Chapter - 2

HISTORICAL SETTINGS

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The early signs of political structure in Malabar might have appeared in the form of tribal tradition during the Megalithic period. During the period of Sangam literature, the tribal chiefs became powerful and their political responsibilities attained a more hegemonic character. The hilly regions like, parambumala, kuthiramala, kollimala, ezhimala, etc., were the centres of their origin. New forms of political structure owed its origin to the growth of different and new means of production in agriculture, domestication of animals and in the acts of plunder and piracy. Some of them like the Nandan and the Nandan Uthiyan even tried to control the maritime trade in the western coast. At a later stage the Muventhers (triple rulers) - Chera, Chola and Pandya- became prominent in South Indian political setting with their strong bases at various river basins (marutham), like the Kaveri and the Vyga. The splendid river systems and massive coastal belt might have provided them with a new urge to control the growing maritime trade. Wars between the Muventhers and the tribal chieftains were frequent. The Muventhers were more powerful than the chieftains by virtue of their control over the Marutham. However these wars were not intended to establish any kind of permanent political overlords over the tribal chieftains but primarily to achieve financial gain in the form of plunder and loot.

The three centuries between A.D fourth and eighth in South Indian history had been termed as the Kalabhra interregnum. The true nature of the Kalabhra interregnum is difficult to be ascertained as the scholars differ in their opinions. However, it is generally accepted that it was an age of severe social conflicts, similar to that of the Kali age in North India. During the Sangam period and up to the eight century A.D, the region
witnessed a thoroughly decentralized power structure. A major portion of the northern part was under the Ezhimala kingdom, central region was under the Chera rule, and the petty rulers who owed their allegiance, either to the Pandyas or the Ayes of Tamilakam, administered the southern part.\(^1\)

By the eighth century A.D a steady increase in the spread and dominance of Brahmin settlements were observed in the region. The new researches in this field of study discarded many of the early notions on the history of the region like, the ‘Kulasekhara Empire’\(^2\) and identified the period between ninth and eleventh centuries of the Christian era as the ‘Rule of Perumals’\(^3\) which represented the growth of Kingship under the *udayavar*. The material base for this transformation was the extension of agriculture in major river valleys in the region. The situation has to be combined with the growth of 32 Brahmin settlements in different parts of the region.\(^4\)

**Distribution of the Brahmin Settlements**

It has been observed by academic historians that the 32 Brahmin settlements in Kerala were located on the river basins which invariably were the fertile rice yielding regions. Nevertheless there must have been a great deal of specificities for each of the settlements. The northern most Brahmin settlements lying between River Perumpuzha and Karumanpuzha were Payyannur, Perumchellur, Karikkadu Isanamangalam, Alathur, Karantala, Trissivapeur, Perumanam, Panniyur and Chokiram. While south of the above cluster between river Karumanpuzha and Churni were such settlements viz., Chamunda, Irinjalakkuda, Avittipputhur, Paravur, Iranikulam, Muzhikkulam,

\(^1\) K.N. Ganesh, *Keralathinte Innelekal* (mal.), (Trivandrum, 1997), p.348
\(^2\) Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, *Cherasambraijam* (mal), (Kottayam, 1961), pp. 9,12
\(^3\) M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, (Calicut, 1996)
Kuzhavur, Atavur, Chenganadu, Ilibhyam, Uliyannur and Kazhuthanadu. The settlements between Churni and Cape Komarin were Ettumanur, Kumaranallur, Katamaruku, Aranmula, Tiruvalla, Kidangur, Chengannur, Kaviyur, Venmony and Nirmannu.  

The Brahmin settlements of the Kolathunadu were Payyannur and Perumchellur. Payyannur is the northernmost village and the traditional Brahmin settlement in Malabar. The peculiar aspect of this settlement was that the Brahmins of this village followed matriarchy, which was absent among other Brahmins in Kerala, perhaps in the whole of India. Tradition says that Parasurama requested the Aryan Brahmin settlers of Kerala to adopt matriarchy for the atonement of his matricidal sin, which the members of this village alone complied with. The Brahmin residents of this village, however, were regarded to be of a lower status. The village temple is situated in Taliparamba Taluk in Kannur district and is dedicated to Subrahmanya. Perumchellur is on the banks of the river Parassini, near Ezhimala. This place could be identifiable with the present-day Taliparamba in Kannur district. The antiquity of this village as an established Brahmin settlement dates back to the Sangam age. Early medieval works like the Mooshikavamsa kavya (Eleventh century) and late medieval works like the ‘Kokilasandesam’ (Fifteenth century), ‘Chellurnathodayam’ (Sixteenth century), etc. contain several words of praise for the Brahmin centre at Chellur. Three temples are simultaneously regarded as the Gramakshetrams of this village, viz. the Siva temples at Taliparamba and Kanjirangat and the Krisna temple at Trichambaram.  

