



CRONYISM, DEVELOPMENT AND CITIZENSHIP:

A Study of the Effects of
Quarrying in Pallichal Panchayat,
Thiruvananthapuram



Cronyism, Development, and Citizenship :
*A Study of the Effects of Quarrying in
Pallichal Panchayat, Thiruvananthapuram*

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Archana Ravi



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**Cronyism, Development, and Citizenship : A Study of the Effects
of Quarrying in Pallichal Panchayat, Thiruvananthapuram**

Ecology/Development/History

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After the devastating floods of 2018 and the series of destructive landslides in Kerala's hilly areas in the subsequent monsoons, the issue of quarrying and its impacts on nature has been much discussed in Kerala's public. Scientific opinion has tended to argue that the changes quarrying brought to the physical landscape could well have triggered landslides indirectly at least, but there has been an increasingly vocal lobby that argues the reverse and asks for a direct demonstration of cause and effect. However, the illegal and reckless extraction of natural resources also has important social, economic, and political effects, which are hardly studied, but which are absolutely vital to our understanding of society and development in contemporary Kerala.

This is what we attempt to do in this preliminary work on the Pallichal panchayat in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, where quarrying is intense, but is also being resisted persistently. This work consists of two stand-alone essays which employ different methodologies, but which explore the impacts of the active presence of natural-resource extractive capital on the physical well-being, social relations, economic activities, and political engagements of people in the panchayat. Like the other RULSG monographs in this series, this work includes, besides the two essays mentioned above,

an introduction, which offers an account of the place and the issue, samples of material collected in the course of the fieldwork, and a photo essay on the place.

Rich thanks are due to all who helped us complete our fieldwork at Pallichal. Jithesh VTK and Khushboo Sharma offered us excellent research assistance; the members of the Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi were generous with their time and information. Elected ward members also spoke with us freely despite all their misgivings – since one of us is actively involved in the struggle there. It is extremely difficult to do fieldwork in a place where people are divided, but a surprisingly large number of our interviews were with people one simply ran into, and who were keen to talk about the crisis in Pallichal – we thank them heartily. We also thank other researchers – especially Gopika G G, whose interviews with dalit quarry supporters in Pallichal confirmed our own insights, and Suraj Jacob, whose excellent comments helped Devika revise her essay, and others who participated in the webinars in which these essays were presented in May 2021. We also thank Resmi PS and Emmanuel of CDS for helping to organise these webinars and offering other support in the preparation of the draft of this work. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewer and Prof Sunil Mani, Director of CDS, who arranged for the review. Last but not least, we thank our families and friends. ■

J Devika

J Devika, Archana Ravi

Introduction:

THE HILL AND THE PANCHAYAT:

A Cautionary Tale

I

Before it became equally infamous and famous for destructive illegal quarrying and a determined local people's struggle against it since 2014, Pallichal was just another nondescript peri-urban village panchayat in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. Until the new century, Kerala in general was not heavily urbanized; it was known for its 'rurban' pattern of settlement, neither urban nor rural, or with urban facilities available close at hand in rural settings. Pallichal is very close to the city of Thiruvananthapuram, just thirteen kilometres away, tucked away under what was once an imposing local natural formation, the hillock called Mookkunnimala, 252 metres above sea level. Judging from the recollections of our senior interviewees born and raised there, until up to the 1960s, the area blended with the general landscape of Thiruvananthapuram, largely unchanged since centuries. An evocative picture of this landscape emerges from the words of the missionary Mrs. Murray Mitchell who visited the city of Thiruvananthapuram in 1885 and penned an account of it in her book *In Southern India*. In her account, the landscape of Thiruvananthapuram included undulating terrain, of rocks and hills, valleys, and flat land: "[T]he mingled rocks and hills, green valleys, lofty mountains with rich vegetation, the palm groves and rice fields and water altogether make as lovely a panorama as one's eyes could wish to look upon." Situated in the Neyyatinkara taluk which, according to the District Survey Report of the

Thiruvananthapuram District (2016: 9), is the only taluk that contains lowland, midland, and highland areas in the district, the Pallichal area falls in the midland, and nestles beside the hillock covered once with verdant forests and rich, cultivable slopes.

The Pallichal panchayat is a relatively recent institution. According to the Panchayat Development Report of Pallichal of 1996 (PDRP, henceforth), it was a pakuti – a traditional spatial-administrative division – of Travancore which accommodated four sub-divisions or desams. In 1952, it became the Pallichal Village Union and the first panchayat committee that included representatives of the major communities in the area – Nadar, Nair, Ezhava, and the Scheduled Castes (PDRP 1996: 16) – was formed. From a public notice issued by the panchayat included in the PDRP, from 1962, in ten years after its formation, the Pallichal panchayat committee had fulfilled a number of vital development functions including the building and maintenance of public roads, wells, foot-bridges, the building of a public market space and an office-building for the panchayat, and the expansion of the public health centre through mobilizing public subscriptions, land donation by a local landlord, and a grant from the State Social Welfare Board. However, clearly, the panchayat was powerless in the face of entrenched interests: the notice complained that many of the paths cleared by the panchayat had been encroached upon by locals seeking to expand their own properties. This changed in the 1990s, with national legislation that strengthened the panchayati raj and set up the village panchayat as a Constitutionally-mandated body with a wide range of powers and resources. In Kerala, this was further bolstered by the mainstream left – the leading communist party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – initiating a campaign for local-level planning, popularly known as the ‘People’s Planning Campaign’ (PPC) that assigned a key role to the Grama Sabhas and the ‘development civil society’ of women’s self-help groups (later to be known as the State Poverty Alleviation Mission’s network, the Kudumbashree). In Pallichal, the echoes of these developments seem to have been quite resounding. Many of the leading activists of the NGO which led the PPC were from this panchayat or its adjacent areas and played an active role in initiating local-level planning here. Since its inception till well into the early decade of the new century, the panchayat was controlled by the Left-led political alliance; a shift towards the Congress-led United Democratic Front occurred relatively recently for two terms, which has been reversed in the most recent panchayat elections of 2020.

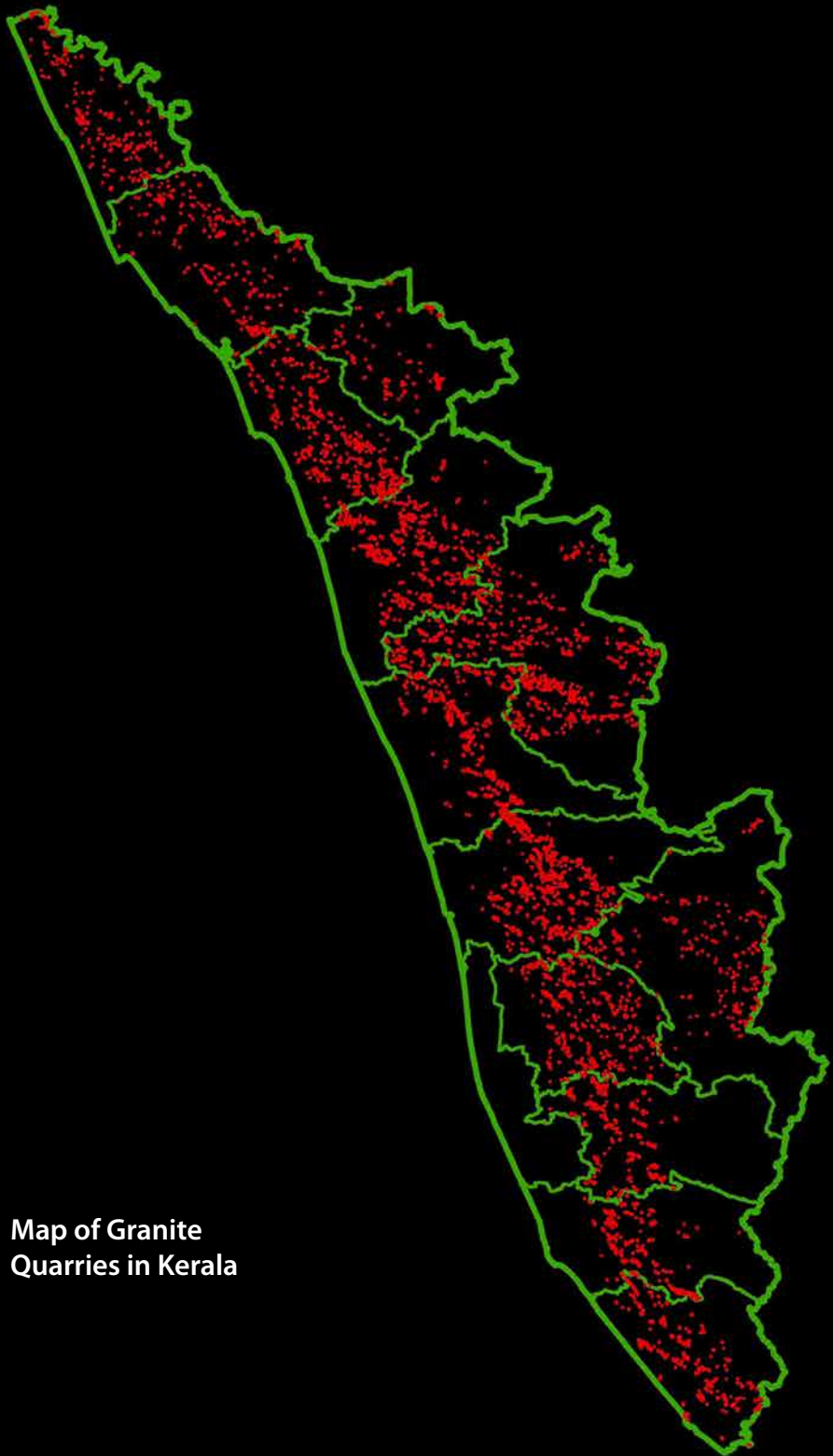
The panchayat extended to four square kilometers and had a population of 18,000 in 1952. In 1996, it had expanded to 21.70 square kilometres and its population had risen to 38,896 (and according to the 2011 Census, 52,562). The number of wards has grown steadily – from

14 in 1996 to 23 at present. It remained a primarily agricultural village right up to the 1990s; the PDRP noted with some chagrin that “though close to the capital city, [referring to Naruvamood, Thannivila, Pallichal, and Pravachambalam], development has still not reached these areas.” (p.17). However, at present, it is beginning to change, being right next to the city boundary (after the panchayat of Nemom was absorbed into the City Corporation). A major six-lane highway to the south now passes through the Pravachambalam junction of the panchayat that abuts the city, which has led to local land prices skyrocketing.

This junction was always the major connecting link to the city; it has reflected the changes in urbanization across the twentieth century to the present quite well. Seniors recalled how it was a major overnight stop for bullock-carts bearing goods from and to the Thiruvananthapuram city’s major bazaar, Chalai, at least till the mid-1970s. A fifty-four year-old interviewee recalled that studying in town and staying in Pallichal was not too difficult as the buses from the south to the city and back always stopped there. “One could get to the East Fort, where my school was, in fifteen minutes even in the morning rush hour – the vehicles then were so few in numbers.” The time-consuming part was walking from the less-connected areas of the panchayat across large stretches of paddy fields to reach the road that led to Pravachambalam junction. Now the Pravachambalam junction reflects the rapid, high-consumption urbanization of Thiruvananthapuram as a whole. A city located on an undulating terrain of low hills and gentle slopes abutting the seashore, Thiruvananthapuram no longer gives the impression of a hilly place, as the ever-expanding built-up area changes the visual experience of the city altogether. Pravachambalam too looks like any other busy, dusty, city area lined with shops and building and incessant vehicular traffic. The road that runs from Pravachambalam to the place where it turns towards the hill, Arikkadamukku, looks like any other crowded residential area in the city. No one would notice the slow rise of the road as it winds its way to the now-eviscerated hillock of Mookkunnimala.

Nor would they be prepared for the ghost hamlet just a couple of bus stops away from Pravachambalam. Nowadays buses rarely ply to the Mookkunnimala bus stop, around a km away from Arikkadamukku stop. There are not too many people living here.

Deserted houses and silence greets one if one were to visit during the day. Many of these plots were bought by quarry companies. The place is not entirely without life. Near Mookkunnimala junction, a handful of families, their chickens and their pet kittens stay on. The other house owners left because life became increasingly difficult, thanks to water and air being polluted by granite dust. A middle-aged resident of the area says “When quarry companies came up, we were promised



Map of Granite
Quarries in Kerala

development. But with development, the population increases. Here, the opposite happened.”

In 1996, the majority of the residents of the Pallichal panchayat were still dependent on agriculture; the local industry was mainly handloom weaving. The nature of vegetation and land use on the hillock, however, had changed considerably. In the 19th century, the hillock was thickly forested, and in 1896, notified as reserve forest by the government of Travancore. In the memory of our senior interviewees, Mookkunnimala was still wooded and wild, if not forested, and still capable of holding a heavy canopy of mist, which made the environs considerably cooler compared to the rest of Thiruvananthapuram. One of them even recalled how his grandfather had been told by his grandfather (and so this must date roughly back to the mid-1850s) that in his childhood, people even reared sheep on its slopes. Irrespective of whether true or not, this recollection surely indicates a very different micro-climate. However, those who remembered the area from the 1940s and 50s mentioned heavy depletion of forest cover due to illegal felling in these decades, most often by the local landlords and tenants, with the connivance of the forest guards and other authorities. Still, the stories passed on to them by their ancestors evoke the image of dense forests even in the 1930s where people falling out with the law could take refuge in them.

Local residents point at shivering treetops for living evidence of Mookkunnimala’s wooded past—the monkeys. Or “monkey nuisance” as the people living at the foot of the hill call it. An old resident told us that monkeys rarely climbed down the hills, until a couple of decades ago. “The deforestation at the top must have destroyed monkey habitats and their sources of food. Many small animals have disappeared from this place,” he said.

Since the early twentieth century at least, the uncultivated mid-land areas of the Thiruvananthapuram district were a bone of contention between the powerful sudra community – the Nairs – who held considerable social and political power in Travancore and the lower caste communities, the Nadar and the Pulaya. The awakening of the ex-slave and untouchable Pulaya community under the leadership of the Pulaya leader Ayyankali happened in a place very near Pallichal, Vengannur. After his induction into Travancore’s legislative assembly the Sree Mulam Praja Sabha, Ayyankali raised repeated demands for arable land from the government to be distributed to members of the Pulaya community so that they could emerge as a powerful farming community in their own right (especially justified by the fact that they were the group who possessed the necessary skills for farming, especially paddy, in the Malayali society of those times). However, the Nair landlords conspired with the local officials who were often

their caste-brethren, to delay and ultimately deny the Pulayas the land that the government had assigned to them – as evident from Ayyankali's repeated complaints voiced in the Praja Sabha, and recorded in the Proceedings of the Sree Mulam Praja Sabha in the 1910s and early 1920s. This land lay in the Vilappil pakuti, very close to Pallichal (barely twelve kilometres away). In Pallichal, old-time Nadar residents recall how their ancestors migrated there as state tenants on uncultivated government land available on the hill-slopes in the early twentieth century-decades, and how clearing the land, defending it against encroachments of the Nair landlords, and dealing with caste discrimination in public places and around public facilities was the grim reality that they had to deal with. As the study that follows the present essay shows, this history has not only refused to go away; rather, it has come to haunt the panchayat, continuing to shape contemporary conflicts around quarrying there.

In 1960 under the leadership of the Chief Minister of Kerala, Pattom A Thanu Pillai, 350 acres of land on the Mookkunnimala were assigned to 90 families. Ostensibly descendants of freedom fighters, mainly from the district of Alappuzha, they were granted land conditionally for rubber cultivation. This was the beginning of a number of events that re-shaped the area, and eventually opened it up for large-scale quarrying. The settlers came slowly, visiting their properties yearly and waiting for the rubber trees to grow, gradually building homes and facilities on the hill. Accounts by members of this growth are suffused with a great deal of warmth and nostalgia for an existence in which inconvenience and pleasure were shared. Yet this was not a deprived group making a place out of what was essentially a wilderness. Rather, they were a group of property owners who retained strong roots wherever they came from, and did not blend into the pre-existing community below the hill. With their coming, the spatial significance of the hillock for the people around it changed drastically. Many interviewees remembered clearly how the abundant vegetation on the upper slopes of the hill had been an important source of livelihood for the poorest; they narrated accounts of how groups of oppressed caste – Pulaya and Nadar – women used to go uphill to collect firewood and fodder which were aplenty, besides fruits and ayurvedic medicinal plants. These women sold the fodder at Pravachambalam, where bullock-carts transporting goods into and out of the city rested for the night. They also sold fresh fodder for goats to families in the area. This was a source of income especially for older women who were too weak to work in the fields. This also altered the perception of the hill. Almost all seniors recalled legends and myths associated with the huge boulders that made up the hillock – stories associated with the Hindu epics, especially the Mahabharatha. Far from being a wilderness devoid of human presence, each boulder was identified with a name and

clad in myth. All this was to slowly but steadily wane from the 1960s, when this area came to be increasingly perceived as primarily a set of resources to be distributed by the state for commercial agriculture.

Spatial changes now accelerated. With the land reforms at the beginning of the 1970s, many of the poorest who received homestead land and the Nadar tenants who farmed the lower reaches of the hill, were settled in the lower slopes. The acquisition of land in the lower reaches for the Indian Army's shooting range and elsewhere in the panchayat for the Railways in the 1970s (and even now) led to the poor getting displaced and moving into the cheaper areas, which were on the lower slopes. In the mid-1980s came another crucial spatial event – the building of a road, through concerted direct action by local people, from the hillock to a place called Arikkadamukku, from where the road to Pravachambalam was accessible. Many residents, especially the leaders of the anti-illegal quarrying movement there, remember this as a turning point in the history of the hillock – the road, which cut across paddy fields, shortened the distance from the hill to the city considerably. Once tarred in the early 1990s, vehicular traffic increased; students from the panchayat studying in the city were now able to avail school and college bus services. It also made the transport of loads from Mookkunnimala to the city much easier. This was an important condition that fueled small quarrying. Small quarrying with hand-held technology, which was already initiated by the land grantees on the hill (in clear violation of the conditions of the land grant, as the anti-illegal quarrying protestors would point out later); this would intensify gradually in the 1990s but would become a matter of public concern only in the new century.

By 1996, the slopes of the hillock were covered with rubber plantations; the lower slopes were used to farm coconut, plantains, tapioca, and others; paddy, which was the main crop in the fields, was declining and now, plantains and vegetables were being also cultivated. Proximity to rivers and the abundance of ponds had ensured enough water for cultivation, but this was already disappearing in 1996: the PDRP noted that there used to be 66 ponds in the 14 wards of the panchayat, but only 49 of these had survived. Canals too which were much longer, were now just 60.6 kms in length. Indeed, water shortage was already being experienced in the upper reaches, on the hill-slopes, in the summer months. Filling paddy fields and neglect of water bodies was becoming more and more common and the PDRP noted ruefully that these were not used any more for farming. Rubber cultivation was failing on the hill slopes. Local-level planning was imagined to be a cure for these rising ills – and it identified early signs of destruction from quarrying. “The north-eastern side of the Panchayat, a part of the Mookkunnimala, is a rock-formation, and so crops like rubber do

not grow well there. But in the parts here where forests were cleared, plantain and tuber crops grow plentifully. However, because of raids by monkeys it is not possible to cultivate these. The quarrying on the hill, too, is leading to the destruction of the environment.” (p. 30). Though not directly, the connection between the blasting in the quarries and the disruption of wild life environments was perceived. The PDRP recommended a hill development programme for Mookkunnimala and the adjacent hillocks, the preservation and cultivation of medicinal herbs, and explicitly opposed increasing quarrying on the hills.

Through the first decade of the new millennium, illegal quarrying on the hillock began to intensify. The construction boom in Kerala, coupled with legislation banning sand mining in Kerala’s rivers in 2002, expanded the market for such materials as M-Sand. Large players seeking granite deposits began to arrive at Pallichal and were aided by the pre-existing small miners there. The small miners had already gained influence in the panchayat committee by 2006 and the presence of the NGO activists began to fade in proportion. The land grantees on the hill began to sell off their parcels of land in violation of initial conditionality and amply aided by officials who were ready to overlook violations – now just three of the original 90 families remain. As the volume of illegal quarrying grew, so also did sporadic confrontations with local people, some of which reached the courts. In 2012, a High Court order directing the District Collector to ensure that the land granted was used only for assigned purposes was passed, but it continued to be ignored.

Meanwhile, vehicles carrying loads from the quarry and returning there began to clog the Arikkadamukku-Mookkunnimala road. The overused road broke down and remained utterly clogged, making normal daily life almost impossible for local residents. Complaints began to pile up – children unable to go to school, school and college buses frequently cancelled, residents unable to use their vehicles or go out for even hospital emergencies, the traffic raising so much dust that the trees on either side were dying covered in layers of dust, the incessant sound of lorries going up and down making people sick, and the air pollution increasing the incidents and severity of asthma attacks among local people. Frequent pipe bursts from heavy vehicles zooming up and down the road, bullying by quarry company staff of people who tried to question their impunity, inaccessibility of the management of the quarry companies to local people – all of this began to be discussed more and more. Besides, the quarrying uphill was beginning to have other, direct impacts – increasing raids by groups of monkeys which had lost their habitat, the drying of the many rivulets that originated uphill, intensifying water shortages, the change in micro-climate such as reduced rainfall and hotter days.

Meanwhile, the panchayat committee was becoming more and more beholden to the quarry capital. The profits from quarrying are enormous and the risks, quite low – thanks to the unbelievably low royalties and fees due to the government, the pliability of government authorities ranging from Revenue department officials to those of the Department of Mining and Geology and the elected members of the panchayat, and the unfulfilled needs of the poor who live on the lower slopes or in the vicinity of the quarries. The quarry companies began to exert influence far beyond their presence or the employment opportunities they created there. All discontent and protests there were either paid off or subtly suppressed. However, the overuse of the road that served a whole community in the interests of quarry capital was to ultimately ignite public anger, which led to locals organizing to physically prevent the lorries from using the road – at least among a section of the people of Pallichal endowed with a significant amount of social capital.

II

On 22 February, 2014, a group of local residents of Pallichal cutting across political lines formed a protest committee against illegal quarrying at Mookkunnimala, called the Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samiti (MSS). This was the first group of protestors who were determined not to enter into individual settlements with companies on limited issues. The MSS filed a complaint against the rampant overuse of the road by quarry vehicles to the Panchayat President on 7 March, 2014. Simultaneously, it approached the judiciary for relief. On 22 March 2014, the members of the MSS secured a High Court order stopping the lorry traffic on the Mookkunnimala-Arikkadamukku road. However, the ire was also against the panchayat's direct complicity in issuing licenses to these quarries. On 2 April 2014, the MSS organized a sit-in protest in front of the Panchayat office against the grant of licenses to five quarries for 2014-15 but also sought all remedies possible within the framework of the panchayati raj. Thus they demanded the conduct of a special Grama Sabha in the worst-affected Ward 20. In the notice issued by the MSS inviting people to attend this crucial meeting, the MSS declared that "Mookkunnimala in Ward 2 was being razed to the ground by some big capitalists." They pointed out that the quarrying was illegal and in violation of several laws, and was now affecting the well-being of local people – through the falling water levels in wells, the skin and respiratory diseases multiplying, the destruction of canals and rivulets, and the terrible rock-dust pollution. This assembly passed a resolution against quarrying in the panchayat on 7 May 2014. In retaliation, the residents of Ward 2, where the quarries are located, called for their own Special Grama Sabha. This was

organized by the supporters of the quarries, and this became a scene of tension; MSS supporters alleged that the Ward 2 Special Grama Sabha was deliberately limited to quarry supporters. This assembly passed a counter-resolution that declared invalid the resolution of the Ward 20 Grama Sabha; it evoked much protest among the MSS supporters. The Panchayat President and committee were clearly quarry-supporters, and in the Ward 2 special Grama Sabha, the former announced the renewal of quarry licenses and the continued use of the Arikkadamukku-Mookkunnimala road by their lorries despite vocal opposition in the hall. This assembly stressed the needs of the lorry-drivers and workers who depended on the quarries for their livelihood. Three days before, the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB) raided the Panchayat office on the MSS' complaint.

The battle-lines thus drawn, the MSS activists launched a series of protests in the following months and filed complaints against the panchayats and the quarry companies in a number of administrative and judicial forums. On 24 June 2014, the VACB reported illegal quarrying and questioned the genuineness of the documents submitted by the quarry companies to secure licenses. This was followed by a burst of protests by the MSS in which women and children were mobilized. The protestors were met with unnecessary force by the police and this was interpreted as a manifestation of the quarry capital's control over the police. The quarry supporters and workers also attacked the protestors while the police watched passively. The talks to resolve the complaints of obstruction of work (by the quarry companies) at the District Collector's office failed.

The MSS took the protests to the city – the Opposition Leader V S Achuthanandan inaugurated the protest march in front of the State Secretariat on 10 July. In their notices, the MSS pointed out that the Mookkunnimala exerted vital influence on the micro-climate of the whole district. A memorandum, prepared alongside, to the Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy, raised a whole host of issues including the renewal of quarry licenses by the panchayat ignoring people's opposition, the illegality of the quarrying and the Vigilance raids, the damages to the hill and surroundings, the upsetting of the micro-climate, the destruction of biodiversity, the degradation of political culture, the capture of the land market, and open violence by those allegedly in the payroll of the companies. It also mentioned the threat to the India Air Force's radar station at the topmost part of the hill from the quarries. It made several demands, including the complete revocation of all licenses to the quarries, and stern action against illegal rock-breaking, the repair of the damaged road and bridge, urgent medical help to those whose health had been affected, and, importantly, compensation of Rs 10 lakhs, family pension, and health fund for the quarry workers who would be affected by the closure of

the quarries, the amounts to be obtained from the companies (Notice dated 22 July 2014). In other words, the MSS acknowledged that some sections did derive a living from the quarry companies and sought to compensate their losses. While the protest caught media attention rapidly, the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption authorities made surprise checks at the Pallichal panchayat office during July-August 2014 and filed a case against the panchayat; the District Collector Biju Prabhakar visited the Mookkunnimala and submitted his report to the Kerala High Court in August 2014. Reacting to the Vigilance authorities case, the MSS demanded in its public notices that the thirty acres of government land encroached by the quarries should be retrieved and distributed among the landless soonest and declared that the MSS was willing to initiate the struggle for land as well (Notice dated 19 August 2014).

