CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and Importance of the Study

This study is an attempt to understand the complex relationship between land, religion and power through analysing the history of two Nayar tarawads - Kavalappara family in the present Ottappalam taluk of Palakkad district and Koodali family in the present Thalassery taluk of Kannur district of Kerala. These two families were typical tarawads in South Malabar and North Malabar respectively. On the eve of the decline of marumakkathayam both families disintegrated. But their culture and legacy continue to exist. They continue to influence local life through their ritual powers and social and economic status. They have left indelible imprints upon the life and culture of their respective areas. The history of these two families stretches back to centuries. They continue to be prominent in the society through the institutions established by them and the social and political activities of their members. The entire study is intertwined with the development of these two families and their influence as landlords, on the locality.

During the pre-colonial and colonial period in Kerala there has been close alliance between religion and power as it has been in any other parts of
the world. Centres of power in a community are interrelated. This interconnection of positions of power may be termed as power structure. The term power structure refers to different offices and roles, including formal and informal, occupied by persons and groups. This does not mean a high degree of organisation. However power structure has its own organisational aspects. It varies from community to community.¹ A well organized power structure involves a comprehensive process of power relations.² In such organised structures interconnection between different power structures are important. Land, religion and power are closely interlinked. A study of the pre-colonial and colonial society of Kerala reveals the complex inter relationships between these structures. In pre-colonial Kerala, land was the measure of the social and economic status of a person. It was not merely the holding of land but the nature of the holding of land that determined his position. An analysis of the social and economic hierarchy shows different types of holdings. The relation between religion and power has been there from the very dawn of civilisation. It has all the been more so with regard to feudal Kerala. Even the king required support of the priest for legitimizing his position. It has been so with regard to the rulers or chieftains in the various gradation of power. The discussions in the coming pages show as to how from the very accession into


² Ibid.
power, the *karanavars* or the heads of *tarawads* and the local chieftains required the service and support of the priest, both in spiritual and temporal matters. In return for their services the priest got material benefits. Even land transactions were associated with rituals. In all such affairs the chieftains got the services of the Nambuthiries. Through the legends of *Keralolpathi* and Prasurama the Nambuthiries were trying to establish their ritual sovereignty in the areas settled by them. Backed by this tradition they amassed wealth and position.³

Power is defined as the "influence over thought and behaviour" of others and as such it is a psychological phenomenon rooted in complex pattern of interaction between various elements.⁴ The ability of a power builder whether he is an individual or group of individuals "to influence a target depends on the power wielder's resource of power, his or her credibility, the extent to which the target needs or places a high value on the power wielder's resources and the relationship of goodwill that prevails between the power wielder and the target".⁵

As the head of a family or chieftain of an area the heads of Kavalappara and Koodali families had ritual powers also. They were symbols of political and economic power and prestige.

It was in the name of religion and temple that these *tarawads* got a monopoly of land in their respective areas. The properties of many temples in the realm of Kavalappara have been under the control of Mooppil Nayar as he was the trustee of these temples. In the case of Koodali family, they had only one temple under their direct ownership but through the trusteeship of this single temple it had amassed wealth in the form of lands. These lands added to the power and prestige of the *karanavar* of the family.

Power involves authority as a favourable connotation, even though it is not to all people and tends to evoke compliance. But power and force tend to provoke at least mental resistance. But many people tend to respect authority, to heed the advice of the authorities and to comply with authorities' decisions. Authority might imply the legitimate and moral use of power for legitimate and moral ends. But force and strength had different character. Power is rooted in the possession of certain tangible resources such as wealth or weaponry. But intangible things also form resources as the exercise of power involves psychological phenomenon and is rooted in complex psychological sources. The use of power involves attempts to modify or control human behaviour by some kind of appeal to the target's values. It may
be an effort to convince the target that certain behaviour will produce direct benefits or reduce deprivations.⁶

The significance of the history of the two tarawads under study is that it invariably includes the polity and culture of both South Malabar and North Malabar during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. As noted above during the feudal period the basis of the status of a person was the nature of the land he held. This ownership of land involved political, social and religious aspects. Thus the study of the two families will highlight the complex relations between land and power. Although the period under study was one of brahmanical dominance, Nayar landlords also had their own influence on religious life. Even religion was dominated by the landed class. Even now we could see the legacy of the relations between the feudal lord and religion. The objective of this study is to highlight this age-long connection between religion and the wealthy class. Till the abolition of feudalism, the power centred around naduvazhis was a real problem to the administration. An account of the history of these two families would bring into light many an aspect of contemporary society.

