

## A Study on The Impacts of Colonial Plantations in Wayanad

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### Abstract

Plantation is a large-scale farm that specialises in cash crops. The crops grown include coffee, tea, rubber, cinnamon, Cardamom, etc. It is usually large farms or states, especially in a tropical or semi-tropical country, on which cash crops are cultivated. European powers like the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French explored new places and colonised them for an extended period. This marked the emergence of a new phenomenon, 'Colonialism' worldwide. Among these powers, the British had colonised most of the world. During colonisation, they arrived in India and ruled us for centuries. To exploit our wealth, they introduced various reforms. They converted our land into a colony, a feeding centre of their revenue. Waging wars was one of the methods by which the British expanded their colonial boundaries. In the second Anglo-Mysore war, they defeated the Mysore ruler, and, as per the Srirangapatnam treaty of 1792, they got Malabar. When the British became the custodian of Malabar in 1799, they introduced many reforms. One among them was Agrarian reforms. It was based on Agrarian reforms that the British started plantations like tea, coffee, rubber, etc in the Wayanad region. The socio-economic improvement of Wayanad was the direct result of plantation in the area. The present study, 'Colonial Plantations and its impact in Wayanad', attempts to analyse the Europeans' establishment of the plantation industry in Wayanad regions and its effect on the socio-economic life in that area.

**Keywords:** - Plantation, colonialism, migration, cinnamon, commercialisation, cultivation

### INTRODUCTION

The colonial supremacy in different parts of India, including Wayanad, affected the socio-economic life. The arrival of the British in India under the banner of colonialism necessitated the making of theories of justification of imperial and survival mechanisms to ensure its long existence in India. Britain, as the champion of imperialism in this land, effectively used the possibilities of science and technology to harness the mindset of the people. Among the various reforms introduced by the British, agrarian reforms were the foremost. As per the new administrative reform, they developed plantations in different parts of the country, including the Malabar area. By the treaty of Srirangapattanam of 1792, Malabar became a part of the British empire, and hither then, they followed an exploitation policy. They drained our wealth and resources, both human and natural.

The British introduced a plantation economy due to the commercialisation of agriculture. The plantation was one of the early colonisation methods where settlers set up permanent or semi-permanent colonial bases. Plantation is a large-scale farm that specialises in cash crops. It is usually large farms or states, especially in a tropical or semi-tropical country, on which various cash crops are cultivated. Among the earliest examples of plantations in the world were the Latfundia of the Roman empire, which produced large quantities of wine and olive oil for export. Plantation agriculture overgrew with the increase in international trade and the development of a worldwide economy that followed the expansion of the European colonial empire's interests. A plantation crop is usually a monoculture and includes growing various products like tea, coffee, rubber, pepper, and other spices. In the early 1820s, the British East India Company began large-scale tea production; they had a virtual monopoly of British overseas trade with China and India and carried out a profitable trade, especially in the tea trade. Later, the activities moved south India, and tea plantations were started in Kerala. The early history of Plantations in Kerala was related to the cardamom plantations. After this, coffee, tea, and rubber plantations were established, especially in Wayanad.

Wayanad is one of the 10 taluks of Malabar district of erstwhile Madras Presidency. The British were so clever that they identified this place as a suitable location for plantation in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> C. It is a hilly region where nature makes melody with a smooth culture. With their engineering skill, the British laid roads across the dangerous slopes of Wayanad and planted tea bushes. Wayanad has become a nature lover's paradise today with a velvety carpet of green tea leaves stretched all over the hilly ranges. Its name was derived from the expression Vayal Nandu, which meant the land of paddy fields. Some have opined that Wayanad originated from the two words Vana and Nadu, meaning the land of forests. It is a land of mountains and a part of the Western Ghats, rich in flora and fauna. This land fell into the hands of the British, who transformed the area for the cultivation of tea and coffee. Messrs Parry & Co. first introduced tea to Wayanad, who grew it for many years in their Peringotty estate. Most of the early tea estate was confined to South Wayanad and later spread to Northern parts. Many of the coffee estates were converted to tea by 1892, and soon, it became the chief plantation crop in Wayanad.

Wayanad is rich, and it has plenty of coffee estates, too. The Madras government made a new announcement, which exempted coffee plantations from land tax. This relaxation offered a high degree of encouragement to the planters to plant coffee. It is no wonder that Wayanad has become the best coffee-producing district of Malabar within a short period. The success in the cultivation of coffee in the region paved the way for the beginning of the first coffee estate. In 1825, Captain Haven started a

coffee estate in Mananthavady, and in 1830, two Englishmen named Dr. Fuston and Mr. Puge started coffee plantations on a large scale. Following this, in 1841, Madras-based M/S Parry & Co. began coffee plantations in Wayanad. Gradually, the coffee estates spread rapidly in Wayanad when East India Company liberally allotted lands to all applicants for coffee cultivation. As a result, coffee cultivation in Wayanad peaked during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> C, and as per the records, there were more than 6,000 acres of coffee plantations there. Along with the Europeans, the natives also engaged in coffee plantations. Coffee estates were at Mananthavady, Panamaram, Tirunelly, Vythiri, Sulthan Bathery, and the English planters owned all the early ones.

