

Contested Commons: History of Colonial Grazing Policy in South India (Andhra), 1890-1930

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Abstract

Historical dimension of common property resource management systems acquired prominence with emergence of environmental history in India. This paper examines the policy and practice of colonial grazing management policies in South India with particular reference to Andhra region. It has been proposed by this paper that British colonial state initiated a radical change in the composition of common property resources by the way of incorporating them into agricultural expansion, forests and grazing reserves. This process exercised significant impact upon rural society particularly of small peasantry and landless were the main victim of this process. This paper also shows that consistent struggle exists between colonial state and rural society over the issue of control over forests and grazing lands. The fights to access village commons so intense that colonial state was compelled to change the grazing policies to incorporate the demands of peasantry. This paper provides a historical trajectory of the way communities which depended upon common pool resources react when their access is curtailed by the state and other agencies.

Keywords: Grazing policy, forest policy, colonial state, Madras Presidency, South India

In the last three decades, environmental history emerged as fascinating field of historical research in South Asia. Two aspects received particular attention of environmental historians i.e., ecological implications of British colonial rule and focus on colonial forest policies. Impact of colonial rule on cattle grazing and its socio-ecological implications remained relatively a less focused domain. This paper investigates history of colonial grazing policies in South India with particular reference to Andhra region during the period of 1890-1930. The significance of this period is

that colonial rule initiated new forms property regimes for management of forests, wastelands and village commons. It is this context that made cattle grazing as a contested domain in rural South India. Agrarian society in South India responded to this process with diversified strategies. This article demonstrates two trajectories of struggle for commons by the rural poor who demanded communal control over grazing grounds and the rural poor who demanded for partition of commons and forests for cultivation. These diversified demands over commons were tackled by the colonial state with diversified strategies. While the demands of the rural elites were addressed by creation of forest panchayats and demands of the rural poor were tackled by the way of assigning commons grazing lands for cultivation. It was due this factor South India in general and Andhra region in particular did not see severe conflicts over access to common property resources in comparison with other regions of British India. Hence it is worthy to have a historical understanding on the strategies of colonial state in tackling the multiple demands of local communities in the domain of common property resource management.

As the concept of grazing policies is a vast area this article itself confines to an analysis of cattle grazing policy of the British in Andhra region of South India.¹ The following sources are used: Board of Revenue Proceedings, annual administrative reports of forest department, petitions by peasants, oral evidences of peasants recorded in the Madras forest committee and naïve newspaper reports. The main proposition of this article is that colonial grazing policies inflicted differential impact on agrarian society. While rich peasant lost their traditional control over village commons and the rural poor lost crucial life-supporting systems. Differential impact of colonial grazing policies led to differential response by the agrarian society. While the demands of rich peasants who were politically vibrant could strike a favorable deal in policy process and demands of rural poor are ignored. The concept of colonial grazing policy in this article refers to intervention of colonial state in management of forests, grazing grounds and village commons and regulatory practices that are devised and executed. This paper is organized into three sections: first section presents review of literature and a brief history of cattle grazing in pre-colonial Andhra: third section analyses the policy and practice of colonial grazing policies and final section demonstrates the response of the agrarian society.

Brief Survey of Literature

History of colonial grazing policies is an important aspect of modern Indian history. Studies focuses on economic changes under British rule highlighted the deprivation of agrarian society due to grazing policies (Habib, 2006, Habib, 2010). Narratives on Indian national movement perceive grazing policies as oppressive

agencies responsible for anti-colonial consciousness (Rao, 1951, Desai, 1994, Sarkar, 2001). Impact of colonial rule on cattle grazing is perceived as stimulating factor for anti-colonial struggle in South India (Muali, 1987). These writings did not focus on historical roots of cattle grazing problem and concentrate on organized protest of people during the Indian national movement.

Environmental history which emerged as a promising historical enquiry in the last three decades in South Asia and offers penetrating analysis on the interaction between human society and common property resources. Three broad approaches could be seen in environmental history. Firstly, popularly known as green Marxist approach proposes that communal resources such forests and village commons were transferred from communities to the state. For this approach, colonial rule is marked with centralization of common property resources and consequent alienation of local communities from their customary access to resources (Guha and Gadgil, 1989, and 1992). This has become framework for studies on the colonial forests (Sarvaan 2003) and grazing policies (Murali, 1995) in South India. Secondly, green imperialist approach perceives colonial rule as scientific intervention to save fragile eco-systems from destructive practices of the natives (Grove, 1995, Barton, 2002 and Hughes 2009). This approach subscribes to the framework of beneficial state based rights over commons for ecological conservation and beneficial distribution of products. Finally regional environmental history approach focuses on regional level impact colonial forest and grazing policies in different parts of India. This approach brings out impact of colonial rule on pastoral communities (Saberwal 1999), forest dependent communities and cattle grazing (Satya, 2004).

