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

Mailaparambil, J.B.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GEO-POLITICAL SETTING OF KOLATHUNADU

> Since every historical event occurs both in space as well as in time, history cannot, except in some of its more specialised branches, be dissociated from country or place….Since history must concern itself with the location of the events, which it investigates, it must continually raise, not only the familiar questions Why? and Why then? but also the questions Where and Why there?[1]

Introduction

Regional history pertaining to early modern Kerala is a rarely visited field of research.[2] This has much to do with the unavailability of and lesser accessibility to source materials to construe comprehensive regional histories of this period. Moreover, the general postulation that pre-colonial Kerala followed an even pattern of historical development through the centuries tempts to pass over regional variations as minor 'deviations' from the general pattern of development. Furthermore, at first glance, the region cannot boast of being the seat of an imposing political formation in comparison with those of the other regions of South India in general and Kerala in particular. The neglect of the northernmost part of Kerala in the general historiography of the region may be attributed to these reasons.

Out of the numerous principalities (*nadus*) which emerged in Kerala during the medieval period, Kolathunadu appears as a region of particular historical interest because of its unique pattern of socio-political development. The distinctive geographical features of the region had an important role in shaping the socio-political culture of Kolathunadu. For that reason, a proper understanding of the history of the region requires an analysis of its geography and its impact on the regional society and economy. Prior to this, I should first briefly introduce the long-term historical antecedents of the Kolathunadu polity.

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[1] W. Gordon East, *The Geography Behind History* (London: Nelson, 1965), 4.

[2] By the term 'early modern', I mean the *ancien régime*, the period from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century.

Kolathunadu through the ages

In order to understand the historical situation of medieval Kolathunadu, it is necessary to place it in a *longue durée* perspective. There appears to have been a sequence of historical developments which coalesced to shape the political economy of Kolathunadu. Ezhimala (Mount Deli in European accounts) and its neighbouring regions were dynamic centres of socio-political activities even in the early centuries of the Christian era. Tamil anthologies draw a brilliant picture of one Nannan who controlled the area in and around Ezhimala. Tamil anthologies describe his engagements with such neighbouring ruling elites as the Cheras.[3] Though, it may be difficult to trace a direct historical link between the later Kolaswarupam which appeared by the end of the first millennium AD and the Nannan of Ezhimala, it is quite remarkable that, as a political entity, Ezhimala seems to have roots which go back almost two millennia.[4]

The political continuity of the region is more or less confirmed by other sources. According to the *Mushikavamsam*, a Sanskrit *kavya* composed by Athula in the first half of the eleventh century, a legendary figure Ramaghada Mushakan had established the lineage of *Kolaswarupam*.[5] Whatever may have been the authority for this story, inscriptional evidence from the eight century seems to support the existence of this ruling line. In addition, an inscription dating to AD 929 mentions about one Vikramaraman. M. G. S. Narayanan identifies him with the ruler Vikramaraman who appears in the *Mushikavamsam*.[6] Another inscription from tenth century mentions a man, Udayavarman, who bore the title Ramaghata Muvar—an epithet used by the Mushika kings.[7] We find quite an interesting inscription from the Tiruvattur temple that mentions an Eraman Chemani (Raman Jayamani). N. P. Unni argues that he is the king who appears as the 109th ruler in *Mushikavamsam*.[8]

Consequently, there was a ruling lineage in this region whose origins could be traced back at least to the eighth century AD. As is evident from the *Mushikavamsam,* the Mushika rulers maintained a separate political identity from that of the neighbouring 'Kerala' rajas—a sanskritized name of the

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[3] Kumaran, *Kolathupazhama*, 15-23.

[4] M. G. S. Narayanan also proposes the link between the Nannan of Tamil anthologies and the Nannan who appears in *Mushikavamsam*. M. G. S. Narayanan, 'Mushakavamsa as a Source of Kerala History' in id., *Re-Interpretations in South Indian History* (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1977), 58-65 at 65.

[5] Though the name of the *vamsa* is given as *Mushikavamsa* by the author, it is clear that the rulers were also known as the 'Kings of Kolam'—most probably after the name of the town (Kolapatanam) established by the legendary founder Ramaghada Mushaka. It seems that Kolaswarupam had derived its name from this town that became more popular than the Sanskritized and seemingly 'alien' title for the locals such as *Mushikavamsam*. Raghavan Pilla (ed.), *Mushikavamsam*, 26, 268.

[6] M. G. S. Narayanan*, Kerala Charithrathinte Adisthana Silakal* (Malayalam) (Kozhikode: Lipi Publications, 2000), 85-99.

[7] Kumaran, *Kolathupazhama*, 94-7.

[8] N. P. Unni, *A History of Mushikavamsa* (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1978), 14.

Cheras of Mahodayapuram.[9] Foreign accounts also corroborate the distinct identity of this kingdom in later centuries. Marco Polo, who visited this coast in the twelfth century AD, noticed the independent status of the king of this region.[10] The fourteenth-century narrative of Ibn Battuta refers to the ruler of this region as residing at Baliapatanam.[11] This offers a clue that by this time, the centre of the political authority had shifted from Ezhimala to Baliapatanam, a town located south of Ezhimala. In the sixteenth century AD, a Portuguese official Duarte Barbosa also mentions Baliapatanam (Baliapatam in European records) as the residence of the 'king of Cannanore'.[12]

Although it appears that there was a remarkable continuity in the political tradition of Kolathunadu region from the early centuries of the Christian era, it also seems that the socio-economic background which supported the political and ideological order had undergone significant changes throughout this period. The Tamil anthologies, supposedly pertaining to the early centuries of the Christian era, depict a picture of a tribal polity in which martial activities appear to be the prime mode for accumulating and redistributing spoils among the ruling class in South India.[13] Viewed in this light, Nannan of Ezhimala was no more than a tribal chieftain who established himself at Ezhimala as the 'capital' of his chiefdom and engaged primarily in plundering raids in the neighbouring territories.[14] By the eight century, however, it seems that the political atmosphere in South India had changed rather dramatically as a new political culture based on settled agrarian exploitation takes root in the region. As in other parts of the Sub-Continent, Brahmanism provided the ideological support for these newly emerging regional, primarily agrarian principalities by linking them to a pan-Indian *vedic-puranic* tradition. The composition of the *Mushikavamsam* by the 'court poet' of the Mushika king Srikanda is a specifically regional reflection of what seems to have been a much wider, all-Indian development. Although this 'brahmanization' of new regional regimes and societies was gaining momentum throughout Kerala after the eighth century, it seems that such a development was relatively weak in Kolathunadu. This may

[9] It is true that Mushaka rulers were under the influence of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram. However, their separate political identity from that of the Cheras did never completely annihilate. Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), 114-17.

