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

Mailaparambil, J.B.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COAST ADrift: THE ALI RAJA AND THE RISE OF NEW MARITIME POWERS (1698-1723)

On 18 October 1698, the Dutch officials in Cannanore received message from Kepoe Tamburan announcing the death of the Kolathiri.¹ The implication of this incident was considerable in Kolathunadu. With the death of this Kolathiri, the forty years of continuous succession of Palli Kovilakam princes to the Kolathiriship came to a halt.² The right to succession passed to the Udayamangalam Kovilakam according to *muppumura* or seniority.

The Company was initially optimistic about the change. It was reported that the shift in authority to the Udayamangalam Kovilakam had aroused great expectations among the public. An abode of ‘many smart and rich princes’, the power transition to the Udayamangalam Kovilakam was expected to bring about an end to the years of confusion and turmoil in the region.³ The subsequent developments show that such expectations were misplaced. We are informed in a letter to the *Heren XVII* in 1701 that the anticipated Kolathiri was still not able to assume the position because of the persisting conflict between the powerful princes in the Swarupam.⁴ There is little doubt that the new Kolathiri did not possess enough resources and strength to counter the challenge to his claim to the position. The Ali Raja, who was concerned about defending and enhancing his own power in this volatile political situation, probably did not give the Kolathiri any solid assistance. This forced him to request the help of the Company to secure his position intact. In return, the Kolathiri promised the tolls at the Cannanore bazaar, which the Mappilas never paid to the raja, as compensation for the expenses expected to be incurred by the Company.⁵ This indicates a growing uneasy relationship between the new Kolathiri and the Ali Raja.

¹ VOC 1627, Report from Lieutenant and *Oppehoofd* of Cannanore Barent Ketel to Magnus Wickelman, 31 Oct. 1698, fo. 367r.

² VOC 1625, Missive from Commander Magnus Wichelman and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 31 Dec. 1698, fo.14.

³ VOC 1627, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 19 Oct. 1698, fos. 279v-280r.

⁴ VOC 1646, Missive from Cochin by Abraham Vink and the Council to *Heren XVII*, 6 May 1701, fos. 125v-126r.

⁵ VOC 1646, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, Feb. 1701, fos. 427r-428r.

At the same time the Arackal Swarupam was anxious about the growing challenges to its control over regional trade from other 'men of prowess' in the vicinity of Cannanore. The Mappilas at the port towns like Dharmapatanam were trying to build up their own commercial networks by making inroads into the hinterland markets previously dominated by the Ali Raja and more serious competition in the hinterland production centres was in the offing by the closing decades of the seventeenth century, when regional elites, especially the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara, took an active interest in reaping benefits from the burgeoning maritime commercial activities in the region.

Close encounters along the coast

The Vazhunnavar of Vadakara, who was notoriously known among the European itinerants and merchants as the protector of infamous pirate nests in northern Malabar, was a powerful landlord in the vicinity of Cannanore.⁶ When opportunities provided by the European commercial competition in Malabar opened up the possibility to alter his putative status of 'lord of the pirates' to a more acceptable status of 'mercantile lord', this resulted in a change in the changing commercial atmosphere in the area as well as in the Arabian Sea. In various communications with the Dutch, the Vazhunnavar expressed his willingness to provide the Company with a trade settlement in his land, which in turn would enable him in his efforts to gain control over all the merchandise produced in the area. He was aware that the presence of the dreaded Malabar pirates repelled merchants, especially foreigners and discouraged them from trading in his land.⁷ He expected that the establishment of a Dutch settlement would facilitate the ousting of the pirates from his land, which would attract more traders to his domain and avert the diversion of merchandise to Cannanore and Calicut.⁸ In another letter through his *ragiadoor*, Kunju Kurup, the Vazhunnavar even promised to provide the VOC with a fort built at his own cost.⁹ Obviously, the design of the Vazhunnavar was a direct threat to the economic interests of the Ali Raja as both were dependent on the same hinterland for the extraction of wealth through trade and the enhancement of their power status in the region. This new development complicated the power struggle in the region even more by the beginning of the eighteenth century in Cannanore.

⁶ Alexander Hamilton has given a vivid account of the Vazhunnavar in his travel account. Hamilton, *New Account of the East Indies*, 301-6.

⁷ VOC 1619, Missive from Commander Magnus Wichelman and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 18 Nov. 1699, fo. 7v.

⁸ VOC 1619, Translated letter from Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to Cochin, 15 Dec. 1698, fos. 69r-70r.

⁹ VOC 1619, Translated letter from Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to Cochin, 7 Feb. 1699, fos. 70v-73v.

In a letter to *Heren XVII* (8 April 1701), Commander Abraham Vink described the then Vazhunnavar as a respectable and capable young person, 'a very different type from his ancestors who have been known so far as none other than the regents and patrons of a wild folk who lived by piracy about their coast'.¹⁰ This sudden change in the political attitude of the local VOC officials towards the lord of Vadakara was obviously made with political and commercial advantages in their sights. Not only this could result in seizing control of the cardamom supply from the region, but the Vazhunnavar was also embraced as a potential ally to resist the Zamorin on the border.¹¹

Yet it was the same old story again. The local officials, who were not able to proceed without the consent from Batavia, caused deplorable delays in responding to the demands of the local elites. In addition to this, Batavia was obviously not in favour of increasing the institutional burden of the Malabar Commandement which was already reeling under a huge deficit and was even seriously discussing relinquishing some of the settlements. This increased pressure on the Cannanore officials who had to satisfy the inquiries of the local elites. They tried to postpone giving any definite answers to the queries and as always this did not produce the desired results.

It was reported from Cannanore (7 March 1701) that, annoyed at the delays in receiving an explicit reply from the Company about help in ensuring his throne, the Kolathiri demanded an immediate resolution. Otherwise he would search for an alternative means to support his cause.¹² Apparently the Company's attempt to avoid becoming involved in the regional power struggle without any immediate returns had a negative impact on its political and commercial influence in Kolathunadu. Local elites, who mulled over trade as an instrument by which to demand assistance from the Company, especially in the form of gunpowder and other military requirements, were frustrated by the indifference of the Company. Its indifference to the demands of the Kolathiri immediately was reciprocated in the tough stance taken by Prince Kepoe against the Company. The Cannanore officials wrote to Cochin that they had refused Kepoe's demand for five packages of copper which he asked to be deducted from the toll.¹³ As a reprisal, the prince ordered the Nayars of the Company to refrain from serving the

¹⁰ VOC 1646, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 8 Apr. 1701, fos. 103v-4r. However, in another report, he has been described as only the third in the succession hierarchy, but possessing the entire authority because of the advanced age of his uncles. VOC 1619, *Dagregister*, Saturday, 7 Feb. 1699, fos. 70v-73v.

¹¹ Ibid. fo. 105r.

¹² VOC 1646, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 7 Mar. 1701, fo. 429r-v.

¹³ VOC 1658, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Feb. 1702, fo. 337r-v.

Company and threatened to prevent the collection of firewood for the fort.¹⁴ Nevertheless the increasing military requirements of the Kolathiri to fight the Ikkeri Nayaks along the northern side of Malabar and the combat threat of Unnithiri from the south withheld Kepoe from severing his relationship with the Company entirely.