In the subsequent months, the MSS kept up pressure holding several educative events in the panchayat and organizing visits by leading political activists like V S Achuthanandan and BJP's O Rajagopal. The notices issued by the MSS in these events mentioned the boulders razed by the quarry companies by their names – Mailaadum Paara, Thonippaara, Pulippaara, Eduthuvachaanpaara—thereby claiming them back into public cultural memory. The depredations of the quarry companies are listed – they steal electricity, run vehicles without paying taxes, steal water from the Kerala Water Authority, loot ground water, and even build a road through the heart of the hill (Notice dated 22 October 2014). The MSS approached the Green Tribunal at Chennai against the panchayat; also, the reports from the Government's Performance and Audit Department, the Panchayat Deputy Director and the Special Secretary appointed by the government revealed massive corruption and illegality in the quarrying in Pallichal. The MSS protested in front of the Neyyatinkara Public Works Department office against the neglect of the road and water pipeline repairs, alleging that it was revenge against the locals who did not hand it over to the quarry companies for their use; they surrounded the Kattakada MLA N Sakthan and announced a march to his official residence; the houses of all 23 elected members of the Pallichal panchayat were to be gheraoed; the MSS began to take action to prevent further control of space by the quarry companies by protesting against one of them building an alternate road for their lorries through the other side, towards the area of Machel. Meanwhile, the supporters of the quarry companies had organized their own protest against the MSS, aided by some ward members, but this soon ended by November 2014.

This upping of the ante by the MSS provoked violence from the side of the panchayat. Members of the MSS who had gone to submit a petition to the panchayat office were attacked, arrested, and jailed on false charges for a week. In December 2014, the Vigilance authorities

opened criminal investigation into the operations of the quarry companies in Pallichal and in January 2015, the Director of the VACB requested the District Collector to close all quarry units to conduct a detailed investigation. This was apparently ignored; so also was the Land Revenue Commissioner's request to revert land misused by the quarry companies to the Land Bank. The MSS organized a Collectorate March in protest against the Collector's calling a meeting of precisely the officials who had granted the licenses. The pressure seems to have worked and the Collector issued orders to close down all quarry-crusher units. In February 2015, the High Court of Kerala heard the petition of one of the quarry companies against the Collector's order, and the Collector filed his statement against the quarry companies. In the same month, the Green Tribunal in Chennai also forbid the Kerala Pollution Control Board from allowing blasting and quarrying on the Mookkunnimala. Following further discussions, the Collector banned all quarrying there and made it clear that no permissions must be granted. The quarry companies, however, requested the panchayat to extend the licenses till 31 March 2015, and this was granted – which led to a slew of protests from the MSS at the Mining and Geology Department, and in the panchayat, by women and children. As the public notice issued by the MSS noted, there was full and complete agreement between elected members belonging to the left parties, the BJP, and the Congress on this (Notice dated 27 March 2015). In a shrewd move, the panchayat extended permission till 31 March, and then, two days before his retirement, the Secretary of the panchayat renewed their licenses further! In July 2015 it issued a stop-memo to the quarries, instead of following the proper procedure to reject applications, which the companies got vacated speedily going to court.

In the meantime, the MSS also struggled against everyday violence against its members by supporters of the quarry companies and even members of the CPM's youth organization the Democratic Youth Federation of India – ranging from foul language to physical threats and obscene body language against women (Notice, undated, c. 30 January 2015). It also had to issue public notices denying that it was collecting money (Notice dated 7 February 2015). An RTI activist, Vijitha, was declared a 'public nuisance' by the panchayat committee – and act which was widely condemned in the media – which was countered with protests by the MSS and with a counter-declaration of the panchayat committee as the 'public nuisance. The MSS also carried on protests, mobilizing school children who found it difficult to go to school, against the MLA for neglecting the road and pipeline repairs on the road through fasting before his residence on Onam day; important public figures and environmental activists including Medha Patkar and others kept visiting the panchayat and addressing

the public. The MSS kept up the pressure during the elections of 2015; and on the new panchayat committee – which appeared to be as committed to the quarry companies than before. Protests continued through 2016; pressures resulted in the initiation of the Total Station Survey ordered by the High Court of Kerala in July 2016 under heavy police deployment, despite which the quarry companies continued their blasting. The interim report of the Survey brought out damning information and the MSS called for the arrest of all culprits. The Survey was riddled with hurdles posed by the non-cooperation of the companies; the High Court extended its deadline by a month. Meanwhile, RTI applications revealed the fact that the quarry companies were enabled to continue quarrying simply because the panchayat did not respond to their license applications, which automatically allowed them to continue. As the MSS' public notice dated 6 November 2016 pointed out, according to the Panchayati Raj Act Sections 232 and 233, the panchayat should either grant or refuse the license in a period of thirty days; if such a response was not forthcoming, the applicant may take the request as granted. The MSS stepped up its accusation of bribery and corruption and pointed to the massive overuse of ground water by the quarries in its protests. The Total Station Survey was completed in December 2016 and it revealed huge losses for the government because of corruption besides the looting of natural resources and encroachment on government land of around 114 acres for illegal quarrying.

The MSS has continued its activities through 2017 and right into the present. The legal battle continues in the Kerala High Court. Meanwhile the Kerala government's policy has leaned progressively favouring quarry capital in ways that tend to forgive its violations, despite the widespread fear of the environmental consequences of quarrying after the Great Floods of 2018. In 2020, the state government argued against the National Green Tribunal's order to maintain a distance of 200 metres between quarries and human habitations, and the High Court quashed the order, re-affirming the distance of just 50 metres. While the debate on whether quarries were the major reason for the massive landslides in Kerala's hilly areas in 2018 and 2019 is still inconclusive, scientists argue that even if quarrying may not have been the primary reason, it was an important contextual condition. The climate-change induced heavy rain, combined with the distortion of the landscape because of quarrying can have aggravating effects difficult to predict, they point out.

Though this persistent struggle of the MSS received great media publicity and support, and their struggle produced a strong critical discourse against illegal quarrying and the environmental consequences of the reckless extraction of natural resources in general, their success was strictly limited. The larger quarries sailed through

the storm and continue to blast and quarry granite even though they do not use the Mookkunnimala- Arikkadamukku road that frequently. During the pandemic –through which we continued our interviewing, activists frequently worried about the lorries making a comeback through their road. Meanwhile, many of the quarry supporters who were extremely poor and powerless once, are now buoyed by quarry capital and not shy of issuing threats of violence. While they have become more and more capable of fighting cases and dealing with the police with the ample support they receive from the quarry companies, the MSS activists, who have no such source of financial support tend to suffer more. “The pandemic makes it harder for us to organize road blockades,” remarked a leader of the MSS, “so some lorries are now defying the orders.” But more important was a sense of disappointment with the seeming inefficacy of persistent democratic struggles – “We have struggled so much, there are so many cases filed but the quarry companies against us, it is mind-boggling... people will tire for sure and be afraid... who has the time and resources to keep going. Still, if the lorries come back down this road and the blasting and extraction continue this way, it will become impossible for not just us, but for anyone here, to live here, in just a few years. That means that people who stay back in their comfort-zone cannot stay there for long; they will be forced to come out and join us. That is because this is becoming more and more a struggle for our very existence. No one will be able to stay back, soon.”

III

So what, then, lies ahead for the MSS and the residents of the Pallichal panchayat? What cautionary tale emerges from the story of this battle?

Clearly, this is no story of the ultimate triumph of goodness; indeed, it appears that illegality has emerged triumphant, bolstered in every possible way by most arms of the state and held up by mainstream politics in general. It is no doubt a sad tale of how the operations of predatory capital can exacerbate deep social divisions in the local space and divide even families, destroying the proudest claim the PDRP made about the panchayat: the social amity there. The story of the MSS, however, is not of simple and sad failure. Rather, it reveals how consistent opposition, however buffeted by violence and threats of the powerful, may survive all the onslaughts and may slow down the pace of predatory capital. Yet the research questions that emerge from this story are urgent indeed: how, under what conditions, has predatory capital gained such a lot of ground in a panchayat with a history of considerable participation in the local-level development planning exercises of the 1990s? What are its dimensions, what explains its hold on state-level policy and politics? Such inquiry may throw greater light

on both the way ahead in Pallichal, and on the effects of the nearly-ubiquitous presence of capital in rural Kerala on local democracy.

What lies ahead?

The Disaster Management Plan of the Pallichal Panchayat 2020-21 admits that climate change is a stark reality. Table 2.1 of the Plan acknowledges that temperatures have risen, while humidity, the wind, and rainfall in all seasons have declines in the present. Table 2.2 admits the prospect of drought to be high and that the ground water table has fallen. Table 2.3 mentions that 43 ponds spread over 19 wards now dry up in drought; importantly, it admits that the hilly area – which it explicitly mentions as Mookkunnimala – is an area vulnerable to soil erosion and landslide, though this is not consistently mentioned (for example, in Table 2.10, where Mookkunnimala is mentioned to be vulnerable to wild fires and danger from quarry craters filled with water). Table 2.4 discloses that all water bodies – ponds, canals, channels, and wells – are drying up rapidly and there is severe drinking water shortage in all parts of the panchayats.

Meanwhile, the Panchayat at Pallichal continues to encourage quarrying, paying no heed to local fears. The quarry companies, in their applications, continue to promise eco-restoration of the areas they quarry, despite the fact that the promise has not been taken up anywhere, hitherto. The applications for environmental clearance filed by major quarry companies include promises of Corporate Social Responsibility. For example, the application filed in 2020 by a major quarrying company at Mookkunnimala, promises drinking water through the local self-government, solar panels for the hospital and school for a pittance of Rs 5 lakhs in five years as 'corporate environmental responsibility' and 'corporate social responsibility' to be fulfilled through the local self-government. The application for environmental clearance filed in May 2020 by another leading quarry owner at Pallichal promises CER and CSR of a princely sum of Rs 2 lakhs, for a solar street light and two solar water heaters, which the local self-government would be privileged to identify, avenue plantations in select locations and skill development training for 'selected ladies in the Grama Panchayat'. In each case, the local self-government is reduced to a receiver of pittance.

In other words, even as the local self-government's own disaster management plan of 2020 does acknowledge the dangers of landslides and from water-filled quarry craters, even if admits to grave crisis in water and palpable change in climate, it appears completely craven, powerless, to engage with quarry capital on equal terms. The appallingly small amounts that the companies offer as 'Corporate Social Responsibility' and 'Corporate Environmental Responsibility' to the

local self-government only re-confirm the latter's powerlessness in the eyes of resource predators. The only force that offers resistance to them here is the MSS – a civil society that has managed to cut across political lines, with Marxists and Hindutva adherents, along with proponents of radical caste equality, coming together. Indeed, they prove that the Marxist leader E M S Namboodiripad's hopes about democratic decentralization – that it would provide a local-level ground upon which adherents of different political parties could come together setting aside their partisan differences to work for the common good of the local community – might indeed be possible.

There is, however, so much tragic irony. On the one hand, this hope has borne fruit outside the institutional framework of the panchayati raj, in an independent civil society that exposes its weaknesses. On the other hand, the 'unity' of the elected members of the panchayat committee – is indeed beyond ideologies and party lines. Only that it has little to do with the common good and long-term survival of the people and the place. ■



S.Mohanakumar

CRONYISM IN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

A Case Study of Pallichal Gram Panchayat in Kerala

Introduction

Cronyism, crony capitalism or capitalism-II has figured prominently in academia with the Asian Economic Crisis in the second half of 1990s. Cronyism or crony capitalism denotes a system of governance in which the profitability of private entrepreneurs and business concerns in a market economy is dependent on political connections. It is made possible through building networks with political leaderships, government officials and judiciary. The capital weaves tacit agreements for sharing supernormal profit earned from the business, which would have otherwise been not possible. Cronyism takes different forms and it is contingent on the nature of the deal the business demands. More often than not, cronyism is practiced by distributing legal permits, licenses, government subsidies, grants, tax concessions and other favours to favoured individuals, groups or business concerns and sole criteria is the principle of exclusion of those who are not in the network knot. The crony capitalism has become a catch phrase to describe governmental decisions favouring self-serving groups and individuals. Crony capitalism has been sufficiently explored and theorised in the context of developed countries. The narratives have dealt upon different facets and modus vivendi of cronyism such as rent seeking (Bhagavati, 1982; McChesney, 1997; Hobcombe, 2013;). Capture of Regulatory System (Stigler, 1971; Tullock, 1975; Kruger 1995) and Interest group Politics (Olson, 1982; Daron, 1995). It may also be noted that substantial literature on different facets of cronyism have been produced in the Indian context, especially during the neo-liberal

economic policies in India. Rajsekhar (October 2020) in a seminal article aptly titled *Capital bows before the state* explains nefarious ways in which rent-seeking character of the capital parked in the natural resources sector hobnobs with the state apparatus and the role of political leadership in managing affairs on behalf of the such capital. Rajasekhar quotes observations made by Prem Shankar Jha in an essay *Where Indian Democracy Went Wrong*, "Political parties need funds to maintain cadre and campaign in elections. In India, given the large sums of money needed for both purposes- and in the absence of state funding-parties depend on funding networks of companies and case class networks. Some of these networks are so influential that dictate terms to elected government" (Rajsekhar, 2020). The observation assumes special significance in the context of the present study as local units of major political parties, cutting across its ideological moorings, use illegal activity of granite mining or sand mining as potential sources of fund collection for political activity+. Mine owners, who are engaged in the exploration of natural resources at the cost of the living standard and livelihood of the natives, are openly promoted and encouraged. It often happens that the legal advisors of miners advise the elected representatives and elected body or Gram Panchayat Committee about legal ways of circumventing rules and regulations. The domination of such rent-seeking capital over the elected body of a local government could be more visible and apparent as compared to higher levels of the government. It needs to be underlined that localised operation of rent-seeking capital enjoys the advantage that its illegality seldom catches macro dimensions at the state or national level unless and until the over exploration culminates into any natural calamity in the locale such landslide with substantial causalities. Until then, local protests are confined to Gram Panchayat level and the political leaders in unison do scuffle and settle such localised protests often buying a few who spear head the local struggle.

At the outset, it needs to be made clear that the study is primarily focussed on the impacts of granite mining on a particular area in a relatively small geographical entity. The empirical findings are juxtaposed against the broad contours of the different theoretical postulates of cronyism. In other words, the discussion that follows do not intend to explore newer avenues of the crony capitalism as a type of capital engaged in natural resource exploration, but corroboration of the nexus between the administrative apparatus at the local government level including political parties and the rent-seeking capital engaged in granite mining.

Though cronyism has taken deep roots and has become an integral part of policy formation in India, yet the operational dynamics of its myriad forms have not received focussed scholarly examination.

The centrality of crony capitalism is its mutual designed and tacitly integrated system through which private capital shares part of the profit that they accumulate through favours from political leadership, bureaucracy and judiciary have been rather widely in the award of permits for exploration and mining of natural resources have attracted media attention and have given birth to political turmoil at the national and sub-national level. The cronyism is networked more directly and overtly as the formation of cronyism is more confined to local governments with localised capital. The agents and players of the self-serving network indulge in more direction action for the implementation of the designed project and profit sharing. Further, cronyism at lower tier of the government is often networked through political connections coordinated by local agents of capital for circumventing regulations. The present study is an attempt to understand the modus vivendi of crony capitalism at lowest tier of the government with a case study of Pallichal Gram Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala. The Gram Panchayat has attracted media attention for its regulatory capture and formation of interest group for effective execution of the project. Cronyism and its offshoots are analysed for Pallichal Gram Panchayat wherein Mookkunnimala is situated. Quarrying, granite processing, Manufacture of M-sand and ready mix are major activities of concern at the hills chain.

The discussion of crony capitalism at Pallichal Gram Panchayat is organised in 7 sections. In section 1, a brief review of different theoretical postulates of crony capitalism and its relevance in Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs), are discussed. Section 2 introduces the topography of Mookkunnimala hill chain in Pallichal Gram Panchayat and Section 3 elaborates the collusive agreements of cronies and the violation of important provisions pertained to the granting of permits for quarrying and related activities in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act -1994. The channels through cronyism capture and turn the regulations to their favour with the support of elected representatives, judiciary and officials in the Pallichal Gram Panchayat are discussed in Section 4.. Sampling procedure and locale of the study are described in Section 5. The data elicited from households living in and around the quarrying sites at Mookkunnimala is analysed in Section 6 and the findings of the study are summarised in Section 7.

Section 1

Crony Capitalism and Local Governments

As described elsewhere, natural resource is one of the focussed areas of concentration of crony capitalism. Under cronyism, capital shares part

of the profit that they grab through favours for it's mutually designed and tacitly planted system of operation. A word is in order in this context about the importance of natural resources and how does its meaning differ for people of different class and social groups for their life and livelihood. The base of human survival is the natural resources such as land, air and water. The capacity of humanity to transform the surroundings to enhance quality of life has phenomenally developed in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale in the long evolutionary process of human race on this planet. However, the advancement in science and technology has been heedlessly applied on nature in iniquitous ways and it has caused incalculable harm to environment and future generation of human being. The unscrupulous exploitation of natural resources propelled by the logic of the market and its aggrandisement has left gross deficiencies that are harmful to physical, mental and social health in the living and working environments of humans both in rural and urban spheres of human living. In rural India, large number of people live on the natural environment of their own locality and meet a part of the material needs within the ecosystem who are termed as ecosystem people. The ecosystem provides the base for their life and livelihood in contrast to biosphere people who have acquired the economic and political power to command resources to meet their material needs from anywhere in the world. Boundless exploitation of natural resources is an inevitable outcome of the contradiction developed between people in the ecosystem and biosphere and what experience in third world countries is the manifestation of the contradiction vouchsafed by the pursuit of reckless chase to catch a higher growth in Gross Value Added (GVA). Neither do the people in the biosphere are safe from the adverse consequences of the destruction of natural resources as it gets reflected by way of rebound of food articles (Kotari and Patel, 2006:10). In this context that the National Human Rights Commission in its report on Environment and Human Rights asserted

Life, livelihood, culture and society, are fundamental aspects of human existence-hence their maintenance and enhancement is a fundamental human right. Destruction of environment and thereby of the natural resources, is therefore, a violation or leads to the violation of human rights-directly by undermining the above aspects of human existence or indirectly leading to other violation of human rights, for example through social disruption, conflicts and even war.... The manifestation of such violations present themselves through a loss of access to clean air and water, loss of access to productive land; loss of energy sources and biomass, loss of food and health security; social and economic marginalisation; and physical displacement (Kothari and Patel, 2006:10).

The modern concept of development, especially after the onset of neoliberal regime has set economic growth and infrastructure development, has set all concerns of environment, life and livelihood of ecosystem people much below the avowed goal of propelling economic growth and development. It is enshrined in the concept of development that it allows the privileged sections (constituent parts of cronies) in the society (biosphere people) to appropriate natural resources of the resource-dependent people. The definition of environment as a basic human right encompasses ecological right of other species to co-exist on the mother earth. The biodiversity or biological diversity is comprised of millions of species and microorganisms as human and the biodiversity is an integral part of daily lives and livelihoods upon which people and their nations depend for livelihood (Kothari and Patel, 2006).

Natural resource sector is one of the most favoured areas of capital for cronyism. The acts of cronies are put together in close liaison with political leadership, bureaucracy and judiciary, which in turn provides an enabling environment for the capital.. For the capital parked in the natural resource sector, permission is granted to raze hills to the bottom at the livelihood cost of those in the political periphery (Midgal et al., 1994). In this context, Kohli distinguishes powerlessness, Centralising Power and Developmental Power (Kohli, 1994). The incapability of the political leadership to translate its election manifesto into action is referred to as powerlessness in democracy while political power help to exercise absolute control over their decision. It is the case of Centralising Power (*ibid*). Conversely, *Developmental Power* implies the capacity of the political leadership to take decisions and carry them through with a defined objective of altering social agents and actors (*ibid*). The process of centralising Power excludes lower and second rank political elites from decision making process and it, in turn, enables the political elites in higher echelon to make decisions for the capital. It appears to be pertinent in this context to ask the following: how local elites are compensated? why they favour the higher ones? And how are they accommodated?

Cronyism is a method of capital accumulation. Instead of depending solely on productive capital and labour for surplus appropriation, cronyism makes use of nexus that they form with the decision making authorities to grab public fund. Actors in the nexus evolve strategies, which disempower the elected representatives by sharing profits brought in by the implicit contractual agreement or cronyism. The cronyism is facilitated by centri-petal and centri-fugal forces that come together and form nexus. Crony capitalism makes use of public institutions and government policies for the benefit of a group or for a few, who have established long term network for mutual benefits.

Cronyism circumvents government rules and regulations and breed political entrepreneurship while stifling transparency and social accountability of public institutions (Khatri, 2016:3).

Cronyism may appear to be synonymous with nepotism, corruption and *guanxi* (*economic gains*). But it is only a subset of corruption. Corruption encompasses a wide array of short-term and long-term agreements to influence peddlers in the state apparatus for a common goal of thwarting legal structures for economic gains. Cronyism is an arrangement between parties with a defined formula for sharing the outcome of the agreement and involves a complex, indirect and mutually reinforcing social exchange. Cronyism, on the contrary, often takes forms such as instrumental cronyism and relational cronyism (Khatri and Ojha, 2016). Instrumental cronyism is a short-term arrangement for a specific task (eg. Granting quarrying license for a particular year at Mookkunnimala hill range). It is motivated by self-interest for a mutual sharing of outcome among cronies. Relational cronyism, on the other hand, is established with roots in loyalty and long-term networks and inter-personal relationships. Instrumental and relational cronyism is often separated with a thin layer and, often, a judicious mix of different types of cronyism could be observed in practice. Shared favours under relational cronyism vary across actors in the relational network defined in terms of the capacity of its members to influence the public policy. The influence of power could be political, social and financial.

Irrespective of the type and nature of cronyism, roots of cronyism are related to the degree of political power and the authority rests with layer of the government. Crony capitalism has taken deep roots in LSGIs, especially after the emergence of third generation of LSGIs across states in India in the 1990s. It is perceived to be embedded in the basic premise of provisions in the governance of Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs). During the last two decades, cronyism has created a disharmony and dissonance between LSGIs and people, and the numerous forms of local protests against such unholy alliance of political leadership, bureaucracy and capital engaged locally have driven people to vehement protests to resist the attack on their human rights. A common characteristic feature of such localised protests against cronyism is that such resistance are more often short-lived and put down heavily by the coordinated acts of the state apparatus. It is because the political leadership is involved in the network and employs other arms of the state to cow down such micro movements. However, it needs to be admitted that the enactment of Panchayat Raj Act and Nagarapallika Acts in 1992 endowed the LSGIs across states with financial and administrative autonomy, *albeit*, its degree and devolution varied from state to state. As administrative power

and decision making authority are rest with the local government, interpretation of rules and the enforcement regulations became handy for the local political leaderships. Cronyism and state patronage get widened and deepened as the network is extended deeper into the everyday life of people. However, such cronyism driven patronages are justified by the awakened citizenry in as much as they are given to believe that people in authoritative positions are empowered to coagulate such nexus formations on behalf of the localised capital at large (Rai, 2016). As the local government prevails over the localised resistance of people, who are less connected with top echelons, they are rendered a hapless lot to undertake such popular movements of resistance irreversibly. At this point of flex, participatory democracy fails and marks the success of cronyism in dis-empowering constitutionally provisioned institutions such as Village Council (Gram Sabha) and other institutions of participatory democracy under the purview of LSGIs. The LSGIs comprising elected representatives and officials assume the role of paid employees of crony capital only to pass the resolution unanimously or find ways to circumvent the regulations on behalf of the network.

The concept of crony capitalism has been explained in different context under rent seeking behaviour of capital and its urge to seek rent turns the productive capital into an unproductive one. The capital expended on rent seeking or buying favours amounts to unproductive activity of capital (Bhagavati, 1982). The studies on rent seeking relate that firms receive favours from cronyism in the form of licenses for imports and placing quota restrictions to exclude rivals from the market (Kruger, 1974). Hobcombe (2013) observed that favours from the government is an incentive for productive capital to divert their activity from competitive and cost minimising production technique to more incentive-based production arena. In other words, favours enable the recipient to have more protection from competitors in the market. Firms reciprocates the favour by supporting political leadership. Firms make use of the network and their connections with political leadership and in the government to get rid of with statutory regulations that the non-rent seekers are bounded with. The government regulations on business have a direct bearing on the cost of production and supply price of the commodity, which the non-rent seekers have to bear with. As compared to non-rent seeking productive capital, rent-seekers enjoys a competitive edge to control the market and it helps them outprice the non-rent seekers (McChesney, 1997). Regulatory capture theory of crony capitalism asserts that the government regulations introduced for public interest are captured and circumvented by the firms with the support of cronies in the government. For capturing regulations, capital forms a concentrated interest group for the furtherance of its interest. Neither the awakened

citizenry nor does the aware of section of the society is fully informed about the labyrinth structure of government regulations. It does work to the advantage of the regulatory capture of firms, who spend for the formation of the concentrated interest group (Stigler, 1971). Business concerns in the regulatory capture mechanism are better informed about government regulations and over the years the regulatory capture group graduates to concentrated group which empowers them to make own regulations and make the government approve and notify it as government regulations. Regulations tend to favour the regulated than the general public and it enables the regulated to assume the role of regulators. This particular phase of transition in regulatory capture termed it as 'transitional gain traps' (Tullock, 1975). The benefits from regulatory capture are converted into value of assets and gradually it adds onto normal profit. It rather compels the regulated to keep paying for maintaining the regulations. Interest groups get established in the political decision making process while facilitating cronies to firm up their grip through political connections rather than productivity enhancing measures. As the political and administrative system develop, the influence of the interest group also deepens. Olson (1982) attributes a negative association between economic growth and degree of influence of interest group in political leadership. Excessive influence of interest group in politics risk productive efficiency and reverse economic progress while the democratic content in the decision making process is largely undermined. In social systems where cronyism establishes profound influence over its legal structures, the interest group place political entrepreneurship in the power elite and saps normal course of development of productive gains of the society at large. Further, it drives the entire system to the directions that rent seeking capital is in need of. This is because the resource flows more towards professions such as law and business administration than productivity augmenting courses such as engineering (Daron, 19095). The relationship between political interest groups and those in government entails that the profitability of the interest group is contingent upon the special-interest benefits offered to them through political connections.

