CONCLUSION

The structure and growth of agrarian relations in medieval Travancore, referred to as Vēnād, and its impact on the political authority over this region, has been discussed, in some detail, in the previous chapters. Now, the arguments presented in the foregoing discussion can be briefly outlined, and a few concluding remarks made.

It is possible to identify several stages in the growth of agrarian relations in medieval Vēnād. The cultivable areas in Vēnād, in particular the Nānjinādu region, were settled in the early medieval period itself. The organisation of production and a system of revenue collection in the southern Vēnād was the contribution of the Tamil rulers, in particular the Cōḷas and the Pāṇḍyas. In the northern part of Vēnād, which came under the later Chēra kingdom, the organisation of production was achieved by the temples and brāhmāṇas. The land grants made to the temples and the autonomous status conferred on them enabled them to grow into large landlords. A similar position was achieved by brāhmāṇas also. Vēnād royal family, in their effort to sustain their authority over the region after the decline of later cheras, encouraged the brāhmāṇa penetration, into their territory, and patronised
a chain of 'royal temples'. Besides the royal family also tried to establish itself as landlords, receiving the share of their produce from royal lands, besides resorting to collection of dues from other areas. In the southern Vēnād, when the Tamil forms of revenue had been established, the Vēnād rulers compromised with the existing patterns of land management, and used assemblies like the Sabhai to collect the dues accruing to the rulers.

By 14th century, the traditional land system in Vēnād had become established. The temples, brahmanas and the royal family were the land owning classes. The ordinary cultivators were either tenants or independent peasants under obligations to pay taxes or share of the produce to any one of the land-owning classes or, sometimes, to all of them. The spread of cultivation and the increase in the number of settlements is demonstrated by the reference to Dēsams and Čērikkals held by the Padmanabha temple.

The organisation of production and the realisation of the share of the produce from the cultivators was becoming complex. Lands held by the temples were located in different regions following a variety of tenurial forms that centralised management
of lands was becoming difficult. The temple lands had to provide for a variety of offerings all through the year. The failure of crops and the failure to collect and transport the share of the produce due to political disturbances would result in the stoppage of offerings. The disruption of the regular offerings in the temples would affect their ideological authority, apart from disturbing the economic activity of the region. Such disturbances appear to have affected the collection of dues by the rulers also. Hence the management of cultivated areas was reorganised during the later decades of the 15th century, beginning from the reorganisation of the collection of rent from the temple lands and ending with the appointment of Karuvukarattil Pillaimar, who acted as the head accountants for different regions.

Although the political and economic authority of the Venad royal family was extended through the organisation of land management established by the temples and brāhmanas, it did not result in the centralisation of political power. The Venād family consisted of a number of lineages originating from the same 'Mother's house' or associated with it. These lineages could survive only by compromising
with the temples and brāhmanas, rather than by controlling them. The traditional land system also implies the growth of the ties of dependence, and the Vēnād royal family although theoretically protected its territories was at the same time dependent on the militia and the land owning classes for its survival. The loose ties among the lineages with each grant trying to extend its authority resulted in the growth of militarisation and the disruption of the economic relations envisaged by the traditional landsystem. The Reorganisation of rent collection during the end of the 15th century was a result of the efforts made by the temples and the royal family to overcome the difficulties that arose due to the changing political and economic conditions.

The appointment of 'Tirpū' and 'Pattam holders' for temple lands and the accountants for the rulers as well as the temples, during the end of 15th century, marked a significant change in the land relations. Instead of depending on the ideological authorities of the temples, a conscious attempt to regularise the rent collection was made by using non-brāhman intermediaries. It is possible that this class was originally recruited from the landholders serving the temples and from the militia. It does not appear
that changes in the land management were able to check the military section and activities of growing class of landowners. Landholders who were tenants to brāhmanas or temples acquired positions as soldiers and the 'companions of honour' (referring to the 'Ariśippadi Jenam' the service of the royal family) of the different Sorupams. Some of the landowners moved up the social scale and became the Pandārakāryam cheyvār and the accountants.

The growth of intermediaries in the medieval land system is not unusual, and in this case, the intermediaries were appointed to sustain the traditional land control, to streamline the collection of the share of the produce. The traditional overlords at the same time, began to assign the actual control, of their lands to other landholders and merchant, in return for the lump sum equivalent to a substantial part of their total income from land, paid in cash or kind. This form of land mortgages, called Otti, aided the growth of the new landholders. Otti transactions and the other similar assignments show that the traditional overlord was willing to delegate the responsibilities of actual intervention in the organisation of production to other persons as long as their traditional authority was not impaired.
The growth of intermediaries only encouraged the further fragmentation of political and economic authorities. Different branches of the Venad royal family and the temple sought to protect their areas and extend them if possible. The growth of such 'protectorates' resulted in intense conflicts among the branches of royal family, and the temples. Such conflicts increased the power of the intermediaries who also served the branches as *Arisirppadi Jenam* or the temples as their *Manushyam* or accountants. Accountants, as the traditional overlords had to depend on their support not only for the protection of their territorial, but also for their economic power. References to *Sorupical* and *Sorupajanam* indicate that the intermediaries were tied to them overlords by the customary acts of fealty. However, the complex character of land relations enabled the intermediaries to break the custom and grab the economic and political authority in their areas of operation.

