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Chapter Three

Whose Trees? Forest Practices and Local Communities in Andhra, 1600–1922*

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In order to understand the depletion of forest resources under the colonial paradigm of ‘scientific’ management and exploitation, we have to start with the differences between traditional and colonial approaches to the use of forest resources, as well as the nature of the conflict arising over the use of these resources between local communities and the state.

To reconstruct the culture of the human-environment relationship—which is traditionally mediated by religion (i.e. beliefs, rituals and institutions)—we have to depend upon unconventional sources in the regional languages, in particular upon classical literature, *stalapuranas*, village *kaifsyats* (local chronicles) and oral traditions. Classical Telugu poetry is full of observations on the countryside, the landscape, the seasons, the fauna, the flora and the inhabitants of the region. Equally, a mapping of the environmental situation from the 1790s to the 1850s could be done by using travelogues and the sympathetic observations and notations of district-level colonial administrators. Finally, after the 1860s we have the records of the Forest Department.


2 Murty and Sontheimer, ‘Prehistoric Background to Pastoralism’, p. 165.

3 Ibid.

4 The story is taken from N. Ramesan, *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh* (Bombay, 1962). For information on the legend of Mallikarjuna at Sri Sallam, see Murty and Sontheimer, ‘Prehistoric Background to Pastoralism’.

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Starting from the time of the Chalukya-Cholas and Kakatiyas (eleventh to fourteenth centuries AD), the inscriptive sources found on the walls of Draksharama, Srikurinnavi, Simhachalam and other temples clearly indicate the involvement of these temples in agriculture, irrigation, taxation and the land reclamation that followed the expansion of cultivation. All these aspects were directly related to the management of the ecosystem in medieval Andhra. The pullary (tax) on grazing lands seems to have been one of the main sources of income for the state. Temples were also involved in appropriating—via royal and private grants or donations—the income from grazing and from the businesses of cattle-breeding and rearing goats. Pastoralism therefore played an important role in social life. For instance, the inscription in the Draksharama temple (in East Godavari district) specifically recorded the role of go-raksakas (cowherds), kiratas (hunters) and boyas (tribals) in village life and temple functions. The support of these social groups—tribals, cowherds and hunters—along with the peasant and artisan classes was considered to be crucial for the political legitimacy of the rulers. From the fifteenth-century we have textual sources elaborating state policy towards these social groups and the ecosystems they were living in.\(^5\)

The necessity for a well-defined policy towards agricultural and forest regions and its relevance for political stability drew the attention of Krishnadeva Raya, king of the Vijayanagara empire. A sixteenth-century classical literary text, Aamuktamalaya,\(^6\) written


\(^6\) Krishnadeva Raya's Aamuktamalaya aiti Vishnu-Chittiyamu was said to have been written between AD 1515 and 1521. I have used the critical and explanatory edition of Sri Vedam Venkatarama Sastry, first published in 1927 (in Telugu, Madras, 2nd reprint, 1964).

by Krishnadeva Raya, spells out what ought to be the policy of the state towards forests and tribal groups. Though he recommends that the state should deliberately develop impenetrable forests on all the boundaries of its kingdom in order to protect people from thieves, he advises only a partial clearing of forests in the centre of the kingdom, not others.\(^7\) The policy towards the people living in the forests, called mannepu janalu, was aimed at assimilation and not annihilation. One poem reads thus:

The tribal people, who roam about in the forest and hill areas, possess several defects. Even by imposing severe punitive measures one cannot remove their defects, for it is like washing a mud wall to remove the mud. Instead, it is better to maintain friendship with them by a policy of truthfulness and offering gifts. By doing so the king can get their physical support during his expeditions against rival kings. Moreover, by using them, the king can get his enemy's lands looted...\(^8\)

In the medieval period the maintenance of well-nourished forests, interwoven with hills, was helpful not only as an effective defence against the enemy, but also as a political boundary. In fact, Krishnadeva Raya is very specific in his policy about the need to avoid hills and forests during military expeditions against rival

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Kshama gurumammapam gabanacharini janambheda doshadriti Kudiyamu gaduganga pooniki, tega daljina saravanu; baasa neegi Vayyumasu nangala daadikagudu; nou gidi Kollalakum; shataaradhaa dhamunu sabhavaradamab natarikyamu sarwanu meelvanikin.

This English translation is a free-style prose version of Poem no. 257, ibid., p. 460.
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He also evolved a well-defined policy to combine his own subjects in alliance with migrants from outside. He provided immigrants with cattle (apart from other items of wealth) whenever such people came on account of scarcity, drought, epidemics and other calamities.9

One important aspect of the Vijayanagara economy was the encouragement given to the spread of settled agriculture. The state was directly involved in developing irrigation systems and helped expand agricultural production with lower taxation on small farmers. But this thrust towards expanded irrigation does not seem to have depleted the forest cover. From the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, the peasant-warrior migrant groups from coastal Andhra are said to have introduced tank irrigation technology into the dry upland zone, resulting in the development of cultivation on dry, fertile soils. How far these newly irrigated areas diverted pressure from the reclamation of forest lands to cultivation in the wet and the dry upland regions is a matter yet to be researched. For the purposes of our argument, we can safely presume that the spread of tank irrigation did engage the energies of peasant-warrior migrants from coastal Andhra by bringing the dry fertile zones under cultivation, not only in Telangana but also in Rayalaseema and some regions of Tamil Nadu.11

The antiquity of the cultural-economic and political construction of human-ecological relationships can also be discerned from the stalapuranas and village kaifiyats.13 I attempt here to discuss the role of religious traditions in preserving virgin forest tracts around the sacred hills, pilgrim centres, temples and sacred springs which were associated with curative miracles.14 I will also analyse some of the village kaifiyats in order to map out the character of the relationship between agriculture, pastoralism and village settlement patterns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Colin Mackenzie, Surveyor-General of India, who arrived in India in 1783, was entrusted the task of surveying the villages of Andhra in 1790. With the help of Kavalil Boraiah, Bhaskaraiyah, Ramaswamy, Abdul Azeez and Srinivasaiah, he compiled a series of descriptive histories of villages known as kaifiyats. They covered the state, did not put any pressure or, broadly speaking, evolve a 'commercial' attitude towards the forests. In reality the control of tribal groups over the forests was recognized by the state as an unquestionable natural right. By recognizing the natural rights of mamepu janula over forests, and through its policy of friendship, the state tried to assimilate them into the empire.12 In other words, during the sixteenth-century the well defined, mutually sustaining relationship between agriculture, forest and pastoral regions seems to have continued.


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Agricultural Development: A Study in Medieval South India', Economic Weekly, Annual Number, 1961; Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India (New Delhi, 1980), and Vijayanagara (Cambridge, 1990); David Ludden, Peasant History in South India (Princeton, 1985).

13 The important stalapuranas which I have looked at are related to Sri Kalahaathi, Sri Salam, Tirupathi, Alampur, Annavaram, Draksharama, Simhachal Khethram or Simhadri Khethram and Annavaram.
14 I am making a detailed study of these aspects in my project, 'The Mediation of Religion in the Human-Ecological Relationship in Andhra, 1600–1900', which is part of an all India joint project on 'Socio-Religious Movements and Cultural Networks in Indian Civilization', Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 1991 to 1995.
the origins—historical, but also as preserved in the social memory through legends and myths—of each village, its flora and fauna, people, religious and secular monuments, inscriptions, natural resources, religious customs, functions and practices. These kaiyyats offer us very useful information about the geographical and topographical background of each village from the seventeenth-century through to the early twentieth centuries.

