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## **The Ali Rajas of Cannanore: status and identity at the interface of commercial and political expansion, 1663-1723**

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## INTRODUCTION

Cultural apartheid was the dominant ideal in medieval Muslim India...<sup>1</sup>

This is a study about the Arackal Ali Rajas of Cannanore, the most prominent maritime merchants in pre-colonial Kerala and one of the very few early-modern Indian maritime merchant groups who succeeded in carving out a powerful political configuration of their own. The extensive maritime network of the Arackal House was based at the port-town of Cannanore. From that place, this Mappila Muslim family came to dominate the commercial networks of various other Mappila families in Cannanore as well as in its various satellite ports such as Maday, Baliapatanam, Dharmapatanam and Nileswaram.<sup>2</sup> Before setting out to expound my own analytical starting position, let me begin by briefly introducing the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of this study as well as the sources and historiographical antecedents on which it is based.

### *Kolathunadu, 1663-1723*

The 'kingdom of Cannanore' or Kolathunadu constitutes roughly what is now called the Cannanore District of Kerala State in the Republic of India. Traditionally, Kolathunadu is described as the land lying between Perumba River in the north and Putupatanam River in the south.<sup>3</sup> The elite house of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hardy, quoted in S. Nurul Hassan, 'Medieval Indian History: Danger of Communal Interpretation and the Need for Reconsidering Priorities', in id., edited and introduced by Satish Chandra, *Religion, State and Society in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>2</sup> According to some scholars, 'Mappila' is a derivative of 'Mahapilla', which means 'the great child'. According to another interpretation, the term 'Mappila' means 'son-in-law'. Another denomination by which the local Muslims were referred to in local Malayalam sources was 'Jonaka'. This could be derived from 'yavana'—a Sanskrit term for Ionians. The Mappilas gradually spread along the coast of Kerala and settled mostly in various ports in the northern part of the region of which Calicut and Cannanore. They were considered the descendants of pure Arab traders and local women as well as of local 'converts'. It is probable that this mixed Mappila identity included some Marakkayar Muslim elements from the Coromandel Coast too. There are indications that few Marakkayar traders from the Coromandel Coast migrated to Malabar for trade purpose by the end of the fifteenth century and gained prominence in the maritime trade of the region. However, gradually this 'Marakkayar' identity amalgamated into the general 'Mappila' identity. For example, in Calicut the title 'Marakkar' became an honorary one bestowed by the local king Zamorin upon the prominent Mappilas of the region by the middle of the sixteenth century. This indicates the flexibility of social identities in pre-colonial South India. C. Gopalan Nair, *Malayalathile Mappilamar* (Malayalam) (Manglore: Basel Mission Press, 1917), 2. C. A. Innes and F. B. Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, I (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1908), 26; S. Jayaseela Stephen, *The Coromandel Coast and its Hinterlands: Economy, Society and Political System (AD 1500-1600)* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997), 114-15; M. R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Sthanarohanam: Chatangukal* (Malayalam) (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidya Peedam, 2004), 46-7.

<sup>3</sup> M. R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Keralolpatti Granthavari: The Kolattunad Traditions* (Malayalam) (Calicut: Calicut University, 1984), 30.

Kolathunadu, which was known as Kolaswarupam, was one of the major political houses which sprang up in Kerala after the disappearance of the Kulasekharas or Perumal rulers of Mahodayapuram by the twelfth century AD.<sup>4</sup> Though the rulers of this house (popularly known as Kolathiris) were generally credited with a superior political authority over the geographical zone lying between the kingdoms of Canara and Calicut, their political influence was more or less confined to Kolathunadu.<sup>5</sup> In spite of its fluctuating political fortunes throughout its existence, the Kolaswarupam was considered as one of the most prominent political houses in Kerala until the British occupation of the region by the end of the eighteenth century. At least from the second half of the fifteenth century, Cannanore occupied the prime position of being the leading port town of Kolathunadu and, consequently, it was the core area of socio-economic and political dynamics of the region.

