INTRODUCTION

The history of Kerala, especially of North Malabar, would be incomplete without discussing the position of the Kolathiris in the political formation of the region. The history of Kolaswaroopam is generally an unknown area of research among historians and students of history. Yet, no significant historical researches have been done on this topic. The purpose of the present study, “The Kolaswaroopam in Historical Perspective Political and Cultural Formations under the Kolathiris of North Malabar”, is to disclose the role of this dynasty in the political and cultural development of Kolathunad. Economic and social issues also form topic of discussion in this thesis. However, some political developments in the history of Kolathunad have been mentioned in connection with the general history of Kerala. The swaroopam generally means vamsam or dynasty that possesses power and overlordship over a vast area of land. Most of them had many feudatory chieftains under their control.¹

¹ The term swaroopam can be split up into two parts swam and rupa. According to N. M. Namboothiri ‘the term swam denotes the meaning udaya or overlord. In the case of the term rupa it can be justifiable that it denotes the meaning territory (in this context we can just notify the meaning of the word rupatha- means a territory comes under the administrative purview of a Bishop. See for reference, Sreekanteswaram. G. Padmanabha Pillai, Sabdataravali Malayalam Dictionary, Kottayam, Sahithya Pravarthaka Co-Operative Society Ltd., 1997, p. 1494.). Thus the meaning of swaroopam is a territory came under the administrative purview of a Bishop. See for reference, Kerala Samskaram Akavum Puravum, Calicut, Calicut University Central Co-Operative Stores, (year of Publication is not mentioned in the book), pp. 310-311.
Kolathunad at the zenith of its power extended up to Nethravathy River in the North and Korappuzha in the South, Coorg in the East and the Arabian Sea in the West. Like the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas, the Kolathiris exhibited Dravidian political construct. But it appears that the conceptual and structural foundations of the Kolathiris were mainly a product of the Dravidian influence on their ancestors, the Mushikas. Historical evidences suggest that the Kolathiri dynasty represented the political continuity of the Mushikas who were descendants of a non-Dravidian sect in the north. Eventually for many reasons the Mushikas came under the influence of Brahmanic, Jain and Buddhist religions. The dynastic order of Mushikavamsam that originated in the Sangam period continued through the Kolathiris up to the end of their kingship in 1792. Kolathunad was completely independent from the Cheras of Mahodayapuram, though on certain occasions the former came under the influence of the latter. Kolathunad maintained continuous contacts with the rulers of neighboring powers like the Chera, Chola, Pandya and Tulu kingdoms through matrimonial alliances, diplomatic interactions etc. as mentioned in the Mushikavamsa.²

The North Malabar region was a centre of long distant maritime trade from the early centuries of Christian era. Naura (Kannur) was a major centre of Roman trade. Discovery of Roman coins from Kottayam (in Kannur District) throws more light on the external trade links of this region. This maritime commercial tradition continued further despite political changes from the

² Athula, Mushikavamsam, K. Raghavan Pilla (trans.), Thiruvananthapuram, Department of Publication, University of Kerala, 1983.
Mushikas to the Kolathiris in North Malabar. The literary sources like *Payyanur Pattu* throws light on the flourishing condition of Kolathunad in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. South Indian merchant groups like *Anjuvannam, Manigramam, Valanchiyar* and *Nanadesikal* were popular in Kolathunad as prominent trade guilds. The internal as well as external trade contacts were in a progressive stage. Moreover, the literary sources provide much information about the progress of shipbuilding activities in Kolathunad. Later on trade contacts with the Arabs and the Portuguese had remarkable role in shaping the political and economic structures of Kolathunad.