The histories of Anakapalli, Yalamanchali, Aarantlakota and other small villages in Doddugolla Seema in Visakhapatnam district illustrate an interesting pattern of harmonious relationship between pastoralism and the agricultural economy. Though most of the village settlements started with the clearing of small patches of virgin forest, initially the transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture converted some of the forest lands to agriculture. However, it was mainly the gayalubhumi (waste, uncultivated land) which was converted into pasturage and cultivated land. There seems to have been no particular pressure on forests once enough area for subsistence had been cleared. One important feature of the ecology of all the villages was the widespread pattern of maintaining a variety of orchards, fruit gardens, tanks, and tappes (orchards) especially of toddy trees, and some form of mandabayalu (open space).

For instance, Gopalapatnam village in Visakhapatnam district was started as a pastoral settlement, and its origins went back to myths of the Mahabharata period. One legend was associated with Sahadeva, the youngest of the Pandavas, who spent his time in hiding, looking after the cattle of the king of Virata. As with numerous settlements, the origins of this village are associated with a cowherd, a pond, a sweet mango tree, and pastoral lands on a distant hill covered by a dense forest. This legend also demonstrates that the traditional process of pastoralism coexisted with virgin forest zones. The pressure exerted on forests never seems to have been above the needs of the subsistence agrarian-cum-pastoral economy. In the case of Namavaram village, it seems that this was surrounded by five big as well as a few small water tanks on all sides, the existence of which went back to antiquity; however, four out of the five major tanks were dug in the mid-seventeenth-century. Because of the newly expanded tank irrigation, both the productivity and the value of the lands is said to have increased.

One of the two mango groves was a hundred years old, established by a Vaishya (Komati) named Kandula Kanumanthu. In Madugula taluka, there were twenty-four agraharas with fertile lands brought into settled agriculture. The unique character of these agraharas was that they were full of well-nourished groves with many varieties of fruit-bearing trees. The whole area, before the establishment of East India Company rule, was controlled by the family of a Konda raja. Though the water was unhealthy, the hills were covered with manchigandham (sandalwood) trees and were rich in honeycombs. The hills and the surrounding dense forest areas were also full of different species of birds and wild animals.

The story of Rapathinpatnam, written down by a Niyogi, Dinavali Krishnam Raju, is another example of ecological conditions decisively influencing the pattern of a village pastoral-cum-agricultural economy. This account describes, in considerable detail, hills covered with dense virgin forests as well as areas developed both for pastoral and agricultural needs—with irrigation from natural streams and waterfalls. One is reminded of Krishnadeva Raya’s policy of integrating tribal areas as a natural protective political barrier against attack, for the whole settlement was protected

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15 The origins and histories of villages were, quite often, converted into oral traditions. This kept the histories alive in social memory. The religious ceremonies and annual religious functions or rituals associated with temples constructed over a period of time also played an important role in the memorialization of these histories.

16 Only fifteen village kaiyyats of Visakhapatnam district have so far been published; the rest are in manuscript form in the Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Hyderabad. See H. Rajendra Prasad, ed., Grama (Village) Kaiyyats: Visakhapatnam District (Telugu, A.P. State Archives, Hyderabad, 1990).

17 For full details of the story, see Ibid., pp. 10–11.

18 Ibid., p. 12.

19 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
on one side by hills covered with forest and on the other three sides by tribals (kondavaandili) living in the forests. The natural ecology was thus exploited cleverly: the pastoral and agricultural needs of the community were met, and these served simultaneously as a natural protective barrier against external threat.20

The village kaifiyats in West Godavari district also show the tradition of clearing forests and porambokes (common wastelands) to construct village settlements; the development of tank irrigation; the conversion of bidu (wasteland) into cultivation, the paying of shrotriem (an estate on which the land revenue had been assigned to the holder), and the development of well-nourished topees.21 The story of Aaginapalli village in Krishna district, written in 1815, is another fascinating example. The origin myth of this village was traced back to the legend of Sri Sobhanachala Swami stala mahatyam, narrated in the Brahmanda Purana, and the changes in the name of the hill in different yugas. Except for the temple of Sri Sobhanachala Swami, the other temples in use at the time (Malleshwara Swami and Shiva) were said to have been constructed around 1700. To support religious functions, rituals and temple institutions, elaborate arrangements were made in land grants. Apart from these land grants, various totalu (gardens) were cultivated and often dedicated to various gods: they played a very significant role in maintaining the ecology of village settlements. Even the temple mantapas were constructed on hilltops, integrating a wider ecological zone into the protective ring of temples.22

In Srikakulam district there is, among various histories—of Kalingapatnam, Kasipuram, Nagavalinadi, Tyadamanyam, Veera Ghottam, Rajam and Srikakulam—one particular narrative, by

24 Ibid., pp. 22–30.
25 All the village kaifiyats of Guntur district have been published. I have used the latest collection for the English summaries provided here. See V.V. Krishna Sastry, ed., Grama (Village) Kaifiyats: Guntur District, vol. 5 (A.P. State Archives, Hyderabad, 1990).
and named it Amriteswara. Then he built the village after clearing the jungle and gave it the name Anrithaluru.  

Though the origin of the village was related to a pastoral economy, over a period of time it expanded into a town, especially from the sixteenth-century. During the rule of Krishnadeva Raya, his karyakartha (regent) Nagappa Nayanimgaru allowed a remission of sunkam (tax) and gave donations for a period of three years; thereafter he regulated taxes and issued lease documents to weavers, servants, and merchants in the year 1526. The village is said to have declined under Mughal rule and passed into the hands of the East India Company in 1802. At the time of the writing of this kaisyat (the date is given as 8 September 1811) by Karanam Mallayya, this village was in the hands of Raja Vasi Reddy Venkatadri Naidu. With the completion of the Krishna anicus the village, which by then was settled as a rytvuragi area, was transformed into a fully developed agricultural area in Nizampatnam taluqa. As Sontheimer and Murty suggest, most of the origin stories of Andhra villages which are recounted in myths and oral traditions were closely related to the god Siva or Mallikarjunas, and to the spread of village settlements based on a bovine-cum-agricultural economy.  

What is worth exploring is the close association of pastoralist groups and Brahman cultivators with temples and village settlements.  

The ecological situation was not radically altered till the middle of the nineteenth-century, as shown by the travel accounts of Enugula Veeraswamy in Kasiyatra Charitra (1830–1)  

and Kola Seshachalakavi in Nilagiri Yatra (1846).  

Enugula Veeraswamy, Kasiyatra Charitra, Telugu original compiled by Komaleswarapuram Srinivasa Pillai, English translation by P. Sitapaty and V. Purushottam (Hyderabad, 1973).  

Kola Seshachalakavi, Nilagiri Yatra (Journey to the Nilgiris). This is a prose work written in Telugu in 1846. The critical edition is published by the Madras Government Oriental Manuscript Library (Madras, 1950).  

