

Agricultural Development and Social Transformation in the Long Nineteenth Century –  
An Analysis of Settlement Registers from South India –  
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The problem how to characterize the Asian economic development during the colonial period has taken the central place both among the “nationalist” historians and the so-called “revisionist” school. This was also the case with India, which has been placed in the middle of the global economy at least from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.

The focal point here is to elaborately clarify the actualities of her development during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to bore actors that not only reacted to the colonial impacts but also took initiatives in involving and integrating indigenous societies with the global economy. The area covered is mainly southern parts of India, but the findings were widely relevant to other parts placed under colonial/sub-colonial conditions.

South India, like other Asian countries, experienced rapid population growth and land/agricultural development. Institutional factors like heavier tax burden, cash requirements, landholding system, weakening land control of magnates, etc., as well as economic factors like demands for global agricultural commodities, availability of unopened land, etc. facilitated such development.

Though frequented by famines, the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century observed increase of prices with even chances of capital accumulation. Extremely high cotton price during the American Civil War was one of such rare opportunities.

The actual situation of economic change at the bottom of the society is, however, hard to analyze due to lack of information at individual level. The source utilized here, *the Settlement Registers* or the landholding registers, is most probably the only source available for the purpose. Through the analysis of three sets of the Settlement Registers of the years 1864, 1894, and 1924, of Lalgudi villages, the followings will be indicated. First is that South India observed conspicuous population/agricultural growth during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Second was that the development of new/peripheral area was participated not only by agricultural communities but also by non-agriculturists including shepherding/artisan/service communities. The latter had often been deprived of traditional rights in the course of colonial administration. Third was that we can observe by far an important role played by merchant-cum-moneylenders in connecting local agricultural development with global economy.

The role of moneylenders has been described both in negative and positive ways. They were the very source of indebtedness and impoverishment of peasants, but also the investors in agricultural development in colonial societies. The presentation will situate the class in the transformation of Indian agrarian economy and the social structure among peasants.