[10] Marco Polo comments, 'The people [of Eli kingdom] are idolaters and have a King, and are tributary to nobody; and have a peculiar language. *The Book of Ser Marco Polo: The Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, III, 3rd edn. ed. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier (repr., Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975), 385.

[11] Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta (India, Maldive Islands and Ceylon),* tr. and commentary by Mahdi Husain (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1953), 186.

[12] Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 80.

[13] R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanisation: South India (300 B.C. to A.D. 1300)* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 95-102.

[14] Rajan Gurukkal, 'Antecedent of the State Formation in South India', in R. Champakalakshmi, Kesavan Veluthat, T. R. Venugopalan, (eds.), *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* (Trissur: Cosmobooks, 2002), 39-59.

indicate that the much of the old tradition, labelled 'Dravidian' by some scholars, maintained sway over the local populace. These apparently conflicting but also mutually overlapping traditions undoubtedly influenced the evolution of the particular socio-political system in Kolathunadu. Hence, the establishment and the gradual spread of Islamic communities along the coast of Kolathunadu and the socio-political consequences of this have to be viewed and analyzed against the background of a relatively enduring regional 'little' tradition which was only superficially affected by 'brahmanization'. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to explore the ecological and geographical context of this process as this is crucial to understanding these and other socio-political developments in this particular habitat within the larger Kerala region.

Malabar: A regional perspective

The northern part of Malabar, as is immediately indicated by its name, is predominantly a hilly country. Geo-physically, North Malabar can be divided into three distinct units: the mountainous highlands; the low lands; and the coastal plain. The Western Ghats, popularly known as 'Sahya Parvatam', stretch along the eastern boundary with heights ranging from 100 to 2060 meters above mean sea level in the Cannanore region. They provide a seemingly an immutable boundary, whereas the Arabian Sea serves as a more open natural boundary on the western side of the region. The coastal plain stretches along as a narrow belt parallel to the coast. It is traversed by many rivers and streams, which are mostly tidal in their lower reaches and backwaters.

In between lies the midland which presents a geo-morphological picture of plains intersected with small hills. In the case of north Malabar, the Western Ghats run almost parallel to the coast at a distance of some twenty miles, providing only a narrow midland area.[15] Importantly, the landmass of this region is noticeable for its laterite formation in the midlands, which is rather unproductive, except for areas lying between the laterite terraces.[16] This topography of the region explains the absence of extensive paddy cultivation there unlike in the neighbouring Canara and Tamil regions.[17] Though rice is the staple diet of the local people, the area has suffered from a scarcity of rice throughout its history. Rice was imported into Kolathunadu mainly from the neighbouring Canara region.[18] Moreover, no

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[15] Innes and Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, I, 3.

[16] According to William Logan, '…where they [laterite terraces] break off in abrupt cliffs the soil is extensively cultivated with coconut and jack and pepper. The flats also lying between the laterite terraces are thickly peopled and every inch of available ground is occupied.' Logan, *Malabar*, II, Appendix, CCLX.

[17] M. R. Raghava Varier and Rajan Gurukkal, *Keralacharitram* (Malayalam) (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidya Peedam, 2004), 112-14.

[18] Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515 and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues*, ed. Armando Cortesão (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 76-7.

radical changes in agricultural technology which might have improved the situation occurred in Kolathunadu.[19] The coastal area except at Ezhimala, a hill jutting into the Arabian Sea, is sandy and suitable mainly to coconut plantations. This long coastal belt gave rise to a number of small-scale port towns in Kolathunadu which also functioned as the centres of socio-economic life of the local Mappila Muslims. The Western Ghats, covered with thick forest, served as the habitat for divergent flora and fauna as well as of such tribal people as Vettuvans and Mavilans.[20] This area supplied the local markets with wood and other forest products. The inhabitants of this hill tract practiced slash and burn cultivation on a large scale, which exhausted the forest resource of the region by the end of the nineteenth century.[21] Pepper and other spices were cultivated mainly on the lower tracts of the high ranges. Therefore a significant part of the high quality pepper, ginger, and cardamom exported from the port of Cannanore were not produced in Kolathunadu territory, but had been brought in from the inland regions of Kottayam (in North Kerala) and Wynadu.

Considering the ecological features of Malabar and Kerala in general, many scholars who have dealt with this area as the focus of their study have highlighted the peculiar social and political pattern of the region as a whole. As Rich Freeman has pointed out, the geographical isolation created by the Western Ghats on the eastern side and the Arabian Sea on the western border gave rise to an environmentally distinctive subsistence and settlement pattern in Kerala.[22] This physical factor has greatly influenced the unique settlement pattern in Malabar which differed from that of its neighbours in South India. As picturesquely portrayed by C. A. Innes writing about British Malabar,

> Along the narrow strip of sand near the coast, the green of palm and jack tree contrasts vividly with the red of the roads that run beneath them. Beneath the shade of the trees nestle the houses of the natives, not huddled together as in an East Coast village, but each in its own compound surrounded by a stout fence, and full of giant plantains with their broad leaves and of the many coloured flowers of the *hibiscus*. A mile or two inland the scene changes, and the country begins to swell towards the barrier of the Ghats, at first in range after range of low red laterite hills with paddy flats fringed with cocoanut gardens winding in and out of their recesses, and later in the long spurs, deep ravines and thick jungles that mark the rise of the hills. Towering

[19] K. N. Ganesh, 'Agrarian Society in Kerala (1500-1800)', in P. J. Cherian, *Perspectives on Kerala History: The Second Millennium*, vol. II, part II (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Gazetteers Department, 1999), 131, 138.