Enugula gives a detailed narrative of villages that were mixed with forest tracts, and shows the close relationship between settled agricultural regions, pastoral lands and natural forests. He also shows that hills and forest tracts were linked with famous temples of all faiths, pilgrim centres, sacred rivers and springs associated with curative miracles, fruit-bearing groves, ponds, and so on. There are interesting descriptions of virgin forests preserved around temple centres like Srisailam, and of tribal involvement in managing these ecological zones. The author records how in several places he was told about wild beasts, such as tigers, which roamed freely, and of the grazing available for goats and cattle in the villages. Even the urban business centres seem to have become integrated with agricultural regions and forest zones. The forests adjacent to village settlements appear to have been used for mango orchards and other fruit-bearing species.  

The description of the living environment in these travel accounts could also be collated with the observations made by Julia Thomas during 1836–9. Like the author of Kasiyatra Charitra, Thomas depicts a close relationship between wild jungles, cultivated regions and village areas. Giving her impression of the journey by road from Vizagapatam to Rajahmundry, she says there was 'a great deal of pretty country and some notorious tiger-jungles.' She also comments on the early clearing of forest tracts by the colonial administration to make roads. She describes in passing the beauty of the wildlife living close to inhabited areas, the ecology of towns and villages, the revolts by tribals and native rajas, and the raging of a cholera epidemic which took a heavy toll of the 'poor natives.'  

Between 1760 and 1800 the growing demand for teak was one of the matters which received attention from the colonial

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26 The story is taken from the English version, in ibid., pp. ii–iv.  
27 See footnote 1.  
28 Enugula Veeraswamy, Kasiyatra Charitra, Telugu original compiled by Komaleswarapuram Srinivasa Pillai, English translation by P. Sitapaty and V. Purushottam (Hyderabad, 1973).  
29 Kola Seshachalakavi, Nilagiri Yatra (Journey to the Nilgiris). This is a prose work written in Telugu in 1846. The critical edition is published by the Madras Government Oriental Manuscript Library (Madras, 1950).  
32 Ibid., p. 41.  
rulers. From 1800 the Madras government 'encouraged and supported' those who showed an interest in entering the teak trade in coastal Andhra, and the Revenue Department even started gathering information systematically, at least starting from 1800–2. The creation of a market for teak and the imposition of government control over forests were resented by the local communities because colonial needs cut into their customary subsistence needs. The administration, however, partially succeeded in reorienting local business through altered taxes and duties on the timber trade, and also by intervening in and manipulating local markets and bazaars for their needs. By 1813, as is indicated in the Board of Revenue Proceedings, the colonial administration could easily find eager local merchants to cut, process and supply timber for export from places like the Raichotee and Chitwell taluqas. One contractor is said to have offered to pay three times the price offered by others to exploit forest timber for the market. The government, however, did not give total control over timber exploitation to private commercial interests, since sympathetic local administrators expressed concern about the displacement of people's interests in the forests by commercial middlemen. In August 1838 G.A. Smith, Collector of Rajahmundry, in his report to the Board of Revenue on the state of forests in the region, expressed sadness at the decline in the supply of 'large timber'. Smith was of the opinion that supplies of such timber had fallen off since he first joined the district in 1822. He had seen an immense quantity of large timber, 'for the supply of which the forests had been severely taxed', so that now 'only small timber was to be observed, and complaints had been made about the failing supply'.

36 See Cuddapah Collector, C.R. Ross, to the Board of Revenue, Madras, July 1813, and other correspondence, in ibid., vol. 904, pp. 177–237.

Close scrutiny of the Board of Revenue Proceedings indicates that, at least till the 1850s, the old forest cover did not suffer much depletion despite the advent of private commercial interests. A speedy transformation occurred from the 1860s, with the completion of the Godavary and Krishna anicuts. In a recent study, T. Vijay Kumar has argued that, as a consequence of this anicut system, coastal Andhra was rapidly transformed from subsistence to market-oriented or commercial agriculture. The rapid strides in the development of canal irrigation in Godavary, Krishna and Guntur districts converted most of the banjar (wasteland), minor forests and even common porambokes into cultivated land producing mostly paddy and commercial crops.

The pressure on forest resources on account of expanded cultivation was only a part of the story of the process of forest depletion after the 1860s. Pressure was being exerted by the

38 For details on the 'projected/intended consequences of the anicuts, see Reports on the Direct and Indirect Effects of the Godavary and Krishna Anicuts in Rajahmundry, Masulipatam, Guntur, etc., and the Coleroon Anicuts in Tarnjore and South Arcot (Madras, 1858); A.T. Cotton, Report on the Irrigation of Rajahmundry and the Delta of Godavary (Madras, 1844).
40 See, Madras Irrigation: Reports for Years 1876–77 to 1916–17 and 1925–26. The land reserved by the state for public purposes—village sites, roads, tankbeds, etc.—is called a poramboke.
41 Several new cattle diseases also seem to have appeared with the anicuts and their numerous canals, such as Jalaga disease. Cattle mortality, the appearance of new diseases, and the shrinking pasturage were closely related. H. Morris, Acting Collector of the Godavary, to Wulston, Sec., Board of Rev., 28 September 1863, no. 314, in Board of Revenue Proceedings, 1 December 1863, pp. 6991–2.
Government of India on Fort St George for effective control and management of forests, obviously for the benefit of the state and state-aided commercial interests. Early Conservators of Forests, such as Cleghorn and H.R. Morgan, did respond critically, though without much effect, to pressure from the Government of India. The discourse of a 'scientific' conservation of forests, both at the all-India level and in the Madras Presidency, sought to make a clear demarcation between the state and private commercial needs on the one hand and the customary rights of local communities on the other. On 17 September 1875 the Government of Madras appointed a committee to prepare a draft Forest Bill which would apply to state forests, communal forests and proprietary forests. As early as 5 August 1871, the Board of Revenue wrote endorsing traditional community rights over the forests:

There is scarcely a forest in the whole of the Presidency of Madras which is not within the limits of some village, and there is not one in which, so far as the Board can ascertain, the State asserted any rights of property —unless royalties in teak, sandalwood, cardamom, and the like can be considered as such — until very recently. All of them, without exception, are subject to tribal or communal rights which have existed from time immemorial and which are as difficult to define and value as they are necessary to the rural population. Here the forests are, and always have been, a common property [emphasis added].

But by 1882, 'circumstances' seemed to 'have changed', and, as Brandis put it, 'It is now recognized that there are no communal forests as distinct from state forests in the Presidency of Madras.' In fact Brandis's report on the need for effective state control over the forests epitomizes the logic of the ultimate denial of the needs of agricultural and tribal communities in the Madras Presidency.

for his views were immediately transformed into the Madras Forest Act of 1882. This colonial 'scientific' conservation policy denied the needs of local communities at two levels. At one level, it denied the tribals their traditional subsistence living by banning both podu (shifting cultivation) and the collection of minor forest produce. This created the basis for a series of tribal revolts after the mid-nineteenth century. At a second level, the peasantry in the settled agricultural regions — both in the wet and the dry ecological zones — were deprived of their traditional grazing facilities and their customary rights to fuelwood, manure leaves and wood for agricultural implements. The consequences of this policy could be seen during the 1920–2 no-tax movements and forest satyagrahas.

