Chapter II

Land Rights of Kerala through the Ages

This chapter tries to look into the evolution of the land rights in Kerala through the ages. Such an attempt is made with a view to look at the emergence of the class of intermediary functionaries who later on, are identified as forming the nair caste. An attempt is made to place the taravad in a historical context to understand what the taravad meant to the people of the locality and how the taravad exerted its influence on the people through the various institutions attached to it.

Early Historic Period

At the turn of the first millennium Kerala was a part of Tamilakam and temporally shared the culture of the Tamil macro region. This period was earlier called the Sangam period but is now called the early historic period. The ancient Tamil works popularly known as the Sangam works help to throw light on the history and life of the people during this period. Tamilakam consisted of five types of landscape ecosystems or micro-eco-zones (tinai-s) – Kurinji (hilly back-woods), Palai ( parched zone), Mullai (pastoral tract), Marutam (wet-land) and Neitai (litoral). These divisions were not mutually exclusive but “a continuum with no point of beginning or end, interspersed with the relative dominance of one or other tinai-s”. Kerala was Kurinji dominated area despite its littoral fringes and patches. Tina-s are now being looked at as macro-eco-zones of a given mode of human adaptations and attempts have been made to ascertain the process of the formation of macro-eco-zones through the interaction of zones. Each had adopted their own forms of

1 Rajan Gurukkal, “Forms of Production and Forces of Change in Ancient Tamil Society”, Studies in History, vol. (NS) 5 (2) pp. 159-76. Also see, “From Clan and Lineage to Hereditary Occupations and Caste in Early South India”, Indian Historical Review, pp. 23-33.
subsistence like hunting and gathering in Kurinji, plundering and cattle lifting in Palai, animal husbandry and shifting cultivation of Mullai, wetland agriculture of Marutam and fishing and salt manufacturing of Neital. Besides, the people of Mullai, Marutam and Neital were involved in craft production also as a means of subsistence. Apart from primitive forms of subsistence like hunting, gathering, fishing and plundering, there were four forms of material production of which we have evidence from archaeology viz. animal husbandry, shifting cultivation, craft production and plough agriculture. But a precise date of the commencement of each of these forms is not possible. We also get numerous references to the interaction between these eco-zones in the exchange of material goods. 

The people of the tinai-s were clan based descent groups dispersed into domestic segments (kuti-s) around each clan settlement (Ur). The people of the Ur were bound by kinship and lead by the headman (kilar) at whose instance the resources of the Ur were pooled and redistributed. On the whole the economies of the Ur-s were partly agricultural and partly pastoral. Recent researches show that their polity was of the chieftain. 

"Kinship must have been the basis of production relations and family the source of labour since the society had been in a state of lineage formation out of dismembering clans." 

This assumption according to Rajan Gurukkal is supported by the clues in the poems referring to all forms of subsistence including plough agriculture. In the absence of caste, clan ties, networks of corporative labour seem to have been the source of labour. Though the surplus potential of kinship based production was very limited, the level of production of plough agriculture during this time was much higher than when compared

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4 Work done by Gurukkal which has been quoted in the chapter along with those done by other scholars like M G S Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat and Raghava Varrier.

to other forms of subsistence. Evidences point to the surplus in wetland sustaining a variety of "non-productive but socially necessary functionaries."

There were different types of chiefs - Kilar, Velir and Ventar who maintained control through predatory raids over settlements beyond kinship. It was through these predatory raids, political domination and the produce of the tinai-s were appropriated. The ideology of plunder raids dominated the society. The produce thus appropriated was distributed to the various social functionaries like Panar-s (bards), Vetluar-s (warrior leaders), Parayar-s (who played a small drum called Para) and Tutiyar-s (who made and played a small drum called Tuti). These bards lived on gifts they got for singing eulogies of the chiefs.

"Ordinary bards generally received some grain, meal or used clothes by way of gifts. However, scholarly bards (pulavar) including brahmanas and warrior leaders (maravar) must have occasionally received gold, horses, chariots, gems etc. Land gifts seems to be little unlikely at that level of polity." The Brahmin bards provided the chiefs with Vedic, Sastraic and Puranic means of political legitimisation. Gradually gifts to Brahmins included land grants (Ekabhoga) also. The burning of agricultural settlements and crops was not congenial to the development of wetland agriculture that required peace and protection. This along with the limitations of kin based production was another handicap of this social formation. Predatory marches and migration were the initial factors that led to the disintegration of kinship. In the poems we do have references to several Brahmin settlements. The first

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8 Ibid., p. 31.
7 Ventar-s were the chieftains of three major lineages - Cera, Cola, Pandya. Velir-s were mostly hill chieftains and kilar-s as mentioned before, the headmen of settlements. Though these three levels of political powers seem hierarchical, there was no single chain of political control binding them. Ibid., p. 35.
9 Rajan Gurukkal, Perspectives, Op. cit., p. 34.
The Emergence of a Non-Kin Based System of Production

As the Brahmins were not cultivators by themselves, they had to get their land cultivated by others. In the kin-based familial system of agriculture, an alternative system had to be evolved. The predatory marches and the consequent destruction of agriculture were not at all conducive to the development of agriculture. Though the number of Brahmins and their holdings were small, the interaction, which the Brahmin households had with the local clans, was significant. The Brahmin settlement with their dependency on non-kin labour represented a new system of relations in production. It has been argued that the Kalabra invasion aggravated the dissolution of the kin based system of labour and its political structure.

By the 6th century A.D, the new system evolved over the few centuries, seemed to have become stabilised. Based on non-kin-labour of agricultural production, the society was now divided into two mutually antagonistic classes - the landed organisers and the landless cultivators. There were also changes in the Brahmin settlements and holdings. The Ekabhoga or individual holdings of the early historic period underwent a change towards collective holdings or corporate brahmadeya-s.