In the rich corpus of environmental history writings two aspects did not receive due attention: multiplicity of resistance patterns that the agrarian society of South India exhibited to the policy interventions of colonial state in the domain of common property resource management and strategies of colonial state in tackling such resistance which has posed serious threat to the functioning of colonial rule. History of grazing policies in colonial South India in general and Andhra region in particular provide an interesting scope to see the way property regimes of common property resource management were evolved and influenced by political economy at one level and societal demands at another level. Infact elsewhere I have shown the dialectical relationship between the assertion of native society and change in the policy process. History of grazing policies in Andhra shows a complex picture wherein three form of common property resource management regimes i.e., state, community and individual could be seen. In order to retain the political control over India the British incorporated the demands of the rural elites and the poor for control over common property resources into governing strategy.

Colonial State and Grazing Policy

Political control over Andhra region was achieved by the British in 1766. Maintenance of conquered territories compelled them to focus on revenue generation. Agrarian policies such as zamindari and rayotwari settlements were introduced to extract revenue from agriculture (Firminger, 1969:146). In zamindari system, forests, wastelands and village commons were left to zamendars' jurisdiction and in the rayotwari system village commons and grazing lands were assigned to bidders in auction. In both cases, generally forests, and common lands are brought under the control of dominant landed castes of Andhra region such as kamma, reddy, kapu etc. During the period of 1850-1900, village commons were subjected to a continuous transition from common pool resources to either private or public property. Two factors are responsible for this: expansion of agriculture and state forestry. Unprecedented agrarian expansion promoted by colonial state converted forests, grazing lands as property of rich peasants. The table I shows the glimpse of agrarian expansion in costal districts of Andhra region.

The extent of area brought under first and second crop in Andhra region shows the upper trajectory of agrarian expansion (Table-1). Irfan Habib estimates that the total cropping area of the Madras Presidency between the years 1881-1901 increased by 32% (Habib, 2010: 55). Besides agriculture, cattle emerged as an important supplementary income to rural society. The amount of grass revenue from milk, ghee, skins and animal items was about 10 cores out of the total grass land revenue which amounts to 55 cores.² Second factor responsible for dimension of village commons was expansion of forest conservation. Forest department was established in 1856 and the forest code was promulgated in 1862 (McLean, 1985: 235). Accordingly, management of valuable forests was assigned to forest department and grazing and village commons were assigned to the jungle conservancy fund supervised by revenue department. This policy intervention brought forests and village commons under the state control. The rule 1 of jungle conservancy fund imposes a seigniorage of ₹ 1 for each bull- cart of wood and imposed grazing fee on cattle grazing. These rules were enforced with strict penalty and punishment mechanism.³

Two arguments are being articulated by the existing scholarship on the origin of colonial forestry. While most of the Indian historians traces the origin of scientific forestry in timber requirements of colonial state and most of the Euro-American historians locate the origin of colonial forestry in conservation sensibilities of colonial state. These two claims are appeared to be true in case of forest policies of South India. Climatic importance of forest conservation was well recognized from 1840 onwards. Forest conservation in fact was perceived as an essential component for well being of agrarian economy on account of their influence over flow of rivers

Table: I. Expansion of area under cultivation in Andhra districts [in Acres]

<i>Year</i>	<i>Ganjam</i>		<i>Vizagapatam</i>		<i>Godavari (East)</i>		<i>Krishna</i>		<i>Gunur</i>	
	<i>1st Crop</i>	<i>2nd Crop</i>								
1891-1892	401,669	37,989	127,949	37,831	434,562	65,303	757,292	49,472	1,734,435	109,301
1904-1905	442,454	83,159	185,372	95,997	539,437	169,697	899,143	170,889	1,792,210	243,909
<i>Year</i>	<i>Nellore</i>		<i>Anantapur</i>		<i>Bellary</i>		<i>Karnool</i>		<i>Cuddapah</i>	
	<i>1st Crop</i>	<i>2nd Crop</i>								
1891-1892	740,879	45,680	1,052,542	1,709,405	35,035	1,413,237	66,236	36,038	1,490,232	13,541
1904-1905	643,629	63,765	1,493,857	1,887,166	44,784	1,380,011	104,715	49,176	2,218,207	20,935

Sources: Compiled from Board of Revenue (Revenue Settlement, Land Records and Agriculture), Madras, Proceedings No.373, 11th October 1906, pp.10-12.

(Balfour, 1878). At the same time, forest conservation was mainly aimed at provision of timber requirements to railways (Cleghorn, 1861). Forest conservation thus was evolved and actualized for realizing the objectives of climatic conservation and revenue generations. Particularly revenue consideration emerged as critical issue for sustenance of forest department. It was this anxiety that compelled forest policy makers to expand their control over grazing and village commons as a means to generate revenue. Dr. D. Brandis, the first Inspector General of Indian forests proposed that: ‘most important duties will in future be to increase the supply of cattle fodder, particularly during seasons of drought in the drier districts. The importance of this feature of Indian forest administration has by no means yet been sufficiently recognized’. (Brandis, 1883)