Trans-regional alliance against the Ikkeri Nayaka: resurgence of the border conflict

In February 1702, two envoys of the Mysore raja visited Cannanore to request the assistance of the Kolathiri princes against the Ikkeri Nayakas.¹⁵ This propelled the Kolathiri princes into the struggle between the various 'successor states' of Vijayanagara in South India. The Company reports intimate that the princes readily agreed to join the fray, as the Ikkeri Nayaka was still occupying some regions which had previously belonged to the Kolathiri. Prince Kepoe moved to the north with about 12,000 Nayars. A Dutch missive of 23 June 1702 reports that Kepoe succeeded in expelling the intruders and occupying such fortresses as Kaviur Kotta, Chitty Kotta, and Kanjira Kotta and that Fort Deckol (?) was about to fall into the hands of the joint forces of Kepoe and Mysore.¹⁶ It is particularly notable that Kepoe received active assistance from various quarters, including that of the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara who sent his forces to fight under Kepoe.

The same Dutch report mentioned, however, that the Ali Raja refused to join the combined forces so as to protect his own private commercial interest in Canara.¹⁷ The Ali Raja, who apparently had strong commercial links in Canara, was obviously not prepared to antagonize the Ikkeri Nayaka. However, there is little doubt that he rendered the Prince covert assistance.¹⁸ When the conflict stumbled on with no definite result, Prince Kepoe was forced to request his arch-rival Prince Unnithiri, to lend him military assistance against the Nayaka. In a gesture of rare goodwill, Prince Unnithiri not only dispatched his own military force but also assembled the fighting force of the Prince of Alladathunadu¹⁹ on his way to the front line.²⁰ To carry on a prolonged struggle against the powerful Nayaka, Prince Kepoe had to rely on extensive military assistance from potential allies. Constant requests for assistance in the form of ships and guns from the VOC were the

¹⁴ VOC 1658, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Malabar Council to Batavia, 5 Apr. 1702, fo. 69r-v.

¹⁵ VOC 1658, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 23 June 1702, fo. 339r-v.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. fos. 339v-340r.

¹⁸ It was reported that the Ali Raja provided some monetary assistance to the prince to carry on the war. VOC 1658, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 13 Nov. 1702, fo. 103r.

¹⁹ Traditionally, Alladattunadu was considered to be the region lying between Kolathunadu and Canara.

²⁰ VOC 1658, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 14 July 1702, fo. 340r-v. However, he soon returned from the field because, 'these two princes can never get on with each other'. VOC 1658, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Malabar Council to Batavia, 13 Nov. 1702, fo. 103v.

outcome of this situation. Although the Company was assured of a share in the benefits of the war as a compensation for such military aid, these requests were usually turned down with various excuses.²¹ The apathy of the Company towards the requests of the prince could have been partly attributable to its hesitance to annoy the Nayaka, and consequently, to avoid any adverse effect on its trade interests in Canara. Although the conflict between Ikkeri and the Mysore-Cannanore combined force came to an end by the beginning of 1703, the Ikkeri Nayakas remained as a potential threat along the northern borders of Malabar.²² The cessation of the conflict was promptly followed by the official accession of the Udayamangalam Kolathiri at Maday without any opposition from the princes.²³

The active involvement of the Kolathunadu princes in the campaign against the Ikkeri Nayaka confirms that the power within the Swarupam was confined chiefly in the hands of the rich and efficient princes. The failure of the Kolathiris to become the embodiment of *sakti* or power in the realm greatly nullified their significance in the political life of Kolathunadu. The changing politico-economic conditions in the region accelerated this process of the dissemination of *sakti* status usually attributed to the position of Kolathiri among various contenders in the region. This waning in symbolic significance intensified the struggle between various 'men of prowess' to enhance their own power and become the sole custodian of *sakti*.

Being a maritime merchant and a chief contender for power in Kolathunadu, the Ali Raja had to tackle problems on two fronts—land and sea—if he were to maintain and augment his claim to *sakti*. But, as maritime trade was the core sinew of his power, the Ali Raja mainly had to deal with challenges to his authority on that front. In an ever-shifting and entirely opened-up arena of maritime commerce, the Ali Raja had to adopt a more pragmatic strategy to keep up and improve his share in trade and, consequently, to uphold his *sakti* in the regional political economy. The European entrepreneurs with considerable capital and maritime strength were, no doubt, the foremost challenge to the Ali Raja's trading interests in Cannanore. In the mounting competition, the Ali Raja's responses to both 'external' and 'internal' challenges were strictly calculated to guard his commercial interests. This is perceptible in various incidents recounted by the VOC officials from Cannanore. The seizure of a ship of the Ali Raja near Daman by the Portuguese in 1705 and the subsequent reaction of the Ali Raja was indeed significantly at variance with his

²¹ The Company was offered Fort Deckol as a reward for the help requested. VOC 1658, Extracts of the letters sent from Cannanore to Cochin, 1 Sept. 1702, fo. 342r-v.

²² VOC 1694, Report from *Onderkoopman* Jan Star and *Boekhouder* Hendrik Wynhout to Commander Abraham Vink, 14 Mar. 1703, fo. 77.

²³ The formal accession of the Kolathiri was on 1 Mar. 1703. VOC 1674, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 1 Nov. 1703, fos. 112v-113r.

indifference towards interfering in the long drawn-out struggle between the Mappilas of Dharmapatanam and the nearby Nayars over a minor incident. In the first instance, the Ali Raja did not squander any time by launching a strongly worded complaint against the Portuguese to the Dutch, who were asked to compensate for the loss conform to the treaty of 1664.²⁴ In another similar incident, the VOC had to intervene to prevent the Ali Raja from capturing the Portuguese 'pirate' ships nearby Cochin.²⁵ In the second instance, the Ali Raja seemed to be reluctant to take sides with any of the belligerent groups which would by no means yield him any profit, but only cause him a host of troubles.²⁶

The Vazhunnavar of Vadakara v/s the Ali Raja

However, it was not the European companies *per se*, but the resilience of the local elites, or at least a few of them in responding constructively to the growing prospect of maritime commerce which threatened the commercial influence of the Arackal Swarupam in the region. We have already noted the attempt of the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to re-invent his status from that of 'lord of the pirates' to the promoter of 'legitimate' trade in the changing commercial circumstances in northern Malabar. The growing tension between the Vazhunnavar and the Ali Raja was not entirely unexpected as both of them had to compete with each other to dominate the spice-producing hinterland of northern Malabar. The Vazhunnavar, unlike the Ali Raja, had never been a ship-owning maritime entrepreneur.²⁷ This did not prevent him realizing the potential of maritime trade and trying to convert his land into a hub of international trade in various ways. On several occasions the Vazhunnavar, as seen before, tried to attract the Dutch Company to establish a factory in his territory. This, he expected, would attract merchants and spices to his realm and subsequently raise an income from tolls. In spite of his failure to woo the VOC, it seems that the Lord of Vadakara succeeded to some extent in drawing more trade to his coast. This inference is supported by his various requests to the Company to supply sea-passes to send ships to different parts of the Indian Ocean. In a letter to Cochin, the Vazhunnavar asked the help of the Dutch in supporting his venture to build a ship that he intended to send to China.²⁸ His requests for passes for such far destinations as Surat and

²⁴ VOC 1708, Missive from Willem Moerman and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 29 Nov. 1705, fos. 67r-68v.

