

## Resilient Tradition: Agricultural Stocks and Practices in Early Twentieth Century Wayanad

Dr. Anoop Thankachan K.

Associate Professor & Research Guide, P. G. Department of History, N.M.S.M. Government College, Kalpetta, Puzhamudi P.O., Wayanad District, Kerala, PIN 673122  
[anoopthankachan@gmail.com](mailto:anoopthankachan@gmail.com)

**How to cite this article:** Anoop Thankachan K. (2024) Resilient Tradition: Agricultural Stocks and Practices in Early Twentieth Century Wayanad. *Library Progress International*, 44(3), 6537-6541.

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the agricultural stocks and traditional practices of early twentieth-century Wayanad, a historically significant agrarian settlement in Kerala, India. Drawing on archival sources and statistical records, the research reveals the persistence of indigenous farming methods despite British rule and the introduction of plantation economy. The study examines the variety of animals associated with agriculture, such as cattle and poultry, and their role in shaping the region's agricultural landscape. The findings highlight the agency and resistance of local communities in preserving their cultural heritage and traditional practices, offering insights into the history of agriculture, colonialism, and indigenous knowledge systems. The article contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between land, people, and culture, illuminating the importance of preserving traditional agricultural practices in the face of colonialism and economic transformation.

**Keywords:-** Wayanad, Agricultural stocks, economy

### Introduction

Wayanad, a district in Kerala, India, has a rich agricultural heritage that dates back centuries. Since the early period, Wayanad has been an important agricultural settlement, with farming being the backbone of its economy and culture. The early twentieth century was a significant period in Wayanad's agrarian history, marked by the prevalence of traditional agricultural practices that had been passed down through generations. These practices were rooted in the region's unique cultural and environmental context, shaped by the intersection of geographical, social, and economic factors. This article delves into the historical dynamics of agricultural stocks and traditional practices in early twentieth-century Wayanad, exploring how farmers cultivated crops, managed land, and interacted with the natural environment. By examining the historical records and archival data, this research aims to uncover the stories of Wayanad's agricultural past, highlighting the resilience and ingenuity of its farmers in the face of colonialism, environmental challenges, and social change.

*Madras District Gazetteers: Statistical Appendix for Malabar District*, also provides classification of area and principal crops of Wayanad Taluk. These informations are in the period of 1912-13.

Table No.1

Classification of area and principal crops of Wayanad Taluk in Fasl 1322 (1912-13) in acres																						
Cereals and pulses						Oil-seeds				Condiments and spices	Sugarcane, etc	Cotton	Indigo, etc	Drugs and Narcotics	Others	Total	Fodder crops	Orchards and garden produce	Miscellaneous non food crops	Total area cropped	Deduct area cropped more than once	Net area cropped
Rice	Cholam	Combu	Ragi	Others	Total	Til or gingell	Groundnut	Castors	Others													
39081			3931	262	43277					7632				11	14862	14873		2879	555	69216		69216

Source: *Madras District Gazetteers: Statistical Appendix for Malabar District*, Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1915, pp.24 & 25

Wayanad, known for its hilly terrain and abundant rainfall, relied predominantly on traditional agricultural practices during the early 1900s. These practices included shifting cultivation, mixed cropping, and a

dependence on monsoon rains for irrigation. The major crops cultivated in Wayanad during this period included rice, coffee, tea, pepper, cardamom, and various spices. These crops were mainly grown on small plots of land, often owned by individual farmers or small family units. Agriculture in Wayanad remained labor-intensive with minimal mechanization. Farmers relied heavily on manual labor and traditional tools for cultivation, harvesting, and processing of crops.

#### Agriculture Implements

The comparative self sufficiency of the Indian villages supplied the necessary implements for the agriculture sector. Mechanisation in agriculture was mirage to Indian farmers during the Colonial period. A common wooden plough, a *kaikot* or *mammatte*, a rake and a leveling instrument of the usual South Indian pattern are the most important<sup>i</sup>. Deep-ploughing is not in vogue and neither iron ploughs nor seed-drills are used<sup>ii</sup>. After reaping, the grain is beaten out with sticks or trodden out by labourers. *A Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency* says bullocks are not used for the purpose save in Wayanad<sup>iii</sup>. It is true that a very considerable number of the cultivators of Madras Presidency could not raise even 25 rupees to buy a plough<sup>iv</sup>. Harrows are employed for clearing the land of the roots of weeds, for pulverizing the soils for covering newly-sown seed, and for opening up the surface of the soil when it has become caked over<sup>v</sup>. The roller consists of a cylinder of wood, of stone, or of iron, which is fixed in a frame, in a way to admit of its revolving freely over the ground; to the frame is attached the pole or shafts for the draught cattle<sup>vi</sup>. For general use, a wooden roller suffices; and such a roller can readily be made by any village carpenter<sup>vii</sup>. The roller is intended to crush or pulverize clods and to consolidate the soil. It is also used to smooth the surface of land for seed<sup>viii</sup>.