[20] Innes and Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, 391.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Rich Freeman, 'Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Premodern Kerala', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 437-500 at 440.

> over all, their slopes clad in dense forests, the majestic mountains of the Western Ghats keep watch over the favoured land at their feet.[23]

Indeed, the unbroken distribution of human settlements gave the entire Kerala region the character of a gigantic, extended village where the demarcation between villages and communities had a tendency to become blurred.[24] This settlement pattern could not have been much different from that of the early modern period as described by François Pyrard de Laval, who visited coastal Malabar at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

> And by the roadside are houses and buildings always in sight, and towns every league of half league, the most distant being two short leagues apart. The whole country is well peopled. More over, all along the roads one meet with great numbers of people, Nairs and Malabars, men and women.[25]

The monsoon factor was one of the main reasons which supported this discrepancy in the settlement pattern with the neighbouring territories, since it receives an annual average rainfall of 300 cm. About 80 per cent of the rainfall is from the South-West Monsoon, which is from June to September. The North-East Monsoon contributes only 11 per cent.

Apart from facilitating very dense settlement patterns, the monsoon climate also replenished the numerous rivers and other water sources which supported the well-dispersed habitats of the Malayalees.[26] This was all the more crucial to North Malabar since there were no big roads in the hinterlands until the Mysorean invasion in the second half of the eighteenth century. Mencher states:

> Wheeled vehicles were known and occasionally used in Kerala, but they were simply not useful in the prevailing terrain; even today, apart from modern motorized vehicles, a man walking can usually reach his destination with far less effort and in about one half the time as a man in a cart.[27]

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[23] Innes and Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, 2-3.

[24] George Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 44.

[25] Fraçois Pyrard of Laval, *The Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil,* I, tr. and ed. Albert Grey (London: Hakluyt Society, 1887), 359.

[26] This monsoon factor helped the Malabar people to escape from any serious famine to affect the smooth sailing of their life through out its history. Thus C. A. Innes commented 'real famine is unknown in the land'. Innes and Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, 271.

[27] Joan P. Mencher, 'Kerala and Madras: A Comparative Study of Ecology and Social Structure', *Ethnology*, 5/2 (Apr., 1966), 135-171 at 136.

Even if we try to turn back the clock centuries earlier, the result is almost the same. Ibn Battuta, who visited Malabar in the fourteenth century, also stresses the pedestrian character of the Malabar commerce traversing the difficult terrain which was connected with the particular settlement pattern in the region.[28]

> Every man has his own orchard with his house in the middle and a wooden palisade all round it. The road runs through the orchards, and when it comes to a palisade there are wooden steps to go up by and another flight of steps down into the next orchard. No one travels on an animal in that country….The principal vehicle of the inhabitants is a palanquin carried on the shoulders of slaves or hired porters; those who do not travel on palanquins go on foot, be they who they may. Baggage and merchandise is transported by hired carriers, and a single merchant may have a hundred such or thereabouts carrying his goods.[29]

The poor condition of the road system which existed in early British Malabar was also attested to by the reports of the British Government.[30] Most of the land routes were more suitable to peddlers than for the transportation of bulk goods. In this situation, the riverine system of the Kolathunadu was of special importance in the movement of bulk commodities into the interior parts of the kingdom.

Although Malabar is rich as far as the number of its rivers is concerned, the number of navigable rivers is limited. Only seasonal navigation was possible along many of them. Usually they dried up during the high summer. The hilly character of the land also limits the access of the river boats to the far interior. The most important riverine systems which were used for commercial purposes in North Malabar were the Nileswaram River, the Ezhimala River, the Taliparamba River, the Valarpatanam River, the Anjarakandi River and the Tellichery River.[31] Among them the most important were the Taliparamba, Valarpattanam and Anjarakandi Rivers which provided access almost to the foot of the Western Ghats and played an important role in the cross-Ghat route trade with the Mysore region.

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[28] The Dutch chaplain Canter Visscher, who lived in Kerala during the early eighteenth century, also gives a similar picture of the road system in Kerala. He states; 'I have never seen a Malabari on horseback, and even their princes do not possess steeds. Indeed, they would be of no use in the low flat lands where the ground is much broken and very marshy, and intersected with streams. Besides this, there are no beaten roads, the whole country being covered with bushes and underwood.' K. P. Padmanabha Menon*, History of Kerala: A History of Kerala Written in the Form of Notes on Visscher's Letters from Malabar*, III (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1933), 3.

[29] Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa (1325-1354)*, tr. and selected H. A. R. Gibbs (London: Hakluyt Society, 1929), 231-2.

[30] Logan, *Malabar*, I, 62.

[31] For a description of the riverine system in British Malabar *see*, Innes and Evans, *Malabar and Anjengo*, 4-6.

Hence there was an unbroken network of trade which connected the maritime sphere with the inland markets in which the Mappila Muslims of the region acted as the linking force through their coastal and inland settlements.

Many scholars have emphasized the significance of the isolation imposed by the natural conditions in the evolution of a unique socio-cultural and political setting in Kerala, making it remarkably different from the neighbouring political economies of Southern India.[32] It is, however, important to note that this socio-cultural uniqueness was not as apparent during the early centuries of the Christian era and it only became more distinctive after the disappearance of the Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram by the early twelfth century AD.[33] During what is known as the 'Sangam' period, the early centuries of the Christian era, both Kerala and the Tamil regions were considered to be part of a common cultural realm and to belong to a common geographical settlement pattern, in spite of being under distinct political entities.[34] More specifically, Tamil anthologies of the early Christian era make no sharp cultural or social distinction between the *Muvarasar* of Tamizhakam or the Cheras, the Cholas, and the Pandyas, all operating within a common cultural and geographical milieu. Also later, the temples of *Malainadu* or Kerala were included in the sacred geography of the Tamil *bhakti* movement and were profusely praised by the *Alwars* and *Nayanars*, the main proponents of the movement, in their verses.[35]

These early perspectives are an indication that the Western Ghats hardly served as an 'impregnable wall' which assured the unique identity of the region. The existence of passes and routes across the Ghats provided important lines of communication between Kerala and the Kannada and Tamil regions.[36] The contact region attracted various merchant communities from the interior, such as the Tamil Pattar Brahmins, who appeared along the eastern frontier regions before the coming of the

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[32] John Richardson Freeman, '*Purity and Violence: Sacred Power in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar*' (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 5. Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest*, 10-11; Woodcock, *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast*, 44; Mencher, 'Kerala and Madras', 153-5.