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12 Ibid., p. 37.
This process involved the super imposition of the superior rights of the Brahmins over the communal holdings and the clan families of the locality. At the apex were the landholders (brahmadeya kikizavar-s). Then came the intermediary leaseholders (karalar-s) that were mostly artisans and craftsmen. At the bottom were the actual cultivators (Atiyalar-s). The process also saw the emergence of a new set of rights indicative of enhanced control of the means of production and diversification of lesser rights like entitlements to a share of crop. This could be seen in the Pullankurichchi rock inscription of 5th - 6th centuries AD, situated in the Tirupattur Taluk of the Ramanathpuram District. The donor having purchased strips of land scattered in a few Brahmin villages, endowed them with the right of cultivation (karanmai) with the non-Brahmin settlements (kuti-s) and the superior right of land holding (miyatci) with the Brahmin householders. This was then placed under the protection of the watch and ward of the locality (natukappar and puramkappar). The rights of the kuti-s were now transformed and were placed under a superior right of miyatci. The kuti-s now were given the karanmai right (the right to a share of the crop) of cultivation only thereby, implying alienation from the ownership of land or the control of the means of production.

The following chart shows the land rights hierarchy at this stage:

Land holders           BRAHMADEYA KIZAVAR-S Miyatci (Right held)
Lease holders          KARALAR-S         Karanmai
Actual cultivators     ATIYALAR-S

The kuti-s or the clan, which was the basic unit of the society, was under the headman (kilar). The clansmen (kutimakkal) banded together under the kilar for raids as the need arose. Once the kin-based system of agriculture disintegrated, caste must have become

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an institutional factor of integration. It has been argued that the specialisation of labour could have led to the transformation of clans into jati-s. The urge to perpetuate land entitlements, which were obtained as rewards for specialised labour, must have led certain clans to turn them into hereditary occupational groups. Soon clan identities disappeared and jati-s evolved. Several names like Pana, Paraya etc vouch for the retention of clan names for jati.¹⁸

Rise of the Temples and Patterns of Land Holdings

By the 9th century AD, the Cera king called the Perumal had control over Kerala. The royal authority was more, a grand idea of an over all control than de-facto power. Though the koyma right rested with the Perumal and he exacted the annual dues (attaikol), but in the absence of a centralised bureaucracy, military/standing army, it hardly meant actual control. The state in this period appears to have taken the form of a loose knit federation of natuvali-s owing allegiance to the Perumal at Makotai. It was during this period that a new wave of Brahmin migration took place leading to the establishment of 32 Brahmin settlements.²⁰ According to M G S Narayanan,

"The art of sychophantry perfected by the Brahmin clients from the Vedic age and the managerial skills acquired by them with the help of astronomy (Jyotisastra), medicine (Ayurveda) and moral science (Dharmasastra) could have endeared them to the petty chiefs."²¹

The king was called 'Ko', the short form of 'Kon' or 'Koman', meaning chief or king in Tamil. The close collaboration of the king and Brahmin oligarchy is seen. The institution

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¹⁸ Ibid., p. 255.
¹⁹ Idem.
of Nalu tali\textsuperscript{22} or four temples, where leaders of Brahmin grama-s were given the right of management of these four temples, while it helped the king in council, it also pointed to growing the power and influence of the Brahmins. The \textit{Perumal} and his officials called Koyil Adhikarikal were directly involved with temple management as they were entitled to a major share of fines and also collected an annual tribute from the temple. The Koyil Adhikarikal-s who were the members of the royal family was conceived as a vital link between the central government and the local government for collection of revenue. By the time of the last \textit{Perumal}, royal power became subject to Brahmin power as seen in the public \textit{prayaschitta} of the \textit{Perumal} for having offended the ‘Ariyar’ or Brahmins.\textsuperscript{23} Thus by the 9th century AD the corporate Brahmin household had dominated the agrarian economy and the temples started emerging as a major institution in the agrarian localities of Kerala.\textsuperscript{24} They soon became the pivots around which the economic and socio-religious life of the agrarian villages revolved.

The central temple around which Brahmin settlement was organised was called the \textit{gramakshetra}.\textsuperscript{25} The Brahmins controlled the administration of these temples as well as the villages. The \textit{sabhaiyar} or the members of the \textit{Sabha} were at the apex of the system. They controlled land as their individual holdings (\textit{brahmasvam}) and as corporate custodians of the temple holdings (\textit{devasvam}).\textsuperscript{26} It was from the \textit{Sabha} that the executive committee called \textit{Parishad} was selected to look after the day-to-day affairs of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22} According to the \textit{Keralolppathi} these 4 temples were Meltali, Keltali, Nediyatali and Cingapuramtali belonged to the four Brahmin settlements of Muzhikkulam, Airanikulam, Paravur and Irinjalakuda surrounding the capital Kesavan Veluthat, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{23} M G S Narayanan, \textit{Perspectives, Op. cit.}, pp. 49-52.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Rajan Gurukkal, \textit{The Kerala Temple and Early Medieval Agrarian System} (henceforth \textit{Kerala Temples}), Vallathol Vidyapeetam, 1992, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{26} The property of the temple was called \textit{devasvam} and Brahmins were entrusted with it. They were bestowed \textit{brahmasvam} as incentive for settlement and continued supervision of the temple. \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 256-79.
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the temple. They organised themselves into Ganam-s (trusts) to look after the endowments involving landed property. These endowments according to Veluthat, was of a specific temporary nature. But where these endowments were of a perpetual nature, the membership of these bodies seems to have become hereditary as shown in the Peruma Inscription.\(^{27}\) Santi-atikal and the chief priest called melsanti who performed the daily rituals were paid by service tenure called virutti.\(^{28}\) The other two important functionaries of the temple were the Potuval and Varyiar belonging to the non-Brahmin order. While Potuval seems to have worked as the General Secretary, the Varyiar was the accountant. The others attached to the temple included the temple dancers, drummers, musicians, sweepers, artisans and craftsmen. All of them were under the service tenure of the virutti or jeevita.\(^{29}\)

According to M G S Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, the epigraphic records of the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries show the changing nature of Brahmin village councils. They received donations in the form of land and gold not only from chieftains and princes but also from merchants, Brahmins, devadasi-s and others. Some of the members of the council surrendered their brahmasvam property to the temple and became tenants of the temple. Gold was invested in land that was then leased out to tenants on liberal terms. These transactions made Brahmin Uralar-s of the settlements, the biggest landlords in Kerala in their corporate capacity.\(^{30}\)

