SOCIETY AND ECONOMY OF PRE-MODERN KERALA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I

SOCIETY AND ECONOMY OF PRE-MODERN KERALA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The present chapter is an attempt to make a survey of the various aspects of a pre-colonial society and economy of Malabar. The substantial collection of literature and debates that have been published on the subject so far make the job of the present researcher less difficult. Malabar in the pre-colonial times cannot be considered as a separate entity as it has obviously been shared many common features with other parts of Kerala. Hence the account presented here may not be deemed as an exclusive narration of the features of Malabar district under the British, rather it necessarily transcends the geographical boundaries1 and offers a larger frame, Kerala as a whole. Hence it is intended to elucidate the nature of the process and relations of production, indeed the intricacies of the nature of ownership/proprietorship of the land along with the characteristics of redistribution and role of existing power centres.

The society under review, as it has often been described as medieval or pre-colonial, is characterised by jati-janmi-Naduvazhi system. The role of

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1 Malabar, in the modern sense, constitutes the northern districts of Kerala. But in the pre British times, Malabar was understood as the whole geographical area known as kerala. In the present chapter, the socio-economic condition of the whole Kerala is taken in to account.
temple in the formation of socio-economic as well as cultural fabric of the medieval society has been studied extensively. The territorial units called swarupams, are described to be the products of the existing socio-economic condition. The predominant role of the brahmans continued to be unchanged even during the time of swarupams. As the agrarian settlements are considered to be the base for the establishment of the swarupams, study of the consolidation of agrarian society may shed much light on the pre-modern economy and society.

The dominant theory on the evolution of an agrarian system in Kerala goes back to the establishment of the brahmin settlements during the early medieval times. An agrarian economy had developed under the temple-based brahmin oligarchy in early medieval times, and the agrarian society of Kerala consolidated by the beginning of the 16th century. In this social setting there were three broad types of rights on land in Kerala, namely, Cherikkal (royal land), devaswam (temple property), and the brahmaswam.

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Gradually, a hierarchy of land rights was developed, as owners, Kudiyar (tenants), and adiyar (agrestic bondmen). This kind of a relation was strengthened by caste hierarchy and very powerful customs and practices that were always designed to keep the brahmans and then Naduvazhis in the highest positions.9

It was the appropriation of surplus product and labour that resulted in the consolidation of a system of land ownership, giving rise to rights such as brahmaswam, devaswam and cherikkal. Brahmaswam and devaswam were permanent tenures as their lands were transferred as nirattipper with libation of water. The grants always contained the formulaic expression 'aachandra tarame santati pravesame', indicated permanency of the tenure. The term swam (thommu) also indicated a form of ownership different from other forms of rights over lands (avakasom). The rights over such lands were said to be absolute, which couldn't be violated by existing political forms. Lands directly held by the rulers were called Cherikkal, pandaravaga or kandulavu. They were also organised along similar lines, although the regulations were

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7 It was prevalent even during the time of Perumals, see M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cera Perumals of Makotai (800 - 1124 AD)*, Calicut, 1996., p.174.

8 K. N. Ganesh, *op. cit.*

not as rigid as the case of temples.\textsuperscript{10} Such lands provided for the daily expenses of the ruling family in grain, condiments and money and large number of other payments were also listed.

The problem of ownership of land is found to be very complex and perception of which has appeared to be rather misleading. The discussion on the question of the nature of right over land in Kerala has helped the formulation of theories that have been dominant. Prof. Elamkulam has emphasised the existence of private ownership in land which according to him, began in Kerala long before the Sangam age. The landlords and local chieftains were the pulayas, idayas, villavas and other agriculturists. From them, ownership was passed to the present class of landholders in the periods from the 9th to 13th centuries.\textsuperscript{11} He traces the time of origin of the janmi system in the medieval Kerala society back to 9\textsuperscript{th} century A. D.

M. G. S. Narayanan, while discussing the land tenure under Perumals of Makotai, maintains that all land seems to have belonged to the Chera king in theory. The governors were his feudatories and as such they enjoyed the lands in their districts in turn for payment of tribute. He highlighted the presence of three kinds of tenure in land, Janmam, Kanam, and Kutimai, which may be translated as the rights of proprietorship, tenancy and

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, p.141

\textsuperscript{11} Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai, \textit{op. cit.}, p.325. But this argument is not accepted by the historians.
occupancy respectively. In the view of Kesavan Veluthatt, the revenue was fixed by the king, where the interests of the temples were also taken into account. He corroborates this argument by using the Trikkaditanam inscription, which speaks of the *attaikkol*, the annual revenue. The revenue system mentioned here prompt us to believe that there existed a form of land ownership during the Chera period.

Another view presented here is with regard to a period from 16th to 18th century, when the consolidation of an agrarian society was more or less complete. The mechanism by which a technically backward agricultural economy like Kerala sustained the diverse lords and chiefs along with the religious institutions has to be sought in the form of ownership and control of land exercised by the dominant classes. In this context, the term 'land owner' is used to signify hereditary titular rights over land as applied to *janmam* and *swam*. This ownership involves birthright or customary right.

The term *janmi*, equivalent to the landlord, is associated with *janmam* means hereditary right or birth right. The term *janmam* literally means birth i.e., the right that the landlord comes to occupy descent from his predecessor who held the land. Hence his ownership of the land does not imply any services or dues that he has to pay to an overlord for maintaining his right.

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13 Kesavan Veluthat, *op. cit.*, p.60.
The *janmi* loses this right only if he transfers or sells his land and the new owner has to pay rent or dues because he does not come to own the land as a birthright.\textsuperscript{15} This birth right was legitimised by the brahmanas with their legal and genealogical tests.\textsuperscript{16}

According to one of the predominant conceptualisations, the term *janmam* originally meant their life time tenure and applied to the position of temple *uralar*. But they were re-appointed repeatedly as trustees of the temple. Though the appointment meant for a stipulated period, in effect, it was possible that a person could be a trustee for life time (*jivitam*). However, the rights over property became permanent and perpetual since there could be no practical difference between perceptual ownership rights and life time rights that were hereditary. This development took place during the long war (between the Cheras and Cholas) in the 11th century.\textsuperscript{17}

From 16\textsuperscript{th} century onwards, there were significant developments in the form of ownership of land, its relations and pattern of agriculture. Temples


\textsuperscript{16} The indigenous texts like *Keralolpathy* and *Vyavaharamala* played the role of ideological foundation for the brahmins which could early dominate rest of the society without establishing hegemony. Donald R. Davis has meticulously delineated how *Vyavaharamala* was incorporated by the upper class of Medieval Kerala. See his paper, ‘Recovering the Indigenous Legal Traditions of India: Classical Hindu Law in Practice in Late Medieval Kerala’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 27, 1999, pp. 159-213.