[33] It is probable that the gradual strengthening of a distinct cultural identity based on an independent language (Malayalam) that was gradually emerging as the literary language of the region and the rise of a separate political culture in Kerala after the twelfth century AD would have promoted the idea of separation between Kerala and Tamilnadu.

[34] The early Tamil poets divided the Malabar-Tamil regions into five geo-literary zones such as *Kurinchi, Palai, Mullai, Marutam* and *Neytal,* although politically it was divided under three political powers. Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers were together called *Muvarasar*. *See*, Narayanan, *Re-Interpretations in South Indian History*, 6-10.

[35] *Bhakti* movement became a popular movement throughout the regions under the influence of the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas by the end of the ninth century. M. G. S. Narayanan, *Foundations of South Indian Society and Culture* (Delhi: Bharatiya Book Corporation, 1994), 194.

[36] For more details about the relations of Malabar with Karnataka regions *see*, K. G. Vasantha Madhava, 'Karnataka-Kerala Contact and Adjustment 1336-1600', *Journal of Kerala Studies*, 2 (March-June, 1979) 103-10.

European powers in the Indian waters and continued to maintain their strong presence during the era of the European commercial enterprises in Malabar.[37]

Owing to the limited access of the European powers to the hinterland of Kerala, only a few superficial accounts exist about the importance of the mountain passes of the Ghats to the economy of Kerala during the pre-colonial period. While the Portuguese were aware of the flow of pepper via the land routes,[38] it seems that the Dutch Company servants had more grasp of the existence of these outlets as well as of the important role played by these routes in the dispersion of spices to the other side of the Ghats.[39] As early as 1677, Commander Van Reede makes mention of about twenty-four such routes across the Ghats.[40] Among these passages, the most important was the Palghat Gap which connects the Malabar Coast with the Coimbatore region. Kolathunadu possessed two important Ghat routes which connected the port town of Cannanore with the Mysore region. They were: the Perambadi Ghat road which connected Cannanore to Mysore and Srirangapatanam via Coorg and the Periah Ghat road through North Wynad to Mysore.[41] These roads were an indispensable link between the Cannanore port town and the Mysore kingdoms even before the coming of the Portuguese.

These overland connections became very important as major supply routes for the new horse-based principalities which emerged in the Deccan and the Carnatic after the first millennium AD.[42] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was regular trade traffic between the state of Vijayanagara and the port town of Cannanore, maintained especially for the purpose of conducting trade in horses. The Vijayanagara cavalry was heavily dependant on the supply of horses from the West Asian ports passing through the Malabar ports, particularly Cannanore. When the Portuguese appeared

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[37] In 1519, the Portuguese factor captured a caravan of 5,000 oxen carrying pepper from Quilon through Aryankavu pass to the Tamil regions belonging to the Pattar Brahmins shows their active involvement in the land route trade across the Ghats. F. C. Danvers, *The Portuguese in India: Being a History of the Rise and Decline of Their Eastern Empire*, I (First published 1894; repr., London: Frank Cass, 1966), 346.

[38] Pius Malekandathil, 'The Portuguese and the Ghat-Route Trade: 1500-1663', *Pondicherry University Journal of Social Science and Humanities (PUSH)*, I /1&2, 129-54.

[39] Mark Vink, 'The Dutch East India Company and the Pepper trade between Kerala and Tamilnad, 1663-1795: A Geo-Historical Analysis', in K. S. Mathew (ed.), *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans: Studies in Maritime History* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 273-300.

[40] Hugo K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala,1663-1701: De Memories en Instructies betreffende het Commandement Malabar van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 158.

[41] Logan, *Malabar*, I, 65.

[42] J. J. L. Gommans, 'The Silent Frontier of South Asia, c. A.D. 1100-1800', *Journal of World History*, 9 /1 (1998), 1-25. Even earlier, *Malaimandalam* (Kerala) traders are supposed to have embarked at the Malabar Coast to supply West Asian horses to Tamil markets. Champakalakshmi, Trade*, Ideology and Urbanisation*, 394. The early specimens of the Malayalam literature also mentions about the horse trade between Malabar and the Chola kingdom. M. R. Raghava Varier, *Medieval Keralam: Economy, Society and Culture* (Malayalam) (Thiruvananthapuram: Chinta Publishers, 1997), 41.

on the scene, Cannanore was already an important port of embarkation for the West Asian horses which were transported further to the Vijayanagara territory.[43] Although this coastal horse-trade with the interior declined after the eclipse of the Vijayanagara, it continued into the time of the succeeding Wodeyar rulers of Mysore.[44]

Region within the region: The social world of Kolathunadu

Despite its geographical similarities with the rest of Kerala, in understanding the specific geographical characteristics of Kolathunadu it is crucial to realize that the space between the Sea and the Ghats in this northern part of Kerala is much narrower than in the central and southern regions of Kerala. Hence, although many of the geographical features of Kerala as a whole are still valid, they seem to be rather less significant for Kolathunadu and may account for a sub-regional *sonderweg* which gave rise to a different socio-economic and political set-up.

The dynamics which characterized the pre-colonial South Indian society did not pass unnoticed by scholars. Migrations and emigrations, agrarian expansions and commercial growth greatly influenced the vertical and horizontal movements of social groups in the South Indian socio-political order.[45] As pointed out by David Ludden, there were sharp contrasts between the caste societies that emerged in the riverine, rice-growing areas and in the mixed and dry areas in the Tamil regions of pre-colonial South India. While the Vellalas and the Brahmins dominated the riverine social hierarchy, Maravas, Kallars and migrant Telugu-speaking 'Vadugas' (that is, people from the north) gradually imposed their superior socio-political status in the latter ecological zone.[46] Consequently, the so-called caste system evolving in South India was a product of various historical forces which shaped and reshaped the social order through centuries.

