



Struggle of the linguistic minorities and the formation of Pattom Colony

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ABSTRACT

Land has many uses but its availability is limited. During the early 1940s extensive food shortages occurred throughout Travancore. As a result, the government opened forestlands on an emergency basis for food cultivation and in 1941 granted exclusive cultivation rights known as 'Kuthakapattam' was given (cultivation on a short-term lease) in state forest areas. Soon after independence, India decided to re-organize state boundaries on a linguistic basis. The post Independence State reorganization period witnessed Tamil-Malayali dispute for control of the High Ranges. The Government of Travancore-Cochin initiated settlement programmes in the High Range areas in order to alter the regional linguistic balance. Pattom colony, which was sponsored by Pattom Thanupillai ministry, as a part of High Range colonization scheme. It led to forest encroachment, deforestation, soil erosion, migration, conflict over control of land and labour struggle and identity crisis etc.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the formation of the linguistic States in India can be traced back to the British period. The movement for the linguistic reorganization of Indian States was not an isolated case; it was an all India phenomenon. It can be assumed that the development of political consciousness, nationalism, the growing importance of the regional languages etc. led gradually to such a movement in India.

Objective of the study :

– To highlight the history of settlement, struggle of linguistic minorities and land control in Devikulam

and Peermede Taluks in Travancore -Cochin during the post Independence State reorganization period.

– To find out the aims of Grow More Food Programme and high range colonisation programmes under Pattom Thanu Pillai.

– To bring the role of political parties and their petitions regarding the formation of new Taluks.

– It focuses the establishment of Pattom colony at Kallar.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The article, prepared on the basis of both archival and secondary sources is written as per the method of

scientific Historical Research. The general methodology adopted for the study is narrative –cum-analytical descriptive and argumentative in nature.

Historical Overview :

The names 'Devikulam and Peermede' are differently spelt in different sources. Devikulam is sometimes mentioned as 'Devikolam' also. According to legend, the goddess Sita Devi of the Ramayana epic bathed in the beautiful Devikulam Lake. Devikulam literally meaning "the pond or lake of the Devi". The taluk situates in the high ranges of idukki district. The name peermede was derived from 'peer' and 'Mede'. Peer is the name of a sufi saint. Mede is the Malayalam connotation for the English word hill. It is believed that the name Peermede is derived from the Mausoleum of Peer Muhammad. Peermede means "Hill of Peer" (GOI, 1955).

The Malayali migration in High Range division occurred in three stages. They are the period in which the food deficit and famine occurred in Travancore state between 1930 and 1948, grow more food production scheme introduced by Travancore and Travancore-Cochin governments between 1948 and 1953 and the period in which the circumstance aroused in Travancore-Cochin in relation with the loss of High Range division to Madras state due to impressive Tamil population between 1953 and 1956 (Rajeev and Idukki, 2007). Between 1930 and 1948 as many as 70,000 Malayalees may have migrated to High Range division. During the interim period between First World War and Second World War, extensive food shortage occurred throughout Travancore (Ibid). It is the remarkable phase of the massive migration. To meet the immense food shortage and famine, the government opened forest lands on an emergency basis for food cultivation. Thus large migrations occurred in High Range areas. It was the first stage of Malayali migration. During this time, the government issued lands in high ranges for the migrated individuals for cultivation on temporary basis. After this with the aim of increasing food production and promoting agriculture of edible crops, the government introduced one more scheme in High Range called 'Grow More Food. Production' in 1948. Under this scheme land grand was made on permanent and temporary basis for those who were ready for migration and do cultivation of edible crops in High Range division. It was known as the second

phase of Malayalee migration. The third and the last stage of Malayaali migration occurred in High Ranges between 1953 and 1965. This migration is also known as the Government sponsored colonization scheme. Under this scheme, many Malayalees migrated to High Range areas (Marcus, 1991).

Devikulam and Peermede were two of the eight taluks of Kottayam district of the former Travancore and later Travancore-Cochin State. These taluks have a different status of being hilly areas, which, for economic and other reasons, were of great importance to the State of Travancore-Cochin. These taluks were noticeable because of Tamil settlements and lying adjacent to Tamil land. The Tamilians of these taluks were mainly labourers in Tea and Cardamom estates. These estate owners were hard to find labours from these taluk. They were forced to depend on the labours from their home and neighbouring district of Tamil Nadu. In course of time, this Tamil working Class became one of the dominant sections in their society. It was one of the reasons for the Tamil linguistic Movement and T.T.N.C. movement to take deep roots in these two taluks since 1945.

The process of state reorganization led to widespread Tamil- Malayali unrest in the High Range area (Deepika, 1954). In addition, Travancore- Cochin initiated the High Range Colonisation schemes in response to the threatened loss of the Devicolam and Peermade taluks. The official purpose of these schemes was to provide land for poor people from the plains. The underlying purpose was to shift the linguistic balance in the High Ranges. Active colonisation projects were started, attempts to evict earlier encroachers were stopped, and there was an underlying unofficial encouragement of Malayali migration to the High Ranges and the settlement of forest lands.