It has also been argued that cronyism amounts to a variant of primitive accumulation wherein natural resource is made available to private capital at a notional price much below its market value. The classic case of primitive accumulation does not fit into the context of cronyism as market comes into play in fixing fees or rent for the use of natural resource by private capital. A little more widened coverage may represent cronyism (capitalism-II as opposed to capitalism-1). Under Capitalism-II (Cronyism), operational rights of natural resources or common property resources are transferred to players in the market for a super-normal profit, but unlike Capitalism-I, part of the profit is

shared among cronies (Byre, 2005). The defining characteristics of primitive accumulation is forceful separation of the means of production from its petty capital owners (peasants) and its transfer to potential capitalists. In this case, Marx distinguishes between colonial primitive accumulation and domestic primitive accumulation (*ibid*). In a narrow sense, cronyism draws parallel with domestic primitive accumulation. If so, it is worth exploring the transfer of natural resource under non-market ways by capturing the regulatory system by forming Interest Group.

The dynamics of formation and working of cronyism, sharing of benefits and its conduct in the democratisation process at national and to an extent, sub-national level has been more or less explored in the Indian context. Engagement of localised capital, its groupings with different players in local polity, bureaucracy and their extension to state and national level political elites after the emergence of third generation of LSGs in the 1990s calls for a detailed analysis. In the recent past, cronyism has assumed a crucial position in the governance of LSGs in the state of Kerala, by virtue of its vast area under the Western Ghats hills range. Formation of cronyism, involvement and engagement of different actors, its facilitators and the role of capital needs to be probed from the perspective of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment. Given the setting, the study examines myriad forms and mode of functioning of cronyism in LSGs and the process of participatory democracy with respect to natural resource endowment in the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayats. It is also examined why the local government neglects the outcry of people who are primary victims of the granite quarrying and at whose cost the interest of the localised capital is protected by weaving together executive and judiciary in the process. A closer perusal of issuance of quarrying permits at Mookkunnimala hill chain at Pallichal Gram Panchayat, intervention of local political leadership in quelling the popular movements against quarrying in the area of the study, weakening of participatory democracy are connected to formation of interest groups and regulatory capture mechanism find relevant.

Section 2

2.1. Topography and Ecology of Mookkunnimala Hills Chain

Mookkunnimala is situated approximately 2.5 KM towards south west of Pravachambalam, the township at Pallichal Gram Panchayat in the National Highway 66 in Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala. The hill chain known as Mookkunnimala is a clutch of three adjoint hills but separated by a gap of notches between its crests. The hill



chain is contiguous and an integral part of Western Ghats but with a height of 400 feet (122 meters) from the sea level and spread over 1.5 square KM. Although the Mookkunnimala hill chain is very much part of the Western Ghats as defined by the WGEEP of 2011, Pallichal Gram Panchayat has not been included in the list of Gram Panchayat included from Thiruvananthapuram district in the WGEEP of 2011.¹ However, Western Ghats Development Programme initiated in 1974-75 across 171 talukas, of which 32 talukas are included from Kerala, Pallichal Grama Panchayat has also been part of the programme. *Moo-kkунnu* in local dialect means three-hills and the hill chain range performs important ecological functions as the range is a habitat of terrestrial biodiversity and endemic species. For Thiruvananthapuram district, *Mookkunnimala* plays an important ecological function as the moisture laden winds from Arabian sea meet the hill chain, they get pushed up and as they climb, winds cool and the moisture condenses and precipitate. It results in a rainfall in the district between



250 cm and 400 cm per annum. Further, 12 important streams/tributaries of *Karamana* river originate from Mookkunnimala hill chain.² The *Karamana* river is the major source of drinking water supply to the city of Thiruvananthapuram. The hill range is a precious stock of granites and since the early 1990s, mechanised granite mining has been permitted in Mookkunnimala. The quarries at Mookkunnimala supplies M-sand and broken granite stones to the construction sector in Thiruvananthapuram district, and it has resulted in razing the hills to the bottom. Quarry owners from other districts have parked their capital at Mookkunnimala and carryout quarrying and manufacture M-sand (M-sand) and other aggregates for the construction sector. It has been alleged that government officials and elected representatives of Pallichal Gram Panchayat by circumventing rules and regulations. Further, protest from residents, particularly in and around the Mookkunnimala hill chain receive little attention from local political leaderships and officials responsible for inspection of quarrying.

Although there exists divergent and contrasting view points on 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1992, the constitutional amendments have given birth to third generation of LSGs in the first half of 1990s. Kerala passed its Kerala Panchayat Raj and Kerala Municipality Acts in 1994. The delegation or decentralisation of power *per se* does not ensure democratic decentralisation but relegate LSGs to an agent of the former, unless the administrative decentralisation is effectively integrated and packaged with financial and political decentralisation (Goel and Rajneesh, 2009; Ahmad, 2003). Unlike in many other states in the country, by resolving to devolve 35% to 40% of plan fund to LSGs, Kerala introduced democratic decentralisation with the commencement of 9th Five Year Plan in 1996-97. Alongside, transferred authority, functions and finance to the lower tier, enabling the latter to perform its political, economic and administrative responsibilities independently. To a great extent, it needs to be mentioned that provisions in the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 has been made effectively used by regulatory captures and rent seekers by forming nexus of different types and forms. Environmental protection and mining related activities are one of the contested provisions under the prerogative of the LSGs and its overt and covert violation with the connivance of different players at the state and central governments have given rise to a series of debates, public litigation, and court verdicts questioning the autonomy and power of LSGs as constitutional entities.

2.2.Quarrying Permits under Kerala Panchayat Raj Act and Regulatory Capture

Gram Sabha /Ward Sabha (Village Council and Municipal Ward Council) are the constituently provisioned forum for people to ensure participation in democracy and exercise their democratic rights under Kerala Panchayat Raj Act (KPRA) and Kerala Municipality Act (KMA) 1994. There exists a linear association between strengthening democratic decentralisation and institutionalisation of Gram Sabha as integral part of the democratisation process at the grass root level. Strengthening Gram Sabha for localised action demands autonomy, authority, functions, functionaries and finance to local governments, and it goes against Centralising Power. The KPRA, 1994 has put in place that any industrially hazardous activity in the geographical boundary of Gram Panchayat (GP) needs to be cleared by the members of the Gram Sabha of the constituency. It is the responsibility of officials and elected body of the GP to ensure that there is no such protests or discontents among the people in the locality before the permission is granted for such quarrying activities (KPRA, 1994). Articles 232 & 233 are pertained to the provisions of issuing permits for quarrying and the Article 236 (3) explains the general conditions, which provides the ample scope for cronyism at the local level.

"232. Purpose for which places may not be used without a license. - (1) The village panchayat may notify that no place in the Panchayat area shall be used for any of the purposes specified in the rules made in this behalf being purposes which in the opinion of Government, are likely to be offensive or dangerous to human life or health or property, without a license issued by the (Secretary)"...... (KPR, 1994)

The article 232 of the KPR 1994 states that the any trade and factories which are dangerous to human life or health or property can be established only with a prior license issued by the Secretary of the Gram Panchayat (GP) only after it is cleared by the GP Committee of elected representatives. It in turn means that if any such activity takes place without license, it is the responsibility of the Secretary to ensure that such activity is banned the persons responsible are brought to book. There are police vigilance report that the quarrying at Mookkunnimala are illegal and more than Rs 300 crore has been lost to the government in terms of royalty and other taxes because of the illegal mining.³

"233. Permission for the construction of factories and the installation of machinery - No person shall, without the permission of the village panchayat.... (a) construct or establish any factory..... An application for permission under sub-section (1) shall be submitted to the village panchayat addressed to the Secretary in such form and with such details as prescribed. (3) The secretary shall, as soon as may be after the receipt of the application, enquire and report to the village panchayat as to whether the establishment of the factory, workshop or workplace or other installation of machinery or manufacturing plant for which permission is applied for is objectionable by reason of density of population in the neighbourhood and the possibility to cause nuisance or pollution and the village panchayat after having considered the application and the reports of the secretary, and of such other authorities as specified in sub-section" (4) may as expeditiously as possible, at any rate within sixty days, - (a) grant the permission either absolutely or subject to such conditions as it thinks fit to impose; or (b) refuse the permission for the reasons to be recorded" (KPR, 1994).

"236 (3) Save as aforesaid, if orders on an application for any such licence or permission are not communicated to the applicant within thirty days or such longer period as may be prescribed in any class of cases after the receipt of the application by the Secretary the application shall be deemed to have been allowed for the period, if any for which it would have been ordinarily allowed and subject to the law, rules and bye-laws and all conditions ordinarily imposed" (*ibid*).

The article 233 of the KPR-1994 is more specific about it. It asserts that the Secretary of the GP should enquire and report to the village panchayat as to whether the establishment is objectionable by reasons of density of population in the neighbourhood and the possibility to causing pollution of any sort to the people to Panchayat Committee and within sixty days of the submission of application, the decision of the committee should be communicated to the applicant.

However, Article 236 (3) of KPRA-1994 asserts that if the authority fails to intimate the applicant the response of the Gram Panchayat's decision on the application within 30 days of the submission of the same, it is deemed as granted license. At the Gram Panchayat level, cronies capture the regulation by forming Interest Group and seek rent under the provisions of the clause of sixty days. The Gram Panchayat Secretary could not issue license for quarrying at Mookkunnimala as there has already been several complaints registered by the people in the neighbourhood for a fairly long time. Since all these documents are self-explanatory, it would amount to gross violation of the act and the licences can be challenged in the court. The cronies get rid of with the complaints from people by a nefarious act of connivance.

For the year 2017-18, nine quarry owners submitted application for license for granite quarrying, manufacture of M-sand and ready-mix plants at Mookkunnimala. The applications were considered by the Gram Panchayat Committee convened on 30th December 2017 for quarry license as agenda item no.30 and left the agenda without any decision. It was safe for the Secretary and the Pallichal Gram Panchayat not to take any decision on the matter as there had already been several complaints against air pollution, water contamination and quarry-dust borne diseases and life threat due to broken rock pieces from unscientific blasting in quarries registered by neighbourhoods at the GP, station police office and revenue department of Kerala government. As the Article 233 of KPRA 1994 demands that the Secretary of the Gram Panchayat has to submit a report about the dangerous trade and activity on which the Gram Panchayat Committee recommends licences to quarries. In this case, complains of people against the quarrying and related activities have already been registered with the GP and, therefore, the report of the Secretary of the GP on protest by people in the neighbourhood, if any, to be presented to the GP Committee not required. If licenses for quarrying are granted, it would be a blatant violation of 232 and 233 of the article of KPRA-1994 and the Gram Panchayat Committee feared that protesters organised under *Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi* (MSSS) -Committee for Protection of Mookkunnimala hill chains, might take it up and it would adversely affect the political image of elected representative and further Secretary of the Gram Panachayat has

already been booked by the vigilance department of Kerala Police for cases related to irregularities in issuing license to quarries and related trade at Mookkunnimala. In order to allow the quarry owners to have the benefit of not having responded to the application after 30 days on submission of application, the Gram Panchayat Committee purposely delayed the response and the quarry owners received a favourable verdict from the high court. The Gram Panchayat Committee convened on 16th January 2018, discussed the matter of court verdict on quarry license. The Committee decision on the matter reads as:

“It was decided to seek advice from the advocate to file counter appeal against the court verdict of directing the Gram Panchayat to issuance license to quarries at Mookkunnimala” (Gram Panchayat Committee Minutes dated 06.01.2018, Agenda item no.35). The Gram Panchayat took up the matter of issuance of quarry licence after six months on 21st July 2018. The decision of the Gram Panchayat Committee reads as:

“The Gram Panchayat Committee discussed the matter of the court verdict to issue deemed license to all applicants for quarries and ready-mix units at Mookkunnimala within 14 days because the GP has failed to act on the applications on time. The advocate of Gram Panchayat failed to present the case of the Gram Panchayat convincing to the High Court. The time granted to the Gram Panchayat for appeal to the High Court has also been ended. It is not appropriate for the GP not to implement the court order. Even if the license is not issued by the Gram Panchayat, the quarry owners will start their quarrying on the basis of the High court order, which would amount to a heavy loss to the Gram Panchayat if it does not issue license to quarry owners. Moreover, if the Gram Panchayat does not issue license, it would amount to contempt of court. The committee unanimously decided to entrust the Secretary to issue license to all applicants for quarrying and related activities at Mookkunnimala immediately” (Minutes of the Pallichal Gram Panchayat Committee, 21-07-2018, Agenda item no. 6).⁴

The committee minutes are very clear how the elected representatives, officials (Secretary), judiciary and the quarry capital join together for seeking rent, capture regulation by forming interest group. It may also be noted that the quarry owners approach the court as a group called quarry owners federation.

2.3. Weakened Gram Sabha (village Council) and Participatory Democracy:

There has been a substantial amount of research on different components of crony capitalism, which converge on the conclusion that cronyism weakens democracy and participation of people in the decision-making process of the government. People’s participation

is relatively more pronounced in LSGIs and the village council is the pillar of democracy at the grass root level, which 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments have been built upon. The constitutional constraints under which democratically elected representatives and institutions render little discretionary powers to authorities. The more the democratic institutions adhere to constitutional constraints, democracies become more productive (Holcombe, 2013:554).

Gram Sabha or village council is the constitutionally empowered body in the KPRA-1994 to ensure participatory democracy in LSGIs. Gram Sabha is defined as "All persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of a village panchayat shall be deemed to be constituted as Grama Sabha of such village" (KPRA-1994; 3(3)). The democratic power and authority of the Gram Sabha is made amply unambiguous in the said Acts reads as:

"The village panchayat shall place before the Grama Sabha a report relating to the developmental programmes relating to the constituency during the previous year and these that are proposed to be undertaken during the current year, and the expenditure therefore, the annual statement of accounts and the administration report of the preceding year. If in any circumstances, any decision of the grama sabha could not be implemented, the president shall report the reason therefore, before the Grama Sabha" (KPRA-1994: 3(6)).

Besides the general-purpose Gram Sabha, the KPRA-1994, Article 3(3) provides for convening of Special Gram Sabha Meeting with a single agenda to discuss any grave issue that the voters of the village constituency deem it urgent and calls for immediate redress by the Village Panchayat. Making use of the provision in the Act, voters of Mookkunnimala ward requested a Special Gram Sabha Meeting to discuss the harmful impacts of quarrying activities in the area and the meeting was convened on 15th May 2014.

Special Gram Sabha meetings were convened to present grievances of people living in and around quarrying sites at Mookkunnimala against unscrupulous exploitation of ground water for M-sand units, ecological, environmental hazards of reckless and unregulated quarrying in the hills for the last 15 years, and quarrying dust-borne diseases that people are succumbed to due to pollution from quarry and other related hazardous factories at Mookkunnimala. As per the KPRA-1994, SGSM is convened with the single agenda. The elected representative of the Mookkunnimala presented the single agenda as follows: "The quarrying at Mookkunnimala should be continued" and it goes against the grain of the voters present in the SGSM. The SPGSM was convened on behalf of quarry managers and spearheaded by the elected representative, who is a representative of BJP and not a member of

the ruling front (United Democratic Front-led by Congress-I). In the Gram Panchayat, BJP is considered to be the political opponent of the UDF. More than 600 voters of the Gram Panchayat constituency (Gram Panchayat ward no.2) attended the Special Gram Sabha Meeting (SGSM).⁵

Prior to the SGSM in ward no.2, a SGSM was held in ward no 20 wherein part of the Mookkunnimala hills chain are situated, 400 voters participated and passed unanimously the resolution that all quarrying and related factories and activities at Mookkunnimala be immediately stopped and all licenses issued by the Gram Panchayat be cancelled. Although Gram Panchayat President, elected representative of the village constituency and officials were present in the SGSM, the Gram Panchayat Committee did not act upon the decision at all. It is a gross violation of the KPRA-1994. The overwhelming participation of 600 members in the Mookkkunnimala ward SGSM was partly mobilised by quarry owners with the active support and patronage of the elected representative of the village constituency, Gram Panchayat Committee and officials. Out of 600 participants, a sizable proportion of voters were women. The Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi (MSSS) activists, who are voters of the ward number 2 of the GP ward were present in SGSM.

As quarry owners, elected representatives of the GP and officials planned, a battalion of police and a gang of goons of quarry owners were stationed at the gate of the school much before the scheduled SGSM. The SGSM was scheduled at 2 pm but the voters who the Gram Panchayat considered would support the agenda of immediate stoppage of quarrying at Mookkunnimala was physically prevented from entering the meeting venue by the police and goons of quarries. The SGSM started and in a few seconds, passed two resolutions as follows:

Resolution 1. Quarrying in Mookkunnimala should be continued and more licences for quarrying, M-sand manufacturing and ready-mix units be issued;

Resolution 2. The resolution passed in the ward no.20 that the quarrying activities at Mookkunnimala should be stopped is declared null and void.

These two resolutions were in gross violation of KPRA-1994. However, officials and elected representatives of all political parties in the Gram Panchayat Committee were present and facilitated the passage of the resolution. On passing of these resolutions, the goons of quarry owners with the active support of the police unleashed brutal physical attack on the activists of MSSS workers, who were mostly women. Further,

criminal cases were registered on false grounds against those who opposed quarrying at *Mookkunnimala*. The police at the insistence of quarry owners and Gram Panchayat Committee selectively arrested those who did not support the agenda of the quarry owners presented by the elected representative of the village constituency, including women voters, who had attended the SGSM. It may also be noted that the Pallichal Gram Panchayat had the whole hearted support from the state government (political leadership) and the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the Kattakada Constituency (Sakthan Nadar), who was also the then speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly. As the government rendered all support to quarry owners, the Gram Panchayat could use the police force and judiciary to their favour in several occasions by arresting people and booking them with false police cases. Every voter who opposes quarrying at Mookkunnimala have not less than five criminal police cases on false allegations. On the contrary, police station office in charge of this area declines to register case against quarry owners, irrespective of the nature of the crime. A group of five activists (two women and three men, all above 50 years of age) of MSSS visited the Pallichal GP to the elected representatives of the Pallichal Gram Panchayat Office to give a representation against quarrying at Mookkunnimala on 20th October 2014. ⁶ The GP's elected representatives (vice presidents and other members) physically attacked the activists of MSSS. Seven sympathisers of MSSS including a women, who were on their ways to attend a marriage in a community hall nearby the Pallichal GP' office, stopped in front of the GP on seeing their friends being beaten up by elected representatives of the GP. The criminal case charged against the arrested and others was destruction of public property, a non-bailable offence, and was held in the sub-jail for eight days. It was strange that Malayala Manorama, one of the leading daily newspapers in Malayalam carried a totally fabricated story with fabricated photos of destroyed office property of the Pallichal Gram Panchayat office. The quarry owners have profound influence with print and visual media in Kerala and they are also part of the crony network.

Ignoring such protests in the Gram Panchayat against unregulated granite quarrying, M-sand manufacturing, water and air pollution in and around the area, the Gram Panchayat granted license for granite mining and related activities at Mookkunnimala. Further, various departments of the state and central governments have held enquiries on rampant corruption associated with the licensing for granite mining related activities in the hills range and found that cronyism exist in issuance of licence for granite mining at Mookkunnimala in the GP. Nonetheless, the quarry owners could get the court orders quashed

against the granite mining and temporary orders to stop quarrying for violation of rules in the hill chain on several occasions. The GP's elected representatives of all political parties along with officials of the GP and other related department authorised to issue certificates for mining in Mookkunnimala keep ignoring protests of people against mining activities at Mookkunnimala. Mining capital could subsume those protests ignoring the debate, discussion and decision of Gram Sabha.

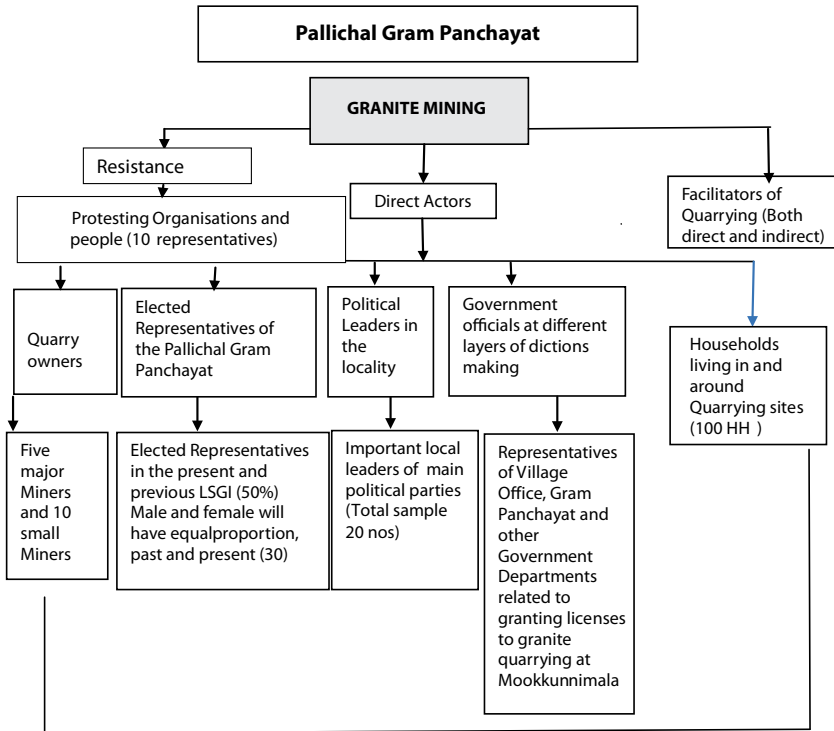
Section 3

Locale, Sample Size and Period of the study

Case study methodology is a philosophical approach to examine the suppositions and principles to investigate a theme or subject of a case in the social world. The case study methodology in this case is justified as it transcends conventional intellectual boundaries and allow widely to include both quantitative and qualitative methods. In case study methodology, what constitutes a case could be an incident, an institution like Pallichal Gram Panchayat or a person(s). It could also be communities or societies. The case study in this context is defined as a combination of qualitative and quantitative enquiry of in-depth analysis of a unit called Pallichal Gram Panchayat, which is a bounded phenomenon and elucidates features of crony capitalism in a LSGI.

Given the objective, locale of the study is confined to Pallichal Gram Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala and the selection of the sample GP is purposive. The selection is justified as there has been vehement protest against granite quarrying at Mookkunnimala hill chain for a long time. The study is based on a primary survey of major players including facilitators in the network of quarry owners in the study area. Court verdicts, government orders and the circumstances, which have led to such outcomes at different levels of decision making have also been considered for a detailed content analysis. Survey tools such as printed schedules were used to elicit data from major stake holders of decentralisation process along with personal interviews with stake holders at different layers of the formation and consolidation of cronyism in the GP. Flow chart-1 explains the sampling procedure designed for the study. Sample households selected from four directions of the quarrying sites have selected using systematic random sampling method and elicited data with printed schedules for households. Semi structured schedules were used for other stake holders in the study.

Flow Chart-1 Sample Design



3.2. Primary Survey Tools

The households residing in and around one km radius from granite quarrying sites constituted the sample frame. A systematic random sampling method encompassing households from four directions, viz., east, west, south and north of granite quarrying were covered in the primary survey. The household survey tool has eleven blocks. The block 1 elicited data on household identification and the blocks 2 to 4 captured livelihood options of sample households. In a location wherein surface granite quarrying has been happening for a long time, circumvention of regulations and blatant violation of rules and regulations of quarrying, it is rather possible that residents living closer to granite quarries shall be forced to relocate their residence due to non-liveable environmental degradation. Blocks 6 and 7 in the household survey tool aimed at capturing different dimensions of land transaction during the last one year preceding the primary survey. Impacts of quarrying activities on livelihood, life and living conditions of residents residing in and around quarries in Mookkunnimala were also elicited (blocks 8 to 11).

3.3. Socio-Economic Profile of Sample Households

Pallichal Gram Panchayat has 23 constituencies (wards) with a population of 45219 (Govt. of India, 2011).⁷ The distribution of population by social group shows that 13.81 percent belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 0.09 percent are Scheduled Tribes (STs) as per the population Census of 2011.⁸ It is strange to note that the official records for distribution benefits under Peoples' plan in Kerala since its inception in 1996, there has been no ST households in the Gram Panchayat. Important SC groups are Cheramar (*pulayar*) and Sambavar (*parayar*). The Mookkunnimala hills chain is situated in the Pallichal Gram Panchayat ward nos 1 and 2 and these two constituencies were part of Mookkunnimala ward before the delimitation. The Mookkunnimala ward was the most economically backward constituency in the Gram Panchayat as revealed by the socio economic survey in 1998. In the survey, economic backwardness are indexed in terms of number of people in government services, density of animal population, particularly goat rearing, and households depending on crop production and animal husbandry as primary source of livelihood (Pallichal Gram Panchayat, 1997).⁹ Table 1 shows the demographic profile of Pallichal Gram Panchayat in the population Census of 2011.

Table 1.

Demographic Details of Pallichal Gram Panchayat (2011 Census)

Particulars	Number (%)
Total Households	11724
Total Population	45219
Male (%)	49.17
Female (%)	50.83
SC (%)	13.81
ST (%)	0.09
Literacy Rate (%)	93.26
Total Workers	16397
Cultivators* (%)	1.13
Agriculture Labours* (%)	7.31
Household Industrial Workers* (%)	3.85
Other Workers* (%)	87.71

Note: *Percentage of Total Workers (Main & Marginal)

Source: 2011, Population Census

3.4. Distribution of Sample households by Social Groups

Fig.1 explains the social composition of sample households. The Scheduled Caste population constituted 15% of sample households followed by Other Backward Castes (OBCs) comprising mainly *Nadarand Ezhava*(53%). An indicator of economic division in a society is better captured with the composition of different types of ration cards. There are four types of ration cards distributed in Kerala and every households is in possession of a ration card. The poorest section is awarded with AAY (yellow cards), followed by Below Poverty Line (BPL), Above Poverty Line (APL- Blue Card) and on the top the Above Poverty Line (White Card-(nonpriority) card holders). In the sample households 6% were the poorest (AAY) and 40% were BPL card holders.¹⁰ Priority Card holders of APL category constituted 24% and non-priority white card holders were 30% in the sample households (Fig 2).¹¹ It may be noted that 46% of the sample households who are living closer to quarrying sites are poor households. Relatively poor people live in hills and its valleys where the land price is not only the lowest, but few buyers for the land other than quarry owners. It is yet another advantage of intensive quarrying in a locality for a long time, which the quarry owners make use of. During the last 20 years, the land area acquired by a quarry owner (Metro granites and Aggregates) totalled 130 acres, of which 30 acres are encroached government land from this area as reported by the total station survey of vigilance department of the Kerala police in 2017. Other quarry owners have also acquired vast tracks of land from individual land assignees which they could acquire at buyers' price.