In the socio-economic hierarchy, the Uralar-s was at the top. They had the proprietary right over the Ur (the Uranmai). Below them came the leaseholders or the

karalar who held the Karanmai or the right of cultivation. Then came the right of the artisan-cum-craftsmen groups called the Kutimai. At the bottom came the primary producers or the actual cultivators with the atimai right. These were the Pulaye-s and the agrarian labourers of the society. In certain inscriptions like the Tarissappalli Records, the term 'Vellalar-s' could be seen. The highest authority resided with the Perumal. His authority was called Koyma. Below that were the Uranmai, Karanmai and Kutimai in the descending order. The Uranmai became the Jenmom right. The artisans and craftsmen group besides the other landless labourers held the tenures that evolved during the ages like verumpattom. The epigraphical sources of the period refer to 'al' or labourers who were always attached to the arable lands and were transferred along with the land. They consisted of Pulaya-s, Paraya-s, Kanakkar-s, llava-s who were engaged in various types of manual labour.

Kanom was originally a hereditary right at par with the Jenmom. Smaller in size and invariably held by lower groups like karalar, kanom right got mortgaged under the institutions orri and panayam. Kanom lands mortgaged by the holders were held back as lease holds and hence came to be called kanom tenure. (I owe this idea to a discussion with the supervisor). Thus the vast amount of land gave to the Uralar great authority over the tenants.

"The skilful blending of the sense of obligation to the landlord and devotion to the deity certainly made the lord-tenant relationship doubly strong and secure... setting down conditions of tenancy with punitive

33 According to Gurukkal and Varrier, the 'vellalar-s' of Tarissappalli copper plates were intermediary landholders who occupied the status of karalar-s. Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier, Keralacharitram, Vallathol Vidyapeetam, 1990, pp. 114-15. Though they were agriculturist it is not known whether they were a separate group of people under the veli (leader). K N Ganesh, Op. cit., p. 61.
35 I owe this idea to the discussions with the supervisor.
clauses reinforced by priestly implications illustrate the degree to which the alliance between rulers and priest tightened feudal ties of dependence. It is also possible that the traditional Nayar militia of the Middle Ages in Kerala came to be recruited largely from these tenants of the temple. To avoid complications it was often prescribed that members of the council or their close relatives were unwelcome as tenants of the temple. That the members of the Sabha at Avittattur and Sukapuram were prohibited from courting alliance with the women of the tenants implies the existence of clandestine Brahmin-sudra relations in spite of orthodox Brahmin sentiment and strictures in Dharmaśāstra literature.37

Thus two aspects of the relations between nambūtiris and nairs can be seen which later becomes deeply embedded in the Kerala society. Thus according to the authors, the secret of

"successful development of Brahmin settlements in Kerala lay partly in the good relations they established with the tenant class and the close contact through sambandham ... The confidence generated among the non-brahmin population of tenants, coupled with the support of political authority, ensured peace and material prosperity for the brahmin settlers."38

In due course the association of the nair-s, which began in agriculture as leaseholders and in conjugal relations through sambandham enhanced the socio-economic status of the former. The nair sambandha-s constituted the local ruling aristocracy.39 Artisans and craftsmen got absorbed into the society as caste below the nair-s although they jointly formed the sudra-s who supplied warriors, administrators, intermediary tenants, washermen and the various other functionaries. Nair, originally a generic term then became a caste suffix.40

38 ibid., p. 422.
40 According to Prof. M.G.S. Narayanan they were "formed of person recruited from the aboriginal tribes for military service in the Cera period ... and soon became a sub-caste." This became more evident after the 16th century and will be dealt with later on in detail. M. G. S. Narayanan, Perumals of Kerala, Op. cit., p. 151. According to Robin Jeffrey nair-s was not a monolithic egalitarian group. They had a number of sub-caste among them which got merged during the 19th century. This fusion of nair sub-caste and the creation of the nair-s as a political community was what the nair-s saw as the solution to the new problems of political power were partially negated by the growing class division among them. Robin Jeffrey, Decline of Nayar Dominance, p. xix and p. 15.
Nair-s emerged as the next most important caste to the nambutiri-s after the antralajati or those who were employed in the temples. We come across mention of bodies like the Ayiram (The thousand), Arunnurruvar (The six hundred) Onnu Kurai Ayiram (The thousand without one), Patinayiram (The ten thousand), Ainnurruvar (Five hundred) etc in the inscriptions of the period. They were not only in charge of protection of the rulers and were called nilai or kaval, but were also in charge of the law and order situations of the community. For services rendered, they were paid in the form of land grants and could raise tax called irai, non-payment of which could lead to obstruction of cultivation by koyilmanuccar (king servants) as seen from the Tirunelli copper plate.  

Rise of Natuvali Swarupam-s

By the first quarter of the 12th century, the Perumal was no longer mentioned, instead, we hear of different natu-s. Natu-s and natuvali-s had become more powerful after the breakdown of the Perumal regime. Some of the natuvali-s soon rose to the position of Swarupam-s (Kolladu, Nedumangadu) or were able to establish their independent status while remaining under the natuvali-s (Mangathu Achchan, Tinayanchere Elayattu) or as prominent nair families of the area. (Kavalppara Nair, Karappurathe Madampi). The natuvali-s under whom the various groups of nurruvar (hundreds) functioned as companions of honour wielded local authority. The natuvali was in charge of the law and order in the natu and he collected rakshabhoga in the form of various dues. The natuvali-s belonged to the nair community and was called as Raja,

42 Ibid., p. 125. By now they were called chaver-s or suicide squads who vowed to protect the person of the rulers. Perspectives, p. 227. Related to this is the emergence of Kiriyangal. They were the fighting forces under the natuvali-s of the region that had as dependants their enangar group. K N Ganesh, Keralathinte Innalekal, Op. cit., p. 54.
Accha, Kaimal or merely Nair. New natu-s was formed and many of the old ones disappeared for e.g. Venpolinad was now divided into two. Instead of Polinad we now have Eranad coming into prominence. Even among the natuvali-s there was gradation according to the economic and non-economic powers they held. Swarupi had power over life and death whereas the Prabhu and the Madambi were petty chiefs with limited powers.