Memoranda were submitted to the state reorganization commission by Travancore –Cochin in early May, 1954. On the Tamil side, statements concerned the mistreatment of Tamilians in Travancore-Cochin and their cultural differences from Malayalis. By July, agitations for the separation of the High Range taluks of Devicolam and Peermade from Travancore-Cochin and their inclusion in Madras state had grown violent. Agitations and unrest over Tamil areas in Travancore-Cochin continued sporadically throughout 1954 and 1955. In August 1954, widespread violence and shooting erupted in southern Travancore-Cochin. The State

Reorganization Bill was introduced in parliament on March 16, 1956 and passed soon afterwards. A number of Tamil-dominated Taluks in southern Travancore-Cochin were merged with Madras. The new state of Kerala retained the High Range Taluks and gained the Malayali-dominated Malabar area from Madras. The High Range colonization scheme was initiated in the context of the state reorganization debate.

The establishment of pilot colony at Kallar :

The proceedings of 1955 stated the inauguration of grass lands colonization scheme at the pilot colony, Kallar (FDA, 1954). The goal of the High Range colonization scheme was to settle 8000 families on 50,000 acres of land at four sites in the lands adjacent to Tamil Nadu (GOK, 1982). The colonists were selected from landless agricultural labour class who were willing to settle down permanently in the blocks with their families (G.O. No. 66, 1963). The four colonies were Kallar, Marayoor, Kanthalloor, Deviyar. The pilot Colony at Kallar was opened on the 20th January, 1955. The extend of the Colony comes to 968.76 acres. 200 families of landless agricultural labourers were settled there (G.O. No.A10-9309, 1955). The Anjanad Colony at Marayoor and Nachivayal Villages comprising 690 acres divided into 125 Blocks was started on 11th February 1955 (G.O.No.A10-10917, 1955). The Kanthalloor Colony comprising the areas of Kanthalloor, Dandakompu, Perivayal nad Anakalpetty This colony was opened on 28th March 1955 and has a extent of 1000 acres comprising 200 Blocks in isolated patches (G.O.A10-1312, 1955). Since the Blocks allotted to the colonists at Marayoor were found unsuitable for cultivation and habitation, Government ordered to open a new colony in

the Deviyar coupe and 73 colonists from Marayoor were given alternative Blocks at Deviyar (G.O.M.S.17002, 1957). The extend of land for allotment to each family was fixed at more or less 3 acres as the soil in the area was found to be quite fertile. In Devikulam and Kallar 480 to 2800 hectors of lands surveyed as per the five orders of the Government of Travancore Cochin.

The Government of Travancore Cochin decided to establish Pilot Colony at Kallar basin to settle 200 families.

The following schedule was prepared for the completion of the scheme (P.T.C., 1954) (Table 2).

The Forest Department ordered to surrender, 1,000 acres from the Kallar Basin for the Pilot Colony. The utilizable timber in the area was used by the Public Works Department for the construction of houses and sheds for the colony (Ibid). The Special Officer for Colonization arranges the survey of 1,000 acres and their sub-division into 5 acre blocks to be completed within the time fixed. He was permitted to obtain expenditure for the transport of the survey staff and survey instruments from Devicolam to the work spot in order to avoid delay in transport. The Special Officer is also permitted to pay line-clearing charges at the rate of 4 annas per chain for the survey of these 1,000 acres. Three sheds build immediately for the use of the Survey Party. Trenches dug around the sheds because the area is infested with elephants. The armed men were deputed for the protection of the Survey Party at Kallar.

In connection with the inauguration of Pattom Colony, it was decided to print 1,000 copies of the enclosed invitation letter on red stamped white paper. The direction was given for the construction of a Pandal and Platform, furnished with sufficient number of chairs

Taluk	1921-31	1931-41	1941-51	1951-61	1961-71
Devikulam	74.50	10.14	32.02	48.38	9.09
Udubanchola	84.43	21.74	40.16	67.75	70.21
Peermede	91.56	41.1	48.37	54.61	9.88

Source: Census of India (1971)

Sr. No.	Year and Date	Scheduled Scheme
1.	27-12-1954	Commencement of Survey (Survey to be completed within ten days)
2.	25-12-1954	Applications to be invited by the Special Officer
3.	08-01-1955	Last date for receipt of applications
4.	10-01-1955	Selection of colonists and intimations to those selected
5.	20-01-1955	Formal inauguration of the colony.

and benches and a microphone. Sanction was also accorded to incur an expenditure not exceeding Rs. 2,000/- by the Special Officer for Survey, Settlement and Colonisation for the inauguration ceremony (Survey Colonization and Resettlement, 1955).

The Special Officer was asked to invite applications. It also came out in press reports at the time by advertising details of the scheme in eight Malayalam Dailies two from each district. They were Malayala Rajyam, Dhinamony, Kerala Kaumudi, Prathidwani, Dinamalar Deepika, Mathrubhoomi Janasakthi (Deepika, 1955 and 1956). Special Officer was directed to issue application only to the deserving poor drawn from the landless agricultural labour class (GOTC, 1955). The selected colonists or their parents did not own property of their own. Advertisements in the dailies made through the Director of Public Relation by the Special Officer.

