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**Negotiating Placeness**

**Tribal Communities in Western Ghats**

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## Abstract

'Lived place' refers to the subject perception of place. It is concrete and based on experience. For the tribal communities staying or camping in the forest, it is their 'lived place' about which they have living memories, orally transmitted narratives and distinct thought processes. It is populated, embodying several meanings and they have symbolic relationship to it. By contrast, 'conservation space' refers to an objectified perception of space. It is abstract and based on geometry. For the state, forest is a 'conservation space' – a space for the management of resources and governance of people therein. It is stratified by the quantity and quality of resources. State preserves the conservation space because of the resources. These two conceptually opposed perceptions of forest are in contact at a locale where the practices of governance of forest take place. In this contact zone, there are moments of commensuration, incommensurability, conflict and transgression. By way of this contact, communities have re-constituted their relation with the forest, their identity and relations with others.

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### Key Words

- :
- Tribal Communities
  - Forest
  - Colonial/ Post-Colonial Forest Department
  - Eco-Development Project
  - Community Narratives

# Negotiating Placeness:

## Tribal Communities in Western Ghats

M. Suresh\*

### 1. Introduction

Tribal communities of the southern Western Ghats have experienced drastic habitat changes since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Plantation and mono-cropping had flourished on the forest land with the extensive support of colonial state. A dam (Mullaperiyar dam) was built towards the end of the nineteenth century (1895), and due to the dam vast area of forest got submerged. To begin with, it dammed<sup>1</sup> the rivers Periyar and Mulla to irrigate the otherwise non-arable land. Later, it got fame as a hydro-electric project. In 1899 the forest around the reservoir, the Periyar lake, was declared as reserve forest known as 'Periyar Lake Reserve'. Further, in 1934, Travancore princely state<sup>2</sup> re-notified the forest as a game sanctuary and bestowed the privilege of 'game' to the elite interests over the local communities' livelihood needs. Consequently, local communities were displaced from their habitat within the dense evergreen rain forests to its fringe. They got 'colonised'<sup>3</sup> there

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<sup>1</sup> A.T.Mackenzie (1963) reports on streams and other forms of water flows that were affected by the construction of Mullaperiyar dam.

<sup>2</sup> Before the formation of Kerala state in 1956, on the basis of language, this region was under the rule of two princely states (Travancore and Cochin) and Madras presidency, which was under the direct British rule.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Morris (1982) argued that the establishment of 'colonies' for the tribes had an objective to settle them on land permanently. The settlements of Mannans and Paliyans have been officially designated as Mannan colony and Paliyan colony, with total area of 88 hectare of land. There are 348 families of Mannans and 125 families of Paliyans residing there.

with the full initiative of the state. Subsequently, the post-colonial state redefined their physical habitat as a Protected Area—Periyar Tiger Reserve (henceforth PTR).<sup>4</sup> With this redefinition, the forest began to be viewed as a space where human presence ought to be minimized. State apparatus forcefully curtailed livelihood activities of the inhabitants inside the forest. At the same time, it became the policy of state to use land for productive purposes and thus contribute to nation's "development"

In the current times of globalization, the state is an overarching agency and not a unified agency as it used to be during princely or colonial state. It is a nexus of local, provincial, regional, national, and global institutions. Different agencies – which include tribal communities, the three-tier panchayat, state, national governments and international agencies like the World-Bank – congregate and interact with one another. Illustrative of this co-presence can be found in the India Eco-Development Project of the World Bank through Global Environmental Facility.<sup>5</sup> The mechanism through which they seek to effect the transformation of environmental governance is often through "community-based conservation".

There is an implicit tension between perception of tribal communities' regarding the forest and that of the state or what Erich Hirsch (1995) conceptually distinguished as the subjective position of place and the objective position of space. 'Place' implies the local, the familiar, the 'here and now' and thus the insider's perspective. 'Space' refers to the standing apart, the unfamiliar, empty. It is based on outsiders' viewpoint. These different perceptions may interact in particular settings as a cultural process. Also Lefebvre's (1991) distinction of abstract space and social space are appropriate in this context. Abstract space is constituted by the interaction of knowledge and power. It is

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<sup>4</sup> PTR is one of the important tiger reserves in the country is located on the Kerala side of the Western Ghats in Southern Peninsular India. It is situated in the districts Idukki and Pathanamthitta and forms a boundary between the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The protected area covers an area of 777 sq. km, out of which 350 sq. km was declared as National Park in 1982. Mannans, Paliyans, Uralis, Mala Arayans, Ulladans and Malamandarams are the "tribal" communities who have settled and camping in PTR.

<sup>5</sup> Staff appraisal Report, India Eco-development Project (World Bank, 1996: 95)

hierarchical space that is pertinent to those who wish to control social organisation, such as political rulers, economic interest group and planners. Social space, in contrast, arises from practice, from the everyday life experience that is externalised and materialised through action by members of society. Persons working with the model of abstract space continually try to reign in and control the social space of everyday life, with its constant changes, whereas social space always transcend conceived boundaries and regulated forms. Judy Whitehead (2002) says that global interactions are constructed through differential power relations. The relation between space and place-based narratives are in a continual process of social negotiation and historical transformation. The state policy, she argues, involves erasure of place and locality. The erasure was achieved, in the beginning, by financing massive development projects and it has now been ironically intensified by means of biodiversity conservation (2002: 1363).

Tribal communities in PTR are obligated simultaneously to irresolvable set of historical variables of the forest. On the one hand, as inhabitants of forest for many centuries, it is their source of livelihood and dwelling place of ancestors and deities. On the other, being subjected to the regulatory practices of forest administration they are asked to be part of forest conservation as well. This paper illustrates the social imaginaries and formations that unfold the reconciliation of obligations.<sup>6</sup>

This paper has five sections. The section is followed by the second section on communities' relationship with forest as a 'lived place'. The third section is the state's perception of forest as 'conservation space'. In the fourth section I have tried to understand communities' discursive, emotional and experiential realms of forest as a contact zone. The paper ends with a brief conclusion.

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli (2002) wrote about moments and experiences of indigenous Australians in their reconciliation of simultaneous obligations to custom and public reason.

## 2. 'Lived Place' of the Communities

For the displaced tribes, forest (*kana*) is their 'lived place' about which they have living memories, orally transmitted narratives about different spots in the forest, hamlet (*kudi*), anecdotes drawn from the past and present and distinct thought processes about the places, trees, animals, rocks, rites, rituals, celebrations, fears, miseries, gods and goddesses and history. Their relation with forest is multilayered and they interact with it in varied ways. That is rooted in a subject position in which space is populated and embedded. Their relations are, above all, symbolic.