This period also saw the emergence of Swarupam-s, which later became the lineage of natuvali-s. The two powerful arms of the political authority of the Swarupam-s were the Brahmins who exercised ritual power over the people and the non-Brahmins who exercised military and administrative power, the latter evolving into the nair caste. The Swarupi Nayar-s served the ruler in various capacities from minister, collector of dues, accountant and army commanders. They commanded large areas and number of tenant cultivators and were thus able to provide the ruler with resources. The other service that they provided was that of militia called Akampadikkar or janam. The Swarupam-s usually brought them along to the new areas in which they settled to bring it under their control. By the end of the period they entrenched their authority over the societies of the natu-s. The natu-s lost their homogeneity and new regional centres of authority developed. This period was also a period of the expansion of agriculture and with it co-terminously the Brahmin settlements started spreading their authority over these newly cultivated areas. Bringing new lands under plough cultivation also meant the transformation of major chunks of tribal population into peasants. Land grants were

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45 Idem.
48 Idem.
assigned to minor chiefs by way of service tenure, and this resulted in their exercising military, administrative and judicial control over it. A large number of nair samanta chiefs arose during this period like Nayanar-s, Nambiyar-s, Moopil Nayar, Achan-s, Tampan-s, Menon-s, Kurup-s, Panikkar-s, Kaimal-s and the like. They were all big landlords with some military pretensions. Enjoying control over large amount of land and people and ready to wield swords, they had all the features of feudal nobility and in the peripheral areas, the real authority was in their hands. They further encouraged the agricultural expansion leading to their strengthening of their position at the cost of major powers.49

Another reason for the emergence of these people was that in the lineage system,50 where the eldest became the chief there were frequent quarrels in which these retainers took sides. Hence every member of the family and major Swarupi chiefs maintained their own service system – karyakkar, accountants and militia leading to increasing militarisation and segmentation of political authority.51 Below the natu-s came the desom-s and the representatives of the natuvali could collect taxes from the desam.52

By the end of the 12th century the organisations of the ‘hundred’ seems to have given way to the cangatams or kaval cangatams who were entitled to receive a share of production as rakshabhogam or kaval panam.53 The Vanjeri documents talk about three persons who were entrusted with the kaval of the Desom (where the Vanjeri illom stood) Urkattu Unnama Panikkar, Candirattil Rama Panikkar and Mukkuttil Unni Ravi.54 It is not a mere coincidence that these three families were of rich nair landlord families of the

50 The swarupam-s soon became fragmented into different tavazhi-s and soon feuds arose as to the seniority among them as succession was according to muppu. Perspectives, Op. cit., p. 224.
52 K N Ganesh, Keralathinte Innalikal, p. 48.
period. The kaval panam was collected and given by the Sanketam. It was realised and was fixed at the annual rate of 121/2 tuni per 1 kalappadu according to the cheria perunazhi measure. This was equivalent to 2 panam-s out of which 1 panam was taken for the deity and 1 panam was given to the nair engaged.\textsuperscript{55} The remuneration given for kaval was called kaval palam, kaval virutti (service land tenure) kaval padu (land set apart for kaval personnel), kaval kandam, rakshabhogam etc. The supervisor in the case of Vanjeri got a big amount as kizhekkappana while the individual nair-s got expenses for rice and oil as jivitappanam (living expenses) and Ona veetam and Vishu veetam (dues for Onam and Vishu).

The temple properties were leased out by the Uralar to the karalar. According to Prof. Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, they had to pay 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} or 1/4\textsuperscript{th} as tax.\textsuperscript{56} Sometimes the owners would transfer the tax to the tenants as depicted in the Trikkakara record\textsuperscript{57}. In most cases, the Karalar-s were made responsible for providing the requirements for certain specified temple rituals for which the endowments were made. This right seems to have been transferred hereditarily. In the case of lands that were being donated to the temples, the karalar-s would be nominated\textsuperscript{58}. The Kaviyur record of 126 Kollam Era specifies that for the land donated the Mangalathu family and their heirs should be given the karanmai right in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{59}

"By the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, the Brahmin settlements in Kerala had grown into huge agrarian corporation with heavy feudal content about it. Each came to posses a large territory of its own with considerable immunity from the temporal powers even in matters, administrative, judicial and fiscal. These Sanketams, ... did not dispense with the fig leaf altogether and had one of the local chieftains as raksapurusa (protector)."\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{55} Idem.
\textsuperscript{56} Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Janmi Sampradayam Keralathil, Sahitya Pravarthaka, Kottayam, 1959, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{59} Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Op. cit., p. 46.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 66.
Sanketam-s was another centre of power and authority in medieval Kerala. They were seen having independent jurisdiction with its affairs being managed by the Yogam, which consisted of the Uralar-s of the temples. Later on, they associated themselves with a secular leader to defend their possessions. Padmanabha Menon compared them to independent republics free from the control of kings from outside. The study of the Vanjeni documents has revealed that it was not so. The Sanketam depended on the neighbouring chief for everything including the constitution of their yogam and the maintenance of law and order. The chiefs would even send directions to the members of the yogam. And provide the Sanketam with nair-s for protection. So we could only say that these Sanketam-s were technically self-governing units but really very much subservient to the neighbouring chiefs. The relation between the two cannot be simply be placed in a hierarchy but was an interdependent, each furthering the other.

