

POWER, TRADE AND RELIGION: A STUDY OF TRAVANCORE (1729-1805)

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2021

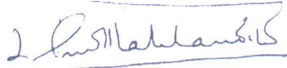
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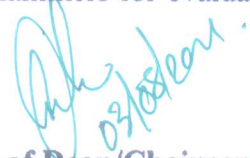
.....
Power, Trade and Religion: A Study of Travancore(1729-1805).....submitted by
Mr/Ms. Nada Tharakandiyil.....in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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has not been previously submitted in part or in full for any other degree of this university
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Acknowledgment

Writing a dissertation in this most uncertain of times, with little academic pressures, no institutional compulsions, and a future seeming bleak and hopeless, have been a mentally and physically demanding and stressful endeavour. If not for the love of what I have gone through in the course of my research and the story I had captured, it would have been impossible to finish this dissertation with the submission deadlines being extended six months thrice. Now, having completed the final works of this dissertation, firstly, I most sincerely thank my supervisor, Prof. Pius Malekandathil, for pinning down my unorganized and vague thoughts and ideas into a clear research question. I am sure, as for me, the current situation might have been equally unpleasant for him, who was very particular about being easily accessible to his students and always ready to assist them, even at very last moments, with his critical comments and corrections. Even though face-to-face regular correspondence and meetings with him at the writing stage would have helped me improve the dissertation even more, the work would have been impossible without the direction he had provided.

Besides, I thank Prof. Sunil Kumar of the Department of History, University of Delhi, whose untimely demise have left us all in profound sadness, for instilling in me great passion and interest in the medieval world and lives. If not for him, my commutation from Bachelors in English to Masters in History would have been more arduous. I also thank the other faculty members of the Delhi University History Department, whose courses and readings have enriched my knowledge in medieval history and have been seminal in formulating my research area and question.

I am also grateful to the staff and members of the archives I had visited, mainly the Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum, and the couple who had lent me their home for stay during my fieldwork at Trivandrum. I was supported by many other helping hands at Trivandrum, making my time there memorable and worthy. Moreover, I sincerely thank all my friends at JNU, Thahani Rezak, Ziyana Fazal, Shameem, Teena, to name just some, who had helped me make up the detriments of my irregular appearances at the campus. Most of all, I need not even thank my family, my parents, husband, siblings, and my little son for putting up, patiently, with all my pressures and for the unconditional support and care until this final stage.

Introduction

In the year 1739, Martanda Varma, a young prince aged 24, ascended the throne of the petty state of Venad, which was one among those scattered and quarrelling principalities of southern Malabar that was ruled by the different *tayvalis* or lineages of the Travancore royal family. Upon his instatement to the throne, Martanda Varma adopted measures and reforms that gradually led to the formation of a unitary state in Travancore, out of the petty chieftaincies and temple lands, between Kanyakumari in the south and the southern borders of Cochin in the north. This formation into what could be identified as an 'early modern state' was unique and novel in the political landscape of medieval Malabar. The central concern of this study is to look at this formation of the powerful and unitary state of Travancore that for almost more than two centuries, held in its sway, the scattered and fragmentary political units of the centuries preceding the time of Martanda Varma. At a period, when both in the northern and southern India, powerful dynasties and states were breaking apart, Martanda Varma, at the southern end of Malabar, by conquering and exterminating all rivals, was expanding his little kingdom, along the coast until the southern boundaries of Calicut, supported by a new bureaucratic state structure, military might, and a reformed economic organization of the region.

Martanda Varma, inherited from his predecessors a dismal state of affairs where in the power of the royalty was diminishing, majorly due to the strained relationship between the temple authorities of the chief temple, Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram, and the ruling family, and the rise in power of the intermediaries in the land based economy of the region. Moreover, the *muppu* of the different lineages of the Travancore royal family was engaged in constant quarrels to win for their side, the status of the *kulashekhara perumal*. The status

of the *kulashekhara perumal*, gave the *muppu* of the rivaling lineages, along with control over the *devaswom* lands of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram, a spiritual ascendancy over the whole of Travancore. However, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the increasing assertion of power, from the part of the *pillamars*, the caretakers of the Padmanabha Swamy temple, and the *madambimars*, the *nayar* administrators of the *cherikkal* and *devaswom* lands, had put the relationship between the royal house and the religious center in crisis. Upon his coming to power, Martanda Varma, thus, devoted his initial years to correct this state of affairs, putting an end to all internal oppositions. After subduing the revolting Thampi brothers, who claimed the right of inheritance to the throne, and exterminating and banishing the *pillamars*, for plotting against his life, Martanda Varma challenged the political power that the Dutch have been enjoying in the region. In the years after the treaty of Mavelikkaray, signed between Travancore and the Dutch, Martanda Varma, along with subduing the collateral branches of the Travancore royal family, extended his power, to the principalities of Porcad, Thekkenkur and Vadakkenkur. The political expansion under Martanda Varma was taken forward by his successor, Rama Varma by a reformulation of the administrative and economic organization of these newly conquered territories.

By the opening of the nineteenth century, the territories and subjects that were brought under the sway of the newly formed unitary kingdom of Travancore were centrally controlled by a unified administrative and fiscal system, supported by monopoly of trade and centralized control over military force. In place of the dispersed *nayar* warriors of the earlier times, a standing army of infantry and cavalry was formed and garrisoned at different nodal points of trade, revenue collection and territorial expansion. The establishment of the new commercial department ensured monopoly of trade, majorly in pepper, and made the merchants employees of the king, now catering to the needs of the

buyers under the king's order, at a price fixed annually for the entire Travancore region. Building up a state by ways that were not traditional in Malabar, Martanda Varma donated his kingdom to its chief temple, the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshetram, now ruling as the servant of Sri Padmanabha, or *padmanabha dasa*. This religious gesture, along with solving the strained relation between the religious center and the ruling family, and incorporating into it, the different religious centers in different parts of the conquered territories, legitimized and cemented Martanda Varma's territorial expansion and consolidation.

The focus of this study is the multi-layered ways by which the unitary state of Travancore was formed and maintained since the time of Martanda Varma. Along with providing a contextual analysis of this transformation, the study, would look into how, the mechanisms of state craft, military advancements, commercial and economic reforms and use of religious institutions and spaces for creating new logic and meanings suiting the atmosphere of change and transformation, worked in a complimentary way, for the expansion and successful consolidation of the kingdom of Travancore under the Trippapur Swarupam. It would closely look into the efforts at bureaucratization, and the formation of an army along the lines of European warfare and technologies, and the ways in which the military and bureaucratic expansion aided by and in turn, also, fostered, revenue generation through monopolization of trade. The founding of a new form of state that could be called an early-modern state was made possible by incorporating into the process of state formation, the discrete socio economic and political developments that characterized the region of the time. It brought out marked transformations and innovations in to the ways in which the military, economic and religious spheres were converged into the political body of the region, fostering a thorough social reorganization.

