Chapter - 3

PROLIFERATION IN THE INDIGENOUS POLITICS

Contents

• The Processes of Disintegration of the Kolathunadu Royal Family

• Lesser Rajas and Petty Chieftains

• Waning of the ‘Greater Kolathunadu’
Proliferation of power groups in the indigenous political structure was a common feature in Malabar region, ever since the strengthening of agrarian settlements and patterns of trade and commercial activities. From north to south-Kolathunadu to Venadu- several chieftains and lesser rulers with indefinite geographical extent and overlapping political overtones could be observed. All of them tried to outwit the others by strengthening their own cause, either with the help of indigenous socio-economic or intellectual power blocks or by aligning themselves with the overseas trading groups. None of them had the economic or military potential to bring about some sort of political interaction, of course with the possible exception of Marthanda Varma in Travancore and Sakthan Thampuran in Cochin.

Kolathunadu was sandwiched between the south Canara and Calicut. The Zamorin of Calicut often interfered in Kolathunadu politics which resulted in limiting its boundary up to Puduppattanam River.¹ The Kolathunadu royal family originally consisted of two houses (Kovilagams), Udayamangalam and Pally. The royal family followed the matrilineal system of inheritance (Marumakkathayam). William Logan made the following observation on the functioning of matrilineal system of inheritance in Malabar.

(under this system) “The head of a Malayali house has two conflicting sets of interests to deal with-first those of his legal heirs, the children of his female relatives of various degrees; and secondly, those of his natural heirs, his own wife and children. The latter have no legal claim on him, but natural affection comes into

play, and to provide suitably for his own children and their mother a man not infrequently trenches upon the right of his legal heirs. Hence arise(s) bitter quarrels and jealousies”.2

The eldest female of all the branches of the royal family was entitled to the dignity of Achamma Mupasthanam. She was considered to be the head of the whole family. However, the executive power was subdivided among the five eldest male members, in their order of seniority. The eldest male member among the two houses was styled as the Kolathiri and he was supposed to be the highest executive authority. The next elder male was called the Thekkilamkur (Southern Regent), the third, the Vadakkilamkur (Northern Regent), the fourth the Nalamkur and the fifth the Achamkur.3 By eighteenth century, the Kolathiri was in charge of some portions of Chirakkal, Taliparamba and the suburbs of Cannanore and his royal palace was at Baliapatam (Valarpatanam). The Thekkilamkur enjoyed independent charge of the southern portion of Kolathunadu with his headquarters at Puthupattanam on the Kotta River and his residence was at Coteepoor palace in Kadathanadu. The Vadakkilamkur had his royal palace at Beela or Deela. The other kurvalchas (rulers of portions) namely, the Nalamkur and the Achamkur were the managers of the royal household of the Kolathiri and the supervisors of royal property.4

There were several instances of treachery and vengeance among the members of the royal family. The magnitude of their antagonism could be

4 C.K. Kareem, Kerala under Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, (Ernakulam, 1973), p. 265
better understood by the following account given by Alexander Hamilton, who visited Kolathunadu in 1702:

“There were three princes of the blood royal who conspired to cut him” (the reigning Prince Unnithiri) “and his family off, to possess themselves of the government of Callistree” (Kolattiri) “But being detected they were beheaded on altars built of stone. About two miles from Cannanore the altars were standing when I saw there. They were only square piles of hewn stone, about three yards high and four yards each side”.

The Processes of Disintegration of the Kolathunadu Royal Family

The two branches of the Kolathunadu royal family- Udayamangalam and Pally-were engaged in frequent struggles “for exclusive possession of authority and each became sub-divided into separate houses”. In course of time both the houses were branched out into various fragments with mutual antagonism. The Pally branch had eight houses, viz., Pally, Chirakkal, Palaugat, Kannacherry, Poodoovely, Payavayali, Chingoat and Tenaood and the Udayamangalam branch had three divisions, viz., Udayamangalam, Melati and Jaya. The proceedings of the Board of Revenue mention the rift among the various houses in the following manner:

“Many were the disputes and even in former times among the above stated 11 houses on account of the management of the country, at last they put to death several princes of the house of Udayamangalam

5 Quoted in Logan, n. 2, p. 391
6 Buchanan, n.3
7 Kareem, n.4, p. 264
ko\textit{vila}gam and utterly destroyed their authority in the country. Since that jealousy, ambition and intrigue took place amongst the other houses, but the house of Cherical had every advantage, both by the extensive power and support they always had from the \textit{Mookistanmars} or Chief Nairs of the country and by the alliance that they have entered into with the neighbouring European powers.\textsuperscript{8}