The central theme of the present study is the multidimensional interaction between the main players in the realm, namely (i) the Arackal Ali Rajas, the most prominent maritime merchants in pre-colonial Kerala who dominated the Mappila Muslim traders in and around Cannanore, (ii) the Kolathiris, the traditional claimants to political power in Kolathunadu, and (iii) the European newcomers, especially the merchants of the Dutch East India Company. While the Ali Rajas exercised crucial control over the people and the maritime trade activities in the port city of Cannanore and in other small Mappila ports along the coastal belt of Kolathunadu, the Kolathiris continued to exercise their influence in the interior of the region. The Dutch East India Company came into close contact with the region after the Dutch conquest of the Portuguese fort of St Anjelo in 1663 and subsequently played a major role in the power struggle in the region. Hence, it was from 1663 onwards that these power groups began to interact closely with each other.

Between 1663 and 1723 the socio-political situation in the region was rather shaped by 'internal' dynamics than by 'external' forces, but the mode of production in Kolathunadu remained focused primarily on the sea. The Ali Rajas, the Kolathiris, and the Dutch Company were the main contenders for power in the port city of Cannanore during this period under discussion. The terminal point of my study is 1723 when the evolution of historical forces which were constantly structuring and restructuring the relations between these power groups in Cannanore reached a critical juncture.

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<sup>4</sup> The Kulasekharas ruled over Malabar between c. AD 800 to AD 1124. See for more details M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala* (Calicut: Private Circulation, 1996). Among the political powers which emerged after the disappearance of the Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram, Venadu (later the kingdom of Travancore) in the south, Cochin (Perumpadappu Swarupam), Calicut (Nediyirippu Swarupam) and Cannanore (Kolaswarupam) in the north were considered as the most prominent.

<sup>5</sup> Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An Account of the Countries Bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants*, II, ed. M. I. Dames (repr., London: Hakluyt Society, 1921), 79, 85. A. Galletti, J. van der Burg and P. Groot (eds.), *The Dutch in Malabar: Selection from the Records of the Madras Government*, No. 13 (Madras: Printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, 1911), 143.

*Sources*

Although I have used both archival and published sources from various archives and libraries of India and abroad, the main repository of my sources the archival depot of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) in the *Nationaal Archief* (National Archive) situated at The Hague in the Netherlands. The manuscripts of the VOC, which existed between 1602 and 1795, are of a great value in reconstructing the history of Kerala in general and of the Malabar region in particular during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The hitherto untapped information contained in those large, dusty bundles of commercial correspondence definitely surpasses, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the comparatively small number of English and French Company materials on Malabar during the period under study. I depended mainly on the so-called *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP) (Letters and papers received) collection which gives an unbroken account of developments in Kolathunadu throughout the period under study. In spite of the formal character of the information provided by the VOC sources and the strong emphasis on commercial details, the OBP collection offers us valuable insights into the socio-political developments in Kolathunadu.

In addition to these unique VOC sources, due attention should be paid to local sources to construe a comprehensive and balanced view of the political economy of pre-colonial Kolathunadu. Although there is nothing of the sort of ‘administrative’ records of the Kolathiris or the Ali Rajas to counterbalance the information provided by the VOC records, the oral and written sources available are invaluable for understanding the socio-political system in Kolathunadu in the early modern period. While the Kolathunadu version of the *Keralolpathi* (Origin of Kerala) legend gives information on the Brahmanical perceptions and interpretations of the regional social order, folk sources, especially the ritual songs (*tottams*) of the *Teyyattam* (Dance of God), are also of considerable value in comprehending and conceptualizing the notion of ‘power’ in Kolathunadu.<sup>6</sup> Thanks to scholars like M. V. Vishnu Namboodiri, many of these oral traditions are available in published form. Unfortunately, so far these rich sources have hardly been tapped by historians.

*Historiographical antecedents*

The first attempt to compile a comprehensive history of Malabar was the result of the British colonial exigency to understand the local history of the region in order to improve its administrative performance.<sup>7</sup> William Logan, who was the collector of the British Malabar in the last quarter of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Teyyattam* is a ritual performance that is prevalent in the northern part of British Malabar.