The proportion of BPL households (46%) in and around Mookkunnimala is significantly higher than the Gram Panchayat average and the district average of BPL and AAY families.

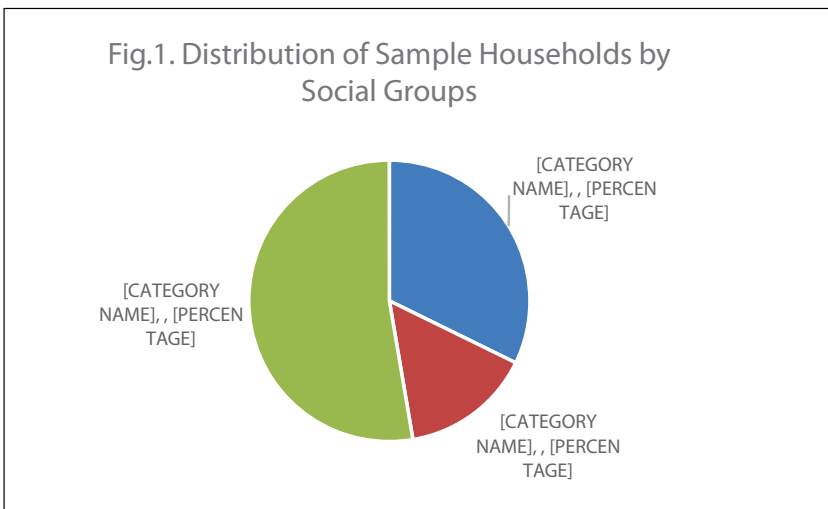
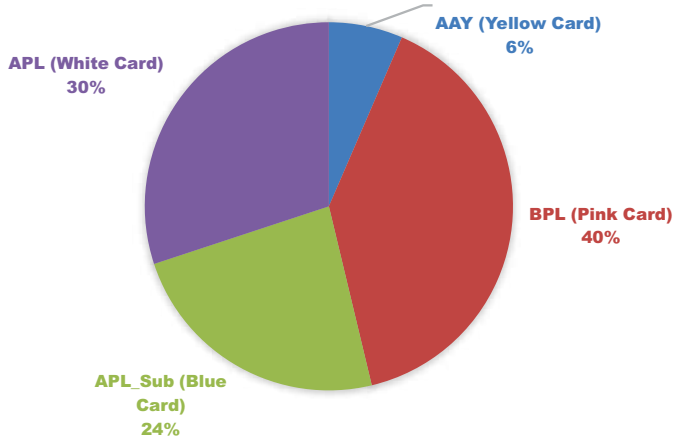


Fig.2.Distribution of Households by Type of Ration Card



For assessing economic background of households, other two indicators used are:(i) type of dwelling unit; and (ii) participation in MGNREGA. There was no *kutcha* house in the area and it is not a special economic characteristics specific to the place. More than 80% of sample households live in *pucca* house or houses with concrete wall, cemented floor and terrace roof while 17% of households live in semi-*pucca* house. It is a common pattern of dwelling units of rural Kerala. Most of the semi-*pucca* houses were constructed with the financial aid from the LSGI under the Peoples' Plan by LSGIs initiated in 1996-97. However, the type of house is not a suitable indicator to assess the economic well-being of a rural household in Kerala. Yet another indicator of economic well-being of a household is the participation in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Relatively poor households avail employment under MGNREGA. More than 60% of OBC households, 27% of households from general category and 11% of households from SC group avail employment under MGNREGA (Table 2). Low participation of SC households in MGNREGA in the quarrying area may be viewed differently. Main source of livelihood of both male and female of SC households is wage labouring. The difference between spot wage and MGNREGA wage in Pallichal village is as high as Rs 500. Female members of general and OBCs do participate in MGNREGA in large numbers because their opportunity cost of labour is almost negligible

as they are not in the rural labour market for any other work, which is not the case of SC households. The economic status of households in the general category is not significantly different from SCs and OBC households living in the valley. Broadly, the analysis of social and economic characteristics of households confirm the general observation that majority of people, irrespective of their social group, who live in the slopes of Mookkunnimala hills range belong to economically weaker sections.

Table 2.

Distribution of Households' Engagement in MGNREGA by Social Group (%)

Social Group	Households Engaged in MGNREGA	Households not Engaged in MGNREGA
Scheduled Caste	11	33
Other Backward Caste	62	16
General	27	49
Total	100 (N-26)	100 (N-67)

Source: Primary Survey

Section 4

4.1. Livelihood Status of Households

Primary occupation is defined as any occupation in which the respondent's family members are engaged for payment or otherwise for more than six months preceding the survey date. The analysis of Livelihood status is perhaps a better indicator to weigh the economic status of households. Farms dependent workforce (cultivators and agricultural labours) in Kerala is 19% of the total in 2017-18. It is much on a lower side as compared to 44% of the farm dependent population in India (NSSO, 2018). A little more than 5% of households depend upon agriculture and only 2% of work force is engaged in agricultural labouring as the main source of livelihood in sample households. It is important to note that predominant crop grown in Mookkunnimala is Natural Rubber (NR) and most of the households living in and around the hills range acquired the (except Scheduled Castes) land as part of 7th Article (Special Rules for the Assignment of Government Land for Rubber Cultivation) Kerala Special Land Assignment Act in 1960. The land has been assigned to educated unemployed youth for self-

employment and freedom fighters in agriculture. People from faraway places received the assigned land at Mookkuinnimala. Accordingly, 89 households received 3.5 acre of land per assignee for NR cultivation. Relatively low proportion of households reported as farm dependent in a predominantly farm-activity dependent village is partly attributable to deforestation due to quarrying and the consequent crop loss by wild animals. The depletion of ground water, drying up of village ponds and streams have added onto fading of cultivation in the valley. A farmer from Mookkunnimala puts it on record:

“I own three acre of dry land and 2.6 acre of wet land. I cultivated paddy, coconut and banana till 2007. There was plenty of water in village ponds and streams and even during peak of summer. As quarry manager piped the polluted water from M-sand units into the streams and ponds, streams originating from hill range dried down while large quantity of water has been pumped out from the ponds in the valley to quarry units for M-sand and ready-mix factories. Many a time, I have complained to Gram Panchayat and ward members, but complaints remain in paper. The quarry owners lease in paddy fields on monthly rental basis to dig ponds, set up huge pump sets for supplying water to quarries. Ground water level, particularly during summer, has depleted to the level that the area gives desert-like look. I have stopped cultivation of banana and tapioca as monkeys and wild pigs destroy the crop. Blasting sound from Mookkunnimala reserve forest area drives monkeys and other wild animals out from forest area and the animals destroy our crops. We farmers are hapless creatures now. My land has been left fallow for many years for quite some time” (A farmer aged 81, Edacode, interviewed on 17-3-2020).

It is worth noting that 16% of the sample households work in quarry units in the sample households. The quarry owners adopted the strategy of engaging residents in the neighbourhood to create a captive support system for them. Those who had protested against quarrying in the beginning, were offered trucks and Lorries on credit and supplied quarry products on a priority basis by quarry owners to woo them to their side. A few of such awardees succeeded in owning trucks and excavators and became strong supporters of quarrying at Mookkunnimala. About 22% of households residing in and around the hills chain reported that they had own shops and other establishments as their main stay of livelihood (Table 3). These group included petty shop owners, truck drivers, and middlemen in quarry products, and casual labours who often get wage employment in the quarrying sites. Workers, particularly youths in the quarrying, are made to believe that they will get white collar jobs in quarry units and therefore

they have to support quarries and resist the protest of local people against quarrying. The unregulated and mechanised quarrying at Mookkunnimala has almost made farming an unviable proposition for farmers of food crops and the marginal and small farmers are left with little alternative but seek work and live at the mercy of quarry owners. Quarry owners expect loyalty from those in the neighbourhood whose livelihood options are entangled with the quarrying and related factories in the area. In other words, a group of people who could produce most of their food requirements from their piece of land (ecosystem) have been transformed to biosphere dependents as they find it difficult to cultivate anything other than NR which the wild animals emerging from the deserted forest area due to quarrying would not destroy.

Table 3.
Distribution of Households by Principal Source of Occupation

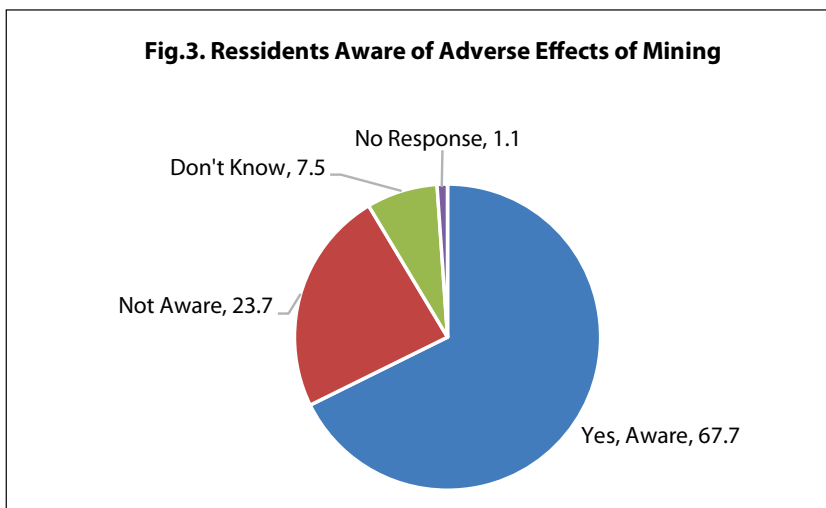
Occupation	Households (%)
Dairying	1.10
Cultivation	5.40
Wage labour in mining	16.10
Wage labour in agriculture	2.20
Salaried employment	22.60
Own Account Enterprise (Agriculture excluded)	37.60
Pension	11.80
Remittances	2.20
Others	1.10
Total	100.00

Note: Total Sample 100; Response rate-93%

4.2. Impact of Quarrying on Life and Livelihood

More than 65% of sample households, irrespective of the distance of their residence from the site of quarrying reported that their living conditions had deteriorated due to quarrying and related activities at Mookkunnimala while 27% of sample households were not aware or perhaps they opted to remain mute from making remarks on quarrying (Fig. 3). In Table 4, response of sample households on impact of quarrying and other dangerous factories working at Mookkunnimala on the life and living status of sample households are reported. For the last few years, residents in Mookkunnimala have been complaining about acute shortage of drinking water. Quarry

owners make use of the drinking water shortage as an effective tool of disciplining the primary victims of quarrying by supplying water in tanker lorries to the residents at regular intervals and it is done with the consent of the elected representative of the village constituency and the Pallichal GP. However, 7% of households refused to respond to the question as they feared that it might attract the ire of both quarry owners and its beneficiaries including the local political



leadership and elected representative from the constituency for the GP. However, 67% of sample households responded that they had developed incessant stomach ache acute water shortage particularly during summer seasons. Moreover, some of the sample households reported that they have incessant abdominal pain and the doctor advised them either not to drink water in this area or shift their place of residence. Residents living around the quarrying sites are convinced that quarrying has deteriorated water quality in the locality (Sl.No.3 in Table 4). The Pallichal GP committee (elected representatives and the Secretary), doctor in the government hospital in the area and the political leadership and social activists maintain absolute silence over water pollution and chronic shortage of water at Mookkunnimala. For a village economy, water bodies are important sources of irrigation and drinking water especially during summer. More than 50% of the households reported that the quarrying has adversely impacted on the availability of drinking water in the area (Sl.No.4 and 5 in Table 4).

Why do not residents living in the quarrying area report the water shortage in the village council (Gram Sabha) meeting in which the GP president, secretary and elected representative of the constituency are present? People in the village are convinced that there is a covert

and tacit understanding between quarry owners on the one side and elected representatives of people, officials, local leadership of political parties and the GP on the other side. Therefore, their complaining would not yield any positive outcome but attract the ire of them (SI No.6 and 7 in Table 4). The cronyism has succeeded in muting the democratic institutions at the grass root as 87% of voters in the constituency responded that they did not rise the issue of water shortage due to quarrying in the Gram Sabha meeting. It could be because they have come to the realisation that the situation will not change and they have to live with it as quarry capital has established its rights over the citizenship. But they discuss the issue of water shortage due to quarrying with their friends and neighbours while 27% of households reported that they had received assistance (water supply) from miners (SI.No. 9 and 10, Table 4). Table 5 shows that 76% of sample households were aware that the drinking shortage was due to quarrying. However, majority of sample households reported that they had not approach quarry owners for water supply. The households who face water shortage and are fully aware of the fact that it is due to unregulated and intensive quarrying in the area for a long time. They reported further that political parties receive contribution from miners (SI.No. 12 in Table 4). It could precisely be the reason that they did not approach Gram Panchayat to find solution for the acute shortage of water in the area caused by unregulated quarrying.

Table 4.
Response of Sample Households on Impact of Mining

Sl. No	Impact of Mining	Response of Households		Indifferent or refused to respond/ Do not know
		Yes	No	
1	Are you aware of ill effects of Mining in Mookkunnimala?	68	24	8
2	Is there water shortage due to mining?	67	26	7
3	Has mining affected water availability in this area?	50	42	8
4	Has mining affected drinking water sources?	47	42	11
5	Has mining deteriorated water bodies (CPR) in the area?	51	40	9

6	Do you discuss quarrying caused water shortage in Gram Sabha Meeting?	4	87	9
7	Have you complained about quarrying caused water shortage to your ward member?	12	88	0
8	Do you discuss quarrying caused water shortage in Gram Panchayat?	8	92	0
9	Do you discuss quarrying caused water shortage with your friends?	61	39	0
10	Do you receive any help/assistance from miners and truck owners?	27	73	0
11	Have you or your family members approached miners for any help ever?	16	84	0
12	Do miners give contribution to political parties and social/community organisations?	58	2	40
13	Is the mining site visible from your residence?	37	63	0
14	Can you hear blasting sound from your residence?	77	23	0
15	Are you suffering from any disease related to quarrying?	48	48	4
16	Are you planning to shift your residence form this place due to disturbance of quarrying activities?	48	52	0

Source: Primary Survey

Table 5.
Reasons for water shortage

Reasons	Response rate
Quarrying	76
Less rainfall	2
Climate change	8
Do not know	17

Source: primary survey

4.4. Distance of Residential Units from the Site of Quarrying

It is the responsibility of district geologist to ensure that quarrying takes place at a distance specified in the mining plan as stipulated in the respective government order. The Mining and Geology department is very much a part of cronyism and seldom do the officials inspect quarrying sites. The proximity of mining site from residential area is closer than stipulated in the land lease agreement for quarrying. More than 70% of residents living in the area reported that they could hear blasting sound and another 37% of sample households revealed that quarrying sites are visible with from their residence. The gravity of the issue can be gauged from the responses given as responses of sample households reported in Table 6. Almost half of the sample population living in the area for generations do plan to shift their residence but for want of finance and livelihood sources (Sl.No.16 in Table 4).

The nexus between Mining and Geology department, Gram Panchayat, pollution control board and officials in the health department were contacted for the primary survey. Table 6 shows that there has been a violation of the stipulated regulation of land lease agreement. It is observed that 15 % of households have their residence within 50 metres of the quarrying site and another 38% of households have their residence within 100 metres of the quarry sites. The latest court order from Green Tribunal has extended the distance of quarrying from residential units to existing 100 metres to 200 metre. Although there were several police complaints registered by the residents on rock falling on roof top and cause damages to life and property, yet not even a single case was investigated by the resident police station, Gram Panchayat or the Mining and Geology department. It amounts to breach of the fundamental rights of citizen to have protection to life and property. Quarry and Truck owners' Associations manages favourable verdicts from High court and Supreme Courts quashing the existing verdicts rather frequently. On the contrary, residents are unable to afford exorbitant court charges and post high-profile advocates for their cases.¹²

Recently, the truck owner's association secured a favourable verdict for trucks of a particular owner from the high court of Kerala to ply the trucks with quarry products in November 22, 2020. The station police office strictly warned the residence on both sides of the road that stringent action would be taken if residents block the trucks from quarries. The irony is that there is a court, order in 2014, which banned the plying of trucks carrying quarry products through Mookkunnimala-Arikkaddamukku road. The Higher Court order was in force until the verdict in November 2020. During this period, truck owners violated the court verdict several times and it led to conflict between local

residents and truck drives and owners. The station police office stood in support of the truck owners and registered case against and residents for blocking trucks with mined materials when the High court order of banning truck plying in the Mookkunnimala-Arikkadamukku road was in force. Even elected representatives of the Gram Panchayat, Member of the Legislative Assembly of Kattakada constituency in which the Pallichal Gram Panchayat and Mookkunnimala fall, did not pay heed to the request by the MSSS soliciting their urgent and immediate intervention to restore the status of the earlier verdict of the Division Bench of the Kerala High Court. It clearly outlines the mechanism and political patronage that the quarry and truck owners enjoy over the fundamental rights of jettisons.

Table 7 shows the distance between the residential units and the public road through which trucks ply incessantly from early morning to late in the evening preventing the movement of passenger vehicles and school buses. In addition to the health issues emanating from intensive smokes and dust from truck plying, even the school bus from the government school have stopped plying. Children from poor families are left with little other alternative but walk up and down 3 km steep hills braving scorching sun during summer and heavy downpour during monsoon. About 65% of residents complained that the movement of trucks with building materials affect the life and livelihood of people in the area.

Table 7.

Distance of Residential Units from Quarrying Sites

Distance in Metre	% of Households
< 50	15.1
50-100	37.6
100-500	46.2
>500	1.1
Total	100.0

Source: Primary Survey

Table 8.

Distance of Truck Roads from Residence of Sample Households

Distance in Metre	% of Households
< 10	65.6
10-50	19.4
50-100	9.7
>100	5.4
Total	100.0

Source: Primary Survey

4.5. Pollution from Quarrying and Factories

Residents in the quarrying area come across various difficulties in their daily and routine life due to prolonged quarrying in the area. The difficulties due to quarrying are clubbed into seven types (Table 10). Air pollution, sound pollution, water contamination along with hindrances in peoples' mobility due to heavy traffic of trucks and lorries from quarry sites. Table 9 explains the difficulties that residents encounter due to blasting sound from quarrying. However, the residents reported also that quarry owners seldom followed regulations of use of explosives for blasting in surface mining, sound pollution, air pollution and others. Residents reported that they did not (want to) complain because they had got used to such sufferings. Moreover, blasting in quarries can be performed only in the presence and by a qualified person as per the rule of quarrying licence, but blasting at Mookkunnimala is usually performed by any casual labour. Unscientific use of explosives and blasting have caused several accidents at quarrying sites. Besides this, there are also specifications on quality and quantity of explosives to be used for surface mining (Ammonium nitrate fuel oil-ANFO), but quarry at Mookkunnimala use high-powered explosives for blasting a wide track of rocks in a single blast. In the absence of total supervision by the authorities (the district collector's office in in-charge of explosives stored in quarry sites and its use) guest workers from Bengal, Assam and Bihar have met fatal accidents at Mookkunnimala. In the event of a causality in quarries due to unscientific blasting practice, and for not adhering to safety measures, the diseased is secretly transported to the native village in other states. Retired police officials or kith and kin of political leader are appointed as managers of quarry sites.¹³ Table 11 shows the damages caused to life and properties including residential units due to unscientific

blasting in quarries. It is considered to be a criminal act, but no such case has yet been registered against any quarry owners till now by station police offices.

Table 9.

Distribution of Households by Difficulties in the Routine life of residence

Type of Difficulties	Distance by Metre from Residential Unit				Total
	< 10	10-50	50-100	>100	
Air pollution	78	11	0	11	100
Mobility and air pollution	100	0	0	0	100
Sound and air pollution	25	0	50	0	100
Air and water pollution	100	0	0	0	100
Mobility and sound and air pollution	60	33	0	0	100
Mobility and sound and water pollution	100	0	0	0	100
Mobility and sound pollution	100	0	0	0	100
Mobility, sound and air pollution	67	33	0	0	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 10.

Distribution of Households by Disturbances due to Blasting

Type of Disturbances	Response (%)
Loud noise and cannot sleep	15
Everyday activity is disturbed	28
Dull background noise	4
Annoying noise	9
Used to loud noise	10
No effect on life	34
Total	100

Source: Primary survey

Table 11.
Disturbance Caused by Rock Pieces from Quarrying

Type of Disturbances	Response (%)
cause physical injury and damage to valuables	34
cause unexpected shock but no damage	5.
still unexpected threat	13
not a serious issue	45
Other	2
cause physical injury and damage to valuables	34
Total	100

Source: Primary survey

Section 5

5.1. Impact of Unregulated Quarrying on Health

Often people are hesitant to reveal health issues to unknown persons. In the case of Mookkunnimala, the response rate on morbidity was astonishingly high. It could be because people living in and around the quarrying sites have been suffering from various terminal diseases for a long time and further the health expenditure takes a heavy toll on their income and engagement in livelihood vocations. About 75% sample households reported that they suffer from various diseases and are diagnosed due to their exposure to quarrying sites. More than 90 % of households reported to have been suffering from diseases which are not related to their age and lifestyles. Most prominently, reported diseases included skin allergy, ophthalmic, mental disorder due to continuous and loud voices, pulmonary issues, asthma, silicosis, continuous cough, allergic to dust and sound and kidney diseases. Besides this, it has also been divulged that incidence of cancer is alarmingly high among households living for a long time around the quarrying sites at Mookkunnimala. Table 12 reports the frequency of diseases of sample households living in and around the quarrying sites at Mookkunnimala. More than 19 percent of sample households reported that they had suffered from cancer (Fig.4). The association between incidence of cancer and quarrying has not been medically established, it needs to be investigated further as the prevalence of cancers particularly among women are higher in Mookkunnimala GP

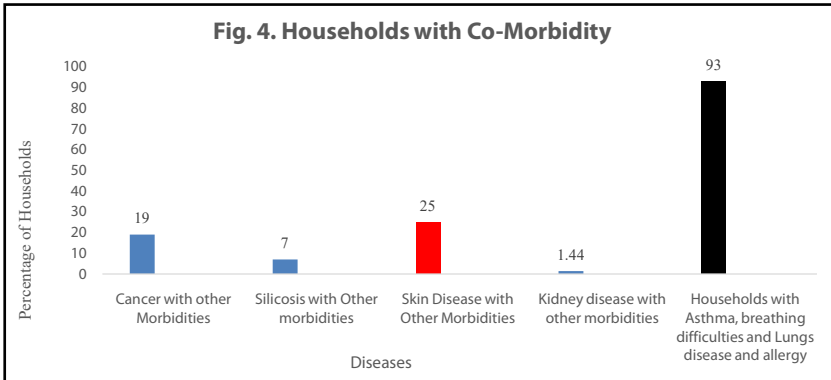
constituency than other constituencies of Pallichal Gram Panchayat as reported by sample households. Other diseases prominently reported were those commonly found in quarrying and mining sites due to exposure to excessive air pollution, dust and smoke.. Table 13 reveals that 93% of sample households report quarry-borne diseases. Among the diseases reported, skin and cancer are the most common diseases among households in the study area (Fig.4 and Table 12). Table 13 shows that households living within a radius of 150 metre from quarrying site are prone to diseases which are specific to quarrying sites. It can also be read from Table 13 that there is a positive association between proximity to quarrying sites and incidence of quarry-borne diseases. The observation assume special significance in the context of the decision of the government to reduce distance between quarrying sites and residential units of the public without authentic medical science report. The study clearly indicated that 93 % of households, irrespective of their age and sex, are prone to diseases specific to quarrying sites.

Table 13.
Quarrying Caused Diseases of Residents Around Quarry Site

Sl. No.	Type of Disease	Percentage Households Reported Illness	Cumulative Percentage
1	Skin diseases and breathing illnesses	9.6	9.6
2	Breathing illness, cough and allergy	5.5	15.1
3	Cancer, skin problem, breathing illness and asthma	1.4	16.5
4	Silicosis+ cancer+ TB+ skin problems+ breathing illness	1.4	17.9
5	Silicosis+ allergy+ cough+ kidney troubles	1.4	19.3
6	Breathing illness	5.5	24.8
7	Asthma+ allergy+ breathing illness	4.1	28.9
8	Lung diseases+ silicosis+ skin problems	1.4	30.3
9	Cancer+ silicosis+ breathing illness	1.4	31.7
10	Breathing illness+ allergy silicosis	4.1	35.8
11	Skin problem+ allergy+ cancer	2.7	38.5
12	Silicosis+ cancer+ asthma+ skin problem	1.4	39.9
13	Cough+ breathing illness	1.4	41.3
14	Silicosis+ skin problems+ breathing illness	4.1	45.4
15	Breathing illness+ skin problem+ allergy	4.1	49.5

16	Lung diseases+ psychological issues	1.4	50.9
17	Breathing illness+ skin problem+ chest pain	1.4	52.3
18	Breathing illness+ skin problem+ cancer	2.7	55
19	Breathing illness+ allergy	8.2	63.2
20	Breathing illness+ sneeze+ allergy	1.4	64.6
21	Breathing illness+ cancer+ allergy	1.4	66
22	Breathing illness+ TB+ cancer+ skin problem	2.7	68.7
23	Breathing illness+ eosinophilia+ allergy	1.4	70.1
24	Lung diseases+ skin problem+ cough	1.4	71.5
25	Asthma+ allergy+ skin problems	1.4	72.9
26	Stomach pain+ chest pain+ eye pain	1.4	74.3
27	Breathing illness+ allergy+ sneeze	2.7	77
28	Breathing illness+ skin problem+ TB	1.4	78.4
29	Breathing illness+ cancer+ allergy+ sneeze	1.4	79.8
30	Breathing illness+ cough+ frequent fever	1.4	81.2
31	Breathing illness+ cough+ allergy+ skin problems	1.4	82.6
32	Allergy + cough	1.4	84
33	Allergy+ heart attack+ breathing illness+	1.4	85.4
34	Breathing illness	1.4	86.8
35	Breathing illness+ sneeze	1.4	88.2
36	Lung diseases+ cancer	1.4	89.6
37	Lung diseases+ cancer+ allergy	4.1	93.7
28	Lung diseases+ asthma+ allergy	1.4	95.1
39	Households with no serious disease to report	5.5	100.00

Source: Primary Survey



Source : Primary Survey

Table 13.