Francis Buchannan who investigated the state of affairs of Malabar during 1800-01 at the behest of the English Company noticed some changes that had crept into the composition of various royal houses in Kolathunadu. The Pally and Chirakkal houses had been united together and Palangat (Palaugat), Puduwvaly (Poodoovely) and Panarayly (Payavayali) became extinct. As far as Udayamangalam branch was concerned, Metale (Melati) and Taya (Jaya), also became extinct.\textsuperscript{9}

The disintegration and proliferation process continued even after the British gained supremacy in the region as is evidenced from the following description given by William Logan in 1886. The Udayamangalam branch had only one \textit{Kovilagam} with the same name and Palli branch had five \textit{Kovilagams}, namely, Chirakkal, Chenga, Tevanamkotta, Padinyara, Kavinisseri. The Chenga \textit{Kovilagam} had two sub-branches, Prayikkara and Ennakkad. The Ennakkad \textit{Kovilagam} was further divided into two, Ennakkad and Mavelikkara.\textsuperscript{10} It should be noted that, all the three sub-branches of the Chenga \textit{Kovilagam} namely, Prayikkara, Ennakkad and

\begin{flushendnotes}
\item[8] Quoted in Ibid, p. 267
\item[9] Buchanan, n.3, ibid.
\item[10] Logan, n. 2, p. 393
\end{flushendnotes}
Mavelikkara are in central Travancore region. It might have been a sort of migration, during the Mysorean intervention in Northern Malabar.

**Figure 2 Proliferations in Kolathunadu Royal Family**

The Pally branch was more powerful than the Udayamangalam branch and Buchanan states that it was achieved by killing most of the members of the latter branch.\(^\text{11}\) However, the different houses of the Pally

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\(^{11}\) Buchanan, n. 3, p. 557
branch also had similar disputes among them. The Chirakkal house of the Pally branch became prominent following a lengthy encounter with the Nayaks of Ikkeri who invaded the northern portions of Kolathunadu in 1732. The eldest male of the Chirakkal house was Udaya Varma and upon his failure to galvanise material help from other members of the family he chose to come to terms with the invaders and later negotiated with the English Company at Tellicherry and the Dutch factors at Cannanore\textsuperscript{12} to expel the Ikkeri Nayaks from his territory. After this incident, ‘the house of Cherical (Chirakkal) managed the country’ and ‘the remaining dominions of the Colutanada (Kolathunadu) family were commonly called Cherical (Chirakkal)’\textsuperscript{13}. It could be assumed that, by the early quarters of the eighteenth century the Chirakkal family achieved prominence among the rival princes through their alliance with the neighbouring European companies and also owing to the extensive support and power they had from the \textit{Mookistanmars} or chief Nayars of the country.

The internal quarrels and machinations among the members of the Kolathunadu resulted in the vassal chieftains becoming practically independent from the customary clutches of the former. The quests for their independence were stimulated further by the presence of European trading companies like the French at Mahe, the English at Tellicherry and the Dutch at Cannanore. Such propensities were invariably prevalent on the coast since the inauguration of the ‘Da Gamma epoch’ and it is not

\textsuperscript{12} Logan, n. 2, p. 415

\textsuperscript{13} Buchanan, n. 3, Ibid
surprising that the fragile political structure of Kolathunadu turned out to be a “sea of intrigues, conflicting interests and mutual jealousies”.14

Lesser Rajas and Petty Chieftains

Kadathanadu, the southern most territory in Kolathunadu, was under the jurisdiction of the Thekkilamkur (southern regent) of the Kolathunadu royal house. The Vazhunnavar, of Vadakara was the hereditary governor of this region. In English records they are called in different styles, like the Beyanore or Bayanoror or Bavnor. The Vazhunnavar family is believed to have descended from the Porlathiri family of Polanad in Calicut. The tradition alludes that “when the Zamorin dispossessed them of Polanad they fled northwards into the Kolathiri domains. The Kolathiri Thekkilamkur (Southern Regent of Kolathunadu), who resided at Puthuppattanam […] espoused one of the women and gave to his son by her the governorship of Kadathanad […]”.15 Thus the southern portion of the Kolathunadu dominions lying between Mayyazhi River (Mahe) in the north and Kotta River (Puthupattanam) in the south was put under the charge of the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara. The Vazhunnavar family had two branches viz. Ayancheri and Edavalatta. The eldest female of the two branches was theoretically the head of the house and the eldest males held political authorities in accordance to their seniority. The eldest among them assumed the title of Porlathiris. By the sixteenth century the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara assumed independent status as is evidenced from various treaties and agreements entered into with the Dutch and the French.