For them *kana* is not separate from *kudi*, rather it is an extension. Preparation to go to deep forest takes only minimum time and effort. Entering into forest and taking a trail of a few days are only a normal act as it is a part of everyday life. One anecdote may exemplify this point. One day I went to the PTR and met my friend, an officer and told him that I wanted to go to the interiors of forest (Thannikudi and Mlappara). Immediately he sent his working staff to call someone from the Mannan hamlet to accompany me, which to him was the most practical solution<sup>7</sup>. Within a few minutes, Raju came from his hamlet. He smiled and told me about the provisions to be bought. His preparation time was only to buy the provisions from the local market, and repack it in such a way that the bundle of provisions could rest on his head throughout the trek without the aid of his hands. For him, to move across forest is just like strolling through the most *familiar* terrains.

During the trek, at various times, Raju shared some of his active memories about his displaced dwelling place, Ummikuppan. He had vivid memories about life at Ummikuppan as a cardamom collector and carrier of the product to the collection centre, locally called *Tavalam*.<sup>8</sup> He

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<sup>7</sup> 30 to 40 males of Mannan and Paliyan communities are work as daily wage laborers for the Forest Department. An employee will get the wage of Rs.100 per day for 20 days a month.

<sup>8</sup> Colonial Forest Department instituted *tavalam* in all the forest ranges in order to extract 'Minor Forest Products' (MFP). Subordinate staff of the forest department like the guard used to manage the *tavalam*. They engaged in extraction the extraction by using local communities. Payment was given either in the form of provisions or money. This practice has continued in the post-colonial period also.

recounted his trek with kin from his dwelling place to the destination. For them being at *kana* is similar to being at *kudi*; *kana* is quite a most familiar place; they experience 'here'-ness, 'now'-ness and familiarity. In other words, although the forest is managed by the state, they experience historical continuity as being a part of the *kana*, in their self-identification with it. *Kana* is similar to what Heidegger (1971) calls "dwelling". "Dwelling" refers to the creation of meaningful places that together form a surrounding world. It entails people's relationship to the world, motivated by concern and consequent involvement. "Dwelling" thus privileges the practical and the spatial in the constitution of knowledge and meaning. Therefore, going to the forest, one can say, is an activity of creating place or "dwelling" that entails emotional attachment to them.

*Kana* still remains as a place of their life, where they lived and where they will have to go, although they recognise their displaced situation. It is not a demarcated space to them, but a place with which they identify their past/present dwelling. Hereafter, 'lived place' refers to both the *kudi* and the places where they moved around. I employ the phrase 'lived place' to underscore the presence of the forest in their everyday life and memory and the feeble distinction between *kudi* and *kana*. Lived place is in their being and becoming; as ancestors are always with them, as much as gods. Although, the borders between *kudi* and *kana* are blurred, their subsequent displacement from the interiors of the forest and resulting "colonisation" in the Mannan colony and Paliyan colony seems to have created a discontinuity. This discontinuity has increasingly occurred over time. Before displacement, the forest was integral to their being and selfhood. Now the forest is, at the same time, here and there. There is an emotional attachment to the forest, but they don't have the propensity to return to the forest and dwell there permanently. They always cherish periodic visits to their *kana*. When I talked to them during the time of the Kerala Adivasi's struggle for the land, led by Adivasi-Dalit Samara Samithi,<sup>9</sup> majority of them dismissed

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<sup>9</sup> *Adivasi-Dalit Samara Samiti* is a tribal and lower caste organization of Kerala. They claimed that around 45,000 *Adivasi* families are landless in the whole Kerala state and organized themselves to demand five acres of land for each of these families (Ravi Raman, 2002). I retain the term *Adivasis* rather than tribe or hill men in the context of political assertions and articulations that emphasize their identity as early or original inhabitants. Otherwise, terms are used contextually.

the notion of moving back permanently to the interior of the forest, if they would be given land there. They told, “We want to make our children study. And we are conditioned to live near the city. We don’t want to shift permanently into the forest but will occasionally visit there for cultivation.” The discontinuity observed in their relation with forest will be discussed in the subsequent sections. In the following part of this section, I try to illustrate the relation of tribal communities with their lived place.

Before the displacement, they dwelled at various places in the forest, collected forest produces and cultivated products such as millet, paddy, pigeon pea, pumpkins and sweet potatoes. Cultivation was only for the self-consumption, whereas collected items other than roots and fruits were primarily for exchange<sup>10</sup>. They shifted their encampments periodically either due to the necessities of opening fertile fields in the forest, or when somebody in their *kudi* died. After the displacement they discontinued the practise of shifting, as they have no longer have any space to shift.

Communities had created their own *kudis*, after the state settled them at the fringe of the wild life sanctuary. Present *kudi* is a conglomeration of huts (*kooras*), cultivable land of families and common places like temples. Modern institutions like primary school and petty shops also occupy a space in their locality. The patterns of settlement have changed over time. Initially, they made a cluster of *kooras* that were far away from the cultivable lands (Government of India, 1966). Later, with the increase in population, families scattered and they started to settle in their own family property. Land also got fragmented due to partitioning. Members belonging to same extended families and lineages may live in distant households. At the same time they assemble together during regular visits or on special occasions like rituals.

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<sup>10</sup> They collected forest products like honey and wax, cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*), incha bark (*Asacia insticia*), dammar resin (*Canarium strictum*), manjal turmeric (*Curuma longa*), wild ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) oil bearing seeds, tanning and dyeing materials, medicinal products, spices and perfumery, ivory etc. Collection of these was done by either families or groups formed for specific resource. Groups gathered the products by visiting the forest exclusively for the purpose of collecting perumthen (*Apis dorsata*)/ incha bark/ dammar resin. Families, on the other, gathered the products like turmeric and ginger, as part of their everyday foraging trips (*thettu*).

Dwelling places of communities have sites of symbolic significance. Within *kudis* there are sacred centres, which are the common property of the community. It is also a site of different meanings. Deities of the Mannan temple are Siva and Parvathi, whereas the deities of the Paliyans are Mariamma and Kali and Ganapathi and Karuppuswami. Before the construction of the Mannan temple, the sacred center (*swami chavar*) was located in the land of their chieftain (kani). The kani had consecrated two stones at the foot of a tree and worshipped it as the forest goddess (Vana Devi) and Forest god (Vana Devan). Two other images that have been worshipped are the ancestor and the serpent (Nagam). After the chieftain's death, his wife had continued to conduct the rituals and look after the sacred centre. Later, a group of community members with the support of the new chieftain<sup>11</sup> decided to construct a temple when the community accumulated surplus of money from community development fund.<sup>12</sup> The temple and its land were transferred to community property,<sup>13</sup> and a Brahmin priest was appointed to perform the rituals. In short, with the temple, Brahminical images and symbolic practices began to get selective representation in the *Kudi*.