The Madras forest act of 1882 was a major milestone in colonial grazing policy. This act defined forests as land which is not claimed, assessed and owned. It means village commons and wastelands were proposed to be brought under the control of forest department. This was justified with the argument of application of scientific management for improvement of wastelands and degraded forests. Rule 21(d) prohibits the entry of cattle without permission in reserved forests. Under rule 26 (e) proposed restrictions for regulations cattle grazing in reserved forests.⁴

Encroaching Commons by Forest Conservation

The process of the state control over village commons and grazing grounds was initiated by grazing rules promulgated by the Madras government in 1884. Under this, rule one says that ‘unclaimed, *Banjar* and *Poromboke* lands should be surveyed and brought under the reserved lands’. Rule 11 empowered forest department to control over village common lands. District collector was empowered to formulate rules for management of grazing under rule 9. Rule 15 imposed penalties and punishment for violation of the rules with the punishment of one month imprisonment or ₹ 500 penalty or both.⁵

Colonial forest and grazing policies are justified with the discourse of progress driven by science. Besides Brandis a distinguished botanist and forester, Volcker, an agricultural scientist exercised influence on state centric property regime for management of commons. He proposed that: ‘I think, to assign any right to a village community, and to have “village forests” managed by the community uncontrolled...What is wanted is, while retaining control over these forests, to work them for the people’s interests’ (Voelcker, 1986). The discourse of colonial scientists thus endorsed encroachment common by the state however with the pretext of welfare of agrarian society. In 1891 the Madras government announced a clear policy on village commons and grazing grounds. This policy initiated the transformation

of village commons as reserved forests. The table no. 2 shows the expansion of state control over forests and village commons:

Table: 2. Reserved Forest Expansion in Madras Presidency in square miles by 1910

<i>Year</i>	<i>Reserve forest notified under the madras forest act, in square miles.</i>	<i>Reserve lands in square miles.</i>	<i>Total forest cover under the control of the forest department, in square miles.</i>
1892-93	7,174	9,403	16,577
1993-94	9,435	7,250	17,185
1894-95	11,466	7,324	18,790
1895-96	12,388	6,690	19,078
1896-97	13,138	5,796	18,907
1897-98	13,775	5,428	19,225
1898-99	14,888	4,706	19,594
1899-00	15,862	3,787	19,649
1901-02	16,589	2,952	19,541
1902-03	17,154	2,412	19,566
1903-04	17,923	1,798	19,555
1904-05	18,107	1,798	19,626
1905-06	18,228	1,297	19,585
1906-07	18,541	1,079	19,620
1907-08	18,549	1,058	19,607
1908-09	18,694	8,76	19,570
1909-10	18,769	8,76	19,570

Source: Compiled from the Annual administrative Reports of the Forest Department, Madras Presidency

By 1895, total percentage of land under the control of forest department constitutes 31% of total wastelands of the Madras Presidency. Massive extent of forests and wastelands were brought under management of forest department. This process must have unleashed a radical shift in case of access to village commons. Management and control of village commons and forests thus transferred from the control of village communities in general and the rural elites in particular to the state. Several strategies of grazing management were evolved to tap the revenue from grazing.

Grazing Management Strategies

Having acquired control over village commons and grazing grounds, forest department designed strategies for management of grazing. Colonial grazing policies were mainly aimed at extraction of revenue by imposing tax on the entry of cattle in reserved forests. This policy perceived the process of exclusion of cattle as a means

to minimize the pressure on grazing sources. Entry of cattle in all reserved forests was regulated by a mechanism called permit system. Accordingly, cattle were permitted to graze in reserved forests with the permit to be issued forest department. The Table 3 show the amount of fee imposed on different types of cattle:

Table: 3. Grazing fee in reserved forests

<i>Grazing rates Per annum</i>	<i>Rs. A. P</i>
Buffaloes	0 8 0
Bulls, Cows, Bullocks, Claves, Horses, Asses and	0 4 0
Foals	- - -
Sheep, cow, goats	0 2 0

Source: Annual Administrative report of Forest department, 1890-91, p. 28.

The permit system for cattle grazing was mainly designed to restrict the access to grazing in reserved forests. It was justified with the argument of preserving grass for sustainable use of agrarian population. However, permit system has following problems: permits are issued by forest department in the district headquarters and villagers were compelled to travel a long distance: permits are issued annually and every year villagers need to take new permit and rural poor could not understand the intricacies of the policy. Consequently grazing policies emerged as most hated state policies in the countryside.