Representation received from the residence of Kallar and neighbouring villages in the Devicolam and Peermade Taluks requesting to name the Pilot Colony at Kallar proposed to be opened on the 20th to be named as 'Patton Colony' after its founder Sri Patton A. Thanu Pillai, the present Chief Minister, so that the colony may be named accordingly and announced at the inaugural function (G.O.No.A10-9309, 1955).

The sub divisional officer informed to the Special officer regarding the inauguration ceremony of and arrangements. As a part of it, a shed and platform erected at kallar by the side of the Kumily Devikulam road and at the junction leading the colony (Survey Colonization and Resettlement, Trivandrum, 1955). This is the ideal place suited to the inauguration ceremony. It was also planned install a laterite name board at the above function with the following words enclosed on it "Patton Colony" opened on 20/01/1955 (G.O. No.A10-9309, 1955). Loans were also provided to the colonists in the form of substantial assistance (Handbook on the administration

of the High range colonization scheme, 1964). Reservation list for the selection colonists also prepared.

Patton Colony declaration and land distribution was done by P.K. Kunju Sahib, the Minister for Finance at Kallar on 20 January 1955. Thoorkupalam was the capital of Kallar Patton colony. The Marayur and Deviyar colonies were known as Najilnad Colonies. Life of the colonist was miserable. Fifty families which first settled but later they gave up the place and returned to their original places as life there was a struggle with wild animals, diseases and starvation. Only the hard working cultivators survived in High-range area. The region was a cherished ground for wild animals. Most of them fled from this region as it was impossible to adjust with adverse climatic conditions, diseases and fear of being attacked by the wild animals (FDA, 1954). More over crisis affected to the agriculturist as the government did not fulfil the declarations at the time of inauguration ceremony.

Cultivators lived in small hut in big trees to escape from the attack of wild animals. In Balagram, Koottar, Vandanmedu, Mundieruma the farmers dig trenches to keep distance from wild elephants and wild Boars (Rajeev, p.114). Intolerable climate existed in High range region at that time. Rainy season started before June and lasted for some months. Thus many of them abandoned the place for their survival. So the government reallocated the forsaken areas to another group of migrants. This process continued for a long time. In the case of providing financial aid the promise was not kept by the government. In order to get the amount assured by the government to the migrant families of this colony, they conducted a starvation march (Pattini Jatha) from Kallar to Thiruvananthapuram in 1956 (File No. R. Dis. 01/06, 1964).

The ecological impact :

The causes of deforestation in the Cardamom Hills in the Idukki district can be only be understood in the context of the relationship between ethnic and religious communities which greatly influenced migration, forest encroachment, and conflict over control of land.

The formation of Patton colony led to large scale forest encroachments. The farmers living near Kallar colony started encroachment of lands in adjacent areas. These people were often relatives or friends of the colonists. Certain powerful politicians also began

Sr. No.	Community	Number
1.	Nair	5
2.	Ezhava	10
3.	Scheduled Caste	5
4.	Other Hindus	4
5.	Christians	6
6.	Muslims	5
Total		35

encroachment of large areas of high ranges for sale or to build their own estates. Grow more food campaign also largely responsible for the forest encroachments'. Soil erosion and forest conservation become major topics. The government also formed a committee known as 'Anti- Erosion Committee'.

Deepika the oldest Malayalam newspaper responded to the effects of evictions by publishing an article entitled Anadhikrithamennu Parayappedunna vanabhoomi kalile Kayyettangal, roughly the so-called encroachments in to the forest lands. This article listed a number of ways in which the government has given tacit approval to forest encroachment.

During the period from 1951 to 1979 it is estimated that about 4.5 million hectares of land was deforested for non-forestry purposes in India. Reduction of soil cover, leading ultimately to the major ecological disasters such as reduction of bio-diversity, increased soil erosion, floods, poverty etc.

Conclusion :

The Second World War, Indian independence movement, the process of State formation in the 1950s, and density of population transformed the High Ranges into a centre for landless migrants. Responsibility for forest areas was divided between the forest and revenue departments, making control of encroachment difficult.

The division of control between forest and revenue departments complicated monitoring and control of encroachment. The long history of encroachment and settlement in the High Ranges has left occupancy rights in a highly confused situation. The forest department officially owns the trees in many areas, while the revenue department owns the land. Cultivators occupy much of this land. More over the re-allotment of blocks for the colonists continues for a long period.

High range colonisation programme led to deforestation and the beginning of an era of migration to the hill ranges of Idukki district. The linguistic, economic, and financial importance as well as power generation potential of Idukki district forced Travencore Cochin to appeal before State Reorganisation Commission demanding Devikulam and Peermade Taluks. Community Wise Reservation list of the colonists was also prepared. It brought communal harmony in high ranges. It was one of the positive effects of colonisation. But Tamil linguistic domination and a feeling of identity

crisis was another result.

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