1. Temporal Limits of the Study

Being a study that focuses on a particular type of formation over a time period, it is important to identify the temporal limits of the study. Even though, the study would provide a brief outline of the period before Martanda Varma's ascending to the throne of Venad that would serve the purpose only of providing a contextual setting. The main research questions of the study focuses on the period from 1729 to 1805. 1729, as already stated, is important for Martanda Varma's coming to power in the petty principality of Venad. As the formation of the unitary state of Travancore, can be rightly associated with Martanda Varma's coming to power, and the policies and measures he adopted in the course of his rule, 1729 could be a good beginning to trace the formation of this South Malabar kingdom. 1805 is selected as the terminal point of study for the increased involvement of British in the affairs of the Travancore kingdom began from then on. It was in 1805, that a modified treaty of alliance and friendship was concluded between Travancore and the English East India Company, making the kingdom a subsidiary ally of the company

2. Historiography

Unlike the case with northern Malabar, where the first compilations of history were a result of the administrative and political exigencies of the colonial government, the earliest attempts at writing a comprehensive history of Travancore could be put into the category of 'court histories' or 'dynastic eulogies'. The work of Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*¹ that was produced under the patronage of the Travancore royalty gives an account of the kingdom from ancient to its early and mid-nineteenth century developments. The central thrust of the book is the presentation of the kingdom of Travancore as an ancient kingdom, and 'one of

¹ P.Shungoony Menon, *A History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, Higginbotham and Co., Madras, 1878.

the very few remaining specimens of a pure Hindu government'.² V. Nagam Aiya's *Travancore State Manual*³ compiled in the early decade of the 20th century, was a result of the Travancore state's decision to produce a comprehensive manual of the Travancore state on the model of the District Gazettters of the then Madras presidency. It was thirty-two years after the publication of Nagam Aiya's *State Manual* that a work of similar magnitude appeared. T.K Velupillai's new *State Manual*,⁴ sought to revisit many of the propositions held by earlier writers of Travancore history including Shungoonny Menon and Nagam Aiya, but more staunchly maintaining the idea of the ancient kingdom of Travancore that was outside the sway of the Perumals, and even superior to them.

The formation of the separate state of Kerala on linguistic basis in 1956, gave new impetus to historical writings from a regional perspective. The works of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai,⁵ and his idea of a 'second Chera empire', that served as a breakthrough in the modern historiography of the region, provided for the later historians, a conceptual framework to work and expand on. Even though, the model of a unitary and centralized Chera Empire under the Kulashkharas ruling between the ninth and twelfth centuries is held unacceptable today, Elamkulam's work gave a solid base to think about the history of early medieval Malabar or Kerala. The works of MGS Narayanan⁶ and Kesavan Veluthat,⁷ providing a corrective narrative to Pillai have taken forward the debates on early medieval political formation in the region, highlighting the growth and consolidation of temple centered economy and feudal monarchies backed by the new Brahman settlements and supported by a whole embracing

² Ibid., p.vii

³ Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, 3 vols., Travancore Government Press, Trivandrum, 1906.

⁴ T.K Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, 4 vols., The Government of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1840.

⁵ Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, National Book Stall, Kottayam, 1970.

⁶ M.G.S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cera Perumals of Makotai (c.800 A.D.to1124 A.D.)*, Cosmo Books, 1996.

⁷ Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009; *Brahmin Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Calicut University, Calicut, 1978.

caste structure. Veluthat's propositions though highlighting the differences with the other South Indian polities, more than less dovetails the history of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram with the larger feudal formations in South India.⁸

These historiographical interventions, however, contributed little to the study of the early modern period, either of the colonial Malabar, or the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. Since the 1980's, however, there have come up a number of works that look into the early modern formation of the kingdom of Travancore, notably those of K.N Ganesh,⁹ Ibrahim Kunju,¹⁰ and K.K Kusuman¹¹. Apart from these, the works that deal with the rise and decline of Dutch power in the Malabar coast, as well have contributed in understanding the early-modern period in Kerala. M.O Koshy's *The Dutch Power in Kerala*,¹² P.C Alexander's *Dutch in Malabar*¹³ and K.M Panikkar's *Malabar and the Dutch*,¹⁴ provide an account of the political developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Kerala. These works, however, do not go beyond a mere narration of political happenings, to provide an analytic framework to study the period and the region.

The rise of an array of petty principalities, with the disintegration of the second Cheras in the twelfth century, followed by a resurgence of trade and related commercial activities have made it difficult for historians to comprehend the medieval and early modern political formations of Kerala or the Malabar Coast, within existing historiographical formulations on medieval state and polity.

⁸ Kesavan Veluthat, *Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, Orient Longman, 1993

⁹ K.N Ganesh, 'Ownership and Control of Land in Medieval Kerala: Janmam-Kanam Relations during the 16-18th Centuries', *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 28, no.3, 1991, pp.299-321; 'The Process of State Formation in Travancore', *Studies in History* 6, no. 1, 1990, pp.15-33.

¹⁰ A.P Ibrahim Kunju, *Rise of Travancore: A Study of the Life and Times of Mārtāṇḍa Varma*, Kerala Historical Society, 1976.

¹¹ K.K Kusuman, *A History of Trade and Commerce in Travancore*, Mittal Publications, 1987.

¹² M.O Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala, 1729-1758*, Mittal Publications, 1989.

¹³ P.C Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Annamalai University, 1946.

¹⁴ K.M Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch: Being a History of the fall of Nayar Power in Malabar*, D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co., Bombay, 1931.

Whatsoever, some recent attempts have been made on this line that employs theoretical perspective like that of ‘segmentary state’ of Burton Stein to reflect on the medieval and early modern political formations of the region.¹⁵ Dick Kooiman’s work on Travancore¹⁶ and Hugo’s Jacob’s monograph on Cochin¹⁷ finds Stein’s ‘segmentary state’ model as an appropriate one to study the multiple political centers of pre-colonial Malabar Coast. However, Margaret Frenz’s study on pre-colonial Kottayam,¹⁸ adopts the ‘little kingdom’ model of Nicholas. B Dirks,¹⁹ though modifying it to suit the Malabar situation. Rejecting Dirks’ model where the ‘great king’ and the ‘little king’ are situated in a two tier system, Frenz proposes a more flexible system where ‘the little king is left with a far greater scope for political ritual and military action, the power for struggle is more pronounced and the order of precedence is continually being rearranged’.²⁰ The lack of a single dominating center in the case of the ‘segmentary state’ model and that of a great king in that of the ‘little kingdom model’, is overcome in these studies by projecting the legendary Cheraman Perumal and the memory of the unified kingship under the Cheras, as the ‘great king’, or the ‘core’.

The more recent monographs of Binu John Mailaparambil on Cannanore²¹ and Mark De Lannoy on Travancore²² provide an understanding of the complexities of seventeenth and eighteenth century political formation in the northern most and southern most parts of Kerala, respectively. For Binu John Mailaparambil,

¹⁵ Burton Stein, *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, 1980.

¹⁶ Dick Kooiman, ‘State Formation in Travancore: Problems of Revenue, Trade and Armament’, in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: Essays in Honour of J.C Heesterman*, eds. A.W. Van de Hoek, D.H.A Kolff, and M.S Oort, Brill Publications, Leiden, 1992, pp. 556-577.

¹⁷ Hugo s’ Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin, 1663-1720: Kings, Chiefs, and the Dutch East India Company*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2000.

¹⁸ Margaret Frenz, *From Contact to Conquest: Transition to British Rule in Malabar, 1790-1805*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁹ Nicholas. B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

²⁰ Frenz, *Contact to Conquest*, p.43.

²¹ Binu John Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar (1663-1723)*, Brill Publications, Leiden, 2011.