Garden Land's Economy

In the 13th century Keralam witnessed expansion of garden lands. An increase in population must have led to pressure on the land, which led people to reclaim forestlands. By this period wetland cultivation was almost entirely under the Brahmin landlords and ruling families. This led to the expansion of garden land or parambu, along the red soil terraces, that were only partly cultivated. The fragmentation of productive

62 Idem. It was hardly necessary that it should be the chief area within which the sanketam was situated. He only had to provide some police assistance in the event of the temple having to deal with recalcitrant elements. But being the raksapurusa of the temples was considered by the chief as a matter of great prestige. Kesavan Veluthat, Perspectives, Op. cit., p. 66. According to Veluthat, the result of increasing independence of Brahmin Sanketam-s was the consolidation of feudal tenure in Kerala. Ibid., p. 91 They tended to be oligarchic in nature as their control passed into the hands of few Brahmin families and was helped further by their unique law of primogeniture where only the eldest could marry prevented fragmentation. Ibid., p. 92.
63 K P Padmanabha Menon, Kochi Raja Charitram, Mathrubhumi, Kozhikode, 1996, Chapter ix.
lands through reclamation of parambu was a simultaneous process of the proliferation of puraidams and expansion of parambu.

The proliferation of Parambu - Puraidam-s led to the loosening of ties of the landlords, as they did not have control over the newly reclaimed parambu. In these newly recovered parambu the kani right (full ownership) was with the reclaimers who were mostly karalar. Soon the Janmi-s staked a claim by virtue of being the Janmi of that particular place. And the karalar started making the customary obligatory presents to them on Vishu and Onam etc.

Trade with Arabs, Chinese, Jews and Christians helped to accelerate the development of a market oriented agricultural economy in Kerala. With the arrival of the Portuguese, Kerala was initially linked with the world economy and later on, more extensively with like the Dutch, the French and the English. This period saw the full expansion and consolidation of Parambu-Puraidam Sampdvyavastha. The period 16th-18th centuries saw the growing importance of the parambu. It was expanded to the forests, to sandy areas and fields. Yield trees like coconut, arecanut, pepper, ginger, turmeric and tamarind were the important cash crops, which were exported. There were uncultivated trees like Teak, Ebony etc and fruit trees like Mango, Jackfruit, gooseberry etc. People also grew crops needed for daily use in them, like vegetables, roots and

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65 According to Raghava Varmer, we come across the names of puraidam-s from the 9th century onwards owned and occupied by individuals. M R Raghava Varmer, "Further Expansion of Agrarian Society- Socio-economic Structure", Cited in Perspectives, Op. cit., p.82. In Parambu vegetables like brinjal, gourds, yam, tubers etc. were the main crops. Ibid., p. 86. But Parambu-s along with the hilly tracts were also used for the cultivation of paddy Ibid., p. 91.
cereals. If conditions were favourable paddy too was grown. Thus it not only brought
income but also helped families to subsist without outside help.66

As puraidam-s increased we see that familial labour alone was not sufficient.
Thus we see the development of labourers for daily wages on activities like plucking of
coconuts, arecanuts and ploughing the parambu. As the work force related to the
parambu increased it soon became a hereditary occupation with certain rights. The
climbers of coconut, arecanut and palm tree were the ezhava-s or tiyya-s. As monetary
transactions increased, people felt the need for money and the institution of mortgages
or Panayam developed. The lower orders started mortgaging their various rights for
money for eg., the right to pluck coconut or their implements of work that could be
mortgaged. The karalar started mortgaging their kanom right by pledging these lands.
Thus kana-panayam came into being. But as loans could not be paid back the land got
alienated. This land thus became the leased land called Kanom' land and was then
leased by the karalar from the Janmi to be cultivated. At times even the Janmi-s had to
borrow money from the hands of traders, as it was they who had money with them. Soon
these mortgages and transactions became more complex.

By the beginning of the 16th century temples emerged as a major land holding
institution, which were controlled by the Brahmin-s. Lands directly held by the rulers
were called cerikkai lands. Simple leases were the most wide spread form of land
holdings. Most of the tenant cultivators (kudiyar) were simple leaseholders paying
pattam or rent for their right to hold the land. Pattam was fixed as a share of the produce
usually taken after every crop and was paid in kind. This period saw the growth of lease

cum mortgage tenures that could be differentiated from verumpattom. Land transactions were done by paying security (artham) in kind or in cash. Mortgages on land were initially for a period from 3 to 12 years and redeemable by the landlords. By the 18th century these periods increased to 36 and 48 years. The interest on the security was deducted from the rent realised from the land and the remainder was paid as michavaram. If renewed an additional amount was supposed to be paid by the leaseholder. The extension of kanom tenure resulted in a new type of landholding where the holder was able to extend his occupation of land for longer periods thereby enabling him to increase his occupation of lands for longer periods. By now kulikkanom tenure had become a popular form of holding associated with lease cum mortgage holdings in Thiruvithamkur and Kochi areas. In South Malabar its spread was limited. Under this tenure lands that were newly brought into cultivation had a rent of only 1/4 or 1/3 and was called kulikkur. Its spread indicated the spread of garden lands particularly those cultivating coconut or arecanut. Right over forest were indicated by kutikkkanom and kutikkuru i.e., the right to gather forest produce from one forest tree or plant by paying a rent. During this period, kanom and otti had become the pre-dominant form of tenure in Malabar. We have evidence about a growth of kanom and its variations with a class of intermediaries who held positions as servants, militia and accountants. The class of intermediaries were mostly from the class that were to form the nair caste later on. This indicated that though the land was with the hands of the customary owners the actual control had by then passed on to the hands of the intermediaries who had made

71 Ibid., p. 319.
themselves indispensable. Thus Randattara Achen, Iravanuttu Nambiar and Mappila-s of Perumgorur undermined the authority of Kolathunad in their areas.\textsuperscript{73} The growth and extension of \textit{kanom} tenure and its numerous variations and extension including \textit{kulikkanom} and debt bonds had resulted in a new type of land holdings where the land holders gained relative freedom and ability to extend his occupation of lands for long periods, thus enabling him to increase his controlling rights over land. These were found in association with the growing intermediary class who held positions as servants, militia and accountants. Thus though the ownership of land was still with the traditional holders, they were dependent on the intermediaries who had made themselves indispensable.\textsuperscript{74}

By the 18th century in Travancore and Cochin these intermediaries were brought under control by the rulers. In Malabar however, their customary sway was disrupted by the Mysorean invasion and a new type of revenue settlement was imposed on the people.