Brahminical mode of worship follows the rules of ancient Hindu texts, *agamas* and *silpa sastras*. These texts prescribe elaborate rules for constructing the temple, regarding the place where temples are to be built, the kind of idols to be consecrated there, the materials with which idols are to be sculpted, the dimension and proportion of various kinds of images

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<sup>11</sup> Mannans are matrilineal and the positions like chieftainships are carried over from mother's brother to the sister's son.

<sup>12</sup> An important component of the India Eco-Development project is the community development fund (CDF). Seventy five per cent of the total fund of CDF was contributed by the World Bank. The rest 25 per cent had to be contributed by local communities either through cash or labor (World Bank: 124). Following this, Mannan families contributed fifty paisa from each kilogram of pepper they had sold. With this contribution, more than 100,000 rupees were collected. World-Bank insisted this investment from the communities to make them aware of the reproductive potential of the resources. However, Eco-Development committees of Mannans decided to invest it for the construction of the temple. The additional expenditure required for completing the temple was collected through families' donation - Rs.300 per family.

<sup>13</sup> The elder lady, the owner of land, initially resisted donating her land to the temple committee. Later, due the pressure from the elders, chieftains and the priest she donated the land.

(Sastri, 1986). The *sastras* consider the sacred centre as an exclusive space by exorcising the spirit of the forest, ancestors and traditional deities from the temple. Space of the temple has to be partitioned and well demarcated; in the sanctum-sanctorum only the Brahmin priest can enter. Mode of worship is also prescribed which would be daily offerings (*puja*) in the morning and evening by the Brahmin priest. Members of the community, however, rejected some of these prescriptions. They continued many of their traditional practices in the new space, although it was against the prescriptions by the *sastras*. For instance, rather than referring to the deities as Siva and Parvathi they called them Vanadevan and Vanadevi. Moreover, as per the *agama* rules, ancestor worship is not sanctioned in the temple premises. They, however, have retained both ancestor and serpent images in the temple premises and have continued worshipping them. Similar alterations and transgressions occur in the worship of Paliyans also.<sup>14</sup>

There is a distinction between the *kudi* and *kana* with respect to their specific relations to things, locations and activities. They continue their relations with the forest and hold auspicious activities in it though they are colonised at the fringes. Many families have opted to go and stay there whenever there is an opportunity. During the school holidays, some families take their children to *kana* and remain there for long period (stretching between few weeks to months). They make a temporary shed at the bank of the lake, engage in fishing, gather forest produce, cook food and sleep in the forest itself. They worship rocks, hills, dead ancestors and forest deities. Once in a while, they go to the local market to sell fish. From the market they buy provisions and return to the forest. In the course of my conversation with a Mannan, he told “*kana* is like our *kudi*, and my wife and children also want to accompany

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<sup>14</sup> Some of the community members questioned the construction of new temples. They preferred to continue their traditional mode of worship, and retain their identity. Some others, on the other hand preferred to change to a new mode altogether. According to them, this change would help them enhance their social status. This multiple and contradictory views exist among community members during other ritual occasions also. In their traditional rites - Pongala and ancestor worship (Kalaootu) - they do not depend on Brahmin priest. At the same time they have stopped giving non-vegetarian offerings. Thus, the notion of “sanskritisation” (Srinivas, 1988) is partial and sometimes contestable in the case of Mannans and Paliyans.

me whenever I go, although it is not practical every time.” He also added “If our relatives want to meet us, they don’t have hesitation to join us in the forest”.

The ritual association with the forest became visible during the occasion of Mannans’ and Paliyans’ visit to forest for conducting rites (*Pongala*).<sup>15</sup> For Mannans, Thanikkudi, Mullathodu and Thondiyar are their sacred sites and for Paliyans, it is Mavadi.<sup>16</sup> Visiting these locations not only evokes memories but also inspires them. By attributing a symbolic quality to the landscape and rivers they perceive them as signs that recall the continuity between past and present. When I participated in the *Pongala* of Mannans at Thanikkudi, one of them said: “You can see glory in these places. This is because our ancestors are living here.” The locations of ritual places are not fixed; it is omnipresent in the forest. Earlier, one of the groups used to go further interior of the forest (Vazhukkappara) to conduct the rites, but due to the restriction of the forest administrators they stopped going there.<sup>17</sup> One year, an officer-in-charge of that particular range suggested to them that if ten to fifteen families alone would to go and conduct the ritual they were allowed to do so. They did not accept this offer because they told that the deities and ancestors are not fixed in any specific site. They are present everywhere in the forest, in the hills, rocks, trees, streams and rivers.

Locations of *kana* are associated with their history. These readily connect them to the past events, whether historical or mythical. While walking along the trails in the forest around the location of *Pongala*, my companions Soman and Rajappan (two middle aged Mannan men), pointed out different sites and landscapes and connected them to past events. Past, however, does not exist out there, as a fairy tale, but it evokes the present. One of explicatory narrative can be cited in this

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<sup>15</sup> Earlier this rite was conducted after the harvest of shifting cultivation. Now, they celebrate it after collecting money from the families. If they do not have the surplus they would not celebrate it.

<sup>16</sup> All these places are located inside the core zone of the PTR.

<sup>17</sup> Some officers even denied them permission to go to the forest for conducting the *Pongala*.

context. One day, along with a non-*adivasi* friend, a researcher in Sociology, my usual companions and three other Mannans, I went to Mlappara. On our way to a hill-top, there was a tree on which innumerable cloth pieces were tied. They told us that it was a hanger of loincloth (*konakam thooki*). They also added that, those who cross this place for the first time must tie at least one piece of thread on the branch of the tree. I said that I have done it before. My friend refused to do so because he was an atheist. Soman narrated the belief behind the act of tying the cloth. "Once, one of our ancestors was infected with an illness. He was unable to get up and was reduced to just lying on the floor and later died without having a single piece of cloth on his body. Everybody is tying the cloth as homage to him." He also added, "Those who refused to tie earlier could not sleep because they were disturbed by nightmares of violent attacks by beasts and ghosts." After hearing the narrative, my friend accepted the "local" custom, cut a piece from his *dhothi* and tied it on the tree.