²⁵ VOC 1943, Malabar Dag-Register, 11 Feb. 1720, fos. 625r-627r. VOC 1943, Malabar Dagregister, 13 Feb. 1720, fos. 628v-631r.

²⁶ VOC 1708, Missive from Willem Moerman and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 29 Nov. 1705, fos. 92v-93v.

²⁷ He has been described by the Dutch neither as a pirate nor as a ship-owner, but only as a border governor of the Kolathiri. VOC 1361, Missive from Commander Marten Huijsman and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 19 June 1680, fo. 510v.

²⁸ VOC 1724, Translated letter from Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to Commander Willem Moerman, 5 Apr. 1706, fos. 433r-v.

Bengal indicate that the striving of the Vazhunnavar to promote trade at his ports paid good dividends.²⁹

Despite the unfavourable attitude of the Company towards giving passes to such distant destinations as Bengal, the Vazhunnavar was able to secure alternative support from the English and the French to accomplish the task.³⁰ In one of his letters to Commander Barent Ketel, the Kolathiri complained about the shipping of the 'Adiyodi' (Vazhunnavar) to such distant destinations as Bengal, Maskat, Surat, and Mocha without his consent.³¹ If this were true, the Vazhunnavar had successfully challenged the Ali Rajas' irrefutable status as the 'lord of the sea' in Malabar. This development nourished a constant rift between the Ali Rajas and the Vazhunnavar in Malabar during the eighteenth century.

In one of his letters to Cochin in 1706, the Ali Raja himself wrote about the mounting tension between the two on both land and in the sea and the possibility of an outbreak of an open hostility in the near future.³² There were continuous attempts by Vazhunnavar to instigate a rift between the Ali Raja and the Company. His attempt to belittle the promise of the Kolathiri to give the right to collect tolls from Cannanore was viewed by the VOC officials only as a sign of his hatred towards the Ali Raja and an attempt to attract the Company's trade to his territory.³³ Although the local officials supported the idea of establishing a trade settlement in Vadakara,³⁴ Batavia was never been convinced of the commercial prospects of such a move, especially when taking into account the background of his increasing cooperation with other European competitors.³⁵

The Vazhunnavar was apparently not pleased with the neglect shown him by the Company and its repudiation of his constant appeals for closer trade relations. He blamed the local VOC officials for caring only about their own advantage and not for those of the Company. He also pointed out the complex working system of the VOC as a reason for its failure to respond quickly to the demands of the local elite and advised that 'absolute power' be given to the *Opperhoofd* so as he could act independently of Cochin and

²⁹ VOC 1790, Letter from Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to Barent Ketel, 30 Oct. 1709, fos. 351v-352r.

³⁰ VOC 1807, Missive from Cochin to Batavia, 24 May 1711, fo. 88r.

³¹ VOC 1852, Translated letter from Kolathiri to Barent Ketel, 9 Jan. 1714, fos. 204v-205r.

³² VOC 1724, Translated letter from the Ali Raja to the Commander Willem Moerman, 24 Sept. 1706, fos. 505v-506r.

³³ VOC 1724, Letter from Cochin to Batavia, 28 Mar. 1706, fos. 179v-180r. VOC 1724, "Letter from Cochin to Batavia, 25 Apr. 1706, fos. 198v-199r.

³⁴ During the time of Commander Willem Moerman the VOC established a small warehouse in Vadakara in 1705 under the Assistant Merchant Harmanius Lindenberg and the linguist Joan de Cruz. However, it was soon abandoned by the Company. VOC 2601, Mallabaarse Woorden Boeken, fo.165v.

³⁵ VOC 1674, Missive from Commander Abraham Vink and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 1 Nov. 1703, fo. 118r. VOC 1724, Letter from Batavia to Cochin, 2 July 1706, fo. 241r-v.

Batavia.³⁶ Meanwhile, the Vazhunnavar persisted in his efforts to gain control of the trade in the region. His attack on the land of Kunju Nayar, one of the prominent landlords in the vicinity, in May 1706, so as to be able to control the Mayyazhi (Mahe) River and thereby an important waterway to the spice hinterland, brought him into conflict, though temporarily, with the French in Panoly.³⁷ However, it is noteworthy that the VOC had been informed earlier of the attempt of the Vazhunnavar to attract the French by offering them a settlement by the Mayyazhi River.³⁸ In spite of an unexpected turn of events which led to the French departure from Panoly, the Vazhunnavar was obviously keen to attract European Companies to his own land. It was therefore natural that the Vazhunnavar reacted promptly to the desperate search by the French to obtain a settlement in Kolathunadu and he succeeded in settling them south of the Mayyazhi River in his own land.³⁹

The Company was informed that in an attempt to wreak vengeance on the Ali Raja the Vazhunnavar had approached the 'pirates of Sivaji', asking them to undertake an attack on the Cannanore bazaar in September 1707.⁴⁰ The Company tried to save the situation by promising to intervene and to work the problem between the Ali Raja and the Vazhunnavar out without allowing the 'robbers' to become involved.⁴¹ The Vazhunnavar's claim concerning the invitation of the Maratha sea forces was most likely an attempt to sow panic among the Cannanore Mappila traders as nothing came to pass within the alleged time.⁴²

The Ali Raja: Strengthening the position

On March 11 1709, the Kolathiri died and was succeeded by his brother who was around eighty years old.⁴³ Consequently, power remained in the hands of Prince Kepoe. Although he was on a quest to rally allies to pursue his conflict with the Ikkeri Nayakas, including

³⁶ VOC 1724, Translated letter from Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to Willem Moerman, 26 Feb. 1706, fos. 415v-416r.

³⁷ VOC 1724, Letter from Willem Moerman and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 15 Nov. 1706, fo. 40r-v.

³⁸ VOC 1724, Missive from Cochin to Batavia, 28 Mar. 1706, fo. 179r-v.

³⁹ VOC 1790, Missive from Checoetty Pover from Cannanore to Barent Ketel, 22 June 1710, fo. 473r.

⁴⁰ VOC 1740, Missive from Commander Willem Moerman to Batavia, 19 Nov. 1707, fo. 25r-v.

⁴¹ VOC 1741, Missive from Commander Willem Moerman to the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara, 26 July 1707, fo. 719r-v.

⁴² VOC 1740, Missive from Willem Moerman to Batavia, 19 Nov. 1707, fo. 27r.

⁴³ VOC 1773, Missive from Commander Barent Ketel and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 18 Nov. 1709, fo. 44r-v.

the VOC, nothing turned out in his favour.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the internal power struggle continued to ravage the political atmosphere in the area. In an incident reported by the Dutch factor Constantyn Coup, the property of the landlord Kunju Nayar, who had allegedly mishandled a young prince who was sent to negotiate on behalf of Prince Kepoe, was ransacked by the joint forces of Kepoe, Unnithiri and the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara. The Dutch factor commented that the problem which could have been avoided through the judicious presentation of some gifts was aggravated by the involvement of the Ali Raja who encouraged the princes to continue with their action by promising to supply all the necessary paraphernalia of war at his own expense.⁴⁵ Although the motivation behind the participation of the Ali Raja remains ambiguous, it confirms the close association of the Arackal Swarupam with the power politics in the region.