Alexander Hamilton found the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara as an independent ruler in 1703. The treaty signed between the ‘Bavnor of Badagara’ (Vazhunnavar of Vadakara) and Mr. Adams, the chief of the Malabar Coast on February 17th, 1725, signified the independent status enjoyed by the former. Through this instrument the Vazhunnavar independently entered into a treaty with the company without the mediation of the Kolathiri. The Vazhunnavar claimed royal status by 1750 and started to be known in European records as ‘Raja of Kadathanad’.

Kurungoth was a petty chiefdom between Tellicherry and Mahe and it consisted of the present ‘amsams’ of Kallayi and Olavilam. This territory was formerly a part of Iruvalinadu and probably during the early stages of colonial penetration the territory became a separate chiefdom under the Kurungot Nayar. Kurungot Nayar, buffered between the English and the French, had an important role to play in the colonial rivalries between the two prominent European trading companies. He was the first chieftain in Malabar who had the courage to take arms against the English factors at Tellicherry as in 1719. He was defeated by the latter and thereafter remained loyal to the French at Mahe. This alliance with the French later shielded him from the Mysorean menace.

Iruvanad or Iruvalinadu literally means the nadu (country) of two rulers. This petty chiefdom had proximity towards the French and the English settlements of Mahe and Tellicherry respectively. The strategic importance of the territory accelerated the process of the disintegration of

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16 Kareem, n.4, p. 268  
17 Logan, n. 15, I/XIII, p.13  
18 Kurup, n.1, p. 16  
19 Ibid, p.15  
20 Kareem, n. 4, p. 269
the power structure in Kolathunadu. Iruvalinadu originally consisted of the modern *amsams* of Panur, Puttur, Triprangottur, Panniyanur, Perinkulam, and Kariyad.\(^{21}\) The origin of this chiefdom also was linked with the Cheraman Perumal legend, according to which the latter is said to have been divided the territory among the two houses of two Adiyodis (a class of Nayars) who were called as Vadakkadi Adiyodi and Tekkadi Adiyodi.\(^{22}\) The position of these Nayar chiefs could have been a kind of feudal vassalage, as the Thekkilamkur or southern regent of the Kolathunadu royal family enjoyed the *de jure* power in this region. We could assume that the advent of the European trading companies and the establishment of their respective settlements resulted in improving the scope of proliferation process of petty chiefs. For instance, by the end of the seventeenth century when the English factory was established at Tellicherry, the Iruvalinadu was under the governorship of six families of the Nambiar caste. They were Kunnumal, Chandrott, Kilakkedatta, Kampuratta, Narangoe and Kariyad.\(^{23}\) In course of time, many of these families either faded or became extinct and four of them- Kamprat (Kampuratta), Chandrott, Puthiyaveedu and Kizhakkedath (Kilakkedatta)-assumed the governorship and they were collectively known as Kulatta Nambiars. Chandrott family became the most powerful among the Kulatta Nambiars and two of its off-shoots – Kunnummal and Narangoli –turned out to be the chief vassals of the Kolathiri. These Nambiars maintained their own military and a part of which was given for the assistance of the Kolathiri as part of their feudal

\(^{21}\) Kurup, n. 1, p. 15
\(^{22}\) Logan, n. 15, I/XVI, pp. 4-5
\(^{23}\) Kareem, n.4, p. 269
obligation. By the latter half of the eighteenth century the Iruvalinadu Nambiars became virtually independent authorities over their territories.