For the administrators, forest is a scientific and objective space but for communities it is an intimate place. The way they conceive place cannot be graphed onto any two dimensional plane as it is in the maps. Although the communities in consideration have maintained the concept of 'lived place', displacement has forced them to encounter the concept of 'conservation space' of the forest department, about which we will discuss later.

### **3. 'Conservation Space' of the State**

The manner in which state has constructed forest as a space is the central theme of this section. State conceives forest as a space for the management of resources and governance of the people therein. Travancore state introduced state royalty over teak and black woods in the first decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century. 'Only the government could harvest them' (Stebbing, 1922.).<sup>18</sup> Later, the forest regulation of 1888 laid down certain procedures to be followed for declaring any forest area as reserved forests. This regulation postulated that the forests once

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<sup>18</sup> Kavitha Philip writes that in the Madras presidency it was introduced in 1807. Most probably around this year it was introduced in Travancore also (2003: 78).

reserved became the property of the government except for certain rights, which were granted to selected people by the Forest Settlement Officer (FSO). A clear cut carving of space has taken place with the governmentalisation of forest (Sivaramakrishnan, 1999:76). Such a carved out space still persists with different coordinates. This carved out forest is the 'conservation space'.

The institutional foundation of scientific forestry in South India can be traced to Dietrich Brandeis, a German forester and Inspector-General of Forests for India and Hugh Cleghorn, Conservator of Forests for Madras (Philip, 2003: 80).<sup>19</sup> Judy Whitehead argues that Brandeis, like his counterparts, applied the abstract, utilitarian logic to the management of forests (2002: 1363-69). Their field of vision was confined mainly to tabulating, growing and protecting those species of wood that fetched high commercial value. This vision got reflected in the knowledge and administration of the forests of Travancore also. The surveyor of the forest in Travancore reported:

I was accordingly appointed in June 1886 to make a thorough examination of the forests of the state "to mark and define those tracts which should be permanently reserved" to submit a report on the resources, especially noting the condition and extent of the forests of teak, to prepare maps showing the character of the forest in different localities and finally to bring to the note of Government any points worthy of attention" (Bourdillon, 1893:1).

In the regulated and abstract perception of forest, calculation and measurement prevailed, and some of the watchwords of the forest administrative reports were 'demarcation of forest areas', 'balance sheet' 'sustained yield' and 'royal timber'.

Calculation has a special place and position in governance, in the past as well as in the present. This is done with the motive of conservation or

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<sup>19</sup> Dietrich Brandis was appointed as Inspector-General of Forests of India in 1864. He along with Hugh Cleghorn, Conservator of forests for Madras from 1856, laid the institutional foundation for scientific forestry in south India from 1860's up-to the passing of the forest act (Kavita Philip 2003).

of future use. To the state forest is a resourceful space. Creation of the game sanctuary, Nellikampatty Game Sanctuary, is one of the fitting examples. The “regulation” was implemented through the introduction of licensed hunting and a ban on killing of animals by local people. Game warden wrote in the administrative report:

In order to encourage the preservation of wild life and check its indiscriminate destruction the Government in 1933 appointed a Game Warden for carrying out the above objects in the state and measures were taken for the purpose by creating game reserves in suitable places. A Game sanctuary was established at Nellikampatty Isthmus in the Periyar lake. A Game Association was also organised at Peermade with a view to regulate hunting, to prevent poaching and other forest offences and to introduce new and varied species of animals and birds from other countries. There are various animals and birds in the sanctuary of which mention may be made of the elephant, the Indian bison or gaur, the sambar, the mouse deer, the ibex, the tiger and the panther.

The Game sanctuary received the special attention of the department during the year and in previous years. Most of the persons in unauthorised occupations of lands in and adjoining the sanctuary were evicted during the year. During to the unremitting care bestowed by the department and the Game Association the various species of animals and birds have increased in number. ... As in previous years many distinguished persons visited the sanctuary (Government of Travancore, 1942-43:56).

In the reconfiguration of space, management was the dictum, as the urge was to accumulate.

It was assumed that forest can be managed and its resourcefulness can be enhanced with the aid of capital and productive labour.<sup>20</sup> We can state at this juncture that conservation was for the future consumption

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<sup>20</sup> Bourdillon stated the ‘uses’ of forest as, ‘(1) Forest supply timber, fuel and other forest produce;(2) They offer a convenient opportunity for the investment of capital and for enterprise;(3) produce a demand of labour’ (197. 1230).

and production was for the present consumption. Therefore, the plantations and conserved forests bloomed. Plantations and monocropping flourished on such 'wastelands' with extensive support of the state. In 1865 government published rules allowing the sale of 'waste land' for the purpose of the plantation of coffee and other cash crops (Bourdillon: 160). Land was granted free to the 'influential' European families (Lovatt, 1972:9). In 1869 government pronounced a number of concessional waste land grant rules, leased forest lands for cardamom cultivation, introduced a scheme for assigning cardamom lands to prospective cultivators on payment of land price (*Tharavilla*). In addition, the government in 1898 granted the holders of cardamom land the right to open waste land for cereal cultivation. By the turn of the century a large portion of the forest was covered by various plantation crops. An official historian of Travancore wrote:

Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the forested lands in Eastern division district ... and entire hill ranges were uninhabited and had no plantation estates or settlement on them. By 1880's approximately 43,000 hac of coffee and tea plantations had come up on these lands (Nagam Aiya, 1906:75-6).

With the abolition of monopoly in the trade and cultivation of cardamom, the state encouraged and supported private enterprises. This eventually attracted more people into the process of expansion of commercial agriculture (Sivanandan, 1986).

Associated with the plantation there was an allied development of infrastructure like new roads. The relative isolation of forest was not affordable and also was impractical. The social composition of this thinly populated forest region also changed.<sup>21</sup> Major entrepreneurs of plantations were Europeans. Larger capital investment required for the plantation cultivation and industry and proximity with the agencies of state enhanced the domination of Europeans. Wealthy Syrian Christians were also among the first Malayalis to try plantation crops (Lovatt: 43).

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<sup>21</sup> In 1931 the population density in the High ranges area (Devicolam, Udumbanchola, and Peermade taluks) averaged 25 persons/sq km. By 1961, the average was 105 persons/sq km (Cited from Census of India by Marcus Moench, 1991:57).

Syrian Christians<sup>22</sup> formed the major representative group in the middle-level artisan, clerical and supervisor positions (Jeffrey, 1976). Plantation also introduced larger number of migrant labourers to hitherto thinly populated hilly regions. Earlier, most of the labourers available for the plantations were those drawn from Tamil regions.<sup>23</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, there was a change in the kind of labourers working in the plantations. Several thousands of people from Malayalam speaking plain land region were taken to the plantation. Most of these workers belonged to 'untouchable' caste.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of space for administration and governance is framed within the conceptual complex of modern science/instrumental rationality and utilitarian view. That is why they found the local practices as unproductive. One self-evident statement can be invoked here.