Peasant Perceptions of Colonial Intrusions

By encroaching on small forests, the government stripped many peasants of their grazing facilities. Once the forests, porambokes and dharmakhandams (community common lands) were declared

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42 See Stebbings, Forests of India.
43 Ibid. See the sections on Madras Presidency.
44 The Board of Revenue Proceedings, 1862–97, contains several interesting observations by district administrators on the conflict between the Revenue and Forest Departments over the issue of controlling wasteland, porambokes and minor forest areas.
49 See the last section of this essay.
reserved areas, people were not only deprived of grazing facilities for their cattle, but their animals were also impounded whenever they trespassed into adjacent areas. As Dunda Nagireddi, a peasant from Guntur district, observed before the Forest Committee:

The reserve (formed around 1900) is not even one furlong from the village. There is no vacant place where we can let our cattle stand in groups and there is no ground for men to ease themselves. The forest people [officials] are putting us to many troubles [sic] that we should not even enter the reserves. When we go to our patta lands for cultivation purposes they say that we have no right of way. On the sides of the reserve lie our patta lands. The reserve runs midway between the patta lands, and to the east and west of our lands we have reserves. We pay them [the officials] a bribe and go.

In other words, the main cause of friction between the Forest Department and the peasants was the question of control on ‘public grazing . . . rural needs for fuel, and small timber for agricultural purposes’. This friction surfaced as an anti-imperialist consciousness by 1920, for the exploitative and oppressive ‘interference of the low-paid [forest] subordinates in the daily life of the villager was great’.

There were several sore points associated with the government’s control of forest resources. The Forest Department’s monopoly of fodder extraction and the sale of it with the help of forest subordinates was one area of conflict, for this adversely affected peasants’ grazing needs. One peasant complained in 1912 that the ‘Kondavidu reserve [was] . . . closed for the last 5 or 6 years. It is cut for hay . . . [After the grass has dried] it is cut and removed by the Forest Department. They keep it in a depot to sell and the ryots buy it at 6 annas a bandy [cart-load] . . . ’

The colonial government also extended its control over activities like the collection of fuel, leaf manure and wood for agricultural implements. For centuries, villagers had depended on small forests and porambokes for the free supply of firewood and fuel. In the words of Kalavai village ryots in Nellore district, paying for permits to get firewood ‘has not been the custom up till now. There are only three or four rich ryots and all the rest are poor and cannot pay for fuel.’ But they had to pay: there were no free permits to be had. Moreover, there was ‘no fuel on patta lands;’ and if people brought fuel from unreserved forests, they were caught for having brought it from reserved forests by corrupt forest officials who extracted mamuls (bribes). All this naturally fuelled peasant resentment against the government’s monopoly on the sale of firewood.

Another vexed question was the peasant’s right to collect manure leaves, such as bandaru, from the forests. Before the government’s control, villagers below the hill ghats or nearer the forest never lacked leaves for manure; they had access to forests without payment. But from the beginning of the nineteenth century this collecting of manure leaves was barred by the Forest Department. Moreover, the Madras government increased the price of leaf manure in those areas where peasants were allowed to collect it on payment of a fee, from 5–6 annas to Re 1 per bandy. This meant the cost of manure increased by nearly 125

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53 Ibid., pp. 177–8; also pp. 230, 451. A patta is a memorandum of the particulars of a holding and land assessment, given by the state to the landlord, usually considered as constituting a title to the land. A pattadar is a holder of a patta.
55 Ibid., 1904-05 (Madras, 1906), pp. 26–7; also see Reports for 1902–3 to 1922–3.
56 See the evidence by Indupalli Veechir of Prattipadu, Guntur district, RFC, II, pp. 200–3.
57 Ibid., p. 64.
58 Evidence by R. Duraiswami Aiyar, Nellore taluksildar, ibid., p. 5. For evidence from other parts of Andhra see, pp. 13–22, 143, 215–17, 259; also ARFD, 1902 (Madras, 1903), pp. 23–30; 1912–13 (Madras, 1913), pp. 13–14; Govt. of Madras, Revenue, G.O. 141 (Revenue), 3 February 1901, p. 3.
59 RFC, II, pp. 34–6; also pp. 58, 64–5, 134, 138–9, 422–3 and 446–50.
per cent, even without the transport charge. It was observed by one ryt:

I got a license for one rupee. The cost of bringing one cartload of leaves will be Rs 3.50 because they have to pass the ghats. Seven or eight cartloads are required for one acre of wet land. Rs 24 or 25 worth of leaves is required. More money is required for other manure. We have to pay for fuel, and thus poor people suffer. It costs much to maintain cattle for manuring purposes.

Free access to timber in the forests for agricultural implements had also been the traditional peasant practice. Here again, the Forest Department's monopoly on forest timber came in the way. The permit system allowed peasants to take wood from unreserved porambokes which lay adjacent to the villages, but the inconveniences involved in getting permits or licences caused them to wait for months to make a plough. The area under unreserved porambokes had, by the second decade of the twentieth-century, been slowly swallowed up by 'reserves'. Consequently, the peasants had to pay private agencies high prices for wood to make their agricultural implements. Waiting for permits would have meant getting their tools much after they needed them.

Traditionally, the organization of living space in the villages, both public and private, was organically linked with the total ecological space. Colonialism, in its bid to extend control over forest resources, destroyed this traditional organization resulting in a shifting of the boundaries of public space (forest reserves) closer to private space, especially to houses and cultivated lands. The slightest violation of this, by beast or human, was seen by the colonial administration as a 'crime', whereas the peasants perceived this reordering of geography and space as 'illegal'. It is this dimension of peasant consciousness or 'social memory' which I propose to illustrate through the use of oral evidence as narrative texts.

Raghava Reddy, a landlord of Chennagiripaliam village in Gudur taluqa, Nellore district, narrated that the reserve is only 4 or 5 yards from my house. I am 45 years old, and the reserve was constituted 25 years ago and the house was built by my ancestors. The boundary of the patta lands is the reserve itself. If the bullocks in ploughing put a foot within the reserve land, then fees are collected.

It was this proximity of the boundary of the forest reserves, and the consequent official harassment, which was most resented.

If a reserve is near, cattle generally go there . . . Immediately, they are impounded, whether there is a permit or not [and] . . . charged compounding fees in addition to the permit fees; they cannot get inside the forest for fuel and to bring jala sticks for protecting fields; even if one cow goes there [to the forest], all the cattle are taken to the pound by the Forest Guards and Watchers.

Thus runs the narrative of one marginal peasant.

The peasants' other grievances were integral to their understanding of the new colonial control over space. The traditional system of manuring cultivated lands depended upon leaves from the forests and porambokes. Biradavolu Venkataraghavayya, the village munsif and a middle-class peasant, said that from time immemorial peasants had gathered manure leaves from the forest, but not now, because we have to pay for permits and it is very difficult to get them. Paying fees and bringing manure leaves "is not an advantage to us". The evidence of the ryots of Kalavai further illustrates this interesting process of the appropriation and

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60 Ibid., p. 71.
61 Ibid., p. 513.
62 Evidence by R. Subbarayudu, Nellore, ibid., pp. 6–7; also pp. 3, 82.
63 For an interesting analysis of 'social memory' as a cultural faculty, see Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge, 1989).
64 He had '2000 cattle before the reserves' were constituted 'ten or twelve years ago' but their strength had been reduced to 100—fifty bullocks and fifty cows. Even though he grazed the cattle on his own lands (340 acres including 40 acres wet), Reddi took permits for 50 cattle for Srirajkota reserve, for 'he has to go through the reserve lands to his patta lands through a narrow path of 3/4 of a mile. Even if they touch the margin they are impounded'. RFC, II, p. 22; also see pp. 26–30.
65 Ibid., p. 13; also see pp. 4–5, 39.
66 Ibid., p. 58.
to be open to grazing. Since 1879, it has been closed. During the time of floods it was open for grazing. At other times it is not open... There are some charitable [grazing] tanks close to our village and between our village and the Kistna river and if cattle go, they are impounded by the forest people... I was fined Rs 3... prior to 1879, the whole was dharmakhandam [for three villages—Penumaka, Yerrapallam and Gundavalli]; no pullary [grazing tax]... each ryt had sixty or seventy cattle.

