

and Forest officials exploited the confusion to grab thousands of acres by creating fake records and fabricated pattayams by making use of the names and addresses of the illiterate Tamil labourers in the region.

Through a systematic process that has been the norm in Idukki District, applications for land assignment were filed in the names of Tamil labourers and other families living in those areas. That the assignment applications and subsequent assignments were irregular is evident from the fact that the norms followed in assessing the eligibility are a crude mixture of the Land Assignment Rules, 1964 and the Special Rules, 1993. Any assignment can be only under **either** of these Rules and not both. As this area does not fall under the jointly verified lands that are covered under the 1993 Rules, any assignment can be only under the Land Assignment Rules, 1964.

Soon after getting the assignment orders, the interested parties, who are nothing but 'land grabbers', took over physical possession of the lands, consolidated multiple assignments and encroached vast adjoining areas. The earlier Tamil labourers who were small encroachers and were cultivating cool season vegetables and supplying these to Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram stopped doing this cultivation. The land grabbers took over possession from the smaller encroachers, planted Eucalyptus Grandis on these lands and on the encroached Government lands, after destroying the Shola forests. This happened in the area under enquiry through a well laid-out plan mainly commencing from the 1990's.

The above action had a number of consequences: apart from destroying Shola forests and adversely affecting the environment, the supply of cool season vegetables from Idukki to the towns and cities virtually stopped. The Tamil encroachers lost their livelihood but they were suitably corrupted by the land grabbers by being told that they were now 'patta holders', conveniently ignoring the fact that this did not make any change in