With the arrival of the Portuguese, Kolathiri wanted to establish commercial contacts with them for the development of his country as well as for earning more income for royal treasury through custom taxes. Therefore, Kolathiri himself took initiative in inviting the Portuguese Captain Vasco da Gama to Cannanore, offering him goods and all other assistance. Further, the Kolathiri found that relations with the Portuguese would help him to assert his political power and independence in North Malabar in the context of the increasing dominance of the Zamorin of Calicut. Portuguese maritime interventions promoted commercial activities in Kolathunad, though it affected the existing commercial norms and networks as well as merchant groups, especially the Arabs. The Portuguese followed a policy of preferential treatment towards local rulers in such manner that supported their monopolistic mercantile interests. Trade monopoly was not a praxis in Malabar approved by local rulers;

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rather all merchants irrespective of their nationality were free to engage in business in an atmosphere of free trade, where principles of demand supply determined the price of commodities. Portuguese interventions resulted in the collapse of long established free-trade system for monopoly trade. Later other European powers also followed more or less same the path of these mercantile practices, which ultimately led to the process of colonization and loss of local political sovereignty.

As far as Kolathunad is concerned it can be pointed out that commercial activities were the major source of income for the king. Therefore, the king always tried to promote mercantile contacts, especially with resourceful and powerful foreign merchants, even to the extent of neglecting relatively weak merchants. This tendency suggests that political formation of Kolathunad was greatly dependant on external mercantile activities. In fact, Kolathunad as a state became powerful, and at the same time weak, due to its maritime trade relations with the Europeans.\(^4\) In the beginning stage of European interactions it appeared that there was prosperity as indicated by the volume of export and import, flow of income, growth of urban centers, markets and other facilities in the locality, but eventually European contact became deep rooted in the local polity and economy through the process of exerting coercive diplomacy and using military force. Therefore, local resources could be appropriated through other means as well like

\(^4\) The role long distant maritime in the shaping the nature of polity in the case of other local kingdoms in Malabar has been discussed. See Pius Malekandathil, “Making Power Visible: Portuguese Commercial and Military Strategies in the Indian Ocean with Special Reference to Cannanore, 1500-1550,” in Winds of Spices Essays on Portuguese Establishments in Medieval India with Special Reference to Cannanore, Tellicherry, IRISH, 2006.
land revenue, and other taxes, besides trade. The Portuguese opened the path of European penetration into local polity and economy and the English completely accomplished this task by making Kolathunad a part of their colonial empire in India. This study comes to end with the cession of Malabar to the English East India Company. Subsequently, the Kolathiri had to live with the malikhan (pension) granted by the English.

**Previous Studies**

There are a few studies on the history of the Kolathiris, which reflect some aspects of the polity and economy of Kolathunad. Certain works on maritime history make an attempt to explain the importance of Kolathunad as a prominent trading centre in medieval period. A few books on the political history of Kerala tried to portray the role of the Kolathiris in the political evolution of Kolathunad. The study of M. G. S. Narayanan, “Mushika Vamsa as a Source of Kerala History” is a notable pioneering contribution to historiography. He tried to point out that the Mushikavamsa by Atula is the earliest surviving independent work of dynastic and regional history. The author concentrates more on the historicity of this mahakavya and the date of its composition. Besides, Keralacharithrathinte Adisthanashilakal in Malayalam by M. G. S. Narayanan is another significant work on the early history of Kerala. A couple of articles titled “Kandakarivarman” and “Ezhimalayile Randu Prachina Likhithangal” (both in

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Malayalam) in this book deal with problems regarding the history of Kolathunad.\(^6\) This work tries to explain the details of inscriptions which have been discovered from the region of Kolathunad. The *Perumals of Kerala* the doctoral thesis of M. G. S. Narayanan, though not a work on Kolaswaroopam, gives details about the role played by the Cheras in Kolathunad and their interactions with the Mushikas, the ancestors of the Kolathiris.\(^7\)

The book entitled as *Regent of the Sea,’ Cannanore’s Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528* by Genevieve Bouchon is a good source of information about the maritime activities of Cannanore and Portuguese conflicts with Muslim traders in the sixteenth century.\(^8\) Bouchon begins the work discussing the early history of Ezhimala kingdom. She noted that this promontory was a natural observatory for the native people and it was inhabited by the pirates. This book is a work on maritime aspects of Cannanore. It deals more with the economic development of Cannanore during the time of the Portuguese than political issues.