The ‘substantive economy’ in peasant societies has a physical and ecological dimension. Since the physical basis of a peasant economy was subject to the vicissitudes of the natural environment, there evolved a specified way of adapting to natural ecosystems. This ‘harmonization’, in turn, was sustained through a network of community-based customary rights and cultural systems. Since colonialism basically operated within the ideological logic of the ‘capitalist law of nature’, it came into conflict with the traditional customary rights of peasants in forests. Through intermediaries (private contractors) the logic of the colonial money economy was ordained upon the peasant’s life-world.

Invoking tradition was not, however, the exclusive preserve of the peasantry. The colonial interrogation of ‘tradition in history’, and the particular construction of social memory in support of the existing system can also be discerned. It was this contradictory process of the recovery of historical tradition which is a useful pointer to the emerging social and political crisis. At one end of the spectrum, the peasant’s narrative of tradition implicitly sought to undermine the colonial hegemony over community space—porambokes, shekadas and dharmakhandams—and forests. The evidence of P. Seshagiri Rao of Penumaka village near Mangalagiri, Guntur district, indicates this:

We want Penumaka hill—Tadepalli reserve. We want the whole reserve

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67 Ibid., pp. 64–5. For another example, see pp. 65–6, 69–78.
realization of this conflict was at this level very much part of peasant consciousness. Two memorials sent to the Forest Committee by peasants of Nizampatam and the surrounding villages of Guntur district expressed this consciousness:

'We have considerable difficulty about grazing leaves. Our cattle graze on mudda leaves and kaday grass and they cannot live upon grass. Others' cattle do live without mudda leaves or kaday grass. They are not used to it from time immemorial. The mudda leaves which are necessary to our cattle will kill other cattle... Now we are prohibited from getting mudda leaves and kaday grass—from some 10 years ago. We aren't allowed to go to the forest and cut grass. There is a contractor who demands payment, who changes every year and who gives permits on a monthly basis. It is not the contractor who oppresses the people. It is the forest officials... From time immemorial we have been grazing our cattle freely... The mudda leaves are also sometimes used to build houses.'

There was also a witness who pinpointed the magnitude of the crisis. Before it was closed, 'some 20 villages were grazing' in Kondavidu reserve: 'with hardship they are now sending cattle to Palnad or Gurupala taluqas or Nizam's Dominions.'

How did colonial discourse seek to address this issue? To deny legitimacy to peasant demands, administrators, in their turn, invoked the tradition of customary practices and by this means sought to justify their control over forest resources as well as their commodification as well. There is an interesting interrogation of a witness by the Forest Committee which shows these conflicting invocations of tradition to legitimize both sides of the struggle in

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73 RFC, II, pp. 185–6.
74 Ibid., pp. 202–3. According to one Lambadi, Nilanayakkudu of Birjepalipad: 'Before the reserves were constituted they were not levied grazing fees... In the initial stages (of the formation of reserves) the Rangers took As. 3, and even As. 8 in khandams, but at that time they were allowed to take cattle wherever they like in the forest'. Ibid., pp. 242–5.

Madras Presidency. The witness was C. Rama Rao, a landowner of 200 acres and a retired district munsif of Ongole in Guntur district.

Committee: You say that the payment of fees in lieu of free-grazing which was enjoyed until the enactment of the forest laws was a grievance. Is that a grievance?

C.R. Rao: It is not so in the big jungles, but in the scrub jungles it was so.

Committee: I am inclined to think you are mistaken. Records show that 120 years ago, there was a charge called pullary levied on cattle whether on forest or village lands. They all paid pullary?

C.R. Rao: Yes. That was an old custom. At the same time, a tax called moturpha was levied on every sheep and goat even if it is grazing in the backyard.

Committee: In view of these facts, are you able to say that it was free?

C.R. Rao: At all events it was not considered to be a charge and not complained against.

Committee: Did you not say that there were village commons? [called mandabagadu in Telugu].

C.R. Rao: Yes. The village cattle used to lie freely there. There were village commons where the cattle used to graze and lie down there.

What was left out, perhaps deliberately, by the administrators when they called upon tradition was the fact that under the old system cattle 'had their belly-full of pasture from all the open area', and this with 'no fee' being 'levied on cultivators.' Not surprisingly, they showed a one-sided eagerness in pointing out the practice of paying pullary under the traditional system.

At the heart of this legitimization struggle was also the issue of access to temples located on hills within the forests, another traditional cultural practice. For instance, here is the narrative of Timma Reddy of Yerrabommanahalli, Anantapur district.

75 Ibid., pp. 132–5 (emphasis added).
76 Ibid., narrative of a seventy-five-year-old big landlord, Dodla Bera Reddy, p. 129.
Committee: What are your difficulties about the forests?
Timma Reddy: There are two temples on the top of the hill, the Anjaneyaswami and Lakshmidevi temples. There is worship there every week. There are many devotees. If ryots go there, the forest subordinates trouble them and they do not go even to the temple. If we do not worship in any year, tanks will not get supply of water.

Committee: Did you worship this year?
Timma Reddy: Yes. A case was also made against us. While the God was being taken along the path, some trees were said to have been injured and the District Forest Officer inquired and let us off. The Ranger took an explanation and the case was dismissed. We worship the God every year. Instead of worshipping the God there, the ryots have to worship the forest subordinates...

Committee: Did you not represent to the District Forest Officer?
Timma Reddy: Once we went to worship the God and a case was made against my brother that he went for hunting. The District Forest Officer charged us for trial in the Taluk Magistrate’s Court. There were acquittal. Even if we go to the D.F.O., we thought we will not have justice. So we do not go to him... There is a right of way (to the temple). But the branches of trees obstruct the path. We represented the matter to the Ranger (but in vain). The District Forest Officer has permitted us to worship four or five times a year and to take Gods there [in a ceremonial procession] and worship. But Ranger does not permit us to take them there. [They were worshiping for ‘all these 30 years in the reserve.”]

Timma Reddy’s narrative ends with his demand for ‘free grazing’ and ‘free worship’. Why the peasants had chosen to link their worship with the water supply in the tanks—and build around it an elaborate system of cultural practice—is a question which cannot be answered here. But what is important is the fact that their livelihood was rooted in these cultural practices. Therefore, when their right of way to their temples and traditional practices of worship in order to get water in their tanks were replaced by a ‘worship [of] forest subordinates’, it caused a huge resentment among peasants.77

In sum, the forest conflict was, to borrow the words of E.P. Thompson, ‘a conflict between users and exploiters’.78 This evolved into a conflict between two different cultural systems under colonialism in the Madras Presidency. While the colonized people looked ‘upon the forests as their own’,79 the colonizers’ monopolistic interests sought to close them off. These monopolistic interests were camouflaged in an ideological discourse: the conservation of forests was for the ‘good of all’.80 This ‘good of all’81 meant curtailting peasants’ customary rights and conserving forests for colonial commercial needs.82 As S. Eardley Wilmot observed:

If the Forest Reserves in the Presidency will not yield produce in grazing or other material enough to satisfy the desires of the population in grazing and other forest produce, only two courses appear to be available, the area of Reserves must be increased and the unreserved lands more stringently protected or the demands of the people reduced... I cannot but recommend that [the latter] be followed here...83

Before going into factors which catalysed peasant protests, it is interesting to note conflicting class interests among the peasantry and the expression of these in their demands.

