Chapter 1

THE BACKGROUND: THE OLD ORDER AND THE MYSOREAN INTERLUDE

The history of eighteenth century India has been debated till date within a specific trajectory of change characterized by the collapse of large centralized empires followed by a mushrooming of local or regional centres of power and the consequent/subsequent subjugation to British power. This chapter examines the late precolonial political economy of Malabar, a region which did not conform to this pattern of change. It explores how the interconnections between Malabar's state structure, political configurations, European commerce and the agrarian economy changed the region's political economy in the late precolonial period and its final disruption under Mysorean rule. Given the limitations of the present exercise, this inquiry into the precolonial economy is only a prelude to the substantive part of the thesis as defined in the title.

Sources used and their limitations:
The absence of easily accessible regional sources pose a severe problem in writing the history of late pre-colonial Malabar. Available information is scattered in repositories of old Malayalam palm leaf documents using archaic and highly localised
terminology and metrology. The absence of a centralized regular land tax and the extremely high level of political and administrative decentralisation made economic data gathering both irrelevant and impossible for the precolonial regimes of Malabar.

Given this paucity of sources any reconstruction of Malabar's political economy in this period has to be based on three broad sources of information. The Dutch language sources available in India consist of the Memoranda or Memoirs of administration of the VOC in Malabar, narratives of important events and a collection of Canter Visscher's letters on the various facets of contemporary political and social life in Malabar. We have consulted only those Dutch records which have been translated into English.

The English Company's Tellicherry Factory Records, the letters from Fort St. George, the Letters to Tellicherry and the Tellicherry Diary and the Home Miscellaneous (hereafter H.M.) series contain valuable information on the history of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Malabar. The immediate need felt by

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2. See Galletti and Groot ed., The Dutch in Malabar being a translation of Selections Numbers 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes, Madras, 1911. Gollennesse's and Moens' Memoranda are reproduced in English by Galletti and Groot. An English translation of Hendrick van Rheede's "Letter to Hon. Jacob Lobs, Governor General on the coasts of Malabar, Canara and Wingorla" dated March 1677 is available in H.M. series 456(B) (1) (2).
the English to comprehend their newly acquired territory resulted in a flurry of reports, memoirs, surveys and travelogues being generated in the early decades of the nineteenth century.³

The third set of sources are the indigenous Malayalam records of certain large influential landed families. These sources unlike the European ones, are as yet a novelty for the historian of late medieval-modern Malabar. They deal with land grants, land lease agreements, social customs and administrative-political arrangements. The chronological and spatial coverage of the indigenous Malabar sources for this period are still highly restricted and does not as yet offer enough material for use as an independent primary source for reconstructing the late pre-colonial history of Malabar. The contemporary private Malayalam sources used here are the family records of the Koodali, Kavalappara and the Vanjeri families and the paper transcripts of eighteenth and early nineteenth century land deeds which survive in the Zamorin's collection.⁴

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SECTION I Political configurations and State structure

The later Chera period, after the eleventh century, saw the extreme parcellisation of political authority. This general pattern continued till the end of the eighteenth century. In the early eighteenth century the Zamorins of Calicut were the largest and most vigorous power in south Malabar and the Kolattiris were the overlords of North Malabar. By the end of the century the Zamorin became the single most important ruling power between Kolattunad in the North and Cochin in the south, with the subjugated rulers paying him a token tribute. The Zamorins continuously tried to subjugate Chirakkal in the north and Cochin in the south without much success. For short periods of time Cochin was forced to accept the overlordship of the Zamorin.

The political and commercial decline of the Kolattiri kingdom was noted as early as 1743 in Gollenesse’s Memorandum. By the mid-eighteenth century the Kolattiri kingdom had shrunk considerably and extended only over Kolattunad.

The other two important powers in late medieval Kerala were Cochin and Travancore. Cochin in spite of being militarily inferior to the Zamorin could exist as an independent state in the late medieval period largely because of foreign support, first from the Portuguese and then the Dutch. With the expansion

5. This led a historian to comment - "though two steps might be made in one territory, a third must inevitably cross the boundary. Unacknowledged quotation in Innes, Malabar, vol.I, p.41

6. See Gollenesse, op. cit.
of a militarised and centralised Travancore, Cochin was progressively sandwiched between the aggrandizing schemes of the Zamorin from the north and the Travancore Raja from the south.

Structure of the state

The persistently high degree of political decentralisation was a peculiar feature of the pre-colonial Malayali state system. Royal powers were severely circumscribed by popular assemblies of Nayars. 7

The fragmentation of political power between the king and his large feudatory princes was usually based on a territorial division of authority. The other important loci of political authority below the territorial princes were the supralocal chiefs or naduvazhis in charge of nadus and below them were the village or desam chiefs known as the desavazhis. It was common for the same family to function in some areas as the naduvazhi and in certain others as desavazhi. A single family could also hold different titles under mutually antagonistic overlords. Each title carried with it rights to exercise certain privileges. As

7. Commandeur Hendrik van Rheede writing in the second half of the 17th century commented that in Malabar 'subjects are not bound to observe any orders, commands or whims and council decisions of the king which are not in conformity with their laws, welfare and privileges and have not been approved in their own district and ratified at the meeting of their district assemblies.' Also see van Gollenesse for a similar observation in Galletti and Groot, op cit.
reward for their services these functionaries or title holders were allowed a part of the customs revenues, a fixed toll tax, various customary gifts and a small share of the agricultural and non-agricultural produce. It was obligatory on the part of the naduvazhi to maintain a sizeable militia which could be called up by the overlord during times of need. The documents of the Kavalappara family provide interesting information on the administrative functions and privileges of the naduvazhis and the desavazhis. According to Padmanabha Menon, in the event of a confrontation between the naduvazhi's immediate overlord and the king, the desavazhi was to be loyal to the former. Administration of the lands under their charge (swooropam), the maintenance of an armed militia, the upkeep of specified temples, the maintenance of feeding houses for the Brahmins and the supply of drinking water in the summer months were some of the duties of the naduvazhi. Apart from managing specified temples he was able

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8. Kurup op. cit., p.XIII; see also KPPM, vol.II, p.300
Although the head of the Kavalappara family was the naduvazhi of the Palghat Raja he also held the position of desavazhi in a number of villages. For instance while the naduvazhi himself performed the role of the desavazhi in the Thekkethara and Cheramangalam desams in Chittalancheri desam there was a separate desavazhi under the naduvazhi. As a naduvazhi of the Palghat Raja the Nair had administrative and defence responsibilities. When the Raja reached the Northern gate of the Ennur Kavu, the Nair was to receive him and take orders from him. The Nair was also the head of 5,000 armed Nairs in the Malappuram territories. Kurup, op. cit., p.xvi

9. KPPM, op. cit., vol.II, Note 16
to direct certain important festivals and ceremonies. The naduvazhi’s sources of revenue were the same as that of the Raja’s but the rates of taxation were lower. The desavazhi was entrusted with the administration of the desam, which has been loosely translated as a village or a parish in later literature. He was entitled to a customary annual payment in kind from the agriculturists and a poll tax from the service castes. The Kavalappara Nair, for instance, held both the naduvazhi’s rank and the desavazhi’s post in some areas while in others he held only one of the two. Further, it was not necessary that every territory had to have both a naduvazhi or a desavazhi. The Kavalappara Nair in spite of his powerful status and large resources often took land on kanam tenure in many areas while also being a substantial janmi in other areas. What the above description points to is a structure of political hierarchy and control which was highly multivocal. A clearly defined linear hierarchy of titles was foreign to the pre-colonial Malabar state structure.