The economic life of the Mannans centres around their shifting cultivation. Being of a migratory disposition, they have no proprietary interest over the land they cultivate. They collectively clear the jungle in February and burn the debris in April. The Headman points out the plot of land which each man is to cultivate. When the jungle is cleared, all the men make a noise to ward off evil spirits. Ragi is sown before the breaking of the monsoon and the crop is harvested in September. Women sow seed, weed the area, and harvest the crop. Threshing of corn is done by men. The needy are helped with seed and some paddy by their clansmen. The Mannans lead a life of plenty after the harvest and do not

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<sup>22</sup> Syrian Christians are collection of Christian groups who believed that they are descendants of the early converted Christians in India. They are popularly referred to as Syrian Christians because of the Syrian Liturgy which they continued to use in church services.

<sup>23</sup> It was difficult to get enough labourers from the west coast where there was no shortage of food or local employment (Lovatt: 13). The system of attached labourer also curbed the migration of labour to the high ranges. So they were recruited from the famine-stricken district of Madras presidency and the dry lands of Mysore state' (Rammohan, 1996: 87).

<sup>24</sup> The members of the lowest caste are called the untouchables. In the caste system there are four varnas, and the untouchables are not even included in the varnas. Instead the untouchables are 'avarna' or outcastes.

work. The produce lasts for about four months. They cultivate a land for two years and then leave it, bag and baggage, in search of another favoured locality. Shifting cultivation is wasteful and impoverish the soil. This encourages the Mannans to be idle and thriftless (Iyer, 1937:221).

Such an ethnographic statement from a colonial subject<sup>25</sup> is not surprising. The message is that all those forests considered as 'waste lands' needed to be converted into arable land or plantations.

This is reflected in one of the earliest moves to distribute land to the hillmen with a view to accelerate production during the first decade of the twentieth century. The 'Rules for the Treatment and Management of Hillmen', in the year 1909, of Travancore Princely State recommended permanent settlement of hillmen and intensive agricultural production. For the "development" of the 'hillmen', it allocated an administrative space, which was expected to be governed by the forest officials and hillmen were to have only restricted interactions with the outsiders, especially with the traders. The hillmen's relation to forest was thus redefined.

Another site of altered spatiality of the region is as the result of the construction of a masonry dam, Mullaperiyar. The reservoir was built at the upper reaches of one of the longest and broadest rivers of Travancore, river Periyar and the other one that joins it, river Mulla. This was a "modern" dam, constructed in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the British directives and supervision. Canals were constructed down to the eastern slopes of mountain for irrigating dry tracts of Kambam and Theni which were under the jurisdiction of Madras Presidency. Unlike small check dams for irrigation, this modern dam first aimed at "tapping" the water resources originating in the forest of western Ghats for irrigation and later for the generation of electric power

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<sup>25</sup> L. A. Krishna Iyer and his father Anantha Krishna Iyer, two native Brahmins, served the colonial state as state sponsored anthropologists. Moreover, Krishna Iyer was a colonial forest officer, who was temporally appointed for studying the tribals of Travancore. Their reports are major sources of information about castes and tribes of two Princely states, Travancore and Cochin.

as well. Notion of instrumental rationality dominated the whole discussions about the construction of the dam.<sup>26</sup> The submergence of forests adversely affected the locations of tribal inhabitants. Some of them were forced to change the locations of their *kudi*. More than this, it created an obstacle for foraging and visiting relatives in other *kudis* also. They were forced to use bamboo-rafts in places where they could have walked.

Colonial/utilitarian conceptions of forest as a resource and an abstract space have got incarnated in the post-colonial notions of national park and wildlife sanctuary. Conceiving a space, whether a park or a sanctuary, devoid of people is the underlying notion of Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 (Whitehead: 1366). Forest policy of independent India made little difference, except that it was determined by national industrial interest rather than imperial needs (Gadgil and Guha, 1992: 185).

Forest encroachment has been occurring continuously in Kerala, since its formation as a federal state. The state responded by legalising these encroachment at various points of time. Large-scale evictions of encroachers are impossible and getting land and title grants for them are possible in the political climate of Kerala.<sup>27</sup> Forest protection is a recognised need, but that has not got support from mainstream political parties. Forest areas have declined dramatically over the state as a whole.<sup>28</sup> A large number of immigrants, as cultivators, traders, labourers

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<sup>26</sup> When the Government of India began to explore the possibility of “utilizing” the river water, Travancore government did not attempt to examine the implications of the project. Later, Travancore government had an anxiety about other possible adverse affects of the scheme. Apart from 8000 acres of forests getting submerged, it was feared that damming of the rivers will adversely affect the flow of Periyar and this in turn would negatively affect low land paddy cultivation at the down streams and impede water transport (cited by Rammohan: 107)

<sup>27</sup> Since the formation of Kerala, political power has shifted frequently between coalitions of left-leaning and centre-right parties. Small political parties and the constituents they represent have wielded great power. In addition, caste and religious communities have major influence in the political society of Kerala.

<sup>28</sup> Based on map and satellite image analysis Srikumar Chattopadhyay (1984) estimated that Idukki district lost 22 per cent of its forest area between 1905 and 1965 and a further 32 per cent between 1965 and 1973.

etc, from plains can now be found in high ranges. Tribes constitute about one per cent of the total population of the Kerala state and some areas where once tribes formed the majority have reduced to minority.

New “decentralization of environmental regulation through community-based conservation” (Agrawal, 2005) is another means to extend Forest Department’s control over local communities (Sundar, 2001). They have been allowed “restricted rights” in the forest. Through this mechanism tribal communities, who are acting in the service of environmental regulation, are part of a new regime of control that seeks to create fresh political-economic relationships between centers, localities, and subjects<sup>29</sup>.