After the death of the Kolathiri on 27 July 1712, there were serious concerns about the revival of the old factional rivalry between Princes Kepoe and Unnithiri.⁴⁶ The new Kolathiri was Prince Kepoe's eldest brother and was described by the Dutch as 'a shrewd and wise king'.⁴⁷ The VOC was concerned about the risk which could invariably affect its trade in Cannanore and tried to resolve the problem by mediating between the princes. The Ali Raja had also been invited to the court to join the reconciliation talks. This again confirms the crucial role of the Arackal Swarupam in sustaining the regional power equilibrium under the changing circumstances.⁴⁸

The accession of a new Kolathiri was received with high expectations by the Company. Although his attempt to resolve the long-standing problem between the Udayamangalam Kovilakam and Palli Kovilakam proved his administrative potential, the Company had serious doubts about his success because of the Ali Raja. According to the VOC, he was more interested in sustaining the rift between the two parties as a safeguard to his own private interests.⁴⁹ The correspondence between the Kolathiri and the Company convincingly shows that the Ali Raja associated closely with the Kolaswarupam, especially with the Udayamangalam Kovilakam, and exercised considerable influence in the political affairs of the region. The interdependence between the Udayamangalam

⁴⁴ It is reported that in his search for help, Prince Kepoe requested the aid of Kanoji Angrea to fight against the Ikkeri Nayakas. VOC 1740, Letter from Cochin to Batavia, 20 May 1707, fos. 209v-210v.

⁴⁵ VOC 1807, Letter from Cannanore factor Constantyn Coup to Cochin, 7 Oct. 1711, fo. 118r. VOC 1807, Letter from Cannanore factor Constantyn Coup to Cochin, 3 Nov. 1711, fo. 118v.

⁴⁶ VOC 1838, Letter from Commander Barent Ketel and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 30 Apr. 1713, fos. 179v.

⁴⁷ 'een schrander en verstandige vorst'. VOC 1825, Missive from Barent Ketel and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 17 Nov. 1712, fo. 9r.

⁴⁸ VOC 1838, Letter from Commander Barent Ketel and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 30 Apr. 1713, fos. 179v-180r.

⁴⁹ VOC 1838, Missive from Batavia to Commander Barent Ketel, 14 Sept. 1713, fos. 107r-108r.

branch and the Ali Raja in efforts to uphold their status in the regional power structure could have been one of the reasons which motivated the Vazhunnavaṛ of Vadakara to move against the Ali Raja with the help of the Company. However, the continuous friendly relationship between the Ali Raja and the Kolathiri proved to be a major impediment to his ambitions to gain decisive control of the hinterland spice supply. His attempt was to destabilize this power relationship by pitting the Company against the Ali Raja. The Vazhunnavaṛ wrote to commander Barent Ketel in 1712 that Kunjoessa Crauw Alias Ali Raja had not only usurped all the rights and privileges of the Kolathiri, but had also begun to mint new coinage. He requested the immediate intervention of the Company to protect the prerogative of the raja to do so.⁵⁰

The right to mint coins was deemed to be an exceptional privilege by the most powerful political elites in Malabar.⁵¹ Shrewdly, the Vazhunnavaṛ was hinting at the political motives of the Ali Raja to transform himself into an independent sovereign in his own right. However, such allegations, right or wrong, did not generate any desired effect as long as the Ali Raja maintained a good understanding with the Kolathiris. Quite the reverse, on an occasional visit to the fort on 27 December 1713 Prince Kepoe requested the Company mediate with the Ali Raja to restart the minting of the local coins, the *fanum* and the *tara* (taram), which had not been issued for the last thirty years owing to the disunity among the princes.⁵² In all probability, this indicates that the Ali Raja had already begun to mint coins with the full consent of the Kolathiris. His control over the supply of precious metals from West Asia and elsewhere was crucial to the monetization of the local economy. In such a weak political system as Kolathunadu, it was not an unexpected move that the Ali Raja would begin minting coins for local and international commercial purposes.⁵³

On 5 December 1713, two of the Brahmins from the Kolathiri visited Cochin. They promised to annotate the two letters which had been received in Cochin from Kolathiri and Vazhunnavaṛ the day before. These letters raised grave questions about the authority of the Ali Raja. The letters averred that the Ali Rajas were granted the authority over '18 Maldivé islands' and the title 'Ali Raja' on the strict condition that they make regular

⁵⁰ VOC 1825, Missive from Vazhunnavaṛ of Vadakara to Commander Barent Ketel, 2 June 1712, fo. 334r-v.

⁵¹ In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa mentioned that their names were the Kolathiri of Cannanore, the Zamorin of Calicut, the raja of Venadu, and the raja of Kottayam. Barbosa, *Book of Duarte Barbosa*, II, 5-6.

⁵² VOC 1852, Missive from Commander Barent Ketel and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 9 May 1714, fos. 63v-64r.

⁵³ The Ali Raja denied the accusation that he was minting local coins, but admitted that he was minting *larins* (a Persian silver coin) for purely commercial purposes. In a later letter to the VOC, the Vazhunnavaṛ also supports this statement. VOC 1852, Missive from Barent Ketel to Batavia, 9 May 1714, fos. 65v-66r. VOC 1852, Letter from Cannanore to Commander and the *raad* in Cochin, 19 Apr. 1714, fo. 199v.

payments to the Kolathiris.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the incumbent Ali Raja and his predecessor, 'Kartamamaly', had not been duly honoured with the title because of their failure to satisfy the condition. The Ali Raja was blamed for instigating the problems between the princes and in building a fortress in order to break away from the authority of the Kolathiri with the help of Prince Unnithiri under the pretext of the threat of the 'Sivaji's rovers'.

The last accusation, that the Ali Raja mistreated Brahmins and desecrated Malabar temples, can be taken as a faint attempt by the Brahmins to 'ideologize' the growing commercial rivalry between the Arackal Swarupam and the Vazhunnavar. However, the overall emphasis of the report was to stress illegitimacy of the Ali Raja to be an independent sovereign on the grounds of his commercial wealth. Although his behaviour was projected as a challenge to the 'traditional' power order, in reality it was a conflict between the local landed elite who had quite recently become attracted by the profits to be had from maritime trade and the commercial elite who had been depending almost entirely on maritime trade as their source of power for centuries. This becomes apparent from the letter sent to Commander Barent Ketel by Kolathiri at the beginning of 1714. The Kolathiri not only refuted the allegations of a conflict between the Ali Raja and the ruling elites on various issues stated above, he went as far as to assert that the Vazhunnavar forged the letter in the name of the Kolathiri to serve his own malign purposes against the Ali Raja. The Kolathiri alleged that it was his *madampi*, the Vazhunnavar, who had upturned the established power order by sending ships without the consent of and without paying tolls and other dues to the Kolathiri.⁵⁵ In his letter to Barent Ketel, the Ali Raja maintained that it was the Vazhunnavar's intention to turn the Company against him by passing on such falsified information.⁵⁶

New regime and the continuing power conflict

The death of the Kolathiri on 22 May 1716 set once more the scene for a deep crisis in the regional power relations.⁵⁷ The succession of Tekkelamkur Tamburan (second senior-most) to the position of Kolathiri engendered new alignments in the existing political configurations. He was an adoptee from the Travancore royal line, which largely estranged him from the 'autochthonous' power group in the region.⁵⁸ Prince Kepoe and the Ali

⁵⁴ VOC 1852, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 5 Dec. 1713, fos. 198v-200r.