77 Ibid., pp. 451–3 (emphasis added). He had 30 acres of wet and 112 acres of dry land; 8 cows, 14 bulls and 6 she-buffaloes, 150 sheep and 10 or 12 goats.
78 Whigs and Hunters, p. 245.
79 RFC, ii. p. 152.
81 In the process of establishing social hegemony the ruling class has first of all to persuade those it rules that the norms and sanctions of society, especially the laws and acts which in reality benefit only the privileged few, are devised for the good of all. See Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (New York, 1971); Joseph V. Femina, Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process (Oxford, 1981), pp. 23–60.
82 For a similar construction of logic in Africa, see Anderson and Grove, eds, Conservation in Africa.
Before going into factors which catalysed peasant protests, it is interesting to note conflicting class interests among the peasantry and the expression of these in their demands. I hasten to add that these class perceptions and interests were articulated within a nationalist ideological discourse. The rich peasantry demanded 'more freedom' and 'less fees', not the free grazing and traditional system of community management of forests. 'All the cattle should be allowed to graze with a lower fee. If all cattle are allowed the grass will be exhausted. There should be differentiation in the reserves', argued one contractor and landholder. An educated and professional non-cultivating rich landlord, H. Narayana Rao, a pleader, was pragmatic (as was the Gandhian nationalist leadership). He merged the demands of the rich and the poor peasantry in a bid to reconcile different class interests, at least at the level of articulation. By arguing that the existing 'grazing fee is not heavy' on the rich, he advocated 'free grazing for poor people, since the poorer class of people find it difficult to pay.' Sanjiva Reddi of Somandepalli, Anantapur district, who had 200 acres of wet and 1,000 acres of dry land, told the Forest Committee: 'We are ready to pay for permits. We wish to have free permits ... It is because of the trouble of the Forest subordinates that we are ready to pay permit fees ... We will be freed of the trouble if the minor subordinates are removed.' The rich peasant class thus shifted the conflict from 'the burden of fees' to freedom from forest subordinates.

For this poor peasant class, the conflict was obviously located in their inability to pay. R. Subbarayudu, pleader from Nellore, summed it up: 'even though the amount may be small it presses rather heavily on the poor ryots, and works a hardship on them, especially when they happen to have dependents ... On several occasions the system of imposing a compounding fee had ruinous consequences for poor and marginal landholders. As S.P. Rice, I.C.S., Acting Collector of Anantapur, remarked:

I am told that in a reserve close to Anantapur and adjoining the public road, straying cattle have been impounded and one Anke Yengadu, a Boya Ryot of Anantapur had to pay Rs 300 which reduced him to begging. Another man named Bandar Ahmed had to pay Rs 15 which cost him his only cow. He sold it for Rs 8 and borrowed the rest.

Under this system the main victims were the poor, as they were also the main offenders of fuelwood lifting, etc. It is not surprising that the major grievance of villages like Penubarti, with a predominantly poor peasant population, had been 'disafforestation.'

There were other causes equally, if not more compelling, which prompted the peasantry to take to forest satyagrahas. One cause was the enhancement of rates charged for grazing in the Andhra districts after 1915. The enhancement in Kurnool, for example, for ordinary cattle was from 3 annas to 8 annas per cow; in Vizagapatnam it was increased from 4 to 8 annas per cow. To reduce heavy grazing in Chittoor reserve, a higher grazing fee was charged from 1 July 1920. Higher grazing taxes were charged in other areas as well: the rates of grazing fees fixed for reserves situated in the plains were, for a cow 8 annas, for a sheep 4 annas, and for a buffalo Re 1.

As noted earlier, the pressure of this enhanced grazing fees was felt more by poor and middle-class peasants, not so much by the rich, for it was the former classes who depended most on government grazing grounds. Oral evidence in Volume Two of the Report of the Forest Committee of 1913 shows that almost all the rich ryots

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85 Ibid., pp. 421–2. Also pp. 35–6, 446–50.
86 Ibid., pp. 424–5.
87 Ibid., p. 5.
88 Ibid., p. 508.
89 Ibid., p. 71.
91 Ibid., p. 17.
93 RFC, II, p. 152; Proceedings of the Chief Conservator of Forests, Mis. 579, 7 December 1920, Govt. of Madras.
sent their valuable cattle to private grazing grounds, even though the fees there were higher than government rates, whereas poor and middle-class ryots invariably sent their cattle to government grazing grounds, even when these were nearly bereft of grass, for they could not afford to pay the higher fee. This perhaps explains the militancy of forest protests: their origin lay in a poor peasant subsistence economy. Leadership, however, was provided by the rich peasant class, which had links with the Congress organization, ideology, programme and politics.

The intrusion of corrupt forest officers, especially subordinates, and of the oppressive colonial judiciary in the day-to-day existence of the peasantry was also an important catalyst in transforming peasant discontent into organized protest. The peasants along with the Lambadis—traditional graziers who took cattle into the forest for grazing—were subjected by subordinate officials to endless demands for bribes, or to 'what they [officials] consider their due'. These illegal exactions by forest officials were almost twice as much the actual government fees paid by the peasants and Lambadis. This apart, if the ryots or Lambadis failed to strike a bargain with forest officers to get grazing permission, their cattle were likely to be impounded on the pretext of some offence or other, and they themselves subjected to other 'petty annoyance'.

Forest Department employees were notorious for corrupt practices in many other ways. For instance, they often drove away cattle grazing near forest reserves and extracted 'from the ryots pound fees as well as compounding fees, or else prosecuted'. If the matter led to prosecution, peasants were either charged exorbitant fines or set free only after parting with heavy sums as

bribes. For such peasants, justice was no easy matter; there was an unwritten understanding between lower forest employes, forest officers and village munisifs. In one case, 'the Munsif and the Forest Officer brought a charge that 30 cattle grazed in the reserve, but they caught hold of 12. We paid poundage for 30, but payment for 18 was divided among the subordinates themselves, and Government got only for 12.'

Thus, nefarious extractions like 'yearly mamools', heavy compounding fees, and bribes to overcome false charges and prosecutions left peasants and Lambadis open to full exploitation by forest officials and subordinates.