Another work on Kolathunad is *Ali Rajas of Cannanore* by K. K. N. Kurup.\(^9\) It is a marvelous study on the medieval political history of Kolathunad

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\(^7\) M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Printed copy of unpublished thesis referred from the personal collections of author himself.

\(^8\) Genevieve Bouchon, ‘*Regent of the Sea’ Cannanore’s Responses to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1988.

with special reference to Ali Raja, the vassal of Kolathiri. It describes the role of Ali Raja in making Cannanore his political headquarters. It further throws light on the relation of the Kolathiris with the Arackal House.

An excellent monograph entitled as *A History of Mushika Vamsa* by N. P. Unni is an introduction to *Mushikavamsha,* one of the few literary works in Sanskrit about dynastic history. It explains various sources of study about the Mushikas. It is a critical comparative study with other sources related to Mushikas and an interpretation of *Mushikavamsa* of Athula. Though the book contains many interesting aspects of Kolathunad and its early history, it does not illustrate the relations between the Mushikas of Ezhimala and the Kolathiris.

The book *The Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century* by K. S. Mathew is another valuable source of information about the sixteenth century Cannanore. It is a detailed study of Portuguese trade with India in general but it also deals with the maritime trade of Kolathunad. Besides, the work describes the importance of ports, local merchants, major principalities, diplomacy of the Portuguese in trade, etc. This work gives the clear picture of the economic conditions of Kolathunad as a whole. The work is notable in economic and maritime spheres than in the political aspects of Kolathunad.

Another important book on Kolathunad is a collection of essays titled *Winds of Spices* edited by K. S. Mathew and Joy Varkey. It is a relevant source of

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study that deals with the Portuguese establishments in India with special reference to Cannanore. A number of scholars contributed valuable articles on various aspects of the maritime traditions of Cannanore in medieval period. It also discusses some aspects of the political and dynastic history. *Cannanore in the Maritime History of India* is another collection of studies edited by M.O. Koshy. Studies in these volumes concentrate on the commercial engagements of Cannanore with different parts of world, especially with European countries during the late medieval and early modern period.

The books *Thiranjedutha Prabandhangal* (Malayalam) by Chirackal T. Balakrishnan Nair, *Madayikavu Orupathanam* (Malayalam) by M. S. Nair and *New light on Swathy Thirunal* by R. P. Raja are also remarkable works that contain valuable information about the history of Kolaswaroopam. Chirackal T. Balakrishnan Nair deserves special mention in this regard as he collected a lot of manuscripts from Chirackal house of the Kolathiris and examined them very carefully. He tried to write about the unknown areas of Kolaswaroopam. But he did not write the full history of Kolaswaroopam. He concentrated only on the

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literary aspects of the ancient sources collected from the Chirakkal Palace. Yet this work gives some precious information about Kolathunad.

The unpublished Ph.D thesis entitled “The Political Processes of Kolathunad Down to 1812” by E. B. Suresh Kumar is another work in this regard. It gives us a detailed account of the establishment of English East India Company in Kolathunad, the Mysorean invasions and the consequent state of affairs in Kolathunad under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan. Although it dealt with the role of Kolathiris in the political history of the region, the work did not mention what happened to the Kolathiri royal family after the Mysorean conquest and how it was politically connected with the royal family of Travancore etc. Furthermore, there is no authentic evidence and discussions in this study to prove the continuity of Kolaswaroopam from the Mushikas and no clear mention of the beginning period of Kolathiris. This study does not explain the significance of maritime trade in the political formation of Kolathunad. The aforementioned studies on the history of Kolathunad shared only partial information. In this context the present study is an attempt to throw more light on the history of the Kolaswaroopam in political and cultural perspectives incorporating economic dimensions. Therefore, offering new interpretations and viewpoints, this thesis will be a new contribution to enrich the historiography of Kolathunad.