⁵⁵ VOC 1852, Translated letter from Kolathiri to Commander Barent Ketel, 9 Jan. 1714, fos. 204r-205r.

⁵⁶ VOC 1852, Translated letter from Ali Raja to Barent Ketel, 9 Jan. 1714, fos. 205r-206r.

⁵⁷ VOC 1881, Resolution taken in the Council of Malabar, 29 July 1716, fo. 861v.

⁵⁸ This shows that the practice of adoption between the royal house of Travancore and the Kolaswarupam was reciprocal. Such adoptions could have also caused internal schisms against the adoptee within the adopted houses. The murder of the King of Travancore Ravi Varma—an adoptee from Kolaswarupam—was

Rajas, who had basked close to the symbolic power centre for years, had gradually begun to push away from it. In another sense, the new Kolathiri became isolated from the powerful local elites and princes, which logically undermined his claim to power. This further complicated the political struggle in Cannanore.

Although the intricacies in the political affairs continued unabated, there were a few changes in the position of the contesters for power in Cannanore. Prince Unnithiri ascended to the *stanam* of Vadakkellamkur and continued to pose the main challenge to the political authority of the Udayamangalam Kovilakam in Kolathunadu. Furthermore, the relationship of the Company with the Ali Raja in Cannanore began to deteriorate under the changing circumstances.

The bazaar which was situated along the Cannanore Bay was not protected by any defence structures till the end of the seventeenth century. This exposure was certainly a matter of concern in view of the changing political situation in Cannanore. The impending danger of attack by the Sidis and Marathas along the Malabar Coast provided the Ali Raja with adequate justification to strengthen the defence of the Bazaar to face any unexpected circumstances from 'internal' or 'external' forces. The building of a rectangular construction, called 'Fort Wallarwattam', to protect the Bazaar, was given a boost in 1712 when there were rumours about a huge combined Sidi-Sambaji force on the move along the coast.⁵⁹ Despite the manoeuvrings of the Vazhunnar of Vadakara devised to turn the Company against the Ali Raja on this matter, the Dutch initially ignored the move deeming it not a serious threat.⁶⁰ However, Batavia was concerned about the sheer negligence of the local officials in observing and reporting the developments in the Bazaar, not to mention the Ali Raja's attempt to construct the fort without obtaining prior permission from Cochin.⁶¹ The subsequent attempt of the Ali Raja to grow a coconut grove between the Dutch fortress and the Bazaar did jolt an immediate reaction from Cochin.⁶² This was interpreted by the VOC as a tactical plan thought up by the Ali Raja to shield the newly built fort and the Bazaar from the surveillance and cannons of the Dutch fortress.

The political disorder initiated by the death of the Kolathiri in 1716 and the plundering of Baliapatanam by the Sidis in the same year gave the Ali Raja ample

a result of this problem. VOC 1905, Missive from the Commander and the Council of Cochin to *Heren XVII*, 27 Nov. 1718, fo. 146r. Lannoy, *Kulasekbara Perumals of Travancore*, 15-17.

⁵⁹ VOC 1825, Missive from Cannanore to Commander Barent Ketel, 6 Aug. 1712, fo. 108r.

⁶⁰ VOC 1852, Translated letter from Vazhunnar of Vadakara to Commander Barent Ketel, 31 Dec. 1713, fos. 198r-v. VOC 1852, Missive from Commander Barent Ketel and the Council to Batavia, 9 May 1714, fo. 66v.

⁶¹ VOC 1852, Missive from Batavia to Cochin, 21 Sept. 1714, fo. 437r.

⁶² VOC 1866, Letter from Commander Barent Ketel to the Ali Raja, 5 Oct. 1715, fo. 675v-676r.

opportunities to carry on his construction plan.⁶³ The increasing rumours about a Mappila conspiracy to overrun the Dutch fortress gave rise to further apprehensions about the construction drive that was in full swing in the Bazaar.⁶⁴ Perceptibly, the growing power of the Ali Raja was causing particular concern not only to the Company, but also to other members of the local elite, including the Kolathiri. The new Kolathiri, who was virtually isolated in the political structure, was desperately striving to ally himself with the Company to validate his authority in the Swarupam. This attempt to regain the estranged rights of the Kolathiri brought him into conflict with both Kepoe and the Ali Raja. This growing uneasiness between the Kolathiri and the Ali Raja surfaced on the issue of a ship stranded on the Cannanore Coast. The Raja, requesting the assistance of the Company to salvage his honour and regain his rights to tolls and other sources of income, accused the Ali Raja of attempting to dominate the region by instigating a schism among the princes.⁶⁵ However, the growing power struggle within the Kolaswarupam weakened the possibility of the emergence of a joint front against the Ali Raja.

Alienating from the ritual centre

1. *Unnithiri*

Unnithiri, who successfully maintained an almost independent political status in Kolathunadu for a longish period of time, finally decided to break away from the nominal authority of the Kolathiri. The self-proclamation of Unnithiri as an independent raja in 1717 gave the final blow to the already weak stature of the 'rajaship' in Kolathunadu.⁶⁶ This final calamity was preceded by the attempt of the Vadakkkelamkur Unnithiri to ruin the accession ceremony of the new Kolathiri at Maday. The Dutch reported that, although the Vadakkkelamkur tried to impede the ritual ceremonies by employing armed men to cause a disruption, this move was foiled by the men of the Kolathiri.⁶⁷ This incident necessitated the splitting up of the royal status between the two rival power groups within the Kolaswarupam.⁶⁸ The Company was anxious that the Ali Raja could exploit the situation to strengthen his position by 'playing the master among the divided rajas at

⁶³ VOC 1881, Resolution taken in the Malabar Council, 29 July 1716, fo. 861v. VOC 1891, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 25 Nov. 1717, fo. 20v.

⁶⁴ VOC 1891, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 13 June 1717, fo. 44r. VOC 1891, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin about the fortification work of the Ali Raja, 6 July 1717, fo. 47r.

⁶⁵ VOC 1912, Letter from Kolathiri to Cochin, 1 Aug. 1717, fos. 399-401. VOC 1912, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg to the Kolathiri, 4 Aug. 1717, fos. 430-431.

⁶⁶ VOC 1891, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 6 July 1717, fos. 47r-v.

⁶⁷ VOC 1891, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 27 Aug. 1717, fo. 53r-v.