“This assessment not only did away with the customary payments and obligations but also forced on the \textit{janmi-s} to pay dues, which went against the traditional concept of \textit{janamam} itself.” \textsuperscript{75}

This loss of customary sway according to Ganesh led to the control of lands into the hands of \textit{kanom} and \textit{kulikkanom} holders. But with the coming of the British, \textit{janmi-s} became the statutory landholders from the customary holders and new privileges including the right to enhance rent and legal eviction enabling them to sustain themselves as a class and improve their position. Land in Malabar, thus by the period of our study, was of three major types - those under the ruling aristocracy known as \textit{cerikkal} lands or \textit{pandaravaka}, those under the temple called \textit{devasvam} and under the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Idem.}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 321.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Brahmins called the *brahmasvam*. A small portion of land was held as allodial property, which in Kerala was called the *kanom* land. This was held by the *nair*-s.

**Tara and the Emergence of Taravad**

To understand the *taravad* and what it meant to the people of the *tara*, we have to locate it in the context of the *tara* where it stood. In Kerala, the village settlement pattern unlike the rest of India, was of a dispersed nature. All castes both high and low were found settled within the village. Most of the villages were more or less self-reliant. Various occupational groups whose services were needed for the people were found in them. Different communities lived in the *tara* as the *jati* oriented field names in the settlement registers indicate. The existence of an institution of the *tara*-avakasam or *tara*-right leads us to assume that these occupational groups could not offer their services to other settlements according to their will and pleasure. This ensured not only their services to the village settlement but also the livelihood of these occupational groups. The *'tarakuttam'* of the *tara* was thus seen as the assembly of the people of the *tara*. Thus the Brahmins had their assembly the *Sabha* and the *tara*-koottam was seen as the assembly of the people out side the *dvija*. *Tara*-s thus was the basic unit then and the *tara*-right indicated an occupational right. It became sites for resource mobilisation and production. It has certain characteristics of a tribal group. It must have been based on kinship (*kilacharcha*) and the warriors who fought must have become the...

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76 M R Raghava Varrier, *Village Communities in Pre-Colonial Kerala*, Place Names Society of India, Mysore, 1994, pp. 10–11.
78 *The tara-kuttam* was soon taken by historians like Padmanabha Menon as bodies that checked the autocratic powers of the king comparing them to the parliament. The *taravad* karanavan-s were seen as controlling the affairs of the *tara*. But the *tarakuttam* was not so powerful as to check the autocratic powers of the *nairwali*. 

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yajamanan-s. As property rights grew, each tara had a yajaman who was a karalar. It functioned as a civil and municipal body. Another division that came up in the habitational sites were the kara-s. It comprised of agriculturist, traders and artisans and together they were called as karakkar. They had their own leader (karanathan) and yogam to decide the affairs of the kara.

Soon these organisations came to be associated with the nair-s. The heads of the tara-s were called Karanavan-s. Mukhyasthan-s or Pramani-s or Mudalal-s or Tandan-s. The tarakuttam consisting of all the heads of the families of the tara managed affairs. The meeting took place under the shade of the banyan tree not far from the temple tank or on a raised platform with a thatched roof. Every desam or tara had a kalari, which imparted training to the young nair boys. Almost all the taravad-s had a place in this organisation and functioned as a village community co-ordinating and serving the different interests of the people. Hereditary functionaries like carpenters, washermen, barbers, blacksmiths, astrologers, physicians and schoolteachers rendered their services to the people of the tara. A watchmen nominated by the headman of the tara maintained vigil at night. These services were remunerated in kind at the time of harvest. Kalari-s along with the kalam-s were thus units of militia and units of administration and the presence of these and exchange centres in the tara-s made them more powerful. The affairs of the locality were conducted on the basis of customs and traditions. The hierarchy consisted of karyasta-s, karyasta-s of cerikkal, Kudiyan-s, and...
kulikudiyan-s (sub-tenants) and velakkar (labourers). The Kudiyan-s were kanom holders. The kanakkudiyan-s in a sense was a janmi. It was as intermediaries strata from karyasta-s to kanakkudiyan-s who established a hierarchical relationship with the ruler, that the nair-s and taravad-s emerged. A similar form of hierarchical relationship can be seen in the temple affairs also where too the taravad-s emerged as intermediaries like temples collectives and warriors, who could and were eligible to read and write. Thus these intermediaries in the 16th to the 18th centuries grew in number as attested by the various documents of the Samutiri and became centres of political, social, economic, cultural and ritual power.

Some of the bigger taravad-s had temples or kavu-s or temples attached to them like the Kootali and Vanjeri taravad-s. The deities of these kavu-s involved not only ancestors of the taravad, tribal gods, local heroes and heroines but also brahmanical deities at times. This was a sacred space for not only the members of the taravad but also to the people of the locality. There were three kinds of festivals of these kavu-s (1) involving different castes in separate stages in rituals, emphasising the interdependence of the taravad, shrine and worshippers (2) going on pilgrimages to different shrines by the upper and lower castes together (3) festivals that emphasised both community as well as relations of power within the rural society. Thus through these temples and kavu-s the taravad was able to exert certain power over the people of the locality. These temples also soon became a financial institution and administrator of justice.

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84 Ibid., pp. 307-8.
85 Ibid., p. 308.
86 Dilip Menon, Caste, Nationalism and Communalism in South India 1900-1948, CUP, New Delhi, 1994, p. 4.
kalari was an institution that trained soldiers each kalari owed its loyalty to one to the many natuvali-s who ruled the area. At times of need the kalari would send the specified number of men. The Section A, Documents 1-5 of the Kootali Granthavari are documents relating to the kalari and also setting up of a new kalari in 1593. In the case of the Kootali family the uncle or Karanavan who maintained the kalari was called the Gurikkalachan a title bestowed by the chieftain the Kottayam Raja for the nair commandant who maintained a kalari training centre. The karanavan-s of such taravad-s controlling the temples also enjoyed privileges attached with it. Such dignities attached were the Uraiyma, Ambalappati Desadhipatyam and Desam. Uraiyma meant management all the lands of the temples and its servants. As an Ambalappati he could direct temple festivals and get a seat of honour in public places or temples. Person who attained the right of Ambalappati invariably held the dignity of Uraiyma but not necessarily vice versa. Desam meant no marriage ceremony or any other ceremony of the desam could be performed without his the leave. Supreme authority was signified by the title Desadhipatyam. It meant that the person could recruit men for fighting these dignities was often attached to the taravad and the hereditary position of the karanavan-s of the taravad. Sometimes a taravad could posses all the above dignities and manage the civil and military affairs of the desam.