Second category of grazing management was known as parcelleary system introduced in 1890. Accordingly reserved forests are divided into different blocks. Permit holders were allowed for grazing in a portion of forest consists of good grass. After completion of one block another block was opened for grazing and the block which is already grazed left for regeneration. This rotation was followed for nine months to ensure the supply of grazing.⁶ However, entry of cattle was strictly restricted to permit holders. Another strategy followed to regulate grazing was categorisation of cattle into privilege and non-privilege. Privilege cattle means cattle used in agriculture i.e., bulls and he-buffalo. One pair of bull or he-buffalo for each five acres was fixed as criteria for grazing at concessional rate. The entry of cows, she-buffalos was prohibited without permit.⁷ The main intention of this policy is extract revenue in the form of permits for grazing. The table no. 4 shows the income derived from grazing by forest department:

Table: 4. Revenue on grazing fees from Reserve Forests in Madras Presidency

<i>Year</i>	<i>Revenue from Grazing (In rupees)</i>	<i>Total forest revenue</i>	<i>% of grazing share in total forest revenue</i>
1886-87	81,203	12,46,738	6.5
1887-88	1,05,811	13,74,920	7.6
1888-89	1,29,855	15,15,006	8.6
1889-90	1,43,845	15,57,627	9.2
1890-91	92,621	17,95,408	5.00
1891-92	1,15,794	16,94,215	6.80
1892-93	1,75,589	15,77,212	11.13
1893-94	2,66,891	19,43,75	13.70
1894-95	3,28,293	N A	N A
1895-96	3,40,496	21,67,630	15.70
1896-97	3,76,354	21,88,917	17.19
1897-98	3,63,905	21,51,144	16.91
1898-99	3,76,354	20,75,254	18.13
1899-00	4,89,765	23,13,507	21.16
1900-01	5,10,451	24,43,773	20.88
1901-02	5,40,068	24,96,494	21.63
1902-03	5,78,500	25,92,779	22.31
1903-04	6,07,400	26,90,571	22.57
1904-05	6,27,474	28,30,542	22.61
1905-06	6,62,837	30,36,892	21.82
1906-07	6,78,537	34,50,733	19.66
1907-08	7,27,343	38,58,026	18.85
1908-09	7,82,510	38,86,296	20.13
1909-00	7,69,770	41,84,633	18.39
1910-11	6,31,643	00	00

Source: Compiled from Annual Administrative reports of Forest department for relevant years.

The share of revenue from grazing in the total revenue of forest department has a humble beginning after commencement of forest reservation. Steady progress was made after 1890 and total share of revenue in the total revenue of forest department constituted 20% by 1900 (table-4). This trend indicates that colonial grazing policies delivered intended results by the way of fetching a steady increase of revenue from grazing. However, this policy damaged the reputation of colonial authorities in the countryside. This was so much that forest department emerged as most hated department among all government departments. Forest policies became agencies to exhibit the anger of people against colonial rule.

Peoples' Resistance-multiple Voices

The crisis due to grazing policy encompassed the entire spectrum of agrarian society. However, this process had differential impact on agrarian population. Rich peasants belong to dominant caste lost their traditional control over village commons and grazing sources. But quickly they found alternative sources in their own lands.⁸ The rural poor consisted of peasants, pastoralists, landless labour, tribes and artisans who do not have own lands for grazing were the victims of grazing restrictions. Due to this differential impact, there existed multiple strategies of resistance against grazing policies. Rich peasants resorted to organized resistance and negotiated with colonial authorities for favors in the policy process. The resistance of rural poor mainly confined to collective violation of grazing restrictions.

Stratified nature of agrarian society and its differential response to state policies addressed by some studies. It is suggested that commercialisation of agriculture introduced by the British mainly benefited the rich peasant castes in South India. These rich peasant castes emerged as powerful in the politics of South India (Washbrook, 1976, Backer, 1976). They not only obtained profits from agriculture but also diversified their economic activities to enhance their capital accumulation. It is this economic power that enabled rich peasant castes to exercise their influence in politics of Andhra region (Satyanarayana, 1990). The ability of rich peasants to influence forest policy remained unexplored. After implementation of forest policies in the plain areas, dominant peasant community lost their traditional control over village commons (Ravikumar, 2012). Their resistance to colonial grazing policies operated with a well defined objective, i.e., regaining of the lost control over village commons. Their resistance exhibited through petitions, native press, demand by political parties etc.

Several petitions were put forwarded to authorities to convey the inconvenience due to grazing policies. These petitions reflect the method of negotiation with colonial authorities. Petitions focused on two points: customary access to forests was highlighted and demanded removal of restrictions on grazing. A petition by rich

peasants from Salem district to the Board of Revenue shows their perception on grazing restrictions: 'Contrary to the immemorial custom of ages by which the ryots have been permitted to graze their cattle upon the common plain, they are now hand-cuffed from the enjoyment of their rights of common. The Sheppard and the cow-hard are told that it is trespass to tree and upon ground where their father tended sheep or cows. The result is that the owners are either prosecuted or forced to pay a heavy penalty by way of compensation'.⁹

Rich peasants demanded rights over village commons. This demand was substantiated with the argument of protection of village commons for several generations. The following quote shows their claims on village commons: 'The Petitioners humbly beg to add that the forefathers of petitioners about 70 or 80 years ago, and ever science petitioners' ancestress and latterly petitioners themselves have been improving and maintaining the forest by planting young trees in place of withered ones and by employing watchman to water and watch them; and that petitioners have in return for the large outlay been enjoying from time immemorial, the producer of the forest such as leaves for manure, wood for agricultural purposes and for fuel and so on'.¹⁰