This study also involves an analysis of the complex land relations and the nature of marumakkathayam tarawad. Several studies have appeared on

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⁶ Ibid., pp. 30-36.
these two aspects. But they are more or less general studies and do not approach the problem from a micro level. These aspects need further historical analysis. The power structure studied in this work is a complex one. Feudalism in Kerala, is always equated by E.M.S. Nambuthiripad as *jati-janmi-naduvazhitham* (caste-landlord chieftaincy).\(^8\) Eventhough the Nayar landlords as non-Brahmins were not at the top of the social hierarchy, some of them by dint of their political and economic power, dominated the society.

These two Nayar feudal families had been patrons of culture and influenced the life and culture of the respective areas where they were reigning. Significance of this cultural legacy has not been subject to serious academic research. This study, among other things, aims at analysing these factors also.

There are abundant source materials in the form of primary sources themselves with regard to these two *tarawads*. They include the *Kavalappara Papers*, collected, edited and published by K.K.N. Kurup\(^9\) and *Koodali Granthavari* dealing with the land-deeds of pre-colonial and colonial period

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belonging to the family of Koodali which also have been collected, classified and edited by K.K.N. Kurup. These *Granthavaries* are related to the political, social, economic and cultural aspects of Kavalappara family and Koodali family respectively. Through the publication of these two *Granthavaries* the editor K.K.N. Kurup was preserving very valuable primary sources for the history of Kerala. It has been a great contribution to the history and historiography of Kerala as these papers had become accessible to the students and researchers.

Family papers form a very valuable source for the study of Kerala history. These papers were written cadjan leaves and were known as *Granthavaries*. They are kept by various old aristocratic families belonging to different parts of the region. They often go unnoticed and sometimes destroyed. This will be an inestimable loss to the reconstruction of the country's past. Recently certain *Granthavaries* have been collected and edited. The Department of History, Calicut University has published four *Granthavaries*. They are the *Vanjeri Granthavari*, Kavalappara Papers, *Keralolpathi Granthavari* and *Koodalai Granthavari*. The School of

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Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam has published *Granthavaries*. They are the *Thiruvalla Granthavari* Vol. I[^15] and *Thirupuliyur Granthavari*.[^16] N.M. Nambuthiri has collected the *Granthavaries* of the Zamorin of Calicut and he has used them in his studies.[^17] These *Granthavaries* are valuable sources for tracing the history of the economic transactions, social institutions, religious ideas and structures of a culture.[^18] The original purpose of *Granthavari* was not at all to provide a source for history. They were the written sources kept by the persons related to the day to day affairs of these families. *Kavalappara Papers* is a true copy from original documents and they are related to the political, economic and cultural aspects of Kavalappara family. Studies on micro history increase the relevance of the study of family papers and *Granthavaries*.[^19] These kinds of documents are highly helpful to the study of the history from grass root level. Of course *Granthavaries* reflect the voice of the powerful, but in such voice one can see the grievances of the scapegoats also. Thus they deal not only with the centres of power but also with those who were subject to the rule of

[^18]: Rajan Gurukkal in the introduction to *Thirupuliyur Granthavari*, *op.cit*, p.8.
the powerful. Thus such documents are highly helpful to the history of the subaltern groups.

The above said Granthavaries are edited and a student can use the same for his research. There is no problem of heuristic errors.\textsuperscript{20} The historical analysis of the same will show hermeneutics errors, if any.\textsuperscript{21} While analysing the Kavalappara Papers and Koodali Granthavari care has been taken to see them with historical objectivity. The court of law has worked on Kavalappara Papers just like a historian.\textsuperscript{22} Further the editor of Kavalappara Papers and Koodalai Granthavari has thoroughly examined them.\textsuperscript{23} The Koodali Granthavari has been of great significance as we have not obtained any such documents from the Northern part of Malabar. It consists of more than 400 documents dating from 1532 AD to 1835 AD. The Koodali Granthavari throws light into the nature of land transactions, land tenures and the like prevailing in North Malabar during three and a half centuries and it has been an important source for the study of marumakkathayam. Both Kavalappara Papers and Koodali Granthavari are of immense value in studying the functioning of kalaries, kavus and temples. The entire documents of Koodali Granthavari are in pre-modern Malayalam.