\textsuperscript{17} Elamkulam, *op. cit.*, p.348; Appendix to *Janmi Sampradayam Keralathil*, Kottayam, 1959, pp. 103-106.
became largest janmis in the beginning of the century.\textsuperscript{18} The temples and brahmans leased out lands to cultivators in order to provide for services in the temple or rent to the land owner.\textsuperscript{19} The right of janmi over land was defined by kiliyakkam or tradition and the obligations of tenants were determined by maryadai or custom.\textsuperscript{20} The point to be born in mind is that, either kiliyakkams or maryadai had no uniform pattern all over Kerala and never had any kind of rigid structures like kacchams that prevailed in early medieval Kerala, especially that of Muzhikkulam Kaccham\textsuperscript{21}.

The term 'control' indicates actual control over the process of production and distribution. In this context, many landholders who may not own the land would be actual controllers of land. The lands owned by large temples and individual owners were held by tenants under various forms of lease.\textsuperscript{22} Simple leases were the most widespread form of land holding. Most of the tenant cultivators (Kudiyans) were simple lease holders. Ordinary lease holders (pattam) and the temple or royal servants converted the rent to be paid

\textsuperscript{18} K. N. Ganesh, 'Agrarian Society,' \textit{op. cit.}, p.141.
\textsuperscript{20} The term Maryadai is wiedely found as desamarachati in \textit{Vanjeri Grandhavari} (hereafter V.G.), Calicut, 1987; see Doc. No. 27A (A. D. 1581) and No. 344 (A. D. 1599) Kiliyakkam is referred in V.G. Doc. 1A, 21 C. etc.
\textsuperscript{21} K. N. Ganesh, 'Agrarian Society', \textit{op. cit.}, p. 146; Muzhikalum kacham laid down strict rules and regulations for the conduct of temple affairs and the administration of temple properties. In the 9\textsuperscript{th} century A.D., the naduvazhis and representatives of temple committees framed these rules and regulations on the basis of general consensus after elaborate discussions.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid}, p.139.
to the land owner in the form of a service. The amount paid as *pattam* apparently didn't undergo radical change for long periods, and the lands remained with the same men even if the rights on land changed hands from one landlord to another.\(^23\)

Remarkable variations occurred in a period between 17th century and 18\(^{th}\) century in the nature of lease holdings, involving cultivating rights for an extended period, called *ulavupattam* or *marayapattam*. Probably the most important change was the growth of the lease-cum-mortgage tenures, which differentiated themselves from *verumpattam* in a marked way during this period.\(^24\) Mortgage tenures called *kanam* or *otti* had existed in early medieval times. It was based upon paying a particular amount of money as security for obtaining land or any other service for a stipulated period of time.\(^25\) But this practice was apparently concentrated in south Tiruvitamkur and very few transactions are found in other parts of Kerala.

By the 16\(^{th}\) century, transactions in land, either by paying security (*artham*) in kind or in cash were on the increase. Land mortgages were initially for a period from three to twelve years and redeemable by the landlord. Later the stipulated period of mortgage began to increase and during 18\(^{th}\) Century, lands were being held under mortgage for 36 and 48

\(^{23}\) *Ibid*, p. 142.
\(^{24}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{25}\) *Ibid*.

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years and sometimes even more. The security given for the lands amounted about three fourths of the value of the land but never equal to its value.\textsuperscript{26} It is obvious that the land was not at all a commodity to be sold at any cost. The interest on the security was deducted from the rent and realised from the land and the reminder paid as \textit{michavaram}. Sometimes an additional amount was supposed to be paid by the leaseholder for the renewal of a mortgage. The extent of land mortgaged became largely by 18\textsuperscript{th} century and the security was paid mostly in cash and involved a very large amount. Several other forms of pledging of lands like \textit{panayam} and \textit{padukalam} were developed in other parts of Kerala (especially in Kochi) which proves a plausible presence of cash payments. A permanent land holding like \textit{chora otti} was in practice in 18\textsuperscript{th} century mainly in Southern Tiruvitamkur.

Along with the mortgage tenure, another form of holding called \textit{Kulikkanam} was developed by 16\textsuperscript{th} century, which became a popular form of holding by 18\textsuperscript{th} century. \textit{Kulikkanam} was found normally associated with lease-cum-mortgage holdings. \textit{Kulikkanam} referred to the modified, often reduced share of produce levied on new trees grown in gardens on new plot brought under cultivation.\textsuperscript{27} It is a special kind of assessment extended to lands newly brought under cultivation or trees newly planted where a reduction was allowed for the initial period when the land was cultivated or

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid}, p.143.
\textsuperscript{27} V. G. Doc. 27A, 28A, 34A.
trees were growing. The Kulikanam tenure is a pointer to the emerging trend to extension of agriculture in the form of parambu or elevated land associated with cash crop farming. Parambu land (growing fruit trees and others) and arable lands were mortgaged as kuttikkuru and kuzhikkuru which were allotments corresponding to Kulikanam.

The Grandhavaris belonging to 16th to 18th centuries, especially the Vanjeri Grandhavari consists of several deed documents highlighting the importance of the emerging parambu land and its sources. Extension of a parambu – purayitam (household) economy must be perceived against the backdrop of the growing connectedness with the exterior world. Each parambu household was self-sufficient with its crops, which actually may have given them an independent identity, from the clutches of the feudal lords. Adiyars (agrestic slaves) were not attached to parambu and spread of Parambu gradually facilitated the settlement of various groups of artisans. Multiplication of parambu - purayitam settlements caused the increase of the collectivity of workers and labourers not fully servile to the land holders.

Several occupations became hereditary as a result of growing needs of the parambu economy; the best examples for which is that of avakasom on

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28 K. N. Ganesh, 'Agrarian Relations in Kerala: An over view' in E. K. G Nambiar, ed., Agrarian India, Problems and Perspectives, Calicut University, 1997, p.70; See also V. G. Doc. 21A, 22A.