²² Mark De Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumals of Travancore: History and State Formation in Travancore from 1671-1758*, Research School CNWS, Leiden, 1997.

both the segmentary state model and the little kingdom model, fail in explaining the unique political formations of late medieval Kerala and he suggests to look at the ‘ruling houses of Kerala in their historical contexts’,²³ and to examine ‘those known as rajas of Kerala as ‘rajas’ in their own right’.²⁴ De Lannoy too, in his study of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century formation of the Travancore in to what could be called an early modern state rules out the possibilities of the segmentary state model as helpful in understanding the medieval and early modern political formation of Kerala. De Lannoy shows that unlike the pyramidal segmentation that marks the segmentary state model of Burton Stein, the Travancore before the 1670s, is defined by a parallel segmentation in the three *kshatriya swarupams*.²⁵ De Lannoy’s chronologically structured study offers a detailed historical enquiry into the formation of the kingdom of Travancore from 1671 until the death of Martanda Varma in 1758.

Apart from these works that try to grapple with the question of state formation in the medieval and early-modern Malabar Coast, the works of Susan Bayly,²⁶ on the eighteenth century socio-political formations of south India, needs mention. Contributing to the larger historiographical debate on the eighteenth century in India, Bayly places the formation of the Travancore kingdom within the different state formations throughout India in the eighteenth century and the rise of new militarized Hindu kingdoms and Mughal ‘successor states’ in North India and Deccan. Bayly’s work, that focuses on the newly formed Travancore state’s relationship with the Syrian Christian community, who were elite warriors, traders and land-holders, looks at how the founders of the state of Travancore, Martanda Varma and Rama Varma, ‘shaped and modified the institution of caste and community within their domains, in order to recruit and control the

²³ Binu John Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea*, p.28.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ De Lannoy, *The Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, pp. iv-v.

²⁶ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; ‘Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1800’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.18, No.2, pp.177-213

specialist military and commercial populations on whom their power rested'.²⁷ Also important is the work of Mary Beth Coffman Heston²⁸ on Martanda Varma's invocation of the past through visual representations in the volume, *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, edited by Catherine.B.Asher and Thomas.R.Metcalf²⁹ that in three sessions looks into the various early modern visual representations of the Indian past. Martanda Varma's efforts at appropriating and constructing the past and the future through visual and artistic representations are considered a classic early modern South Indian case of imperial appropriation of the past.³⁰

Another field of historiographical enquiry, in which the coastal region of Malabar figures in importantly, is the flourishing field of Indian Ocean studies. Despite the central position Malabar occupies in the Indian Ocean studies, and the increased realization about the centrality of trade relations in the socio-political formations of the Malabar coast, historical enquiries that go beyond an exploration of the formation of particular trading communities within the local polities, and looks into Indian ocean as defining the local political formations itself are very scarce. Ashin Das Gupta,'s work, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, is an important intervention in this regard.³¹ Das Gupta looks at the changing affairs of the eighteenth century Malabar as tied up to the 'ebb and flow of Asian trade'.³² He shows that at a time when Calicut was blessed with a trade boom, at the southern end, Martanda Varma was expanding and building a centralized unitary state along the coast until the southern boundaries of Calicut. According to Das Gupta, all these developments were "part of the same jig-saw,

²⁷ Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship', p. 178

²⁸ Mary Beth Coffman Heston, 'Images from the Past, Vision of the Future: The Art of Marttanda Varma', in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, eds., Catherine.B.Asher and Thomas.R.Metcalf, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd, 1994., pp. 188-199.

²⁹ Catherine.B.Asher and Thomas.R.Metcalf, eds., *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd, 1994., pp. 188-199

³⁰ Mary Heston, 'Images from the Past, Vision of the Future', pp.188-199

³¹ Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge University Press, London and New York, 1967.

³² *Ibid.*, p.4.

in other words it was because the port of Calicut was so busy that the Dutch were fighting the king of Travancore and things were so different in Malabar”.³³

This thesis intends to contribute to this historiography in two ways. Initially, it intends to provide a detailed historical enquiry into the multi layered formation of the state of Travancore in the eighteenth century, looking into how the mechanisms of state craft, military advancements, commercial and economic reforms and use of religious institutions and spaces worked in a complimentary way for the expansion and as well successful consolidation of the kingdom of Travancore under the Trippapur Swarupam. And secondly, through this enquiry, the study aims to bridge the gap between the existing historiographies, by looking into the Travancore state formation as rooted in the seventeenth century complexities of the Travancore region, the nature of Indian Ocean trade, and the possibilities offered by the adoption of a particular religious lexicon.

3. Structure of the Study

This study consists of three chapters apart from the introductory and a conclusive section. The introductory section along with stating the research question and the study’s temporal limits, would locate the study within the existing historiography, of which a detailed study will be provided. It will also provide a detailed discussion of the sources and the methodology undertaken for the study. A brief sketch of the three major chapters will also be given.

The first chapter, which will be a context setting for the chapters to follow, will discuss the different facets of the political, commercial and religious spheres of medieval Southern Malabar region before the formation of Travancore. This initial chapter would primarily provide a historical background to southern Malabar region that would extend from the Cape of Comorin in the south to the territories of the Cochin *raja* in the north, from the complex politics of which

³³ Ibid.

had formed the state of Travancore. The first section of the chapter would provide a historical outline of the region of South Malabar, of its polities and ports, looking into the aspects of religion, political organization and economic formations. In the centuries after the fall of the Chera Kingdom the political landscape of Malabar was defined by fragmented political units termed as *swarupams*. Venad, from which had formed the kingdom of Travancore, appears in the sources of this period as a less significant one in terms of political power and trade prospects compared to its northern neighbor, the *Perumpadappu swarupam* of Cochin, and the further northern *Nediyiruppu Swarupam* of Calicut. Moreover, in the post-Chera political order, Venad, was only one among the many different polities ruled by the four major *swarupams* of the Travancore royal family. From the records available to us from the sixteenth century, the names of four major *swarupams* of Travancore can be discerned which are, the *Chiravay swarupam*, *Trippapur Swarupam*, *Desinganad swarupam*, and *Elayedathu swarupam*.

The second section of the chapter moves into discussing the complexities, tensions and new formations that characterized the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It would look at the changing relations of power and the tensions ensued henceforth, within the fragmented political set up of the late medieval Travancore region. The period is marked for some fundamental transformations in the land based economy of the south Malabar region that is manifested in the increasing conflicts between the customary authorities on land, and the growing intermediary class, who held the actual control over the production process. The advent of the European companies served as a catalyst and a benefactor of this transformation. With the increase in the intensity of trade and demand for commodities, especially in southern Malabar, we see an expansion of agricultural lands by clearing forests and by extending the customary land right system to more and more regions.

It is in this backdrop of the new interventions in the commercial structure, and the breaking down of the medieval system of graded rights based on customary obligations and rights, around caste groups, that we can locate the conflicts and tensions that were characteristic of the region two centuries preceding the formation of Travancore. The kingdom of Travancore that formed out of the fragmented polities and temple lands of the region between Quilon and Cape of Comorin, increasingly imbibed the novelties introduced by the European newcomers, for a reorganization of the traditional land based system of rights and obligations. In the backdrop of the breakdown of the customary ways of revenue gathering and military consolidation, the claimants to the position of Kulashekhara Perumal, resorted to untraditional means of military interventions and commercial engagements that found its fruition only from the third decade of the eighteenth century, with the ascendance of Martanda Varma, the Trippapur *muppu*, to the throne of Venad.