\textsuperscript{20} External criticism regarding the authenticity of sources.
\textsuperscript{21} Internal criticism with regard to the authenticity of sources.
\textsuperscript{22} Pushpalatha. K. “Kavalappara Papers : An Enquiry into its value as a source of Kerala History”, Proceedings of South Indian History Congress, Madurai Kamaraj University, 2005, pp.719-721.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Documents like *Kavalappara Papers* and *Koodali Granthavari* show that there is no dearth of sources for the history of Kerala. But it has been believed that the sources for Kerala history are ‘scanty and meagre’. But this is a misunderstanding. Actually there are abundant of sources in the form of family documents, title deeds, temple records, files in the courts of law etc. But these sources have not been properly used for writing history. Thus inspite of the availability of sources, a comprehensive history connecting these families has not appeared.

In the general history of the region the aspects like those of two land owning *tarawads* are not important and as such they will be omitted in a grand narrative. Only a micro study can bring out the features connected with them. Micro history is aimed at an intensive study of the documentary materials.²⁴ Through the analysis of the history of a single family like Koodali or Kavalappara many an aspect of pre-colonial society, economy and politics can be brought out. They also reveal many an aspect of colonialism especially the relation between the colonial masters and *naduvazhis*. It is hoped that micro studies like this would add to the re-reading and reassessment of the mainstream of history.²⁵ The study of micro history enables us to understand the ignored aspects of life and culture in a locality. The

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²⁵ Also see T.K. Venugopalan, *Desacharithram, Avinisseri Grama Panchayath* (Malayalam), Trissur, 2000, pp. 10-11.
present study involves aspects of particular localities and as such it includes features of local history. In a local history aspects related to anthropology, sociology, folklore, literature, etc., will be included. Writing of local history is indispensable for studies of a society and for its development. This has been proved while implementing the Janakeeyasuthranam or peoples plan in Kerala. There is an unprecedented enthusiasm for local history nowadays among the historians and researchers.

Local history has been variously interpreted. There is a widespread view that it is the history of a locality. It is also taken to be a "miniature photocopy of the history of the nation written on traditional documentary style with chapters dealing with politics, economy, culture and so on". But it is not so. Local history has been an emerging area of investigation in Kerala. In the era of globalisation the writing of local history is meaningful as there is a tendency in globalisation to appropriate the local and make it

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29 Ibid.
unseen. Local History more or less bears the capacity to overcome this
tendency.30

Modern historical consciousness has been a product of the
enlightenment and modernity and has been naturally dominated by the
conception of the 'nation states'. When a modern historian began to enquire
into a social order or a movement of the past it was centred on the nation
states, such as Indian, English, French, etc. It had no scope to accommodate
the local.31 This does not mean that aspects of a locality was altogether absent
in the historical consciousness of modern times. But modern history
considered locality as an integral part of the nation states. Under the British
the locality was conceived not as a unit but as a part of a whole. This was
from the point of view of revenue collection. But "local history perceives
locality as a human space and a unit of economic production and so
significant in itself and not as a component of any other locality".32 Local
history perspective has more interest in the basic units of economic
production. It demands explanation of the emergence of localities.33

30 K.M. Panikkar, "Writing Local History in times of Globalisation", ibid., p. 9.
31 M.R. Raghava Varier, "Local History Changing Perspectives" E.B. Mujeebu
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
1.2 Scope

Eventhough the present study is on the aspects of two Nayar tarawads of Kerala, it has to address problems at macro level. It is only in the background of macro history the study on these families are possible. As these two families are landed magnates, the land relations connected with them are looked into. It involves an analytical study of the feudal structure in Kerala. The nature of ownership and transaction of land, nature of rent, interest, etc., are included in this study. Aspects of agrestic slavery in connection with both Kavalappara and Koodali families are analysed. Social and cultural institution like kalari, and temple festivals are detailed. Power and authority of the two families under discussion, involve ritual powers and so on. Aspects of religion and rituals including the ceremonies connected with them are discussed.

Aspects of marumakkathayam are looked into as part of the institutions connected with these families. The decline of marumakkathayam is specially examined. The study reveals the social conditions including agrarian relations during the period under review. A segment of the present work is the family history of the Koodali tarawad and Kavalappara Mooppil Nayar. The study involves aspects of the culture and heritage of the two families and as such it includes analytical account of religious institutions, ritual arts, folklore, etc., connected with them. What is intended mere is not a more
description of conditions, events and facts but an analytical study of the same. Attempts have been made at an analytical explanation of the facts culled out from various sources in the light of the new developments in historiography so as to reveal the close connection between land, religion and power. The study involves a re-reading of the important sources. Although this study is related to two families it is undertaken with holistic view. The macro region of Kerala and the colonial state are its background. All these have necessitated an interdisciplinary approach to the study.