29 M. R. Raghava Varier, Madhyakala Keralam Sambattu Samuham Samskaram (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1997, pp. 23-32. Though Prof. Varrier mentions the independence of the artisan groups, actually they were depending upon agriculture.
coconut tree climbing found mentioned in *Vanjeri Grandhavari*. Hereditary guilds extended their labour power to the land owners as part of the caste obligations and compulsory duties (*Katamai*). But the *kanakkars* and *kutiyars* were not the beneficiaries of this labour because these labourers had no obligation to them.

By 18th century, almost all services had become hereditary, and *virutti* holdings had acquired a permanent character. *Utamai*, the allotment of share of produce from land or in cash to royal and temple servants was recognized by 18th century. Both the overseer and the overlords siphoned off the surplus produce from the producing folk in various ways. Several forms of dues were in vogue, extracted either by the temple custodians or by the royal coffers. *Kavalpalam* or *Rakshabhogam* was paid to the temple servants (*Changatam*) who were in charge of the protection of land. The newly introduced customary obligations in the form of a number of dues to the rulers were collected either in cash or in kind. The ruler of Venad, for example collected *Rajakaram* during early 18th Century as an extra ordinary cess for maintaining cavalry (*Kutirappanthi*). The ruler of Kolathunad at the same

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time collected a cess during the invasion of Bednore.\textsuperscript{33} We will come to a detailed discussion on various types of dues later.

The question regarding the existence of land revenue system in Medieval Kerala remains a more complicated aspect of economy of the period. Some historians are of the view that land revenue was first instituted in Kerala in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. This kind of a perception, according to Elamkulam, is based upon the conditions after the advent of the Portuguese. In fact land revenue was extant in Kerala till the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. By then most of the landed property was confiscated, under devaswam, brahmaswam or Viruthi rights, which were absolutely exempted from the taxation. This fact contributed much in strengthening the belief that revenue system was absent in Kerala from 13\textsuperscript{th} to 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{34} Observations of the medieval chronicler, Sheikh Zeinuddin is also antithetical to existence of a revenue system. He states that there was no form of land tax or revenue extraction in 15th or 16th century in Kerala, though there were such dues imposed upon traders.\textsuperscript{35} However, the discussion below based on recent research throws more light on the subject.

\textsuperscript{33} Elamkulam, \textit{Studies}, p. 35. fn 2.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid}, p. 343; P. K. Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram} (Mal), Trivandrum, 1994, pp. 270-71.

Though the references regarding the existence of a systematic collection of land tax is scarce, we have ample corroborative evidence to prove the methods of extraction of surplus of produce. The term *pattam* is often denoted as a share of the produce to the overlord, though it is a term for tenure. The share of the produce to be paid by the *pattam* holders was normally a fixed amount.\(^{36}\) The general pattern was to fix the amount on the basis of sowing capacity of the land.\(^{37}\) *Pattam* as a mode of payment has similarity to *varam*, usually the overlord's share of the produce. The terms like *melvaram, melpathi, melodi*, etc. signify the collection of a fraction of the produce from different types of land, usually by the rulers, the temples, or chieftains. This differentiation was presumably *melvaram* and *koluvaram* the latter, the share going to the immediate landlord.\(^{38}\) Some scholars have endeavoured to unravel the intricacies related to the share of the produce and concluded that *melvaram, melpathi* etc., were considered the owner's share of produce, but were generally enjoyed by the ruling family or the temples.

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36 The term *pattam* was firstly found mentioned in *Tali Records* as the share of produce. It was actually the rulers' share that was agreed to give away to the temple expense as *pattam*. It was on this basis that there was an understanding that the lands granted as *devaswam* were to be exempted from the tax (*Raja bhogam*). When the right of *Rajabhogam* was transferred to temple or individuals, it naturally becomes *pattam*; see P. K. Gopalakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p.265.


38 *Ibid*, p.130.
which gave the dues the character of rent-tax.\textsuperscript{39} An important feature of this realization of dues like \textit{melvaram} is that when it was realised by the temples or rulers, the landholders and cultivators were considered as subjects to the overlords in a customary sense.

\textit{Melvaram} and \textit{pattam} the two forms of rent were generally collected twice a year during the months of \textit{kanni} and \textit{kumbham}, i.e, September – October and December – January respectively, in the case of double crop lands, and once in the case of single crop lands. In the case of \textit{melvaram}, the realisation differed from half the total yield to one-fifth or one-sixth of the total yield. Lands yielding \textit{melpathi} or \textit{melvaram} might have been held on a share-cropping basis. Collection of a fixed amount per crop was more common than the collection of a fraction of the produce.

Default of rent was considered to be a serious crime. In the cases, the cultivators fail to pay the rent arrears would be collected with the next installment. Though there were instances of imposing the double amount on the defaulters and eviction of a regular defaulter in the early medieval period, such instances were not reported later on. Still records from Nanjinad in southern Travancore mention other forms of coercion as well. One of which was the treatment of arrears as \textit{padukalam} by which the royal representatives were free to treat the tenants as debtors, inflicting punishment on them

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 130-31. He calls it ‘rent-tax’ as it is characterised by the features of both rent and tax.
including seizure of lands for non-payment of the arrears, along with its interest. Another was the prevention of cultivation in the lands held by defaulters until the rent in arrears were paid. Sometimes a whole village or desam would be so prevented from carrying out their agricultural activities (desattadai, or desamudakkam). There were additional cess like Kachchayavinai (payment of cloth), pativukanikkai (fee paid by the cultivator, for preparing the document showing his rights on land called pativu) etc.40

Allotment of the share of produce to the overlord was not simple. Several landlords like temples, brahmans etc. received a fixed amount as the overlord's share from the same land. The landholder paying the overlords' share might have leased his lands, so that he himself was receiving rent from his tenants. Sometimes the rent going to the king or the overlord was differentiated from the rent going to the landholder himself, whether they were individuals or bodies like temples, mathas etc. Hence from the total rent, the amount to the landholder (koluvaram, as in the case of Nanjinadu) also has to be deducted. From the details produced here, we can infer that a lion's share of the total produce was appropriated by all the overlords put together. In some cases, even the landholder's share was taken by overlords like temples. But the case of thanathu land was quite different, as the rent

was collected exclusively by the actual overlord and no other overlord could receive any share from it. However the rent of the pre-colonial times was entirely different from the revenue regime that was introduced by Mysoreans and later taken over by the British.