<sup>7</sup> The term ‘Malabar’ was used by the early Arab travellers to denote the western coast of India, but in later centuries it came to denote the pepper-producing south-western coast of India which roughly corresponds to the modern Kerala State of the Indian Union. Under the British colonial administration, only the northern part of Kerala, except for the modern Kasaragod District, came to be known as Malabar. In this study the term ‘Malabar’ will be used to denote the entire state of Kerala, because the region was popularly known as ‘Malabar’ during the pre-colonial period.

nineteenth century, should be credited with the preliminary attempt to write a comprehensive history of the region. Though handicapped in many ways, his three-volume *Malabar Manual*, published in 1879, was the first scholarly attempt to compose a history of this region based on both legendary and other available source materials.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, after this magnum opus, no other serious attempts were made to study the pre-colonial history of this region for quite a long time. Although the first half of the twentieth century witnessed further progress in the field of historical research in Kerala, the focus was mainly on 'court histories'.<sup>9</sup> K. V. Krishna Ayyar's *The Zamorins of Calicut* is a fine example of this trend, yet it falls short of becoming a history of the region.<sup>10</sup> The growing influence of the Indian independence movement and the pervasion of Marxist-Socialist ideas in Malabar had their reflections on Kerala historiography too. *Keralam: Malayalikalude Matrubbhumi* (Keralam: The Motherland of Malayalees), a Malayalam work written by E. M. S. Nambutirippadu in 1948, was an endeavour to analyse the history of Kerala from a Marxist perspective. However, his limited access to source materials compelled him to concentrate more on the history of modern Kerala. O. K. Nambiar's, *Portuguese Pirates and Indian Seamen* (1955), was obviously inspired by the spirit of Indian nationalism.<sup>11</sup> K. M. Panikkar's works on both the Portuguese and the Dutch powers in Kerala were innovative attempts to make use of other European source materials than the usual English ones to

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<sup>8</sup> William Logan, *Malabar*, 2 vols. (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1951). However, this is not to suggest that there was no historiographical tradition in Kerala prior to the British. Composed in the eleventh century, Athula's Sanskrit *karya*, *Mushikavamsam*, was an attempt to construct the history of the Mushika royal family of Ezhimala in a chronological order. Sheikh Zain-ud-Din's *Tuhfat-ul-Mujabidin*, which describes the historical developments in Kerala during the sixteenth century, was another important example of the local historiographical tradition. Various *Keralolpathi* (Origin of Kerala) traditions of Kerala can be considered attempts to interpret the history of Kerala from a Brahmanical perspective. Although Portuguese and Dutch officials and other foreign travellers wrote 'histories of Malabar' prior to the British, most of their works turned out to be observations of contemporary Kerala culture and polity with a brief introduction narrating the story of either Parasurama or Cheraman Perumal. An important example of this category is *Historia do Malavar* written by Diogo Gonçalves. K. Raghavan Pilla (ed.), *Mushikavamsam* (Malayalam) (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1983); Velayudhan Panikkassery, *Keralam Pathinanchum Pathinarum Noottandukalil* (Malayalam) (Kottayam: Current Books, 1997); M. R. Raghava Varier (ed.), *Keralolpathi Granthavarī*, Diogo Gonçalves, *Historia do Malavar*, ed. Josef Wicki S. I (Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1955).