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5 Narayanan, n.3, p. 142  
Thus in the middle and southern portion of the Kolathunadu there were no Brahmin settlements. Topographically, in the north the distance between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea is smaller compared to the southern parts of Kerala. The shortage of arable terrace lands is acute in this region. Moreover, owing to its closeness to the sea and mountains, the river systems also are small in length, compared to the southern part of the coast. Tidal flows bring saline water deep into the interior, which also is disadvantageous to development of agriculture. Thus due to the relative shortage of agrarian settlements, Kolathunadu had little material resources for supporting strong political formations, worth mentioning.

**Political Formations in Kolathunadu-Physical Base**

The rivers and backwater systems which provided momentum for the development of Malabar during pre-modern times were the only means of transport and communication in the region owing to the absence of wheeled traffic and a network of roads. It also provided immense opportunity to connect the hilly regions of Western Ghats with the coastal trading centres. The Muslim traders found it convenient to settle down close to the river sites where they developed out posts of trade, warehouses and settlements. This pattern of riverside trade settlements withered only after the opening up of roads and railways during the colonial rule.

At the northern extremity of the territory, the 47 mile long Nileswaram River connects the southern Karnataka districts with Kolathunadu. Small vessels and medium range boats could travel deep into the interior through this river. The Elimala (Mount Eli) River has its course only about thirty miles in length. The river rises in the Western Ghats and loses itself in a number of

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7 Varier & Gurukkal, n. 4, pp. 113-4
creeks to the east and north-east of the Mount Eli. One of its creeks flows south and enters the sea in the angle of a bay formed immediately to the south of and under the very shadow of the mount itself. These creeks being tidal convert the Mount Eli peninsula into an island. The Sultan’s Canal is an artificial work, executed by Ali Raja in 1766. It connects, the Mount Eli River with the backwater formed at the mouth of the Taliparamba and Valapatanam rivers and gives uninterrupted water communication in all seasons. The Taliparamba River is navigable for boats in all seasons as far as the lower slopes of the Ghats. It connects the Pazhayangadi, an old trading centre near Cannanore, with Valapatanam River and the sea. The Valapatanam River is 74 miles in length. Through one of its tributaries, small vessels could travel deep into the Wynad region. On the banks of one of its branches, the Arab Muslims established their first trade settlement—Sreekandapuram—which was the seat of one of the earliest Muslim mosques in Malabar. The town developed as an important emporium of trade since the ninth century A.D. Idirsi, traveller from Arabia had given a graphic description of the trade activities in Jurbanat (Sreekandapuram). The Arabs conducted brisk trade with Coorg and Mysore on the spices from this town. A traveller could reach Mount Eli from Sreekandapuram within a day. Another prominent Arab settlement on the upper banks of Valapatanam River was Erikkur. Both these trading centres achieved prominence as a result of its proximity to the Coorg-Mysore trade route. The Ancharakkandi River-- rises in the Wynad Ghat slopes-- after a course of about forty miles, gets divided into two branches and forms the island of Darmapatanam at its junction with the sea. It was navigable for boats

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to a place called Venkat, the finest pepper producing country in Malabar.\textsuperscript{10} The Thalasseri river had strategic importance during the period of British dominance since it afforded protection to the English factory at Tellicherry from the possible threats from the northern and eastern landward sides. Mahe and Kotta Rivers also had such strategic importance.