There were some extra ordinary payments and surcharges in cash like *kottaippanam* and *Mattalpanam* on the people of Nanjinadu, which were called by them as *Vaiyavari* or impossible dues. They had also to make payments for the stationing of army or other extra ordinary expenses from time to time. The Padmanabha swami temple as well as the rulers of Venad used to realise the same for time and again. They collected the dues like *Kappukattu Kettirai, Chittirai, Rakshabhogam, kandukalcha, taliappanam, piral kuttagai, Kuttadendam, Kottapanam* and *Viseshakanikai* etc. There existed the dues like *Anamuria, chengompu, podiyadi* and *Talaivilai* from northern parts of Venad. *Talaivilai* and *Talaippanam* were presumably charged from the depressed communities. They were similar to *Innavari* or poll tax on communities like *Nadars* and for *Irai, Ilakkam* collected from *Shanar* and others. There were other occasional dues like *Purusantharam* paid by families which the head of the property was inherited by his heir, *Adiyarar*, paid for conferring titles, appointments to various posts and *kuttadendam* and *uthirappadu* both were fines for offences. There are also

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references to *kuppakkalcha* and *melkalcha*, which were among the customary payments.\(^{42}\) Some other surcharges were generally termed as *adakkuvathu*, including *melalavu*, *kaikkuli* and *manuchaveetham* normally realised by the people mediating on transactions.

We have ample references to the dues going to the temples in the form of special dues like *Onam Chelavu*, *Karkataka Chelavu*, *Chenkompu*, *Anamurai*, *Pulai irai*, *meni irai* etc. which were also collected by the rulers as mentioned above. When the Navayakkulum temple was transferred to Akkaiyur Devan, the dues collected by the ruler like *Chengompu*, *Talaivilai*, *Muppura munnali*, *Angam*, *Chungam*, *Taragu* etc. were also transferred along with temple.\(^{43}\) We can see the practice of maintaining a royal representative or *adhikari* and tax collector or *Turakkarai* was being continued. Besides, the references about accountants like *Karuvakara Kanakkku* and *Pandara kanakku*, who were in charge of maintaining royal dues, suggest that there existed an institutionalized collection of revenue by the state of Venad. But at the same time the variation in the taxation and some other specificities prompted some scholars to conclude that there couldn't be a centralised revenue department, whose success was presumably depended upon the ability of the accountant as well as the princes to exercise their authority. The

\(^{42}\) *Ibid*, p.172.

above stated facts are sufficient to understand the system of revenue existed in medieval Kerala.

**Pattern of Settlement**

A picture of the pattern of settlements may be made clear by going through the names of *purayidams* or household sites occupied by the individuals. We have very few evidences on occupational structure of settlements. *Tharisappalli* copper plates of 849 C.E. mentions the occupational families such as *Ilavas* (toddy tappers), *Vannar* (Washer man), *taccar* (carpenters), and *Vaniyars*, literally merchants but oil mongers in the present context, handed over to the donee along with the land. The same practice can be seen repeated in the Vira Raghava copper plates of 1225 C.E., where the five artisanal workers, *ainkammalar* were also provided for the donees. Kollur Matham Plates of 1189 C.E. also suggests the presence of different occupational groups like oil mongers, potters, washermen etc. in the settlement. The temple oriented brahman settlements had specialist functionaries such as drummers (*uvaccar*) and garland makers.44 The basic occupational groups of such settlements consisted of agricultural labourers, ritual-cum medicine men, astrologers, washermen and so on. The coastal area was inhabited by the fisher folk.45 The most common agrestic slaves were constituted by the cherumas, pulayas, kanakkars, parayas etc. along with

Malayas, kadars, and Nayadis who were major hill tribes.46 By the extension of the agriculture to the hill tracts, these tribals naturally played an important role in the agricultural production.

Redistribution and consumption

The gradual development of the production process naturally demanded a redistribution system. Concepts of 'reciprocity and 'redistribution' can be applied to the pre-modern system of exchange in our society, though not in the very strict sense as Polyanyi formulated.47 We can point out the fact that the temples had played a major role which stood at the centre of redistribution of the rent collected. Besides, they also acted as major centres for transactions in cash or kind. Quite often, the huge amount was spent mainly for construction and beautification of temples, and the personal consumption of their overlords provided the major channels of redistribution of the amount coming to the hands of the overlords.48 There were instances of occasional/customary practices of giving away the gifts to the overlords by the tenants or cultivators as well as the endowments offered to the scholars or priests by the overlords/the state.

Utilisation of rent actually was determined by institutions and individuals: A substantial part of rent was under the control of temples royal households and institutions like maths. There were some instances of utilisation of nityanadai chelavu in some temples and allotment of Chandra chelavu for various koyikkals. Apart from this there were some allotments in cash or paddy for specific expenditure in temples like maintaining lamps, providing garlands, paying the temple servants etc. There were also some allotments for constructing or repairing shrines. Construction and beautification of houses of overlords was another way of consumption. But the other side of picture was painfully bleak. The primary producers and artisans groups often failed to meet the both ends together, though they were actual owners of produce. The consumption pattern however reveals that, there existed entirely unequal distribution of wealth.

Trade

We have a large corpus of inscriptions and literature which shed light upon the existence of an extensive trade network from the very ancient times onwards. Characterisation of the society under discussion as 'self sufficient' seems to be a partial fact. The pattern of production developed in Kerala was production for use and production for market/exchange which was the prime cause of the internal developments in the various sub regions which led to the
growth of trade and trading centres.\(^4^9\) Kerala's trade was spread in three levels namely, local trade, long distance overland trade and long distance overseas trade\(^5^0\).

**Local trade**

The so-called subsistence oriented economy had produced surplus in agriculture as well as in craft production which were used for procuring the items of need. Certain areas produced a surplus of some articles but lacked items which had to be acquired by exchanging the surplus. Medieval trade of Malabar was based on small farming and handicrafts production.\(^5^1\) Village markets in regular intervals show institutional forms of this kind of exchange.\(^5^2\) As found elsewhere in India, the periodical fairs, the *melas*, where only specialized traders met together to sell and replenish their stocks also was a characteristic feature of the local trade.\(^5^3\) References in *Unniyati Charitam*, *Unninili Sandesam* and *Ananthapura Varnanam* etc., corroborate the presence of a strong and extensive market network in the hinterland. Presumably, barter was the most common form of exchange prior to the wide


\(^{5^0}\) This classification is by Prof. Varrier, which is cited here for the purpose of elucidation.


\(^{5^2}\) Ibid, pp. 99-100.

