

Different Interpretations on Peasant Insurgencies in Colonial India Special Reference to Colonial Malabar

SHAMEER TA

University of Hyderabad.

Abstract

This work is mainly rearticulating and restructuring existing discourse of peasant movements in colonial Malabar and try to maintain interspace from colonial power Discourses. Approaching this writing as per modules formulated by subaltern writing and to find the new structure of paradigm within mainstream Discourses. Formulating an idea of economic insurgency among the peasants to stand new mode of resistance towards colonial power and indigenous power groups. Information is also provided regarding Insurgency among peasants in colonial Malabar. It also discusses factors contributing to restructuring colonial economy as well as traditional Land tenure system. Apart from peasant movements to create a new understanding of Malabar peasants and their role in making consciousness among peasants. This study is mainly emphasizing how the Mappilas reacted new colonial and indigenous power centers.

Keywords: subaltern, Insurgency, Colonialism, peasants, Malabar, Mappilas

When we analyze peasant uprisings in colonial Malabar, We can understand that defining all the discourses related to peasant movements as much considered as so-called "fanatical" in Malabar. Approaching towards Mappila Peasant movements were tough to say that it was only extreme religious movements apart from the peasant Insurgency. Mainstream historians forgot to take the initiative to study peasant movements and lower caste movements as a part of history. Ranajit Guha is a pioneering person in the introduction of subaltern history in India; he is not only concentrating history from below but also rewriting the entire paradigm within Popular history. Towards Understanding peasants, he revolutionized the idea of peasant communities in India. He also traces the peasant movements under the so-called colonial empire, made an assumption regarding peasant movements and disruption of peasant community by the colonial power (Guha 2:1994). His writing also influenced by other writers and as well as they also try to analyze questions regarding peasants role in agrarian structure. We can correlate with this kind of writing with French Annals historical thought because of when March Bloch published his book French Rural History, it was first time drawing peasants into French revolution and also peasants role conceptualized in mainstream historical writing (Burke 1-14). According to Eric Stokes, there were two basic types of agrarian protest in late 19th and early 20th century in India (a) By rich peasants in areas of high farming which were seeking to extend their power (b) Who had suffered terribly as a result of colonial rule (Hardiman 3:1992).

Ranajit Guha, in his book *"Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India"* says that insurgency among peasants created widespread resistance because of colonial imperial expansion. What Guha is articulating that peasant movement in colonial period mainly due to insurgency created by colonial policy. Most of the historians neglecting peasant roles in the framing of discourses centered around development and labeling peasant movements due to the several other reasons especially in Malabar case calling so-called fanaticism. Even British also try to analyze peasant movements in Malabar as religious divinity discourses, most of the British sources says that it was considered as Mappila revolt against Hindus, these existing kind of discourses deliberately constructed or maintained, for subaltern writing concerns it was tool to rearticulate these movements as not only peasant movements but also resistance from marginal groups (Guha 26:1994). Guha mainly classifying peasant movements in a sophisticated manner, in his book he advocated two main arguments, first point that there were certain structure to peasant uprising in 19th century in India, these he examined number of heads such as "Negation, Ambiguity, Solidarity, Transmission, and Territoriality", Then he says that Peasant consciousness was prevalent most of the revolts. Guha argued that by reading their actions, one would start to understand their minds, although Guha approach allowed for a richer understanding of peasant resistance and framing peasants as a part of history (Hardiman 7:1992).

KN Panikkar started pioneering studies related with peasants in colonial Malabar and try to say that peasant movements in Malabar not only religious dimensions but also peasant resistance towards existing structures centered around the land system. He published his arguments through his book called *"Against Lord and State; Religion and Peasant Uprising in Malabar."* He also tries to analyze the causes of revolts occurred during the colonial period and tried to say could it be part of religious or agrarian

problems, here interpretation moving apart from what colonial structure is defining the peasant movements in Malabar (Panikkar 1:1989). Its exclusive structure of colonial power system which peasants was in deprivation and starvation not conceptualized by the mainstream writers. Apart from the divinity around peasant movements in Malabar we want give importance to consciousness of peasant's. Most of the studies indirectly understanding that Malabar Peasants were feeling some kind of community and also try to defend new policies followed by British. We can decipher that all the peasant movements in Malabar due to economic insurgency among peasants what Guha is calling it as Peasant uprising in the colonial period (Guha 54 1994). Panikkar is equating EMS work "*The National Question in Kerala*" EMS highlighting that all these peasant movements were an expression of the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist consciousness of Malabar peasantry and peasant resistance. (Panikkar 1:1989).