While claiming antiquity to customary access to forests and grazing Pattabhi Ramireddi, a rich peasant complained that: 'From the time of Adam and Eve we have been using the forests. I do not know why the Forest Department should come in and fix a fee'.¹¹ Naveen Reddy, a peasant who owns 200 acres of land expressed that: 'before reserves were constituted all lands were common lands'. Consistent demand was made by rich peasants to restore their traditional control over village commons. About 200 hundred rich peasants gathered and submitted a petition to the Governor of Madras when he visited Kurnool district. Their demands as follows: permission for ploughing cattle to graze in reserved forests without permit and de-reservation of wastelands and village commons which were close to village habitation.¹²

The demands of rich peasants received the attention of the native press. The main reason perhaps for this is that most of the native news papers were established by public figures belong to rich peasant castes. The focus of the native press was mainly devoted to the problems of rich peasants and the problems of tribes, pastoralists and other rural poor are ignored. The native press projected the creation of communal forests as a remedy for grievances related to cattle grazing. The *Hindujana-samskharini*, a Tamil daily opined that: 'People in this country had never been accustomed to pay a tax on firewood, but they are now made to do so, that is precisely reason why many people hate the forest rules and the department'.¹³ The editor of the *Swedeshimitran*, a Tamil newspaper, suggested the following remedy

for grazing problems: 'the wastelands adjoining villages should be planted with trees and given to villagers who should be made responsible for the cost of planting and maintaining trees on those lands, in return for their labour, the villagers should enjoy free of tax or on payment of an easy tax on the produce of these forests'.¹⁴ Similar opinion was expressed in another edition of the *Swadeshimitran*, 'For many generations people have been freely utilizing the forest products for purpose of life, and to put sudden restriction upon the long continued practice by the adoption of stringent measures will but cause the people much distress. The officers of the Forest Department should therefore, be kept under proper control and not allowed in their zeal for carrying out the measures stringently that would ignore the time immemorial rights enjoyed by the people'.¹⁵

Besides the critique, newspapers also put forwarded proposals on communal forests which were the demand of rich peasants. The editor of the *Swadeshimitran* demanded for creation of village forests for each village.¹⁶ The *Dashabhimani* a Telugu periodical suggested that government should conduct an enquiry on the extent of waste and forest lands and create village forests for free supply of forest products.¹⁷ While projecting the demands of rich peasants the native press invoked the orientalist conception of happy village communities and demanded for retrieval of such situation. Thus, native press reflected the demand of rich peasants and pressurized the Madras government to recognize this demand.

The existence of strong anti-grazing policy feeling in the countryside forced political association take a note of them. The demand for creation of communal forests was articulated by political associations. In 1885, the Congress working committee appointed a commission to enquiry into the grievances of agricultural population due to forest policies in Bombay. The Madras Mahajansabha and the Karala Mahajanasabha collaboratively conducted an enquiry into the operation of forests policies and demanded for relaxation of forest rules.¹⁸ The district level associations also took up the issue of forest policies. In 1894 the Guntur District Association, adopted a resolution on protest against reservation of *porombobokes* in villages.

The nationalist political discourse reiterated the demand of rich peasants for creation communal forests as remedy for grievances due to forest policies.¹⁹ Venkatappaiah, leader of the Congress in Guntur district suggested for two models of communal forests: communal forests for each village and communal forests for a groups of villages. In the three agricultural conferences held from 1909-1911 resolutions were passed and demand for communal forests under the supervision of village pahcyhayats.²⁰ The grievances related to forest policies also captured the imagination of urban public sphere of the Madras Presidency. The district peoples'

association of Mudhra district which is part of Tamil Nadu region of Madras Presidency passed a resolution in 1909 with a demand of 'sufficient land must be set apart for in each village' for communal forests.²¹

Another important strategy of rich peasants was that negotiating with state authorities for control over village commons. A committee was appointed by the Madras Government to suggest remedies for grievances related to forests rules. This committee consisted of two natives belonging to dominant sections of agrarian society. The report of this committee was published in 1912 by the Madras government. This report reflects the strategy of colonial state in formulating policy formulations. Collection of native opinion on policies was given priority and used as justifying factors for policy interventions. The Madras forest committee interacted mostly with rural elites belongs to Kamma, Reddy and Kapus and their caste men worked as layers, village officials and government officials. The information gathered in such a way that native opinion significantly favored for creation of communal forests. This trend can be captured from the narrative of Ramachandra Rao, collector of Nellore district proposed that: 'village forests can be managed by village panchayats'.²²

The demands of rich peasants are also well represented by caste associations established by rich peasant castes and political activists who themselves belongs to rich peasant castes. The Kamma caste happened to be one of important rich peasant castes of Andhra region. The Kamma caste association known as the Kamma Mahasabha was established in 1910. Between 1910-1940 thirteen conventions of the Kamma Mahasabha were organized in different parts of Andhra region. Besides demand such as education, reduction in land tax, creation of cooperative societies, etc one of the consistent demand was reduction of grazing tax and creation of communal forests. The Justice party which formed government in the Madras Presidency dominated by several leaders belongs to Kamma caste. The leaders belong to Kamma castes occupied several important positions in government and bureaucracy.²³ Most of the governing process of colonial state including legislative and bureaucracy occupied by Brahmins and rich peasant castes from village to capital level. It was this factor that enabled the upper strata of South Indian society not only articulate their specific demands but also able to prevail upon government to initiate policy changes to address their demands.