Thus by the beginning of the colonial period the nair taravad-s had grown to become powerful controlling the surplus appropriation and distribution of the resources of the tara-s. The taravad was related to other taravad-s as enangar-s who participated

88 Ibid., p. x.
90 Ibid., p. 4.
in the life crisis ceremonies of each other. Thus the leadership of the tara organisation was in their hands and in the hands of their enangar-s.

**Taravad and Land Relations**

The beginning of the colonial period we find that the *taravad* as an institution had grown to become the focal point in the local affairs. The British conquered Malabar with the help of the prominent local chieftains among whom the majority were *nair*-s. Once the conquest was completed, they entered into agreements with the various chieftains, Mukhyasthan-s, and principal landlords regarding the collection of revenue and other administrative affairs of Malabar. From the beginning, the various reports by the British administrators dealt extensively with the land relations in Malabar. The intention of the Report of the Joint Commissioners (1793) was to give the British a clear picture of their possession. The Report of the Second Commissioners of Malabar, Spencer, Smee and Walker in 1801, says,

"... it is believed that the whole of the landed property was formerly in the possession of the Namboodiri Brahmins ... The Raja-s in possession of large domains gave in fee to their principal officers of nairs and other castes by escheats and other means whence the old attipett deeds (by which Jenm or free hold estates are assigned and held) very commonly per port to be grants of lands from Raja-s as well as from Namboodiri-s and never expresses the price of a sale; the freehold is however now transferable by and to any person whatever and in effect by purchase, but the price is paid in these cases under certain previous forms of deed". 

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92 A look at the treatises signed and other agreements entered with the native chieftains and other prominent warriors shows the prominence of *nair*-s in the society. Out of 63 such people with whom such agreements were signed, 41 were *nair*-s. William Logan (ed.), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and other papers of importance*, AES Reprint, New Delhi, 1989, Document cxxii, pp. 355-6 On going through many documents compiled, we can see that the *nair*-s played a prominent role in the civil, military and judicial functions. Listing the areas ceded to the British we can see that a significant amount were *nair*-s. John Shore talks of them as being the primary landholders along with the *nambuthiri*-s leasing out their *jenmon* to cultivating farmers or *kanakkar*-s. John Shore, "Governor General's Minutes On Malabar Records", 1797, para. 3, p. 1, para. 3 and 4, p. 2, para. 11, p. 9.

Thus the jenmom right from the beginning was equated with freehold lease prevalent in England. The majority of the nair-s who were karalar were seen as the intermediaries and the army of nair-s was replaced with the army of the British. The local chieftains were forced to disband their armies. Initially the British effected the revenue settlements with the local chieftains leading to the establishment of "...a system based on the native feudalistic elements ... reinstated under proper supervision of paid servants of the Company". But this was not a full restoration of feudalistic structure as we see that many of their earlier powers were curbed. The Joint Commissioners prohibited the collection of the presents from the cultivators during Onam and Vishu.

In 1800, it was decided in a conference of the janmi-s that out of the total produce 50% should be left with the cultivator, 20% was to be given to the government as revenue and 30% with themselves as the share of the janmi's rent. The task of collection was left to the local chieftains initially but was taken over by the Company officials, as the system was not successful. In 1805, a new scheme of distribution of the agricultural produce was initiated.

"On wet or rice grounds, after deducting from the gross produce, the seed and exactly the same quantity for expenses of cultivation and then allotting 1/3rd of what remains as Kolulabham (or plough profit) to the Kudiyan-s, the residue or pattom is to be divided in the proportion of 6/10 to the Sirkar and 4/10 to the Janmakar; secondly on Parambu or orchard lands 1/3rd of coconut, supary (areca) and jack tree produce being deemed sufficient for the Kudiyan, the remainder or pattom is to be equally divided between the Sirkar and the Janmakar; and thirdly on dry grain lands (which are very scantily cultivated in Malabar) the sirkar's share is to be half of the Janmakar's varam (rent) on what is actually cultivated during the year". 95

95 T C Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 24-5.
This meant that the states share was 40%, the cultivator and the landlords got 33.3% and 26.7% respectively.

Thus we see that, though the revenue collection was initially farmed out among the native elite, the Company took over that function. This meant the landlords being reduced to the position of intermediaries. Secondly, as mentioned earlier in the field of military affairs, the Company did not need the military service of the nair-s. The land that they earlier enjoyed as rent-free tenures was now being assessed. Instead a definite share was assigned to the landholder or the taravad as rent for its superior land rights. According to K K N Kurup, the

"British made these Taravads absolute land controlling units. In Bengal, farmers of revenue were converted into absolute proprietors. In the same way, in Malabar, the share cropping feudalistic nobility of the Taravads were converted into private proprietors with a right of land monopoly. This consolidation of feudalistic land ownership introduced new agrarian relations in a colonial context. The land lords now abrogated the traditional rights of the peasantry and started to encroach up on the tenants share of produce as an absolute owner enjoying the right in the Roman concept of dominium".  

But the right of jenmom that was conferred on the landlords was not absolute. The British policy in India was to consider the state as the 'superior land lord' and hence only partially accepted the claim of the jenmi-s as the sole owners of the landed properties of Malabar. This class of the landlords became their supporters as their existence depended on them. Below them came a class of intermediary kanakkars-majority of whom were nair-s. Some of the powerful nair taravads had Jenmom right on land. In the late 18th and early 19th century pioneering nair taravad managed to carve out areas of influence with the opening up of forests and expanding into the interior regions.