British policies actually created unrest among peasants especially deterioration through expansion policy by British it also created different perspective in the structure of society. The major attempt by British was a collection of the high system of taxation and maintain surplus economy for their own needs. And their policies also embraced almost all the necessities of life and intense oppression by the landlord. British actually followed pro-landlord policy for their structuring economy (Wood 20:1987). When we understand pro land policy created by British, there would be chance to raise peasant movements because exploitation was explicitly countable, why British followed this kind of understanding of society because they want to dominate as empire as well as maximizing revenue, then question will come regarding the nature of revenue policies introduced by colonial administrative apparatus, understanding British policies also felt that it was only for economic exploitation. Then moving into Malabar region we can say that most suitable area to extraction and maximize surplus, Malabar region especially Kaduthunad region was an integral part to British economy. British history drawing Malabar history started when Tipu was defeated 3rd Anglo-Mysore war, after the defeat of Tipu, British mainly looking Malabar as a primary target because of bulk trade resources available in Malabar. When the state appropriated revenue from the peasant's significant shares of surplus went to state machinery, the problem lies with this system there was no clear mechanism to understand how much surplus extracted from the peasants. Between 1803 and 1822 company officials had made a different method to assess the land revenue from the peasants, the problem mainly overassessment even company officials know the collection of income much more what actually done. By 1833 they agreed to reassess the land revenue system because they thought that this system was one reason to decipher peasant insurgency among the groups, how to understand the insurgencies formed by the colonial policy, there were complaints given to assistant collector of North Malabar contains 100 petitions in a month, it mainly showing that economic insurgencies would be there due to several reasons especially imperial colonial desires. The burden of land revenue contains primarily on tenants and small landholders who cultivated their own field. Panikkar used the phrase "perpetual ferment" for the rural society of Malabar, He says that revolts and dacoities occurred different times. It was essentially an expression of protest towards oppression and exploitation by poor peasants, British coined these peasant uprising as Mappila outrages in which insurgencies were drawn predominantly from the ranks of poor peasants, agricultural laborers, artisans, petty traders. The land revenue and taxes were the appropriations of surplus from the peasants through legal and illegal measures. The tax policy and judicial system of the company lead to move away from all restriction to the landlord, they followed new mechanism of extracting surplus from peasants. British tax system upset traditional land relations and bringing about fundamental changes in the nature land rights before these initiatives taken by British land were centered on Janmam and Kanam tenurial rights. The origin of these rights was linked to the control over land by Nambudiri Brahmins. William Logan who had very accurate knowledge about this kind of land appropriated by Jenmis, He says that Kanakkaram was much of the proprietor of the soil as Jenmi himself was in former days (Panikkar 12: 1993). Logan mentions that in Malabar where the authority of Jenmi landlord derived not merely derived from the landed property but also from the functioning of trustees of village temples (Guha 50, 51:1994). The company actually changed the land based social and economic system; it was closely associated with Jenmies in Malabar, He also recognized as absolute proprietor of the land and all rights vested upon him. Kanam was reinterpreted as a tenure terminable at the end of every 12 years which gave the Janmi right to decide whether he want to continue or lease to other peasants. KN Panikkar says that British administration did not preserve any kind of favorable attitude towards peasants while they worked for the mercy of Jenmis (Panikkar 20-22:1989).

Stephen Dale in his book "*Islamic society in south Asian frontier; the Mappilas of Malabar*" mainly focusing all the outrages occurred in Malabar as part of fanaticism and try to analyze background of Islam among Mappilas of Malabar to mould resistance towards so called Hindu landlord, understanding Dale propositions mainly moving a Mappila rebellion as fanatical movement and religiosity played many roles

to formulate ideas among Mappila peasants. He assumed that 32 outbreaks have occurred in Malabar between 1835 and 1921. Malabar rebellion, most of the riots occurred around Valluvanad and earanad taluks. Dale is characterizing the groups which participated in the Malabar peasant movements were young Mappilas and also he is calling them as rural proletariats, poor tenant farmers, and landless laborers. Here victims mainly from Hindu upper caste people does it means it was fanatical productivity under colonial period; we can't calling these movements only in terms of religion but also want to look economic insurgencies among peasants in Malabar. Redefining economic structure of colonial Malabar actually inferring an idea of change within the hegemonic paradigm. If we are looking historicity of Stephen Dale arguments, we can understand that these Mappila outrages were mainly against so-called Hindu but somehow we can maintain that target of Muslim peasants always looking a new system apart from jenmi exploitation system (Dale 120-125:1980).

If we targeting history of Mappilas of Malabar, were agricultural labourers and hired labored they labored chiefly for the Jenmis, then what changes produced by colonial empire, Is there any kind motives by British to suppress the peasants, regarding these matters we went move beyond colonial construction on peasant movements (Radhakrishnan 20-25:1989). Ranjith Guha's argument was very clear that there would be peasant insurgencies and played a prominent role in framing agrarian structure (Guha 2:1994).