The Arakkal royal family of Cannanore (The Ali rajas) was, interestingly, the only Muslim dynasty in Malabar Coast. The Arakkal family followed a matriarchal system of descent. The elder most member of the family, male or female, was its head and ruler. While male rulers were called Ali Rajas, female rulers were known as Arakkal Beevis. There are a number of opinions about the origin of this royal house. Some traces their origin to the Cheraman Perumal legend while some others prefer to consider them as of the Kolathiri origin. The Kerlolpathi contains references about the origin of this Muslim royal family in Kerala. As in the case of any other ruling families on the coast, Kerlolpathi connects the Ali rajas also with the Cheraman Perumal legend. Cheraman Perumal, as the text goes on, took several measures to encourage trade and commercial activities in his country and invited many Mohammedan merchants (Jonaka Mappilas) and “in particular he invited a Muhammedan and his wife to come from his native land of Aryapuram and installed them at Kannanur (Cannanore). The Muhammedan was called Ali Raja, that is lord of the deep or of the sea”. An equally prominent tradition connects their ancestry with Aryan Kulangara Nayar, one of the ministers of the Kolathiri who is said to have lived about the end of the eleventh or beginning of the

24 Kurup, n. 1, pp.14-15
25 Kareem, n. 4, p. 269
27 Buchanan, n. 3, p.554
29 Logan, n. 2, p. 274
twelfth century A.D. He embraced Islam and adopted the name of Muhammed or Mammad Ali. Owing to his skill and ability, the Kolathiri permitted him to continue as a minister even after the said conversion to Islam. Muhammed or Mammad Ali’s successors were called as the Mammali Kitavus (successors) and were hereditary ministers of the Kolathiris and they also acted as the Chief Sea Customs Agents and Admirals of the Kolathiri.30

Another genealogy connects the Arakkal family’s origin with the Kolathunadu royal family itself. A princess while bathing in the Chirakkal kulam (pond) was drowned accidentally. Her friends were unable to rescue her and they cried out. A Muslim boy passing by, heard the shouting, jumped in to the pond, and rescued the girl. Since the girl was naked, the boy gave her his mundu - a long cloth used to cover the lower part of the body. When this news reached the ruler, he called both the girl and the Muslim boy to him. The boy was afraid for his life. As per the custom in those days, if a man gives a "pudava" (a long cloth used for covering body) to an unmarried woman, it was considered as if he and she got married. The elders and religious people advised the ruler that, two things happened here, one the king’s daughter was touched by a Muslim and the second was that a boy gave "pudava" to his daughter, meaning that the daughter cannot enter the palace anymore and also she got married to the Muslim boy. As per the custom the ruler had no other choice but to give his daughter to the Muslim boy. The Raja was unhappy to give his daughter to a poor family, so he gave the boy some part of his country, and made him the ruler of that part. The area, which was given to the boy, was then onwards known as Arakkal

30 Ibid, p. 408
and his family, the Arakkal family. The ruler’s daughter was known as Arakkal Beebe.31

The relation between the Kolathiris and the Ali rajas seemed peaceful and cordial until the advent of the Portuguese. Religion was not at all a matter of conflict and rather both, the Arakkal house and the Kolathiris, had mutual dependency. The trade with the Laccadive Islands and the purchase of horses from Hormuz or Gujarat were materialised with the help of the Muslim sea-fearers. The Muslim populations were treated at par with other native religious groups and any sort of religious molestation had not been reported in the available records. The Portuguese presence on the coast opened up a new era of violent intervention in the native politico-economic structure.32 It ultimately brought the Portuguese bitterness towards the native ‘Moors”, ever since the early trade operations of the former at Calicut. Their attempt was to ensure trade monopoly at the point of the gun and insisted that all native vessels had to possess ‘Cartazes’ signed by the Portuguese commandants either of Cochin or of Cannanore, to ply on the coast. The old Kolathiri, who was a friend of Vasco Da Gama, had already sought sanction from the King of Portugal for plying native vessels to the Laccadive Islands and to Hormuz or Gujarat.33 However, Gonzalo Vaz, the Portuguese captain, seized and plundered a native vessel in April 1507 and the crews were brutally massacred. One of the victims was the son-in-law of Mammali Marakkar, an important Muslim merchant of Cannanore and the Kolathiri was reluctantly forced to start hostilities against the Portuguese. This was, perhaps, the first instance of open fight

31 P.A. Syed Muhammed, Keralam Noottandukalkku Munpe (mal), (Koduggallur, n.d), p. 62
33 Logan, n. 2, p. 358
between the Kolathiris and the Portuguese. The Muslims and the Zamorin of Calicut supported the former. However, the Kolathiri was forced to sue for peace with the Portuguese, by August 1507, which shook the confidence of the Muslim population in Cannanore on the Kolathunadu royal house.