Tea and Coffee were not the only plantations of the British in Wayanad. They realised that the soil there was suitable for rubber and pepper cultivation. The rubber plantations started in Wayanad in the 1880s, and the cultivators were dubious about the success of rubber plantations. They feared it would not yield any latex, but rubber cultivation became a success later. The main centre of the rubber plantation was Vythiri. Like rubber, Wayanad also cultivated pepper, and Wayanad pepper is one of the unique items entirely different from other parts of the world. It was first grown there in the 1860s, and Mr. Powell took off a South Wayanad coffee estate in 1875.

The British had many motives in establishing their hold over different areas in India. Though their primary motive was economic, they had many other motives which enabled them to achieve a monopolistic trading position in India. The colonial plantations had different economic, social, and cultural impacts. The financial implications of colonial plantations have other branches, such as the commercialisation of agriculture, trade, infrastructural development, migration, etc. They introduced commercial crops such as tea, coffee, pepper, rubber, etc., and commercial interests were vital in formulating British colonial policy. Thus, we can assume that the introduction of commercial crops mainly determined Britain's colonial policy. The period from 1792 to 1800 was marked by the British East India Company's attempt to enforce their commercial monopoly in Malabar, especially in Wayanad. The British planters leased out large areas of land in the foothills of the Western Ghats and made it conducive for various kinds of plantations. As a result, the existing agricultural system was changed, and now production is for the market, not self-consumption. The company established the first plantation (cardamom) in 1797 at Anjarakandy in the erstwhile Malabar district.

The colonial plantation in Wayanad accelerated the process of peasants' migration from Travancore to Malabar, which had a significant impact on colonial plantations. The main attractions for such migration are various opportunities for employment and the desire to acquire land cheaply. It caused the expansion of plantations in the region. As a result, the demographic level began to change even in the remote villages. The colonial plantations altered the region's social and cultural realms. A new social system emerged there, and the spread of coffee and tea estates required more workers than native workers. So, the planters recruited workers outside their estates, and this immigration led to many social and cultural changes in society. The newly migrated people lived permanently in the locality and became part of the society. The estate owners later depended on the professional labourers recruited from the agents, and they were popularly known as Kanganies. The coffee estate owners of Mysore, Coorg and Wayanad employed them. There was a gang of workers, and usually, a gang consisted of a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 80 workers. The European planters were inhuman and punished the workers. The recruiting agents-Kanganies denied the workers the basic amenities of life and tried to make maximum money. Many workers escaped from the labour camp because of the inhuman treatment and exploitation of the planters.

A tragic impact of the migration, which resulted from the colonial plantations, was the eviction of many people from the land. Initially, it highly affected the tribal people and, later on, other people also. The colonial plantation also affected the population of Wayanad, which has been showing steady growth in the area. The total population of Wayanad in 1827 was 34,272, and it increased to 1,25,827 in 1871. The life of the Adivasis and the native people also changed drastically due to the beginning of the colonial plantations. When the British established factories in forest areas, it changed the people's livelihood, especially of the Adivasis. The colonial plantations in Wayanad led to some environmental changes. The ecological imperialism in Kerala started with the arrival of the Portuguese. They accelerated the tendency of agriculture of cash crops at the expense of food crops. Following them, the other Europeans, like the Dutch, French and British, came to this land and made notable changes in the environment of this region. The British onslaught on the climate of Kerala began in the high regions like Wayanad. Their intervention in the ecology of this area paved the way for the spread of plantations like coffee, tea, and rubber. In commercialisation, the colonial policy refused to accord due importance to ecology and environment and the sustainable livelihood of the tribal communities. Before the colonial intervention, commercial exploitation of forest produce was confined mainly to collecting spices such as pepper and cardamom. It did not pose a serious threat to ecology. However, when the colonial powers exercised their hold over this area, it positively and negatively impacted the natural environment. The negative impact is that they cleared acres of land to prepare it for plantation. The land, in turn, was used for planting tea, coffee, rubber, etc, which can be seen as a positive impact.

Westernisation was another significant impact of the colonial plantations. The beginning of plantations created a new era in which the people's standard of living in the locality underwent a drastic change. The European planters started factories of coffee and tea, constructed roads, and set up schools and hospitals. These colonial institutions forced the native people to change their traditional way of life. Now, people have access to English education. So, the native people began to imitate the colonial rules, which highly affected their lifestyles. When the natives underwent education and followed other Western ideals, the existing social condition of Wayanad began to change. The colonial plantation led to the transformation from a traditional society to a better society.

## CONCLUSION

The establishment of colonial rule, especially the British rule in Malabar, paved the way for the beginning of several new phenomena. They intended to maximise their wealth, so they began to exploit the resources available here. The British introduced many reforms in Malabar when they came under their direct control in 1792, including the agrarian reforms. Based on this new reform, they started a new agricultural system in the Malabar area and began planting in the Wayanad region. The

British planters planted plantations like coffee, tea, rubber, cinnamon, and cardamom, providing the natives a new and novel experience. The Englishers used plantation as a method of colonisation and introduced a plantation economy in Malabar. It produced several impacts in Malabar and can be classified as economic, social, cultural, environmental, etc. With the spread of colonial plantations, agriculture was commercialised, and since then, the production has been targeted to the market. By introducing cash crops, the authorities expected a tremendous amount of revenue. The colonial plantation in Wayanad caused notable societal changes, such as introducing a new work culture, population hikes, migration, and westernisation. The provision of infrastructural facilities like schools and hospitals also changed the area. The colonial plantation in Wayanad also threatened the traditional pastoral system. Therefore, it is clearly understood that the colonial plantations in Wayanad had their own positive and negative impact on the society and economy,

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