The subsequent chapters will deal with this multi layered formation, by singling out and looking closely at its different aspects. This second chapter intends to look at the formation of the kingdom of Travancore from the third decade of the eighteenth century from the standpoint of military innovations, and the interventions into the medieval martial culture of the region. The chapter tries to pry out the process of the development of this military state in southern Malabar that reaches its apogee in the military contestations with the Mysore Sultanate in the last decades of the eighteenth century. On assuming the position of the *muppu* of the Trippapur Swarupam Martanda Varma had set out to carve a new political organization in Malabar basing majorly on a reconfiguration of the medieval military system by reaching out to new skills, technologies' and groups being made available in the eighteenth century south India. Like the new Maratha, Sikh and Jat warrior successor states of the Central and northern India, sustained warfare and rigorous military program through incessant conquest,

increased fortification, and adoption of novel military technologies and modes of warfare were central features that determined the formation of the Travancore state under Martanda Varma. The materialization of this new political system introduced particular forms of military organization hitherto unknown in the region.

The initial section of the chapter provides a brief historiographical account of the military endeavors of Martanda Varma in the starting years of his reign until the 1734. By then, Martanda Varma had dealt with the two major internal challenges to his claim to the throne of Venad; the Thampi brothers and the hostile *madambimars* and *pillamars*. The section would look at how Martanda Varma's military accomplishments of this period went beyond the contours of medieval military endeavors and institutions, and the traditional martial culture of the region. In the course of the wars waged against the other collateral branches of Travancore, Martanda Varma, unable to exploit the service of the traditional *nayar* militia of the land, stepped in as a key player in the military labor market of the eighteenth century South India, from which the different contenders for power could recruit men and procure weaponry on providing adequate payment, and commenced changing the rules of medieval warfare in the region. It was the chances in engaging successfully in this military labor market in the face of the absence of support from the traditional militia that defined Travancore's survival against the internal and external threats in the initial years of Martanda Varma's reign.

The second section looks at the period of the contestation with the Dutch East India Company and of rigorous military conquest to trace the growth of Travancore as a military-fiscal state. It was in the course of the rigorous expansion policy that Martanda Varma undertook in the years that followed the annihilation of the major internal threats; that the kingdom of Travancore was formed. Territorial expansion through military expeditions by incorporating into

the process of state formation the strategic service groups and the different military innovations available in the eighteenth century South Indian context was key to the formation of this new form of state on the Malabar Coast. The kingdom of Travancore, by the end of Martanda Varma's reign in 1758, extended from Tovala in the south to borders of the Cochin Kingdom in the north. The final section looks at the period after Martanda Varma that is marked by the rise of Mysore and of the consolidation of the English colonial power. On inheriting the throne of the newly found kingdom from his uncle, Rama Varma was to continue the policy of expansion and military empowerment. This period saw the apogee of Travancore's military might and its development into a significant military power of the eighteenth century South India, a position no other Malabar rajas could hitherto claim.

The third chapter is an attempt to look at how the formation of an early modern state in South Malabar—is deeply intertwined in the complexities of the commercial realm and the medieval agricultural economy of the region. It tries to investigate the process of the Travancore state's commercial expansion through a series of strategic commercial interventions that worked hand in hand with military conquest and territorial expansion. Historiographical understandings on medieval state formations, especially in the southern India, have mostly associated state formation with agrarian expansion centered on a religious epicenter. However, the case of Malabar, dominated by its water bodies, in the form of riverine channels, back waters, and thriving ports connecting the region to the networks of the Indian Ocean trade, have presented a distinct case.

In the initial section, the chapter provides a historical background of the complex and dynamic commercial world of the early eighteenth century South Malabar and how the beginnings of the formation of the kingdom of Travancore were deeply located in these complexities and the possibilities it offered. The

section will show that it was Martanda Varma's strategic engagements in the commercial world and agricultural economy of the region that enabled him to maintain a rigorous and consistent policy of war and military aggression against internal and external threats from the very beginning of his reign. The second section traces the Travancore king's first major commercial strike; the establishment of the monopoly in the trade in pepper. The commercial department of the new state that was set up by Rama Iyen Dalawa under the direction of Martanda Varma instituted a centralized system of pepper procurement by establishing *pandikasalas* or storehouses at various locations like Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, Quilon, Mavelikkaray and Muvattupuzha in Arakkuzha that were kept under an officer called the *vijaripukaran* or *thorakaran*, and guarded by military men. In these *pandikasalas* or *thoras* were stored the monopolized products like pepper, areca, cassia and cardamom, that were purchased and sold by the commercial departments at rate fixed by the king. The section also shows that the gradual commercial expansion of the Travancore kingdom, into the entire expanse of land in South Malabar including that of the Cochin *raja* was made possible through the establishment of a centralized bureaucratic structure that eliminated all the intermediaries in trade and agriculture, and the royal interventions into the agricultural economy of the region.

The third section looks at how land and religion were intertwined in the medieval political order, and the ways in which the royal interventions in the land economy through centralization and bureaucratization entailed the reformulation of the religious order of the region. Martanda Varma's efforts at claiming the title of the *kulashekhara perumal*, and the donation of the entire kingdom of Travancore to the Lord, Sri Padmanabha, an unprecedented religious gesture, involved, in novel ways, the conflation of the religious and the political. These efforts at religious reformulation necessitated the alteration of

the structures of land organization in medieval South Malabar region. Moreover, this worked hand in hand with the construction of the idiom of sacred kingship by ritual enacting of kingly piety, borrowing heavily from the Hindu warrior states of eighteenth century South India.

The final section looks at the development of Travancore from a land power into a power at sea achieved by the establishment of the port city at Alleppey and its gradual rise into the most pivotal port of the coastal Malabar catering to the demands of the Indian Ocean Trade. The opening of the port at Alleppey was a momentous decision from the part of Martanda Varma's successor Rama Varma. Under the supervision of Dewan Kesava Pillay, Rama Varma's chief minister, the beach at Alleppey was cleared, and the village was turned into a center of trade by inviting merchants to visit the port. Various construction projects including that of warehouses, bankshalls and shops were undertaken to facilitate trade for the visiting merchants. Alleppey was, however, never to become a center of free trade like that of Calicut. The trade at Alleppey was strictly supervised and controlled by the commercial department through the *vijaripukar*, who was appointed for the purpose. The details of the trade and accounts were maintained through a centralized system of record keeping at the Alleppey port office. By the end of the century, brisk trade was reported at the port of Alleppey. Dhows and ships from different ports on the Arabian Sea frequented the port for the exchange of commodities. The port was to become the focal point of the expanded commercial realm of Travancore, connecting it with the hinterlands and the *pandikasalas* through a network of roads and inland waterways. The other ports of Travancore like those of Vizhinjom, Colachel, Anjengo and Quilon were made into feeding ports to Alleppey. The establishment of Alleppey and its rise to the pivotal port on the Malabar Coast reflected the extension of the sweeping transformations wrought by the

formation of Travancore in the coastal political structure and agricultural economy of the region into the structures of Indian Ocean trade itself.

The conclusion part will provide a summary of the major findings and arguments of the study.