The relations between the Muslims and the Kolathiri was further ruined by 1525, when the latter failed to protect the life of a prominent Muslim captain Balia Hassan, who had been delivered up to the Portuguese by the Kolathiri himself. Hassan was a close relative of the Ali Raja and the Kolathiri’s last minute efforts to protect the life of Balia Hassan, failed and the disgusted Muslims decided to act independently of the Kolathiri altogether and many of them took refuge at Darmapatanam Island. The Kolathiri punished them with the help of the Portuguese by organising an expedition, which destroyed “the towns, bazaars and shipping at Darmapatanam”.

The ensuing centuries saw the gradual growth of this petty principality into an independent status, practically free from the authority of the Kolathunadu. By the dawn of the seventeenth century, it had become a prominent ruling house in Kolathunadu. They had acquired possession of the Laccadive Islands and the Darmapatanam, in addition to their hold over the Cannanore town. The change in the political structure was primarily due to their financial clout gained by virtue of the profitable trade activities with alien countries. Alexander Hamilton’s observations in 1702 could be

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid, p. 360
36 Ibid, p. 371
taken as the best proof for the independent status acquired by the Ali rajas from the Kolathiris.

[Cannanore as] “a pretty large town built in the bottom of the bay…… [under] Adda Raja, a Mohametan Malabar prince, who “upon occasion can bring near 20,000 men into the field. His government is not absolute nor is it hereditary; and instead of giving him the trust of the Treasury which comes by Taxes and Merchandise, they have chests made on purpose with holes made in their lids, and their coin being all gold, whatever is received from the treasurer is put into these chests by these holes and each chest has four locks, and their keys are put in the hands of the Raja, the Commissioner of Trade, the Chief Judge and the Treasurer, and there is occasion for money none can be taken out without all these four be present or their deputies”.38

The Joint Commissioners also testify to this fact by stating that, “foreign trade carried in by the Beebe in her seven vessels which navigate and trade principally under her own flag from Bengal to the Gulfs in all the productions of the intermediate countries”.39 The Dutch had treated the Ali rajas as a separate political unit and they entered into a separate treaty with the latter on 11th February 1664.40 In 1771, the Ali Raja purchased the Fort of Cannanore and the land round about from the Dutch

38 Quoted in Logan, n. 2, pp. 408-9
39 Quoted in Kurup, n. 37, p. 93
40 Poonnen, n. 28, p. 194
by paying huge sums of money. This also had enhanced the trade and financial potential of the house.\(^{41}\)

Randathara was the seat of another petty chieftain in Kolathunadu. It was reputed to produce the finest quality of pepper in Malabar.\(^{42}\) Randathara lying adjacent to Darmapatanam and the modern amsams (villages) of Mavilayi, Chembilode, Iruveri, Muzhappilangad, Edakkad and Anjarakandi formed parts of this territory. Randathara is also known as ‘Poyanadu’ in the belief that, the Cheraman Perumal went to Arabia from here. According to the tradition, Cheraman Perumal divided the region among several of his vassals and kept only two tharas for himself. He resided at the temple of Chala for a short while, prior to his final departure to Arabia. The two tharas and the temple of Chala were given to two of his ‘Karyastans’ (ministers), namely, Edattil Kandangodan and Ponnattil Mavila from whom have sprung the four important houses – Kandoth, Palliyath, Ayillath, and Arayath- of ‘Achanmars’ of Randathara.\(^{43}\) The Achanmars had feudal obligations to the Kolathiris and were the chief suppliers of Nayar soldiers to the latter.\(^{44}\)

Randathara had a strategic position owing to its proximity to Dharmapattanam and Tellicherry. It also produced large quantities of pepper and wild cinnamon and the chieftdom became one of the nerve centres of colonial politics in Malabar. The Achanmars entered into an agreement with the English East India Company in March 1741 by which they mortgaged Randathara to the latter as a security against the loan of 60,000 fanams taken from the company. They ‘promised to collect the quit-