Above these local and district level functionaries stood the king. The region’s political culture was such that the Malabar king’s powers in relation to the rest of the society was highly

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10. See deposition of Appukkutan Unni alias Kanakkat Moopil Nair, D.W. 14 in O.S. No.34 of 1919, Sub-Court, Ottapalam.
mediated and restricted. 11 The king's rights and privileges in Malabar were essentially a replication on a grander scale of those rights enjoyed by his tributary princes and their subordinate functionaries. Kingship appears to have been guaranteed in the ultimate instance by the overlord's ability to mobilize superior military power vis-à-vis his subordinates. William Thackeray writing soon after the British assumption of sovereignty in Malabar observed that 'there are no establishments to support so that there does not seem to have been any necessity for a general level tax, nor had the raja perhaps the power to collect one.' 12 In the absence of a standing army the Malabar kings were dependent on their subordinate chieftains for resisting external military attacks and for territorial expansion. In military terms the overlord's own military power would necessarily have had to be greater than that of any of his subordinate chieftains. It is in this context that the 'national' assemblies or nadu kootams assume significance in Malabar's political history. Rheede repeatedly points to the

11. Commenting on the form of Government in the second half of the 17th century Rheede wrote 'It cannot be said that the Malabars have a Monarchical Government nor is it a Republic nor have the...[illegible Mss] Commons the sway but it is the composition of the whole, for neither the king, the nobles nor the common have the supreme authority... but one observes in all their transactions a precise order and well turned [tuned?] policy'.

circumscription of absolute royal power by these assemblies. In cases where differences between the king and the assemblies could be sorted out through negotiations military confrontation ensued.

The Brahmins who were exclusively in charge of ecclesiastical affairs and owned very large landed estates were another important component of the state. The family records of the Vanjeri illam provide a valuable source for examining the relationship between the Nambudiri priests and the rulers in late medieval Malabar. The lands granted to the Brahmins were organised as a sanketam which was a self-governing, semi-autonomous territory. Though the sanketams were self-governing units with their own code of conduct and general rules, they were dependent on the king and subordinate princes for protection. The Brahmins had developed institutional forms of resistance (e.g. pattini or hunger strikes) to coerce secular authorities when all other forms of protest failed. The king in some documents also appears to have derived a revenue from the temples under the

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13. "Assemblies are commonly held against the king and therefore he employes all measures to prevent them. But this cannot be easily done, considering the great number of armed men who resort to these assemblies, often amount (sic) to about 30,000." Rheede, op. cit.


control of the sanketam. The semi-autonomous landed Nambudiri Brahmin groups while retaining substantial autonomy and ritually recognized penal powers even over the king depended on the secular heads for their protection.

Notwithstanding Stein's argument that Kerala stood outside the segmentary Tamil macro-region, Malabar's state structure does appear to have closely approximated to Southall's description of the segmentary state in Alur. Southall's model has been severely criticized (and rightly so) on a number of scores, especially for ignoring the state monopoly over force and taxation and for constructing a model divorced from material conditions. In Malabar the king may not have had any 'ritual hegemony' in the sense of an accepted preeminent sacral status, but he did command 'authority'. This 'authority' was based ultimately on his greater military mobilizing capacity vis-a-vis his subordinate chiefs. However, without a standing army he could not exercise military and political control over his entire

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16. V.G. see documents 1A, 2A and 3A dated 716 M.E. or A.D.1541

17. Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India, New Delhi, 1985 p.48; Aidan Southall, Alur Society: A Study in Process and Types of Domination, Cambridge, 1956. In a recent article Southall claims that his segmentary model of the Alur state can be profitably used to understand state dynamics in India. See Southall, **

18. See R.S. Sharma, "The segmentary state and the Indian experience", Indian Historical Review, XVI, Nos.1 & 2, 1989-90 for a recent attack on Southall's model.
territory in any permanent, pervasive manner. Political superiority was demonstrated and established at rituals such as the Mahamakham, the essential nature of which was military.

The state system as it developed along the coast was characterized by small kingdoms. Each kingdom with its trade centre on the coast needed to control the hinterland where its exported commodities were produced. As one went farther inland the control of the centre declined. Control was attempted either through direct rule where possible or through indirect mechanisms of allegiance. The chieftains further inland often played off rival kings against each other, e.g. the Kavallapara Nair. This kind of spatial economic organization formed the basis of the segmentary state structure in Malabar. 19

Ecology and State Structure:

Topography, climate and the cropping pattern crucially influenced the nature of the state structure in Malabar. The physiography of this coastal strip separated it from the rest of the Indian peninsula, minimizing social and political intercourse with the areas on the leeward side of the Western Ghats. The Malabar coast was dissected by numerous small seasonal rivers originating in the Ghats and draining into the Arabian sea. Maintaining regular links across any substantial expanse of this

region was near impossible. During the torrential rains of the long monsoon months maritime communication came to a virtual halt and overland links became difficult. The virtually nonexistent road system in Malabar and the consequently high transport costs continued well into the nineteenth century. This was one plausible factor in limiting the extension of large highly centralised sovereign territorial units in Malabar.

Apart from physical geographical barriers to civilization, the exploitable agrarian resources also encouraged political dispersion. To repeat an axiom, all large centralised state structures need dependable and regular sources of social surplus. The dispersal of paddy fields in the valleys seems to have encouraged the dispersed settlement pattern in Malabar. Ecology along with the politico-administrative structure appears to have contributed greatly to this pattern of habitation. The rice fields being widely dispersed made it important for the land Settlement dispersal in turn further reduced the possibilities of tight administrative and political control. Although Malabar, a rice deficit district was known more for its exported spices, the distribution of wet paddy lands exerted a strong influence on the location of the large sovereign territorial units in the pre-colonial period. Access to zones of substantial production provided the necessary resource base for kingly rule. Though

20. "The roads are very bad...In Malabar even cattle are little used for the transportation of goods, which are generally carried by porters." Buchanan, op. cit., p.434.
agriculture based resources had to be substantially supplemented by other trade based revenues it nevertheless constituted a vital component of the resource base. Wet paddy lands were granted as part of remuneration for dignities and titles in pre-colonial Malabar. A regular supply of rice was indispensable for the maintenance of large bodies of Nair militia. Further, the output and returns from wet paddy cultivation were more regular and predictable than for other garden and dry crops. As Map 1 suggests wet paddy cultivation demarcated certain zones as areas of potential social surplus and thus attracted and permitted the establishment of powerful royal lineages.

Changing Political Configurations: the external dimension

The closing years of the fifteenth century marked the beginning of Portuguese commercial and armed intervention. According to Dasgupta, 'The character of Asian trade in what may be called its high medieval period (AD 1300 - AD 1500) was essentially peaceful'. Unlike the Arab trader the Portuguese merchant had to embark on a much longer and riskier voyage to trade with the East. This required a much greater capital investment. Risk aversion and the logic of profit led the Portuguese to introduce systematic non-economic coercion to

21. The Kavallapara Nair maintaining five thousand armed Nairs provides a recorded evidence of this practice.

22. Dasgupta, op.cit., p.7
MAP

MALABAR

CROPPING ZONES AND THE LOCATION OF MAJOR, MINOR AND INTERMEDIATE KINGDOMS IN THE 18TH CENTURY

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maintain their commercial presence and viability in the East. The "pass-system" and their attempts to forcibly depress the prices to be paid to the primary producers distinguished them and their Dutch successors from the Arab traders. The high rate of trade turnover between the Arabian sea board and the Malabar coast had permitted the Arabs to be content with the profits they could earn in the market place.

