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**Planning the “Economy”:
Development and Hydroelectricity in Colonial South India**

In 1923 the Government of Madras appointed the Chief Electrical Inspector of Mysore (a Princely State in British India), S.G. Forbes on deputation for six weeks to extensively survey the potential for hydroelectric power development in the Presidency. The appointment of Forbes on this assignment by the Madras Government, one of the many provincial governments in British India, was a decision whose roots can be traced into the early years of the twentieth century. As early as 1905, the Government of India, in a letter, had attempted to spearhead an effort to determine the power production capacity of the country. While this early endeavour yielded little result, the post First World War era saw a more concerted push to improve the power resources of India by both central and provincial governments. In 1916 the Government of India appointed an Industrial Commission to examine and report on all matters economic. Shortly after the war, the finished reports recommended that a hydrological survey be conducted by the government at an all India level to scope out the potential for hydroelectric power production and utilization in the country. Following the publication of the hydrological survey, constitutional reforms in 1919 meant that a new federal structure referred to as ‘dyarchy’ transferred responsibility for electrical growth to provincial governments. Following the trail of the expansion of hydroelectric power in the Madras Presidency, this paper makes two arguments. The first argument centres the process and practices of colonial developmental efforts in understanding and producing water as ‘multipurpose’ in the twentieth century. In other words, I will suggest, using the specific instance of the Madras Presidency, that the genealogy of damming water for multiple purposes was not diffused from Britain to its colonies, but rather that the colonies were spaces where such experiments were carried out and fructified. Second, and perhaps more speculatively, I will argue that the electrification of specifically the Madras province was critical to conjuring, performing, and practicing a powerful and lasting image of the twentieth century—that of the ‘economy’.