The animals associated with the agrarian economy need to mention. They are the indispensable part of the rural folk. Before the introduction of mechanization in agriculture, its number decided the richness of a farmer. Some of them are used to serve the food of the people. The given tables show the picture of animals used in domestic purpose in Wayand taluk and Malabar.

Table No.2

AGRICULTURAL STOCK IN 1920-21							
	Working cattle		Breeding stock				
	Bullocks	He buffaloes	Cows	Bulls and heifers under four years	She buffaloes	Young buffaloes	Sheep and goats
Wayanad Taluk	14298	12208	17787	14522	10501	6289	1504
Malabar District	254360	137529	306872	276049	33892	21176	159312

Table No.3

AGRICULTURAL STOCK IN 1920-21									
	Horses and ponies	Mules and donkeys	Carts	Ploughs (iron and wooden)	Boats	Indigo vats	Sugar mills	Oil mills	Looms
Wayanad Taluk	54	5	467	10991					
Malabar District	1099	52	13720	189738	7123		6	4937	10596

Source: *A Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency, Statistical Atlas:Malabar*, Revised and brought up to the FND of Fasli 1330, Madras, printed by the Superintendent, Govt. Press, 1924, p.16 & 17

The agrarian economy of Wayanad was largely subsistence-based, where farmers cultivated crops primarily for their own consumption and for local trade rather than for large-scale commercial purposes. The social fabric revolved around agrarian life, with communities organized around village-based agricultural practices<sup>ix</sup>. Landownership patterns were typically small-scale, with land often passed down through generations within families.

The following table shows the agricultural stock of 58 Desams which was based on the Resurvey Settlement Register.

Table No.4

Agricultural stock of the Desam as on Census of falsi year 1334								
Sl.No.	Desam	Bullocks and he buffaloes	Cows	She buffaloes	Young stock	Sheep and goat	Carts	Ploughs
1	Periya	270	180	101	106	12	2	72
2	Vararyal	92	64	20	24	Nil	Nil	24
3	Irimanathur	56	21	21	21	Nil	Nil	19
4	Alattil	70	54	23	53	Nil	Nil	29
5	Kunnom	251	181	90	296	26	Nil	113
6	Tondar	552	335	211	555	17	14	198
7	Thindummal	85	78	40	105	26	11	22
8	Thavinhal	248	157	140	265	3	1	100
9	Valat	170	133	96	180	18	Nil	59
10	Porur	119	85	62	136	Nil	Nil	50
11	Edavaka	219	156	83	192	3	Nil	112
12	Olakkodi	292	298	117	351	30	4	134
13	Payingattiri	24	99	9	87	Nil	Nil	11
14	Edachana	130	59	80	114	Nil	Nil	61
15	Kunnamangalam	97	83	50	95	Nil	Nil	35
16	Pulikkad	208	170	117	216	16	4	94
17	Kanmana	123	106	53	183	Nil	Nil	55
18	Vemom	836	610	286	861	188	44	343
19	Arattuthara	184	158	52	155	7	Nil	92
20	Thirunelli	764	466	51	190	20	20	337
21	Thrissaleri	726	459	178	496	4	9	380
22	Mangallasseri	149	107	49	112	17	2	58
23	Vellamunda	414	322	145	413	17	2	183
24	Changadam	288	143	83	191	22	6	116
25	Kommayad	251	135	82	165	43	5	79
26	Karingari	337	195	73	229	19	3	119
27	Cherukara	175	91	53	114	22	Nil	63
28	Anchkunnu	476	340	190	291	57	11	190
29	Vilambukandam	144	94	51	121	Nil	Nil	73
30	Echchom	271	236	130	160	44	1	115
31	Kuppathod	1131	713	533	840	135	16	495
32	Pakkam	461	268	156	339	22	Nil	222
33	Pulpalli	538	469	186	426	45	3	196
34	Veliyambam	207	99	120	143	Nil	Nil	88
35	Pudadi	928	432	516	640	Nil	Nil	407
36	Pulpadi	764	379	263	595	82	21	207
37	Ponginichikkallur	394	212	157	310	68	11	176
38	Purakkadi	963	561	643	483	66	6	381