Kerala presents another regional variety of the caste system which was in many aspects quite different from the system prevalent in the rest of South India. Despite the regular communication

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[43] Ludovico di Varthema, *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna From 1502-1508*, tr. John Winter Jones, ed. Norman Mosley Penzer (London: The Argonaut Press, 1928), 50.

[44] Binu M. John, 'The VOC and the Prospects of Trade between Cannanore and Mysore in the Late Seventeenth Century', in K. S. Mathew and Joy Varkey (eds.), *Winds of Spices: Essays on Portuguese Establishments in Medieval India with Special Reference to Cannanore* (Tellichery: IRISH, 2006), 205-230.

[45] David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980). Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[46] David Ludden, 'Caste Society and Units of Production in Early-Modern South India', in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 105-33 at 111-12.

between coast and interior across the Ghats, large-scale migration and new forms of state-formation did not affect Kerala as dramatically as they did in the Deccan, the Carnatic, and Tamil regions from the thirteenth-fourteenth century. Within Kerala as a whole, Kolathunadu stands out as an area that is particularly detached from the 'medieval' developments in the interior and, consequently, remained most prone to maritime influences. As we will see throughout this study, the major influence on Kolathunadu was maritime in character. From this perspective that I would like to analyse the distinctive social relations developed in medieval Kolathunadu.

Eric J. Miller's study on caste in British Malabar points towards the territorial segmentation of caste system in Kerala. According to him, distinct caste relations developed in the north and south of Malabar. He indicates that the river Korappuzha (Kora River) was a particularly sharp cultural and political frontier between North and South Malabar.[47] Interestingly, in their customs and manners Kolathunadu people presented deviations from their fellow communities in other parts of Malabar. This was most conspicuous in the system of inheritance. When all other Nambutiri Brahmins of Kerala strictly followed the *makkathayam* (patrilineal) system of inheritance, the Brahmans of Payyanur *gramam* (village) followed the *marumakkathayam* (matrilineal) system.[48] While the Tiyyas of Kolathunadu followed *marumakkathayam*, their counterparts in nearby Kadathanadu and South Malabar were *makkathayis*.[49] Although the Nayars in both regions were matrilineal, in the North their marriage was virilocal. The Mappila Muslims of North Malabar followed a matrilineal system of inheritance and their counterparts in the South were patrilineal. Even nuptial relations between the communities in the North and South Malabar were not permitted by orthodoxy as late as the early twentieth century.

While Miller stressed the importance of politics in the regulation of caste relations in Malabar, Ravindran Gopinath pointed also to the geographical factors and the consequent differences in the dominant agricultural production regimes as a decisive factor in determining the differences in the social relations in the southern and northern Malabar.[50] Garden crops dominated northern Malabar and paddy-cultivating southern regions gave rise to fairly different political systems and social orders. His hypothesis is that the extremely labour intensive paddy cultivation demanded a large servile labour force and an economically exploitative system of control. This in turn required an ideological system justifying and preserving highly unequal social relations between the surplus-appropriating groups and

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[47] Eric J. Miller, 'Caste and Territory in Malabar', *American Anthropologist*, 56/3 (June, 1954), 410-20 at 416-17.

[48] *Keralolpathi*, as usual, attributes this 'exception' to Parasurama. Varier, *Keralolpatti Granthavari*, 6.

[49] William Logan based on the account given by Dr. Hermann Gundert gives a list of *makkathayis* and *marumakkathayis* in Malabar and their regional variations. Logan, *Malabar*, I, 155.

[50] Ravindran Gopinath, 'Gardens and Paddy Fields: Historical Implications of Agricultural Production Regimes in Colonial Malabar', in Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta (eds.*), India's Colonial Encounter: Essays in memory of Eric Stokes* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1993), 363-89 at 367, 377.

actual producers. This gave rise to a more intricate and rigid social system and concomitantly a comparatively more centralized political order in South Malabar than in the North.[51] Territorial segmentation in the North largely promoted micro-level caste relations which inhibited the emergence of broader caste identities till the establishment of the British rule in Malabar.[52] This geographical influence on the evolution of Kerala society is also clearly perceptible in the discrepancy in the Brahmanical village settlement pattern emerging in the region from at least the eight century AD.

Brahmanism in Kolathunadu

As mentioned already, the period between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries witnessed the growing influence of Brahmanism in Kerala. But we should stress that Brahmanism was most deeply rooted especially in the wet-land, paddy-cultivable regions of central Kerala. The Nambutiri Brahmins, who accentuated their higher status in the social order as landlords as well as the religious leaders, claimed great influence in the society. As the *uralar* of the temples they possessed great landed properties.[53] This period also saw them emerging as the *karalar* of the temple properties.[54] In Brahmanical villages, temples acted as the centre of socio-economic activities. The possession of great landed properties, acquired in various ways, but mainly as donations from the ruling authorities and rich devotees, made temples one of the most important landholders of the medieval period.[55] Some of the Brahmins claimed political status too.[56] There are suggestions which indicate that the Brahmins were not exclusively religious in their profession. According to Pyrard of Laval, some Brahmins also engaged in military service along with the Nayars, 'performing the same duties and wearing the same dress as the latter'.[57]

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[51] Ibid. 379.

[52] According to Eric Miller, greater spatial mobility was a particular feature of higher castes in Kerala. Miller, 'Caste and Territory in Malabar', 410.

[53] *Uralar* were the people who looked after the property of the temples. They belonged mainly to the Nambutiri caste.

[54] *Karalar* were the people who were granted the landed properties of the temples from the *Uralar* in lease and had to give a portion of their products to the temples.

