Chapter X

Conclusion

The preceding pages attempted to bring together some details of the political culture in one of the medieval kingdoms of Kerala, namely, Kōḷikkōṭu. The attempt there was to study various aspects of the royalty and patronage of culture. Focusing on the high culture which evolved during this period and the role of royalty in it, a picture of the political culture in the kingdom of Kōḷikkōṭu has been sought to draw.

Before the emergence of the medieval principalities, such as those of Kōḷikkōṭu, the whole of present-day Kerala was under the hegemony of the Perumāḷs of Mahōdayapuram. The disintegration of the Perumāḷ suzerainty resulted in the emergence of the chiefs of Vēṃāṭu, Ėṛanāṭu and Kōḷattunāṭu as independent rulers. Our study has hopefully brought out the reasons for the development of Ėṛanāṭu as the kingdom of Kōḷikkōṭu under the Zamorins. The port city of Calicut and the possibilities of trade which it offered had a major role to play in the process. The growth of a new harbour and the Arab interests in the region, the political ambition of the newly emergent rulers, i.e, the Zamorins, the new Chinese enterprise in the 13th century, the decline of Koṭunāllūr harbour due to natural calamities in the 14th century, etc. boosted the prosperity of the kingdom of Kōḷikkōṭu in the post-Cēra period. Side by side with these, the process of agrarian expansion which began in an earlier period continued. The large number of estates controlled directly by the king and other members of the royal family as well as those controlled by the royal functionaries and other local magnates bear testimony to this. What is significant is that this expansion was less tied up in this period with temples and brahmanical settlements than in an earlier period. The Zamorin claimed to be stepping into the shoes of the Perumāḷ at least on a few
occasions; but the political vacuum created by the disintegration of the Cēra kingdom was not quite filled.

A study of the political structure of the kingdom of Köljikkōtu is interesting. It helps in understanding the political culture of the kingdom in a better way. The kingdom of Köljikkōtu was ruled by the Netiyirippu Svarūpam (the House of Netiyirippu). The word Svarūpam can be translated roughly as “the House”, whatever its literal, etymological meaning. The term is used generally to denote any influential family but in the context of medieval Kerala polity, it stood for as the royal house. The ruling houses of Kerala in the post-Cēra period including the family of the Zamorin followed the Marumakkattāyam (matriliny). The royal house consisted of various tāvalis or collateral branches in the matrilineal descent group. In Köljikkōtu three tāvalis constituted the ruling lineage viz. Putiya Kövilakam, Kilakke Kövilakam and Patināre Kövilakam. Among a large number of families in the extended kinship group, these three were considered as the senior lineage. The rest of the extended kinship group formed a parallel, junior, lineage called Ėrāṭis. Members of these junior lineages had no right to rule the kingdom. There were five positions in the ruling, or senior, line of the Zamorin family. These positions were based on the inter se chronological seniority of the incumbent in the above mentioned tāvalis. The five positions in Köljikkōtu were the Zamorin, Ėrāṇāṭṭu Ilamkūr Nampiyātiri (Ērālppāṭu), Ėrāṇāṭṭu Mūnnāmkūr Nampiyātiri (Mūnnāḷppāṭu), Ėṭattūnāṭṭu Nampiyātiri (Ēṭattrāḷppāṭu) and Netuvirippil Mūṭta Ėrāṭi (Neṭṭutrāḷppāṭu) in the descending order of seniority. The eldest male member of the royal house became the Zamorin. On the death of an incumbent at any level, those junior to him got promoted one step in the order of succession. Since chronological seniority was fixed, there was no rotation of position among the tāvalis in Köljikkōtu, unlike in the case of Cochin. Thus the accession to the position of the Zamorin by more than one incumbent from the same tāvali in quick succession was not impossible.
In the female line too, there were three positions, namely, Neṭuvirippil Mūṭta Kövil, Neṭuvirippil Iḷaya Kövil and Neṭuvirippil Ċeriya Kövil in the descending order. Each tāvalī had a senior male member (Valiya Tampūrān) as well as a senior female member (Valiya Tampūrāṭṭi) as its heads. The members from the respective tāvalīs, who made it to the ruling positions, are not considered for the post of Valiya Tampūrān and Valiya Tampūrāṭṭi. The consort of the Zamorin did not have any role in the affairs of the kingdom.