**Land Holdings and the Socio-political Reconfigurations**

The pre-Mysorean politics in Malabar was supported by a specific pattern of socio-economic development. A Nayar *taravad* was a gathering of Nayars on the basis of immediate kinship in which the eldest female member known as *karanavathy* regulated the internal activities of a Nayar joint family whereas the eldest male member called *karanavar* decided on the external matters.\textsuperscript{11} The *taravads* had some precise political responsibilities at local level. It controlled the various occupational groups in the locality such as the *kanisan* or *kaniyan* (astrologer), the *asari* (carpenter), the *tattan* (goldsmith), the *kollan* (blacksmith), the *malayan* (black magician), the *vannan* or *velutheddan* (washer man), the *velan* (mid-wife) and the *vilakkathalavan* (barber). These groups were endowed with hereditary rights and perquisites, over a specific portion of the agrarian produce of the locality in which they served, known as *cherujenmom*. Some prominent *taravads* maintained fixed number of soldiers, ranging from 25 to 100, under their command and enjoyed civil and military responsibilities in a *desam* (*desathipatyam*).\textsuperscript{12}

A group of *taravads* joined together to form a *tara* which was under the supervision of an assembly called *tarakoottam*. It was the powerful

\textsuperscript{10} Logan, n.8, p.14
\textsuperscript{11} Balakrishnan. P. V., Matrilineal System in Malabar, (Kannur, 1981), p. 43
\textsuperscript{12} K.K.N Kurup, William Logan: A Study in the Agrarian Relation of Malabar, (Calicut, 1981), p. 4
institution, which regulated the local level administration. Above the taras there was a desam (village) under the desavazhi, who controlled the civil, military, police and religious matters of a village. A natu was comprised of two or more desams controlled by a general assembly of nattukoottam under the leadership of a naduvazhis or lesser rajas who were second only to the raja or king of the realm. The principal raja was at the apex with many privileges sanctioned by custom and conventions as the de jure authority.

Figure 1. Socio-political Structure Prior to the Mysorean Invasion

The resource base for such a power structure was land tenures and the corresponding feudal exactions. The colonial administrators, who made pioneering attempts in evaluating the power structure, had however based their studies on certain misconceptions about different types of land

14 Ibid, p. 4
15 Margret Frenz, From Contact to Conquest: Transition to British Rule in Malabar: 1790-1805, p.15. The Malabarkuttam as an assembly of rajas and since thirteenth century, the Zamorin by virtue of his superior military strength among all other Malabar rajas usurped this leading ceremonious position. The Malabarkuttam held it’s meeting during Mamankam or Mahamakham in Tirunavaya once in twelve years. The last of the series of Malabarkuttam was held in 1743.
ownership. In their observation, the *janmam* was the most important form of land ownership and the holders known as *jenmakaran* held the whole land in Malabar as private property inherited by birth with full absolute right.\(^{16}\) Likewise *kanam* was understood as a mortgage and the holders, *kanamkkars* who held the land pledged to him in security for the interest of money advanced to the *janmamkars*. The *kanamdars* could continue to hold the land until the advance was redeemed.\(^{17}\)

The tenurial system in Malabar was complex and was crowded with a host of intermediaries between the *janmi* and the actual cultivators. The different categories of men in the traditional structure of fragmented feudalism were hierarchically ordained and each shared the produce on the basis of a social equation. In the absence of a centrally controlled administrative apparatus, things had to be arranged at the local level on the basis of mutual dependence and reciprocal interests.\(^{18}\) In other words, the division of produce between the *janmi* and the entire range of agents at subordinate levels was in accordance with certain customary rules called *kanajanma maryada*, until it reaches the actual tiller. At the same time before the Mysorean invasion, the rajas of Malabar did not derive a fixed share of the gross produce either from rice land or from garden land.\(^{19}\)

It should be noted that the northern part of Malabar had some local variations in the functioning of *kanajanma maryada* as well as tenancy rights of different categories of men associated with agriculture. *Kanamdars* in

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\(^{18}\) K.N. Panikkar, ‘Peasants Revolts in Malabar in the 19th and 20th Centuries’ in *Peasant Struggles in India*, (Delhi, 1979), pp. 604-5.