Objectives and Hypothesis

Principal objectives of this study are the following:

1. To examine the lineage of the Kolathiris from the Mushikas
2. To discuss the role of various religious systems in the political formation of Kolathunad in the early period
3. To analyze the role of European maritime trade in the political formation of Kolathunad
4. To explore the nature of relations with Travancore
5. To study the nature and process of European penetration into Kolathunad
6. To illustrate the cultural aspects promoted under the Kolathiris.

This study will point out that the Kolathiris represented political continuity from the Mushikas. Close analysis of all literary as well as archaeological sources reveal that the Kolathiris were direct descendants of the Mushikas. It is noteworthy that the royal family of Kolaswaroopam itself did not claim its continuity from the Cheras, instead they believed in Mushika dynastic inheritance. In the long history of Kolathunad a particular state system started only after tenth century under the Kolathiris. This was a period of transition from patrilineal to matrilineal system in the dynastic history of Kolathunad. It was for the first time in the long rule of Mushikavamsa that a king was followed by his maternal nephew instead of his son.

Jainism and Buddhism had special role in the political formation of Kolathunad. The trade guilds *Anjuvannam, Manjgramam, Nanadeshikal* and
Valanjiyar, which belonged to Jainism and Buddhism, took initiative in the commercial activities of Kolathunad. In Kolathunad trade guilds had high status in society and they played important role in temple administration.

Further, this study put forward the hypothesis that maritime trade contacts of Kolathunad with different European countries had a special role in the political formations of the kingdom. Ultimately these maritime trade contacts led to colonial penetration under the English and elimination of Kolathunad polity from the land of Malabar. The Portuguese trade contact with Kolathunad took away the freedom of trade activities from the country. For a long time the Arabs were major trade intermediaries between Europe and India. Kolathunad had a prominent role in commercial activities with ancient Greaco-Roman countries and later with Arab world. This freedom of native trade had been shaken by the advent of the Portuguese. They introduced new trade tactics and controls in the orient. Thus the native traders, who enjoyed freedom of trade under Kolathiri, became incompetent before the European traders.

The Mysore invasion tolled the death-knell of the prolonged rule of Kolaswaroopam in north Malabar. The Kolathiri’s continuous struggle with Ali Raja, his vassal, disturbed the country’s peaceful atmosphere and that finally invited havoc in the form of Haider Ali’s invasion. Internal factors also led to the decline of the kingdom.

The repeated adoptions from Kolaswaroopam to Travancore Royal Family strengthened the political contacts between them through blood relationship.
Politically these continuous adoptions would strengthen both Travancore dynasty and Kolaswaroopam. If we check the last six hundred years of the history of Travancore Royal Family, we can see that majority of the rulers were direct progenies of adopted princesses from Kolaswaroopam. Most of these rulers earned historical prominence by their administrative policies as well as personal skills.

During the late medieval period the two important port-towns such as Cannanore and Tellicherry in Kolathunad emerged under the patronage of the Portuguese and the English respectively. The Kolaswaroopam had a vital role in creating favorable conditions for European colonialism in Kolathunad. The system of Kooruvazhcha strengthened the position of the regents, who became the intermediaries between the Kolathiri and the European powers. The regents like Vadakkilamkoor and Thekklamkoor invited European merchants and officials to stay in their country and allow them to start factories and fortresses for the protection of their commercial enterprises.

Sources and Methods

This thesis has been completed with the data collected from both primary and reputed secondary sources. However, considerable amount of information was collected from primary repositories like archives as well as through field visits and interviews. Archival and archaeological data like Mathilakam records, Churunas, Neettus, unpublished Royal orders, manuscripts, Government publications, Gazetteers, Manuals, traveler’s accounts, personal writings and oral
traditions like *Theyyam pattukal*, Vadakkan Pattukal and Marakkalam Pattu, etc., formed an authentic source of information about the Kolathiris.