1.3 Historiography

No comprehensive historical work on the Koodali tarawad and Kavalappara family have come out. But there is an unpublished family history of Koodali family written by one of its karanavar namely K.T. Kunhikammaran Nambiar. But this history includes only some personal details of the members of the tarawad and incidents in the family like marriages and deaths, etc. It is only a description of such aspects. There are a few research monographs which deal with the feudal aspects of these families. Certain aspects of these families have been cited in the general works on feudalism in Kerala.

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35 M.T. Narayanan, *op. cit.*
Works on *marumakkathayam* including research monographs have been consulted for the study of the matrilineal system in connection with these two families.\(^{36}\) The historical account on these families gives by K.K.N. Kurup in the introduction *Kavalappara Papers* and *Koodali Granthavadi* include facts and many a pointer to the study, even though they are brief.\(^{37}\) Here in this work a humble attempt is made at presenting a comprehensive account of the land, religion and power in connection with these two nayar feudal families.

### 1.4 Sources

The main sources of this work are the *Kavalappara Papers* and *Koodali Granthavari*.\(^{38}\) Official records like court orders, documents connected with litigation in which these families are involved form other important sources. Official documents in connection with ending certain social institutions are examined and facts are culled out from them. These documents include those related to the marriage systems, end of *marumakkathayam*, end of landlordism etc., Gazetteers, Manuals and the like also have been of use in obtaining facts for this study. Insights from toponyms also have been used. Unpublished history of Koodali *tarawad,*

\(^{36}\) Jyothi, P.K., *op. cit.*


\(^{38}\) *Ibid.*
souvenirs and articles published in weeklies are also used. Newspaper reports form an important source. Insights from traditions, legends and folklores also have been made use of.

The tools of oral history have been used for this study. Formal interviews and discussions with family members of the *tarawads* and persons intimately associated with them form an important source for this study. Interviews have been helpful in extracting facts from documents. They also help the overall grasp of available documents.\(^{39}\) The persons interviewed are people well aware of the conditions in their surrounding but not well known outside their area. Thus the documentation of their opinions and knowledge makes them visible in the process of history. Thus in this study the voices of those who are not figuring in general history are recorded. Every man in his own way is a historian constantly remembering, recording and recounting what he has seen and heard.\(^{40}\)

Written records will be more or less connected with the power centres and the elite in history. It is the upper-hand received by the written records that obstructed the acceptance of oral sources as a source for history. Oral sources like folk songs help to have a broad perspective for the aspects that

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determined historical change. There is a belief that oral sources are more subjective than written sources. But written sources need not be so objective, as in them the marks of the person who wrote it or the person who made it written will be reflected. Facts will not speak by themselves. They begin to speak only when the historian wants them to do so. It is the historian who decides as to what all facts are to be given slots in his accounts. Oral history is a more appropriate medium for explaining the experiences, approaches and ideology of a bygone age.

1.5 Methodology

Historical methodology is used for the study. Along with the methodology of conventional history those of local history and micro history are used. These involves the methodology of oral history also. Exploratory method also has been used for collecting data. Quantification of data has been made wherever possible.

1.6 Chapterisation

This study consists of nine chapters. The first one is introductory dealing with the aim and importance of the study, its scope and subject matter. A review of literature on the topic, the methodology used, etc. are

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
given. It includes a discussion on the important sources for the study. The second one is on the Nayar tarawads and land monopoly. In this chapter aspects of landlordism are discussed. The third chapter is the family history of the Koodali tarawad and Kavalappara Nayar. The fourth one is on the aspects of religion and rituals connected with these families. The fifth chapter details the responsibilities of the heads or karanavars. It includes their personal achievements also. The sixth chapter looks into the impact of colonialism on both Kavalappara and Koodali families and the transitions undergone by them. Invariably it includes certain aspects of British colonialism. Seventh chapter deals with the decline of the institutions related to these families. The eighth one traces individualism and mobility in connection with the two families. The last one is the conclusion of the study. As usual bibliography, glossary, etc., are given after the conclusion. Certain documents related to the topic are appended.