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41 Koya, n. 26, p. 432
42 Logan, n. 2, p. 394
43 Logan, n. 15, p. 44.
44 Kurup, n.1, p. 14
rent from the fields and gardens’ on behalf of the company and also obliged to pay 6,000 fanams, annually to the company as interest of the borrowed money. They also agreed to pay the principal amount in the sixth year together with the interest.45 It is interesting to note that, the ruling the Kolathiri was not even consulted by the Achanmars or the company before entering into such an agreement. However, three months later, on 12th June 1741, another agreement was executed by the four Achanmars along with 500 Nayars in the presence of the Prince Regent of Kolathunadu by which the company was given authority over the Achanmars and they were brought under the protection of the company.46 These developments indicate the fact that all sorts of feudal obligations and subservient political position of the Randathara Achanmars towards the Kolathiris, ceased to exist by the beginning of the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. Moreover, in the same year (1741), the Prince regent of Kolathunadu demanded the Achanmars of Randathara to contribute 30,000 fanams to defray a huge debt. The Achanmars refused to help the Prince regent, as they “felt that the basis of such an obligation no longer exists”.47

The Kottayam territory lay between Tellicherry and Wynad. It was also known as Purakilanadu or Purali Swarupam. Its ruler became independent and assumed the title ‘Raja’ after the fall of the Cera Empire.48 The Kottayam rajas are mentioned in English records as ‘Cotiote’. They were considered as kshatriyas from foreign (Puranadu) region and in this capacity they were also known as ‘Puranattu’ rajas. They differed vehemently from other Hindu ruling families of Malabar in that the eldest

45 Logan, n.15, I/XLIV, pp. 43-44
46 Ibid., I/XLV, p.,44
47 Swai, n. 14, p. 74
48 Kurup, n. 1, p. 16
female was not the head of the family among them. The family was divided into three branches (Kovilagams) - Eastern, Western and Southern- and the three eldest males occupied three dignities in the family in their order of seniority. They received Kottayam territory from Kolathunadu but soon became independent to be styled themselves as ‘rajas’. They were in a position to claim suzerainty over the Wynad region, which was well known for its good quality pepper and cardamom. The Kurumbranad Raja who ruled over the territory between Korappuzha and Puthupattanam River had close family linkage with the Kottayam rajas. The Pazhassi Raja of Kottayam was one of the first among the Malabar rulers who established direct relations with the English company. However he, later on, staged the most devastating assaults on the English company.

Nileswaram which was the northernmost territory in Kolathunadu, lying between the Kavayi and Chandragiri rivers, was stripped off from Kolathunadu, to make an independent political division subsequent to a matrimonial alliance between one of the princes of the Vadakkilamkur and a princess of the Zamorin’s royal house. The Zamorin had taken over all managerial responsibilities of the Kolathiri in connection with the Taliparamba temple at the heart of Kolathunadu territory. This might have taken place in the latter half of the fourteenth century or in the beginning of the fifteenth century. It was probable that the Raja of Nileswaram was a pioneer in enjoying independent status in Kolathunadu, thanks to its close connections with the Zamorin of Calicut. Duarte Barbosa in the beginning of the sixteenth century described the skirmishes between the Kolathiri and

49 Logan, n. 15, f.n., p. 25
50 Kurup, n. 1, p. 16
51 K.V. Krishana Iyer, The Zamorins of Calicut (Calicut, 1938), p. 136
52 A. Sreedhara Menon, Kerala District Gazetteers: Cannanore (Trivandrum, 1972), p. 96
Nileswaram Raja. After crossing Cumbala, which was under the sway of Vijayanagara Kingdom, Barbosa entered Nileswaram. He stated that “further on was a river named Miraporam (Nileswaram River) on which stood the seaport (Nileswaram Port) of Moors and Heathen, a place of much trade and navigation, where dwelled another of his (The Kolathiri’s) nephews who often rose against him, and the king again brought him under his power”. Barbosa made no further mention of it. It was doubtful whether the Kolathiri had been in a position to ‘bring him under’ control. Since Nileswaram Raja had an independent estuary and the support of both Zamorin and the Arab Muslims, it was unlikely to make him subservient to the Kolathiri.

**Waning of the ‘Greater Kolathunadu’**

The aforesaid survey makes it clear that with the advent of the European trading companies, the proliferation processes in the power structure of Kolathunadu achieved unprecedented momentum. Even prior to the ‘Da Gama’ period the loose feudatory obligations that welded the Kolathunadu power structure were often challenged by the occurrences of external attacks. The circumstances by which the northern and southern portions of Kolathunadu became practically independent of the Kolathiri’s suzerainty were noticed earlier. The Kottayam rajas or the Puranadu rajas had already been accepted as independent of the de jure power structure and even claimed superiority by virtue of their so-called kshathria heredity.

