely to debate the actual figures involved, virtually accepting the truth in the report.
 - 35 See Mitra, M. N. 'Workers Starving due to closure of tea estates in North Bengal', *Down to Earth*, Vol. 16, No. 7, 27 August 2007.
 - 36 Interview with workers, Peerumade, Last week of January 2008.
 - 37 Yet the workers were also dissatisfied with the four recognised unions, which included those affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress, INTUC, and the All India Trade Union Congress, AITUC. They were of the opinion that the unrecognised unions affiliated to the CITU, though sensitive to their interests and capable of articulating their concerns, were too small to wield any influence with the management.
 - 38 For details, see S. Viswanathan and Syed Muthahar Saqaf, 'The Tirunelveli Massacre', *Frontline*, Vol. 16, No. 16, 31 July–13 August, 1999.
 - 39 Many prominent leaders declared that the Chief Minister Karunanidhi was going the former Chief Minister, Jayalalitha's, way in the last phase of her government. However, Karunanidhi justified the incident saying that the police had only retaliated when the crowd had turned violent.
 - 40 The following pieces of information found in *Behind Closed and Abandoned Tea Gardens – Status Report of India* by the *Centre for Education and Communication* (CEC), New Delhi, 2007 are further corroborated by the author's field visits, particularly in the abandoned and closed estates of Kerala during the last week of January 2008.

- 41 Ravi Raman, 'Planter at Large Labour at Crossroads', op. cit.
- 42 The Tea Act 1953 empowers the Tea Board to take over estates and to transfer the management of plantations to any new entity and hence the takeover of some of the closed estates is legal; such ventures, however, would have to take on the liabilities of previous owners, and deal with the corporate bias in the larger tea market.
- 43 A few positive lessons learnt from the experiment of the Tamil Nadu Tea Development Corporation which was set up to rehabilitate the Tamil repatriates from Sri Lanka and provides greater amenities to the workers have not yet received the acknowledgement they merit. With a simple beginning in 1968, the organisation became a corporation in 1976 owning nearly 11,000 acres of tea planted and grown by it. The Corporation now employs more than 10,000 workers and provides them with a relatively acceptable level of living. Other state-operated factories like INDCO offer small growers a reasonable price for their tea leaves; however, these experiments remain confined to isolated sites and have yet to be taken up in a big way across the planting regions.

Chapter 9

- 1 Even when FDI was not allowed in agriculture in general, tea remained exempted, with 100 per cent FDI being allowed on condition that compulsory disinvestment of 26 per cent equity in favour of an Indian partner/Indian public be effected within a period of five years and the prior approval of the State Government sought for any future change in land use. As both conditions were not very attractive to foreign capital, it attempted to consolidate its position in the upper nodes of the global tea commodity chain, particularly in marketing as has been happening in the case of Unilever and Tata-Tea.
- 2 See Blasi, J. R. and Kruse, D. L. 'The Political Economy of Employee Ownership in the United States: From Economic Democracy to Industrial Democracy', *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 16, No. 1, March 2006, pp. 127–47; Russell, R. 'Using Ownership to Control: Making Workers Owners in the Contemporary United States', *Politics & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1984, pp. 253–294.
- 3 While the total workforce in the tea plantations of Tamil Nadu numbers 48,574, there were 1,01,748 workers in Kerala in 2006. The tea plantations in India as a whole directly employ 9,78,412 workers; this is in addition to the large number of indirect employment opportunities that the industry offers, see Labour Bureau, Government of India, Occupational Wage Survey (Sixth Round 2006), *Report on Plantation Industries*, see <http://labourbureau.nic.in/Reports%20old.htm>.
- 4 For details, see Ravi Raman, K. and Ronnie D Lipschutz Ed., *Corporate Social Responsibility: Comparative Critiques*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, forthcoming.
- 5 The lands owned by Tata Tea in Kerala have always been under dispute, and in July 2007 the LDF ministry led an operation in Munnar for the 'recovery' of these lands. However, the Tata group has denied all charges of encroachment and the Munnar operation remains suspended, factional politics having blighted the chances of its successful conclusion. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Poonjar royal family, the original lessee to the James Finlay from whom it was transferred to Tatas, has moved court to recover its land from Tata Tea.
- 6 The author's conversations with some of the workers (Munnar, April 2008) in the company revealed a sense of both hope and despair; even as they savoured the pride of ownership they became ever more 'bonded', this time to commercial banks.
- 7 Detailed discussions were held with Kurian C. A., General Secretary, All India Federation of Plantation Workers (AITUC), 23 March 2007, Ernakulam.

- 8 See Gramsci, A. *Selections from Political Writings 1910–1920*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977; some of these writings are available from the Marxist internet archive; also see Trudell, M. 'Gramsci: the Turin years', *International Socialism*, Issue 114, 2007; <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?s=contents&issue=114>; Jossa, B. 'Gramsci and the Labor-Managed Firm', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, OnlineFirst, published on 16 December 2008 as doi: 10.1177/0486613408324421 (accessed on 1 February 2008).
- 9 The workers' gender invited, as noted earlier, another specific threat: that of sexual harassment (Chapter 5) and it appears that they are more vulnerable during periods of crisis.
- 10 The legitimacy of such political parties and trade unions was already in question due to serious erosion of their membership, ideological relegations and also owing to their inability to articulate alternatives to economic restructuring, retrenchment and intensification.
- 11 See Capra, F. *The Web of Life*, New York: Anchor Books, 1996; Harvey, D. *Spaces of Hope*, Berkeley: California University Press, 2000. As part of survival, the workers often indulge in illegal plucking and 'pilfering' of tea leaves from the estates, much as in Scott's 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' (as confided by workers in Peeru-made and Ponnudi who prefer to remain anonymous; also see Chapter 7).
- 12 For such a transformation from a social democratic regime to a neo-liberal one, see Ravi Raman, K. 'Asian Development Bank, Policy Conditionalities and Social Democratic Governance: Kerala Model Under Pressure', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2009, pp. 284–308; also see Ravi Raman, K., Ed. *Development, Democracy and the State: Critiquing Kerala Model of Development*, London and New York: Routledge, 2010 forthcoming.
- 13 Sen, A. 'Capital, Class and Community', in *Subaltern Studies V*, Ed. R. Guha, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 225, 1987. This inegalitarian hierarchy within trade unions is explored by Dipesh Chakrabarty through his *bhadralok/babu-coolie* idiom, see *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal, 1890–1940*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, pp.116–154.
- 14 Mackay, W. S. S. *Memoirs Describing His Career as a Tea Plantation Manager in the High Range of Travancore*, London: India Office Library & Records, 1984; interview with D. M. Blake.
- 15 Vijaya, a Tamil woman worker whose parents brought her to the estates in Peeru-medu-Vandiperiyar, was most vocal in this, and many joined our discussion which took place in the presence of their own leader, Mr Vazhoor Soman (AITUC), dated 27 January 2008. However, when asked whether the women would be ready to form their own unions, she remained silent.
- 16 See particularly, Jill, H. C. *Towards a Politics of the Rainbow: Self-Organization in the Trade Union Movement*, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002.
- 17 Franzway, S. 'Women Working in a Greedy Institution: Commitment and Emotional Labour in the Union Movement', *Gender, Work and Organisation*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2000, pp. 258–68.
- 18 See *The Telegraph India*, 27 January 2006, ATTSA into agitation seeking social benefits.

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