4. Sources of the study

Even though, compared to the previous centuries, sources pertaining to the eighteenth century in the southern regions of Malabar are relatively abundant, the materials, are still scattered, in different languages and lands, making a historical enquiry into the period a difficult task. Owing to the limitations of an M.Phil project, this thesis could not fully overcome the constraints imposed by this difficulty in acquiring source materials. The study, however, have tried to make use of available archival and printed materials for undertaking a study of the multi-layered formation of the Travancore kingdom.

All of the archival sources used in the study are collected from Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum. The materials collected from Trivandrum, could be put under four categories; *The Showcase Records*, *Mathilakam Records*, *Neettu Records*, and *the Alleppey port records*. The *Mathilakam* records are those records that were preserved at the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple and contain abundant information pertaining to cultural, religious and political matters of the Travancore region from the fourteenth century to 1900s. The *Neettu* records form a collection of the royal proclamations of the Travancore *rajas* issued to various heads of departments on matters concerning the administration of the state. The Showcase records that are preserved in a particular shelf in the state archives, is a collection of different kinds of records, that include treaties concluded with the English, Dutch and as well the other *rajas*, proclamations and records pertaining to trade and related activities, appointment of officers

and establishment of different institutions. It as well contains details regarding the military endeavors of Travancore *rajas*, and the various measures and innovation undertaken for modernizing the military power of the Travancore kingdom. The Alleppey port records, give details of the activities and the imports and exports at the newly established port of Alleppey. However, the port records are not yet copied from the palm leaves to papers and only the index of the collection is made available for research students. The study, however, could not access and make use of the rich repository of sources preserved in the other parts of the world, including the VOC records at archives at the Netherlands and the British records from the archives in the United Kingdom.

The published sources used for the study, include the accounts of the travellers to the Malabar Coast, the administrative and other records of the European settlers. The accounts of the travellers to the Coast are majorly used to look at the region before the formation of Travancore. The travel accounts used for the study include that of Ibn Battuta³⁴, Marco Polo³⁵, Nicolo de Conti³⁶, and the Chinese records of Zheng He and Ma Huan³⁷. For the sixteenth century the book of Portuguese Duarte Barbosa provides ample information about the geography and the practices and systems of the people and kings of the coast.³⁸

³⁴ Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta al-musammat tuhfat al-nullar fi garaib al-amsar wa ajaib al-asfar*, 5 vols., ed. A. al-Thazi, Acadamiya al-Mamlakat al-Maghribiyya, Morocco, 1997; or the English translation in, H.A.R Gibb and C.F Beckingham, trans., *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D 1325-1354*, 5 Vols., The Haklyut Society, London, 1994 (Henceforth referred to as Ibn Battuta).

³⁵ Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, 2 vols., eds. and trans. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot, Routledge & Sons Limited, London, 1938.

³⁶ N. M. Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo together with the Travels of Nicolo de Conti*, 2nd ed., Adam and Charles Black, London, 1937.

³⁷ J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan: Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan, 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970; Fei Hsin, *Hsing-C'a Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, trans. J. V. G. Mills and ed. Roderich Ptak, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1996.

³⁸ Mansel Longworth Dames, ed. and trans., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa: An Account of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean and their Inhabitants*, 2 Vols., Haklyut Society, 1918-21 (Henceforth cited as *Duarte Barbosa*).

The works of the European settlers utilized for the study include, *The Anjengo Consultations*,³⁹ printed in two volumes covering the period between 1744 and 1750. The *Anjengo Consultations* are a compilation of the records of the Anjengo factory of the British East India Company. It contains important information about the value and commodities of English trade with Travancore *rajass*, and details about the important nodes of commodity exchange and the different trading communities. It is also abundant in information on the military concerns of Travancore kingdom, and its changing strategies of trade and arm procurement. The *Consultations* is used majorly to trace the contours of Travancore's commercial expansion and the transformations in the commercial world of South Malabar that the formation of Travancore had elaborated. Along with *Anjengo Consultations*, the different volumes of *Tellichery Consultations*⁴⁰, belonging to the records of Fort St. George, are also used to mark the trade boom at Calicut in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

The Dutch in Malabar,⁴¹ that contains the English translations of the memoirs of two Dutch governors, Stein Van Gollenesse and Adrian Meons, is another important primary source that is used in the study. The memoirs of the Dutch chiefs retiring from the office, produced for the guidance of their successors have been an important source for historians working on the Dutch period in Malabar. Stein Van Gollenesse' memoir⁴² provides along with a description of the different principalities and *rajass* of Malabar, a detailed account the Dutch affairs in Malabar in the year 1739-1744, the period of the Dutch-Travancore

³⁹ *Anjengo Consultations*, Records of Fort St. George, 2 Vols., Superintendent Government Press, Madras, 1936.

⁴⁰ *Tellichery Consultations*, Records of Fort St. George, 21 Vols., Superintendent Government Press, Madras, 1933.

⁴¹ A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar: Being a Translation of Selections Nos. 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes*, Superintendent Government Press, Madras, 1911.

⁴² Stein Van Gollenesse, 'Memorandum on the Administration of Malabar by his Worship J. V. Stein van Gollenesse', in A.Galletti, ed. and trans., *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp. 43-96.

war. The memoir of Meons,⁴³ produced in the 1782, at a time when the Dutch power in Malabar was waning, gives an account of the Malabar of his time, the expedition of the Mysore sultan, and also, about the Jew and Syrian Christian community on the coast, who were important and powerful trading communities in the territories of the Travancore *rajās*. Along with these, the work also uses the Dutch man Jacob Canter Visscher's letters from Malabar⁴⁴ for the firsthand account it provides of the different aspects of the Malabar society and political structure in the form of letters written from Malabar. Apart from these, the study also uses relevant sections of the administrative compendia of the British colonial power in Malabar, *The Joint Commissioner's Report on Malabar 1792-93*⁴⁵, Francis Buchanan's *A journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*⁴⁶ and William Logan's *Malabar Manual*⁴⁷.

⁴³ Adrian Meons, 'Memorandum on the Administration of Malabar by the Right Worshipful Adriaan Moens' in ed. and trans., A Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, pp.97-246

⁴⁴ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters From Malabar*, trans., Major Heber Drury, Granz Brothers, The Adelphi Press, Madras, 1862.

⁴⁵ *The Joint Commissioner's Report on Malabar, 1792-93*, ed. J. Rejikumar, Kerala State Archives, Kochin, 2010.

⁴⁶ Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, in 3 Vols., Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1988

⁴⁷ William Logan, *Malabar District Manual*, 2 Vols., Superintend Government Press, Madras, 1887.

Chapter One

The Making of Travancore: Historical Background

This initial chapter primarily intends to provide a historical background to the southern Malabar region that would extend from the Cape of Comorin in the south to the territories of the Cochin *raja* in the north, from the complex politics of which had formed the state of Travancore. The chapter would look at the region, through the lens of the outsiders as well as through indigenous sources. The first section of the chapter would provide a historical outline of the region of South Malabar, of its polities and ports, looking into the aspects of religion, political organization and economic formations. The section would try to discern the early history of the region as found in indigenous records and in writings of the travellers. The second section would move into discussing the complexities, tensions and new formations that characterized the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It would look at the changing relations of power and the tensions ensued henceforth, within the fragmented political set up of the late medieval Travancore region. The chapter would try to locate the unitary state of Travancore, in the backdrop of the breakdown of medieval land based customary power of the king and the temple, and the introduction of political and commercial novelties with the advent of new actors in the region like the European East India Companies.