\(^{19}\) Warden’s Report, p. 15.
north was not a tenant (kudian) under the janmi and most of them own land as kanamdar in their capacity as peasant proprietors. Moreover a great majority of the janmis are small proprietors who owned their land as their own. The majority of janmis in south Malabar were Nambuthiri Brahmins and in north sudras also enjoyed janam rights and they were not considered as slaves of the Brahmins and had not therefore any claim to the lands of the janmis for services rendered and nor any service tenures.20 In short, Nayars in north Malabar had land ownership (janmam) and proprietorship and they seldom subjected to Brahmanical dominance in contrast to their counterparts in south Malabar.21 Thus political authority evolved from the specific levels of landholding groups and the desavazhis and naduvazhis enjoyed their respective position in political spectrum from their corresponding interactions with the land rights. The importance of the Nayar taravads was particularly noteworthy in the relative absence of Brahmin settlements in north Malabar which in turn steered the development of a peculiar socio-economic structure.

The Royal Family

The physical and material factors influenced the political developments in Kolathunadu, particularly the influx of complexities associated with the order of succession in its principal royal house. It consisted of two branches (Kovilagams), Pally and Udayamangalam. The executive power was subdivided among the five eldest male members-the Kolathiri, the

20 C.G Master & Others, Report of the Land Tenures Committee appointed in GO 650, Public (Political), September 17 1885, Enclosure No. 1 to appendix F (f), Note by Varanakkott Krishnan Namputhiripad, pp. 60-62,Tamil Nadu Archives, (hereafter T.N.A)

Thekkilamkur the Vadakkilamkur, the Nalamkur and the Achamkur-in accordance with their order of seniority. In theory, the junior members had to abide by the suzerainty of the Kolathiri, but often they acted as independent rulers in their respective sphere of influence.\(^{22}\) In addition to this there were a number of feudatories who acted independently at the time of European intrusion into the mercantile activities of the region. The Ali Rajas of Cannanore, the Achanmars of Randathara, the Puranadu Rajas of Kottayam and the Vazhunnavar of Kadathanadu deserve special mention in this regard.\(^{23}\) In short, faced with internal schisms the kingdom of Kolathiris was on the ruin. The royal princes and the feudatories seldom showed courage and willingness to defy any of the external threats against their own position. They instead competed among themselves to hold power over the traders at the neighbouring trading centres for the meagre revenue from transit and export duties.

The tropical climate and dense forests in the Western Ghats favoured the natural growth of spices. There is no evidence to prove the organised production of spices prior to the colonial domination. The spices, except pepper, available in the hinterland of Kolathunadu were mediocre in quality and quantity. The Eli ginger, which grew in abundance, could not compete with the Beladi ginger of Calicut. Wild cinnamon that covered the slopes of Mount Eli could not compete with that of Ceylon. However, the good quality pepper available in Malabar produced a poor crop.\(^{24}\) It could not depend on the local production and their commercial potential was sustained through the contacts with the Vijayanagara and Konkan region.

The Kolathiris had no control over the production, distribution and fixation of prices of the spices. Vasco Da Gama visited the king of Kolathunadu with a letter of recommendation from the King of Portugal in 1502. Gama consulted at length with the Kolathiri on the main issue of fixing the price of spices. Kolathiri was helpless and he admitted that the fixation of the prices of the spices ‘had to be worked out with the merchants to whom the commodities belonged and he confessed that the king was not the owner of the merchandise’. At evidence is the scant role played by the Kolathiri in commercial activities and the unhindered operation of market forces in determining prices.

The fiscal structure of Kolathunadu during the period needs closer examination. Francis Buchanan who investigated the state of affairs in Malabar during the early quarters of the nineteenth century came to the conclusion that the system of land revenue was unknown to the inhabitants of Malabar, prior to the invasion of Hyder Ali. Customs duties over spice trade were perhaps the principal source of income for the Kolathiris. In addition to this they also received import duties levied upon the trade of horses. The ‘rulers’ of the realm had no working control over both types of commerce and the Muslim chiefs were in charge of both the spice and horse trade.

The native military was obsolete with its traditional feudal and caste identities. Communities other than Nayars were rare in the traditional military system and Nayars had become the synonyms for native military

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26 Buchanan, n. 22, p. 548
27 K.A. Nilakanda Sastrī, A History of South India: from Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar, (New Delhi, 1999), edn. 4, rpt. 17, pp. 304-5
Two major aspects that determined the proficiency of Nayar militia were the skill of wrestling and flexibility of body. Highly proficient masters in the field imparted training in Kalaries (gymnasiums). The training was given for the use of weapons like spear, arrows, swords and shield. However, the traditional militia was trained and equipped with for the purpose of dual fights rather than any kind of concerted military action.