Zayan al-Din in his *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin* written in the 1580s documents the Portuguese attempts to destroy the Arab trade monopoly in Malabar - 'initially they forbade the Muslims to trade in pepper and ginger and then later cinnamon, cloves and other commodities which yield the largest profits were prohibited. They prevented the Muslims from making commercial voyages to Arabia (al’arab), Malacca (Mataga) Achin (ashi) and Damao (damasri)."23

However, the Portuguese attempts at controlling the production and trade in pepper did not go unchallenged. "Smuggling" soon developed as one of the means of combating these controls. The coast of later day Malabar district is said to have been able to maintain 'a relative freedom for its markets'.24 Portuguese intervention in trade gradually led to the decline of

24. Dasgupta, *op.cit.*, p.18
Calicut’s external maritime trade. The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries witnessed the gradual growth of European companies’ political and commercial power on the Malabar coast and the ultimate establishment of the English Company as a major military and political power on the coast. Since the middle of the thirteenth century the Arab merchants and the Zamorin had a symbiotic relationship. The collaboration of the Arabs with the Zamorins was resented by the Portuguese who failed to displace them from Calicut. At the time of the Portuguese entry into Malabar’s trade the Zamorin was powerful enough to exert his overlordship over Cochin. Only subsequently with Portuguese and later Dutch help were the Cochin Rajas able to shake off the Zamorin’s control. Dutch sources of the early eighteenth century ascribed the decline of the Northern Kolattiri empire to intra-family quarrels and the interference by the English and the French in Chirakkal’s commerce. These events emphasise the crucial role played by foreign traders and the military aid provided by these mercantile groups in deciding the political fortunes of these kingdoms. In precolonial Malabar, the State power was highly localized, but the significance of trade revenues made it undesirable to have politically strong

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25. Dasgupta, op.cit., pp.10-12

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neighbours. This made constant warfare endemic.26

Section II State Revenues and Expenditure in Late Precolonial Malabar

The acute scarcity of contemporary sources compels any reconstruction of this aspect of precolonial rule to be somewhat speculative. The lack of political distance between the king and his subordinate princes and functionaries has been noted. In the field of revenue too, there was only a difference in the scale of taxation. The tax net was in theory spread over all economic activity.

The more regular and dependable revenue sources may be listed as chunkam or customs duties, cherical revenues or the income from lands under the direct control of the king or the prince and taxes on professional groups.27 The customs was a major source of revenue for the kings, princes and their subordinate officials. Customs tolls were imposed on external as well as inland trade. Zayan-al-Din writing in the early 16th century mentions that the kings levied a 10% duty on all merchandise which was imported, exported or transshipped. Other

26. This point has been stressed in explaining the rise of Dahomey. See I.A. Akinjogbin, Dahomey and its neighbours, 1707-1818, Cambridge, 1967; also see Kenneth R. Hall, Maritime Trade and State Development in Early South East Asia, Honolulu, 1985.

27. These included tonipanam or boat tax, vallapanam or net tax levied on fishermen, katti chatti panam (knife and still tax) on toddy tappers and distillers.
estimates range from 2.5 to 3 per cent.\textsuperscript{28} According to Pearson, the Raja of Cochin in the late 16th century while under Portuguese protection levied a duty of 6 per cent on all goods landed in Cochin.\textsuperscript{29} In 1723 Hamilton observed that all ships unloading at Tellicherry paid an import cess of 2 bales of rice to the Nayar 'that (sic) was the lord of the manor.'\textsuperscript{30} In the revenue and expenditure accounts of the Zamorin for 1790-91 customs amounted to 9.2 per cent of the total revenues. We know from other evidence that by the end of the eighteenth century the Malabar kings and princes had alienated a large part of their rights over customs revenues to the European companies.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore one can safely assume that in the early years of the eighteenth century before the European companies attained formidable powers the contribution of trade based customs to the total revenues would have been much greater. Graeme in his report refers to the 'King of Badalamevi' granting to the English company 'the whole right of collecting customs' throughout his dominions for a sum of 21,000 silver fanams per year.\textsuperscript{32} On the basis of this figure, Innes felt that 'they were not a very

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{28}KPPM, \textit{op. cit.}, p.325
\item \textsuperscript{29} M.N. Pearson, \textit{The Portuguese in India}, Hyderabad, 1987, p.48
\item \textsuperscript{30} Innes, \textit{op. cit.}, p.379
\item \textsuperscript{31} See J.C.R.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Graeme's Report, \textit{op. cit.}, para 81
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fruitful source of revenue..." On comparing the 1763 estimate for the customs revenue of Chirakkal with the later chunkam collections of the Zamorin in 1740 we find that the former still exceeded the latter by nearly by 32 per cent in absolute terms. If we take into account the smaller extent of Chirakkal and the relatively weaker position of its rulers vis-a-vis the Zamorin and the inflation in the intervening years we find that customs constituted an extremely rich tax source in Malabar with its high level of mercantile activity. Land customs constituted an important revenue sources for the princes, Naduvažhis and Desavažhis in the interior areas.

The next most important source of income came from the rental proceeds from the lands under the direct control of the royal family known as Chericals. The Samudiri Kovilagam or the Zamorin's palace had more than a hundred chericals under their charge. The forest rich Nilambur Kovilagam had thirteen chericals in the nineteenth century. Interest rates on kanam loans ranged from 5 to 10 per cent a year. The kanam amount was always paid in cash (panams) while rent payment was usually in kind. While such details of rental transactions are available no information is forthcoming in the aggregate rent or surplus which these lands

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33. Innes, op. cit., p.379
yielded to the Zamorins.\textsuperscript{34} Another important source of revenue was the tax on certain trades or occupation.\textsuperscript{35} The Mapillas paid a capitation fee ranging from 2 to 4 fanams.\textsuperscript{36} Rakshabhogam or protection money was levied by the overlord on his subordinate princes. This tax seems to have been levied in later times not only by the overlord but also by companies of armed Nairs. Apart from these regular taxes the king levied a number of succession cesses. A fourth set of revenue sources consisted of penal fines or cesses. These taxes were also levied by naduvazhis and desavazhis. The fifth class of revenues were related to the ruler’s rights to forests, hunting cesses and wild animals. Then there were certain very characteristic feudal levies. Duels were very often fought by feuding parties or their mercenary representatives. The Raja who often acted as the umpire charged amkam for this. Burton noted that this was a source of considerable income amounting at tunes

\textsuperscript{34}\textsuperscript{34} See paper transcripts of lease deeds of the Zamorin’s Estate from A.D. 1761 to 1853. Samudiri Kovilagam Records, Vallathol Library, Edappal.

\textsuperscript{35} The valapanam which literally means net money was levied on fishermen. The catty and chatty panam or the knife and still tax were levied on those engaged in toddy tapping and liquor brewing. Weavers paid the surry panam for each square hole that they made in the floor, in which they got while weaving. A boat tax known as valla panam or toney panam was imposed on the Muguars or those of the fishermen caste. KPPM, \textit{op. cit.}, vol.II, p.336

\textsuperscript{36} ibid.
upto 1,000 fanams. Kola was an emergency tax which was at times forcibly collected. Kalcha consisted of presents which had to be given to the Raja or the naduvazhi on various fixed occasions and is said to have ranged between two to two thousand fanams.37

This account of the various sources of revenue point to a highly unstable revenue base. The most predictable regular sources of revenue appear to have been the ruler's income from the cherical lands and trade customs. It is interesting to note that land revenue does not figure as an important source of revenue in the above sources. Most accounts of the revenue system of precolonial Malabar have emphasised the that a land tax was not levied by the state during this period. When the colonial state established itself in Malabar it discovered land revenue to be an extremely profitable and regular source of tax which could be collected without difficulty. The early administrators tried hard to locate earlier estimates of the revenue yielding capacity of the region to use as a base to decide at what level the revenue demand could be pitched at. However, no such information was available for the pre-Mysorean period in Malabar's history. The early British officials then advanced explanations for this apparent absence of a land tax. According to Thomas Warden, there was no argument that proved that 'the Rajahs required a larger revenue than what their royalties gave to them to enable them to

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37. Burton, op. cit., pp.197-198
conduct their Government'. Another official William Thackeray was of the view that, 'The Rajas had other sources of revenues, from fines, royalties, imports, personal taxes, and plunder, which were sufficient to support them. There was no army besides the militia, nor any expensive establishments to support, so that there does not seem to have been any necessity for a land tax, nor had the Rajas power perhaps to collect one'.