British rule introduced two changes in Malabar agrarian society, (a) They made land revenue a permanent institution (b) the landlords were made absolute owners of the land. In Malabar each raja and naduvazhis had land of his own, according to this system no one could be away to land as he pleased, and there existed regular code of relationship between the landlord and tenant, the lord could interfere with personal and domestic affairs of the tenant, it shows an unquestioning power by lords or jenmis. There was a speech by home minister William Vincent in the legislative assembly on 9 March 1922, on the economic and agricultural conditions in Malabar, he says that "I will confess that, it is a matter which myself have never felt very well satisfied as regards the landlords and agriculturalists" (Hardiman 24:1995). All the lands of Malabar are supposed to belong primarily the chief landlord called jenmis who were mostly Nambuthiry Brahmins and the majority of cultivating group were cultivating tenants, landless laborers apart from dependence on agriculture and trade. Economic insurgency among Mappila peasants shown with a religious identity that's why historians are moving apart from peasant resistance towards policies by colonial hegemony. Ranajit Guha is also talking peasant uprisings because of several agricultural disturbances carried throughout the colonial period, and it only happened when colonial power expanded. There were local riots occurred from 1830 up to early 20th c. and also it was mainly led by peasant insurgencies located in these regions. What Guha is saying that Insurgencies was the necessary anti-thesis of colonialism and Guha try to analyze resistance through administrative documents. Guha is quoting Antonio Gramsci words into his analyses, Guha says that "there is no room pure spontaneity in history." He argued that one important consequence of retilization of landlordism under British was the growth of peasant indebtedness. He also to identify some of the common forms of ideas in rebel consciousness during colonial period. Gramsci terms like the pillars of politics and of any collective action whatsoever, Guha calling it as Elementary aspects. While has more concession to peasant insurgency is actually criticizing the existing paradigm centered on peasants (Guha 18:1994).

Stephen Dale arguments mainly are seen as religious ideas in rebellions, but what we indirectly saw that he is using fanaticism as primary along with Mappila peasants, he seemed all the revolts occurred in Malabar in terms of a Mappila peasant revolt against Hindu landlord. He also says that 12 incidents immediate provocation from rural class and conflict between Hindu janmi class and Muslim peasants. He assumed that some of the cases were a dispute over property, it means Dale is also looking these movements had a perpetual role to show peasant movements apart from so-called fanaticism. The land was supreme in colonial Malabar because of British policies created the idea of private property individual conflicts emerged over disputes on land. In 1831 assistant magistrate observed that one of the most common subjects of police complaints in Malabar always frequently about the cultivation of land the right to which is asserted by different individuals, it means land were on the part of the capital. The problem mainly coming with interpretation, historians of modern India have generally used the Mappila rebellion as evidence to support their own theories about the nature and impact of colonial rule, these outbreaks perceived as an example of an oppressed peasantry rising to protest at the newly imposed imperial market economy. Ranjit Guha observed that these outbreaks not only against property but it was against principle native collaborators of rajas even they also fight with local powerful coercive agencies. He says that Malabar rebellion started as anti-landlord resistance, but it culminated as a campaign against raj itself. Negation was a tool to defend new colonial land revenue system. The modality of negation in peasant insurgency consists of peasant attempt to destroy the authority who dominate peasants. Here

Guha is giving historical importance of peasant resistance in the form of festival, Theyyam festival as a part of culture and it became lower caste resistance towards popular culture, this festival centered on the shrines of female deity Bhagavathy, which are attached to the landowning and politically as well as economically dominant Nayartharavads. The propitiatory rituals are, each tharavad one of its lower caste servants put on mask at particular point of ceremonial process, servants can imitate an aggressive or authoritative attitude towards his superiors, when at the end of ceremony the mask will drop from his body and revert into his menial work. Why this festival importance because resistance and repression can express directly by lower marginalized people. Kathleen Gough views that traditional authority of Nayar landed gentry over the subaltern group in the villages, and also these festivals bring the limited expression of their aggression towards higher caste hegemony (Guha 174:1994).