#### **4. ‘Lived Place’ contacts ‘Conservation Space’**

In this section I will examine forest as a site of contact of discrete forces of perspectives that has re-constituted and continues to re-constitute tribal communities’ relation with place, their identity and relations with others. On the one hand forest is a “conservation space” regulated through the institutional mechanism of governance in which local communities, state machineries and international developmental agencies congregate and interact. On the other, it is a ‘lived place’ of local communities, which is retained through livelihood activities and “non-place” like sacred place.<sup>30</sup> In this contact zone there are moments of commensuration, incommensurability,<sup>31</sup> conflict and transgression.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Arun Agrawal (2005) argues, on the basis of Kumaon forest, north Indian Himalayas, “local regulatory power” or more “intimate forms of regulation” of forest as a shift from “central control” of forest. However, on the basis of Bastar, Madhya Pradesh, Nandini Sundar (2001) opines that there is a continuation of centrality in the decentralized regulation.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault (1986) described and conceptualized this kind of other spaces as “heterotopias”.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli’s (2001) idea about the emergence of both radical alterity and social commensuration in the context of liberal ideologies demands like public reason is insightful here.

<sup>32</sup> Transgression has multiple connotations here. At one level, for those who govern, it is a break of the rule. At another level, for those governed, it is a violation of informal rule or norm. I owe to Michel Foucault’s (1998) idea, ‘transgression incessantly crosses and re-

When the colonial state decided to displace the 'hillmen' from the forest, in the name of "preservation", some of them resisted. I recall here the statements of the game warden in section three that described and justified the displacement as a part of the creation of the game sanctuary. To him the inhabitants were "encroachers". State tried to settle the act of displacements by giving them compensation to re-build their habitat.<sup>33</sup> For the inhabitants, their lived place wouldn't be replaceable. "One day officials came and told us to move away from our *kudi*. They also promised to give us land and education. But we remained there." State used to encounter this situation by using violence. "They set fire to our *kooras* and forced us to move away from our locations." Power relations were such that the inhabitants could not foresee the strategies of the state, nor could they withstand the force of the state apparatus.

Conflict of perceptions may be observed from other popular narratives also. The popular narratives that have been articulating and circulating among the community members, which has more of a fictional characteristic, do not project them as encroachers.

Once a princess of travancore, along with a white man visited the forest. Before their arrival we were informed not to go outside of the *Kudi*. Can Mannan remain stayed in a spot? Some of our ancestors rowed a country raft opposite to the princess' boat. Seeing them in the lake, the princes asked robinson (Game warden), "who are these people? robinson replied that they were Mannans. Princess was angry and ordered to throw us from the forest. On reaching land, robinson ordered us to be evicted from our *kudi*.

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crosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable" (27).

<sup>33</sup> In the administrative reports we can see the figure of expenditure used for rehabilitation of the inhabitants from the forest.

They considered the forest as their own and their movement through it as spontaneous without being subjected to external restrictions, 'Can Mannan remains staying in a spot?' Interestingly, this narrative imagined their active agency for the cause of eviction, 'Some of our ancestors rowed a country raft opposite to the princess' boat.' However, in their folklore, they narrate their eviction as a miserable experience. At the same time, they do not consider themselves as passive victims:

After our eviction from the forest we frequently changed our settlement from one place to another. We fought with some of the *nattukars* (migrant plain land people) for claim on the land. Some of our kin died due to illness. We cursed all of those who initiated our eviction. A wild bear attacked robinson. He later came to meet us after the surgery in his mouth. A tube was inserted in his mouth. He talked with us by using our dialects. The princess died, in seclusion in a dark room.

Local communities' encounter with colonial state apparatus not only created conflicts but also commensurate worlds. One instance was administrator's use of the labour of 'hillmen' for various purposes in the forest. Their knowledge about the forest was very much needed to alien administrators. The appreciation of their labour can be seen in many colonial reports. Communities remember this as respectful recognition. Post-colonial Forest Department has continued to depend on the labor of tribal communities. Communities are proud of their knowledge of forest and their skillful ways of dealing with it. One narrative talk about their recruitment as subordinate staff of Forest Department is as:

Initially, officers were reluctant to recruit us for the forest preservation because we used to kill and eat animals. They wondered how to teach us to interact with animals. Later, they realized that we could distinguish animals based on its smell; thus they were convinced about our ability.

There were points of negotiation, within the unequal power relation, between colonial state and tribal communities. Despite state's regulation in the forest, tribal communities had continued their foraging life and

livelihood practices based on shifting cultivation and gathering, even in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shifting cultivation contributed more than half of their food requirement (Iyer, 1937-39). They gathered various kinds of fruits, yams, vegetables during their everyday foraging in the forest. It has been noted that the major portion of meat and fish involved in their consumption was also available from this everyday foraging.

Contact zone was also a site of new production relations. Apart from those had with Forest Department, local communities also found paid occupation in the cardamom plantation. Spatially, these production sites were in the forest itself, so working there meant continuity. The deforestation and subsequent development of cardamom plantation had made no major traumatic impact on them because the changes on the landscape on which they depended were not fundamental. Working there was like their everyday foraging and cultivation. Iyer described the everyday life of Paliyan:

The Paliyans get up at daybreak. The women cleanse the vessels and prepare the morning food. The men take the food at 8, and go out for work in the jungle or for the collection of wild berries or roots. They return home in the evening. Women have the food ready and they take their supper at 8. They eat ragi both morning and night. When their resources exhausted, the whole family moves for work on the cardamom estates, where men earn six annas, women five annas, and children three annas daily. They lead a life of plenty after the harvest. When the husband is engaged in jungle clearing, the wife works in the cardamom estates and earns wages from the upkeep of the family (Iyer, 1939: 80-81).

Their selection of work was definitely dependent on their familiarity of the place as is clear from the refusal to work in the tea plantation where deforestation was total.<sup>34</sup> Unlike cardamom estates, the nature of work in

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<sup>34</sup> Many planters have reported the attempt to select tribals as labourers in the tea plantation and their indifference or refusal of taking the job.

the tea industry demanded migration of labourers to 'production site'. Some of the inhabitants even moved away from the site of tea plantations to suitable lived place.<sup>35</sup>

With the colonisation in the fringes, there has been increasing occasions of commensuration and negotiation between conservation space and lived place. The nature of negotiation is self-evident in the following conversation between a group of Mannan males led by the tribal chieftain, Raja Mannan<sup>36</sup>, and the chieftain of the *kudi*, Kani, and a forest officer, Eco-Development Officer. It was in the midst of the Kerala adivasis' struggle for the land, led by Adivasi and Dalit samarakshna samithi under the leadership of an Adiya tribal woman, C.K.Janu.<sup>37</sup>

Raja Mannan: We are not cooperating with the *adivasi* agitation under the leadership of Janu. This is a memorandum solely of Mannans. We request you to give us land near our *kudi*. I gave a copy of this to the minister. He said that he would take care of our demand. Sir, please do something for our benefit. If you give us the forest land, we will not cut the trees; we could cultivate cardamom without destroying forest. We have never destroyed the forest.