1.1 Southern Malabar before the Formation of Travancore

The ancient and early medieval travellers and geographers have called the pepper growing lands between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats by different names, all of them pointing towards the derivation of the word

Malabar in the later European sources. Along with the variant names appearing in the different sources the extent and boundaries of the region too is not fixed.⁴⁸ For most of the early Arab travellers, Kollam or Quilon marked the southern end of the Malabar peninsula and Honawar, its northern extent. This definition however, leaves out the stretch of land between Quilon and Cape of Comorin, where lies the origins of the kingdom of Travancore. In the European sources, from that of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Cape of Comorin marks the southern tip of the peninsula.⁴⁹

These variations in determining the boundaries of the region point towards Malabar as a geographical unit, rather than a unified or singular political unit. The variations reflect each traveller's familiarity with the different extents of the pepper producing land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea. As a geographical unit, cut off from the rest of the sub-continent by the Western Ghats, and facing the Arabian Sea, Malabar from earliest times have preserved a distinct culture and modes of social organization, and have been an important nodal point in the maritime trade routes across the Indian Ocean. The fragmented political state of Malabar in the centuries after the fall of Chera kingdom can be discerned from the accounts of medieval travellers like that of Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo.⁵⁰ Among the major political units or *swarupams* that sprouted up in the period, Venad, in these sources, appears as a less significant one, in terms of political power, and trade prospects compared to its

⁴⁸ Most the early Arab travellers mark Kollam as the southern end of the pepper producing land or Malabar. For Abul Fida, however, the land of al-Manibar extends until Kumahri in the south from Honawar in the north. In the Portuguese and Dutch sources from the sixteenth century, too, the southern end is marked by the Cape of Comorin.

⁴⁹ According to Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese traveller, "the land of Malabar begins from the place called Cumbola, and in all from the Hill of Dely and ending at the Cape of Camorin". See *Duarte Barbosa*, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo describe their journey through the coastal Malabar ruled by different *swarupams*, not incorporated into any larger political order. See Ibn Battuta, *Rihlat ibn batuta*, Vol. 4, p.38; *Ibn Battuta*, Vol.IV, pp. 805-821; Marco Polo, *Marco Polo: the Description of the World*, Vol. 1, pp.414-419.

northern neighbor, the *Perumpadappu Swarupam* of Cochin, and the further northern *Nediyiruppu Swarupam* of Calicut.⁵¹

Venad, however, was one of the significant *nadus* of the Chera period, and a central one in the Chera-Chola strifes of the period owing to its location in the southernmost end of the Chera Kingdom. The *History* of Shungoonny Menon claims that the medieval principality of Venad that later developed into the kingdom of Travancore is the historical extension of the Cheras.⁵² The *Travancore State Manual* of T.K Velupillai draws a distinction between the Cheraman Perumals who ruled from the Northern Malabar, and the Kulashekhara Perumals, who ruled from the southern principality of Venad. In Velupillai's reconstruction of early medieval history of the coastal region, the Kulashekhara Perumals, who are the predecessors of the modern Travancore *rajās*, were independent of the Chera kings, as soon as the Perumal rule was established in the northern part of Malabar.⁵³ The manual of Nagam Aiya as well claims that the Cheras of Travancore were independent of the Cheraman Perumals of the north whose descendants are the Kolattiri Rajas of North Malabar.⁵⁴ Later historians have however, discounted these claims, and hold that even though the governor of Venad, similar to the governors of other Chera *nadus*, exercised their independent authority; they placed themselves under the sovereignty of the Cheraman Perumals who ruled from Mahodayapuram.⁵⁵

Venad, in the early historic period, figures in the Sangam literature as part of the land of Ay-Vel, whose inhabitants were Bhudhist herdsmen under a hill chief. The protracted Pandya-Chera conflict in the early medieval period, led to the disintegration of the Ay-Vel territory into the Ay territory under the Pandyas

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² See Shungoonny Menon, *A History of Travancore*, pp.73-75.

⁵³ See T.K Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.2, p. 25.

⁵⁴ See Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, pp. 227-228.

⁵⁵ See P.K Balakrishnan, *Keralathinte Samskarika Charithram*, State Institute of Languages, Kerala, 1974, p.327; M.G.S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp. 191-194.

and the Vel under the Cheras. It is this Vel territory under the Cheras, that later developed into Vel+nad, Venad, with its headquarters at Kollam, in the southern end of the Chera kingdom, acting as a bulwark to subsequent Chola-Pandya aggressions. However, the sources we have of an Ay king, making a land grant to a Buddhist temple in the lands of the Chera in the year 898 AD, also shows that the relation between the Pandyan Ay and Chera kings were not always conditioned by Pandya-Chera enmity.⁵⁶ It is also assumed that the Vels of Venad, during the latter Chera period, had extended their authority in the former Ay kingdom, until the town of Kottar in the south.⁵⁷

On its partition into two, while the Ay kingdom fixed its capital at Vizhinjam, a central port city of the period, the princes of Venad, ruled from Kollam that developed into a bustling port alternative to Vizhinjam. The rise of Kollam into a center of trans-oceanic trade networks of the Arabs, Chinese, Jews and Christians, has facilitated the growth of Venadu into an important region under the Kulashekharas. The standard era of the Malayalam speaking lands, the Kollam era that commenced with 825 A.D is commonly believed to commemorate the foundation of the town and port of Kollam. The popularity of the Kollam era, in the entire Malabar region in the post-Chera period is a testimony to the significant space Kollam once enjoyed in the changing hierarchies of the port cities of the coastal region.⁵⁸ Even though the references to the town of Kollam and the port in sources that pre date the eighth century proves that the port and town existed even before the commencement of the

⁵⁶ Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵⁸ The different port cities of Kerala were located in a constantly shifting hierarchical relation, determined by the changing geo-physical conditions and the efforts of the coastal ruler to exploit the changed circumstances. In the port hierarchy at the time of the Kulashekhara Perumals of Mahodayapuram, in the period between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, Kollam emerged as the principle port with the other ports including Muziris, Pantalayani Kollam and Ezhimala, acting as satellite ports feeding the Principle port. See Pius Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity and the Changing Port-Hierarchy of Kerala', in *Coastal Histories: Society and Ecology in pre-Modern India*, ed. Yogesh Sharma, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2010, pp.75-91.

Kollam era,⁵⁹ it is ascertained that the rise of Kollam into a burgeoning entrepot happens in the early years of the ninth century, under the Kulashekhara Perumals of Mahodayapuram.⁶⁰ The Tharisapally copper plate deed of 849 A.D issued to its Christian community by a local ruler of Kollam, with Jew and Muslim signatories to the deed points to the active participation of these communities in the affairs of the town and the efforts of the local ruler in exploiting the possibilities of oceanic trade. The mercantile nature of these communities can be ascertained by a complimentary copper-plate deed that bestowed them with extensive commercial and political privileges.⁶¹

In most of the accounts of the Arab travellers and geographers, Kollam marked the southernmost end of the Malabar Coast, making it an easy and frequent destination for the Chinese and South East Asian traders. On his arrival in the city of Kollam, Marco Polo, in the 1290s could see in the town prosperous Chinese merchants and Ibn Battuta, who visited the coast only fifty years after Marco Polo, called Kollam the finest ports on Malabar, and a frequent destination of Chinese merchants.⁶² Apart from these merchant communities, Kollam was unique in the entire Malabar Coast, for the active role played in its trade, by the merchant guilds of South India. Ibn Battuta's account in the fourteenth century refers to a group of immensely wealthy merchants known as *al-suliyān*, an Arabic rendering to denote the Tamil merchant groups.⁶³

The natural features and strategic location of Kollam, made it the central transshipment point of the Chinese ship in their homeward journey from the regions of the Persian Gulf. The ships waiting for the monsoon wind and taking

⁵⁹ See K.P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala: Written in the Form of Notes on Visscher's Letters from Malabar*, 4 Vols., Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, Vol. 1, p.271.