David Hardiman is mainly focusing that peasants faced several problems due to British policies. He is the member of subaltern studies and tries to say that peasants were impoverished under colonial rule. He then emphasizes the community consciousness of peasants, it was a form of consciousness which gets redefined structure in those movements led by peasants. He articulated his views on different topics related with peasant insurgencies. He finds out 5 areas of resistance by peasant community (a) Peasant against European planters (b) peasant against landlord (c) peasant against money lenders (d) revolts against the land tax bureaucracy (e) resistance to forest officials. Then he included Malabar peasant resistance in the second category that is resistance against the landlord. The essential point is that these peasants got much support from Muslim peasantry whose religion helped to make solidarity and bring community consciousness. The tenants were chiefly from low-status peasants and also who had suffered a growing degree of exploitation by a landlord who had given new power by the British. When British annexed Malabar in late 18th century, Hindu landlords had much influence and given priority to British new revenue systems. Most of the rights over land in Malabar under Hindu landlords. The peasants were deprived of their right occupancy and turned into more tenants; from 1830 onwards Hindu landlord became more oppressive and followed exploitative system (Hardiman 23, 24:1994). What Conrad Wood argues that Islam provided a means of solidarity and brotherhood. Also, Conrad claims that the attack was mainly against Hindu landlord rather than the ultimate oppressor that was a colonial state (Wood 8-30:1987). Stephen Dale attacking this argument through his book called Islamic society on the South Asian frontier; Mappilas of Malabar, He believed that main motivation of Mappilas was not an economic grievance but the desire to gain paradise by the defense of the faith. The interesting part is that He denies that these were peasant movements and he says that Mappila rebels were by no means all hungry and landless, to question this argument we want to look authoritative and legal references then we can understand that peasant lived in the uncompromising condition in Malabar (Hardiman 26:1992). The problems with Marxist and National writing mainly seen as all these kind of resistance labeled as peasant movements only, when Ranajit Guha started to working with history writing all the discourses opened a new dimension. In Subaltern writing mainly seemed these revolts not only from the peasant groups but also from lower caste landless people (Guha 74:1994).

David Arnold says that Dales actually failed to understand the socio-economic condition in that area in depth way. He also assumed that there was consciousness of Mappila peasantry, while Dales are never describing the social composition of the community, Dale has given a label to these revolts only in terms of Fanatical identity. Arnold basically argues that these outbreaks mainly anti-landlord revolts revealed importance to the peasantry of legitimizing ideology with a strong sense of belief in a better future. He also refers that Peasant society in India, this almost invariably took a religious form, this was case happened in Malabar (Arnold 258:1982). Ronald E Miller mainly emphasizing Muslims of Malabar were alienated and excluded from British society. He says that most of the outbreaks carried as resentment towards colonial rule, He analyzing different reasons in peasant movements especially poverty, religious fanaticism. Alienation of Mappilas actualized the interact and produced the general pattern of unrest. Miller seems as poverty and Serfdom were most frequently cases to led most of the outbreaks. British policies are actually looking at jennis not beyond the profit of them, they only compromising with jennis not peasants. We can assume that most of the scholars agreeing the fact that Malabar rebellion had elements peasant insurgencies created by British as well as native rajas. Miller has brought several reasons related to peasant movements in Malabar, when we try to understand the nature of movement we can understand that all the peasant movement in Malabar from the 1830s to 1921 Rebellion mainly happened in apex of colonial power, it means peasants were looking new system because of exploitations (Miller 108-118:1992).

CONCLUSION

Restructuring colonial policy and effects on the Malabar economy is elusive. New revenue settlement introduced by British not for peasant benefit but for maximum accumulation of capital. Even in Malabar also peasant reacted against new measures had taken by British. It is not easy to identify causes that led resistance in Malabar. Peasant insurgency in colonial period conceptualized when Ranajit Guha articulated this subaltern view. It also affected existing ideas related to peasant movements. We can see that most of the outbreaks from Malabar perceived as religious fanaticism not considered as peasant insurgency. Through these analyses, I felt that economic and peasant uprisings played many roles in most of the revolts. Officials from British called this resistance only in terms of Muslim tenant fight with Hindu landlord. So we can't call these movements only in terms of religion, but there were some insurgencies played a paramount role in shaping peasant ideologies.

REFERENCE

- Arnold, David. "ISLAM, THE MAPPILAS AND PEASANT REVOLT IN MALABAR." *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 9(4):258-64.
- Burke, Peter. "CONCEPTS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN HISTORY." *Cambridge Histories Online*: 1-14.
- Dale, Stephen. 1980. "ISLAMIC SOCIETY ON THE SOUTH ASIAN FRONTIER: THE MAPPILAS OF MALABAR." New York: Oxford Publications.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1994. "ELEMENTARY ASPECTS OF PEASANT INSURGENCY IN COLONIAL INDIA." Delhi: Oxford Publications.
- Hardiman, David. 1992. "PEASANT RESISTANCE IN INDIA; 1858-1914". Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Ronald. 1992. "MAPPILA MUSLIMS OF KERALA." Madras: Orient Longman Publications.
- Panikkar, KN. 1989. "AGAINST THE LORD AND STATE; RELIGION AND PEASANT UPRISING IN MALABAR." Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Panikkar, KN. 1990. "PEASANT PROTESTS AND REVOLTS IN MALABAR." Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research and Peoples Publishing House.
- Radhakrishnan, P. 1989. "PEASANT STRUGGLES AND LAND REFORMS AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN MALABAR." New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Wood, Conrad. 1987. "THE MOPLAH REBELLION AND ITS GENESIS." Delhi: Peoples Publishing House.