⁶⁸ VOC 1891, Missive from Cochin to Cannanore, 30 Aug. 1717, fo. 58r.

will'.⁶⁹ Being suspicious of the sealing of a secret agreement between Prince Kepoe and the Ali Raja, the Company took immediate measures to strengthen the defence of the fortress so as to face any urgent needs.⁷⁰

In this evolving political situation, as mentioned before, the Kolathiri was forced to rely completely on the Company to defend his status. In an intriguing letter to Admiral William Backer Jacobson at Chettua, the Kolathiri pleaded for the help of the Company to bolster his power asking the Company to repeat the efforts it had made for the Cochin Raja.⁷¹ By requesting a helping hand to fight the Ali Raja and the Vadakkkelamkur, the Kolathiri confirmed his willingness to put the country under the control of the Company.⁷² This desperate attempt of the Kolathiri to defend his status elucidates the dynamic changes to which the political economy of Cannanore was subjected in the opening decades of the eighteenth century. By the end of 1718, the power configuration in Cannanore was a very perplexing one for the Dutch in which, as commented by the Company men, 'all were pursuing their own interests without bothering about the well-being of the kingdom at all'.⁷³

After the establishment of an English factory in Tellichery, the English were steadily expanding their influence in the regional trade and politics. Their growing political influence was explicitly revealed in their engagement with a member of the local Nayar elite, the Narangapurathu Nayar, in an effort to retrieve the huge debt which he owed to them.⁷⁴ Neither the Vadakkkelamkur nor Unnithiri, though each maintained his strong relationship with the English camp, tried to antagonize the VOC. The Company described him as a 'double-hearted man straddling over two sides'.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the Vadakkkelamkur was gradually strengthening his self-styled position as an independent power centre with

⁶⁹ VOC 1891, Missive from Cochin to Cannanore, 4 Aug. 1717, fos. 55r-v.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 55v.

⁷¹ '... gelijk U Edele Achtbare den koningh van Cochim groot gemaekt heeft, believe U Edele Achtbare ons, en ons ryk ook groot te maeken...'. VOC 1905, Translated letter from King Kolathiri to the Admiral Willem Backer Jacobzoon in Chettua, 3 Jan. 1718, fos. 253r-254r.

⁷² However, it is more probable that the tone of the letter did not imply any political subjugation to the Company, but only an economic arrangement in which the Company was supposed to sustain and strengthen the 'rajaship' by collecting and sharing the tolls in the port with the Kolathiri. The letter written by the Kolathiri on 10 Apr. 1719 and the reply from Cochin on 22 Apr. 1719 hints at how the local political elites perceived the Company's position in the regional context. VOC 1925, Translated letter from the Kolathiri to Johannes Hertenberg, 10 Apr. 1719. Idem. Letter from Johannes Hertenberg to the Kolathiri, 22 Apr. 1719, not foliated.

⁷³ VOC 1905, Missive from Cochin to *Heren XVII*, 27 Nov. 1718, fo. 146r.

⁷⁴ VOC 1852, Translated letter from Chekkutty Pokker to Commander Barent Ketel, 15 May 1714, fo. 243r-247v.

⁷⁵ '...een dubbelhertig man, over twee zyden hinkende...'. VOC 1912, Missive from Cochin to Batavia, 13 May 1718, fo. 316.

the help of the English. In September 1718 the factor at Cannanore was invited, with the English, by the Vadakkkelamkur to attend the consecration of a new '*heydensche pagood*' (heathen temple) he had had built. It was obviously a symbolic act of secession and the announcement of the construction of a new power centre within the Swarupam. Naturally, it invited the displeasure of the Kolathiri.⁷⁶

On 21 March 1720, the Ali Raja Conjamisie (?) passed away and was succeeded by his nephew Coenisja Mamale.⁷⁷ The initial action of the new Ali Raja, after the prescribed days of mourning had been observed, was to mobilize his people, and the Vadakkkelamkur, against one Nayar noble called 'Dangre'. The success of this operation, however, did not bring about any fundamental change in the relationship between the Ali Raja and the Vadakkkelamkur. Buoyed up by this achievement, the attempt of the Vadakkkelamkur to attack Kottayam ended in disaster. He blamed the Ali Raja, who did not render the expected help, for the debacle.⁷⁸ The Company was informed that the Vadakkkelamkur had advised the Ali Raja to attack the Dutch fortress on the authority of the Prince. The Dutch alleged that the Prince, who was jealous of the burgeoning power of the Ali Raja in the land and his intimacy with the Dutch, had entertained plans to turn him against the Company.⁷⁹ The supportive role played by the English behind the Vadakkkelamkur in all these operations is noteworthy. They not only assisted the prince to gain independent ritual status by supporting the construction of the temple, but they also they provided the necessary gunpowder and lead for his campaign against Kottayam—'the best trade centre of the whole kingdom'.⁸⁰ The English roundly supported the political aspirations of the prince, a move which helped them to penetrate the inland markets and control them. The letter sent from Cannanore on 18 February 1720 depicts the growing fear of the Dutch who were gradually losing their control over the spice trade, especially cardamom, to the English who effectively outsmarted the Dutch.⁸¹ In another letter to Cochin, the Cannanore factor wrote that, notwithstanding the promise of the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara to trade with the Dutch, the merchants of Vadakara preferred the English who were not hesitant about procuring other local merchandise, including pepper and arrack, from them.⁸²

⁷⁶ VOC 1928, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to Batavia, 7 May 1719, fos. 128-9.

⁷⁷ VOC 1943, Letter from *Karanavar* Kunju Mammaly, the present Ali Raja to Cochin, 8 Apr. 1720, fo. 732r-v.

⁷⁸ VOC 1942, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 9 July 1720, fos. 105v-108r.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* fo. 107v.

⁸⁰ VOC 1942, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 16 Oct. 1720, fo. 21r.

⁸¹ VOC 1947, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 18 Feb. 1720, fos. 372-5.

⁸² VOC 1947, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Feb. 1720, fos. 376-7.

2. *The Ali Raja*

The death of the Vadakkkelamkur on 29 July 1720 and that of Prince Kepoe few days earlier had instant political ramifications in Cannanore which turned out to be unpropitious to the Ali Raja.⁸³ The deaths of the two princes put an end to the long-drawn struggle between the two most powerful political elites in Kolaswarupam. The death of Kepoe seems to have had an adverse effect on the position of the Ali Raja in the regional power relations. It severed, if only temporarily, the Ali Raja's long-standing relationship with the Kolaswarupam. Prince Kepoe, who had maintained a good understanding with the Arackal Swarupam for the sake of his political ambitions, also served the purpose of the Ali Rajas in expanding their influence in the region. But the political atmosphere after his death was not well disposed for the Ali Raja. Neither the Kolathiri nor the successor of the Vadakkkelamkur—the two prominent competitors in the regional power struggle—was sympathetic to him. The growing dominance of the Ali Raja in the local power relations unmistakably threatened both of them, who in turn, preferred the support of the European companies which were thought to have no direct interest or role in the regional power relations, except for trade. The new Kolathiri, who was determined to restore the lost status of the 'rajaship' in the regional power structure, allowed the Ali Raja no chance to make use of his conflict with the Vadakkkelamkur. The closely knit relation of the English, the strongest competitor of the Ali Raja in the local markets, with the Palli Kovilakam Prince also curtailed any possibility of a compromise with the Vadakkkelamkur. This changing power relationship culminated in a series of clashes between the Mappilas of the Bazaar and the Nayar soldiers of the Palli Kovilakam Prince and his supporting elites.