The attitude of Madras government toward forests and wastelands located in the settled agriculture region influenced by three factors: the Madras Forest Committee recommended for creation of forest panchayats to avoid everyday forms of confrontation between government and people: the strategies of the rural elites for communal forests compelled the government to incorporate their demands into policy

process and the vibrant nationalist movement, particularly after the entry of M.K. Gandhi and his innovative resistance strategies compelled the colonial state to evolve liberal attitude toward demands of native society. The combination of these three factors resulted in introduction of community centric forest management in some parts of South India. About 4000 square miles of forests located in settled agriculture region were transferred to land revenue department to be managed by the local committee known as forest panchayats.²⁴

The demands of rich peasant communities for acquiring control over forests and wastelands was incorporated into governance process by colonial state as a means to maintain its strategic balance of power with emerging power centers of Indian society. The strategies of the rural elites of South India for communal form of property endorses the argument of some studies that communal forms of property mainly opted by elite sections of society.²⁵ This trend actually shows the paradigm of communalization of natural resource management that was initiated at a massive level in South Asia. The demand for localization of natural resource management was not a demand by the poor rather it was a product of neo-liberal regime's attempt to stay connected with local power centers.

Fight for Commons by Rural Poor

The second category of peoples' resistance to colonial grazing policies is that of rural poor. They perceived restrictions on grazing as infringement on their customary access. Their right against grazing restrictions did not operate with well defined aim rather reflects their intentions. Generally rural poor's resistance intended to exhibit anger to restrictions on their customary access to grazing and conveying a message to authorities to relax or revoke restrictions. The resistance of rural poor was manifested in the form of open violation of grazing rules. The resistance exhibited by them consists of two characteristics: violation of rules and participation in forest satyagrahas and other movements. Violation of grazing rules was done in the following forms: driving cattle into reserved forests, violation of grazing rules and violation of forest rules. Most common form of resistance was collective violation of restrictions on grazing access. The table 5 shows the illegal entry of cattle into reserved forests:

Second important manifestation of peoples' discontentment against colonial grazing policies is breaching of forest and grazing rules. High rates of permits, absence of alternative source of grazing and lack of own lands forced the rural poor to indulge in collective violation of forest rules. The cases booked for illegal entry of cattle constitute a major category of forest crime in the Madras Presidency (table-6).

Table: 5. Numbers of Cattle Impounded for Illegal Entry in Reserved Forests

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. Cattle during the year.</i>
1898-99	2,82,877
1899-00	2,72,304
1900-01	2,21,372
1901-02	1,75,129
1902-03	3,70,388
1903-04	2,92,196
1904-05	2,92,196
1905-06	2,30,234
1908-09	2,13,802
1909-10	2,12,861
1910-11	2,02,093
1911-12	2,00,161
1912-13	1,96,408
1913-14	1,90,652
1914-15	2,08,393
1915-16	1,75,903
1917-18	1,18,806
1918-19	1,47,385
1919-20	1,44,849

Source: Compiled from the Annual Administrative Reports of the Forest Department

Rural poor and tribes did not acquaint with modern form of protest like rich peasants and expressed discontent with their own modalities. The process is popularly known as social banditry (Hobsbawn, 1985), everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 1985) and elementary aspects of peasant insurgency (Guha, 1985). History of resistance by the rural poor to colonial grazing policies reflects these trends. Besides violation of forest rules, rural poor resorted to willful damage of reserved forests which were being perceived as symbols of oppression. In Bellary district, 10,339 acres of forest was burnt in 1894. Most of the time fires are occurred due to incendiarism.²⁶ In 1900, in Ganjam district of Andhra region, 51 incidents of incendiarism reported. Fires in Nellore district reported to have destroyed 1200 acres of plantation. In North Arcot, 98 fires damaged 6,926 acres. In South Canara 7,926 acres are burnt in fire accident. In Coimbatore 25 fires occurred and damaged 10,395 acres. The annual report accepts that mostly the fire accidents are under reported. It means the rate of fire accidents must have been more then officially reported.²⁷ The annual administrative report of 1903 pronounced an alarming voice on increase of fire accidents. The total areas burnt reported to be doubled then previous year. It has been declared that ‘it is unfortunate that the efforts of the

department in this important matter have not met with more successes'.²⁸ In Vizagapatam district, 3,000 acres of reserve forests were damaged by tribes in Kondasantha village by putting fire.²⁹ The *Khond* tribes of Ganjam and Vizagapatam districts frequently set fire in forests and troubled forest department. In most cases the cause for fire was not traceable due to non-cooperation of tribes. Damaging symbols of oppression was perceived by rural poor a legitimate act.