\(^{5^3}\) Prof. K. N. Chaudhuri, while classifying the types of Asian markets, highlights these fairs as an important aspect of local trade; see, K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660-1760*, Cambridge, 1978, p. 138.
circulation of money and no considerable change in this regard be found. Interestingly, local trade continued its course without considerable changes for quite a long time. Athanis and Angadis are repositories of the existence of peddling trade in Kerala.

**Long distance trade**

Long distance trade on land was somewhat complex in its functioning and had spread out whole of South India extending to Bengal in the East and Gujarat in the west. Merchants from the regions of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Konkan' Andhra Pradesh, Kalinga, Malwa, Bengal etc., appeared in the interior markets of Kerala. The organisation of trading centres called nakaram were evolved in Kollam (Quilon), Kodungallur, Thazhakkad, Bhaskarappuram and Pantalayani Kollam during the time of Perumals.  

Epigraphical records from 9th to 12th century A.D. mention some trading organisations like anchuvannam, Manigramam, nanadesikal, patinenbhumi. Tisai ayirattu ainnuutuvvar and valanciyar etc. were engaged in commercial activities cutting across the boundaries of the various political regions of South India. Tamil Brahmans were one of the active trading groups who supplied the commodities like rice, cotton, silk, fabrics and chillies to Kerala and returned large quantity of spices, especially pepper.  

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54 M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals*, p.171  
Kerala are noticed in this period in several inscriptions (13th - 14th centuries) of different parts of Chola empire. There are frequent references in Chola inscriptions from Tanjore, Tiruchirappalli and South Arcot to Kutira chettikal (horse dealers), who seems to have been importing horses from Arabia.57 Presumably they belonged to northern parts of Kerala. Chettis, Vaniyar and Kalavaniyar were other groups who activity engaged in trade.

Throughout medieval period, Malabar had sustained a vigorous merchant class. Groups of merchants had followed one another to commercial predominance. During the 16th century the Muslim aristocracy of commerce had retreated before the coming of the Portuguese. The vacuum was filled by the Konkani brahman's arrival on the coast.58 Along with the Konkanis, the Jews also left their age-long colony of Cranganore and they migrated to Kochi and Kozhikode.59 The Muslim merchant groups like Kunjalis and Karimis had been engaged in the lucrative business of Malabar. The Christian families like tharakans also had played their role in the trade of Kerala. Apart from luxury articles and food grains, considerable amount of metals, medicinal herbs, silk and other fabrics etc., were brought to Kerala. Though details of these transactions are not known, apparently the products were from North.

57 M.G.S. Narayanan, op. cit., p.172.
58 Ashin Das Gupta, op.cit. p.103.
Overseas trade

Malabar had made an imprint on the map of international trade from the very ancient times on. This land was considered to be a place of halt for traders on their way between the West and South East Asia. Al Idirisi of 12th century was first to call this land as 'Malabar', the land of pepper (Mall = wealth) which had a great reputation for spices. Large amount of spices including pepper' ginger, cardamom, cinnabar and Malabathrum' spikenard etc. were exported from Malabar. The Arab traders must have been able to get the support of a locally sanctioned group which had access to the regions of pepper and also to the cultivators. 'Trade diasporas' of the Arab Muslims were developed on the coast of Malabar, which were perhaps to render support to the Arab traders. The main role of merchants in sea port towns was to act as intermediaries between the producing class and the consuming markets which actually was widely scattered in space.

Malabar had an interesting feature in the domain of overseas trade: the commodities imported from Indonesia and China were exported again without being absorbed locally. Local consumption of imported goods was nominal. But at the same time the produce which came down from north was' to a large

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61 Ibid, p.105
62 K. N. Chaudhuri, op. cit., p.139.
extent, absorbed upon the coast.\textsuperscript{63} Trade through the Palghat gap, at times responded to a demand from the interior. Japanese copper would, occasionally, be sold to 'the merchants from the hills'.\textsuperscript{64}

The men who engaged in trade varied greatly in wealth and position. Persons like Ezechiel Rahabi, Haji Yusuf, Nelliappa Chetty, Padaram Chetti, Muccuttum Paquy etc., were very rich merchants of Malabar during 18\textsuperscript{th} century. The rich merchants were privileged to operate their business network with a number of associates who normally spread along different ports. They were usually called by various names, such as 'correspondents', 'agents' or brokers. These agents' role was instrumental in procuring the local goods as well as in selling out the goods brought from outside. When the European traders, especially the Portuguese and the Dutch endeavoured to engage in trade, the duties assigned to these correspondents varied. Firstly, to keep his foreign associates posted with local news and commercial intelligence. Secondly, to assist their vessels when the correspondent's port in all possible ways. Thirdly, to procure local cargo when this was desired\textsuperscript{65}. Some scholars characterise the Portuguese trade as 'higgle-haggle' trade. We are yet to locate the identity of the local traders of medieval Kerala as pedlars or small traders.

\textsuperscript{63} Ashin Das Gupta, \textit{op. cit.}, p.139.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 106-108.
One thing is obvious that the nature of overseas trade and composition of the trading groups had undergone major changes with the advent of the Portuguese in Malabar. Introduction of pass system (cartazes) was a great challenge as far as the traditional merchants were concerned. The quest for revenue and the struggle against the Muslim commercial aristocracy were coalesced into an elaborate pass system. The hostility of Portuguese towards Muslim traders has been occasionally regarded in religious terms and the fighting between the merchants became sustained and systematic. Incessant violence and hostility from the part of Europeans caused many traders, who were depending on coastal/overseas trade, to move inland and to invest in agriculture, especially, in cash crops.

Markets

Different kinds of markets like antichantha, aazhcha chanta, and Nalangadi were the common market places in pre-modern society. In addition to these occasional markets, there developed permanent bazars or markets exchanging goods such as rice, edible roots, vegetables, fruits, salt, pepper, oil, textiles etc. of daily life. Barter was the most common form of exchange and petty bargaining was the method of procurement. All the goods were supposed to be brought to the market by head/shoulder load, pack animals and by waters. The markets in interior regions like Tirumaruthur, Tamarasseri,

67 R. Varrier, "Socio-Economic" op. cit., p.100.
Angadippuram etc. are the evidences of the existence of extensive trade networks and transport of commodities.

Artisan classes had their own peculiar strict settlements called *theruvus*. In this way there were *chaliya theruvus*, where the weavers produced textile goods and *chakkara vanibha theruvu*, where the jaggery manufacturers settled and sold their products and *kusava theruvu*, where potters exhibited their articles for scale. These streets attracted many people and in the course of time were developed into markets. These markets had a wide range of goods from food stuffs to craft products.