In 1792 the Zamorin reported to the Joint Commissioners that in Malabar the Nayars traditionally held land free of revenue and were obliged to assist the king only in times of war. The Joint Commissioners accepted this view as conclusive evidence of the absence of land tax in Malabar. This view was also shared by other Britishers such as Captain Walker and Murdoch Brown. In contrast to the generally held view that a land tax was unknown in pre-Mysorean Malabar, Munro in a report to the government on the village administration of Malabar recognized that a land tax was collected in the region though not regularly. William Logan also argued against the view that land revenue was never customarily collected in Malabar. Logan's arguments in favour of

39. "Extracts from Mr Thackeray's Report on the Revenue Affairs of Malabar"
a land tax remains till date the most perceptive historical treatment of this issue. He begins by asserting that a land tax was collected in Malabar till the time of the Perumals but subsequently fell into disuse. Going into the etymology of the term pattom, he argues that it originally meant the ruler’s share of the produce. With the breakup of the centralised Perumal rule the pattom was appropriated by the various petty chieftains. To quote Logan, "No revenue" was in one sense levied from the petty chieftains who thus flocked around the standards of the great families, for the petty chiefs themselves enjoyed the ancient land revenue assessment. But in another sense land revenue was paid on every cultivated acre: the difficulty was to see and realise that this was really what, in every other Indian province, constituted the basis of the revenues of the province.41

Expenditure:

The Zamorin's expenditure accounts given above for the year 1790-91, does give some idea of the changes and magnitude of royal expenditure over time during the eighteenth century. On the basis of the unrevised expenditure accounts for 1790-91 we obtain the following break up under the various heads as proportions of the total. The military and the Zamorin's establishment together accounted for 88 per cent of the total expenditure.

Ecclesiastical expenses and routine administrative expenses

amounted to 1.7 per cent and 0.4 per cent respectively, while presents accounted for another 0.4 per cent.

The above expenditure account may be revised to make it more representative for the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, on the basis of qualitative information that is available for the administrative structure of the pre-colonial state in Malabar. For the pre-Mysorean period we can safely omit the expenditure licensed on the Travancore army because of the traditional enmity between these two kingdoms. Disbursements towards meeting the expenditure of auxiliary Nayar forces during peace time seems to be unlikely since this was one of the obligations of tributary chiefs and Naduvazhis. Thus the Zamorin's military expenditure was essentially limited to maintaining his own personal guards.

During the eighteenth century Malabar witnessed increasing military conflicts. Not only did military conflicts became more frequent, but the technology of warfare became more sophisticated and expensive. The greater use of fire arms, especially artillery pieces and gunpowder and shot substantially pushed up the cost of war. The European trading companies became willing suppliers of fire arms and ammunition. In such a context military expenditure can safely be assumed to have registered an increasing trend over the eighteenth century. In spite of constant wars the late medieval state in Malabar neither attempted to create a centralised standing army nor did it try to centralize finances and resources by circumventing or suppressing the local
potentates.

The Zamorin's establishment included the expenses of the senior princes which amounted to 31.3 per cent of the total expenditure in 1790-91. One striking feature of the royalty in Malabar was their markedly frugal lifestyle in relation to their counterparts elsewhere and especially of the Mughal successor states. The royalty and the aristocracy in Malabar did not have a tendency to settle in cities in marked contrast to the phenomenon of urban based elite consumption which Bayly has discussed for north India.42 The major sources of expenditure would thus have been on maintaining the palaces of the various princes, the armed royal guard and the expenses incurred on customary of festivals and religious ceremonies.

The argument here is that the routine wants of the royalty and the district level feudatories were limited, and could be easily met by revenues from customs on trade, income from private lands and judicial cesses without resort to a generalized regular land tax.

42. See C.A. Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1880, p.57. Buchanan observed, "The present Sekhury Raja is a poor looking, stupid old man, and his abode and attendance are the most wretched of anything that I have seen, belonging to a person who claimed sovereignty." (p.351) Writing about the palace of another Raja of South Malabar, he observed, "it is roofed with tiles, and totally destitute of elegance or neatness, but is looked upon by the natives as a prodigy." Buchanan, A Journey from Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, Madras, 1870, vol. I, p.390.
SECTION III: Trade and the Agrarian Economy

Malabar imported its basic subsistence goods, namely rice, paddy, cloth and salt from outside while exporting its famed spices to other parts of the sub-continent as well as to Europe. The commodities which were the most important profit earners for Malabar were its spices (namely pepper and cardamom) and hard woods. Coconut, betel nut, Laccadives' coir and cowries were also important but low value articles in Malabar's export trade. The region had no significant manufacturing industry. Some coarse cloth was produced locally, but the bulk of the region's cloth demand was met by imports of piecegoods from Bengal, Surat and the Tamil districts of Coimbatore and Salem. In most studies on medieval Asian trade the focus has been on the high value luxury commodities. Only recently have historians begun to realise the significance of the bulk trade in cheaper staples in supporting the luxury trade. The picture that emerges in the discussion

43. "... as to the manufactures, unless vegetable oils and coir... fall under that denomination there are hardly any others..." J.C.R., op. cit., vol.II, para 412

44. ibid., para 414

45. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Portuguese, the port of Basrur and the rice trade, 1600 - 1650" in Subrahmanyam, ed. Merchants, Markets and the State in early modern India. Contrary to Bayly's contention that "trade in items such as grain and salt was a reflection of taste rather than need..." in Malabar's case rice
above suggests an economy which neither produced enough of its basic subsistence staple, nor specialised in secondary manufacturing industry. The export of high value commercial agricultural products earned Malabar the necessary revenues pay for its essential basic necessities. The Joint Commissioners described this phenomenon thus - '...in the trade with the Northern countries of India, Persia and Arabia, and also with China, Coromandel and Europe; all these pay in liquidation of their commercial transactions with Malabar, a considerable balance in cash, whilst with Canara and Bengal, the case is reversed.' 46

Logan writing in the late 19th century also commented on Malabar's history of producing insufficient grain for its consumption and its import from Canara. 47 48 Malabar's financing of its rice imports out of the proceeds from its commercial exports was also stressed by Logan 'Malabar pays for much of the grain consumed by the people out of the money obtained for its special products - coconuts, coir, coconut oil, areca nuts,

[cont.]

importation was indispensable for its survival. See Bayly, Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars, Delhi, 1983, p.57

46. J.C.R., op. cit., para 425

47. Logan, op. cit., vol.II p.330

48. ' Down to the present day an artificial famine can always be produced in Malabar by stopping its imports of grain and it appears to have been the same in the sixteenth century.' Logan, op. cit., vol.II p.330
coffee, pepper, ginger, cardamom, timber, etc.' The relative prices of pepper and rice over the eighteenth century suggests that Malabar was in a very advantageous position with regard to its balance of trade and payments. The increasing price differential between paddy or rice and pepper while suggestive of Malabar's profit and positive trade and payments balances does not constitute sufficient evidence for Malabar's increasing profits.

Table 1.1 Price of Rice and Pepper in the 18th century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rice prices (Pagodas per Corge)</th>
<th>Pepper prices (Rs per Candy)</th>
<th>Relative price (Pepper/Rice)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1728 (March)</td>
<td>27 to 28</td>
<td>61-62.5</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735-36 (Mar.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: 1 Corge of 42 Morays = 1470 seers
1 Candy = 560 lb. 1 Pagoda = 3.5 Rupees.