Sanskrit works like *Mushikavamsa*, composed by Athula, the court poet of the historical ruler Srikanta, *Kolanrpotpatti*, a Sanskrit work in the form of *Umamaheshvarasamvada*, *Udayavarmacharithhasangraha* alias *Deshyashtakam*, *Udayavarmacharitha* alias *Brahmaprathishta*, *Udayavarmacharitha* of Ravivarman, are important source of information about the Kolathiris. The *Sangam* literature provides a considerable amount of information regarding the history of Kolathunad and its rulers. One part of the Mackenzie manuscripts in Telugu language, collected by Col. Colin Mackenzie between A. D. 1810 and 1815, contains the history of South India and its rulers including Kolathiri. Malayalam literary works like *Unnuneelysandesham*, *Payyannur Pattu*, *Chellurnathodayam* enriched the history of Kolathunad. They are a good source of information about Kolathunad and its geographical position and its commercial developments in the contemporary periods.

Interview with R. P. Raja, Ravindra Varma, Karumarthu Narayanan Namboothiri, the then chief priest of Kolaswaroopam became fruitful. Visits to the important temples of Kolathiri in Kannur district like Madayi, Cherukunnu, Kadalayi, Kuruvkavu, Raja Rajeshwara temple at Thaliparamba and remnants of the forts and palaces of Kolathiris at Valarpattanam, Madayi, and Chirakkal, English fort at Tellicherry and Portuguese fort at Cannanore were useful for the present thesis. All the temples and palaces of Kolathiri at Chirakkal are good specimens of their architectural and cultural contributions.
With regard to the methodology of research, the thesis is based on the critical evaluation of all primary and secondary sources. Both internal and external criticisms have been used to verify the authenticity of documents collected from the archives and other sources. Often corroboration of data from different sources was necessary to substantiate the accuracy of historical information. Inter-disciplinary approach is another essential methodological component of this study to have an integrated and comprehensive understanding of the subject of research. Visiting of important historical sites and interviews with royal family members were undertaken for obtaining first-hand information about the Kolathiris. Maps, charts and other illustrations have been used for this study. On certain occasions deductive reasoning has been used to prove my arguments. Fundamentally this is a thesis based on the qualitative analysis of historical facts.

Presentation of the Thesis

The thesis has been presented in eight chapters. The first chapter tries to prove that the Kolathiris were the direct descendants of the Mushikas. A study of Mushikavamsa kavaya and other sources of information vividly underscore the argument of the political continuity of the Mushikas in the name of Kolathiris. The subject matter of the second chapter is the formation of a state system under the Kolathiris in the tenth century A. D. Moreover, the system of administration, peculiarities of kingship, system of Kooruvazhcha, role of non-Brahmin trade guilds in the formation of a powerful state system in Kolathunad etc. also come under the matter of discussion in this chapter.
The third chapter discusses the chief features of trade activities in Kolathunad, the Portuguese interventions, the role of the Arabs as intermediaries in the trade activities. Besides, the confrontation between the Arabs and the Portuguese also forms topic of discussion. In the conflict for obtaining trade monopoly the Portuguese became successful using their military force and treacherous diplomacy.

The fourth chapter shows the relation of Kolaswaroopam with Travancore Royal Family and how the continuous adoption from the Kolaswaroopam strengthened both the royal families of Travancore and Kolathunad. The chapter also deals with the relation with Arackal Palace in Cannanore.

The fifth chapter is an attempt to illustrate the political affairs of Kolathunad after the Mysorean invasion. The Mysorean invasion brought about many changes in Kolathunad. This totally erased the kingship from Kolathunad. It finally helped the beginning of English East India Company’s rule in Kolathunad with the cession of Malabar by the treaty of Seringapatnam in 1792.

The sixth chapter draws a fine picture of colonial penetration into Kolathunad. This chapter throws light on the advent of the Dutch, the English and the French in Kolathunad, their competition to acquire monopoly in pepper trade and the challenges faced by the Kolathiris from these companies. This chapter ends with the narration of the domination of the English East India Company as the sole sovereign power of Kolathunad.
The seventh chapter shows the contribution made by the Kolathiris to art, architecture and literature. This chapter contains description of special features of the architectural styles of the palaces and temples of Kolathiris, the growth of performing art forms like Theyyam in Kolathunad, development of literature under the Kolathiris, the contributions made by the princes to literature, etc. The final chapter is the conclusion of the study.