Distribution of Households by Distances

Distance of Residence from Quarry (in Metre)	Number of Households	Number of Households Reported illness	Percentage of Households with morbidity
<50	14	10	71
51-100	35	22	63
101-250	13	13	100
251-500	30	24	80
>500	1	0	0
Total	93	69	93
Households without illness	4	0	5.60
Households did not respond	22	0	24

Source: Primary survey

Section 7

Conclusion

Theoretical narratives of crony capitalism are centred around two mutually competing paradigms, viz., big versus small government. More stringent regulations and adherence to constitutions represent the big government postulates while the least control over economic activity with minimal state interventions through regulations would place the market in prime decision making process and cut down the need for interest group formation. Crony capitalism, as the term sounds, represents an aggregate of different components such as rent seeking, regulatory capture, interest group politics and resource curse do act upon on another to produce an economic gain to its proponents by capturing and influencing the decision making process of the government in power.

Crony Capitalism is formed at the behest of the capital by incorporating different players in the decision making process of the government to influence policy decisions to earn supernormal profit, which would even out competitors from the market. The state of Kerala assumes special importance in the light of the above, as the state has transferred power, authority and fiancé to LSGIs as early at the beginning of the 9th Fiver Year Plan (1996-97). The authority and financial autonomy of LSGIs endowed with political power have left the Pallichal Gram

Panchayat to explore and use the possibilities opened up by 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. The study found that there had been a systematic formation of cronies at Mookkunnimala hills chain to facilitate granite quarrying. As a result, local democracy has substantially weakened and people have lost their trust on elected representatives. The cronies have almost captured the regulatory system and it has placed the cronies to frame policies for the government and get it approved. As local democracy has weekend, people stopped taking interest in the affairs of the local government, which in turn relegate the administrative status of the Pallichal Gram Panchayat to a subsidiary role. People suffer all brunt of the government and now they are indifferent. ■

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Endnotes

1 Part 1 of the Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) (Govt. of India, 2011) known popularly as Gadgil Committee Report defines Boundaries of the Western Ghats as “ the term Western Ghats refers to practically unbroken hill (with the Exception of the Palakkad Gap) or escarpment running roughly in a north–south direction , for about 1500 km parallel to the Arabian sea coast, from the river Tapi down to just short of Kanyakumari at the tip of Indian Peninsula. For our purposes we use the term Western Ghats in the broader sense to include the entire tract of hills from the Tapi to Kanyakumari” (WGEEP Report, p.5; part 1). In this broad definition, Mookkunnimala is part of Western Ghats. The Report follows. “For the purpose of defining the boundary of the Western Ghats, we used the altitude and forest or vegetation as drivers defining the boundaries. Our operational definition for the Ghats therefore is forest area above a certain altitude. Accordingly we demarcated the eastern edge by identifying the forested areas that are above 500 m,..... For the Western Ghats edge, we used a cut off of forested areas at 150 m and above as the Ghats fall more steeply down to the coastline as compared to the eastern side of the Ghats” ((WGEEP Report, p.6; part 1). In the Report, it is added that “This cut off to decide on the boundary needs to be revisited as it is an approximation” (ibid, page 6).

2. Due to prolonged mechanised granite quarrying in the area, most of 12 streams originated from Mookkunnimala have dried down now.

3. Vigilance Department of the Kerala Police submitted its report on 27-12-2014 to government and the police has filed the case in the Kerala High Court too. In this case, it has been clearly stated that the quarrying in Mookkunnimala is illegal and 40 officials including the then President, Secretaries of the Pallichal Gram Panchayat, village officer of Pallichal village and other officials are implicated. The Kerala High Court has not yet acted on the case and issued any verdict.

4. It is mandatory that the minutes of the Committees of local governments in the state of Kerala should be uploaded along with the detailed agenda note. For the study, copy of the minutes were downloaded from the website.

5. Pallichal Gram Panchayat is relatively a large peri-urban local body with a population above 50000 in 2011 Census. The Gram Panchayat has 23 constituencies, and the United Democratic Front was in power during 2010-2019 (two terms). In the first term, out of 23 members, nine of them belonged to the state opposition party of Left Democratic Front (LDF) and one member was from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The sole member of BJP in the Gram Panchayat Committee was elected from the Mookkunnimala ward in 2010 but received whole started support from all political parties in supporting quarrying in the Gram Panchayat Committee. In the case of opposing the anti-quarry struggle, both BJP, LDF and UDF joined together. The ward no.2 (Mookkunnimala ward) was Gram Panchayat Committee. The minutes of the Gram Panchayat reveals that the only one agenda item passed unanimously in the Gram Panchayat Committee is the agenda note related to issuing of quarry licenses.

6. Five activists were: (i) Sugatha kumara; (2) Ratnbahi; (3) Mohanakumar,S, (4) Venugopalan Nair and (5) Surendra Kumar. All were office activists of MSSS and residents in the area. Then Pallichal Panchayat vice president known in his nickname as vellaputtu along with member Biju of UDF and other female members joined together to physically attack the activists. More interestingly, one of the female members of the Gram Panchayat committee was an CPI(M) elected representative of the Panchayat constituency of Edacode (Ward no. 20) Ms Sandya Sathikumar. The Gram Panchayat Committee is ruled by the political coalition of Congress-I (UDF) and LDF (in opposition) had nine members in the Gram Panchayat Committee) Ms Sandhya took strong position against the activists notwithstanding the fact and demanded the immediate arrest of the activists. Accordingly, the Gram Panchayat President and the leader of the Congress-I (Mr Rakesh, who later joined the Communist Party of India-CPI on the denial of the opportunity to contest in the next Local Body election by Congress-I and he is the CPI leader of the area) called police and arrested seven of our activists including a women and put them behind bars for nine days. Filed case against nine activists imposing non-bailable offence (Public Property Destruction). The case is still in progress at Neyyattinkara Munsif court in Thiruvananthapuram District.

7. As per the records available with the Pallichal village and Pallichal Gram Panchayat, there is no household in the Scheduled Tribe Category.

8. There are 23 Gram panchayat constituencies in Pallichal Gram Panchayat. As far as the knowledge of ward members, there is no household who is identified as scheduled tribe in the Gram Panchayat. However, population Census has recorded. This mismatch still remains unresolved.

9. As part of the Peoples Plan campaign, a detailed socio-economic survey (Census method) was conducted and a report has been prepared to facilitate planning process of the Gram Panchayat in 1997-8. A group of social activists undertook census operations in the village and it took five months to complete the survey.

10. AAY card is provided to the poorest among Below Poverty Line households under the scheme known as Antodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). Households with AAY cards are entitled to 35Kgs of rice free of cost every month. Usually, households with no assured means of subsistence or social support scheme or households headed by minor, disabled persons and people aged above 59 are endowed with AAY cards. BPL card holder (Pink Card) is entitled to 4kg of rice and 1 kg Atta free of cost every month per member in the family.

11. Two categories of households Above Poverty Line, APL (Blue Card) and APL (White Card). APL Blue card holders are households are designated to be just above the Below Poverty Line mark and are entitled to 2kg rice per member in the family at the rate of Rs 2/kg while APL card holder with white colour card is entitled to 2kg rice and wheat (as per availability) at the rate of Rs 8.90/kg/rice and one kg wheat powder at the rate of Rs 6.70/kg per month.

12. In response to the complaints registered by the residents living on both sides of Mookkunnimala-Arikkadamukku road against continuous plying of trucks with quarried materials, the District Collector in the capacity of district magistrate issued a verdict banning plying of vehicles on the road until further order in 2014 (order dated 15.05.2014). The quarry and truck owners' associations' representatives in their individual capacity challenged the said order in the High Court of Kerala on 28.11.2014. On obtaining the report from the District Police Officer and District Collector, the Division Bench of the Kerala High Court passed an order on 01.12.2014 in which it was ordered that the vehicles with quarried material cannot be plied through Mookkunnimala Arikkadamukku road until further order. The court order by the Division Bench of the High Court was overruled by another Single Bench Order on 22-11-2021. In the said court order of November 2020, clear instruction is given to the district collector is directed to place the matter of constituting the Traffic Regulatory Committee within two weeks of the issuance of the Court Order. Despite several reminders to the District Collector and President, Pallichal GP, no action has been taken yet to constitute the traffic regulatory committee to regulate the plying of vehicles carrying building materials through Arikkadamukku-Mokkunnimala Road.

13. It has been estimated that between 30 and 50 lakhs migrant workers mostly hailing Mostly from West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and Bihar work in Kerala as casual labours. Quarry owners prefer migrant workers as casual labour along with native workers for the reason that supply of migrant workers are regular and are more disciplined. Further, they do not complain about safety measure and in the event of any casualty, the case could be hushed up and the news about the casualty would not spread outside the mining site. Native workers are mostly engaged as supervisory staff or drivers in mining area and they remain loyal to the mine owners. The native youths are lured to the jobs in the mining site as they find their fellow men manages the business and enjoys power with the political leadership. It is the native workers who are often employed to handover freebies to the political leadership by mine owners.



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DISCIPLINARY VS. NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY?

Understanding Agency in the Pallichal Panchayat

Abstract

This essay is essentially about local-level democracy in the shadow of predatory quarrying in the Pallichal panchayat. It raises mainly two questions. First, how may we understand the historical shaping of the conditions under which quarry capital was able to capture, or at least disarm quite decisively, the institutions of democratic decentralization in a panchayat like Pallichal which did indeed have a strong legacy of experiments in bottoms-up planning, as well as collective efforts to secure development much before the late 1990s? Secondly, how may we make sense of the agency of people there, against and for quarry capital, without recourse to the binary of the enlightened citizen-agent vs. ignorant non-agent? It concluded that the conflict in Pallichal is much more than the story of the failure of local government and the alleged ensnaring of elected representatives in corruption. It is that of a pre-existing socio-economic divide that remained poorly addressed in the decentralized development initiatives of the mid 1990s now complicated considerably by the acceleration of post-liberalization capitalism and the new neoliberal subjectivities linked to the spread of individualized welfare.

Introduction

This essay is an attempt to make sense of politics and agency of the residents of the Pallichal panchayat who have been sharply polarized, at least since 2014, around the issue of intensifying granite mining in the sprawling hill adjoining the panchayat, the Mookkunnimala (MM

from now). That year, a group of concerned residents of the panchayat formed the Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samiti (MSS), a civil social organization whose membership cut across political, caste, and community boundaries, and which involved a large number of women in public protests. The formation of the MSS was an oppositional-civil social¹ response against the tightening spatial domination of quarry capital on public spaces in Pallichal, including public roads, and the panchayat itself. As the resource plunder on the hill accelerated, so did the grip of quarry capital on the panchayat, which, during the heydays of the People's Planning Campaign, was considered a place of relatively successful experimentation with local bottoms-up development².

All accounts of the granite mining on the MM indicate that it is yet another instance of what Barbara Harriss-White refers to as "the criminal predatory economies" of South Asia (Harriss-White and Michelutti 2019: 4). She means by this the "illegal exploitation of natural resources, raw materials for India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh's exploding towns and cities." This extraction is easily passed off as necessary for 'development', and are generally thought to be "green crimes" or "soft crimes, less harmful and affecting fewer victims than 'real' predatory crime does." (ibid. : 5). Indeed, the nexus that seems to be at work in Pallichal panchayat certainly comes close (even if it does not perfectly fit) to the understanding of 'mafia' in many regions in South Asia at present: "... the now-indigenous South Asian term 'mafia' is commonly used to refer to business enterprises with political protection that seek to monopolise particular trades, sectors, and localities through extra-legal and violent means ... many captains of industry are at the apex of much more extensive criminal ecosystems embedded in formal, registered, and regulated institutions, and, crucially, the political sphere and its bureaucracy." (ibid.: 7-8). Also, it is evident from the unfolding of the struggles of the MSS as well as the many reports from government agencies about it now³ that the mining on MM is not artisanal or small-scale, though it is clear that it certainly involves in parts the opening up of rural people to capital. The poor who support quarry companies in the MM may well be described thus: "Neither fully labourer or a peasant anymore, these people inhabit the margins of the mainstream mining economy ... adapting to the political economy of mineral extraction, and derive some benefits from the forces that are undermining their well-being." (Lahiri-Dutt 2018: 10-15)

In his perceptive essay on the 'sand mafia' of Tamil Nadu, J Jeyaranjan lists features of resource plunder and there can be little doubt that the situation in Pallichal panchayat bears a close resemblance, in both the social, political, and ecological impacts (falling water table, fatal accidents, continuous movement of heavy vehicles and the attendant evils, violence against locals, vitiating of local politics) and the tactics

employed by capital (for instance, entangling protestors in prolonged litigation, bribing them, funding temples, offering work to complaint villagers, offering cash and assets, hiring local vehicles to move products, regular payments to local leaders etc.) (Jeyaranjan 2019: 109-10). He remarks that in a few places, these have not worked – and they are, as in the Pallichal panchayat, places where “people were mobilized to struggle against the designs of the Lifting Contractor and the state machinery.” (ibid. : 110).

Nevertheless, there is more of a puzzle here. Pallichal panchayat was a place where the People’s Planning Campaign received the support of many leading activists of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat – clearly, such a legacy has been completely unable to stem the tide of quarry capital there. The rise of neoliberalism in politics and policy as well as the acceleration of neoliberal capitalism in Kerala has been discussed for some time in the literature on Kerala (for instance, Raviraman 2010). Studies on capital in rural spaces and governance, however, are relatively few, but are beginning to emerge (Hari 2020, for example). Besides, there is a growing literature on the challenge of environmental degradation attendant on heightened consumerism and predatory resource extraction (Veron 2000; Korakandy 2000; Raman 2010; 2012; Kelkar-Khambate 2015; Sajeev and Alex 2017; Jojan et al 2018). Important questions about the efficacy of invited spaces in Kerala’s local self-government in the wake of new challenges post-2000 are being asked through an examination of the failures of decentralized government in Pallichal (Gopika, forthcoming).

The present essay seeks to contribute to this growing literature as well. It raises mainly two questions. First, how may we understand the historical shaping of the conditions under which quarry capital was able to capture, or at least disarm quite decisively, the institutions of democratic decentralization in a panchayat like Pallichal which did indeed have a strong legacy of experiments in bottom-up planning, as well as collective efforts to secure development much before the late 1990s? Secondly, how may we make sense of the agency of people there, against and for quarry capital, without recourse to the binary of the enlightened citizen-agent vs. ignorant non-agent?

In order to answer the first question, an attempt at tracing the local history of the Pallichal panchayat and the MM is inevitable. This necessarily requires suspending the dominant view regarding the origin of the problem – in the coming of quarry companies to Pallichal in the post-2000 years, or even in the early artisanal quarrying that began there in the early 1990s. It even requires the suspension to some degree of some assumptions that underlay the ‘Kerala Model’ and the People’s Planning Campaign discourse of the 1990s, and which continues to inform many contemporary accounts of democratic

decentralization: of Kerala as a place in which socio-economic conflict has been minimized to a considerable extent through redistributive measures and welfarism.

Regarding the second question, the assumption that the poor subjected to predatory neoliberal capitalism may either be its hapless and passive victims, or, on the contrary, subjects who resist it unambiguously, may have to be reexamined. It has indeed been reexamined by the larger discussions on neoliberal agency. Ascribing unambiguous victimhood or resistance assumes that the subjected poor are somehow outside of the agential potentials of such capitalism. Perhaps this misses the formation of the poor as neoliberal subjects through constant exposure to 'everyday' neoliberal policies and practices (Clarke et al 2007; Mirowski 2013), especially through responsibilized governance. In other words, understanding how neoliberalism becomes a commonsense that guides the ways in which people interpret themselves, the world in which they live, and the future may be crucial to make sense of the agency of the quarry supporters and their opponents in Pallichal. Perhaps it is possible to understand the supporters of the MSS and those of the quarry companies in Pallichal as not active citizens vs. bribed consumers but as the subjects of two distinct modes of governmentality, which Michel Foucault (2003, 2008) has famously called 'disciplinary' and 'neoliberal'? Importantly, I claim that the answers to the two questions may be connected. It may indeed be that the pre-existing spatial divides and resource inequalities may have been worked over by more recent political and economic forces.

This essay is based on the qualitative data collected during field work in the Pallichal panchayat during 2019-2020. It makes use of around forty-two interviews with panchayat members, activists of the MSS and those who were active in the People's Planning Campaign of the 1990s, mining company representatives, and local residents. Sample selection was not easy at all given the extremely polarized environment (and given the fact that my co-researcher is a leader of the MSS) – so interviews were conducted with those who were willing to speak with us. A few of the quarry supporters did consent to be interviewed; but we were able to make up for this by adding a qualitative component to the survey questionnaire, as well relying on secondary literature (specifically, the work of Gopika G G on the Pallichal panchayat). The context of the pandemic meant that many interviews were telephonic – which had clear advantages to us, but which required greater disclosure on our part. And closely associated as we were to the MSS, a keen effort to remain self-reflexive through intensive memo-writing and triangulation between different members in our team, and different source-materials was inevitable: we sought to understand

our interviewees even as we disagreed; we sought distance when we agreed. Besides the interviews, field notes, and several informal but substantial extended conversations with local people, this essay makes ample use of the notices, submissions, and memoranda of the MSS campaign to the public and various government institutions since 2014, the development reports of the panchayats adjacent to the MM, and the newspaper reports of the conflicts there since 2014 until the present, as well as historical material that throws light on early twentieth-century conflicts over land in the area adjacent and similar to Pallichal.

This essay consists of three substantial sections followed by a conclusion. The section that follows has to do with the history of spatial change and resource ownership or access in the areas on and around the MM since the nineteenth century, reconstructed mostly from the interviews and triangulated with other sources as far as possible. The subsequent sections examine the nature of the agency of the MSS activists and the residents on or around the MM who have actively supported predatory quarrying there, respectively. The conclusion pulls together the arguments, reflects on the broader question of policy, regarding changing the institutional framework of Kerala's panchayati raj to address questions of socio-economic and environmental justice, as well as the question of Partha Chatterjean 'political society' in times of neoliberal governance.

Spatial Change and Resource Access at Pallichal: A Brief History

In the memory of a senior local historian born and raised near the MM, the hill appears as a towering, overarching, decisive empirical presence – not only was it the overwhelming visual feature of the area, it also ensured that the climate of the region was markedly cooler than the rest of the district. His memory stretches back to the mid-twentieth century, before the assignment of large stretches of the hill to individual families for rubber cultivation in the early 1960s; this impression is confirmed by many of our interviewees who spent their early childhood there. Indeed, the erstwhile government of Travancore had notified the hill as a reserve forest in 1896⁴. Many interviewees recounted the impressions of their parents and grandparents about the hill as full of valuable timber including sandalwood and rosewood. It appears as a forest so dense that fugitives from the law could hide there for months – as a seventy-four-year old interviewee, Mr RN, remembered from his grandfather's life of hiding there from the law in the 1920s.

By the 1930s, the timber there was being cut down both by the government as well as illegally. Fifty-four year old Mr KH, a native, remembered how people living in the vicinity of the MM would sell

illegally-chopped timber to his grandfather who used to build wooden false-ceilings for houses. Sixty-three-year old Mr S. who has memories of going up the hill in the early 1960s remembers how male members of his community, the dalits in the area, were used in the 1950s and before by the local sudra (Nair) landlords to fell trees illegally and sell them. Eighty-four-year-old Mrs SB, who belongs to one of the families allotted land for rubber-farming on MM in 1960, vividly remembered how deserted the area used to be, but also that the big trees were mostly gone by then and all that was left were the smaller trees, abundant shrubbery and grasses when she visited the place for the first time in the early 1960s.

The land around the MM – the present-day panchayats like Malayinkeezh, Pallichal, and Vilavoorkkal – was dominated by Nair landlords who controlled vast paddy lands since the nineteenth century at least. Paddy farming was dominant in these areas well into the 1980s, when it started declining drastically. The paddy lands and garden lands in Pallichal – especially coinciding with the lower-lying present-day Edacode ward next to the hilly MM ward – was dominated by Nair landlords. The other prominent communities in the area of the later Pallichal panchayat were the lower caste Nadars and the dalit Pulaya community, who worked in the fields and farms of the Nair landlords. However, the area has a history of struggles between the Nair landlords and ex-slave communities attempting to clear forest land Travancore and set up their own farms. This is mentioned by none other than the great early-twentieth century champion of the dalits, Ayyankali, in his speech as a member of the Travancore Sree Mulam Popular Assembly in 1912. In a discussions on forest and other lands newly converted as arable farm lands (*puduvals*), he pointed out that many Pulayas had sought to obtain registration of the lands cleared by them, but were systematically thwarted. This was so especially in the Neyyattinkara, Vilavancode, Trivandrum, and Nedumangad taluks. “Many obstacles were thrown in their way by the inhabitants of the locality, assisted by some of the subordinate revenue officials. The effect of this was that the *puduvals*, which were hitherto unknown to the people but sought and found out by the Pulayas, were obtained by the rich higher classes and the Pulayas were persecuted and driven out from their habitations, and even the little they had before, was lost to them now” (PTSMFA 27 February 1912: 19). Even as late as 1920, this issue was unresolved, with sudra officers conniving with local encroachers to deny dalits land – just around half of the land was given and that too, often only rocky areas.

In response, the Dewan offered the Pulayas 500 acres of puramboke (government waste) land for registration at Vilappil pakuti. In 1913, he clarified that by GO No 13029 of 4 December 1912, 500 acres of

Sirkar land at the Vilappil pakuti had been reserved for the Pulayas of the community organization initiated by Ayyankali, the Sadhujana Paripalana Sangham. This land was to be divided into one-acre blocks and assigned to willing Pulayas by the Trivandrum Peishkar (PTSMPS, 13 February 1913: 21). Vilappil is very near Pallichal, just 16 kilometres away, and adjacent to the hillocks near MM. However, in 1914, Ayyankali complained in the Assembly that the land has not yet been assigned to the Pulayas (PTSMPA 20 February 1914: 24), in which he was supported by the other Pulaya Members, C Saradan Solomon and T Chothi, followed by just an assurance from the Dewan that it would be expedited. In 1915, Ayyankali and other members were still pointing out the continuing failure to assign lands to Pulayas (PTSMPA 24 February 1915: 117-8). In 1916, Ayyankali complained further, noting that "Influential people had occupied portions of the area and the Pulayas were not able to compete with , ordered to remove the tree growth – and the department was very tardy in acting (PTSMPA 29 February 1916: 116). The matter was still unresolved in 1917 (PTSMPA 13 February 1917 : 23) and in 1918 too though the tree growth had been completely removed by then (PTSMPA 19 February 1918: 20). In 1919, Ayyankali submitted that out of the 500 acres allotted, only 242.48 were available for registration and the rest was "under the occupation of others". A large part of land available was "barren and rocky", but he prayed that "orders be issued to see that no one entered upon the available land and to complete the proceedings for registry" soonest (PTSMPA 18 February 1919: 20). The difficulty was reported again by him in 1920 (PTSMPS 24 February 1920: 20); the matter of Pulayas being denied access to land through the connivance of local elites and subordinate revenue officials continued to be raised in the subsequent years by the representatives of the Depressed Classes in the Sree Mulam Popular Assembly⁵. As for the Nadars, many Nadar farmers had better success in Travancore (Hardgrave 1969) in the course of the nineteenth century and were accepted as enterprising farmers, even as models for the new nation of Travancore – commended publicly, for example, by Prince Rama Varma of the Travancore royal family in a public address in 1874 (Varma 1874). However, a great many remained poor workers who eked a living from wage labour and gathering.

The history of Pallichal as it emerges from the memories of our interviewees seems to closely corroborate the above account of struggle for land⁶. The dalits there evidently had no access to arable land and only to their tiny hutment dwellings; some Nadar families seem to have had better access, for example, the grandfather of seventy-year-old Mr CE, a leading Nadar voice and quarry supporter, who moved here from another area in the district taking 50 acres of government land on a *kuttakappattom* lease. But as he recollected,

while some held limited quantities of land under *kuthakappattom*, most Nadars here were poor, dependent workers of the Nair landlords who built hutments of unbaked bricks with thatched roofs on the lower slopes of the hill, working the landlord's fields and also cultivating tapioca, and later even hill-paddy in the small areas they cleared on the hill. Mr CE recollects his grandparents mention caste restrictions on their use of water sources and paths. Mr CE's account is corroborated by our other senior interviewees who remember the poor Nadar families as the majority among the hutment dwellers on the lower reaches of the hill, who engaged in labour in the coconut gardens owned by the Nair landlords on the lower slopes (and a few nadars did own such gardens too, on leased government land) or bought the mangoes and jackfruit from landlord households and sold them in the local market at Pravachambalam, or further in Thiruvananthapuram city.

It is important to note that while the MM was indeed a dense forest, it was much used by the locals, especially the local poor. All our senior interviewees had long accounts and many anecdotes to share about how the hill was an important source of livelihood especially for poor lower caste women. They went up in groups to gather fodder, bark, and medicinal herbs. There was a ready market for fresh fodder in the roadside bazaar at the Pravachambalam junction where bullock-carts bound to and fro to the south from Thiruvananthapuram tarried for the night. Fodder and bark to feed the goats and fertilize the fields, as well as twigs for the kitchen-fire, were gathered by these women and supplied to homes all around Pallichal and the neighboring places as well. The hill especially served women agricultural labourers who were too old or unwell to work in the fields full-time – it gave them an income, however small.

Senior interviewee Mr S. remembered many varieties of fruit and berries that could be abundantly plucked in the upper reaches of the hill in the 1960s, before the area was filled with rubber plantations. The hill supplied the bark that replenished the fields from where clay was mined. Most interviewees aged above fifty recalled eight to twelve rivulets that flowed downhill from the MM. Most of them remembered trip to the upper-most areas from which the whole of Thiruvananthapuram city was visible and the ruins of an old colonial bungalow there. Importantly, the rocks on the hills were not lifeless boulders but definitely swathed in culture -- most of our interviewees could remember the names they were given, and legends around them, especially connected to the events in the Mahabharatha. Our interviewees also remembered abundant wildlife. A fifty-four-year-old farmer from a Nair family with roots of many generations there recalled his grandfather telling him of the abundance of the barking deer and wild boar in the area, and of how, in his grandfather's youth (probably

in the early nineteenth century or earlier), sheep were reared there even (probably indicates a much-cooler climate).