Table: 6. Cases Reported on Illegal Grazing in Reserved Forests

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of causes reported during the year</i>
1902-03	9,158
1903-04	7,656
1904-05	6,496
1905-06	7,712
1906-07	7,958
1907-08	7,914
1908-09	8,874
1909-10	8,497
1910-11	8,405
1911-12	*
1912-13	8,591
1913-14	*
1914-15	9,495
1915-16	8,191
1916-17	7,166
1917-18	6,589
1918-19	7,169
1919-20	7,511
1920-21	6,869

Source: Compiled from the Annual Administrative Reports of the Forest Department in the Madras Presidency for relevant years.

Besides free access to grazing one of the important demands of the rural poor has been partition of forests and village commons for cultivation. Particularly dalits forcefully demanded for allotment of village commons for cultivation. Bradley the demands of dalits for land was represented by communist party of India and the political organization established by dalits themselves. The communalist party of India focused on grievances due grazing policies in 1930s. It demanded for allotment of forests and village commons which are brought under forest reservation to the rural poor.³⁰ This policy adopted by communist was actually an extension of their slogan 'soil to the tiller'. Forests and wastelands were perceived as potential agencies to emancipate the rural poor. However, as the leadership of communist party of

India manly dominated by rich peasant castes. Consequent upon this fact the issue of land distribution to dalits did not receive priority.

Consequently the left political parties did not launch a serious campaign on the grievances of rural poor due to grazing policies. However, these movements provided an umbrella for rural poor to fight against grazing policies.

The quest of dalits for forest and waste lands gradually acquired political proportions. Dalit intelligentsia inspired by Jotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar initiated political associations for development of dalits. This awareness was manifested in the form of political associations which demanded rights for dalits. The first Andhra panchama conference was held in Vijayawada in 1917. It was renamed as Adi Andhra Mahasabha and organized its conferences in Eluru and Anantapur in 1924. These conferences focus on two things: claimed dalits as original inhabitants of India and secondly demands were placed before the government for education and reservation in employment. One of the important demands of the Adi Andhra Mahasabha was allotment of waste and lands for dalits (Rao, 2003). Some of the dalit leaders in South India took up the task of emancipation of dalits from poverty. M.C. Rajah, demanded for education and allotment of waste and forest lands for dalits to empower dalits from backwardness. The demand for allotment of wastelands was also taken up by the left movement in Andhra Pradesh. From 1930s agricultural labour associations were established and demands were put forwarded for better wages and allotment of wastelands.

Table: 7

<i>Year</i>	<i>Extent of areas allotted In acres</i>
1925-26	206
1926-27	514.77
1927-28	503.29
1928-29	640.33
1929-20	687.48
1930-31	557.41

Sources: T.A. Boag, *The Administration of Madras Presidency, 1881-1931*, Government Press, Madras, 1933, p. 131.

The demand for allotment of waste and forest lands for dalits was incorporated into a policy framework perhaps for two considerations: Dalits emerged as an important component of agrarian economy in the form of labour at one level and small tenant cultivators at another level. Particularly commercial agriculture required massive labour for agrarian operations. Besides this, creation of loyal lower level

social order was perceived as a necessary to liquidate nationalist consciousness in the countryside. Many dalit leaders in fact projected the view that colonial rule is beneficial to dalits to escape from exploitation of oppressive agrarian structure. From this thought process, the policies for wasteland allotment for dalits were devised. A special officer with a small establishment was created in 1919. It was this establishment that initiated allotment of wastelands for housing of dalits.

Two methods were followed for allotment of land for dalit housing: government lands allotted at free of cost and government purchased from landholders and distributed to dalits on installments basis. This task was entrusted to Christian missionaries in Andhra region. Besides this, wastelands were allotted for cultivation to dalit families. In 1920-21 an extent of 19,251 acres and 342611 acres in 1931 was distributed to dalits. These apart, Christian missionaries were entrusted the task of distribution of land to dalits. Extent of 1411.68 acres to Catholic and other missionaries and 5109.56 acres to the Salvation Army mission was made over for distribution (Boag, 1933). Thus, the demands of dalits and strategies of the British aimed at benefits to both. Hence dalits acquired ownership over a small piece of land and the British obtained loyalty. The strategies of the British worked as most of the dalit castes stayed away from non-cooperation and civil-disobedience movement in Andhra region.