William Logan after examining the system in an exhaustive manner came to the conclusion that, “their organisation into small bodies with discordant interests, unfitted them to repeal any serious invasion by an enemy even moderately well organised.”

M. Mahe de La Bourdonnais who had some experience about the martial spirit of Nayars, when he captured Mayyazhi for the French in 1725 made an interesting description. “They had no calling but the military, and would be excellent soldiers, were they disciplined but their fighting is disorganised.”

By the time of European penetration to the coast, the martial spirit of the Nayars had been subjected to a great deal of degeneration on account of two major developments. Their martial spirit died out for want of exercise and they had increasingly become family men. Moreover they became addicted to the use of narcotics like opium, toddy etc. The degenerated Nayar militia was not capable of defeating the Europeans who were superior in arms and military discipline. The trait of obedience and the willingness to face danger and suffer hardships provided the European

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29 Logan, n.8, p.166
30 Fuller, n.28, p. 7
31 Logan, n.8, p.167
military with a morale which was far superior to anything that could be produced by clan adhesion, personal loyalty, or individual bravery.

The Zamorin of Calicut had enough financial and military potential to control the neighbouring principalities like, Cochin and Kolathunadu, thanks to his trade and commercial alliances with the Arabs. The Kolathiris were very cautious against the territorial ambitions of the Zamorin when he had taken over all those managerial responsibilities of the Kolathiri in connection with the Taliparamba temple at the heart of Kolathunadu territory. It was not an accident that the Portuguese started commercial contacts with the Kolathiri when their relations with the Zamorin strained. The Kolathiri invited the Portuguese Captain, Alvares Cabral, while he was leading his ships from Calicut to Cochin. Cabral accepted this invitation and commenced commercial relations with the Kolathiri on the 15th of January in 1501. The Portuguese received 1663 kg of cinnamon and the Kolathiri sent an ambassador to Portugal along with Cabral. This development shows the level of animosity between the Zamorin and the Kolathiri.

The hereditary feuds between the two rulers were often superseded by the imperative alliances of commercial interest reinforced by the solidarity of the Islamic communities. Cannanore guaranteed the supply of the Vijayanagara cavalry and the Muslim merchant communities mediated the import of horses from Ormuz and Arabia. Vijayanagara rulers turned out to be the arbitrators of the mutual conflicts between the Kolathiri and the Zamorin. With the disintegration of the Vijayanagara kingdom, the arbitration came to an abrupt end.

33 Mathew, n.25, pp. 183-4.
Implications of Overseas Trade

Malabar had trade contacts with the outside world from time immemorial. Long-range arteries of maritime trade had spanned the Malabar Coast for centuries. The Chinese junks and Arabs dhows maintained close trade links with the coast and these came to an abrupt end with the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1288.34 The Karimi merchants from Cairo initiated the western trade again and it went on uninterrupted for nearly two centuries. Ibn Battuta spoke of the flourishing trade in Calicut during the latter half of the fourteenth century.35

The Arabs made Calicut their home and with their assistance the Zamorin came to control the political scenario of Malabar. The Arabs built up a successful commercial network in the region with the Zamorin’s encouragement and help. The arrival of Vasco Da Gamma in Calicut in A.D. 1498 signalled the beginning of the Da Gamma epoch36 in the Asian Continent. It “was one of those rare events in history”37 as the discovery of the all-water route to the East had revolutionised the transport technology barrier between Asia and Europe. The volume of trade was no longer subjected to the capacity constraint imposed by the availability of pack-animals and river boats in the Middle East.38

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The international mercantile activities in Malabar were more or less peaceful during the pre-Portuguese era. The Portuguese inaugurated a totally alien kind of trade by which they elaborated a complex system of compulsions, primarily in the form of *cartazes*, on the one hand to ensure monopoly over the spice trade and on the other to outwit the Arab traders of the coast. The Portuguese merchants initiated the practice of oppressing the primary producer for keeping prices down and it showed the early patterns of colonialism in the Malabar Coast.

