Preface

The present study is an attempt to analyse the pattern of colonial expansion of the English East India Company in Kolathunadu in North Malabar. Malabar pepper became an important article of European trade by the middle of the eighteenth century. The Tellicherry Factory of the English company became the nerve centre of political and commercial manoeuvrings and they became successful in not only outwitting the rival European companies of the French and the Dutch but also in controlling the indigenous political structure for their profitable commercial prospects. The factors that favoured the establishment of a colonial state and the role played by the indigenous political agents of Kolathunadu in accelerating this process are the core areas of this study. The study analyses the historical junctures of collaboration and conflicts among the indigenous political agents and the colonial agents. The former consisted of several levels of authority, namely the Kolathiris, the Ali rajas of Cannanore, the Achanmars of Randuthara, the Nambiarst of Iruvazhinadu, the Puranadu rajas of Kottayam and the Kurungoth Nayar. The latter were the European merchant companies of the Dutch, the French and the English. The schisms within the Kolathunadu royal family were analysed to bring out the decadent nature of the native political system.

The study is presented in seven chapters. Chapter first, ‘Introduction’, presents the emergence of Kolathunadu political cluster in northern Malabar on the debris of the Mooshika dynasty and the subsequent prominence achieved by the Kolathiris by virtue of the trade on horses and spices. The physical and economic dissimilarities associated with the Kolathunadu political cluster in comparison with the other parts of Malabar
are examined in an exhaustive manner. A review of the available literature on the area of study is also made in order to provide a proper perspective on the proposed study.

‘Historical setting’, the second chapter, deals with the historical background of the origin and growth of political formations in Kolathunadu. The distribution pattern of agrarian settlements and the driving forces in the socio-economic peculiarities in north Malabar are the essential themes of this chapter. The trade potential by virtue of the massive river systems, the availability of the best quality spices from hinterland and the decentralised power structure of the royal family are examined here. The feudalistic character of the Kolathunadu polity has been analysed with solid evidences to prove the existence of Kolathiri as a titular head with limited control over the means of production and mercantile activities. The nature of the native military is examined in the context of the general socio-economic system prevailed in the region and the feudal and caste identities are highlighted to prove the obsolete character of the native militia. The early colonial machinations for controlling the profitable trade on spices are described here.

The third chapter, ‘Proliferation in the indigenous politics’, analyses the structural pattern of the decentralized power structure of the Kolathunadu royal family. A detailed survey on various petty chiefdoms and the historical circumstances of their origin are separately analysed. The circumstances leading to the elevation of the Arakkal house as an independent ruler of Cannanore and its repercussions on the political and social spheres are elaborately discussed. This chapter also deals with the colonial tactics employed for fanning up the rivalries among the agents of
the indigenous politics and the demotion of Kolathunadu political structure as a petty chieftaincy of Chirakkal during the eighteenth century.

The fourth chapter, ‘The Onset and Consolidation of the East India Company in Kolathunadu’, concentrates on the tactics and circumstances of colonial sway over the territories of Kolathunadu. The gradual and steady advancement of the English East India Company in collaboration with the Kolathiri is elaborated with instances of conflicts among other claimants of lesser authority. The circumstances leading to the establishment of the Tellicherry Factory is presented as the milestone in articulating colonialism in Malabar. The rivalries among the French, the Dutch and the English powers for controlling spice trade and the collaborations and conflicts between colonial and indigenous power structure for parochial ends are critically analysed.

The fifth chapter, ‘The Historical process of native political earthquakes’, deals with the process of the breakdown of native political structure during the course of the Mysorean invasions (1766 to 1790) in Malabar. The merchant capitalist interest of the English company wrapped in the thick veil of diplomacy is explicit in the attitude of the English company in selecting Hyder and his son Tipu as perfect substitutes for the weary native chieftains of Malabar. The Mysorean powers tried to change the existing socio-political structure to a suitable one for a centralized system of administration. The experiment succeeded only partially in north Malabar and the reasons are examined in the backdrop of the physical geography and political environment. The circumstances for brewing up the clash of interests between the Mysoreans and the English, the way in which the indigenous powers were made ally of the latter, and the
expulsion of the Mysoreans from Malabar are all described to show how the company became the ‘legitimate’ political authority in Malabar.

The sixth, ‘From Sovereignty to Landlordism’, deals with the circumstances by which the traditional rulers of Malabar had been demoted to the position of mere revenue collectors or landlords. The clash of interest between the private trade interests of the company servants and the corporate interests of the company is also examined. Special attention is given to the colonial process of creating a pro-colonial native group of Janmis by legitimising their right over land as inalienable birth right over the age-old concept of customary sharing of produce. The resistance by Kerala Varma Pazhassi raja of Kottayam is presented as the last attempt by a native ruler against the establishment and spread of an alien rule in Kolathunadu. The Kurichya rebellion of 1812 is taken as a specific case of spontaneous outburst by a group of peasant aborigines against the mode of exorbitant revenue collection by the colonial masters. It is an important event in Kolathunadu history since peasant uprisings were rather meagre in north compared to the southern part of the region.