[55] The period of the second Chera Kingdom witnessed several land grants and concessions to the temples and Brahmins by the ruling authorities. For more details about the organization of these emerging Brahmin settlements during this period *see*, Kesavan Veluthat, 'Organisation and Administration of the Brahman Settlements in Kerala in the later Cera period- A.D. 800-1100', *Journal of Kerala Studies (Special issue in Honour of the World conference on Malayalam, Kerala Culture and Development)*, 4/1&2 (June-September, 1977), 181-91. For a discussion about the role of temples in medieval Malabar society *see*, Kesavan Veluthat, 'The Role of Temples in Kerala Society (A.D. 1100-1500)', *Journal of Kerala Studies*, 3 (June, 1976), 181-94.

[56] *Kokasandesam* (a medieval Malayalam poem) described the Edappalli King Tirumalacherri Nambutiri as a great battle hero. Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pilla (ed.), *Kokasandesam* (Malayalam) (repr., Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1997), 42.

[57] Pyrard of Laval, *Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval*, I, 373.

However, the concentration of the Nambutiri Brahmin villages in North Malabar happened to be very thin in comparison with their counterparts in South Malabar and the central Kerala. According to the tradition, the Lord Parasurama established sixty-four Brahmin settlements in *Bhargavakshetram* (Kerala).[58] Among them, thirty-two were located in modern Kerala state. Among these thirty-two original *gramams*, only two appear in North Malabar, namely Payyannur and Chellur or Perinchellur (Taliparamba).[59] It is conspicuous that the locations of these Brahmin *gramams* were predominantly in and around the paddy-cultivable wet-lands in Kerala. Actually, this also explains their lack of numbers in North Malabar as the geographical circumstances there limited the scope of wet-land paddy cultivation. Taking this factor into account, the social and, to an extent, the ideological influences of these two *gramams* over the entire Kolathunadu realm was rather limited. Besides the Nambutiri Brahmins, Tamil Brahmins, known as Pattar Brahmins and Canara Brahmins also settled in some parts of Kerala. However, neither of these groups seems to have constituted influential sections in medieval Kolathunadu society.[60]

Nayars as local elites

The absence of dominant Kshatriya and Vaisya castes in the *varna* order was an important feature of Kerala society. The dominant Nayars, who were attributed only a low status in the *varna* order, carried out the duties usually assigned to the Kshatriyas.[61] There were also Nayar households which controlled extensive landed properties. Their high status was attributed not only to their role as the landed aristocrats and politically powerful social elites in Kerala, but also to their 'ritual' relationship with Brahmins through *sambandam*.[62] Nevertheless, as noted before, this ritual relation with the Brahmins as

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[58] For a discussion about the identities of these settlements *see*, Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies* (Calicut: Calicut University, 1978).

[59] Among the 1, 017 Nambutiri Brahmin families enumerated by the colonial officials in the British Malabar, only seventy-nine were in Chirakkal *taluk*. Logan, *Malabar*, I, 119-20.

[60] However in a letter to the *Heren XVII* in 1689, the Cochin Council reported that as a consequence of the disagreement among the elites in the region, one 'Mana Pattere' was appointed the *ragiadoor-moor* of Kolaswarupam in place of Prince Unnithiri, who was in conflict with the Kolathiri and the Ali Raja. Intriguingly he has been described as a 'moorman'—probably a mistaken identity. If this is true, the Pattar Brahmins enjoyed some influence, although not as equal to that they enjoyed in Cochin, in the socio-political system in the region. VOC 1448, Missive from Commander Isaack van Dielen and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 17 January 1689, fo. 355v. Hugo K. s'Jacob's work on Cochin indicates the considerable influence exercised by foreign Brahmins, including the Pattars, in the political life of that principality. Hugo K. s'Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin (1663-1720): Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2000).

[61] From the Brahmanical perspective, the Nayars were regarded as *Sudras*, occupying the lowest status in the fourfold social division.

[62] *Sambandam* was a sort of temporary sexual relationship maintained by Nayar ladies either with their own caste people or with high caste men, especially the Nambutiri Brahmins. Hieronimo Discanto Stefano, a Genovese traveller who visited Malabar

the sole factor in determining their social status should not be overestimated in North Malabar. It is likely that the direct ritual relationship between the Brahmins and the Nayars was more or less confined to the regions lying in and around Brahmin settlements which were quite rare in North Malabar. As a consequence, it is my contention that the success of the Nayars in North Malabar in legitimizing their superior social status should not be associated with any links to Brahmins, but instead, should be traced to the much more local cosmological concept of power or *sakti*, which we will discuss in detail in the following chapter.

The Nayars were the martial class, though not exclusively, of the society.[63] The rulers and *naduvaẓhis* of medieval Kerala employed them as their bodyguards. Because of their martial credentials, Barbosa commented 'all Nairs are mighty warriors'.[64] Barbosa also mentions that the Nayars of Cannanore were 'knighted' directly by the raja himself.[65] The Nayars received military training from their childhood at training centres known as *kalaris*. Reports of foreign travellers indicate that Nayars sold their military proficiency in the local job market and earned their livelihood from doing so. Barbosa refers to a tradition called c*hangatam* which was prevalent in medieval Kerala. It was a system in which, 'if any is in dread, he takes one or two of these *Nayres*, or as many as are daring to maintain, to these he gives a certain small fee to protect him and for love of them none dares do him any hurt, for they and all their kindred will take vengeance for any injury done to such an one.'[66] Besides the Nayars, there were some other caste groups which enjoyed comparatively high status in the Malabar social order. Duarte Barbosa noted their name as *Biabares* (Vyaparis),[67] *Cuivem* (Kusavan),[68] *Maintos* (Vannattan),[69] *Caletis* (Chaliens) and others.[70]

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towards the end of the fifteenth century, mentioned this peculiar custom stating that in this land 'every lady may take to herself seven or eight husbands, according to her inclination'. R. H. Major (ed.), *India in the Fifteenth Century: Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India* (Delhi: Deep, 1974), 5.

63 This does not, however, mean that they were the sole community under arms in medieval Kerala. Almost all the other communities which enjoyed social power, such as the Syrian Christians of South Kerala, the Mappila Muslims, and the Tiyyas had their own martial culture and training systems. Christians were even enlisted as soldiers under local rajas. *See*, Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumals of Travancore*, 138.