It is in the late medieval period i.e. between 16th - 18th centuries that *Kilmariyadai* and *Kiliyakkam* is particularly stressed. The significance of such terms is that they do not appear so frequently in the early medieval records. In a period when customary
relations are the basic mode of sustaining the social and economic relations, there is no need to appeal to the customary authority every now and then. However, preserving the customary relations was considered important when they were being challenged and hence, Kiliyakkam and Kilmariyadai were invoked to persuade the intermediaries to fulfil their traditional obligations. It appears that appeal to customary obligations was not intended to restrict the operations of the intermediaries, but only to preserve the link between the traditional overlords and intermediaries. The assignment of the traditional designation 'Madampi' to a new set of landlords, award of privileges and positions for such landlords in the temples and royal service, were also meant to contain in the traditional framework. But such measures only helped to make the intermediary more powerful and challenge the customary authority of the traditional overlords.

The social and economic crisis of the late 17th and 18th centuries was a result of the contradictions developing within this framework. Kiliyakkam and Kilmariyadai were invoked to reconcile the incompatible elements, where the actual controller of land, had to accept the
overlordship of someone else who held only the titular authority over the land. Kilmariyadai in the temples was different as it involved the supremacy of the temple, but even that was undermined by the activity of the intermediary assisted by the ambitious Vēnaḍ princes. However, the destruction of the customary obligation was facilitated by the breakdown of traditional political and ideological authority.

The royal families or Sorupams developing in medieval Kerala were assemblage of lineage groups mentioned earlier and such lineage groups called Theyvalis on the basis of their relation to their mother's house, fought among themselves for territorial powers, and for the privileges that they gained on the basis of seniority. (mūppu). Customary practices regarding political authority cannot be maintained in a region with a plethora of kinship groups and princes scrambling for the redistribution of the available resources. The privileges were sought to be enhanced through adoptions and military means. Each prince had to be provided with the customary share of privileges by means of Köyikkals, which increased the fragmentation of the actual control of royal
holdings. Customary authority of the royal family was being replaced by the authority of a number of sorupams, Tayvalies and Koyikkals. Each prince also tried to command the loyalty of the intermediaries, which put the latter in more influential positions than ever before. Moreover the Vēṇād princes, in their effort extend their territorial authority, come into clashes with the temples. Although the temples, like the Padmanabha temple made the princes pay the customary compensation for the disruption of cultivation in the temple lands and injuries done to temple servants, even such payments were not regularly made by the princes during late medieval period.

The conflicts within the traditional political authority developed into the struggle between the traditional form of overlordship and the new form of land control exercised by the intermediary class. However, the latter form of conflict emerged clearly on two occasions. First, when the princess of Attingal tried to organise the rent collection of the Padmanabha temple which directly interfered with the control of the intermediaries. In this case, it was combined with the conflict within the royal family. The second, was when Rama Varma tried to reinforce the customary royal authority with the
help of Tamil troops which alienated both the intermediaries and brāhmanas. This conflict was not modulated by the conflict within the royal family. If such conflicts existed, they were kept in the background.

If Rama Varma tried to invoke the customary authority to maintain his power, Martanda Varma, went one step further, by altering the traditional conception of authority. He replaced the fragmentation with centralisation and built a close alliance with the ideological authority of the Padmanabha temple, by granting his entire territory to the temple and making himself Padmanabha dāsa. He also dismantled the traditional structure of economic management which gave considerable power to the intermediaries and established a structure where the ultimate authority rested with the king. The royal officials were no longer landlords, but paid servants who were not given permanent assignments. Similarly, the collection of rent was also centralised and a systematic land survey and the fixation of income accruing from each piece of land was organised. The traditional system of accounting was replaced by the system which involved the direct intervention by the overlords. The forms did not
do away with the intermediary class as such, but their political and judicial powers were completely removed and economic powers curtailed.