The peasantry saw the British judicial system as the epitome of coercion. The experience of a rich landlord, Vena Reddi Rama Reddi of Varapali in Nellore district, revealed to him the excessive nature of colonial retributive justice. In 1901, Reddi took a permit for forty cattle and once, when he failed to carry this permit with

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97 Ibid., p. 23.
98 Evidence by the ryots of Kotagunta and Lingampalak village, ibid., p. 69.
99 Ibid., p. 3.
100 In his evidence, B. Narasinga Rao, Vice-President, Taluqa Board of Narasaraopet, Guntur district, quoted a classic case where he personally appeared. He said that 'in a case in which 4 annas worth of grazing implements were taken by a ryt in Madalapad, the composition fee fixed by the District Forest Officer was Rs 100.' When an appeal was made 'he was fined by the Magistrate Rs 125, at the rate of 4 annas per rupee above the composition fee. I had some talk with some magistrates, and they told that there was a circular that fine should be heavier than the fee'. Ibid., p. 258.
101 For instance, one witness, Venkataramacharaya, a village munisif of Nellore district, observed that the forest officers 'say they will impound the cattle and ask money for leaving off. They sometimes ask Rs 50 to Rs 60. They threaten to impound the cattle and make out a case against us. I'm also told that they take 3 pies per permit issued over and above the permit fee. The ryots are afraid of cases and try to give money to them, and they are demanded Rs 2 per head of cattle (whereas the pound fee per head of cattle was 4 annas)', Ibid., p. 58; also see pp. 64, 164, 172, 434.
102 The evidence of the previous five instances is from ibid., pp. 31–2, 69, 232, 476–7.
him, the Forest Ranger impounded the cattle. The magistrate is said to have 'believed the evidence of the Forest people and fined Rs 60.' He said the peasants were not against the law as such, but 'the way in which the rules [were] being carried out by the forest subordinates . . . To begin with there [was] the infliction of two sets of punishments for one offence. Compounding fee itself [was] higher than the usual impounding fee.' The enormity of the miscarriage of justice was such that even the Forest Ranger on Special Duty in Nellore district, Seshagiri Rao, had to admit before the Forest Committee that 'the percentage of cases in which the District Forest Officer has made any enquiry when reported by Guard before fixing the compounding fee was 3 or 4 in a 100.' The best illustration is the evidence of the ryots of Kotagunta and Lingampalem villages, Nellore district:

**Ryots:** The elders were not at home. The cattle were sent and brought half-way. Boys were in charge. Rupees 10 were demanded [by] the Watchers. The boys said they will bring their father, and settle the matter. He was two miles off. He threatened us by saying that if we did not compound the case, we would be charged Rs 10 per head.

**Committee:** If you said in the Magistrate's Court that it was your own kancha, and it was your own cattle, you would not have paid fines?

**Ryots:** But we have paid fines already to the extent of Rs 300.

**Committee:** Why were you fined Rs 300?

**Ryots:** There was a Supervisor in our beat. He asked us for a bribe for allowing our cattle in the reserve. Our villagers were afraid that something will happen if the goats go into the reserve. Therefore they did not pay anything. So he collected a large number of Watchers of Gundagolu and other villages, and said that permits are to be checked. So they drove all the cattle to a place called Jangambavi where the Supervisor said the Ranger was. They cheated the boys and drove the cattle to Jangambavi. Then the forest people took all the permits. The boys asked where the Ranger was. They said he was somewhere further off, and they must go there. So they went to the boundary of Chagaram. The Ranger was not there. But some had their own suspicions, and they returned to the village. Then all the villagers went to the place. In the meantime, they drove the cattle to the pound, and they were handed over to the Chagaram Munisif. The permits were shown to the Village Munisif. He wanted to know why they should be caught when they had permits. 'We do not care for them. Will you take the cattle and give us the receipt or not?' was the question put to the Munisif by the Watchers. The village Munisif would not give the receipt for a long time, since he has seen the permits. We put in a petition to the Collector, and the District Forest Officer and told all our difficulties. The Magistrate fined us Rs 300—Rs 50 each man.

**Committee:** What was the offence?

**Ryots:** The offence was that we grazed in the closed kanchas. It happened two years ago.

**Committee:** Did you make an appeal?

**Ryots:** We made appeals in two previous cases without success. So we did not make an appeal. It is for fear that we paid compound fees.  

So much for the colonial legal permit. One is reminded of Marx on the juridical illusion 'that a man may have a legal title to a thing without really having the thing.' The theory and practice of colonial forest laws were light-years apart. There was not only no proper administrative check on official misuse of power, the retribution did not fit the 'crime' either. Poor peasants' customary rights were not recognized, nor were they

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103 RFC II, pp. 69–71. Kancha is a Government wasteland let out for grazing.


compensated for the loss of their old ‘life world’. To borrow from Marx again: ‘the right of human beings give way to that of young trees.’

These ruinous day-to-day experiences and their consequent ‘hated’ of British rule not only strengthened anti-colonial consciousness over time, it also took the form of a movement which expressed itself in a spontaneous peasant protest. This eventually linked up with the national liberation struggle of 1920–2, via the local Congress leadership.

Officially, it was conceived that ‘an important branch of forest work consists in the protection of the forests from damage at the hands of the people or by forest fires.’ It was ‘the people’ who seemed to have hunted the colonial forest administrators, for the ‘usual course of operations’ of the Forest Department were ‘with regard to the detection and punishment of arson, theft and encroachment in the forests.’ In the first two decades of the twentieth century, one notices a shift in the nature of ‘punishment’ meted out to such people, who now turn out to be simple ‘offenders’ of forest regulations. In the Madras Presidency, while the number of cases disposed off by the courts decreased from 7082 in 1901–2 to 5363 in 1911–12, the number of cases compounded increased from 13,827 in 1901–2 to 19,456 in 1911–12. Legalistic forms of punishment were slowly being overshadowed by arbitrary punishments meted out on the spot. This shift in the

punishment of ‘forest offenders’ should be seen in relation to the steady increase of pressure for grazing rights in the forests. For example, the total number of buffaloes, cows and bullocks grazed during 1899–1900 in the Madras Presidency was 1,441,000; in 1901–2 it was 1,487,000, and in 1911–12 it rose to 1,858,135. The result was a clash between forest law-enforcement officials and peasants—the ‘infringers of forest regulations’.

The first and spontaneous individual peasant protest against forest regulations took the form of a violation of government restrictions. Illegal grazing and the resulting impounding of animals had become perennial problems, despite strict supervision by forest subordinates. There was an increase in cases of unauthorized grazing and the removal of grass and other forest produce. Unauthorized felling was the biggest forest offence in the eyes of the state in Guntur, Nellore, Chittoor and Anantapur.

In 1919–20 as many as 8900 cases of forest ‘crimes’ were reported. Of these, 2434 relate to Guntur and this district probably tops the Presidency as regards forest offences. In fact, ‘protection from man and beast become the chief problem in Guntur district.’ These perennial forest ‘offences’, the symbols of peasant protest against the removal of customary rights, were considered by the colonial state as ‘crimes’, and the peasants and the villages that harboured these offenders were ‘dens’. This transformation of forest ‘offences’ into ‘crimes’ which invoked severe punishments undermined the legitimacy of the colonial state:

In short, if popular customary rights are suppressed, the attempt to exercise them can only be treated as the simple contravention of a police regulation, but never punished as a crime . . . The punishment must not inspire more repugnance than the offence, the ignominy of crime must not be turned into the ignominy of law; the basis of the state is

107 The cause for this ‘hated’ was summed up by G.N. Thomassen of the American Baptist Telugu Mission, Bapatla, Guntur district, in his evidence before the Forest Committee: ‘I presume that it is [hated] because people look upon the forest as their own. They cannot get firewood and cannot take a single stick without being handed over to the Magistrate. The Forest Department has interfered with their liberty. This is reason for complaining against the Forest department . . . again and again that they pay manmul and yet they have no surety their cattle will not be impounded.’ RFC, II, p. 152.
109 These statistics are from ibid., pp. 221–2; for 1911–12, pp. 260–1.
110 See tables on ‘Comparative Statement of Impounded Cattle’ in AFRD, for 1910 to 1924.
111 Ibid., for 1905–6, 1918–19.
112 Ibid., 1919–20, p. 17.
113 Ibid., p. 29.
undone if misfortune becomes a crime or crime becomes a mis-
fortune.\footnote{Marx, 'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood', p. 235.}

How appropriate these words are to our situation!