64 Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 55.

65 Ibid. 45-6.

66 Ibid. 48.

67 *Vyapari* Nayars were the indigenous traders of Malabar. Ibid. 55-6.

68 The main occupation of the Kusavan caste was pottery-making.

69 These people were engaged mainly in washing the clothes of the high caste people.

70 The people belonging to these castes were regarded as sub-castes of the Nayars.

Other social groups

The majority of the regional population, however, did not belong to the *varna* order envisaged by the Brahmins. They were treated as outcastes and untouchables. Barbosa refers to these people as this was; '[with] whom the others do not associate, nor do they touch them under pain of death and there are great distinctions between one and another of them, preserving them from mixture with one another.'[71] Caution is advisable here as it should be borne in mind that what Barbosa was depicting was more or less an ideal state of caste relations in Malabar which had not much to do with the day-to-day functioning of the society. The information provided by Pyrard of Laval testifies that the practice of untouchability was much more relaxed in its actual exercise than the situation as Barbosa described it.[72] Such people as the *Tuias* (Tiyyan), *Manen* (Mannan), *Canaquas* (Kaniyan), *Ageres* (Asari) and the like were regarded as the higher classes among these outcastes. Barbosa also provides us with a list of people who belonged to this category, such as *Mogeres* (Moosari?), *Monquer* (Mukkuvas or fishermen), *Betunes* (Vettuvan), *Paneens* (Sorcerers), and *Revoleens* (Eravallars), who earned a living by carrying firewood and grass to the towns.

In Kolathunadu, the Tiyya community constituted an influential social category. There is no unanimous opinion about the origin of the Tiyyas.[73] Barbosa described the Tiyyas as people engaging in such various trades as tending the palm-groves, quarry men, agricultural labourers, and men-at-arms; in short those who, 'earn their living by work of all kinds.'[74] Numerically they maintained a strong position in the social world of North Malabar.[75] It is also remarkable that, without any hesitation about engaging any trade to make their livelihood, they were gradually able to carve out a strong position in Kolathunadu, at least by the eighteenth century.[76] Owning to their higher economic and ritual status, the Tiyyas in the North claimed a non-polluting status in comparison with their counterparts (Izhavas) in the South.[77] This shows that the conceptual stratification of society in a hierarchical order according to the Brahmanical social theory of *varna*, by excluding a large section of population from its structure, did not really correspond to the economic or social status of these 'outcastes' throughout Malabar.

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[71] Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 59.

[72] Pyrard of Laval, *Voyage of François Pyrard of Laval*, I, 391-2.

[73] William Logan considered 'Tiyyan' to be a corrupted form of the Sanskrit *Dvipan*, which means 'people from an island', that is from Ceylon. Logan, *Malabar*, I, 143.

[74] Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 60.

[75] Logan, *Malabar*, I, 143.

[76] Francis Buchanan refers to the Tiyyas as an industrious people engaging in various trades. He also mentions that they did not pretend to be of the *Sudra* caste, but were content with their lowly position as *panchamas*. Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, Performed under the Orders of the Most Noble the Marquis Wellesley, Governor General of India*, II (London: Cadell, 1807), 415-16.

[77] Gopinath, 'Gardens and Paddy Fields', 377.

Pulayan, Parayan, Cheruman and other such people occupied the lowest position in this predominantly agrarian social order, where they were mainly treated as agrestic slaves. Pulayas were the actual tillers of the soil. Even the low class people treated them as untouchables. The Parayas were held to be worse than devils. 'Even to see them is to be unclean and out caste'.[78] The British census of 1857 shows that the concentration of agrestic slaves in Chirakkal *taluk*—the core region of old Kolathunadu—was thinner than in the neighbouring tracts; except Kottayam—a hilly area.[79] Buchanan also noticed a few members of this 'slave' population in North Malabar.[80] As noted earlier, the differences in the crop cultivation regimes between the North and the South Malabar could have influenced this discrepancy in population pattern. The more labour intensive paddy cultivation demanded the concentration of these tillers of the soil in the South rather than in the garden-crop dominant North Malabar. Moreover, the shortage of agrestic slaves in the region rendered the hired labour of Nairs, Tiyyas, and Mappilas more expensive.[81] This situation may have guaranteed the regional agricultural labourers greater social and occupational mobility.

Perceptible regional differences in caste structures and social relations denote the flexibility which characterized the social scene of pre-colonial Kerala or North Malabar. It also raises the question of how far these groups of people generally referred to as communities functioned as strictly structured 'communities' in pre-colonial Malabar. It is also true that these social groups depended largely on agrarian surplus to make their living and as a consequence of the slow changes in the agricultural sector the scope for mobility on the socio-political ladder seems to have been rather slow. In contrast, the coastal society of Kolathunadu, which depended on trade and related activities, was far more vibrant than that of the inland agrarian social groups.

Mercantile groups in Kolathunadu

The ports of Kolathunadu attracted very diverse and complex merchant groups from different parts of the Indian Ocean world. During the pre-European period, such traders as Chettys, Jews, and Christians frequented these ports. The Geniza papers dating from the twelfth century mention the brass factory of the west Asian Jewish merchant Abraham Yuju at Dharmapatanam.[82] The existence of a pond near

[78] Barbosa gives a detailed account on the Pulaya and the Paraya castes. Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 68-70.

[79] Logan, *Malabar*, I, 148.

[80] Buchanan, *Journey from Madras*, 508,525,526,559.

[81] M. T. Narayanan, *Agrarian Relations in Late Medieval Malabar* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2003), 135-40.

[82] S. D. Goitein (ed.), *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 188. Interestingly, the Italian Carmelite priest Vincenzo, who visited Kerala during 1657-1658, reported about five or six Jewish families living near Ezhimala or Mount Deli. According to him, they engaged in the business of metal-smelting and manufacturing brass vessels. Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. III, part II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 893.