Changes in Malabar's own production and consumption of rice as well as the exported amount of pepper need to be estimated. Ezechiel Rahabi estimated in 1733 that 'in a period of complete peace and given a good harvest' the coast would produce 28,000

49. Logan, op. cit., p.214
khandies that is 14 million pounds of pepper. On the basis of the annual export estimates for the area south of Calicut, Das Gupta estimated Calicut's exports in the middle of the eighteenth century to be about 9 million pounds. Given the large number of kanam documents and the availability of cultivable land in Malabar it is plausible that area under cultivation increased. However, with about 64 per cent of the pepper output exported, this expansion of cultivation appears to have been significantly fuelled by foreign trade. Though the European Companies' share was only about a third, their greater military commercial power vis-a-vis their competitors suggest their domination of the market.

The population figures for this period are also highly speculative. According to Das Gupta 'The entire population of the Coast appears to have numbered around 4 million throughout much of the eighteenth century.' He, however, does not provide any clue as to how this estimate was formed. The British estimate of Malabar's population in 1807 at 707,556 appears to be a gross

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51. ibid. p.196

52. The European Companies' share of the total exports was only a third with Indian, Arab and private European merchants taking the rest. See Das Gupta, ibid.

53. ibid.
underestimate. Our first estimate of 1 million for that part of the coast which constituted British Malabar, is reached by backward extrapolation. The average annual compound rate of growth for the period 1871 to 1911 was imputed for the 18th century. Since most population growth curves follow an asymptotic curve, one can safely assume a higher rate of growth (in relation to the post 1871 period) of say 1.5 per cent for the eighteenth century. 54 This estimate leads to a population figure of 53,6032 which is less than half of Das Gupta's estimate.

Late eighteenth century records picture the period to the Mysorean invasion as one of depopulation and economic dislocation. Since the cultivating classes did not flee during the Mysorean occupation, agricultural production was in all likelihood not affected adversely. The land revenue jama estimates of Tippoo come quite close to early colonial land revenue demand schedules. In all probability Malabar did not witness any major depopulation in this period.

Thus demographic expansion appears to have definitely taken place in eighteenth century Malabar, as suggested by Subrahmanyam. However, his attempt to downplay the exogenous factor in the growth in trade is problematic. Domestic agrarian expansion including monetization and commercialization went hand

54. This is the average annual compound rate of growth between 1851 and 1856. The choice of the years were dictated by the fact that the enumerations were comparable because of uniform reporting.
in hand with the growth in foreign trade. Given Malabar's long history of an 'open frontier' with the West it would be incorrect to separate the 'exogenous' from the 'internal'. Malabar's dependence on foreign trade was crucially dictated by its peculiar natural endowments and this in turn led to trade playing a major role in the reproduction of the economy. Frank Perlin's rejection of conceptions of India 'as an autonomous collectivity abraded here and there by contacts with European companies and commerce' applies very well to Malabar's experience.55

While the export price of pepper registered a secular increase since the third decade of the 15th century the monopolies over this trade and the sharp decline in pepper production restricted the revenues from this highly profitable commerce especially in the latter half of the 18th century. Thus relative prices in an age of fast changing political power configurations do not constitute the reliable indices of economic gain. The Mysorean invasion in the 1760s severely disrupted pepper production while increasing prices tremendously.

Thus Malabar's comfortable balance of trade and payments at least till the early eighteenth century meant a considerable inflow of specie into this coastal region. A regular inflow of specie, vigorous commercial activity and the large scale import of the region's basic staple rice strongly point to a high degree

55. Frank Perlin, 'Proto-industrialization and pre-colonial South Asia', Past and Present, 98, 1983, p.80
of commercialization. In the case of Malabar, in the absence of a regular land revenue taken in cash it is difficult to argue for state stimulated extension of a monetization as suggested by Habib for Mughal north India. The impact of the coast's brisk maritime commerce was felt beyond Malabar's port cities. The entire hinterland's economy was profoundly shaped by the commodity composition and pattern of Malabar's maritime and overland trade.

Section IV The European Impact

The European impact on Malabar can be studied under the following sub-heads:

i) The impact on Malabar's trade, maritime and the traditional trading groups.

ii) The impact on state revenues and expenditure.

iii) The long term cumulative impact on money availability and the mutation of agrarian relations.

The coming of the Portuguese and subsequently the Dutch, the French and the English did not alter the commodity composition of Malabar's foreign trade. Did the trade of the European companies result in a net addition to Malabar's foreign trade or did it merely mean a redistribution or diversion from the existing channels of trade? This problem has been tackled in the case of early eighteenth century Bengal by regarding the exports to Europe and the new market in Japan as net additions to Bengal's foreign trade. The decline in some of Bengal's Asian trade
routes, it has been argued, was not attributable to the policies of the VOC.\textsuperscript{56} In the case of Malabar, however, we cannot argue that the commercial activities of the European companies resulted in a net addition to its trade. Gujarati and Malabar traders had traditionally engaged in a brisk coastal trade between Malabar and the ports of Gujarat. We have evidence of the Portuguese and the English buying Malabar pepper in Surat for export to Europe. From the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar, these European trading companies continuously tried to control this coastal trade and engross the region's pepper output through monopolies. The Portuguese ban on Malabar's trade with Aden and the Red Sea and its policy to attack all ships from Calicut led to the blocking of the Malabar - West Asia trade route and the flight of wealthy Arab merchants from Calicut. Malabar pepper continued to be smuggled to Gujarat in light boats but Portuguese patrolling along the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay prevented its re-export to the Red Sea.\textsuperscript{57} Malabar's merchants were more affected than their Gujarati counterparts because the staple export commodity was pepper (on which there was a ban). Unlike the Gujaratis the Malabar traders could not diversify into other commodities owing to Malabar's restricted production base.\textsuperscript{58} Thus

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Om Prakash, "Bullion for Goods: International Trade and the Economy of Early Eighteenth Century Bengal" \textit{IESHR}, XIII, 1978, p.152
  \item \textsuperscript{57} M.N. Pearson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.47
  \item \textsuperscript{58} \textit{ibid.}
\end{itemize}
during the heyday of Portuguese control over Malabar their trade meant a substantial diversion of Malabar's exports from its traditional markets into Portuguese hands.

In the seventeenth century we have reports of the English buying Malabar pepper in Surat and the rich Gujarati merchant Virji Vora procuring spices from Malabar through his agents and then selling them to the English and the Dutch. According to Gopal, 'The encroachment of the English and the Dutch in the realm of coastal trade between Gujarat and Malabar practically eliminated the Malabaris... They (the local traders) were doomed to play a subsidiary role for the rest of the century.'

With the monopolization of pepper exports by the English and to a smaller extent by the French in Malabar, indigenous export trade in pepper decreased. Thus while the trade in Malabar's spices by the European companies did not mean a net addition to Malabar's imports, their entry into the region's trade led to the demotion of the Malabar mercantile groups who were engaged in foreign trade to a comprador status. Malabar's rich Mapilla merchants as well as the Chetti and Canarese and Gujarati merchants survived the European onslaught, by recognizing their subordinate status. They continued to act as middlemen in the


60. Surendra Gopal, *Commerce and crafts in Gujarat: 16th and 17th centuries*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 112-113
procurement of pepper and as financiers to the English factories right upto the end of the eighteenth century. This survival can however, not be taken as representative of continuity between the pre-European and European/colonial periods in Malabar’s history. The pepper exports from Malabar and the per unit price of this commodity registered an almost secular increase upto the 1760s but these trends were not correlated either with the growth and development of an independent mercantile group in Malabar or increasing revenues to Malabar’s ruling elite and an increased influx of specie into its the economy.