<sup>9</sup> This trend was already visible in P. Shungoonny Menon's *A History of Travancore* (1878). It was followed by *Travancore State Manual* (1906) after the fashion of *Malabar Manual* of Logan by V. Nagam Aiya and *Cochin State Manual* (1911) by C. Achyuta Menon. Another *Travancore State Manual* was compiled in 1940 by T. K. Velu Pillai. Although 'state manuals' attempted to present the histories of those respective princely states in a broader framework, the analytical framework remained that of dynastic eulogies. P. Shungoonny Menon, *A History of Travancore* (First published 1878; repr., Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1983). V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, 3 vols. (First published 1906; repr., Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1999). C. Achyuta Menon, *Cochin State Manual* (First published 1911; repr., Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1995). T. K. Velu Pillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, 4 vols. (First published 1940; repr., Thiruvananthapuram: Government of Kerala, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> K. V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut* (First published 1938; repr., Calicut: University of Calicut, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Later this work was published under the title 'The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut'. O. K. Nambiar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963).

construct the pre-colonial history of the region. Panikkar's studies should be considered as pioneering works in this field in Kerala historiography.<sup>12</sup> P. K. S. Raja's *Medieval Kerala* (1953) was a unique attempt to write a comprehensive pre-colonial history of the region in a single narrative framework by using both indigenous and European sources.<sup>13</sup> The formation of a separate state of Kerala on a linguistic basis in 1956 gave a new impetus to historical research in Kerala. Especially the works of Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai made a breakthrough in understanding the pre-colonial history of the region.<sup>14</sup> His conceptualization of a 'second Chera Empire' and the evolution of 'Janmi system' after the twelfth century AD, albeit with various pitfalls, gave a solid conceptual framework for later historians to expand on.<sup>15</sup>

Post-Independent Kerala historiography, in spite of its accomplishments in various fields of research, still falls short on the study of the early modern period. This is particularly true in the case of the northern part of Malabar, including Kolathunadu. Except for a few attempts, this region still remains in the periphery of the early modern historiography of Kerala.

Among the scholarly works dealing with the early modern history of North Malabar, the monographs of Geneviève Bouchon and, to an extent, Margaret Frenz deserve special attention. Bouchon's *Mamale de Cananor: Un Adversaire de L'Inde Portugaise (1507-1528)* can be considered the first major attempt to reconstruct the history of pre-colonial Cannanore based on European source materials.<sup>16</sup> Bouchon's expertise in Portuguese archival materials enabled her to throw new light on the growth of Mappila Muslim Merchant groups as decisive elements in the socio-political life of Kolathunadu. The monograph gives a well-documented account of Mamale, a grand Muslim Merchant magnate of Cannanore, also the predecessor of the first Ali Raja of Cannanore.

The monograph of Margaret Frenz, although mainly dealing with the early phase of British colonialism in the principality of Kottayam in North Malabar, presents the historical developments there as a significant break from the early modern socio-political matrix in the region. Frenz's discussion of the state structure in pre-colonial Kottayam constitutes an attempt to analyse the local political culture within the general framework of discussions on the nature of state in pre-colonial South India.<sup>17</sup> Dilip M. Menon's seminal contribution, 'Houses by the Sea', also analyzes the

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<sup>12</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch* (Bombay: Taraporevala, 1931). Id., *Malabar and the Portuguese: Being a History of the Relations of the Portuguese with Malabar from 1500 to 1663* (Bombay: Taraporevala, 1929).

<sup>13</sup> P. K. S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Calicut: Nava Kerala Cooperative Society, 1966).

<sup>14</sup> Some of his important articles have been published in English. Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> M. G. S. Narayanan, later, has modified the conceptualisations of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai in several aspects, including those of the Chera 'empire' concept and the 'hundred year war'. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*.

<sup>16</sup> Oxford University Press has published an English translation of this book in 1988. Geneviève Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea: Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion 1507-1528* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest: Transition to British rule in Malabar, 1790-1805* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

character of the 'state' in pre-colonial Malabar.<sup>18</sup> Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan's Malayalam work *Theranjedutta Prabandangal* and M. P. Kumaran's *Kolathupazhama* throw light on some specific issues pertaining mainly to the pre-colonial history of this region. However, neither of them proposed a broader analytical structure for understanding the history of the Kolathunadu region.<sup>19</sup>