Eco-Development Officer: Rather than the forest land, why don't request revenue land?

Raja Mannan: All of us intend to live together in one place. If we get the land adjacent to the *kudi*, outsiders will not intervene. More

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<sup>35</sup> Mannakudikkar of Chengara and Plaladi near Vandenmedu plantation site shifted towards the locations of PTR.

<sup>36</sup> Raja Mannan is the chieftain of the whole Mannan community residing at various locations of Idukki district. His *kudi* is at kattappana, which is far away from the PTR. He visits other *kudis* on important occasions. He also claims to be the only Raja among *Adivasis*, which majority of other tribal communities do not accept.

<sup>37</sup> Adiya is one of the tribal communities of Wayanad district of Kerala. Wayanad is one of the Northern districts of Kerala. Janu worked among the Tribal communities of Wayanad, prior to becoming a leader of *Adivasis* of Kerala.

than that, we could get protection from the forest department. If our land is outside, that will be taken away by stealth.

Kani: Our ancestors are living in the premises of the forest, so we have to live here itself. We have received many benefits from eco-development and we request you to continue it in the future also.

Though they sustained the notion of lived place, “our ancestors are living in the premises of the forest”, they conceive it in tandem with the perception of conservation space. Land is also perceived as means of production. Moreover, they demand state's protection because of their unequal power relations with the *nattukar*.

Tribal communities of Kerala are facing the problem of land alienation and indebtedness due to their low economic and political power. Academic, non-academic literature and government reports narrate instances of land grabbing by powerful migrant mainlanders. The pattern of land alienation is unfolded in these narratives, in following way. Land grabbers give cash or kind to tribal people in the form of credit or loan, and then force them to sign on the documents that finally result in their eviction from land and its possession. Unlike the tribes settled in the revenue land those settling and camping in the forest land have an extra legal protection for their land<sup>38</sup> as outsiders cannot own or possess forest land. In my conversation with Raja Mannan, he said that his settlement is in the revenue land but most families with settlement there lost their land to local moneylenders and land grabbers. He also added that this is not happening in the colonies at the fringes of PTR because of the protection from the Forest Department. Their demand of land within the conservation space can be seen as a reaction against the exploitation and domination of local powerful groups.

There is economic reason as well for their demand of land within the sanctuary as they may receive economic benefits from the development

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<sup>38</sup> In the wild life sanctuaries and tiger reserves, the inhabitants do not have the absolute ownership for the land, which they are using. It remains as the property of state. The inhabitants of PTR can use it to cultivate the land and exchange it with other tribes.

projects there.<sup>39</sup> At times, they have undergone predicaments because of their simultaneous interest in developmental benefits and tradition. Once, during the agitation some Mannans declared that they would enter the forest and take hold of some area of land from the PTR. Forest officials were in panic on hearing this. They asked the community members, who worked in the Forest Department, to dissuade the agitators from this move. Finally, the agitation for land of the adivasis of PTR lost its momentum after forest officials threatened that they would withdraw the eco-development project, whereby the community would lose the benefits.

The emergence and way in which communities perceive forest as source of resource can be seen in their attitudes towards hunting, fishing and collecting forest resources. After forest was re-constituted as a game sanctuary, hunting of wild animals by 'natives' was curtailed. State started to conceive wild animals as an object of preservation for future pleasure hunt only by those who were privileged to have the license for hunting. This act of restriction was in conflict with tribal communities perceptions of wild animals. The first and foremost aspect is that hunting was a means of subsistence so far as the communities were concerned. Further, animals were a *familiar* and an integral part of their being. Various kinds of rituals associated with hunting, their taboos to kill certain animals, absence of pleasure hunting indicate this.

After the hunting, they offered a portion of the meat to the deities and ancestors. Moreover, magicians like elephant magician (*Anavathi*) and tiger magician (*Pulivathi*), who were powerful enough to deal with animals, had special position within the community. Elders say if *Anavathi* or *Pulivathi* look straight into the eyes of animals, they become still. It is also noted that they do not kill certain animals like tiger, elephant and wild buffalo because of taboos associated with them.<sup>40</sup> An interesting narration that refers to the association of animal, ritual and social taboo is provided here:

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<sup>39</sup> A family received ten to fifteen thousand rupees as credit and grows loan from the Eco-Development. Apart from this, some of them got employment also.

<sup>40</sup> What Levi-Strauss (1963) said about totem animal is true here, it is 'good to think' rather than 'good to eat'.

Foresters gave us money for collecting elephant tusk from the forest. We did not take that money to our *kudi*. It belonged to the Vanadevata (forest goddess). After buying provisions from this money, we cooked the food and offered to the deities and ancestors. Then we ate food from the *kana* itself. Nothing should be taken to the *kudi*

Ban on hunting had created a new situation that in turn generated new meaning of animals in their life. They could not even drive away the animals that destroyed their fields.<sup>41</sup> Gradually, they had started to perceive the animals as external beings. In 1961 Census Report, it has been reported that majority of the families had not cultivated in their land because wild animals were destructing crops. During my field-work, most of them complained about the problems of 'wild animals' in their *kudi*. The treatment of wild animals as external leads to another notion of it. They have become mere flesh; the quantity and quality of the meat of animal matter.

With increasing restriction, they either stopped hunting or continued it surreptitiously. Occasionally, forest administrators of PTR used to provide informal permission to community members to gather animal meat that had been killed by other wild animals, for their own self-consumption. Later, following the advice of forest officials they stopped gathering meat from the forest. 'We used to collect meat of the animals. We have stopped this practice following forest officer's advice not to take meat from the forest. They said that it belonged to the forest.' Same situation prevails in relation to their collection of forest produces like *incha*, *vayna* bark and *telli* from the forest. Even with increasing restriction, some of them have continued to collect these commodities. Majority of them have stopped collecting these items after their participation in the eco-development committees and those who continued it were punished by eco-development committee.<sup>42</sup> So in the

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<sup>41</sup> Many of the community members have faced legal actions like jail sentence alleging that they attacked or poached animals. Forest officials reported that *nattukar* had used tribals as an agent for hunting.

<sup>42</sup> Eco-Development committee comprised of the families of local communities. It has an executive committee, which consisted of a chairman, who is the member of Eco-

act of discontinuing hunting and collection of forest produces, communities have adopted the rules of conservation space. Unlike this, a different norm has been created by communities and the Department together, with respect to the practices of fishing and firewood collection.