Nevertheless, it is evident from Ayyankali's complaint above, that when viewed as land with the potential for modern agriculture, hill-slopes could not but figure as merely 'rocky and barren'. Such a transformation in the perception of hill-land was afoot from the early 20th century in Malayali areas.

Two important events seem to be central to the twentieth century history of spatial shifts there. The first of these was the conditional assignment of around 350 acres of lands on the MM to around 90 families to cultivate rubber by the Kerala government in 1960. The Kerala government had enacted Special Rules for the promotion of rubber cultivation by private parties on government land; the Revenue Department was to allot this portion of the MM to assignees who were bound by the clauses that it shall not be used for any other purposes (exceptions being made for house and garden) and that the rights of the government on roads, paths, streams, mines and quarries near the land are not affected by the allotment. The assignees, it appears, were neither all poor nor were they all farmers—they were supposedly freedom fighters (though other senior interviewees, born in Pallichal, claim that they were merely supporters of the then-Chief Minister Pattom A Thanu Pillai's party). Many of them had enough resources to stay back until the rubber began to yield and maintained strong connection with their homes elsewhere and were supported by their relatives too. Eight-four-year-old Mrs SB remembers:

At that time this place was almost completely deserted – there were just big boulders and wild bushes. Only the workers would be there, who came from Pamangode. Only after many –five- years, when the rubber began to yield, did the owners come over to stay. I would come only during the school vacations and there used to be a small shed – thatched shed – where I stayed to supervise the workers. My daughter was 4 and we would return when the school opened. I came here to stay here only after I had given birth to another daughter and a son. Sh. was born here, in 1972. I have 6 children. I came to settle here in 1967. Before I came, others had come and settled here – a NP from Ayiroor , his wife, and three children, lived in a shed like us; then a M.sahib, from Mallappally. He had a job in the Secretariat. Then an Ambalappuzha fellow KP with his wife and two children, just below us. The others came afterwards.... There used to be a great deal of farming here, including hill paddy. Karanellu. I used to farm in the spot near the well. I have harvested it and taken it in a sack to

Aleppey! Tapioca, yams, colocasia, lots of bananas. Everyone would do farming. Initially, most people here were supported by their families back home; their brothers and others would send them some cash... or their mothers. But after the rubber, nobody depended on their families because now a steady income was available. People were satisfied with the fruit of their labour. Then they sent their children to the local school – all my children went to the Nemom school. They all climbed heights!

The younger generation of most of these families, not just Mrs SB's, 'climbed heights' – obtained professional degrees and government employment, and once rubber prices began to fall since the 1990s, these families were ready to sell this land to the quarry companies. Clearly, this does not seem to be from a lack of facilities in the allotted areas – Mrs SB recalls how the families got together to have a road built and how they put pressure on the government for a bus service to the MM and got it. At present, barely three of the original assignees remain on MM.

In the meantime, land reforms in Kerala of the early 1970s had regularized the rights of many poor, lower-caste residents who lived in small plots and hutments. Mr CE claims that around 250 families, mostly Nadar and SC, which were dependent in one way or the other on the Nair landlords, gained small homestead plots. Others, who were small farmers on otti leases, sometimes went for litigation. A few won, while others were evicted forcibly by the landlords.

Nevertheless, the poor continued to be affected by a number of displacements because of land acquisition by different government agencies. Some sixty acres of the MM were acquired to set up the Indian Army's firing range around 1978; more than ninety acres on the top part of the hill was acquired by the Southern Air Command of the Indian Airforce in the late 1980s; land in the panchayat was acquired in the 1970s (and more recently) for the railways, and each time, the poor were displaced. They inevitably moved towards the cheapest parts of the area, the lower slopes, adjacent to the rocky areas. Local residents interviewed land prices there to be as cheap as Rs 50 per cent in the 1970s, and Rs 1000 cent in the 1990s. Needless to say, once the rubber-cultivators – title-holders of the land allotted to them for this purpose – arrived there more numerous by the early 1970s, the livelihood opportunities afforded by the hill to the poor women of the area shrank⁷. Mr S. whose mother had gathered firewood and fodder from the hill remembers that her visits to MM grew more and more infrequent as the years passed and with the changes in transport which made bullock-carts relatively rare, around the mid-1970s, it stopped altogether.

The other key event in the spatial history of the area was the building of a road that connected the MM directly with the centre of the Pallichal panchayat, opening it up to the city and beyond. The stretch of road from the Arikadamukku junction to the MM, which became highly contentious in the 2010s, was built in the mid-1980s, through direct community intervention. Earlier, the residents of the MM reached the city through another route which led through Machel to Pamangode, to the north and west of the hill. Now, they could reach Pravachambalam junction through the new road. The new road was built through a vast stretch of paddy land, connecting its two sides. Most importantly, it is this road that made the MM easily accessible, providing an important condition for the entry of quarry capital into the area. Mr GK, a fifty-one-year-old resident and participant in this community road-building, remembers it with considerable excitement:

There was no road here, so it was very hard. The fields lay unbroken and you had to walk on the one-metre raised ridge. A few pregnant women had to be carried across the field; a senior man died because he could not be given medical help on time. Some 85 families would benefit from it.

So all locals, men and women, got together, beyond political affiliation, to build this path actually encroaching the field! The field belonged to a powerful man, Pattom Thanu Pillai's nephew, Madhusoodanan Nair. He lived in Pravachambalam, but owned the fields here.

... Adherents of all political parties were part of this road-building effort. The women included many officers, and educated women, and the participants were from different social classes as well. When the work began, men cut the road out of the field with pickaxes and women carried the mud out. We built the road in a single night.

This was illegal activity, of course, and soon police cases for encroachment were filed against all of us. All the men involved in the road-work went into hiding. When the police came, the women told them that they were responsible – there were some really strong women here those days – and the police went back and the cases were withdrawn.⁸

Though Mr S, someone who also witnessed the road-building pointed out that it brought to fore the tensions between the Edacode ward, where most of Nair landlords resided, and the MM ward, where the assignees and the poor workers on the MM lived, and that the road has really been the latter's need, he also remarked that it was the availability of this road (which was soon tarred by the early 1990s)

which opened up the possibility of quarrying to some of the assignees who had granite boulders on their property. It is perhaps important to reflect on why the allottees were more prone to selling lands to quarry-capital – whether it was merely due to their changing needs, or also because they were habituated to seeing this land as a ‘resource’ – a habit that came along with the government’s allotment itself. This may lead us to ask more questions on belonging and the conditions under which place-making by settlers proves enduring or ephemeral. In this case, clearly, place-making efforts (the settler interviewees mentioned how they collectively pressurised the government for a road through their settlement, gathered together at a common place at the hill-top to listen to speeches by political leaders and so on) did not work well-enough to bestow a deep sense of belonging.

In the 1990s, small-scale mining began, and permits for limited mining seem to have been issued. Remembering a visit to the MM in the late 1980s, a KSSP activist, Mr KH, remarked that quarrying had already been initiated:

When we visited the Mala there was already quarrying there, but for personal use, and using hand held technology. There was no practice of breaking down a whole hill. It was for home use, say for building someone a house. You can call it homestead quarrying. Later someone there who used to work in the Secretariat, someone called K. – he was once my teacher too – who started large-scale quarrying there in the MM area. They would break rock and turn it into small metal, with crusher technology, they introduced it there. The locals started this process, then it expanded. The freedom fighters who got land on the MMala... this K’s ... was one of them. He was an official at the Secretariat and probably this is how he got the idea of selling the rock commercially.

The freedom fighters who got the land were not poor. Anyway once they took over and cleared the forest, the whole place became a rubber plantation and all these families had income from the rubber. Occasionally, the monkeys would spill the rubber sap, but for that, they had no issues at all. They were aiming for even more profit. Those people who did not have the resources to start such big quarry units on their own came to slowly offer their land for sale. The big quarries began to acquire land approaching them. KK Rocks and others owned the land there. KK Rocks has been a presence since 2008.

The laboring poor on the lower slopes, especially the women, migrated to these small quarries as stone-breakers as paddy cultivation declined in the 1990s. The output was not high, and so pollution was not intense

either. Residents remember disputes between neighbors about falling splinters and so on, but the hand-held technology used is widely remembered as relatively harmless. With the late 1980s and 1990s, more and more of the laboring poor in this panchayat moved towards the construction sector, and working outside the panchayat more frequently.

All this is confirmed by the *Panchayat Development Report* produced for Pallichal as part of the People's Planning Campaign in 1996. It notes the retreat from agriculture, falling use of water bodies, the increasing migration to construction by labour, the poor yields from rubber cultivation; while it mentions quarrying as undesirable and a potential environmental hazard, clearly, it was never perceived as a serious danger. Four granite crusher units are among the small-scale industrial units in the panchayat (p. 55) and a granite metal production cooperative is also mentioned (p. 49). The *Report* also acknowledged the landlessness of the dalits (though not of the other lower caste poor on the hill) and seeks land for them.

In 2002, Kerala passed The Kerala Protection of River Banks and Regulation of Removal of Sand Rules. The demand for substitutes rose sharply, given the continuing boom in construction. M-Sand became an extremely profitable prospect. In MM, the small quarry owners became the 'stepping stones' for quarry capital – they facilitated the entry of the latter. All of the activists and many residents remembered with considerable ire how one of them closed off the path that went through his plot to locals, demanding a toll which he extracted from the quarry lorries and locals. "He put up a board saying 'Outsiders May Not Enter'. How ironical!" said a leader of the MSS, Mr MH. In another anecdote shared by sixty-year-old activist Mr V, a small quarry owner was literally duped: "... there was a KN who had a quarry at Machel. He had a loan for it, from a bank and the quarry was at a loss. The bank manager, who is now the owner of a major quarry, offered him some 20 lakhs – this was much more than KN expected, which was around 15 lakhs. He brought some indirect pressure on Nair by influencing the unions of workers there and fomenting a strike... But he was content with the 20 lakhs which was way more than he expected. The sale deed however mentioned that the price was 40 lakhs. This allowed the bank manager to get a loan of 35 lakhs... a great gain. And the quarry company bought off all the former stone workers by giving them a monthly pension of Rs 500, which continues even today..."

Activists claim that the small quarrying interests in the panchayat were able to influence the panchayat committee and local politicians quite strongly after 2005 to make these easier for the bigger players. However it appears from the accounts of a farmer-activist, Mr BL, who

was a Block Panchayat Member who tried to shut down illegal quarries in the late 1990s that the inclination towards criminal intimidation was already present then:

When I was in the BP, we have opposed it even then ... I have filed a case against rock quarries back then, then. These people [the panchayat] gave a stop memo and we sealed the quarries, and these fellows then went to the HC against us ... and the government did not implead with us. This was around 1998. We did not give them permission to mine the rock, we stayed them. They were not so big then and not all had permission. When they were denied permission some of them came to my house. Not all were the owners of property on MM ..there were the big ones too. But it was not so extensive ... there was someone from Malayam, a Nair ... those days, this fellows used to extract a hundred times more than what they were permitted. And they could be quite violent, they tried to run me down with a lorry. I was traveling in an auto and these fellows tried to kill me in a staged accident. . This was in 1998-99. They then brought me 50000- 1 lakh rupees – remember, this was 1999, this was quite a huge amount then – as a bribe. I sent them off, I fought all alone, quite strongly. Then they went to the HC and brought back an order allowing them to break rock. But we had made them close all the quarries, but there was no one to help us in the HC. The govt did not support us nor did the panchayat become a party supporting us in court.

Mr BL claimed that a notorious thug there, infamous for having murdered his wife, who is now a quarry worker attempted to murder him. Because the quarries hired many more local workers than now, there was an uproar over workers losing their incomes, and posters were stuck everywhere against him. Quite likely, then, that illegal quarrying became invisible as labour protests took over.

People's Planning Campaign activists we interviewed are now candid about the limitations of their activism in the 1990s. Both Mr H. and Mr KH admit that they could not do much to remedy the identification of 'local development' with local 'road-building'—though activities such as resource-mapping was done with great enthusiasm and public participation in Pallichal. They agreed that ecological connections were not recognized and the possibility of the panchayat regulating quarrying as a small-scale livelihood option for the poor there was not even thought of. And when they thought of it, it was too late, apparently:

... after about a year after resource mapping and the development seminar, we decided to gather the elected members and others in the Nemom school for a discussion on

what all could be done ... The president and some members, not all, but some... came. That was the time when road building became extensive and we decided to say something about it. This isn't really scientific, we said. Though roads are essential, building roads by filling up the canals and streams is dangerous... We wanted to set up PPC convenors to build roads – actually try this with five model roads that would be models for all Kerala. We had got together there to discuss this.

The president listened to us and agreed with everything but then told us that there were 'other elements' who controlled him. As soon as they knew that panchayat was going to issue the tender for the five roads, these elements had met the contractors and taken the share of profit even without letting him know. They informed him that they had taken this share for certain purposes. He opened up only because it was us...

Political parties assigning donation quotas and the panchayat president and committee members becoming the collection agents was the bane of the system, they said. Public works are the easiest way to meet the quota. Mr H. pointed out how this made use of an earlier culture of collective road-building that was closely associated with 'development' in the popular imagination: "There was surely an earlier culture of people taking over land for roads, but these were not concreted and were usually only for immediate need. It was when the panchayats were set up with money available that this became so extensive." At present, with increasing urbanization, there is a higher demand for roads, and this fits perfectly with the panchayat members' quest for development that is 'visible', for which they can take direct credit. As an activist of the MSS, Mr AE, remarked:

Local people also would like to have a road in front, with an auto reaching there. From land prices which were 2-3 thousands it went up to 5 lakhs or more. So the canal-banks have all been turned into roads, and the canals are now encroached for roads and so narrowed down. Yes, it looks like a housing colony now and in some places, local people themselves (and not just others) do the business of buying up land, arranging road facilities, and turning the land into plots for sale. Panchayat members also take an interest in road-building because it is a visible way to show your work. You can hang a sign saying that the road was built in such-and-such member's term and organize a foundation-stone-laying ceremony and so on.

Veteran of the People's Planning Campaign, Mr KH., remarked that this culture of self-projection by panchayat member marked the

final exclusion of the KSSP from development discussions in the panchayat : “This was during the panchayat president R’s time. She was a CPM leader of course. Until then it was normal for KSSP activists to participate actively in the development seminars. This time I was invited to give an opening address. I spoke against the culture of panchayat members raising signs and flex boards claiming credit for road improvements; they hated it. After that we have never been involved... after the UDF got power, things went totally downhill. Some six-seven years back, I went back to the panchayat office for something, and saw the resource map we had created with so much effort, so much public participation, rolled up and thrown into a corner of the Secretary’s room ...

The KSSP’s vision for development, as articulated in the Panchayat Development Report of 1996, had outlined proposals for the revival of local industry, particularly weaving, which had been quite widespread, through better technology and local marketing. All these efforts, some of which were quite promising, were abandoned completely after the second term, after 2005.

In the same time-period, quarry capital gained a firm foothold in the panchayat by buying up land from both the assignees and smallholders at very high prices as well as by influencing the local poor through many kinds of handouts including monthly cash payments, festival gifts, and kits during school reopening, and so on. Their tactics are the stuff of local legends – for example, about how a local twelve-year-old schoolboy from a poor family went to a leading quarry company and asked for some money for a flower-design he planned to set up for the Onam festival and was given twelve thousand rupees immediately. The locals were given money, rations, compensation for damages to houses, support for building new houses elsewhere, and even new houses entirely. But it appears that the local commonsense that the quarry companies offered prices that were unimaginably generous to the local poor for their land seems exaggerated. Forty-six-year-old Ms. A., a keen observer of poor women in the panchayat, remembers:

.... before the quarries came, there were a very large number of people, families, which lived on its slopes. They were plenty. When the M. company came, all of them were evicted. They were thrown out with the connivance of the panchayat, the Village Office, and the politicians – they were given a pittance, actually quite a small sum, not very large like the quarry companies claim, and they were scattered all around. We don’t know where they all went. Some of them went to live with their grown children, some to places around here. These days we don’t see much of them at all. Sometimes you run into a

familiar face and you ask, *chechi*, didn't you use to live in MM? And they say, yes, *mole*, I did. We were all thrown out when the M company came there and now I live with my daughter. So many times I have heard this – some go to their children, to their in-laws, or to relatives' places. Most of these were extremely poor, and lived in the land that was taken over by the quarries ... initially before they began to break the rock and set up the crusher unit, all the poor around that place were paid money. That is why they ask, the people there don't mind, what is your problem?

The modus operandi is to first approach a person with some influence around. Say I know some ten people around. I will be approached and told, see, breaking the rock is going to be quite difficult for these families, can you please persuade them to sell us their land, some way. We will give them any amount of cash. Can you please get them to sign an agreement?⁹

It must be noted that quarry capital was greatly advantaged by the fact that no competing labour in an organized form, for example, agricultural labour unions, stood in their way. By the time they began to enter the panchayat, agriculture was already in steep decline as the Panchayat Development Report of 1996 revealed; the younger generation of agricultural worker households was already entering non-agricultural work especially in construction. A sizeable section of quarry supporters hails from oppressed-caste, ex-agricultural labour families, and they received even more liberal support, in the form of new houses, vehicles including lorries, two-wheelers and mobile phones, as well as generous payments. It is this group that is accused widely by the supporters of the MSS of orchestrating violence against them on the behest of quarry capital. Meanwhile, there is widespread agreement, cutting across political lines and among activists and residents who are not involved in any public life, that the entire panchayat committee is subservient to them. So also, there is the same degree of agreement that quarry companies are able to hush up accidents and deaths of migrant labourers in their sites. Since 2012 when a High Court order that directed the District Collector to prevent the use of the assigned land for purposes other than rubber-farming was passed but ignored¹⁰ many efforts to organize protests have risen and subsided, the rumour being that each time, the quarry companies managed to buy off the agitators. In time, quarry capital also won over traditional civil society – some local temples and churches – through generous donations. They also began to consume other resources, especially water resources, paying a pittance to its owners and winning them over.

The MSS was formed in 2014, when the quarry companies had begun to directly affect the everyday physical wellbeing of the residents of the Edacode ward – through the incessant lorry traffic on the Arikkadamukku-MM road, which is a panchayat road. This overuse had ruined the road; the dust and disturbance it caused affected the physical health of the people, the vegetation, and even daily routines (given that locals found it impossible to use the road) of even children. The efforts of the companies to tar the road in a way that suited two-lane lorry traffic, making impossible even pedestrian use, aroused the anger of local residents who pointed out that private interests could have nothing to do with improving a public road.

The active efforts of MSS members to counter the domination of quarry capital of the public road provoked confrontations between them and the quarry supporters, who seemed to be actively aided by the elected members of the panchayat, cutting across party lines. From 2014 to the present, this conflict has been staged more or less continuously in many spaces, including the invited space of the Grama Sabha and on the streets as well, besides before government authorities.

Not surprisingly, the leading activists, residents of the Edacode ward belong to the privileged castes and communities in the panchayat, who are also endowed with modern education, employment, and middle-class social and cultural capital. On the other side, their opponents are the local political leaders, miners, panchayat members, and the residents of the area around the quarry sited who support quarry capital. It would appear, then, that the divide in the panchayat is an extension of the historical divide between the upper-caste, privileged elite, the descendants of the Nair landlords, and the resource-less dalit/nadar poor.

It may indeed be argued that the poor in the area are now trying to make up for their historical exclusion from resources by fostering links with the new predatory capitalism, taking a share of the plunder. However, the divide is not simple as it seems superficially. There are leading dalit activists in the MSS while members of the most eminent of erstwhile Nair landlord families side with the quarries actively. A good part of the traditional elite civil society is with quarry capital. It may well be that this pre-existing divide is being transformed yet again in a time when neoliberal commonsense is turning hegemonic.

Civil Society in Pallichal: The MSS

There can be little doubt that narratives of the MSS activists are more often than not marked by social and cultural privilege. For example, the narrative of social harmony – of people living equitably and peacefully – as characteristic of Kerala, is one that serves privileged

communities. As may be evident from the previous section as well as on the vast literature on the 'outliers' of the Kerala Model (Kurien 1995) and growing inequalities in Kerala (Subramanian and Prasad 2009), it is one that remains blind to the simmering inequalities in Malayali society. We found that many MSS activists shared an understanding of society at Pallichal deeply informed by this narrative. "The quarries have divided us," said Mr AE. "... there was time when people lived in close harmony, and used to know each other face-to-face in a friendly way. Now those who take money from the quarry owners are hostile, seeing this new source of income, and drawing it, they have become closer to the outsiders from Pathanamthitta and elsewhere [the quarry company owners]. The unity of former times has been weakened considerably." This of course was characteristic of the very vision of local development in the panchayat, articulated well in the Panchayat Development Report of 1996 (p.16).

It was perhaps not a coincidence, then, that we found that most of our interviewees who were of privileged communities knew very little of the dalit communities in their panchayat, especially of their history of resource access. Gopika (forthcoming) records from her fieldwork in Pallichal panchayat that a dalit settlement there had been demanding an overbridge on the railway line in Edacode, as a shortcut to their places of work and that they had organized a protest. Gopika's dalit interviewees complained that the MSS paid little attention to their needs and justified their non-participation in it. Interestingly, none of our interviewees mentioned this incident at all. This does not mean that dalits and social justice are absent from the discourse of the MSS. Judging from the interviews as well as the large number of public notices issued by the MSS since 2014, the demand for resources, including land, on behalf of the underprivileged in the panchayat has been a prominent and recurring one. Nevertheless, it appears that this may do little to allay the suspicions of the underprivileged supporters of the quarries, given that the relationship of power appears non-reciprocal still. Moreover, the espousal of the demand for land on behalf of dalit makes little difference when many MSS activists use a moral lens to view the actions of the quarry-supporting underprivileged people. For instance, condemning those who lined up to take the school-reopening kits distributed by a leading quarry company, the activist Mr AE said, "There was a time when many of us struggled hard to get an education, even for a slate and pencil, but we wouldn't do this." Nor the presence of prominent dalit people among the MSS' leading activists do much to heal the divide, simply because these activists are well-educated, employed, and certainly middle-class – and actually valued by some of their upper-caste co-activists for the fact they have risen on the strength of 'merit', not reservations.

How, then, has the MSS mobilized an arguably effective - albeit - limited- course of action against the combined might of powerful quarry capital, politicians (both clearly non-local in connections and command), the panchayat (both elected members and officials), sections of the judiciary, the police, and a substantial section of local people?

As an answer, one may begin with the observation that the MSS mobilized the road users who were being deprived of their convenience for the sake of transporting the quarried materials. Local-level development as road-building, as mentioned earlier, has appealed greatly to neoliberal consumers in the 1990s and after. The obstruction of road traffic, loss of direct vehicle access to homes, as well as the unbearable air and sound pollution caused by the transportation of quarried material was also widely perceived as affecting land prices and thus leading to potential financial loss to individuals. The MSS' call, therefore, received strong responses from the locals, especially the inhabitants of the area served by the Arikkadamukku-Mookkunnimala road, and definitely, these concerns were to do with individual, not collective interests. As MSS activists often complained to us, many supporters seemed interested only in keeping the road for themselves and not in protecting the environmental health of the areas – and thus their opposition to quarrying was often woefully partial.

But more interesting perhaps is the MSS' claim to being 'civil' and 'moral' citizens united in benevolent collective interest,¹¹ despite the fact that their supporters are more prone towards just their own individual interest. As many activists we spoke to mentioned to us, the MSS was the last in a long line of protest committees and efforts which had tried to take on quarry capital in the panchayat but were either bought off or worn down. The MSS activists attributed their success to the fact that they were able to function as truly 'civil society' – by setting aside their political affiliations for an issue that affected all alike and the long-term sustainability of life in the panchayat. "This struggle includes people of all political affiliations – CPM, Congress, BJP," said Ms BR, a leading woman activist, "MH and I are of the same political affiliation but we never talk our politics here. All the people in this are the same, they just want to do good to the local people." Many of our interviewees, especially BJP and CPM supporters, told us how they had openly broken with the local party leadership on this issue.

United as they were by a deep disillusionment about their own political parties, these activists strived to ensure that the committee would be structured in such a way that no political party would be able to capture it. Instead, they drew on not just the social and cultural capital that they possessed, but also on the *moral* capital they could claim – it

was not a coincidence that the word *samshuddham* (pure, pristine) was used repeatedly by MSS activists to describe their leaders and movement.¹² This bolstered their frequent claim that they were not “up for sale” unlike many of their predecessors. Recalling the early days of the formation of the MSS, Mr ME said: “I was careful when I joined the protest because of my earlier bitter experiences. So at the very first meeting which was very big and attended by many local political party members, of all kinds, I declared that no one who occupied leadership positions in any political party should be allowed to become committee members and if that happened, I would withdraw. These members were there with a view to enter the protest and capture it as they do always. Anyway, what I said was accepted and GP sir, who was the headmaster of the school I studied in, became the president – he was 84 then, a highly-respected and incorruptible person. The local Library president was the chairman and joint convenors were MH sir and S who had recently retired from government service. We got the committee registered immediately.”

Taking a ‘moral’ position against quarry capital is, in other words, that which unite the MSS activists. This had softened the deep distrust that BJP and CPM adherents had of each other. “There are activists in the BJP and RSS who are untainted and moral – in their own terms,” said the CPM-affiliated KSSP activist, Mr H. “They refuse to be bought by quarry capital and stand with the people.” A notice of the MSS from November 2014 reads: “The MSS has no narrow caste, religion, local chauvinism. There has been no violence, no attempt to disrupt peaceful social life from its part till now, and never will it happen.” In another notice announcing a protest march to the Collectorate on 19 January 2015, the MSS proclaimed that the quarry capital and corrupt officials feel nothing but “the organized power of the people,” claiming it for the MSS. In other notices, it uses words that denote “people” as the ultimate bearers of sovereignty – *janasakthi*, *janakeeya prathishedham* – as also the bearers of moral force against organized capitalist plunder of natural resources. In another notice announcing a public commendation of meritorious local students by the MSS (2 October 2016) it describes itself thus: “The MSS is a cultural collective of progressive and fearless local people (*naattukaar*) who are free of narrow caste and communal considerations, gender discrimination, narrow localisms. The declared aim of the MSS is realizing people’s participation in social activism and raising their consciousness to empower them to fight injustice. The first step in achieving the consciousness of struggle is creating an awareness of society. Children, women, and older people all have equal right to participate in it.”