The successor of the Vadakkkelamkur, according to the Dutch, followed in the footsteps of his uncle by allying with the English and asserting his claim to the 'Kolathiriship'.⁸⁴ The death of the powerful Kepoe, which initiated troubles within Udayamangalam Kovilakam, also served to support his claim to the kingship. Unsurprisingly, the initial plan of the Vadakkkelamkur was to move against the Ali Raja—a major challenge to his claim to power in Kolathunadu and a key obstacle to the English domination in the regional trade.⁸⁵ The Ali Raja responded quickly to the grave situation by strengthening the defences of the Bazaar with a large number of cannons and by

⁸³ VOC 1942, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 16 Oct. 1720, fo. 22r.

⁸⁴ VOC 1942, Missive from Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 16 Oct. 1720, fo. 22r-v.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* fos. 22v-23r.

summoning assistance from all possible corners.⁸⁶ Although the Vadakkellamkur requested the help of the VOC to assist his claim to kingship, suspecting a conspiracy between the Prince and the English ‘troublemaker’ Robert Adams to turn the entire country against the Mappilas, the Company men did favour it with a positive response.⁸⁷ In their eyes, a victory by the Prince would have certainly meant the success of the English in dominating the regional spice trade. In order to prevent this, the VOC was forced to support the cause of the Ali Raja. The involvement of this European commercial interest added a new dimension to the internal power struggle between the Ali Raja and the Vadakkellamkur.

The cause of the final showdown between the Vadakkellamkur and the Ali Raja ignited on 25 May 1721, when the new Vadakkellamkur Coenja Ommen became embroiled in a direct conflict with Mappila labourers working outside the Bazaar. The report from the envoys of the Ali Raja to the VOC provides us with some prior background of the conflict between the two. Allegedly, the Vadakkellamkur attempted to extract customary payments from certain lands of the Ali Raja (Kanatur Tara) by claiming overlordship. This initiated a series of clashes between the supporters of the two ‘men of prowess’ in the region.⁸⁸ The incident on 25 May was the culmination of this development when the Prince and his men were completely overpowered by the Mappilas and he was taken to the Bazaar as a captive.⁸⁹ Although the Prince was later released, if we believe the tale of the Ali Raja, with due respect, the action elicited an outcry among other local elites.⁹⁰ The maltreatment and disgrace the prince claimed to have been suffered at the hands of the Ali Raja was sufficient to execute the Vadakkellamkur-English strategy against the Ali Raja.

The Prince successfully turned a major section of the elites against the Ali Raja and unleashed a mass attack against the port towns along the coast in which the Ali Raja had a dominant control. The Dutch claimed the reaction led to the brutal assassination of the Mappilas in certain bazaars in the north of the kingdom including, ‘against the custom and practice of the heathen’, women and children.⁹¹ In an earlier Dutch report, it was stated that the Mappilas from the Cape Ezhimala and Nileswaram were expelled by the local

⁸⁶ VOC 1942, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 23 Sept. 1720, fos. 111v-112r.

⁸⁷ VOC 1958, Missive from Commander Joannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 20 Oct. 1721, fos. 28v-29v.

⁸⁸ VOC 1982, Report on the beginning of the problem between Prince Coenja Ommen and the Ali Raja given by the envoys of the Ali Raja, Cochin, 6 Oct. 1721, fos. 334-7.

⁸⁹ VOC 1982, Letter from *Onderkoopman* Daniel Simonszon to Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council, 4 July 1721, fos. 292-3.

⁹⁰ VOC 1982, Letter from the Ali Raja from Cannanore to Cochin, 15 Aug. 1721, fos. 319-21.

⁹¹ VOC 1982, Letter from *Onderkoopman* Daniel Simonszon to Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council, 4 July 1721, fos. 293-4.

elite.⁹² However, the powerful Mappila port towns of Dharmapatanam, Baliapatanam and Maday successfully withstood the assault.⁹³ The Dutch were surprised at the palpable indifference of the Mappilas of other southern Mappila port towns to the developments in Cannanore.⁹⁴ The attacks were focused entirely, as observed by the VOC, on the Ali Raja's 'people, properties and places'.⁹⁵

The extensive participation of groups referred to as Tiyyas and Malayas 'from the highlands' along with the Nayars in the attack on the Cannanore bazaar turned out to be a decisive factor which significantly strengthened the anti-Ali Raja faction against the formidable defence of the Bazaar.⁹⁶ This unforeseen situation indubitably minimised the chances of an easy victory over the Princes, and it simultaneously forced the Ali Raja to adopt a more defensive position.⁹⁷ The reports from Cannanore also observed that other local elites from distant places like Kunju Nayar and such personages as the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara had joined the fray. Moreover, the Dutch alleged an active involvement of the English behind the decision of the last-mentioned elites who had never been sympathetic to the Prince at any time.⁹⁸ It was a known fact that the English at Tellichery supplied all essential support, including rice, gunpowder, and lead carried on their vessels to the Prince.⁹⁹

This active English involvement in the struggle was the prime reason which stimulated the VOC to interfere. Its first serious concern was to ensure the security of the fortress, which, its men were afraid, was one of the primary targets of the English.¹⁰⁰ Besides this, there was a growing concern among the Dutch officials about the necessity of providing support to the Ali Raja. An English success in controlling the regional spice trade through the Vadakkellamkur would barely have left the Company's European spice trade unscathed. The attempt of the Vadakkellamkur to occupy the small hill situated near Carla (Kadalay) and to isolate the Bazaar from Dharmapatanam were promptly opposed by the VOC. The possibility of siting cannons on the mound would certainly have given

⁹² VOC 1982, Report from Cannanore to Cochin, 1 Aug. 1721, fo. 304.

⁹³ VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Sept. 1721, fo. 332.

⁹⁴ '... een groote onvoorsigtigheyd, en trouwlooscheyt der zuyderse dat dese hun *geloofsgenoot* dusdanig in den pekkel laeten sitten'. VOC 1982, Report from Cannanore to Cochin, 9 Aug. 1721, fos. 316-17.

⁹⁵ Ibid, fo. 316.

⁹⁶ VOC 1982, VOC 1982, Letter from *Onderkoopman* Daniel Simonszon to Commander Johannes Hertenberg and the Cochin Council, 4 July 1721, fo. 294.

⁹⁷ VOC 1982, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 1 Aug. 1721, fo. 298.

⁹⁸ VOC 1982, Missive from Cochin to Cannanore, 17 July 1721, fo. 295. VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 24 and 30 Oct. 1721, fo. 342.

⁹⁹ VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 20 Aug. 1721, fo. 324. Idem. Letter from Kolathiri to Cochin, 10 Jan. 1722, fo. 385.