(ii) The Impact on State Revenues and Expenditure

Since the latter half of the seventeenth century and more so in the eighteenth century, the frequency of armed conflict between the different territorial powers of Malabar increased. The English Company’s factors, with great skill took full advantage of the centrifugal tendencies in Malabar’s (specially in North Malabar’s) political structure. While the English controlled Tellicherry, the French captured Mayyazhi which was renamed Mahe. The Dutch continued to hold a fort at Cannanore and got the Ali Raja to capture Coduvally.

In 1732 the Chirakkal territories were invaded by the forces of the Nayaka ruler of Bednur. The Canarese forces took control of the territory upto the Valarpattanam river.61

61. Innes, op.cit. p.57
A significant feature of this conflict is the fact that it was during this conflict that we get reliable evidence regarding the imposition of a regular land tax for the first time in the history of pre-colonial Malabar. According to Buchanan, it was in 1731-32 when confronted by the Mysorean invasion that the Kolattiri Raja, for the first time in Malabar’s history imposed a 20 per cent land tax on the patterns of all rice lands. It was not until they became the tributaries of Bednur that the Nileshwar Rajas, (who had earlier been part of Malabar) started collecting a regular land-revenue. Resources to fight the Canarese could not be raised from the conventional revenue sources and the Kolattiri Raja was forced to levy a regular land tax.

The steady erosion of sources of commercial revenues, territorial sovereignty, the increasing frequency of military conflicts and the consequent growth in the demand for imported ordnance combined to cumulatively produce a severe resource crunch. English commercial and territorial power expanded rapidly during the eighteenth century in North Malabar.62 In south

62. 1664 English begin to trade in the Zamorin’s dominions.  
1708 Obtained grant of the Tellicherry fort. Soon extended southwards by conquest from the Coringot Raja.  
1719 Obtained exclusive right to trade in pepper from Coringote Raja.  
1722 Obtained similar privileges from the Kolattiri.  
1725 Obtained similar privileges from the Cartinaad Raja.  
1734 Acquired Dharmapattanam island.  
1759 Obtained similar privileges from the Cotiote Raja.
Malabar political territorial fragmentation was negligible in relation to the north.

In a period of increasing pepper prices the northern princes continuously granted monopoly trading rights to the English, and in particular cases even sold the right to collect customs duties, denying themselves any share in the increasing price of pepper and the trade of the coast. This suggests a process of state involution.63

Secondly, while the revenue base was progressively being restricted, warfare contributed to a large extent in hiking up their expenditure. This is borne out by the frequent loans which the Malabar princes took from the English company to purchase rice and ordnance.64 Increasing expenditure on these items

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[cont.]

1760 a) Obtained from the Kolattiri the privilege of collecting customs duties within their own territories in consideration for a fixed sum of Rs.4,200 per year.

b) Obtained the mortgage of Randaterra as payment for the loans contracted by the Raja. Based on C.V.Aitchison, A collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring countries, Vol.V, Calcutta, 1864 p.343


64. A number of references to such loans are to be found in the Tellicherry Consultations and the H.M series. For instance, "The constant solicitations of the Prince for supplies of Rice, Ammunition & Ca, and which we have hitherto furnished him with hopes of being in possession of wherewithal to discharge his arrears, and now finding, notwithstanding all his promises, he is
further meant withdrawal of specie from the local economy into foreign hands. This in turn possibly decreased the availability of money within the Malabar economy. The imposition of regular land revenue by the Chirakkal Raja also points to this.

iii) The Impact on Malabar’s agrarian relations

The commercial and political expansion of the European companies (especially the English and to a lesser extent the French companies) in the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a profound cumulative impact on Malabar’s agrarian relations. The European impact on Malabar’s agrarian relations was refracted through the ecology and the contemporary political configurations of the region. The spice and garden dominated north was more prone to structural transformations of its agrarian economy than the wet paddy dominated south. The former was much more dependent on its returns from trade for its revenues, cash and essential foodgrains supplies. The North or the territories under the erstwhile control of the Kolattiri were also the areas which witnessed the largest alienation of political and economic

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[cont.]

very backward in performing them, leads us to fear a large sum may be due from him and which may perhaps be irrecoverable." Letter of Friday, 30 May T.C. 1735-36. "Received an ola from the Boyanore pressing us to assist him with a Loan of Rice, which he would certainly pay for soon. If not he would be forced to comply with the demands of his Enemies." 23 August 1726 T.C. 1726-27 vol.II. For debts incurred by the Zamorin see T.C. 1726-27, 1736-
privileges from its local potentates in the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Lack of population figures do not allow us even to attempt an estimation of the impact of commercialization in the 18th century on population distribution.

The historical origins of tenurial differences in North and South Malabar and more particularly in territorial arrangements can be traced to the eighteenth century. The North was also the most monetized and dependent on foreign trade generated revenues. This region was also the most deficient in locally produced rice.

The political crises of the eighteenth century and the alienation of custom revenues and trading rights in pepper to the European companies severely curtailed both the chiefs' surplus as well as their supply of cash. While the spread of the tax net shrunk greatly in the course of the eighteenth century, their expenses appear to have increased. Combined with this, it is possible that the economy was getting increasingly monetized. The existence of the kuzhikanam lease at the beginning of the 19th century provides some evidence of agricultural expansion. The increasing demand for spices, as evidenced by the increase in prices and the frequent references to smuggling suggest an increasing demand for these commodities. Population increase

[cont.]

37, etc.

65. The documents of the Vanjeri illam record a number of kuzhikanam deeds from the 16th century to the early 19th century, but surprisingly these do not contain a single entry for the entire 18th century. See V.G., Documents 34-A dated 1599, 80-A dated 1632, 88-A dated 1644, 100-A dated 1650, and 114-A dated
points to an expanding demand for rice. However, given the paucity of sources no definite assertion can be made on the issue of agricultural growth. Assuming no decline in the level of monetization, demographic growth even in the absence of agricultural expansion suggests greater demand for cash at a time when the rajas were facing a severe liquidity crunch. This resulted in a severe shortage of cash which seems to have got worse with the Mysorean invasions in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the British annexation and the revolts of the early 19th century. This is suggested by the increase in interest rates in Table 1.2. The larger landlords in the North faced with a dearth of cash were forced to borrow to such an extent from their tenants that the kanam tenure became a real mortgage in the North while it continued as a nominal mortgage in the paddy cropped southern taluks. Garden cultivation in the North expanded despite the dearth of cash by means of the subsidized kuzhikanam tenure which was granted by large tharavads for land reclamation. The large landlords could thus expand cultivation without investing any of their resources in the hope of future gains. The actual cost of cultivation was borne by the kuzhikanam tenants.

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[cont.] 56
Table 1.2 Interest rates in Malabar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Kanam</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1710</td>
<td>Vatakinnuakara desam</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>901*</td>
<td>Logan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>Walluvanad</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>840**</td>
<td>Logan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>Walluvanad</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>840**</td>
<td>Logan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Koodali</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>K.G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Thenilapuram</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>12,700*</td>
<td>K.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>Padur Village</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>K.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Kalamari Paryaram desam</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td></td>
<td>K.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>Buchanan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Pudiyangadi</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>V.G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>Tirur</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>102***</td>
<td>V.G.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Kanam amount given in panams, new panams and pothis of paddy. * denotes panams, ** new panams *** pothis of paddy.


This line of explanation which traces the origins of the North-South difference in landlord-tenant relations on the basis of dwindling export based revenue has to account for certain apparent contradictions.

For instance it may be asked that if indeed there did take place a general withdrawal of money from circulation, then the cash shortage would affect all social classes alike. In such a situation it would be difficult for one to expect that the tenant kanamdars would continue to have monetary resources to meet the rental obligations of the superior right holders. A closer study of the historical changes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries however clarifies the factors resulting in the differential income trajectories of the different agrarian

[cont.]
classes in North Malabar.