Protests against such definitions of forest 'offences' consol-
didated into a coherent movement in 1920–2 not only because of
this ignominious situation but also, as was observed by the District
Collector, due to (a) unfavorable season, (b) great short-age of
fodder and water, (c) the recent more vigorous enforcement of the
Forest Rules, and (d) non-co-operation agitation.\footnote{Confidential
letter from W.R. Robertson, to Marjoribanks, Chief Sec.,
Govt. of Madras, 17 July 1921, in G.O. 483, Ordinary Series, 30 July 1921.}
When the unfavourable season and the consequent famines added further
misery to peasant lives, the Non-Co-operation Movement started
by Gandhi gave a political character to social protest.\footnote{For
details, see Murali, 'Civil Disobedience Movement in Andhra',
Andhra Patrika, 21 January, 3 February, 25 March, 22 July, 8–9 September
2019; Anantya (Telugu monthly, Kakinda), July–August 1919; Report on
Native Newspapers (Madras, 1921), pp. 843, 1235–6; Madala Vearabhadra Rao,
Desababbhakta Jeevina Charitramu (Maulipatnam, 1966), pp. 81–3; Nyaya Dipsika
(Madras), 4 October 1921; AFRD, 1919–20, p. 17, 1920–21, pp. 14–15.}
The nationalist intelligentsia articulated peasant perceptions of an
immoral colonial monopoly over forest resources and mobilized the
peasants to join the Gandhian movement. This can be illustrated
with a famous nationalist song sung in the villages and at political
meetings.\footnote{'Dandalu Dandalu Bharatamata' by Vaddadi Sitaaranjaneyulu, in
Sarojini Regani and Devulapalli Ramanuja Rao, eds, Decam Pilpu ('Call of
the Nation') (Hyderabad, 1972), pp. 19–22 (translated from Telugu).}

\begin{quote}
Three hundred years back
Company man descended
You have kept quiet
He robbed the whole nation
He claims all forests are his
Did his father come and plant?
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Bharatamata,
Bharatamata,
Bharatamata,
Bharatamata,
Bharatamata,
Bharatamata.
\end{quote}

\footnote{For details, see Murali, 'Civil Disobedience Movement in Andhra',
Andhra Patrika, 21 January, 3 February, 25 March, 22 July, 8–9 September
2019; Anantya (Telugu monthly, Kakinda), July–August 1919; Report on
Native Newspapers (Madras, 1921), pp. 843, 1235–6; Madala Vearabhadra Rao,
Desababbhakta Jeevina Charitramu (Maulipatnam, 1966), pp. 81–3; Nyaya Dipsika
(Madras), 4 October 1921; AFRD, 1919–20, p. 17, 1920–21, pp. 14–15.}

Whose Trees?

Conclusion

In the pre-colonial period, people in the Deccan region lived in
an ecosystem which had evolved historically with a complex but
mutually sustaining relationship between agricultural, forest and
pastoral zones. We have seen the antiquity of the cultural, eco-
nomic and political contours of this interface after the sixteenth
century, especially through Telugu literary texts and kaifiyats. An
important point is that peasants and pre-colonial rulers did not
develop a 'commercial' attitude towards forests; the control of
tribal groups over forests was recognized by the rulers as their
unquestionable natural right. The forest cover in Andhra districts
was not altered radically until about the mid-nineteenth century:
only from the 1850s did the deliberate policy of the Madras
government—to develop both private and state commercial inter-
ests in teak and other varieties of timber—begin the depletion of
forest resources.

Simultaneously, during this period, the systematic extension
of colonial juridical control over the entire minor and major
forests—porambokes, village wastelands, etc.—as well as the emer-
gence of market-oriented agricultural production, brought new
pressures on the forests. In other words, the entire ecosystem was
transformed under the influence of the colonial model of 'private
property' in land, water and other natural resources. The custom
of cultivating wastelands by villagers 'without authority' was
banned by converting wastelands into 'reserved lands'. This ex-
tension of colonial law to wastelands meant the exclusion of the
poor. The state claimed a monopolistic right to alienate these
lands, 'under the wasteland sale rules', basically to the property-
ted classes. The same was true for trees: these were converted into
'reserved' trees; the right to fell them was entrusted to the Forest
Department, which in turn sold them at higher rates than those
charged for unreserved trees.\footnote{Brandis, 'Suggestions Regarding Forest
Administration', pp. 27–8.} In 1862, the 'use of teak or
Satinwood for ploughs' by the ryots was declared 'clearly an abuse
which should be checked. But this did not restrict the colonial state from selling this same wood to the same ryots on payment of seigniorage. The pre-colonial method of a collective village regulation of grazing lands was banned; the state now introduced a uniform tax on all kinds of grazing lands. The most crucial change, however, was the conversion of all the major and minor forests into government reserved forests, with boundaries drawn on the land conspicuously. This 'skilfull demarcation' of the boundaries of reserved forests and the 'settlement of rights' had, by the 1910s, become the visible space for the execution of colonial laws. 'The world condition of unfreedom', said Marx in the context of a debate on the law on the theft of wood in Germany, 'required laws expressing this unfreedom.' It was this colonial juridical and socio-economic context which shaped popular perceptions of colonial rule as unjust, alien and immoral. Such perceptions and their context were the ultimate basis for radical agrarian and tribal movements in Andhra during 1920–4. A quotation from the report of a correspondent, published in *Swadesamitran* on 18 July 1893, may serve as a conclusion:

[I regret] to see that there is no space left for cattle-grazing in the North Arcot and Ceded Districts; all the wastelands, including even village sites and porambokes, having been brought under reservation by the Forest Department... that this procedure on the part of the Forest Department is due to ignorance prevailing among the ryots, whose sole kingdom is their village, of which the village *mognar* is the sovereign... that reservations of this nature are not in the least felt by officials and traders, but fall with great severity on the poor ryots, whose stock of cattle dwindles into nothing day after day.

119 Board of Revenue Proceedings, Govt. of Madras, 19 December 1862, 8284, pp. 3946–7.
120 Ibid., 3 February 1864, 733, pp. 552–3.
122 Brandis, 'Suggestions', p. 16.

Chapter Four

British Attitudes Towards Shifting Cultivation in Colonial South India: A Case Study of South Canara District 1800–1920

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There is a subject of much interest and importance and which is deserving of the attentive consideration of Government, not so much perhaps with reference to the immediate or future supply of timber for public purposes as in the general bearing which it cannot fail to have at no distant period upon the welfare and condition of the Province. I allude to the rapid destruction which is going on amongst the forests along the whole length of the district by the process of Coomeri cultivation.

These are the introductory words of the section on shifting cultivation in a report sent by the Collector of Canara to the Madras Board of Revenue in 1847, when the preservation of the Canara forests began to assume in the eyes of the colonial authorities a character of primary importance. The problem, in this opening sentence, is at once set in very general terms, in accordance with the tendency of the time: shifting cultivation, locally known as *kumri* (literally 'hilly land') cultivation, is deprecated not merely

1 Collector of Canara to Board of Revenue, Fort St George, 31 August 1847, in Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings (hereafter BRP), 8 November 1847.