Madayi known as the 'Jewish pond' is another piece of evidence which supports their presence in the region in an early period.[83] The references to Anchuvannam and Manigramam merchant guilds in the *Payyanurpattu*, also indicate the strong presence of merchant communities from various parts of the Indian Ocean along the coastal tract of Kolathunadu in the pre-Portuguese period.[84] In this cosmopolitan mercantile world, Mappila Muslim traders gradually emerged as the predominant merchant group in Kolathunadu. The account of Ibn Battuta, who visited the Malabar Coast in the fourteenth century, indicates the increasing influence of Muslim traders in Kolathunadu.[85] Although it would be wrong to assume a complete disappearance of other trading groups from the commercial sphere of the region, the Mappila traders undoubtedly enjoyed supremacy in the coastal and the trans-oceanic trade of Kolathunadu by the beginning of the seventeenth century.[86]

Duarte Barbosa mentions the *vyapari* Nayars of Calicut, who also might have occupied a position in the inland trading activities of Kolathunadu.[87] It is also possible that a large section of the people of Kolathunadu who did not belong to the *varna* order never cultivated an aversion towards trade as a means to earn their livelihood. However, it seems that they were more likely to have engaged in a sort of peddling trade as their resource base was too limited to engage in extensive commercial activities. The collective memory of the local people preserved in the folklore tradition of the region also supports this assumption. The *tottam* of the *Kativannur Veeran Teyyam* of the Tiyya community in North Malabar recounts the peddling trade of the god Katuvannur Veeran and his friends with the Kudagu region in Canara.[88]

Quite clearly, the strong resource base of the Mappila traders and their connection with the Indian Ocean Islamic trading networks put them ahead of other local traders in controlling the trade of Kolathunadu. Although it is difficult to present a vivid picture of the inland migrations and settlements of Mappila traders before the nineteenth century, it may be safe to assume that such hinterland Mappila

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[83] Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, 7-8.

[84] P. Anthony (ed.), *Payyanur Pattu: Pathavum Padanavum* (Malayalam) (Kottayam: D. C. Books, 2000), 28. The Narayan Kannur temple inscription of Ezimala also mentions the Manigramam merchant guild. Narayanan, *Kerala Charithrathinte Adistana Silakal,* 85-99. For a discussion about Manigramam guild *see*, Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), 13-39.

[85] Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 233-5.

[86] For more details about the emergence of Mappila traders as the most influential trading group in Kolathunadu, *see* Chapter Three.

[87] Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa,* II, 56.

[88] *Tottam*s are the ritual songs related with the ritual dance *Teyyam* performed among various Hindu communities in North Malabar. For the *tottam* of Kativannur Viran *Teyyam see*, M. V. Vishnu Namboodiri, *Katuvanoor Veeranthottam: Oru Veerapuravrittam* (Malayalam) (Kottayam: Current Books, 1997). For more details about Teyyam *see*, John Richardson Freeman, 'Purity and Violence'; K. K. N. Kurup, *The Cult of Teyyam and Hero Worship in Kerala* (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1973).

bazaars as Srikandapuram, Irukkur, Talipparamba, Kottayam and other places were brisk trading centres even before the coming of the Portuguese.[89] It is particularly important that the most sought-after commodities for international trade such as pepper, ginger and cardamom were acquired from the deep hinterlands of Cannanore port.[90] Different types of woods— an important forest product which were in high demand for shipbuilding—were brought from the Western Ghats via the rivers of Kolathunadu.[91] Moreover, such commodities for local consumption as rice, cotton, salt, opium which also had to be imported from outlying regions provided an impetus to the emergence of these inland-trading centres. However, contrary to the situation in the neighbouring territories under the control of the Zamorins of Calicut, the Mappila population in the interior of Kolathunadu remained negligible even in the nineteenth century.[92] Besides these local trading groups, Malabar society also hosted a number of *paradesi* (foreign) traders. Among them, the Chetty traders from the Coromandel Coast and the Gujarathi Banias were the most important.[93] However, their commercial presence in Kolathunadu during the seventeenth century seems to have been inconsequential owing to the increasing power of the local Mappila merchants.[94]

Conclusion

Although I do not intend to champion the idea of 'geographical determinism', one can hardly overrate the significance of geography in the shaping of the history of Kolathunadu as a particular micro-region within both South India and Kerala. Local geography more or less determined the quantitative and qualitative aspects of agricultural output. This obviously influenced the pattern of settlement and the agrarian relations in the region. The sought-after spices produced in the hinterland coupled with the limited possibility for paddy cultivation gave rise to the emergence of a prominent maritime

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[89] Barbosa describes Taliparamba as a town of 'both moors and heathen which has great traffic with the merchants of the kingdom of Narsinga (Vijayanagara)'. Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 80.

[90] The hinterlands of Cannanore port town were famous for their spices from a very ancient period. M. P. Kumaran has identified 'Kottanora', the place from where pepper was exported to the Roman Empire during the early Christian centuries, with the Kottayam bazaar in British Malabar. *See*, Kumaran, *Kolathupazhama*, 40-7.

[91] The Dutch used to engage in trade contracts with the Cannanore traders to acquire timber for shipbuilding purposes. VOC 1268, Missive from Rijcklof van Goens and the Council at Colombo to Batavia, 13 June 1668, fo. 1123r-v.

[92] Logan, *Malabar*, I, 148.

[93] For more details about them see the account of Duarte Barbosa, Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 70-3.

[94] There are some references about their presence in Cannanore during the late seventeenth century. A Dutch manuscript mentions one Chetty as the 'mint master' of Cannanore. VOC 1360, Letter from Commander Marten Huijsman and the Council at Cochin to Batavia, 28 Apr. 1680, fo. 1757r.

commercial sector which dominated a comparatively less flexible inland agrarian social order. As there was only a very narrow stretch of agricultural land, Kolathunadu as a whole remained relatively detached from earlier processes of Brahmanization and agricultural expansion and, instead, became very responsive to maritime commercial influences. This was particularly true in the early modern period when the Indian Ocean trade underwent further stimulation in the wake of the arrival of European entrepreneurs. Maritime trade provided a fine opportunity for improving the economic status for the social groups in Kolathunadu where the agricultural surplus was limited. Naturally, the port towns of Kolathunadu, especially Cannanore, became the centres of socio-political dynamics in the region.