It is reported that in the regular bazars, fairs were held on special occasions like Onam and Ramzan. It was supposed to be the duty of the chieftains to conduct these fairs aiming at encouraging the trade. A small amount was levied on articles sold. The fairs attracted traders from various parts of the region.

It is believed that the local markets in Malabar were monopolised by the Mappila merchants. Those traders had enjoyed virtual monopoly to procure and sell the commodities like pepper, cloth, rice and coir in all markets in the region. Though the predominant role of the Mappilas in

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these markets is undeniable, the role played by the Christian traders in the South and the Nair traders' interest in pepper in some areas etc. should not be underestimated.

The articles appeared in the rural fairs and markets included salt, spices, metal objects which were either produced in distant centres or made from raw materials which were not locally available. This type of exchange resulted in the rise of small fairs, markets and towns which were the mediating factors in the distribution of commodities. Place names like Parappanangadi, Tirurangadi, Angadippuram, Pazhayangadi and Putiyangadi most of which appeared in the medieval period are sufficient evidence to conclude that there existed an exclusive network of permanent markets throughout Malabar.

On the basis of the features of the exchange, commodities and locality, some scholars have attempted to classify the trading centres as follows:

a) Rural exchange nodes

b) Periodic fairs where itinerant and specialised traders gathered together to sell and buy commodities.

c) Interior markets and small scale bazars which catered to the necessities of comparatively wider regions and
d) The big emporia of foreign trade.\footnote{71}

Likewise, to some, the occasional gatherings like mamankam had played the role of a wider market.\footnote{72}

Kodungallur is considered to be one of the earliest emporia on the western coast. Though in ancient times Muciri was mainly a reputed centre of luxury goods, in later times there was a marked shift in the products by medieval period. By 13\textsuperscript{th} century, articles of trade in Kodungallur included not only imported luxury items like musk but also jaggery, salt, oil, grains, cloth etc., necessary items for the daily life of the common people.\footnote{73} Kollam, Kochi, Kozhikode, Kannur and in later times Thalasseri were prominent emporia of foreign trade. The changes in demand of commodities, international or regional politics often caused to vary the importance of trading centre from one to another. Interestingly, the foreign traders considered Malabar Coast as a whole as a unit of trade rather than some specific centres. The earlier centres of trade had retained the features of medieval towns where a farming element was present. The absence of a clear-cut demarcation of rural and urban boundaries was shared by the centres like Kodungallur, Kollam and Panthalayani Kollam. The medieval trade in Malabar was subjected to remarkable changes towards the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} century.

\footnote{71} R. Varier, \textit{op. cit.}, p.114.
\footnote{72} N. M. Namputiri, \textit{Mamankam Rekhakal} (Mal); Sukapuram, 2005.
\footnote{73} \textit{Ibid}, p.115.
It is argued that the trade was also subjected to dislocation due to the Mysorean invasions.\textsuperscript{74}

**Money**

Increasing exchanges among the local and overseas traders necessitated the circulation of various types of coins on different occasions. Inscriptions and contemporaneous deeds have often referred to the names and values of certain coins. Vazhappally copper plate speaks of *tinarum* (dinara), which to some writers, came to Kerala along with the Brahmans who came from the North. Apart from *dinara*, *palam kasu* and *kasu* are occasionally mentioned in Cera inscriptions. But the most common regular medium of exchange appears to have been gold of prescribed weight and standard.\textsuperscript{75}

*Dinarum* in the early medieval time, was a multi-purposed coin - a coin for giving away the *dana* and *dakshina* and to pay the rent, fines etc. Later it was considered and used to be a coin of common value.\textsuperscript{76} More importantly, money, in the earlier times was absolutely circulated through the hands of the rich and the big merchants only.

By the latter half of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, a group of new coins like *achu*, *kasu*, *panam*, *sakala* are found mentioned in the inscriptions. Period from

\textsuperscript{74} Ashin Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p.114. He argues that, by the Mysorean invasions, trade in North Malabar ceased to be an attractive profession. This statement can be seen as a part of the general view and demands further research.

\textsuperscript{75} M. G. S. Narayanan, *Perumals, op. cit.*, p.144.

\textsuperscript{76} R. Varieir, *Madhyakala Samuham*, p. 37.
13th century to 15th century witnessed considerable changes in the coins and use of money. It was in this time that panam was having a dual identity, that is, as a synonym for wealth/money and as a name of a particular coin. The transformation of panam from its first form in gold to lower metals indicates the popularisation of the use of money.

As mentioned earlier, the changing economic and social condition from 16th to 18th centuries necessitated the wider use of money. Extension of cash crops based economy and emergence of new tennurial forms like kanam, otti, artham and various forms of interest etc., suggest that there was considerably wider use of money. Likewise, the emerging parambu-purayidam economy witnessed growth of a class of wage labourers instead of agrestic slaves, also found money as an important factor. The contemporaneous records like Kootali, Vanjeri Grandhavaris and Kavalappara Papers extensively speak of the coins with a regional variation/distribution as well. Fanam, vira rayan putiya panam etc. were circulated in some areas of Malabar.77 Putupanam and panam were in use in southern part of Malabar.78 Kannanoor Putiya panam was another regional coin.79 If panam had a wider circulation throughout Kerala (Venad, Kochi, Valluvanad, Kozhikode), tharam is mentioned as coin of Kozhikode and

Kochi from 14th to 16th century.80 Though money had been circulated between the hands of affluent class, there is no meaning to believe that barter system was obsolete during the time. Even among the overseas companies, there was a custom of doing exchanges partially in cash and partially through barter.81 However money played the role of a catalyst in the process of emergence of a dynamic economy.

Power Structure and Relations

The socio-economic process of medieval Kerala was subjected to control of three different power centres, namely, the family, the jati and the swarupam. In the case of family, we have different varieties of which including patrilineal and patrilocal Namputiri Illam, the matrilineal taravad and swarupam and the matrilineal or patrilineal kinship or clan groups. Matrilineal kinship was prevalent among Nairs and in some areas among Mappilas and thiyyas. Some scholars argue that matrilineality in Kerala was a form of matriarchy or rather the two terms have been used almost synonymously. It is substantiated by documents on land transactions of that period, most of the deeds were made in the name of the families. Penvazhi avakasam was the transfer of rights on a hereditary basis along the family line. Though women were considered to be the titular heads of the families,

80 R. Varrier, Madhyakala, p.47.
81 Ashin Das Gupta, op. cit., p. 114.
the legal and juridical functions involving the household were carried out by men.