The rulers of Cochin, Veṭṭam, etc. always claimed precedence over the Zamorin in social or “caste” status. They claimed to be kṣatriyas while the Zamorin was treated as of śūdra origin. The Zamorins who were originally Ėrāṭis as stated in the Kēralōṭpatṭi tradition and thus of a śūdra status began to claim the status of sāmanta kṣatriyas. They sought to claim their origin from Agnikula. They used various titles or epithets in an attempt to build a more than life-size image. The royal rituals, patronage of influential Brahmans, scholars and poets and also temples were the means resorted by the Zamorin for the enhancement of the status.

The nature of kingship in the kingdom of Kōḷikkōṭu is important in the study of political culture. K.V. Krishna Ayyar conceived the Zamorin as an autocrat. But a closer study brings out a picture of the Zamorin that does not conform to it. Though the Zamorin was the head of the House of Neṭiyirippu and so the chief of the kingdom, the junior princes also shared responsibilities. Ėṟāḷppāṭu, the heir apparent, looked after the affairs of the kingdom on behalf of the Zamorin in times of emergency. Various nodes of power such as locality chiefs, local magnates, royal functionaries and temple authorities existed in the kingdom of Kōḷikkōṭu. The Zamorin was the ruler of a little kingdom, enjoying a

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1 K.V. Krishna Ayyar, ZC, p. 261.
2 See above, Chapters III, IV & V.
position slightly better than that of a locality chief, but was projected in a larger-than-life image. Importance was given to the position and not to the person. Thus the loyalty of the various nodes of power to the king and royalty continued though the persons died.

The Zamorin exerted his power and strengthened his position through various channels. There were different nodes of power in addition to the king and his functionaries such as locality chiefs, local magnates and temple authorities. There was considerable difference in the position and status of those who were at these nodes. The locality chiefs controlled a large area. Though they accepted the overlordship of the Zamorin they remained relatively independent in their dominions. Their relationship to the royalty was based on loyalty. The Zamorin conferred the investiture of the locality chiefs and the latter participated in the investiture of the Zamorin. Though there were cordial relations and mutual understanding between the locality chiefs and the Zamorin, exceptions are also found. The strained relationship between the Zamorin and Veṭṭam Uṭaya Mūṭta Kōvil is a case in point. It made imperative to the Zamorin that the allegiance of them to be kept as intact by force or tact. Changing sides of the locality chiefs threatened the power of the Zamorin and posed a serious problem in the chaotic politics of medieval Kerala. Thus the Zamorin made use of the rituals, festivals, the conferment of honour and privileges and the splendour of the Svarūpam to the continuance of their loyalty.

The local magnates were big landlords. Unlike the locality chiefs, they were not independent of the authority of the Zamorin. They were invested with different symbols of political authority in relation to the Zamorin which included "the sword and the robe", "the shawl and the dagger", "turban", etc. The Zamorin

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performed their investiture. They acted as royal functionaries. Ties of dependence and superordination were created through the conferment of honours and privileges.

Our study of locality chiefs and local magnates leads to the following points on the political structure of the kingdom of Kōlīkkōtu. The locality chiefs and local magnates were hereditary in nature. The allegiance of a family to the king rather than a person is clear enough. The entire locality chiefs and local magnates in the higher rungs of the hierarchy were landlords. Thus they were influential people in society in their own right. The king and royalty made use of them for the effective functioning of the "state machinery". The Zamorin had a claim of political hegemony over the locality chiefs, while the local magnates were directly controlled. The local magnates acted as the functionaries of the Zamorin. There was no strict division or defined sharing of power among different incumbents. There was no strict division of the work as civil and military or as ritual and political. The function of a person changed in accordance with the need of the hour. Though the locality chief or local magnate was generally the head of a family, the junior members also worked in various capacities. A general pattern of the appointment and the conferment of privileges on the local magnates etc. based on inheritance and custom can be accepted with exceptions.