The Islamic community in Kolathunadu has also received some attention from scholars. *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*, written by K. K. N. Kurup, is particularly important among those works dealing with the history of the regional Islamic communities.<sup>20</sup> Yet, this short monograph describing the long history of the Ali Rajas, rarely uses documents dating from the pre-colonial period and hardly takes into consideration the wider aspect of socio-political changes in the region. The article by Ruchira Banerjee, 'A Wedding Feast or Political Arena?: Commercial Rivalry between the Ali Rajas and the English Factory in Northern Malabar in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century' provides interesting information on the political interactions of the Ali Rajas of Cannanore in the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Roland E. Miller's *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* looks at the history of this community in Kerala during the colonial period.<sup>22</sup> Stephen Frederic Dale's attempt to write the history of this people also falls in the same category.<sup>23</sup> *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar (1836-1921)*—an excellent study on the Mappila peasant resistance to the colonial regime by K. N. Panikkar—concentrates on a later period.<sup>24</sup> All these three scholars have chosen the Mappila peasantry in the paddy-growing wet-land in South Malabar as their main subject matter of study, but overlook the case of the Mappila trading communities.

The works dealing with the 'Dutch period' in Kerala history, also contribute to an understanding of early modern Kerala history, but do not go beyond the recital of the political narrative. Such monographs as *The Dutch Power in Kerala* by M. O. Koshy,<sup>25</sup> *The Dutch in Malabar* by P. C. Alexander<sup>26</sup> and *Malabar and the Dutch* by K. M. Panikkar,<sup>27</sup> give descriptive accounts of the political developments in Kerala during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The two books by T. I.

<sup>18</sup> Dilip M. Menon, 'Houses by the Sea: State Experimentation on the Southwest Coast of India-1760-1800', in Neera Chandhoke (ed.), *Mapping Histories: Essays presented to Ravinder Kumar* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 161-86.

<sup>19</sup> Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair, *Theranjedutta Prabandhangal* (Malayalam) (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academi, 1996). M. P. Kumaran, *Kolathupazhama* (Malayalam) (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Academi, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> K. K. N. Kurup, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore* (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Ruchira Banerjee, 'A Wedding Feast or Political Arena?: Commercial Rivalry between the Ali Rajas and the English Factory in North Malabar in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century', in Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Lakshmi Subramanian (eds.), *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 83-112.

<sup>22</sup> Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends* (Madras: Orient Longman, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Frederic Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar, 1498-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar, 1836-1921* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> M. O. Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala, 1729-1758*, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> P. C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar* (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1946).

<sup>27</sup> Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*.

Poonen; *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-78)*<sup>28</sup> and *Dutch Hegemony in Malabar and its Collapse (1663-1795)* also deal with the political history of Cannanore as a part of this broader narrative.<sup>29</sup> M. A. P. Roelofs's early work, *De Vestiging der Nederlanders ter Kuste Malabar*, gives a detailed description of the early relationship between the Dutch East India Company and the Kerala Coast and explains how the VOC gradually developed an interest in Malabar affairs.<sup>30</sup> The more recent monographs by Hugo K. s' Jacob on Cochin and Mark de Lannoy on Travancore give an in-depth insight into the complex character of political formations in the central and southern parts of Kerala during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup>

### *Analytical framework*

Among various scholarly works dealing with the Mappila Muslims of Kerala, in South India, Dale's monograph deserves to be paid particular attention on account of its attempt to locate and analyse this regional Islamic community within the broader pan-Islamic framework of Asia.<sup>32</sup> In a sweeping endeavour to summarize the dynamic history of the Mappilas from the sixteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century in a thematic narrative framework, Dale insists on the existence of Mappilas as a 'frontier' people, situated on the fringe of the local 'Hindu' social order throughout this period. His argument is that Islamic ideology perpetuated a distinct socio-political identity which invariably put the Mappilas in the position of a distinctive 'religious community' opposed to the 'Christian' Europeans and the 'Hindu' locals. He adduces 'religiously defined militancy' as one of the characteristic features of the Mappilas, initiated by the Portuguese atrocities committed in the latter's ruthless attempts to control the spice trade in the region and perpetuated by the subsequent European commercial competition in the region. Consequently, he perceives the Mappila rebellions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries merely as the culmination of events which commenced in the sixteenth century, regardless of the political and economic changes which have occurred in the region, especially after the establishment of the colonial rule. In a nutshell, he attempts to comprehend such developments as a sort of 'clash of civilizations'.<sup>33</sup> In line with this somewhat anachronistic perspective,

<sup>28</sup> T. I. Poonen, *A Survey of the Rise of the Dutch Power in Malabar, 1603-78* (Trichnopoly: St. Joseph's Industrial School Press, 1948).