However, the trade between India and Europe faced with a major constrain during the early phase. It can be sustained only with the medium of large quantities of precious metals-gold and silver- and the stock of which was deplorably meagre in Europe. The conquest and annexation of the American Continent expanded the scope of plundering the gold and silver mines in that Continent and a part of it was made available for investing in Asian goods.39 By the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch displaced the Portuguese. They achieved trade monopoly with the sword and interfered in the chaotic internal politics of the region. For instance, the Dutch sent a fleet in support of the Zamorin of Calicut and entered into a treaty with him, which assured to expel the Portuguese from the Zamorin’s territories.40 The Portuguese power virtually became non-existent in the Malabar region by the 1660s. The Dutch concluded several treaties with the native rulers ensuring trade monopoly and perpetual friendship.41 The Dutch enjoyed a

39 Ibid., p.4  
40 P.C. Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, (Annamalai, 1946), p.9  
profitable trade in the region for some time.\textsuperscript{42} By the 1730s, Travancore emerged as a strong military power under Marthanda Varma (1729-1758) and the Dutch designs over the region clashed with the new indigenous leadership. They were defeated in the battle of Colachel in 1741. “It was the first great blow inflicted on the Dutch arms and its moral effect was so great that the Dutch never recovered from it at all”.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1497, an English ship landed on the American mainland under the leadership of a Venetian subject, John Cabot. As years went by, Spain and Portugal moved ahead in the race of geographical discoveries, outsmarting England then compelled to withdraw on account of its internal political problems. It was only by the middle of the sixteenth century that the English came at par with their continental competitors.\textsuperscript{44} The English explorations to the East were inspired primarily by a desire to sell English woollens in exchange for Eastern silks and spices. But by this time, Spain and Portugal, by virtue of the Papal Bull achieved monopolistic claims over the hitherto unknown and unchristian parts of the world. Spain had been awarded the ‘New World’ and Asia was gifted to the adventurous Portuguese.\textsuperscript{45} The Portuguese route round the Cape of Good Hope and the track of Magellan into Pacific seemed to be out of bounds for the English. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 gave a fillip to the English attempts to navigate around the Cape of Good Hope. Queen Elizabeth I chartered the English East India Company for trade with Asia on 31

\textsuperscript{42} One fifth of the pepper export from the West Coast of India was through the Kayamkulam harbour under the auspices of the Dutch, vide K.P. Padmanabha Menon, \textit{History of Kerala}, (New Delhi, Asian Educational Services,1993), rpnt. 3, vol. 2, p.294
\textsuperscript{43} A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{Kerala and Freedom Struggle}, (Kottayam, 1997), p15.
\textsuperscript{44} William Foster, \textit{England’s Quest of Eastern Trade}, (London, 1933), p. 5
\textsuperscript{45} Burton Stein, \textit{A History of India}, (New Delhi, 1998), p. 204.
December 1600. The original object of the group of merchants involved was to break the Dutch monopoly of the spice trade with the East Indies.

Ralph Fitch was the first Englishman to visit the Malabar Coast. His mission, in 1588, was primarily to explore commercial possibilities with the coast. In 1615-6, Captain Keeling at the head of three English ships visited the Zamorin of Calicut and concluded a treaty—perhaps, the first treaty concluded by a Malabar chief with the English company—by which they were permitted to build a factory at Cranganore, which was later shifted to Calicut. The treaty further permitted the English company to acquire the fort of Cochin and duty-free trade in the Zamorin’s territory. The Zamorin’s interest was to undermine the Portuguese power in his territory by providing opportunities to the English. However, the latter was not serious about this treaty and was busy in exploring the possibilities of trade with the spice islands of Malayan archipelago. It was only after their virtual expulsion from the archipelago in 1623, that the English decided to concentrate on Malabar trade.46

Kolathiris were eager to participate in European trade and they warmly welcomed the English East India Company and gave permission to build a factory at Tellicherry in 1694. The Chief of Tellicherry, in course of time, achieved prominence in north Malabar and by the 1750s he was in a position to control some of the most important forts—Dharmapattam, Attarah, Codota, Cuna, Malure, Eddicot (built in 1737), Grove Island, Madakkara, Kudali, Morocoonna and Milan in addition to small fortifications and watchtowers like Cochincunda and Mount Delli-