The janmis or the superior tenure holders belonged to the privileged and ascriptively superior Nambudiri and Nayar castes in Malabar. In North Malabar, however, Nambudiri monopoly over landed wealth was much weaker than in the south. An analysis of later village patta registers exhibits a concentration of titles to land in the hands of the samantans and Rajas who constituted the bulk of the regions royal or chiefly ruling groups.

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the various branches of the erstwhile dominant Chirakkal royal family began to proclaim their autonomy or independence. In these attempts they were forced to seek the help of the European companies. The ever willing European in return of military technology, hardware, cash loans and rice, demanded and received monopoly rights over the local spice trade and waiver of customs duties for one time payments. The waiver of customs in the long term had deleterious effects for the king as well as his local functionaries such as the naduvazhi. In a period of secular price rise, especially since the 1730s these arrangements denied the royalty and the ruling functionaries a share in the increasing profits from trade based revenues.

Thus what seems to have happened gradually but progressively was a sharp increase in expenses on the one hand coupled with a shrinking revenue base on the other. In the absence of any regular and heavy land tax the actual cultivators in North Malabar were left with a substantial surplus in garden produce,

[cont.]
which in a period of high commercialization found a ready market and constituted a significant source of cash income. The relatively (in relation to south Malabar) lower inequalities of land concentration and political and social power may have also contributed to the ability of the North Malabar peasantry to resist any attempt by the non-cultivating jammis to enhance the level of agriculture based surplus extraction.

Another factor, one of long duration, in explaining the lower political economic skewedness in North Malabar is related to the economics and biological rhythms of garden crop production. The coast based Mapilla merchants derived huge benefits from their role in the trade of the region and as creditors to local chiefs as well as the European factories. However, in North Malabar we do not come across any evidence for the investment of commercial profits by these merchants in land. This may probably have been due to the higher rates of return offered by trade than by agriculture. In the South Malabar, on the other hand we do not witness any equivalent weakening of the erstwhile ruling and land controlling groups vis-a-vis the subordinate revenue holders. Here the relation between the janmi and the kanamdar approximated very closely to that between the typical landlord and a tenant. The kanam amount was nominal and consequently the rent payable by the tenant was high. In these areas possibly because of the greater economic distance between the jammis and the kanamdars, the crises faced by the ruling groups could not be exploited by the subordinate tenure holders to their own advantage. Further, 

[cont.]
alienation of revenue rights to the Europeans and the parcellization of sovereignty was negligible in comparison to the North.

Here too we find evidence of a stringency of money faced by the local rulers. However, the Pattar or Eastern Brahmin traders who were active in the interior country trade of this area and in the coasting trade with the Tamil areas, seem to have acted as creditors to these late precolonial ruling houses. The more dependable returns from wet paddy cultivation combined with the higher rent extractable from wet paddy cultivation may have constituted an adequate incentives for diverting trading profits to agriculture in this region. Being a relatively larger producer of the staple food grain, in the southern taluks (especially Palghat) the dependence on the market was much less than in the North.

The Mysorean Interlude

The short Mysorean interlude (1766 to 1792) witnessed not only the military defeat of the Nayar ruling class and a drastic disruption of agrarian relations in the southern part of the district but it marked the first attempt at creating a centralized bureaucratic administration.

The available sources for this period are entirely limited to revenue and military matters. No original Mysorean sources pertaining to Malabar are available, except for an undeciphered

[cont.]
revenue demand schedule in the Modi script prepared by Hyder. Most of our information is based on later British references to Mysorean records.

The confrontation with the Mysoreans clearly demonstrated that the Malabar militias were no match for the centralized Mysorean army. The organizational inferiority and the ineffectualness of the Malabar militia in comparison with the Mysorean forces was symptomatic of the old order Malabar state's inability to withstand the political and administrative might of a centralized state. With the military defeat of the chiefs, a crucial prop of the traditional Malabar state structure collapsed.

The new revenue system introduced by Hyder and Tipu reduced the Rajas to mere tributaries who were dependents of the Mysorean government. The new practice of levying a 50 per cent land tax on the pattam or the janmis' share of the produce substantially reduced and in some cases (where 100 per cent of the pattam was taken) eliminated the surplus taken by the landlords. It must be noted at this point that very often the Mysorean land revenue settlement in Malabar is attributed exaggerated accuracy and completeness in early British revenue accounts. This probably stems from the fact that the early colonial revenue arrangements were substantially based on the Mysorean revenue estimates.

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[cont.]

1820.

66. This uncatalogued document is available in the Kerala State
Subsequent colonial officers, when faced by a persistent shortfall of collected revenue (with reference to Tipu’s estimates) observed that the territories ceded by Tipu were overrated. According to Munro, "This [i.e. the overrating of ceded territories] seems to be confirmed by experience in Malabar where after a trial of seven years, the revenue is still lower than the schedule."67

The Mysoreans did not pursue a uniform revenue policy throughout Malabar. The revenue collection in the northern taluks was left largely to the local chiefs. In the south the revenue administration was conducted directly by the Mysorean officials. Incessant insurgency and frequent military conflicts all over the peninsula forced Hyder Ali to permit the North Malabar chiefs to manage revenue collection independently.

According to Innes, upto 1789 in North Malabar the assessments were "fixed more in accordance with Malabar customs, and took the form of a proportion either of the verumpattam or share of the produce reserved for the janmi, or of the vilacchal meni pattam, or the balance of the gross produce available for distributing between the Government and the janmi."68 In South Malabar, in the initial years Hyder collected occasional nuzzers
[cont.]

Regional Archives, Kozhikode.


62
from a few nads. In North Malabar the revenue demand calculated as a proportion of the pattam was very high but the rates for commuting the produce into money revenue were low. In South Malabar this relationship was reversed. In the North the Rajas were in charge of local administration and revenue collection for the major part of the Mysorean occupation. In South Malabar the actual work of fixing, distributing and collecting the land revenue was carried out by Mysorean officers.

The burden of revenue demand in Malabar under Mysorean rule was lower in relation to that in other areas under its control. In Malabar only the pattam or the landholder's surplus was taxed in contrast to the gross produce which was taxed in other Mysorean territories. The weakness of the revenue machinery, fortunately for the Malabar population, resulted in a severe underestimation of the taxable resources of the country. In the North the average assessment as a percentage of the pattam came to 50 per cent and the average commutation rate was Rs.40.50 per 1000 seers of rice whereas in the South it was 26.16 per cent and Rs.89.46 respectively. Assuming the pattam to be 100 seers of rice, the revenue payable on wet paddy in South Malabar was 15.6 per cent higher than the revenue demand in the North. This variation in the spatial distribution of revenue demand was probably due to uneven character of Mysorean control. A comparison of Arshad Beg Khan's settlement in 1784-85 of South Malabar...

[cont.]