Thus it is no surprise that the MSS uses a moral language very often to speak of the polarization among the residents of Pallichal. The

public campaign notices it issued describes the miners using such words as as kollakkar (bandits), the 'mafia', 'pakalkollakkar' (daylight robbers), 'kallanmaar' (thieves), and 'naattukaarude daaidryathinu vilayidunnavar' (those who put a price on people's poverty). The panchayat officials and members who collude with quarry capital are referred to as 'dalals', 'kankaanis', 'machambi raashtreeyakkar' (brother-in-law politicians), 'ucchishtambhojjikal' (crumb-takers), 'vaalattikal' (lapdogs), 'cheruppunakkikal' (shoe-lickers) and so on. The violent elements among the local quarry supporters are called 'goondas', 'drunkards', 'corrupters of youth who ply them with drugs and hooch', 'hired thugs', 'bought', 'unlettered', 'ignorant/foolish'. When questioned why they do not retaliate with police complaints even though the quarry companies and their supporters harass them constantly with police cases, the leaders of the MSS occupy high moral ground – the burden of it would fall on the underprivileged supporter of the quarry company, they replied, while the real culprit, quarry capital, will escape easily.

What does this tell us about the nature of agency exercised by the MSS activists? Undoubtedly, from all the discursive materials produced by the MSS and our interviews, it appears that their understanding of politics and the market are liberal, or at least, they seem willing to operate within a liberal political framework – in which the state, even as it commits itself to private property and enterprise, is expected to intervene in the market (understood as already-existing) to punish criminality in business. They also believe that citizenship is built through acquiring ethical standards and norms, not merely by keeping away from wrongdoing. Clearly, this understanding of citizenship is not neoliberal; it is also not the stereotypical Hindutva imagination of it. MSS members adhere to the liberal commitment to protecting self-interest and coming together for the protection of collective self-interest – clearly, self-interest is not understood as profit-maximization or majoritarianism. Their faith in the state is also unimpeachable: they want, through their activism as disciplined citizens acting in liberal democratic space to get the state to discipline quarry-capital.

Importantly, their understanding of the state's biopolitics conforms to what Michel Foucault (2008) has called 'disciplinary biopolitics'. In 'disciplinary biopolitics', states exercise a political rationality in which the administration of life – its sustenance, growth – is central. The power exerted is 'biopower': "...that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to 1976: 137). One may argue that modern biopolitics was integral to shaping Malayali identity and citizenship from at least the nineteenth century, with all its exclusions, internal fault-lines and fractures. State welfarism in post-independence Malayali society was the exercise

of biopower by the developmentalist state, within a state-society relationship of 'edgy cooperation' – what Amartya Sen described as 'public action'.

It is precisely the breakdown of this relationship that the MSS activists sought to reveal and remedy through their public protests and activities, which ranged from stopping the quarry lorries on the Arikkadamukku-MM road to fasting on Kerala's national festival day, Onam, to dharnas and protest marches to various government agencies inside and outside the panchayat. Protestors throwing themselves on the road in front of the quarry lorries was not only an act of symbolically claiming the public space as essentially belonging to citizens, it also brought attention to the state's inability to act as a protective force fostering the biological existence of the people there. Protestors stopping quarry capital's smooth production and flows with their bodies highlighted the crisis of the liberal order in which citizens were forced now to use their bodies, endanger their lives, to counter the relentless threat that quarry capital raised. This threat, as they perceive it, is to their very lives as biological beings vulnerable to the clouds of quarry-dust, the pollution of water bodies and streams by m-sand residue, the dangerous changes in micro-climate that affected all forms of life, the risks to life from the possibility of explosions in quarries, possible landslides, and so on.

Nevertheless, this ostensible liberal active citizen-agent exerting resistance through a morally-pure civil society is by no means 'pure', i.e. completely insulated from political parties or mainstream political ideologies, nor is it a guaranteed path towards shedding the political baggage of inherited historical power differences. For instance, it appears that the MSS' decision to avoid contesting local elections is driven not just by its determination to remain untainted by political partisanship, but also by its need to preserve the political connections of its members. Some activists were candid that an important reason why quarry capital had not unleashed outright violence against the MSS was that its activists were members of powerful political parties. Mr S. for instance, pointed out that MSS members included longstanding RSS activists and CPM members with considerable influence outside the panchayat. Besides, MSS members also control some traditional civil social institutions, religious and secular – a temple, for instance, which refused the donations of quarry capital, the Nair Service Society's local committee (*karayogam*) and the local library. Secondly, it is also clear that entering this civil social formation does not rid activists of the orientations acquired through their political and ideological training and caste location. Many activists interviewed displayed this to different degrees: for the BJP supporters, often, the issue was of 'achaayanmaar' (wealthy and enterprising Christians)

plundering local resources; in others, the elite discomfort at the dalits flaunting their new wealth – their vehicles, new clothes, phones etc. and elite caste-families living on rent in houses owned by low-caste quarry supporters built from quarry-capital's largesse – is more than palpable. This discomfort, too, is couched in moral terms, and it finds in it evidence for the moral failings of these people. Not surprisingly, too, some interviewees read the evocation of pre-existing caste inequalities by some of the quarry-supporters as a justification of their stance as evidence for their 'communal attitudes'.

From this, it seems evident that the civil society that took shape against quarry-capital in Pallichal was not exactly the one that was projected in and through the People's Planning of the 1990s in which people of all sorts were to cooperate with each other for the protection of mutual interests beyond caste and community. It is more decidedly coloured by a degree of the 'sons of the soil' sentiment which could potentially take on communal colour (hence the complaint of RSS-supporters often sliding into anger against 'Christian Achaayanmaar from Pathanamthitta' taking out their birth-place.

In other words, the moral language renders invisible the social history of power in the panchayat. It also renders some of the internal tensions, between MSS activists, unintelligible. A leading dalit leader Mr S. for example, struggles for a language in which the question of pre-existing socio-economic divide and the persistent elitism (like the attitudes described above) may be addressed – and the language of moral uprightness is inadequate. His complaints are understood by others are often 'an ego issue' or 'personal quirks'.

Uncivil Society? Quarry-Supporters in Pallichal

The local quarry-supporters appear in the discourse of the MSS as stooges and paid thugs of quarry capital who undertake criminal intimidation and subversion of democratic institutions at its behest. They are accused of corrupting youth through getting them addicted to liquor and drugs; they accost critics of quarry capital on the roadside and in grama sabhas making threats of violence or indulging in violence and showering them with verbal abuse. However, the MSS is acutely aware that this section of people does not represent all, or even the main, supporters of predatory mining in the panchayat. They are aware that not just the poor but also many of the better-off, including early supporters of the MSS, have joined ranks with the companies. However, they agree that all these different people are the recipients of 'quarry-welfare' – doles handed out by the companies to their supporters, which differ according to the social standing and political clout of the recipient besides their utility to the company.

To make sense of the strategies of the poor among the quarry-supporters, one must perhaps take note of new neoliberal subjectivities that have arisen with the rise of individualized welfarism in Kerala since the late 1990s. Elsewhere, I have written about the *aanukoolyam*-seeker (or the seeker of the welfare handout) the management of who seemed to be an onerous task to many leaders of the Kudumbashree SHG network (Devika 2016) :“*Aanukoolyam* seekers observed market discipline in repayments, which was relatively easy given the low interest rates, but apparently dodged ‘governance labour’ or the many subsidiary tasks that SHG members are expected to perform ... KS leaders felt that they were dealing with people who resembled ungovernable consumers, in contrast to older-generation party supporters who were unfailingly loyal even when the party could not meet their demands immediately.” (p.7) It is not easy to dismiss these welfare-benefit seekers as a greedy bunch: “In a context in which responsibilised welfare was thrust on them, they seemed indeed to indicate a new mode for the poor to gain vital consumption resources from the state.” (p.7).

From our interviews with the ward members and from Gopika’s examination of Grama Sabha functioning in Pallichal (forthcoming), it seems apparent that *aanukoolyam*-seekers are no less numerous here than elsewhere. Given this, it is no surprise at all that the freebies offered by the quarry companies have numerous takers, though many of the MSS activists we interviewed were puzzled – according to one of them, “...if there is an announcement that even just Rs 10 was going to be distributed, there would be a long queue living up at once.” The predominance of individualized and responsibilized welfare in Kerala’s decentralized development meant that liberal citizenship-building could hardly happen, and once the People’s Planning Campaign volunteers began to retreat (for several reasons), the grama sabhas shaped the *aanukoolyam*-seeker. In my earlier research, Kudumbashree leaders complained how readily they indulged in multiple membership of several credit networks to maximize gains (p.7; also see Devika and Nair 2018); it is not difficult to imagine the *aanukoolyam*-seeker readily accepting welfare benefits from quarry companies as well. Many interviewees, activists, residents, and miners, as well as many local people we spoke with, were quick to point out that there were many poor families who lived around the quarries who extracted money from the companies claiming that they were ill from quarry dust, or that their houses were damaged etc. who would readily admit that they were complaining not so much about what happened as what might potentially happen. Mr G. who is a quarry-supporter living near a quarry, recounted :“I saw this happen ‘live’. Our neighbour K. was seen bringing down the walls of his house with a

hammer. He then went up [to the quarry company manager] and got compensation. He would get Rs 2000 to Rs 4000. He did this every week, for seven or eight months. My house wouldn't even have a scratch. Finally the company bought his land paying 2 lakhs per cent. He had thirty-five cents. With this money his elder daughter could be married off and the younger one could complete nursing," he said. When asked if the company could not see through this obvious scam, he said they bought the lands anyway to stop the annoying people. "To get rid of a nuisance," he said.

However, in Pallichal, the quarry- freebies could be also read, easily, as payment for 'services' rendered to the quarry company – for silent assent to active violence in support of the companies – and this would add a layer of dignity that may well make the quarry-supporter feel higher than the welfare beneficiary. The quarry-supporters that we interviewed, especially the leader of the Nadar community on the hill, cast the MSS as a reactionary upper-caste initiative born out of their envy at the prosperity of the nadars and dalits. One of them, Mr GC said of the coming of the quarry companies: "The poorest people around this place have been able to gain... those who were not educated, they learned driving, bought lorries, and actually improved their lives. So there are good things and also bad things. Those who sold the land too have improved themselves. They went elsewhere, bought land, and built two storey houses there and they have gained a lot... The quarry owners give all sorts of help to the people when they ask. This is why the protest will not win. Many here have been bought land downhill but the quarries, many have been given rock and m-sand for construction, and all kinds of help. The people in the leadership of the protest are from former landlord families who owned a lot of land."

This seems in sharp contrast with the experience of their forefathers, especially the ancestors of dalit people there. As Mr S., a dalit leader of the MSS recounted about the past of his community there: "They were also used as labour in the illegal felling of trees in the MM. Valuable timber used to be removed using them and forest guards would look away or take away the timber. This illegal business was often carried out by the descendants of the savarna janmis but the blame would fall on the dalit men who would be arrested. I know this first hand because I saw these cases in the court. The addresses of the culprits would be inevitably of the hovels in the panchayat around the hill." In both cases, lower caste men served the elites – dalit men took the penalty when they served the caste elite of the panchayat; they, however, seem rewarded when they serve the 'outsider' quarry capital. No wonder, then, that (according to an MSS leader), a local thug named KA who had grown very rich through his criminal activities supportive of the quarry companies bragged: "My father used to distill the best [illegal]

arrack in the district. Do you know how he died? The police kicked him to death. Here am I, the son of a man who died like that, KA, lording over this place. And the Nairs just can't stand it!"¹³

Given this, there is hardly any surprise that the quarry supporters converge with the miners we interviewed in their belief that all morality in this matter was nothing beyond 'cheap talk', and that the MSS activists were as strategic agents in search of the most profitable deal as anyone else. They inevitably claimed tried to project the latter as hypocrites (who used ample quantities of granite to build their own houses and some of them, making use of free materials from these very quarries) or strategic agents trying to put pressure on the companies to extract a larger sum – in fact, as no different from the panchayat members who, according to them, are all allegedly paid regularly by the companies, the only difference being that the MSS activists were striving to secure payments in the future. In this level playing ground, they perceived, themselves, the historically-underprivileged, for once, to be more successful.¹⁴

Further, there is the undeniable fact that governmentality in Kerala has been moving towards what may be described as 'neoliberal governmentality' in which the behavior of the market is treated as a model for all behavior, and in which governance merely involves building incentives to make actors behave in specific ways (Fletcher 2010). It may be argued that neoliberal governmentality was already afoot in Kerala from the 1990s in the transition towards responsabilized welfare in decentralized development; however, local governance in Kerala is still sheathed in the moral language of caring and mutual dependence. However, the direct incentivisation of capital, especially natural resource extractors, was not easy, despite the Kerala government's turn towards promoting accelerated globalized capitalist growth which emphasizes infrastructural growth. Given the fact that the oppositional civil society and the critical press is still not completely silenced in Kerala, an open embrace of neoliberal governmentality that offers direct incentives that tilt in favour of quarry capital and against local residents and others is still not possible. Therefore, instead, the trend has been to set up disincentives ostensibly to prevent excessive and harmful quarrying which are either weak or insufficiently implemented. For example, in quarrying at least, government policy has been less of offering direct incentives to quarry businesses, than of building weak disincentives neither sufficient nor well-implemented. Secondly, in the wake of public protests about quarrying (and the struggle for MM is prominent among them), the pace and direction of the policy process had not been steady; it is also forced to zigzag.

For a very long time, well into the new century, the mining of minor minerals was relatively free of regulation (a time remembered fondly

by the early locals who started small-scale mining) and when it began to be tightened (for example, after the intervention of the judiciary following litigation by those it negatively impacted), the record shows that most implementing agencies were lax in enforcing restrictions (repeatedly exposed by the MSS). At MM, after various government agencies unearthed unspeakable levels of plunder and corruption that seems to have caused huge revenue loss to the government, restriction imposed worked as disincentives to the smaller players only.¹⁵ The larger players have remained above the structure of disincentives.

What, then, we see at the local level is not the outright march of neoliberal governmentality but a steady hollowing-out of liberal governmentality and with the former making a stealthy entry. The panchayat committee's tactics in the renewal of the licenses of the quarry companies (pointed out repeatedly by the MSS in their numerous public notices from 2014) makes sense in this light: they are just like the other government agencies lax to enforce restrictions – they side-stepped the issue by not following the rules, through passing on the responsibility to the panchayat secretary, and so on – i.e. by not exercising whatever restrictions they could, but without openly incentivizing the quarry companies much. The moral language of liberal local governance is retained but there is the tacit understanding that as long as strong disincentives do not exist, then it is perfectly acceptable to continue large-scale, harmful quarrying. This was well-illustrated in the interviews we had with representatives of the quarry companies.

And typical of neoliberal governmentality, criminality is viewed not as abnormal or deviant, and criminals are nothing but “rational actors merely seeking to maximize their utility through the most promising avenues available to them within their subjective horizons.” (Fletcher 2010: 174). Also, in neoliberal rationality, the Self engages in external relationships conducting a constant cost-benefit analysis (Gershon 2011), and exiting from those relationships whose utility has ended. It is easy to read, then, that if strong disincentives do not exist that deter criminals, then such acts are permissible and even count as ‘work’; it is also easy to understand why criminal or illegal acts/persons may be abandoned as quickly as they are accepted. Many locals, in casual conversations, as well as residents interviewed, did not think of corrupt local politicians as unworthy of public office; indeed, in the recent local elections, the most ‘tainted’ of such candidates won. When asked about the electoral defeat of a local politician widely known to have helped the quarries liberally for many years now, and functioned actively as a mediator, securing free or cheap construction materials for his supporters and others, the response of a local resident, Mr P, was that “he is too old and ill, and anyway, now he is not the sole contact point

to reach the companies... any panchayat member can approach... and they are not especially obliged to him anymore.”

Also, the understanding of biopolitics has changed drastically with the hollowing-out of liberal governmentality – this is yet another way in which neoliberal governmentality enters people’s commonsense. Almost every single panchayat member, miner, quarry-supporters, and many residents we interviewed or had long conversations with were keen to emphasize that at the bottom of it all was the reality that “we can’t do without *vikasanam* [a word that can mean ‘development’ in Malayalam but in a literal sense, just ‘growth’], and we need plenty of construction materials for it.” The implicit understanding of biopolitics that many quarry supporters and union leaders, panchayat members, and politicians at the local and state-level advance is not of the state directly protecting, nurturing and sustaining life but of it supporting economic growth in a way that all individuals are able to maximize their returns to investment and skills and advance to secure individual/family financial cushioning against risk. In their imagination, therefore, trying to limit growth poses the bigger danger to the exercise of biopower. All talk of the future, of sustainable environment, of keeping the local habitable and livable is, in this frame, ‘cheap talk’. The perception of the possibility of mobility, of moving away to safer places, informs the narratives of not only representatives of quarry capital but also its underprivileged supporters. Also, it must be remembered that some of the difficulties from recent micro-climate change in Pallichal, prominently, water shortage, was an everyday reality for the poor hill-dwellers since long. The road-building style of local development allows the conversion of their tiny plots into saleable real estate.

Interestingly, it is clear from our interviews with the MSS activists about their tactics of struggle that they implicitly recognize the deepening hegemony of neoliberal governmentality and its furtive advance at the local level, in panchayat governance and among the local residents. This is evident in their insistence at fighting the battle not only through ‘direct action’ – stopping the lorries on the road -- but also through working persistently through the maze of government agencies, from the courts to the pollution control board, the panchayat directorate, the public works department, the revenue department, the district collector, the vigilance and anti-corruption bureau, the Green Tribunal, petitioning them and organizing protest events. Through these acts, the MSS has managed to expose exactly the surreptitious advance of neoliberal governmentality, and use the media against it quite powerfully.

To conclude this section, one may raise the caution against clubbing the agency of the underprivileged quarry supporters too readily with

that of the quarry companies or the politicians and elected members who support them. As mentioned earlier, the *aanukoolayam*-seeker is a response to the waning of liberal governmentality in and through the arrival of responsabilized welfare. In Pallichal, this subject seems to have advanced towards claiming a share, albeit a small one, of the resource plunder by capital. It appears that while the agency of quarry capital is actively, even if indirectly, supported by the state in the local and beyond, that of the agency underprivileged quarry-supporters is decidedly precarious. There is no guarantee, that they will be protected and supported in the long term. There is no guarantee, even, that those among them who have amassed large fortunes from supporting quarry capital with criminal acts will climb up from social exclusion on the strength of the new wealth. As a dalit activist of the MSS, Mr AA, remarked about KA who is now among the richest in the panchayat: "Once he became rich he began to patronize the local church. They gladly accepted his donations, but when he began to 'play Jesus' – i.e. make himself the centre of attention in the congregation, they threw him out. Now he's trying is luck with another church. The same drama seems to be on there."

Conclusion

In sum, the conflict in Pallichal is much more than the story of the failure of local government and the alleged ensnaring of elected representatives in corruption. It is that of a pre-existing socio-economic divide that remained poorly addressed in the decentralized development initiatives of the mid 1990s now complicated considerably by the acceleration of post-liberalization capitalism and the new neoliberal subjectivities linked to the spread of individualized welfare. To that extent, it is clear that anti-corruption drives may be superficial and may, at best, offer temporary relief. But more importantly, removing large quarry capital completely may only be a necessary but not sufficient resolution, given the intensity of the socio-economic divide. The MSS, though it uses a moral language and often sees only 'quarry workers' and 'hired thugs' and not the descendants of groups subjected to gross injustice over centuries, is aware of this – evident in that they have often demanded (as articulated in their public notices and memoranda submitted to various authorities) not just ending illegal and large-scale quarrying, but also access to land as assets, adequate compensation for loss of employment, health allowance, and life-long pensions for the poor who stood to lose by the closure of the quarries. It is not difficult to notice that all these are endowments that were prominent under the mid-to late twentieth century egalitarian developmentalist regime in Kerala. That these

proposals actually exceed what was offered by the state to the poor in Kerala's 'public action' times may be read as a silent critique and corrections of the inadequacies of that wave of welfarism, even.

This research forces us to rethink many important debates: for example, the story of MM contains at least two instances of what appears to be the eventual perversion of an original pro-poor development instinct – the road-building of the 1980s at the local level, and the ban on sand mining of 2002. This seems to indicate the extent to which the impacts of particular development interventions and instincts remain largely unpredictable: close attention to forces at work at different scales cannot be avoided in making sense of these. In any case, it may be that as long as the imagination of development remains expansionist and infrastructural, such perversion is well-nigh inevitable. Secondly, land actively used for livelihood purposes by the lower caste people in the area was taken over and reallocated by the government as a resource; there was also the acquisition of the land they used for army and railway development. This was even as the lower caste power received minimal land allotments in the 1970s as part of land reform. It appears that this is creeping dispossession that prefigures the neoliberal state of the 1990s.

Thirdly, this research questions several popular notions about Kerala's experiment in decentralized development and bottoms-up planning of the late 1990s. Foremost among them would be the idea that this experiment was a continuation of the mid-20th century redistributive agenda of the Left. Clearly, the enduring socio-economic divide in Pallichal shows that it did not, or could not, address the persistent inequalities of caste and class. Secondly, the great hopes placed on the state-centric developmental 'civil society' set up in the 1990s as the bolster of local self-government as the engine of local democracy seem to have been rather misplaced. In Pallichal at least, it was built on an imagined ground of 'social unity' (so deeply embedded in elite commonsense there) but it is evident that a certain 'sons of the soil' sentiment advanced by the elites could well translate into communal hatred among a section of the resisters at least. This is not to say that the MSS is communal or majoritarian. It is true that the MSS, in a way, was what the PPC dreamed of - a local civil society cutting across political differences without abandoning those differences, implementing local development for local well-being, but without being insular in its attitudes. The MSS works hard to keep itself local but also strives very explicitly that they are not for a sons-of-the-soil kind of insularity (there is a notice, a printed one). But the presence of quarry capital makes them perhaps more local than they would have been had there been no threat to the place itself through the quarries.

The civil society envisaged under the PPC has been foisted in the end upon network of women's self-help groups of the Kudumbashree (Tiranagama and Devika 2020) have been the most silent and passive actor in the entire conflict. Kudumbashree in the panchayat does little more than micro-credit and micro-enterprise and provide welfare beneficiaries for Grama Sabha meetings – and little else. The helplessness of underprivileged women in the face of forces pulling poor families asunder was poignantly voiced by Ms A. in response to our question why women, and the poor women especially, were so loath to taking sides openly even though they had clear views for or against the quarrying:

The people in the affected wards are divided. Say, I am a person living in one of these wards and I am someone who openly expresses my views. Now I want to go there and give these quarry fellows a piece of my mind. But I cannot but cool down because there is no one behind me. Because each one is burying their rage deep within themselves. For women, if you express your views, the men in your household will be treated like enemies by the others. Many want to talk – this I know for sure, that they are keeping it inside their families. No one will really come together. Say a mother has two sons, one is for the quarries and the other one is against. The older one tells his mother, amme I am going to the samaram against the quarries, tell your [other] son to make himself scarce around there. There's going to be a scuffle if he comes. The younger fellow tells his mother, amma, tell your son [his older brother] to keep away from the quarries. I am not going to consider who. These are the sons of the same mother. So what will that mother do? She will say, if any of you two step out of this house, I will consume poison and kill myself. And so the three of them will sit on the steps of the house, the mother in the middle and the two sons on either side, looking disappointed, hands on their chins. Either they will be murdered, set against each other by the quarry people, or the mother will die. The boys will point fingers at each other and say - he's the reason I can't go. The younger fellow's party people will tell him - beat up your brother and come. The older fellow's party people will say - after all he's your younger brother, give him a thrashing, lock him up, and come. This is how it is, in each family. These party people won't say – you two are brothers, we won't interfere, we are going.

However, from this research, the hope for unity on the ground among people of different political parties working together for common ends, voiced by such leaders as EMS Namboodiripad in the public discussion

on decentralized development, does not seem groundless at all. The MSS is proof of that. Nevertheless, the inadequacies of such unity – that it does not overcome the limitations of an elite formation – are equally apparent. It is also evident that such a formation need not necessarily appear, or be successful, against the onslaught of predatory capital in any general sense.

Also, the limitations of ‘bottoms-up’ planning with no ecological vision are apparent now. The pervasive presence of the road in the imagination of development in the 1990s and after at Pallichal (and other places in Kerala) is worth exploring at greater depth. The attraction of recent road-building as a consumer/convenience (as opposed to the earlier ‘illegal’ kuchha road), not only for politicians/contractors but also for residents – neoliberal influence manifested in infrastructure over less environmentally-destructive, community-oriented transport infrastructure. Presumably it is this individual consumer/convenience which makes for the logic of politicians thinking it is a visible sign of ‘development’. Therefore the opposition to quarry-capital’s overuse of the road and the loss of local people’s control over it does not necessarily indicate the latter’s opposition to neoliberal sensibility. That the People’s Planning and subsequent activities were not able to counter such sensibilities is evident there.