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97 T C Varghese, Op cit., p. 25.*
through the setting up of the tavazhi-s. The younger members who were sent established contact with the tribal groups and through the cherikallu system their cultivation was brought under the nair taravad. The younger members of the taravad were allotted land in the taravad with a Maniyani tribal as supervisor. Rice and pepper were the main crops that were cultivated. Taravad thus emerged as major landholders by subordinating tribal labour in the forest and through marriage alliances with other powerful taravad-s. In Kasargod taluk, when the females of the prominent nair families contracted a sambandham alliance, the men were allotted certain number of agrestic labourer and slaves along with wastelands for bringing it under cultivation. Thus the taravad-s consolidated their hold over land and increased the extent of cultivated land through kinsmen and affines.

In the case of Wynad, land was owned by few major nair landowning houses. The Muthornad including the villages of Peria, Tavinjal and Edavaka were under the nair chieftains Vazhzhathtil Nayar, Tavinal Nayar, Mulliyankizhel Nayar, Alattil Nayar, Ayiravittil Nayar and Varayal Nayar together called the Aruvarambath Jenmakkars or the landlords of six boundaries. The Ellornadu consisting of Vemon and Tirunelli were under Edachana Nayyar and Vemom Nambiar. Wynad was under Kuppathodenayar, Tondee Nambiar, Pulpadi Nayar and Chilk卡拉ur Nayar. Porunrunnur consisting of Porunrunnur and Vellamunda Desam-s were under Manchan Nambiar, Karingari Nayar, Mangalasseri Nayar, Vattathode Nambiar and Cherukara Nayar. Nallurnad was under Manchan Nambiar, Karaingari Nayar and Edachana Nayar. Kurumbalanad including Kurumbala and Kottathara Desam-s were under Avinjat Nayar of Payyormala. Edanathaskur consisting of Kottappadi, Kalpetta and Vayithiri were under Kalpetta Nayar and Kanthamangalath Nayar. Tondernad was under Tonder Nambiar: Muttil and Pakkam.

Desam were under Bhagiam or Pakam Swarupam. Veliyamban was under Veliyambamvalunnavar. Similarly, the whole of Attapadi region belonged to the three nair chieftain families of Mannarghat Moopil Nayar, Palat family and Eralpat Raja. The prominent families had marriage relations with the other such families of the region. The Karakkatitathil and Kalliathu taravad-s through marriage owned 17,000 acres of 20,000 or so acres of forest in the Kallyad revenue division. The Kootali Thazhathu Veedu had marriage relations with all the major land holding families of the region like Kalliat, Vengayil, Echikkanath Chirakkara taravad and others. Thus we can see that the taravad-s had controlled large areas of land in Malabar and this position continued for a long time even after Malabar came under the British.

With the establishment of the colonial rule, though the nair-s lost their traditional role as militia and other privileges, they soon adopted very well to the changed circumstances. Right from the beginning they were incorporated into the administrative hierarchy due to the exigencies of the arising in 1801 with the pensioning off of the Rajahs. In 1822 when H S Greame organised district into revenue divisions called amsam-s and desam-s (Greame mistook the desam to be the basic unit of administration in Malabar) and the adhikari who was made responsible for the collection of revenue was chosen from the influential land holding families. Often the revenue division was congruent with the spheres of influence of the family. They took to western education and soon acquired a foothold in the colonial administration. This proved advantageous to them as it helped them to manipulate the rules and regulations.

100 P R G Mathur, Tribal Situation in Kerala, p. 98, Cited in Ibid., p. 84.
101 In the case of South Canara, British appointed as Potalis and Shanbogues people from the prominent nair families as was the case of the village officials in Malabar. K K N Kurup, Land Monopoly and Agrarian System in South Kanara with special reference to Kasargod Taluk, Calicut University, Calicut, 1989, p. 25.
The Sherestadar-s, Revenue inspector, Clerks and others acquired larger and larger land in Malabar under the Janmi-s but mainly in kanom and kulikkanom tenures. As District Munsifs (there were a lot of nair-s in this rank in the judiciary) cases relating to land like compensations for improvements were passed over. The intermediary class was thus able to push down smaller kanakkar-s to the position of tenants-at-will. The number of non-cultivating tenants increased considerably in the second half of the 19th century.

"The educated nair professionals began to invest money on land. They could make profit by utilising the labour of parayas or pulayas or by sub-leasing it to the tiyas." Thus we see that the intermediary kanakkar-s took advantage of their position in the administration to increase their land holdings.

Thus by the 19th century, we see that the middle class nair-s who had a foothold in the colonial administrative machinery emerging as a force to reckon with along with the major nair land holding class that were there traditionally.

Summary

Thus the caste that came to be identified as nair-s can be initially traced to the karalar-s who had the karanmai right. The superior right of miyatci got superimposed with the coming of the Brahmins and the establishment of a temple centred society. The close relationship they had with the higher nambutiri caste enhanced their status power

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and prestige. The relationship between these two castes could be compared to that between the church and baronage in the medieval European history. The nair-s or the sudra caste included not only the agriculturists but also militia, artisans and craftsmen. In fact they included all those people whose services were essential to the nambutiri-s. But through these various functions in the socio-political spheres, they were able to emerge as a class to reckon with. As militia they were close to the ruling aristocracy whom they served as retainers, accountants, ministers and collectors of dues thereby making their presence felt in both administrative and military wings. With the emergence of the natuvali-s the nair-s soon made their presence felt as chieftains. Big land holding families emerged that commanded sway over their respective areas. By the colonial period the majority of the intermediary kanakkar-s were able to take maximum advantage of the situation by taking to western education and getting a foothold in the colonial administrative machinery. They were able to manipulate the rules to their favour, their presence in judiciary helped them to get favourable decisions in cases relating to eviction and compensation of improvements, thereby reducing the verumpattakar-s to the position of tenants-at-will. Thus by the early 19th century the nair-s had emerged as a caste to reckon with.