46 Kurup, n. 32, p. 39.
in the region.\footnote{Bonaventure Swai, “Notes on the Colonial State with reference to Malabar in the 18th and 19th Centuries”, Social Scientist, Vol. 6, No. 12, (July, 1978), Online version, p. 50} When they emerged as a potential power in Malabar, the Dutch were forced to retreat from Malabar Coast, with the possible exceptions of Cannanore Fort and some other minor trade centres else where in the coast. The French also entered into Malabar during the same period and they established their commercial agencies in Mahe and Calicut.\footnote{Kurup, n. 32, p.19.}

**Pepper in European Trade**

Pepper was one of the most indispensible articles of the Indo-European trade. It was an article of mass consumption that could be retailed in small quantities to the varied income groups.\footnote{In 1670 the English company received 4.3 million lb of pepper and in 1672 the quantities went up to as much as 7.6 million. The Dutch company likewise imported 9.2 million lb in 1670, vide, Chaudhuri, n. 37, p. 399} However by the second decade of the seventeenth century Indian cotton piece goods had become the premier article of import to Europe. The 1680s was the great period of expansion for Indian cotton.\footnote{In 1664, 73 per cent of the entire trade of the English company was on Indian textiles. In two decades it increased to 83 per cent. vide, Ibid. p. 401} However the industrialisation of England in the second half of the eighteenth century transformed the commodity structure of Indian imports to England. In order to protect the textile products of industrial Britain import tariffs were imposed upon Indian textiles which forced the English company to find out some alternatives to ensure its commercial survival. The company could have reversed the carrying trade by exporting British cotton piece goods to India, but the oriental natural economy had yet to be disarticulated and placed securely under imperialist hegemony. The discovery of the China tea trade gave the
English company a new opportunity to exchange Bengali opium and Malabar pepper for the China tea.  

The competition among the European companies on the coast for controlling pepper trade resulted in pushing up the price of that commodity. For instance it grew at an alarming rate between 1722 and 1756, as could be evidenced from the following table:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Price (Rs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1722-30</td>
<td>A Candy of 560 lb</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1731-34</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>70-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735-9</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>88-90</td>
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<td>1740-50</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>80-78</td>
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<tr>
<td>1751-53</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>100-95</td>
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<tr>
<td>1754-56</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>125-105</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This tendency of pepper price might have provided momentum for the proliferation of political fragmentation. A pepper politics was in operation and new agents of power and claimants of revenue in the form of transit or custom duties burgeoned. A new power structure, with new economic and political bases, was fast emerging. The European companies on the coast may have accentuated the contradictions already rampant in Kerala society. As far as possible the English company tried to support the urge for centralization shown by the native rajas. This, they might have thought, would reduce the burden of direct intervention in the commercial practices of the region. By strengthening the causes of

51 Swai, n.47, p. 51  
52 Gupta, n.34,, p.25  
centralization process within the region and by concluding treaties with the upcoming leadership, trade monopoly was achieved in an indirect manner by the colonial power. Every attempt of resistance by the quarrelling princes of the native royal families further tightened the company’s grip over the rajas.

With arrival of the European traders the process of the disintegration of the royal family in Kolathunadu got accelerated. There were several claimants, from among the members of the royal family as well as vassal chieftains, to control the inflow of spices from the Ghat region through their respective spheres of influence. As the demand and price of spices had remarkable upward trend the internal dissensions also became severe. With the advent of the English East India Company this process entered into unprecedented dimensions. The company and its factors had engaged in vigorous fights against other European mercantile companies for achieving the profitable ‘eastern trade’. The ‘early birds’ had already started their business and ‘late comers’ had to device new programmes and policies to appease the native powers so as to dominate the profitable spice trade. The indigenous politics of Malabar in general and Kolathunadu in particular was conducive to colonial coercions as was evidenced from the fact that the English Company got a strong foothold in North Malabar, when they were permitted to occupy a factory at Tellicherry by the Vadakkilamkur (Northern Regent of Kolathunadu). The struggle for supremacy in Malabar among the European traders themselves and their native rivals had been resolved in favour of the English by the end of the eighteenth century. The policy of expansion followed by the English company was well-planned. It was through

54 Kurup, n. 32, p.42
diplomacy, negotiations and machinations that the company extended its influence over the various segments of the Malabar region. This was possible in a fragmented polity like that of Malabar where the medieval political and commercial structures had undergone drastic changes the end of the eighteenth century.