The typical matrilineal household is characterised by complexities of power hierarchy in terms of the order of seniority, inheritance and segmented pattern of rights and obligations. The tayvazhis and the kur (seniority rank) were always determining factors. Among the gradations within the swarupam seniority was the major criterion for becoming the ruler. This practice was called assuming Muppu (Eldership). Muppu was at the same time the head of the family and the titular ruler of the territory. The order of seniority (Muppumura) within the family was of importance. According to the system kuruvalcha, the swarupam would be divided into several kur and the order of seniority determined among them. The order of seniority was complicated by the emergence of Tayvalis, or mother’s lineages. The senior most male member, Karanavar/ammavan, who was whether son or brother acted as the custodian of the entire activities of the family and he symbolized the public power. The growing militarisation was the reason for the reinforcement of the public power of the male member. The medieval matrilineal household was essentially patriarchal, with a clear division in power relation between men and women in terms of their role in the public and domestic domains.

Taravads and Swarupams, to some historians, are extension of this family power.

Jati, the second power centre had a telling role in shaping the socio-economic relations in the period under discussion. Jati, is considered to be an after effect of the existing economic structure centred around the brahmins' land which remained as independent units of production. These units required permanency of labour and naturally, several families belonging to clannish groups must have been permanently engaged in food production as well as other essential functions. Occupational differentiation that evolved on the basis of the growing production relations and ritualistic order resulted in the growth of the jati system. Brahmin household had tried to distinguish themselves from others by the rest of the folk, by the ideal of purity and pollution in order to ensure the principle of inequality. Jati system cannot be viewed merely as an ideology based on brahminical treatises but it may be looked at primarily as an 'effective' way of division of labour in the pre modern society. The jati had determined even the force and relations of production and centres of power for ages, and in fact had acted as a separate centre of power as well. The institution of jati has been very much complex indeed, and having its own distinctions and patterns different from the caste system that existed in many other parts of India.

Seventh, Eighth and Ninth centuries witnessed the large scale proliferation of brahmadeyas or Brahmin villages all over Tamilakam. This resulted in the expansion of irrigated agriculture as well as of the new system of relation, eventually led to the super imposition of Brahmin proprietorship over many communal lands which introduced new social relations. There emerged an intermediary caste between Brahmins and peasants. Naturally there was a clear cut separation between the primary producers and the full time non functionaries such as administrators, warriors etc., who were entitled to lion's share of surplus through their managerial and protective functions.\(^8\)

In this sense the *jati* was made use for the siphoning off of the surplus by some influential groups. Indeed, it was for the same reason that the caste differentiation was introduced and maintained.

As mentioned before, the *jati* system prevailed here was a variant form, in which there was a vertical as well as horizontal element. The vertical element was consisted of a ritual hierarchy mediated by brahminical /sanskritic ideology. The horizontal element incorporated various occupational groups, caste groups, and sectors involved in every forms of production and exchange. It was in this way that the *Nazranis* and *Mappilas* were termed as separate *jatis* rather than religious groups. Even the Portuguese (Parankis), the

\(^{84}\) *Ibid*, p. 396.
Dutch and the English were called as separate jatis. Here we see a departure of Kerala form of jati from the so called caste system.

Barhmin landlords, who were the custodians of temple wealth and the proprietors of the village, had highest economic status as well. Those rich agamic specialists brahmins gradually emerged as a separate group called tantrikal as distinguished from the other brahmins. There were bhattas, chattas and santi among the brahmins who received virutti, the land-lease as reward for their services in the temple. There was a sharp differentiation between the brahmins themselves based on land control, the major landlords among Brahmins, identifying themselves as adhya as distinguished from others, called asya\textsuperscript{85}

The Madhyasta caste Potuval was the common man positioned as intermediary between the temple and devotees, who also were acted as the secretary of the temple, both variyar, the member of temple committees (variym) had received the virutti privilege. Other castes like marar, chakyar, nanniyar etc., were also rendering service to the temples in various capacities. These castes are generally called the antarala-jati, that is the caste between the brahmins and the non-brahmins, who were alternatively known as temple castes.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, pp. 398-9.
The emergence of a system of land control called *karanmai* was favourable to some non-brahmin castes, predominantly the Nairs. The class of intermediaries in land, with the rank of and entailing privileges of nobility owing allegiance only to the brahmin land lords, succeeded in asserting themselves in the temple oriented society. The peculiar form of the Nair women's relation with the brahman (*sambandham*) was an added quality for their closeness to the brahmans. Traditionally, the Nayar was a warrior and non-cultivating tenant. Gradually, some predominant Nair families acquired position of *taravad* with civil and military powers. The astuteness of the Nairs helped themselves successfully utilising the opportunities, and as a result, they became the intermediaries or supervisors of the land with the title of *Kanakkar*.

Transformation of craftsmen and artisans (*kammalars*) to the caste groups also occurred in the same manner through their attachment to the temple society. Inscriptional evidences refer to *taccar, Kollar, Kallavaniyar* (potters) *vaniyar* (oil mongers), *vannar* etc., were brought and settled in the temple village to ensure their service to society. The *parambu* (plot) names like *aasariparambu, aasarakandi, kollan parambu/thodika, thachan kandi/kunnu* etc., exemplify the extensive presence of these crafts/caste

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groups in a growing cash crop economy. They enjoyed occupancy right over land and this constituted the material incentive for them to be hereditary professional groups, and further, there was no other alternative for them as they were caught up in a social milieu of immobility and functional obligations. Each group had been accepting its annual rights from the concerned over lord as well.

Lower strata of the hierarchical social order was constituted by the primary producing class/castes such as pulayas, cherumas, and vettuvas. They were attached to the lands and were leased and mortgaged along with the lands. There developed the distancing of these jatis on the basis of purity/pollution by which their identity was reduced to servility (atiyayma) under the landlords/temples. Brahmins could successfully subjugate the avarnas primarily in three ways: economically, the brahmans possessed the right over their land; ritually, they were kept aloof from the sacred spaces as untouchables; and intellectually, all the resources and medium of attaining knowledge were denied to them.

References to the existence of agrestic slaves and hired labourers all over Kerala shed light on their role in the extension of an agrarian economy.