Those who surrounded the royalty took care of the immediate needs of the king and helped him in every kind of his work. Most of them moved along with the king or stayed in the respective Kōvilakams as the case may be. They constituted what can be loosely called a "court". In addition to the retinue of the royalty a large number of persons acted on behalf of the king on various capacities, who seem to deserve the description of "royal functionaries". The royal

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functionaries are called Kāryakkār and Polttis in general in the Granthavari. The militiamen (lōkar) and various occupational groups are also included among the royal functionaries. The appointment of the royal functionaries was largely made on hereditary basis. The royal functionaries made payments to the king for the conferment of the titles and other privileges on them. The king or the junior princes paid the functionaries or their family and this helps in the understanding of the intricacies of their functioning. The royal functionaries in the higher rungs were the local magnates with huge landed properties. Regular salaries are not paid to them. They had their own private estates. The functionaries who were in charge of royal estates (cērikkal Polttis) were allowed to meet their expenses (taṇcilavukāḥ) from the revenues of the concerned cērikkals. The work of functionaries in the lower rungs was clearly defined while there was, as a general principle, no such clear-cut definition of work in the higher rungs. The ties of obligation and dependence between the royalty and functionaries were strengthened through a series of acts, much of which was based on precedent.

The functioning of the “state” can be found in the way in which the royal order is issued and executed. The power of the ruler is challenged when an order is not carried out or terminated by other nodes of power. The royal orders of the Zamorin were issued as tiruveluttu (royal letter). There were two types of royal letters called netiya and kuriya tiruveluttus. In a later period the royal order was called as pūnturakkōn tīṭṭu. Two distinct types of tiruveluttus are seen and they are called the “netiya” and “kuriya” tiruveluttus. The way in which the royal letters were classified itself shows the keen interest of the “administrative machinery” in the effective functioning of its correspondences. This is not surprising as the Zamorin maintained the day-to-day accounts using an elaborate group of
Menokkis or superintendents and scribes, a picture brought out vividly by foreign travellers such as Barbosa and Pyrard of Laval.\(^5\)

*Kuriya* and *netiya* literally mean ‘short’ and ‘long’. K.V. Krishna Ayyar has noted these two types of royal letters.\(^6\) He does not refer to *netiya* or *kuriya* but uses the expressions ‘simple’ and ‘elaborate’. He says, “the royal writs recognising succession were simple or elaborate according to the rank and status of the Naduvali”. He quotes the royal letter to Cālappuraṭṭu Nālāmkūṟuṭṭaya Nāyar in KE 775 Tulām (AD 1599) as an example for ‘simple’ and the letter to Kutiravaṭṭattu Nāyar in KE 825 (AD 1650) for ‘elaborate’.\(^7\) Since both these letters were described as *kuriya* in the *Granthavan*\(^8\), it appears that he does not differentiate the royal letters as *kuriya* or *netiya* on the basis of their description. When he speaks about the length, he failed to take notice of the description of the letter in the *Granthavan*. His suggestion that the ‘simple’ and ‘elaborate’ letters indicated the rank and status of the Nāṭuvāḷi is at best speculative. The royal letter to Taṇakkal Iremma Mēnōn\(^9\) would fall under the category of ‘elaborate’ if we follow Ayyar’s classification; but Iremma Mēnōn does not seem to be above Cālappuraṭṭu Nālāmkūṟuṭṭaya Nāyar in the hierarchy of local magnates.\(^10\) Thus it is difficult to accept the distinction made by Ayyar. N.M. Nampoothiry, who wrote a

\(^5\) See above, Chapter I.

\(^6\) K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *ZC*, p. 270.

\(^7\) *KG*, Vol. 7.

\(^8\) K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *ZC*, p. 270.