⁶⁰ See, Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, p.192; Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity and the Changing Port-Hierarchy of Kerala', p.78.

⁶¹ The Tharisapally copper plate deed documents the donation of a region along with its administration to Tharisapally Church that was established in Kollam by Mar Saphir Iso by the ruler of Venad, identified as Ayyanadikal Thiruvadikal.

⁶² *Ibn Battuta*, Vol. IV, p.816; *Marco Polo*, Vol.1, p.414-415.

⁶³ *Ibn Battuta*, Vol. IV, pp.818.

provisions for the forward journey had to pay heavy post duties at the port as it is enumerated in the Arabic *Akhbar al-Sin wa'l Hind* written again in the mid-ninth century.⁶⁴ Along with acting as the key transshipment point, Kollam, in the period between the 9th and 14th centuries took over the old Muziris port as the primary supplier of pepper to the markets across the Indian Ocean.⁶⁵ The port of Kollam was connected to the pepper and spice producing hinterlands, and the markets through a rich system of backwaters of the Ashtamudi Lake, facilitating the movement of goods and people in locally made boats or *tonis*. The remarkable prosperity of Kollam, during the period of the Kulashekharas is a testimony to the trade orientation of the Chera kings and the centrality of trade interests in the years of conflicts between the South Indian kingdoms of Chera, Chola and Pandya.

S.N Sadasivan's work, *Social History of India*, that is a study of Bhudhism and the subsequent arrival of the Brahmins to Kerala, tries to pry out another aspect of the early history of Venad. According to Sadasivan, the rulers of Venad, until the influx of Vaishnavism to the coastal Malabar region, were patrons of Bhudhism, and were converted to Vaishnavism, a populist form of Brahmanism under the influence of Vaishanava Azhavar Kulashekharas. The work claims that the present Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple was rebuilt from a Bhudhist Pagoda by the convert prince in 1050 A.D, installing the image of Vishnu in the place of Budha, and the area around the temple was a large grove, called the Ananda Vana Vihara or Anandan kavu that was then largely inhabited by Pulayas.⁶⁶

The growth and consolidation of temple centered feudal monarchies backed by the new Brahmin settlements or the Brahman *gramas* and supported by an all-embracing caste system, in the post Sangam period, have recently acquired

⁶⁴ S.M Ahmad, trans., *Arabic Classical Accounts of India and China*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1989, pp.38.

⁶⁵ Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity and the Changing Port-Hierarchy of Kerala', p.78.

⁶⁶ S.N Sadasivan, *Social History of India*, A.P.H Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2000, p.361.

extensive historiographical attention.⁶⁷ The Chera kingdom of Makotai or Mahodayapuram, in political and cultural sense was a product of this new temple centered Brahmin settlements that became prominent in Kerala from the early 7th century primarily through the vehicle of the Bhakti movement.⁶⁸ The new political and cultural order that was thus formed imbibed into its ambit the pre-existing tribes, clans and forms of believe, through a systematic production of myths and legends.

The disintegration of the Chera kingdom to form different political units like *swarupams*, *naduvazhis*, *desavazhis* etc. did not hinder this process of the consolidation of temple centered Brahmin settlements. Instead, with the movement of these new power centers from often land-locked low lying paddy cultivating terrains to the mid-upland regions, in order to exploit the possibilities offered by augmenting pepper trade, the Brahmin settlements too, along with its idea of God and social organization and its Bhakti orientations, started moving into these new power centers.⁶⁹ In fact, the revenue generated through trade in pepper provided a further impetus to the spread and consolidation of these Brahmin settlements through increased patronization of Bhakti poets and devotional literatures. In the political order of the post Chera period, Venad is a classic example of the development of petty temple states in a highly fragmented political context. It is to this aspect of Venad that we would now turn to.

⁶⁷ See, Kesavan Veluthat, *The Early Medieval in South India*, Oxford University Press, 2010; *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, 1978; M.G.S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*; M.G.S Narayanan and Kesavan veluthat, 'The Bhakti Movements in South India' in *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent, Protest and Reform*, ed., S.C Malik, Indian Institute of advanced study, Shimla, 1978, pp.33-59.

⁶⁸ Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, pp.15-18.

⁶⁹ From the thirteenth century, a shift of political capital of the *swarupams* from agrarian enclaves to port cities is very visible. The Nediyruppu Swarupam shifted its center from Eranad to Calicut by the thirteenth century. Similarly, the chief of Perumapadappu Swarupam, shifted his capital, in the fifteenth century, from the land locked Vanneri to port city of Cochin. See, Pius Malekandathil, 'Dynamics of Trade, Faith and Politic of Cultural Enterprise in Early Modern Kerala', in *Clio and her Descendants: Essays in Honour of Kesavan Veluthat*, ed. Manu.V.Devadevan, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2018, pp.157-198.

1.1.1 Venad as a Temple State

We are not very certain about the exact limits of Venad during the closing years of the Cheras of Mahodayapuram, unless some speculations are raised about its extension to the Pandyan Ay region. In the devotional hymns composed by Vaishnava saints, the Alvars, on the 13 temples located in the Malainadu, the southernmost temples of Thiruvananthapuram, Tiruvanparisaram, and Tiruvattar is located in the Ay territory. At least from the fourteenth century, we have clear evidence of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple of Thiruvananthapuram merging as the prime religious house of the rulers of Venad. We have records from 550 M.E/1375 A.D that refers to certain land grants for lighting lamps for *Alpasi Utsavam* in the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple, by the senior Tiruvati of Venad, Kerala Varma.⁷⁰

The temple and Thiruvananthapuram appears in Vaishnava saint, Namalvar's, *Tiruvaymoli*, as one of the 13 *divyadesams*⁷¹ in *malainadu* and it is evident from the work that the place was then known by the name, Ananthapuraganaram. The holy shrine, according to the commentator Arumpadavuraiasiriyar, is referred to in *Chilapattikaram* as well, pointing towards its existence even before the spread of Vaishnavism in the years from the 9th century. The Golden Shrine or the *Adakamadam*, whose *prasadam* was brought to Senguttavan by some visitors on the eve of his expedition to the north is believed by this commentator to be the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple. The text refers to the deity in the temple to be sleeping in Yogic trance on a 'divine serpent'. In the hymns of the Vaishnava Nammalvar the idol of Vishnu in the temple is in the Ananthasayana

⁷⁰ *Mathilakam*. C.1720, O. 113, in *Pradhanapetta Mathilakam Rikkardukal*, ed. J. Rejikumar, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, 2010 (Henceforth cited as *Mathilakam*).