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90 K. P. Padmanabha Menon, Kochi Rajya Charithram, p. 121.
The hired labourers were taken in for seasonal work on lands such as transplantation of paddy plants and were paid daily wages mostly in kind. The *panans* of Thalassery and *Malayans* and *Kadars* of Kochi and the *Tiyans* in Kottayam worked as hired labourers of Christian and Nair landlords.\footnote{For a detailed discussion on agrestic slaves, see Johnsy Mathews, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-75.}

With the growth of coconut cultivation, the *Ezhavas* (*Tiyyas*) became an important caste serving on the land. Some among them served the *naduvazhis* as warriors known as *Chekon*, especially in Malabar. Though dynamic in production process, these people were deemed to be polluting castes by the brahmins so that they maintained several folk gods and goddesses in their own *kavus* for worship. This eventually caused to evolve two streams of culture in society, namely, 'high culture' and 'lower/popular culture'. While the upper castes composed of *janmis* and intermediaries represented the high culture; the lower castes represented the latter.

State, another major power centre was characterised by the political authority, which was wielded by extended joint families called *swarupams*\footnote{The following works delineates details the state formation of Medieval Kerala, K. N. Ganesh, "Structure of Political Authority in Medieval Kerala", in P. J. Cherian, *op. cit.*, 1999, K. N. Ganesh, 'Process of State Formation'; K. V. Krishna Iyer, *op. cit.*, 1989; M. G. S. Narayanan, *The Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, and Bonaventure Swai, 'Trade and Politics in 18th century Malabar,' mimeo, Unpublished, Dar es Salam, Tanzania, 1979.}. In fact, the early form of medieval state, the *Perumal*, was necessitated and sustained by the constitution of agrarian social formation under the initiative
of the Brahmins. Some scholars trace the origin of the *swarupams* into the *nadus* of the later *Cera* period. After the decline of the later *Cera* kingdom, some *nadus* disintegrated and others became *swarupams*, who were known by the location of the ruling joint family. *Swarupams* were following a matrilineal order and each had a family elder and other members were given a rank (*mura*). There is a tendency to represent the terms of *muppu* and *swarupam* in a reducible form of the king and kingdom, due to a lack of proper understanding of a period where in the central authority was absent.

Like the former rulers, the *Naduazhi* power was based upon the extraction and accumulation of surplus from the *nadus*, the regions which were under cultivation. Trade networks and the levies on trade also benefited them. According to the available evidences, the ruler didn't attempt to control the overseas trade in ports directly, but was receiving a share of tolls normally collected by the principal merchants. The most important example is that of the Zamorins of Kozhikode. The port of Kozhikode was under the control of Talachennor, a representative of the *samutiri* and the Kozhikode *Koya*. Similarly Kollam was not controlled directly, and the princes of Desinganad

95 K. N. Ganesh, 'Process of State formation', *op. cit.*
stayed at Kallada, to the north of Kollam. Similar were the cases of rulers of Kochi and Kodungallur. Tolls from trade were given high importance as they augmented the financial reserves of the rulers, a feature that played a major role in the rise of the Samutiri and the authority of Kolathunad and Venad.\(^97\)

The state system existed during the period was without much pomp or splendour and even without a standing army. More importantly, there was no legal formulation like *Kiliyakkams* or *Kachams*, the brahminical legal codes, but the ritual and economic role of the temple was noticeable. The *Naduvazhis* were conferred to be the rulers of the land and the managers and trustees of the temples by means of ceremonies such as *ariyittu vazcha* or *hiranyagarbha*. Temple *sanketams* were so powerful, which gave protection to rulers against outside invasions.\(^98\) The services of landlords and militia and the benediction of the brahmans were based by the elders to exercise effective control over the producers. Although customary authority ensured the subjugation of the producers, the segmented character of the ruling families also required the services of the *swarupis* to keep the cultivators completely suppressed.

Since an efficient system of revenue collection was absent, a large number of small chiefs and landlords existed everywhere, military power was essential for mobilization of resources for the ruler. Thus the ritual power of

the brahmans and the secular power of the non-brahmins who evolved into the nayar caste were the two major arms of the political authority, of the swarupams. As mentioned elsewhere, the surplus generated appears to have been utilized for unproductive activities like renovation or construction of temples, palace buildings etc.

In the changing political environment of the late medieval period, the swarupams were attempted to become larger states and some of them became victorious. Expansion of parambu lands, increase in spice trade with the West Asians or Europeans and the direct intervention of the ruling families in the organisation of trade etc., made this attempt favourable.

Conclusion

This chapter may be concluded with recapitulating the major points as follows. The land was central to the process of production and the relations of production also were determined by land. The whole land, came under the heads of brahmaswam, devaswam and cherikkal were owned or controlled by the influential groups which caused to evolve an absentee landlordism where the landless acted as the actual tillers. The rights of janmam and kanam, the forms of ownership and control determined the control over the production process as well. The emergence of a cash crop economy and extension of agriculture to the hill tracts made the economy more vibrant. The presence of

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intermediary *kanakkars* associated with the emergence of a cash crop economy had not paved the way for commercialization of agriculture. It is also important to note that the feudal relations remained unchanged though a money economy was developed.

Though the economy of medieval Kerala is termed to be self-sufficient village economy, the trade was a forceful and dynamic factor. There was a wide network of local trade, long distance trade as well a strong emporial trading net work on the western coast. The state normally did not directly intervene in matters of trade but attempted to maintain a congenial atmosphere for flourishing the same though it levied toll or taxes. The new form of trade inaugurated by the Portuguese by the 15\(^{th}\) century, by which Kerala became part of a world system, resulted in drastic changes in the existing economy in several ways.

The three centres of power, namely, family, *jati* and *swarupams* shared the actual power over the process and relations of production and the exchange as well. Extension of plough agriculture and the demand for a permanent labour force resulted in the maintenance of *jati* system, In order to sustain the dominance over the labour, the brahmins made the primary producing class in the position of servility. In a sense, the *jati*, which never was stagnant, was acted as the most effective system of division of labour and an ideology for extracting the surplus.
The actual form of state, known as swarupam, was an extended form of the erstwhile taravad families. The right to rule was determined by muppumura and ramifications of which were not so simple. Though the swarupams were not strictly based upon kacham or kiliyakkam unlike in the case of Perumal state, their political power was normally conferred and supported by the Brahmins. In such a way, the upper castes and the ruling class stood hand in hand in extracting the labour as well as surplus product. The age-old socio-political structure was destabilized by the Mysorean invasion towards the close of the 18th century, which will be examined in the next chapter in detail.