\(^10\) The amount paid by Taṇakkal Iremma Mēnōn to the royal treasury after his appointment in KE 851 (AD 1676) is 1826 *panams* whereas Cālappuraṭṭu Nāyar paid 3000 *panams* in KE 775 (AD 1599). *Ibid.*, Vols. 7 & 12. If the amount paid to the royal treasury is an indication to the rank and status of the local magnates, Cālappuraṭṭu Nālāmkūṟuṭṭaya Nāyar comes above Taṇakkal Iremma Mēnōn in the hierarchy of the chiefs. But the letter received by Cālappuraṭṭu Nāyar was ‘simple’ and Taṇakkal Iremma Mēnōn was ‘elaborate’ according to the classification of Krishna Ayyar.
In the context of the political culture we would like to raise a few problems regarding this classification of the royal letters distinguished as kuriya and netiya. Was it a casual usage of the palace scribes or was there a special reason for such a distinction? Literally, the term kuriya means short and netiya means long. Thus a possible line of enquiry is in this direction. In terms of actual length, rarely a netiya letter seems to be longer than the kuriya letters, for instance, the kuriya letter sent to Kutiravaṭṭatu Nāyar. In other matters such as hierarchy, importance of the person addressed, etc., also, one does not find any distinction between the kuriya and netiya letters. A scrutiny of all the royal letters found in the Granthavari enables one to shed more light on this problem. Vallatāvali Kuṇṇī Kurikkal, when invested as Sarvādhikāravam, received the kuriya letter while netiya letters were sent to the concerned royal functionaries to inform on the installation of Kuṇṇī Kurikkal and state the obligations of the functionaries. Similarly, after the conferment of “the sword and the robe” on Taṇakkal Unikkanta Mēnōn, the royal letter presented to him was kuriya and about 15 netiya letters were sent to different royal functionaries and local magnates that notify the appointment of Unikkanta Mēnōn. For the Māmākam of KE 858, netiya letters were sent to Ûrāli

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11 N.M. Nampoothiry, SCK, passim.

12 KG, Vols. 3, 7 & 12. The netiya letter sent to the Dutch Governor General at Batavia is longer than the kuriya letter sent to Kutiravaṭṭatu Nāyar, but all other netiya letters are shorter or similar to the latter.

13 Though nothing is common between the length of the contents of letter and its description, the possibility of netiya and kuriya royal letters executed in 'long' and 'short' palm leaves respectively cannot be discarded. The documents found in the Granthavari are only the copies of the letters and do not show such distinction. No original letter is found. See also below, Note 19.

14 KG, Vol. 3, copies of the same document in Vols. 7, 10, 12 & 13. A netiya letter addressing the royal functionaries was handed over to Vallaṭṭāvali Kuṇṇī Kurikkal himself.

Nayars, lōkar of Polanāṭu, Payyanāṭṭukara Janam, etc. For the royal procession (kotticcelunnallattu) of the Zamorin in KE 915 (AD 1740) netiya royal letters were sent from Ponnāni to Vaṭakkumpuram lōkar, Kilakkumpuram lōkar, Kōlikkōṭṭu Talaccenna Nāyar, etc. Examples can be multiplied. What is clear from these examples are that when a royal letter was directly handed over to the addressee it was designated as kuriya and when it was sent to the addressee through a third person it was called as netiya. The description of the letter probably referred to the length that the letter had to travel.

What is more important to us is the fact that the royal letters were classified and their maintenance was taken care of during the many centuries under the Zamorins. It is not irrelevant to point out that the Mughal rulers also classified their administrative orders into various categories such as farman, parwāna, ḥukm, etc. The keen interest shown by the Zamorin and his “administrative machinery” in the effective functioning of their correspondences is reflected in it. This is not surprising as the Zamorin maintained an excellent record office and elaborate group of Mēnōkkis (superintendents) and scribes that is vividly depicted by the foreign travellers Duarte Barbosa and Pyrard of Laval. The utmost care with which procedure was committed to writing also indicates an aspect of the political culture. Customs and precedents had given way to formal commitment to writing in documents.