In any case, given the pervasiveness of the subjects of *aanukoolyam* in the panchayat on one side, and the better-off middle-class who do not need the panchayat and its institutions for their sustenance on the other, the likelihood of the panchayat becoming a nerve-centre of rethinking development was probably distant. Nevertheless, serious reflection on how the historically-shaped socio-economic divide may be healed seems more urgent than ever before. Nor is it possible to set aside the concern for environmental sustainability anymore, as evident from the ecological shocks, including the Great Flood of 2018, the severe flooding of 2019, recurring droughts with water shortages, climate-change-related shocks including cyclones and rising temperatures, and the heightening human-animal conflict all over the state. A trade-off between ecological security and a measure of social justice is not acceptable because (a) the question of ecological security exceeds the local – MM affects the climate of the entire district, not just Pallichal, and (b) not only is the ‘social justice’ received by the underprivileged quarry-supporters irregular and impermanent, it is also easily reducible to charity and does not serve the interests of democracy and the eradication of social inequality.¹⁶

It appears, then, that if the framework of panchayati raj may need to be rethought from its roots, if it is to be made adequate to our present in which capital, especially natural resource-extracting capital,

has made heavy inroads into much of rural Kerala.¹⁷ In other words, the challenge is to bring capital into the framework of governance, make it responsible for the harms it perpetrates, ensure a fair sharing of the gains with local communities beyond just corporate social responsibility, and regulate it to avoid all harmful consequences to living things and nature in general. There is an extensive academic literature on the struggles of local communities, especially indigenous peoples, to secure justice against predatory mining, around the world, as well as on how local governments could play a significant role in ensuring fair partnerships at the local level under the rubric of 'local economic development' (Cunningham and Meyer-Stamer 2005; Rhodes 2011; Leifsen et al 2017; Phillips et al 2020). But a systematic effort to critically follow development policy in Kerala – in general – so as to lay bare the covert advance of neoliberal governmentality – may be an indispensable first step here. This brings us back to some serious thought for a Kerala Model of public action for the twenty-first century that rescues it from both silent abandonment and an ongoing hollowing-out.

Finally, there is the most important question: what are ways in which the MSS can seek to understand (and sympathise with and collectively transcend) the situation of fellow residents who were 'bought'? What kind of 'moral politics' could have happened instead? Could there be a transcendent politics which recognises positionality and overcomes it? Right now such possibilities seem far away as the struggle continues to rage in Pallichal. However, the persistent demand for land to the dispossessed lower caste poor, welfare for quarry workers, and social security for all quarry workers and dependents, local and migrant by the MSS as well as their extreme reluctance to file cases against lower caste local people who attack MSS supporters for quarry-capital – these might be glimmers of such a politics in the making, which refuses or reduces the antagonisms brought about by quarrying. ■

List of Interviews quoted

Sl. No	Initials	Age	Residence	Caste/Community	Role
1.	Mr. H.	45	Local resident	Viswakarma	social activist
	Mr. S	63	Local resident	Dalit	MSS leader
	Mrs SB	84	Local resident – in-migrant	Muslim	--
4.	Mr CE	70	Local resident	Nadar Christian	Nadar community leader, quarry supporter
5.	Mr GK	51	Local resident	Nair	Quarry supporter
6.	Mr MH	56	Local home owner, out-migrant	Nair	MSS leader
7.	Mr V	60	Local resident	Nair	MSS leader
8.	Mr BL	60	Local resident	Nair	Leader of farmer cooperative
9.	Mr KH	54	Local resident	Nair	Social activist
10.	Mr AE	52	Local resident	Ezhava	MSS leader
11.	Mrs A	52	Local Resident	OBC	--
12.	Mrs BR	62	Local Resident	Nair	MSS leader
13.	Mr GC	51	Local resident	Nadar Christian	Quarry supporter
14.	Mr AA	36	Local resident	Dalit	MSS leader.

[From a total of 42 interviews.]

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Notes

1. I mark off the MSS thus from civil society understood in the Gramscian sense. In Pallichal, as may be seen later, quarry capital has mobilized much of Gramscian civil society – a major temple, the local church – to its ends. The MSS itself was the last of a series of oppositional formations – all the earlier ones were apparently bought off by the quarry companies. As we shall see, even though many of the members of the MSS did belong to caste/community and religious organizations, they declared that their participation in the MSS was beyond or actually in opposition, even, to their prior affiliations.

2. Interview with a senior activist of the PPC in Pallichal and the people's science movement that drove it, the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat Mr H.

3. According to a news report from 2017 November, eighteen such reports were available. See, 'Mookkunnimala: Niyamasabha Paristhithi Samiti Kandathum Kanendathum' [Mookkunnimala: What the Legislature Environment Committee Saw and Should See], *Dool News*, 30 November 2017.

4. As per Section 18 of the Trivandrum Forest Regulations of 1068 (M.E). Cited in the Kerala High Court Verdict, of 25-04.2017, WP(C).No. 20532 of 2010 (N)).

5. See, PTSMPA, Session 17, 1 March 1921, 29-30. Even in 1922, only 100 acres of the Vilappil assignment were actually granted.

5. See PTSMPA, Session 18, 10 March 1922, 174. In 1923, Ayyankali complained that the Pulayas who had been paying taxes were unable to enter their lands at Vilappil. PTSMPA, Session 19, 21 March 1923: 178.

6. The *Development Report* of a panchayat, Malayinkizh, that lies close to Pallichal, also mentions a similar history – of dalit agricultural workers struggling to turn puramboke lands into agricultural lands in the nineteenth century after the prohibition of slavery in Travancore. See Malayankizh Panchayat Vikasana Rekha, 1996, p.110.

7. It may be important here to note perhaps that the state here appears decidedly Janus-faced – granting homestead allotments to the lower caste poor in the early 1970s while facilitating a creeping dispossession through the acquisition of their land for infrastructure construction. This state seems to prefigure the arguments made by Partha Chatterjee and others about the neoliberal state that combines individualized welfare allotments with dispossession. For a discussion, see D'Costa and Chatterjee 2017. However, it is also worth noting that this takeover is mostly by Central agencies, and not the state government.

8. But there is reason to think that this was not always the case with community-led development efforts at this time – and therefore there is no warrant for projecting the pre-decentralization period as somehow a time of unity and people's militancy. This is clear from the same interviewee's account of public effort to construct an Anganwadi building which got mired in disputes and then got taken over by a political party, the BJP.

9. The owners of the land on MM were not always compensated for; absent assignees especially. The experience of one such assignee from the 1960s who had been living in Alappuzha and who returned to find that her land had become a quarry crater was news in 2016. See, Prabhat Nair, 'She Saw Her Plot After 36 Years; It's Now A Crater!', *New Indian Express* 1 December 2016.

10. See report, 'Mookkunimala ...', *Dool News*, 30 November 2018.

11. It is important to note that there are anti-quarry voices outside the MSS which draw upon the language of the securitized state more vehemently. For example, there are local residents who claim that the quarrying may be a conspiracy by anti-nationals and illegal Bangaldeshi migrants doubling up as spies might be at work near the strategic sites of the Indian Army and the Southern Air Command on the MM. See the news report by Prabhat Nair, 'Mookkunnimala Issue: NIA Enters the Scene', *New Indian Express*, 7 January 2018.

12. More discussion is perhaps necessary about the connotations of the word 'samshuddam' which means 'pristine pure' – especially about its caste connotations, the allusion to pollution that it contains. is a word used to describe the abhorrence for bribes, material and otherwise, and the ability to resist temptation -- a properly disciplined self. Untaintedness becoming a synonym almost for the self-disciplined self is interesting for sure.

13. The dalit lifting contractor mentioned in Jeyaranjan's study (2018) of the sand mining mafia of Tamil Nadu bears a close resemblance to KA.

14. It is perhaps vital here to note that this group does not fit into a Partha Chatterjean understanding of 'political society' (Chatterjee 2004)– they do not take the form of a community with normative grounds to make claims to the state. They do not take upon themselves moral attributes, as the Chatterjean political society does. And certainly, their aim is not that of securing resources from the government. For critical discussions on Chatterjean 'political society', see Guduvvarthy (ed) 2012. Nor is it the more familiar version of clientistic politics, since no steady patron-client relationship is found and it is much more than mere subservience to 'netas', 'brokers' and so on (Witsoe 2012; Berenschot 2010; Kreuzer 2009).

15. For details, see the introduction to this work by Archana Ravi and the chapter by S Mohanakumar.

16. As Barbara Harriss-White points out, this is common across South Asian 'criminal economies'. (2019: 232-33).

17. The experience of other panchayats in Kerala of trying to represent the community in the face of quarry capital confirms this entirely. It is clear that the elected panchayats are increasingly no match for the quarry-capital-political party nexus. The shift from all political parties jointly fighting off the sand mafia (extracting from river beds) and the real estate mafia (extracting top soil from plots of land purchased for construction) to helplessness and division in the face of quarry capital is a reality in many panchayats now. The experience of Ambili Sivarajan, ex-president of the Puthukad panchayat in Ernakulam, is a case in point. Entering local governance as an idealist development activist shaped by the KSSP, she was, early in her term (2015) able to create a joint front with the opposition to fight off the sand mafia and even the land mafia trying to extract top soil through mobilizing local resistance. However, when it came to quarrying, despite widespread popular protests and Grama Sabha resolutions, her party, the CPM, ordered her to support the quarry capitalist. In an interview with us, Ms Sivarajan recounted her great unease and helplessness in having to obey this order. The panchayat committee ended up supporting the crusher unit, and it was justified by the higher circles in the party as 'maximum support for industry'. As Ms Sivarajan noted ruefully, the people in the panchayat who were once her staunch supporters, now treat her like an implacable enemy.

Public Notices

The MSS has issued a large number of public notices on their struggle in 2014-2020, and this formed an important primary source for this work. Below are translations of two such.

Translated by J Devika

Ban Quarrying on Mookkunnimala! Protect Mookkunnimala!

Secretariat March, 10 July 2014, 10 00 AM

Mookkunnimala is on the road to Neyyattinkara from Thiruvananthapuram, two and a half kilometres north-west of the Pravachambalam junction. A continuation of the Western Ghats, the Mookkunnimala Hills, situated in the Pallichal panchayat, is under dire threat today. The hillocks play a major role in regulating the climate of the Thiruvananthapuram district, and it is also an important watershed of the Karamana River which is the chief source of drinking water for the district. Twelve major streams that flow into the Karamana River originate in these hills. These streams are at present being choked by the M-Sand waste that washes into them from the crusher units on the hill. This waste is also flowing into the river itself. Once, this valley used to be the source of drinking water of the land; today it is reeling under severe water shortage as a result of the exploitation of water resources by industrialists. This area which was famed for its very unique and rare treasures in flora and fauna, is now a desert. The uncontrolled and continuous operation of quarry-crusher units has polluted the air. Water is rarer. The local people suffer from cancer, silicosis, tuberculosis and such ailments. Quarry capitalists blinded with greed have joined hands with those who blow their trumpet to divide a peaceful local population on the lines of caste, religion, and locality, make them fight each other, and grab the gains from this. Besides this, the vehicles from the quarries speeding on the Mookkunnimala- Arikkadamukku road have made it un-useable. Rock that should have been mined over a hundred years has already been extracted from the hills by now. Most parts of the hills are now covered by massive quarry cavities.

People now live in the fear of landslides. This is why they demand that there should be no more crusher units and mining on the Mookkunnimala. But quarry capitalists and their minions are still threatening to finish off those who oppose quarrying there.

The police, which is responsible for the safety of the lives and property of the people, and the authorities in the Pallichal Gramapanchayat are on the side of the quarry mafia. The unanimous demand of local people, that the licenses of the quarries, which continue to function here, challenging the law here, should be revoked, has been refused by the Panchayat. The renewal of the licenses of the quarry-crusher units here is a challenge to the very institution of democracy itself. But the Vigilance Report against the panchayat is now released. It reveals the shocking corruption, the connivance of the panchayat samithi with the quarry-crusher mafia, running to crores of rupees. People in the panchayat have been protesting against the quarry mafia there over the past three months. The Secretariat March on 14 July, 2014, is a continuation of this.

The March will be inaugurated by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Comrade V S Achuthanandan. The leaders of major political parties, social activists, and cultural leaders will address the march.

We appeal to all lovers of humanity to participate in the March and make it a grand success.

Convenor,

Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi, Edacode.

Printed and published for the Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi by Madhusoodanan Nair, Kalathara Veedu, Edacode. Printed at Tara Printers, Pravachambalam.

Is MNREGS Work the Councillor's Charity?

The MNREGS is an employment programme that has been in force by the law in India since 2006. By this scheme, the State and Union Governments are bound by the Indian Constitution to ensure that every family in rural India should receive at least 100 days of gainful work. The MNREGS is executed through the panchayats in India. If the panchayat is unable to provide work for one hundred days, it is the duty of the panchayat to pay wages to the workers who were denied work. If the panchayat is unable to provide work to an applicant within fifteen days, then they should be paid the Unemployment Allowance. If the Ward Member or the Panchayat prevents the worker from accessing work, that is a grave violation which will disqualify the Member. Therefore we wish to humbly inform you that if you say that those who did not take part in the Janakeeya Samithi [the anti-protest forum put together by the pro-quarry Ward Member] cannot be granted MNREGS work, the MNREGS workers of the Pallichal Grama panchayat will not accept it meekly.

The Jankeeya Samithi, it is known, blows the trumpet of the quarry capitalists. It need not be reiterated that what operates on Mookkunnimala as 'Janakeeya Samithi' [People's Committee] which is actually 'Janadroha Samithi' [Committee to Harm the People] is just the perversion of protest set up to divide the people. The Metro Company, which had just a single acre of land, now has assets worth crores and one hundred acres of land on Mookkunnimala. The same is with Southern Granites Industries, run by K J Thomaskutty of the Kannamthanathu House, from Vadasserikkara in Pathanamthitta. The quarry and crusher unit owners on Mookkunnimala have amassed many crores of assets

mainly over the past ten years. The quarry owners have quoted a price for the poverty of people here and divided them and made them fight in order to cover up their own daylight robbery. This is the only reason why our sisters and mothers decided to spare an old man who flashed at them in the front of the Janadroha Samithy while the women were returning from a protest meeting [held by us].

We do not question the right of those who work in the quarries and those who betray the local people to feed on the leftovers dropped by the quarry owners. But please remember that vandalising the boards of the [Mookkunnimala Samrakshana] Samara Samithi and attacking its members are a serious crime according to the law.

Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi respects democracy. We will mobilise the people against social evils and protest through peaceful means. Perpetrating violence in the panchayat office, stoning vehicles, setting the police and goondas on women arriving to attend the Grama Sabha and beating them up, filing false cases against local people – the Samara Samithi does not merely disagree with these, it actively opposes them. Please remember that the lack of violence is not our weakness, it is our strength!

Convenor,

Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samara Samithi.

Archana Ravi, J Devika

INTERVIEW WITH 'TRINITY' BABU

Ex-miner, PWD contractor, 12 November 2020

[Local resident, born and raised in Pallichal, actually on Mookkunnimala. Nadar Christian. 59 years. Studied in the local Nemom government school. Has been manager cum owner of the Trinity School which is situated in the Pallichal panchayat for the past 24 years. Also owner of a quarry until 2015, until its license was cancelled. He is an A Class contractor with the PWD and is in charge of numerous works in Thiruvananthapuram city as well.]

Can you please tell us about the employment you have been able to generate?

I employ 35 people in the school and some 65 people in the contract work. That is, I support around a 100 families. Among the workers, most are Malayalis, nearly 75 per cent, and there are also workers from TN and Jharkhand. Of the 65, 40 are Malayalis, and 25 are from TN and Jharkhand.

The Malayalis I employ are not all from Pallichal. There are some who hail from here but others are from various towns in the Thiruvananthapuram district, such as Parassala, Neyyatinkara, and from the city of Thiruvananthapuram as well.

I used to employ a number of women as stone-breakers in my quarry in the older times, when machinery was not used much. I have given them all work in my contract business.

Workers are interchanged between the mining and the contractor work. We give work to all these people this way now too. The quarry business has been stalled for the past 3 years. I intend to start a new quarry soon and have been applying for the license.

Local workers do not turn up for work every day or on time. They are lazy. The workers from elsewhere are regular at work and they send home their money. You can rely on them, and get your work done. Among Malayalis, 30 percent work regularly and steadily while 70 percent slip off occasionally. There are unions of quarry workers, but they are not a problem.

Is that easy now?

It is not easy to get the license for the quarry, legally – mainly because of the environment stipulations, the distance of the quarry from the houses. It used to be 50 m, and now it is 200 m, and they now say it will be made 100 m. Whatever it may have been before, it is now 200 m and this is now being challenged in the court to make it 100 m.

I have been in the business for 40 years – as a PWD contractor in the TVM district. Mining has been a possibility for the past 20 years. I have a great connection with local residents. I have had a long history of public service, and local people support me. With the support of local people, mining is easy.

In most cases, someone gives a paper [a complaint] against the quarry and that takes 2 -3 years in the court to get settled. In the meantime the quarry owner gets exhausted. The reasons can be random things [enthelum okke]. For example someone would complain that a piece of rock fell on their house after lifting that piece and carrying it to their place. That would take 2 or 3 years. Later the court will be convinced of the truth and grant permission but by then the owner would have given up.

How did you get the support of the local people?

Before I started this, I used to participate in the activities meant to help local people every day. I have participated in elections and in other public activities in this place, and so people have supported me too in my activities. CPM fielded my wife as a candidate for the elections; I have been asked to contest, many times, but I was never in the fray. Even before the quarry started, I have been working towards people's needs here. This school was itself a response to a very local need of the people. [The Trinity school was started in 1992, an English Medium State board school]. A lot of local development initiatives were born as a result of the efforts to help the local poor. Even this school came into being because of this. It is a private unaided school.

Through this school, so many local children have become doctors and engineers. I have taught them without asking for any special remuneration in return. They include the poor. That is people within a 10 km radius of the school. We have four school buses.

The reason to start the school was to help the poor, because the area was backward in education. The fee is just Rs 300 per month; if you went to a tutorial college, you would pay Rs 500 a month. It is a High School now [with Plus Two].

Can you tell us about your beginnings as a quarry owner?

I began in 2012. I had been a contractor for 40 years; as a quarry miner, I began only in 2012. By then, it was mechanized but in the beginning we did use hand-held technology using local labour. There was no machinery at this site then. We would gather broken pieces of rock and break it with hammers down to a standard size. Later we got machinery that would crush the metal. We used a crusher. It could grind even 9-inch rock to a powder; make half-inch, quarter-inch as well as one-and-half inch metal; sieve it. The hand-held 'tamir' has been out of use for the past 30 years or so. The people from the panchayat constituted some 40 per cent of the Malayali workforce; they are still working in my PWD contract work sites.

I have plans to set up a crusher unit; the documents are being reviewed by the Collectorate now. The initial investment for a quarry was about Rs 15 lakhs. This includes the amount spent on various licenses as fees and royalty, but doesn't include the machine cost.

The Kerala Financial Corporation offers loans for such enterprises. They will give you any number of crores that you may ask. They just need the licenses and other securities. You get a loan only after you get all your papers right.

If you move legally, correctly, there isn't much delay in getting the licenses. You may have to run around four-five days, but it will get done without much trouble. If you don't, then there is probably some challenge. The problem with my quarry was that my land was near the land acquired by the Indian Air Force. They took over the land higher up and then we could build the quarry only a 100 metres away. That land is not being used now. That's not entirely true. I am using the quarry cavity there to grow fish. It is part of a scheme of the Fisheries Department. They give 9000 fish spawn for cultivation in water-

filled quarry cavity. But harvesting is not always possible. When I went there the last time, I came across two people from Neyyatinkara happily fishing there. I said, "Have a happy time fishing." It was because the quarry land turned into a water reservoir that I started cultivating fish. But people simply enter the place and catch the fish. [People have turned the place into a Commons – Nammude sthalathu vellam kayari kidakkunnu, athu kondu meen ittu. Ippo nattukaar kayari pidicchondu pokunnu!] [So] I didn't auction the fish.

I started the quarrying firm only after I actually gained an understanding of the business. I studied the business closely and learned gradually. Between 1990s and now, quarrying business hasn't changed much – if you have the ability, you can run it.

Did you own the land which you were quarrying?

Yes, the quarry is on my own land. My family home is down below; I stay near the Trinity School. The quarry is two and a half kilometres up the hill. It is near the Kannamthanam company, just next to it. There are a few buildings there which used to house the office and the quarters of the workers and their kitchens, but it is completely abandoned. I am going to begin a quarry but it is in Aruvikkara. This quarry in Mookkunnimala will probably never be revived. The proximity of the Air Force means that permissions are going to be very hard. It does not seem likely that this land can be of use anymore. The Air Force land actually extends right up to here, from the Vilavoorkkal side. They began to use their land actively now, setting up the radar and everything. They acquired the land in the late 1980s but let it was lying there unused till recently.

In Aruvikkara, the mining is going to be on government land – the rock is government rock – and permissions have to be granted by the Collector. ■



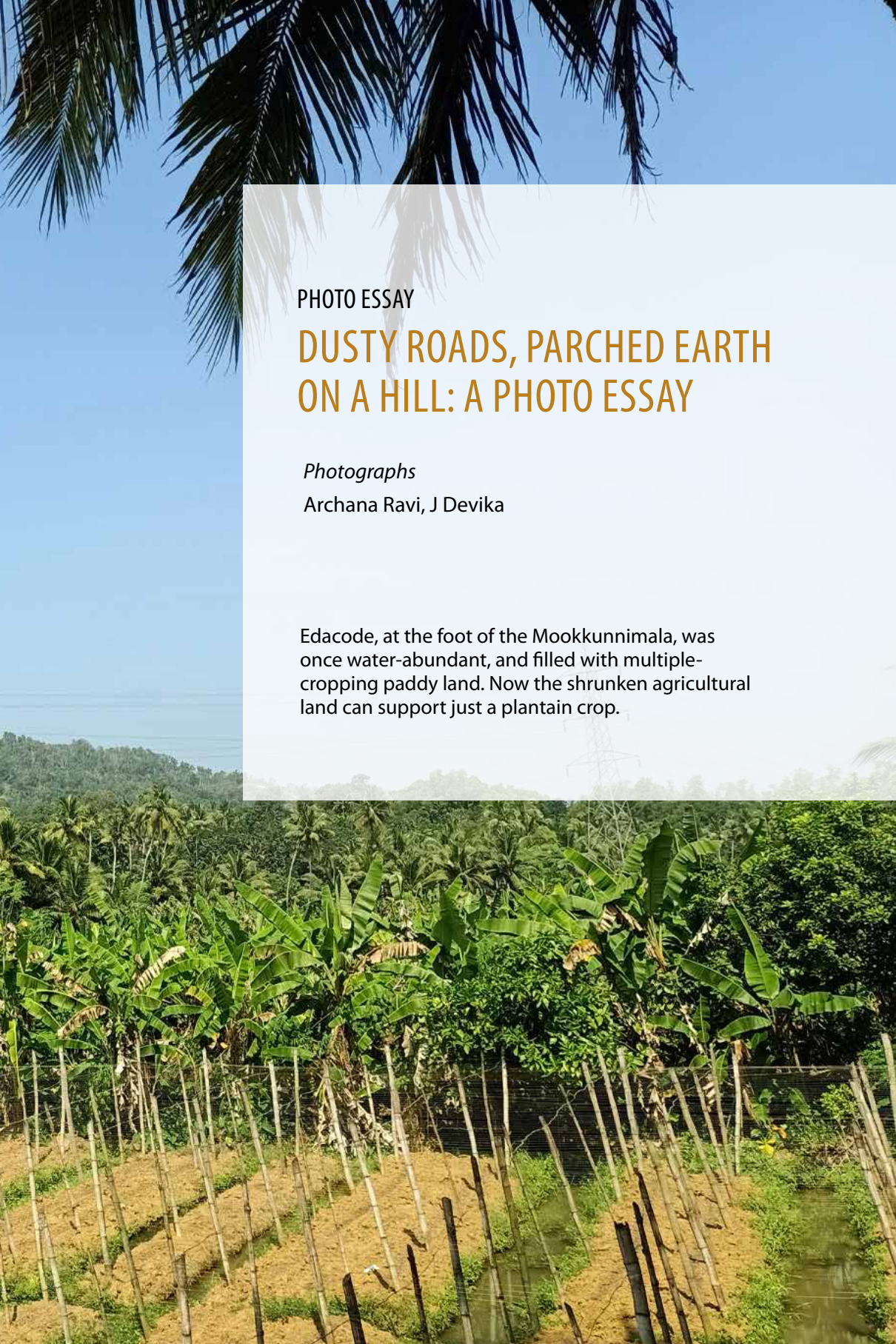


PHOTO ESSAY

DUSTY ROADS, PARCHED EARTH ON A HILL: A PHOTO ESSAY

Photographs

Archana Ravi, J Devika

Edacode, at the foot of the Mookkunnimala, was once water-abundant, and filled with multiple-cropping paddy land. Now the shrunken agricultural land can support just a plantain crop.



What looks like a drain is actually the remnant of what was once a perennial stream originating from the hill called Valakuzhithodu ; according to locals, it was once much wider. Half its width or more was swallowed up by the road.



Water shortage is made up by pipeline schemes and water tanker delivery, instead of making the water-depleting quarries accountable.



Meanwhile, water accumulates in the massive cavities which the quarrying leaves behind ... stagnant water. Meanwhile, water accumulates in the massive cavities which the quarrying leaves behind ... stagnant water.



Some quarries have become fishing ponds. And also waste-dumping areas – notice the patch of floating solid waste at the farther end of the quarry-pool.



A crusher unit on the Malayam-Mookkunnimala road. The M-sand waste – dust-covers the ground like a white film. It smothers the vegetation and pollutes the air and water.



The road to the quarries remains unrepaired after the trucks were taken off it.



The broken road uphill.



Paths to the quarries through private properties are controlled by the quarry owners: sign says that the gate will remain open only between 5 AM and 7 PM and that it will not be open on Sundays and holidays.



The road used by the quarry vehicles seems to be in a state of extreme disrepair.



Trucks ply on broken roads covered with M-Sand waste.



The locked gate of the closed-down Metro Company.



The boards warning trespassers. Even researchers and responsible government officials are deemed 'trespassers' often!



Signboard erected by the Malayinkeezh Grama Panchayat, next to Pallichal, warning motorists that the road was in danger and so no heavy vehicles carrying loads are to cross the Machel –Moozhinada bridge.

പഠിക്കുക/അളന്നു

CRONYISM, DEVELOPMENT AND CITIZENSHIP:

A Study of the Effects of
 Quarrying in Pallichal Panchayat,
 Thiruvananthapuram

This is the fourth in the series of short research projects from the RULSG, CDS, on ecological challenges and local government responses in Kerala. It examines the conflict around quarrying in a peri-urban panchayat in the Thiruvananthapuram district, Pallichal. The two central essays examines the the rise of crony capitalism and the challenges to local democracy, especially in the wake of the intense neoliberalization of welfare.

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DR. S Mohanakumar is Professor and Director of Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur. He is one of the founder leaders of the Mookkunnimala Samrakshana Samithi.

Archana Ravi is an independent journalist who has worked with The New Indian Express and Deccan Chronicle.

പരിസ്ഥിതി



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