¹⁰⁰ VOC 1982, Missive from Cochin to Cannanore, 17 July 1721, fos. 296-7.

the Prince, and therefore the English, the advantage in controlling the Bay of Cannanore. The Vadakkkelamkur, however, defended the occupation of the hill by stating that it was only an undertaking to restore a ruined palace of his predecessors.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the swing of the Company towards the Ali Raja resulted in a series of exchanges between both the Kolathiri and the Prince on the one hand and the VOC on the other. Although the Cannanore officials had been advised by Cochin to make an endeavour to settle the dispute peaceably through the mediation of the Company, there were no prompt results.¹⁰² The initial attempts of the Company to exploit the discord among the Princes so as to rob the anti-Ali Raja front of its effectiveness did not work out.¹⁰³ It seems that the Vadakkkelamkur succeeded, at least in the early phase, in joining the Princes of both Kovilakams under his general leadership against the Ali Raja.¹⁰⁴ The failure of the local officials to accomplish a peaceful agreement left the Company with only one choice: to give the Ali Raja its active support by supplying war materials on demand.¹⁰⁵

The continuous efforts of the Ali Raja and the Company to instigate schism among the princes had borne fruit by September. Although some of the Udayamangalam princes and the Kolathiri as well had shown an inclination to settle the dispute, the conditions they advanced were so unacceptable to the Ali Raja that he preferred to continue the fight against the siege of his important trade centres.¹⁰⁶ Unquestionably, the powerlessness of the princes at sea and the support of the VOC helped the Ali Raja to continue with maritime trade without any serious obstruction.¹⁰⁷ Besides, the Company and the Ali Raja were both scrupulous in their efforts to guard the coast to prevent English vessels from approaching the bay.¹⁰⁸

By the end of the year, the Vadakkkelamkur and the Kolathiri had made more attempts to settle the dispute for a price. The mediation of Kottakkal Marakkar Kuttimusa in trying to resolve the problem was rejected outrightly by the Ali Raja as it included the

¹⁰¹ VOC 1982, Report from Cannanore to Cochin, 1 Aug. 1721, fos. 301-2.

¹⁰² VOC 1982, Letter from Cochin to Cannanore, 11 Aug. 1721, fo. 314.

¹⁰³ VOC 1982, Letter from Cochin to Cannanore, 11 Aug. 1721, fos. 313-14. VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 20 Aug. 1721, fos. 321-23.

¹⁰⁴ VOC 1982, Missive from the princes of both branches of the kingdom of Kolathiri to the factor of Cannanore, 17 Aug. 1721, fos. 325-26.

¹⁰⁵ VOC 1958, Letter from Cochin to Cannanore, 30 Aug. 1721, fos. 191r-195r.

¹⁰⁶ Besides the Cannanore Bazaar, Maday, Baliapatanam, and Dharmapatanam were still besieged by the princes. VOC 1982, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Sept. 1721, fo. 332.

¹⁰⁷ VOC 1958, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Sept. 1721, fos. 198r-v. VOC 1982, "Letter from the Ali Raja to Cochin, 28 Sept. 1721, fo. 333.

¹⁰⁸ This strict vigilance against English vessels was conspicuous in an attack against a rice-carrying English vessel in the Bay of Cannanore in Sept. 1721. VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 24 Oct. 1721, fos. 342-3.

destruction of his fort in Cannanore.¹⁰⁹ The evidence shows that the anti-Ali Raja alliance began to falter when the internal struggle for power revived after a short lapse. In a letter to Cochin, the First Prince of Udayamangalam unequivocally assured the Ali Raja of the support of the Kovilakam and asked for monetary assistance to assure the support of his allies and servants.¹¹⁰ The Ali Raja and the Company also succeeded in luring the Prince of Naduvil Kovilakam (Cunhome Tamban) and Chetticherry Nambutiri¹¹¹ into their alliance to discuss the matter of peace with the Ali Raja.¹¹² Although such an attempt ultimately failed because of the interference of other princes, the belligerent letter written to the VOC by the Kolathiri testifies that there were serious rifts among the princes on the issue of peace.¹¹³ The steady efforts of the Ali Raja and the Company to gain the support of other local elites outside the Kolaswarupam were not particularly encouraging. Although the Kottayam princes promised to support the Ali Raja, they did not offer any active help in the conflict. While the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara pursued with his rivalry with the Ali Raja, the Kottakkal Marakkar Kuttimusa, as observed by the Dutch, refused to help his 'religious-mate' owing to his relations with the English.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, after extensive bargaining, the Ali Raja was able to 'purchase' the peace for 10, 000 gold Cannanore *fanum* and an elephant. For the time being this put an end to the unrelenting confrontation between the Kolathiri and the Ali Raja in Cannanore.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

The period between 1698 and 1723 witnessed the increasing tension within the power structure of Kolathunadu. Although, there was a political shift within the Kolaswarupm in 1698 when the right for assuming the 'rajaship' was passed from the Palli Kovilakam to the Udayamangalam Kovilakam, the power remained within the hands of the prominent princess of the Swarupam—Unnithiri and Kepoe Tampuran. The self-declaration of Unnithiri as an independent raja in 1717 was the culmination of the mounting pressure

¹⁰⁹ VOC 1982, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 8 Sept. 1721", fos. 368-369. VOC 1982, "Letter from the Ali Raja to Cochin, 13 Dec. 1721, fos. 373-74. The Kolathiri and Vadakkellamkur again tried to settle the dispute in Jan. 1722 for the huge amount of 80, 000 gold *fanums* and the Ali Raja's fort in Baliapatanam. This was also rejected by the Ali Raja. VOC 1982, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 31 Jan. 1722, fos. 395-6.

¹¹⁰ VOC 1982, Letter from the First Prince of Udayamangalam Kovilakam to the factor of Cannanore, 13 Dec. 1721, fos. 372-373.

¹¹¹ He is described as one of the three representatives of the 'gemeente' in the government.

¹¹² VOC 1982, Letter from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Jan. 1722, fos. 388-91.

¹¹³ VOC 1978, Letter from the Kolathiri to Cochin, 10 Jan. 1722, fos. 439v-440r.

¹¹⁴ VOC 1982, Missive from Cannanore to Cochin, 28 Jan. 1722, fo. 393.

¹¹⁵ VOC 2010, Missive from Commander Jacob de Jong and the Cochin Council to *Heren XVII*, 26 Oct. 1724, fo. 44r.

within the Swarupam. Overall the Ali Rajas were closely allied to the 'official' Kolathiri camp, at least till 1716 when the Tekkelamkur Tamburan, who was an adoptee from the Travancore family, ascended to the office of the Kolathiri. At the same time, owing to the growing challenge within the Kolaswarupam to the established order, the Kolathiris were forced to depend on the Ali Rajas to maintain their status in the elite configuration in Kolathunadu.

Simultaneously, this period also witnessed the rise of new power centres in Kolathunadu, which seriously challenged the dominance enjoyed by the Arackal Swarupam in the political economy of the region. The increasing maritime trade opportunities, promoted to a great extent by the ongoing competition among the various European trading companies for Malabar pepper, opened up new opportunities through which the local elites could appropriate a share of the profit. The emergence of the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara as a competitor to the Ali Rajas to control the maritime trade of the region was a consequence of this trend.

The incessant strivings of the Ali Raja to maintain and enhance their political power and commercial influence in the region and to withstand the new challenges provided the background for the outbreak in 1721. Moreover, The strivings of the competing European trading companies to promote their own agenda by winning over the support of the local elites further complicated power relations in Kolathunadu. Both the English as well as the Dutch, directly or indirectly, contributed to intensifying the internal power struggle in Kolathunadu. The open conflict which broke out between the Ali Raja and the Kolathiri factions in 1721 was the culmination of the mounting pressure within the power structure of Kolathunadu. This violent outbreak indicates that the Ali Raja was gradually drifting away from the traditional power centre of Kolathunadu—the Kolaswarupam—and had begun to assert a more independent status in the regional power structure.