16 The royal letter to Payyanāṭṭukara Janam was sent through Vāḷāyār Uṇṇiṭāricca Erāṭi and is described as netiya. Ibid., Vol. 2.
17 Ibid., Vol. 1.
18 For more royal letters, see, Ibid., Vols. 1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 13 & 14.
19 If terms are metaphors, then kuriya could denote a letter taking a short cut to communicate and netiya a letter taking a longer route. If the terms are derived from physical features, the kuriya letter may be written on a short palm leaf. This long palm leaf might be folded and sealed to ensure the confidentiality of the document. Ibid., Vol. 45. However, the latter suggestion on physical features cannot be empirically tested as no original letter has come down to us.
20 See above, Chapter I.
The political culture of medieval Kerala had revolved around the rituals. Everything in the life of the royalty from investiture to death and from bath to hair cut was heavily ritualised. The rituals helped the royalty to enhance their social status and prestige in the eyes of his subjects. The investiture ceremony of the Zamorin and the junior princes called *tirumuttappalavariccārttu* was an elaborate ceremony involving many rituals. The investiture ceremonies of the Zamorin and the junior princes were held at different parts of the kingdom and at different venues like residence of the royalty, house of the locality chief or temple. *Utavālanakkal* or investing with the royal sword was a ritual related with the investiture ceremony. The funeral of the Zamorin and other princes was also heavily ritualised. After the death of a prince all members of the family observed fourteen days of ritual pollution. On the 15th day the purificatory rituals called *tiruvantāli* or *vākatali* were performed. Other royal rituals include *āṭṭattirunāl* (birthday), *tirumāsam* (the first death anniversary of a Zamorin), *attaccamayam*, *tulabhāram*, *trikkani* (sighting of auspicious things to mark the beginning of a day), *tevaram* (worshipping Bhagavati) and *vayarattu* (a ritual waving with a creeper). Sometimes things went to such ridiculous extents that even the haircut (*tirumutī ɾakkah*) of the Zamorin was an elaborate ritual consuming considerable time and resources.

*Koṭṭiccelunnaḷattu* or royal procession with music ensemble was an important feature of the political culture of Kōlakkōṭu. The Zamorin or the Ėṟāḷppāṭu with other princes, Kāryakkār, local magnates and their retinue with all the royal insignia and paraphernalia proceeded from a Kōvilakam to another or to the houses of the local magnates and royal functionaries or to temples. There were processions based on precedent like the *koṭṭiccelunnaḷattu* of a new Zamorin to Calicut after he was invested to that position in a place away from Calicut, the *koṭṭiccelunnaḷattu* of the new Ėṟāḷppāṭu to Karimpula, etc. The present study
shows that the royal procession was an exhibition of the pageantry of royalty in a
general way. It projected a larger than life image of the Zamorin and paved the
way for the growth of devotion to the king among the subjects. But it helped to
strengthen the bonds of royalty with different functionaries and local magnates. It
helped in the extraction of revenues to the royal treasury.

The interdependence of the temples on the one side and the king, locality
chiefs and local magnates on the other is an interesting aspect of the political
culture in the kingdom of Kōlkkōtu. The Zamorin treated the temples in a similar
way to that of locality chiefs and local magnates. He assigned Ĉērikkals to various
royal temples. He also collected virinnamittupanam from the temple as in the case
with the locality chiefs and local magnates. The royalty offered an amount of
money to the deity whenever visiting temples. They also made offerings to the
deities during the royal rituals. Thus the royalty and the temples were
economically interdependent. The priests of royal temples received the Zamorin in
most of his temple visits.