The transformation was the result of the change in the structure of the state. The state based on kinship ties and customary privileges in a curious amalgamation of the tribal chief and the feudal king was replaced by the absolute power of the king that invoked the aid of the divine sanction of the temple. Here, the divine sanction was clearly meant to legitimise the centralisation under Martanda Varma, which was confirmed through the ritual of Trippadidanam. The forces that assisted the growth of absolute power were the traders small landholders and the brahmanas, apart from the help given by the British factors of Anjengo. The control of trade played a crucial role in sustaining the power of the state, but this does not mean that Travancore became a state dependent entirely on foreign trade. The elements of traditional authority that still proved useful were combined with the building of the administrative network whose primary function was to channelise the available resources of the region into the hands of the absolute power.
However, the impact of the transformation was of a limited nature. The reforms were not accompanied by a substantial change in the conditions of production. The available resources were very few, and there was no transformation in agricultural technology. The reference to Kulikkanam tenure indicates that investment in agriculture, particularly in the garden lands was increasing. Cash transactions including sale of lands had also been increasing. This changes did not indicate a transformation of the nature of the acrarian relations at least in the early half of the 18th century. As discussed in the chapters, these changes were contained in the traditional framework of land relations and hence, the growth of commercialisation of agriculture cannot be envisaged in the present context.

The growth of the state of Travancore should also be seen from the overall historical context. The relations of Travancore with the Europeans has not been discussed in detail in the present study, except when necessary. However, the growth of European domination was significant, as colonialism played the crucial role in transforming Travancore into a typical native state. It is enough to point out
that the reforms of Martanda Varma was significant for other two reasons. It determined the relations between the European powers and Travancore. The state structure built by Martanda Varma unified a large part of Kerala. At the same time, presence of an absolutist power friendly to the British helped the colonialists not to think about establishing political control over a territory, only of peripheral importance whose resources were, in any case, easily accessible.

It would be useful to provide some explanatory remarks on a few points outlined above. First is regarding the social classes in medieval Travancore, particularly the composition of the intermediary class. The traditional overlords, that is, the royal family, and the temples and brāhmanas composed a loosely integrated hierarchy with their authonomous centres of power. The intermediaries occupied different positions in the hierarchy from big landlords to tenants, and also belong to both brāhmanas and upper caste non-brāhmanas. The privileges they held were not the same. Some held Kāniyātci holdings, as in Nānjinādu and others only held privileges in their official capacity. Hence it is difficult to bring them under a single category.
The only common point that they had, viz-a-viz the traditional landlords was that they directly intervened in the organisation and management of production under the traditional land system. However, the cultivators per se, belong to two distinct classes. One the ordinary cultivators and tenants who at times had a common interest with the intermediaries, and the mass of untouchables or the Adiyār class who were oppressed by all.

The second is the nature of land rights. It is clear that the land rights formed a hierarchy which was not destroyed by Martanda Varma. The protagonists of feudalism and segmentary state have agreed on the pyramidal character of the land rights in Kerala\(^2\). Apparently, the pyramidal concept does not conform to the evidence on Kerala from medieval period when the fragmentation appears at the top of the pyramid that is the kings themselves, and the autonomy of temple lands exists side by side. Pyramidal character is seen in the form of customary relationship sought to be established by the dominant classes, but never fully actualised in practice. It appears that the pyramidal character is mixed with kinship categories and the interlinkages among the dominant classes not guided by the economic or extra
economic relations that normally provide the basis for the medieval state; i.e. they are pre-medieval in content. The origins of most of the medieval rulers in Kerala, including the Venad family is obscure and they were given the status of śīmanta kṣātryās by brāhmanas, in order to justify their right to rule. It is possible that some of these rulers had tribal origins and the customs and practices that guided the political authority including matrilineal kinship had their roots in tribal society.

The discussion on land rights emphasises the fundamental importance of the tillers of the soil. The entire traditional economic structure dependend on the reduction of a substantial part of the population into bondage. It is clear that the bonded castes were treated as the commodity and sold along with the land and even the lease holders (pāttakkār or kućiyar) whose character was similar to serfs in medieval Europe were not different from the bonded castes in their economic positions. Caste divisions, particularly the divisions in the upper caste, for eg; Nāyars, which created groups of 'elite' and the 'downtrodden' within the same caste seem to have played the major role in deter-
mining these relations. It is possible that some of the features of the caste system in Keralo, including the extreme degree of purity and pollution practised by all the castes including the untouchables, were of tribal origin. The role of caste can be interpreted within the context of class divisions as of a combination of economic and extra economic concepts and practices that eventually confirm the hegemony of the dominant classes. The character of the dominant classes in the time of Martanda Varma was, in this sense, hardly different from that of the traditional overlord. There is also nothing to indicate that the conditions of the producers i.e. the class to which the entire untouchable castes be oged, underwent radical changes under Martanda Varma. The organisations of productions and the regularisation of the collection of dues, brought into being by Martanda Varma resulted in the centralisation of political authority and the management of economic activity from above, and did not alter the traditional relations of production.
REFERENCES


2. Burton Stein applies his concept of pyramidal segmentation to Kerala society and this appears to be an attempt to incorporate the concept of feudal pyramid into his understanding of the segmentary state. See his *Politics, Peasants and Deconstruction of feudalism in Medieval India* in the debate on "Feudalism and Non-European Societies", *Journal of Peasant Studies*, spl. issue vol. 12, Nos. 2 & 3 Jan/April 1985.