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Figure 3. Kolathunadu Power Structure

Kolathiri
(Ruled Chirakkal with the help of Nalamkur and Anchorkur)

Vadakkilamkur
(In charge of northern Kolathunadu)

Thekkilamkur
(In charge of southern Kolathunadu)

Lesser rajas
(Naduvazhis)

Petty Chieftains
(Desavazhis)

Nileswaram Raja

Ali Raja of Cannanore

Kadathanadu Raja

Kottayam Raja

Chuzhali Nambiar

Koondali Nambiar

Iruvazhinadu Nambiar

Randathara Achanmar

Kurungoth Nayar
Political structure of Kolathunadu had its inherent shortcomings. First of all, it lacked political endurance to tide over even moderate challenge to its authority. The control of the indigenous politics and most of the land rested with the feudal chiefs who had limited scale of feudal obligations with the Kolathiri. The Kolathiris didn’t have dependable military potential to ensure their supremacy over their own vassals. The new political dynamism with new organs of power in a transitional stage between feudalism and modernity was visibly absent in Kolathunadu. The quarrels between different rajas of the coast and the turbulent spirit of the Nayar chiefs, who were frequently in arms against each other made the introduction of order or better government impossible in Kolathunadu.\(^\text{54}\)

Moreover, the *de jure* sovereigns of Kolathunadu were not the beneficiaries of the accumulated treasure in the form of precious metals over the centuries from the spice trade; instead much of it had been bestowed with different temples. The Perumchellur copper plate of 22 September 1145 (21\(^{\text{st}}\) Day, *Kanni* month M.E. 321) refers to a loan (707 *anayachu*) given by the Kolathiri and the Brahmin *sabhas* in Perumchellur jointly to Pukazhamalcherry Chuvaran Devan. At a second stage Kolathiri offered 300 coins (*anayachu*) to the Brahmin *sabhas* and the earlier loan given to Chuvaran Devan was also credited to the Brahmin *sabhas’* account. This refers to the process of converting the wealth bestowed with the temple as *brahmaswom* with the connivance of the Kolathiri.\(^\text{55}\)

\(^{54}\) Buchanan, n. 3, p.548

Zamorin’s attempt to control the administration of the Taliparamba temple in Kolathunadu and the attempts of Canarese and Mysorean rulers were primarily for monetary reasons, rather than political. The feudal system in Kolathunadu remained traditional even after the introduction of relatively new mode of mercantile activities in the spice trade. As noticed by Buchanan, (at the time of Hyder’s invasion) “the government of (Kolathunadu) which being perfectly feudal, neither laws, nor a system of revenue, were known amongst its inhabitants”.\(^{56}\) The Kolathiris were eager to improve trade and commercial activities in their region, since their primary income came from the custom duties and levies. They didn’t have any control over the production and distribution pattern of the produce of ‘their land’ and a host of middlemen, both native and foreign were the real beneficiaries of the growing spice trade. The middlemen and the petty chieftains didn’t have any legal obligation to the Kolathiri and as far as the petty chieftains were concerned, the loyalty to the ‘sovereign’ was feudal and customary in nature. This loyalty was purely personal or customary and as such dependent up on the fates of individuals and the turns of the fortune wheels. A number of chieftains, like Kurungot Nair, Achanmars of Randathara etc., started to claim their own transit duties or other cesses on the commodities transported through their regions, and in course of time they became independent from the feudal yoke of the Kolathiris. The schism within the royal family was another cause for the decline of the Kolathunadu royal family. It was divided into five segments of authority in the order of seniority. However, there were occasions when a junior prince conspired to outwit his elders. For instance, the Tellicherry factory site was granted to the English company, not by the Kolathiri himself but by the

\(^{56}\) Buchanan, n.3, p.548
Northern Regent (the Vadakkilamkur), who happened to be the de facto ruler of Kolathunadu at the time. It can be assumed that the Vadakkilamkur was deliberate in his venture to drive the other princes out of power by siding with the English company.

The seventeenth century Malabar in general and Kolathunadu in particular witnessed much commotion among the prominent European mercantile companies for trade monopoly and territorial acquisitions. The indigenous power structure, sided with these alien powers at their convenience for strengthening themselves against their native opponents. In course of the eighteenth century, even the idea of ‘Greater Kolathunadu’ disappeared, leaving the Kolathiri and his princes in control only of small strata of territory of the Kolathunadu proper or Chirakkal.

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57 Logan, n. 2, p. 394