<sup>29</sup> T. I. Poonen, *Dutch Hegemony in Malabar and its Collapse, 1663-1795* (Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> M. A. P. Roelofs, *De Vestiging der Nederlanders ter Kuste Malabar* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1943).

<sup>31</sup> Hugo K. s'Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin: Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company, 1663-1720* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2000). Mark Erik Jan de Lannoy, *The Kulasekbara Perumals of Travancore: History and State Formation in Travancore from 1671 to 1758* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier*.

<sup>33</sup> The interpretation of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' societies as distinct 'civilizations' in the Indian Sub-Continent still exerts a definite grip on scholars. For a recent discussion of such a view see, Andre Wink, *Perspectives on the Indo-Islamic World: The Second Annual Levtzion Lecture* (Jerusalem: The Nehemia Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies, 2007). Also see, J. F. Richards, 'The Islamic Frontier in the East: Expansion into South Asia', *South Asia*, 4 (October, 1974), 91-109. Likewise, Theodore



other scholars have often one-sidedly stressed the importance of a particular 'Hindu' form of ritual kingship as informed by the Brahmin textual tradition. Too often, this all-Indian perspective has been rather uncritically applied to South India in general and to Kerala in particular.

Considering the weak presence of Brahmins in Kolathunadu, the present study seeks to highlight a more regional perspective that nuances what seem to be highly essentializing approaches which exclusively stress the 'great traditions' of both Islam and Brahmanism. I shall not dismiss these voices for the pre-colonial period, but merely intend to restore the neglected and also often far more important regional agencies of the important phenomenon of royal power. As such, the present study has drawn much inspiration from comparable, 'autonomous' histories of Southeast Asia which have also successfully challenged such 'greater' Indian and/or Islamic viewpoints. Hence, it is my contention that any study of Islamic communities without a concomitant analysis of their regional context will offer only a flawed historical view of Islamic communities in South India.<sup>34</sup> It is from this emphatically regional point of view that I propose to analyse the political status and social identity of the Mappila Muslim trading community in pre-colonial Cannanore.

In this monograph I intend to make, with the help of new, so far neglected sources, an additional contribution to the already available body of knowledge about the Mappila Muslim trading community in the pre-colonial Kerala. Instead of following a simple chronological analysis, a thematic approach has been adopted. The work is divided into three main parts. In the first part an attempt will be made to analyse the formation of a distinct socio-political structure in Kolathunadu by giving due attention to the geographical setting (Chapter One). This provides the proper regional context in which we should understand the emergence and the operations of the Arackal Ali Rajas (Chapter Two). Having established the crucial importance of maritime trade, the following section (Chapters Three, Four and Five) examines the history of the most prominent rival maritime trading groups in Cannanore: the Mappila traders of Cannanore under the Arackal Ali Rajas and the Dutch East India Company. The last section (Chapters Six and Seven) demonstrates in more historical detail how both the regional conditions and extra-regional trade relationships affected the destinies of the various political co-sharers of the Kolathunadu realm. In the concluding chapter, a balance of my research findings will be presented.

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Gabriel's monograph on the Mappila Muslims of Malabar reiterates the argument that there has been an essential tension between the Muslims and Hindus in Malabar running along communal lines ever since the sixteenth century. Theodore Gabriel, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in North Malabar, 1498-1947* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> In South Asian studies also, scholars now tend to stress the 'syncretic' aspect of Islam. Among them Susan Bayly's works are particularly notable. Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). This is also stressed by Richard M. Eaton. Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-34. Also see, Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).