68. Innes, op. cit., p.327
Malabar (as given by Jinnea to the Joint Commissioners) with later British figures indicates underestimation to the tune of 60 per cent in the case of grain output and 88 per cent in the enumeration of productive trees. Tipu is alleged to have deliberately exaggerated the revenue yielding potential of the territories ceded to the British after his defeat in the Second Anglo-Mysore War. According to Munro, "this report [i.e. the overrating of the ceded territories by Tipu] seems to be confirmed by experience in Malabar where, after a trial of seven years, the revenue is still lower than the schedule. I could scarcely hope to bring the country up to its estimated value in so short a time, to do in one year what had not in the adjoining province been done in seven." If indeed this was the case, given the relatively constant if not increasing rate of taxation and the greater underestimation of taxable resources under Mysorean rule it follows that the tax burden on the district would have been much lighter under the Mysoreans compared to early Company rule. A large degree of underestimation resulted in scaling down the severity of the Mysorean revenue exaction considerably. Understating of the pattam and the ridiculously low commutation rates applied to garden produce in South Malabar allowed the janmi a share of the pattam even when the assessment was officially at 100 per cent. Ignorance of these practices may

70. Munro to Wellesley, 29th June 1799 in Martin's *Wellesley's*
have led some of the early British officers like Munro to conclude that Tipu had falsely exaggerated the revenue potential of the ceded territories. 71

Table 2.1 Mysorean and Early British Estimates of Taxable Agricultural Resources (Wet Lands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Malabar excluding Palghat</th>
<th>No. of Paras of seed sown</th>
<th>Out-turn Multiple</th>
<th>Gross Produce</th>
<th>No. of productive trees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As per Jinnea's account</td>
<td>704,645</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7,046,450</td>
<td>733,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As per Jamabandi of 1800-1 founded on Jinnea's account</td>
<td>782,194</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7,821,940</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As per the Janmi account</td>
<td>1865,040</td>
<td>about 6</td>
<td>11,262,125</td>
<td>2033,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pymash account given by the people themselves in 1805-6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Logan, op. cit., Vol.I, p.624

The extreme inequality in the distribution of the revenue burden on individual landholders was a cause of much complaint. According to Graeme, even though Arshad Beg Khan reduced the

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[cont.]

Despatches, vol.II, p.58

71. This report [i.e. the overrating of territories by Tipu] seems to be confirmed by experience in Malabar where, after a trial of seven years, the revenue is still lower than the schedule. I could scarcely hope to bring the country up to its estimated value in so short a time, to do in one year what had not in the adjoining province been done in seven. "Munro to Wellesley, Governor General, 29 June 1799 in Martins, op. cit.,
revenue assessment not all landholders benefited from it. 72 Direct administration of South Malabar meant that the political power of the local ruling landed magnates was either severely curtailed or totally eliminated. The Mysorean attempts to tax the entire pattam, even if only partially implemented would have greatly restricted the surplus appropriation of the local magnates. In many cases where the ruling Nair landed potentates fled the country after being defeated militarily the Kanamdars entered into a direct relationship with the State. 73

Mysorean rule in Malabar has often been portrayed by British writers and officials as a period of depopulation, shrinking cultivation and general misery. Although the increased revenue demand was in principle to be levied only on the landlord’s share of the produce, it is quite possible that some of the enhanced tax burden would have been passed on to the smaller cultivators by the former. In places where the Nambudiri janmis fled from Mysorean ruled areas and in taluks such as Wallavanad, Ernad and ______________
[cont.]
vol. II, p.58

72. "As regards individual estates the reduction was very irregularly applied, some having received a greater remission than they were entitled to, others not having benefited in the smallest degree." H.S.Graeme, A Report on the Revenue Administration of Malabar, dt. 14 Jan 1822

73. Deposition of Oodhut Row on 13 August 1793 in Mr. Duncan’s Report on the Revenue Settlement of the Ceded Countries, M.D.R Vol.2531, pp.96-100 -- Question "In what year did the Jenmakars run away?" Answer "In 964/1788-89 all the Jenmakars ran away and as to their not attending in Arshad Beg Khan’s time the cause was that in this country the principal Jenmakars are Nemboory
Ponnani where the Mapilla Kanamdars were powerful politically, such moves on the part of the Janmis would not have been possible. Consequently in South Malabar which was subject to direct Mysorean administration there appears to be no historical reason (evidence to the contrary being unavailable) for supposing that general cultivation and population growth suffered. In North Malabar where the Rajas remained in charge of revenue collection till the fag end of Mysorean rule, circumstantial evidence suggests a possible worsening of economic conditions for the agricultural producers. Having accepted the status of tributary princes under the Mysorean regime, the North Malabar Rajas were no longer dependent on their erstwhile vassals militarily and politically. In such a situation it may have been possible for them to pass the enhanced revenue burden to a large extent on to their subject agrarian population. Murdoch Brown in an interview with Francis Buchanan gave a perceptive account of the repercussions of this policy on Malabar's agrarian population - "By this new order of things these latter [the Chieftains] were invested with despotic authority over the other inhabitants, instead of the very limited prerogatives that they had enjoyed by the feudal system, under which they could neither exact revenue from the lands of their vassals, nor exercise any direct authority in these districts . . . In short, the precarious tenures by which the Rajas held their station, joined to the uncontrollable authority with which they were vested rendered them to be utmost rapacious; and not even a pretence was set up for exacting money from all such as were known to have any . . ."  

The destruction of pepper vines by Tipu and the establishment
of a state monopoly on the pepper, sandalwood and cardamom trade of Malabar most probably had a deleterious effect on the North garden cultivation. In a modern work on Malabar under Mysorean rule, Ibrahim Kunju contends that "Tipu purchased pepper from the producers at 100 Rupees a candy. Therefore it is clear that what Tipu did to monopolize the pepper trade was for the benefit of the cultivators." Kunju's argument that the pepper producers received a higher price is not very convincing. In 1792 in an agreement between the Company and the Chirakkal ruler, pepper was to be supplied at Rs 100 a candy. Rs 100 per candy, thus does not seem to be an unusually high price even during Tipu's occupation of Malabar. To make sure that the cultivators received this price Tipu would have had to either increase the purchase price by at least 50 per cent or do away with the intermediary traders. There is no evidence for either of these measures being taken. Further, when we take into account the fact that a 30 to 100 per cent assessment commuted at an exaggerated commutation price was levied, it becomes quite difficult to make an unqualified assertion that pepper producers benefited more under Tipu's regime.

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[cont.]

Brahmins who do not or did not then come to the Cutcherry"

74. Buchanan, op. cit., Vol.III, pp.189-90


76. See "Articles of Agreement between William Gamul Farmer,
The shortness of Mysorean rule and fundamental changes under subsequent British administration make it difficult to estimate the extent to which Malabar's agrarian structure was altered under the former. What the Mysoreans accomplished was a disruption of the old order and an experimentation with new institutions of a centralized state. This short span of years conclusively proved that the old precolonial state structure of Malabar could not survive when threatened by the military fiscalism of Mysore.

Concluding Remarks
A study of Malabar's late precolonial political economy calls for revising a number of assertions made on the precolonial economy and the changes effected by European merchant capitalist trading companies in eighteenth century India.

First, the sharp distinctions between indigenous economic and political change and exogenous factors need to be questioned, particularly in areas which had had a long history of commercial contacts with foreign countries. However, this does not mean that all foreign mercantile groups be considered as an undifferentiated entity. The activities of the European Companies' need to be distinguished from that of West Asian traders. The structure of the State cannot be discounted in understanding the nature of economic change. The extremely localized nature of the ancien regime in Malabar with its fuzzy lines of command prevented the concentration of the returns from trade by a few central rulers simultaneously creating space for a

[cont.]
high degree of political and military fluidity. The essentially military basis of the highly localized state structure in Malabar also created conditions for European companies to intervene subsequently with their superior military technology. In such a political context the increasing cost of war was very significantly related to changes in the region's economy.

Monetization and commercialization were not directly state sponsored, but political power ensured better terms of exchange. The mere survival of indigenous or non-European trading groups in the face of Company competition thus provides inadequate evidence of continuity. The princes' increasing shortage of cash by the end of the eighteenth century suggests a growth in the demand for cash because of growing commercialization and a marked increase in their expenditure relative to income. Here again we see the close interweaving of the 'exogenous' and the 'endogenous'. Finally, the British conquest of Malabar in 1798 should not be seen as a sudden rupture with the precolonial past but as the culmination of a long process of state involution occurring in the course of the eighteenth century. The extent of political and economic impact of the European Companies on different parts of the subcontinent appears to have depended on their antecedent trajectories of political economic development.

[cont.]

William Page and Major Alexander Dow ... and Revi Varma, the Raja of the country of Cherucul dated 12 October 1792" in Logan, op. cit., vol. 3, Part II, Document XVIII