39	Padinnarattara	503	326	135	462	28	3	218
40	Kuppaddittara	322	155	64	284	37	Nil	153
41	Kottattara	660	389	213	629	28	3	315
42	Thekkuntara	106	55	31	95	Nil	Nil	51
43	Tariyod	378	236	122	303	3	Nil	173
44	Vengapalli	344	140	116	169	Nil	2	149
45	Kalpetta	524	308	241	253	48	35	163
46	Pinangod	189	125	74	92	Nil	2	82
47	Achchuranom	129	117	89	97	14	23	31
48	Kunnattidvaga	137	248	69	189	62	46	6
49	Kottappadi	329	390	122	229	87	33	50
50	Triikkaipatta	358	174	187	255	Nil	8	153
51	Muppaiyinad	1046	654	596	774	129	60	433
52	Muttil	1397	565	740	1102	63	36	712
53	Chingeri	382	232	195	313	46	4	168
54	Nenmeni	2809	1627	1170	875	139	16	1031
55	Kidanganad	869	605	367	252	36	36	310
56	Vadakkanad	256	137	100	94	Nil	Nil	108
57	Chenad	129	53	36	24	Nil	1	55
58	Nulpuzha	1940	1022	729	562	1	3	699

Source: Resurvey Settlement Register of 58 Desams of Wayanad Taluk in 1928

Another table in the following part shows stocks maintained per 100 acres in Wayanad taluk.

Table No.5

Agricultural stock								
Taluk	Area cultivated by a pair of tilling cattle (ACS.)	Stock maintained per 100 acres						Area available for grasing (ACS.)
		Occupied		Cultivated		Area available for grasing		
		Cattle of all sorts	Sheep and goats	Cattle of all sorts	Sheep and goats	Cattle of all sorts	Sheep and goats	
Wayanad	6.03	60	1	95	2	87	2	86623

Source: A Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency, Statistical Atlas: Malabar, Revised and brought up to the FND of Fasli 1330, Madras, printed by the Superintendent, Govt. Press, 1924, p.6

The above tables made it clear that the agrarian society in Wayanad had enough supply of agricultural stocks. These were contributed the richness of the agrarian village economy in Wayanad. Another significant fact is that the efforts of animals was not so less in the agricultural production. During the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the British Govt. slowly introduced machines in agricultural use. For this purpose the Govt. conducted training programmes for the cultivators for some extent.

Under British colonial rule, there was limited intervention or modernization in agricultural practices in Wayanad. Unlike the plains of Kerala, which saw some commercialization of agriculture, Wayanad retained its traditional methods largely unchanged. Agricultural produce from Wayanad catered primarily to local markets and nearby regions. The lack of significant modern infrastructure, such as roads and transportation, limited extensive trade beyond local boundaries.

Men and cattle had a fair supply of food grains and fodder<sup>x</sup>. Despite the colonial backdrop, Wayanad maintained its agricultural identity with minimal external influences altering its traditional farming methods significantly.

As Neeladri Bhattacharya observes, the peasants inevitably drew upon the resources of tradition, the

---

**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup> *A Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency*, Revised and brought up to the FND of Fasli 1330, Madras, printed by the Superintendent Govt. Press, 1924, CDS Library, Thiruvananthapuram, 65731,p.4

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> William R.Robertson, *An Agricultural Class-Book for the Use of Schools in South India*, Printed by E Keys, at the Govt.Press, 1880, Madras, p.48

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, p. 49

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid

<sup>ix</sup> Neeladri bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest : The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World*, permanent black in association with Ashoka University, New Delhi, 2018, p.64

<sup>x</sup> Department of Agriculture, Madras, *Season and Crop Report of the Madras Presidency for the Agricultural Year 1929-30*, Fasli 1339, Madras, printed by the superintendent, Government press , 1930, Collector Malabar 25 Dec 1930, Regional Archives, Kozhikode, p.5