Conclusion

In the recent past, environmental history had begun to move away from rigid theoretical and ideological framework to creative and flexible enterprise. As part of this process the aspects which are not being paid due attention such as gender, class, and caste dimensions are given due attention. This paper brings out plurality of agrarian society and its interaction with colonial grazing policies. Colonial grazing policies were designed and executed to extract revenue. This process initiated the process of state encroachment of commons. It was this process that made commons as competing domains between rich peasants and rural poor. Rich peasants well versed with modern forms of negotiation with the state secured their main demand i.e., declaration of village commons as property of community in the policy process. This has enabled them to access grazing from commons and use their own agricultural land for maximum benefit. Colonial state favored rich peasants as a strategy to keep them away from national movement. At the same time, the demand of rural poor articulated in the form of violation of rules and movements against grazing policies did not receive serious attention. Their anti-grazing consciousness did not pose a serious threat to the existence of colonial rule. Consequently colonial state conveniently ignored their demands. Thus, community forest management policy

was a response of colonial state to the demands of rural elite. It was this form of community forestry which became a model for joint or community forest management schemes introduced after 1990s. Hence, history of forest policy in South India shows that during the colonial rule rich gained and poor lost.

Notes

1. Political geographically of South India consists of five native states and territories directly ruled by the British known as the Madras Presidency. Excluding native states, the total area of the Presidency is 141,075 square miles. This article draws historical events from Tamil language speaking districts part of modern Tamil Nadu state in general and Telugu speaking areas known as Andhra region in particular to demonstrate the interaction between colonial grazing policies and the natives.
2. *Land Revenue Policy of the Government of India*, Sai Satguru Publication, Delhi, 1986, P.221.
3. Board of Revenue Proceedings (hereafter BRP), Madras, 16th March 1863, No. 1567, p. 1693, Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA).
4. *The Madras Forest Manual*, Government Press, Madras, 1912, pp. 7-8.
5. BRP, 25th July 1884, No. 2541/F-201, pp. 1-7, (TNSA).
6. Annual Administrative Report of Forest Department (AARFD), Madras, 1899-90, p. 33.
7. AARFD, 1892-93, p. 20.
8. We do have several examples of how rich peasants responded to restrictions imposed upon free access to cattle grazing. Mr. Krishna Reddy, a rich peasant from Nellore district of Andhra region possesses 200 acres of land. After reservation of forests, he converted 70 acres of dry land into pasture land. See the Report of Forest Committee (hereafter RFC), Madras, Vol. II, 1913, pp. 11-12.
9. Petition from the ryots of Salem District, in BRP, L/R, Mis, 19th July 1889, F. No. 686, (TNSA).
10. BRP, LR, Madras, 2nd October 1890, Forests no. 159, TNSA. Petitioners belong to Reddy, which was an official designation to village officials in medieval period, but transformed into a dominant agrarian caste in Andhra. They claimed prescriptive rights over the forests in their village. Their claim was rejected by Forest Settlement Officer, the further appealed to higher courts. But their claim was rejected on the point that ownership over forests absolutely belongs to the state and people could only enjoy privilege in the form of access to forest produce.
11. RFC, p. 33.
12. Petition from the ryots of Kurnool District, in BRP, L/R, Mis, 22nd April 1904, F. No. 358, (TNSA).

13. Native News Paper Reports, (NNPR), Madras, translated version of the Native Newspapers in Madras Presidency *The Hindujanasamshkarini* (Tamil Daily) 26th February 1887, p. 25. (TNSA).
14. NNPR, Madras, *The Swadeshimitran*, (Tamil Daily), 26th February 1887 6th June 1885, p. 20. (TNSA)
15. NNPR, Madras, *The Swadeshimitran*, 16th April 1886, p. 55. (TNSA)
16. NNPR, Madras, *The Swadeshimitra*, 16th April 1887, p. 55. (TNSA)
17. NNPR, Madras, *Deshabhimani*, (Telugu, weekly) from Cuddapah District, September. 14th May 1892, in p. 220. (TNSA)
18. NNPR, Madras, *The Karala Patrika*, September 7th 1885. (TNSA)
19. RFC consists of interviews of native intelligentsia on the remedies of grievances due to forest policies. Several lawyers, who also own vast extent of fertile lands demanded for creation of communal forest management by entrusting management responsibilities to local communal bodies. For instance, Venkatamarama Aiyar, lawyer and agriculturists from Nellore district demanded the Madras Forest Committee for handing over degraded forests for the management of Panchyats. The Zamandar of Muthyalpad of Nellore district proposed for creation of Panchayat for management of forests close to villages.
20. *Ibid.*, 122-23.
21. *Ibid.*, 334.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
23. K.B. Choudhary, *History of Kammas* (in Telugu language), (Gunture, Pavuluri Publishers, 2007).
24. Government Order, No.1185, 1st June, 1931, Government of Madras, Revenue Department (Andhra Pradesh State Archives).
25. For good review of studies see Haraka Yanagisawa, 'The Decline of Village Common Land and Changes in Village Society in South India, 1850-2000', *Conservation and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2008, pp. 293-307.
26. AARFD, 1894-95, pp. 22-23.
27. AARFD, 1899-1900, p. 32.
28. AARFD, 1902-03, p. 3
29. AARFD, 1914-1915, p. 18.
30. The writings of famous communist leaders Sundaraian's writings were compiled and published under the name 'Puchhapalli Sundaraiah Rachanala Sankamlam (Compilation of his writings), in Telugu language, published by Prajasakthi Book House, Hyderabad, 2010.

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