Legally, there is a ban on catching fish and collection of firewood from the wild life sanctuaries. Tribal communities in PTR, however, have been informally provided sanction to catch fish and collect firewood. Like hunting, fishing had communal and ritual significance. With increasing interaction between them and the *nattukar* in the contact zone, they are being persuaded to catch fish for marketing. *Nattukars* gave implements like fishing nets to the members of communities in exchange of fish. When the demand for fish increased,<sup>43</sup> members of communities started buying more fishing nets<sup>44</sup> on their own initiatives. For the communities fish is for self-consumption and also a marketable commodity.<sup>45</sup> Fishing, although an illegal activity in the conservation space it continued as a kind of informal privilege. State apparatus kept their eyes closed whenever such events took place unless and until excess of such activities were identified. In the context of participation of local communities in the management of forest under Eco-Development Project, fishing by local tribal communities has been formally permitted. As a sequence, it was documented that they are allowed to catch “exotic” varieties of fish from the lake.<sup>46</sup> Eco-Development Committees

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Development committee, and a secretary, who is an official from the Forest Department. Because of the larger size, Mannan settlement has three committees. The committee punishes the rule-breakers by either expelling them from the Eco-Development committee or withdrawing the economic benefits from eco-development project.

<sup>43</sup> Increasing number of hotels, restaurants and migrant settlers substantially hiked the demand for fish in the local market.

<sup>44</sup> They depend on markets at distant places like Kumarakom in Kottayam district or Theni in Tamil Nadu for purchasing second- hand fishing nets. These they procure availing grants from the state agencies like fisheries department or using agriculture surplus or by raising personal loans.

<sup>45</sup> A study shows that Mannans and Paliyans together caught 32000 kg of fish in the year 1997-98 (Arun et al 2001).

<sup>46</sup> See Micro-plan documents of eco-development committees of Mannans and Paliyans. Micro plan is a plan document created by forest officials, experts and local community members together. This document includes profiles of the settlement, census of

also distributed loans and credit for buying fishing nets. In this process, distinctions like lake/river or streams and exotic/endemic fishes<sup>47</sup> have entered in their fishing practices. Fishing from the lake is a major source of income for many families. Likewise, for many families collection of firewood is a major source of income. Though the foresters fix the locations from where they can collect firewood, catch fish and other forest commodities impasses of surveillance permitted transgressions into areas beyond the fixed locations.

Above examples show the negotiations between two perceptions towards forest and how it perpetuates a commensurate world that satisfies the interest of both the state and local communities. In this process, at many occasions, communities have translated the language of “conservation” into their *familiar* notions. For instance, while discussing ‘community based conservation’ an elder member of the community says:

We are the people of the *kadu*. Our children know the nooks and corners of the forest. Wherever we want to reach we will reach without losing way. Give us the chance to protect the *kadu*; we will protect it without any destruction. We will not destroy the *kadu* because we need the *kadu*. Foresters do not like to live in it because they want all the comforts. So they choose to remain in their staff quarters. But we can live anywhere in the *kadu*.<sup>48</sup>

Their identification with the forest and their interest to visit the forest are commensurate with the conservation space of the state. Within its formation and institutionalisation of conservation space local communities have retained some of their places that are

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household, land holding, occupancy and sources of income, dependence on forest. It also includes a ‘consensual’ note for regularizing and reducing the activities in the forest.

<sup>47</sup> Two species such as Tilapia (*Oreochromis mosambicus*) and European carp (*Cyprinus carpio communis*) are the exotic fishes found in PTR. Mahseer (*Tor khudree*), Periyar barb (*P. micropagan Periyarensis*), Curmuca barb (*Puntius curmuca*) are some endemic species of Western Ghats (Arun et al 2001).

<sup>48</sup> It is interesting to note their use of the word *kadu*, a popular Malayalam term for forest, instead of their own local term, *kana*.

incommensurable with the state's notion. During certain occasions and moments this alterity leads to the transgression of the rules of the state as well as their own norms that otherwise they have been following. An ethnographic vignette observed during a celebration of Mannans, Pongala, illustrate this point clearly.

Pongala is an annual rite conducted by lineages<sup>49</sup> of Mannans at different locations of the "core areas" of PTR. In the World Bank report the places where Mannans go for the *pongala* is described as follows: "In the heart of the forest, at Mullathode and Thannikudi, two holy places are situated. Once in two or three years some of them stay there for three days. This has only meagre impact on forest". This casual description represents the World Bank's imagination of "indigenous" communities; their cultural practices are taken to be environment friendly. Communities' visitation to the sacred sites has been dependent on Forest Department. Their permission to visit the forest, availability of boats to travel through the lake, number of persons going are all subjected to the regulation and control.

Given the official surveillance during their presence in the forest, Pongalites activities in the forest are not always subjected to the regulation. When I conveyed my decision to go to the Pongala, some forest officials commented, "Oh, they are going for fishing." Later, on our way to Thanikkudi, noticing the enthusiasm of pongalites, my Mannan companion Soman commented:

Look at their enthusiasm. There are no people in the *kudi*; nobody is interested in the temple there. All the interest is for the fishing. Earlier, none of them fished before completing the rituals. See, these guys are going directly to the river.

Pongalites came to the forest with fishing implements like nets, fish-hooks and pots. Some of them always showed interest to move along

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<sup>49</sup> Mannans are matrilineal and exogamous. There are different names to denote their lineages, Aravakudi, Paniyakudi, Oorukaran, Kunakudi, Nagamalayan, Uravanadan are some of the lineages. Obligations between affine relatives take the form of exchange of gift during the occasion of Pongala.

the banks of the river. During certain situations, elders became angry towards some of them because of their over-indulgence in fishing, rather than participating in the rituals. Fishing in the days of Pongala is different from their regular catching for the market. It is for their self-consumption, and likewise they luxuriously catch 'endemic' fishes from the rivers of Mulla and Periyar. After consuming as much as they could, the surplus fish was dried before returning to their *kudi*. All families carried bag full of fish, as much as they could carry. Fishing is an exuberant activity.

Transgressions are taking place in the field of ritualistic behaviour of the community as well as with the rules of the conservation space. This indicates that transgressions take place away from the tradition and modernity or across them.

## **5. Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, it can be proposed that with the governance of forest lived place of the local communities began to intersect with conservation space of the state. This intersection has affected the forest and the people living within it or depending on it. Forest as a contact zone has temporality and spatiality. It is, at the same time, experienced and made use of by different motives and interests. There is coexistence, discontinuities and persistence. The implications of the rendezvous between the space and place have different advantages and the members of the local communities have negotiated with it differentially. It has re-formulated their subjectivity and their relation with others. Any reduction of this complex existence and practices to instrumental or scientific rationality is partial that excludes the moral order they have been creating and sustaining.

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