The conquest of an area not necessarily changed the way in which temples
were managed or those who had authority over the temple. But the Zamorin was
very particular to have control over the temple in the area which he captured. An
interesting aspect is that the temples in the kingdom are of the deities of āgamaic
and non-āgamaic or “folk” character. The twelve royal deities of the Zamorin are
of such non-āgamaic nature. The study of the important temples in the kingdom
helps us to bring out the relation with royalty and the temples. An important
feature of the temples was ūttu or feeding house. Ūttu provided free meals to the
Brahmans. The Zamorin assigned lands for meeting the expenses of ūttu. Thus it is
another means of attaining legitimacy to the Zamorin as annadāna (the gift of
food) to the Brahmans helped him in the projection of his image as the protector of
Brahmans.
The Zamorin were, like all rulers, patrons of scholarship, art and literature. In addition to promoting scholarship, literature and art forms it was also an attempt of patronising and controlling the scholars, poets and artists. The royalty was eager to have a control over the above group as they influenced the elite section of the society. Thus patronising them became a means to control the ideology of the elite class. It was also a method of enhancing the prestige of the court and royalty. *Krishnadeva*, a dance drama in Sanskrit, was an art form originated and developed exclusively in the kingdom of Kollam. The story of Krishna depicted in a series of eight separate episodes presented as dance dramas to be performed in the *Kovilakams* of the Zamorin and in the royal temples, particularly at Guruvayur. It addressed the elite section of the society. The arts have always been regarded as a powerful medium of channelling opinion and therefore the royalty have invariably tried to mediate and regulate its activities.

*Paṭṭattānam* was an annual assembly of Brahman scholars held in Tali temple at Calicut. Debates and discourses in the *śāstras* were held and the Zamorin conferred the successful scholars with the title *Bhatta*. This was a much-coveted position among the scholars in the medieval period. Earlier scholars believed that an assembly of poets called *Patineṭṭarakkavikal* existed under the Mānavikrama Zamorin. We have made a reappraisal of it and brought to light the inaccuracy of the story. However, we have enough evidence for the patronage of poets by the Zamorins. The surviving literary works are evidence enough to speak about such a patronage. The patron-protégé relationship is indicated in the works itself. The image of the Zamorin as a *dhīrodātā* is projected in many works. The valour and prowess of the king, the protection of good and punishment of wicked, the scholarship of the king and the allegiance of minor kings to him were highlighted in the individual *ślokas*, which were circulated as the court lore. This also helped in the creation of larger than life size image of the Zamorin.
Another way in which the prestige of the ruler was sought to be enhanced was by taking recourse to a historical tradition. The Zamorins had suitably manipulated the past of Kerala in the Kēralōppatti tradition so that their own position was celebrated at least in those versions relating to the kingdom of Kolikkōṭu. Again, another historical narrative, using the dominant narratological mode of the kilippāṭṭu, is seen employed for recounting the history of the kingdom in general and of one of its rulers in particular. All this went a long way in legitimizing the ruler.

It was in the celebration of two festivals viz. Māmākam and Taippūyam the climacteric of the ceremonial expression of the political hegemony of the Zamorin is found. Both festivals were celebrated once in twelve years on the banks of Pērār at Tirunāvāya. Māmākam was a grand festival of thirty days while Taippūyam, which was celebrated in the preceding year of Māmākam, was a one-day festival. The Zamorin made elaborate preparations for Māmākam. The royalty, royal functionaries, locality chiefs, local magnates and militiamen were involved in the festival. The festival is noted for the show of royal splendour, pageantry, military power and the observance of rituals. The Zamorin and other junior members of the family sought the divine blessings of the deity of Tirunāvāya and legitimisation of their political status by these ceremonies. Māmākam was a festival under the auspices of the “state” and very much political in nature. It was an occasion of strengthening the relationship between the king and the locality chiefs, local magnates and the royal functionaries.

By AD 1732 onwards the Mysoreans invaded Kerala on occasions more than one. Haider Ali invaded the kingdom of the Zamorins and brought it under his control. The power of the Zamorin as an independent ruler thus came to an end. The Zamorin set fire to the powder magazine in the Kōvilakam at Calicut and
sacrificed his life on April 27, AD 1766 after sending the members of the royal family to Vēṇāṭu. From 1766 to 1792 the kingdom of Kölijkkōṭu was under Mysorean rule. In 1792 the English defeated Tipu Sultan of Mysore and assumed control of Malabar. The Zamorin became a landlord under them, receiving a pension called mālikhāna, in the subsequent years. Thus came to an end to the kingdom of Kölijkkōṭu after a period of about five centuries.
Map I:
Major Nāṭus in Kerala (AD c. 800-1124)