⁷¹ Vaishnava Divaydesams confer to 108 Vishnu temples that find mention in the works of Vaishnava saints known as *Alvars*.

pose, as we find it in the later temple records as well.⁷² Thiruvananthapuram, or the Ananthapuraganagaram, is referred to in these songs as a majestic town with golden walls, centered on this shrine of Vishnu. The temple of Thiruvananthapuram finds reference in the inscriptions of the Pandyan king who ruled in the early twelfth century as well, here too, in records about land grants offered by the king to the temple.⁷³

In the fragmentary political order of the post-Chera period, Venad appears no more a single entity, but one among the many different polities ruled by the four major *swarupams* of the Travancore royal family. From the records available to us from the sixteenth century, the names of four major *swarupams* can be discerned which are, the *Chiravay swarupam*, *Trippapur swarupam*, *Desinganad swarupam*, and *Elayedathu swarupam*. Venad was conventionally ruled by the *muppu* or the eldest male member of the Chiravay Swarupam, which but, from the sixteenth century, seems to be challenged by the Trippapur Swarupam.⁷⁴ The members of the Venad ruling family who moved to Kallada in Quilon developed into a separate branch called the Jayasimhanad or Desinganad.⁷⁵ With the takeover of Venad by the Trippapur Swarupam, the Chiravay Swarupam moved to Kayamkulam, a region further north of Kollam. The Elayadathu Swarupam of the Kottarakara region, to the north of Quilon that appears in the sources only by the sixteenth century is a result of latter day migrations of the members of the royal family and the setting up of new residences. Another branch that appears only from the sixteenth century is the

⁷² Nammalwar, the 9th century Vaishnavite saint and poet of the alvar tradition, who is considered to be the 5th in the line of the twelve alvar saints, has composed ten hymns in praise of Lord Padmanabha.

⁷³ *Travancore Archeological Series*, 7 Vols., Methodist Publishing House, 1910-1913, Vol.1, p.49.

⁷⁴ Mark De Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.2; K.N Ganesh, 'The Process of State Formation in Travancore', p.18.

⁷⁵ K.N Ganesh, 'The Process of State Formation in Travancore', p.17.

Nedumangad or Perakattayvali branch, under whose control were the territories near to the Ghats in the Travancore region.⁷⁶

Power, within these different branches of the royal family, was organized in a graded hierarchy of inheritance through the female line. The rules of inheritance that governed the ruling *nayar* houses of Malabar have not missed notice of any traveller who has written on their journeys to the coast.⁷⁷ The women of these families, who are called *tamburatties*, enter into *sambhandham* with *Nambutiris*⁷⁸ or with men of their own caste.⁷⁹ A relationship of *sambhandham* can be terminated by any of the both parties or both together, according to their will. It is the sons and daughters born to the female members of the royal house, in *sambhandham* or in relationships of marriage who inherits the throne according to the *muppu mura*.⁸⁰ The female members of the family are provided with their own area of residence that is placed under the autonomy of the eldest female member. The *amma veedu* of the Trippapur Swarupam was Attingal⁸¹ and the consorts of Attingal ranis were selected from the Koil Thampurans of Kilimanoor. According to Padmanabha Menon, the Koil Thampurans of Kilimanoor originally belonged to Kolattunad and settled down at different regions under the sway of the Trippapur Swarupam through successive waves of immigration.⁸²

The princes of the different *swarupams*, in accordance to their grade were given the *cherikkal* lands, which were distributed as appenages to the *naduvazhis*. The

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ For instance, see *Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.2, pp.9-11.

⁷⁸ Nambutiris are the Brahmins of Malabar. For the myth about the advent of Nambutiri Brahmins in Malabar and their ways and manners, See K.P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.3, pp.27-136.

⁷⁹ Barbosa gives detailed description of rules of inheritance of the *Kshatriya* or *nayar* royal households, focusing on the Nediyruppu Swarupam, *Duarte Barbosa*, Vol.2, pp.9-11, Also see, Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.3, pp.137-144.

⁸⁰ The succession to the throne of the different *swarupams* were practiced in accordance to rules of *muppu mura* or seniority. The first prince could claim the title of the *muppu* who was the ruler and the next senior would be called the second prince. See Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, vol.2, p.5.

⁸¹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.4 ; K.N Ganesh, 'Process', p.19

⁸² Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.3, pp.139-140.

naduvazhis in turn administered their territories by recruiting members from their own *swarupam* or its *nayar* adherents, who were called the *desavalis*. The *desavalis* were village headmen, also known as *madambis* in some places, who in few cases could prosper into styling themselves as a *swarupam*.⁸³ In Travancore, the *desavalis* of Cheravay and Jayasimhanad Swarupam were called *madambimar*. The responsibilities of the *desavali* includes, the *ambalapatti* or the management of the ceremonies of the village pagoda, *uraima* or management of the pagoda lands, the *asaima* or the control of occasions and festivals in the families within the village and the *desadhipattyam* which is general administration of all affairs of the village. The *desavalis* also functioned as military headmen who could provide the *naduvali* with warrior *nayars* of his region in times of war or other necessities.⁸⁴

This system of fragmented and graded power was structured in a way that ensured a steady flow of revenue from the bottom to the top. One of the main sources of the *desavali*'s income was the fees received from the suits decided by him, with the help of the other *pramanis* of the village. Apart from this, he has his yearly share of plaintain tree, coconuts, jack, and betel nut from the owners of the gardens and as well, from the riots, a share of ghee and sugar and a small poll-tax that would amount to eight *annas* from the carpenters, washermen and smiths. The *naduvali* in turn was entitled to an annual allowance from the *desavali* along with other sources of income like fees received from suits brought under him, low level customs, fines under four rupees, orphaned properties and a good number of other dues. The *naduvali* in turn owed to the prince of the *cherikkal* land, *purushantharam*⁸⁵ and the *dattu kazhcha*⁸⁶. For the ruling prince of the *cherikkal* lands, tax collected from merchandise passing his

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ *Purushantharam* is the fee paid by the *desavali* to the prince for inheriting the administration or some land in the *cherikkal* of a prince.

⁸⁶ *dattu Kazhcha* is the fixed tax to be paid to the prince for adopting someone to the family of the *desavali*.

domain is the main source of revenue, along with the income derived from the sale of select products. The prince could also extract contributions in case of emergency situations like that of war and the poll-tax called the *talappanam*.

Even though this structure of graded hierarchy, roughly found functioning all over the Malabar Coast, would appear as a decentralized bureaucratic system of state administration, it was not the case. Rather than administration, the system was more about graded rights within a matrilineal kinship structure, ascribed to its members and to its *nayar* adherents according to *muppu mura*.⁸⁷ And this coincides with the social organization of caste and its rules and regulations of rights and pollution. Similar to that of the Chera period, what we have in post-Chera Malabar, is a fragmented polity of *swarupams*, *cherikkals*, *nadus*, *desams*, *devaswoms*, and *brahmaswoms*, organized around the nodes of caste power. The apex of this graded system of power and rights is the ritual sovereign power granted by the Brahmans of the land to the *muppu* of the *swarupam*, which, in post Chera Malabar is most manifest in the state of Venad.⁸⁸

In Venad, the benediction of the deity of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram bestowed upon the *muppu* of the *swarupams* the title of the Kulashekhara Perumal that carried with it a ritual sovereign power over the region. It provided the *muppu*, along with control over *devaswom* lands, half a vote in the temple administrative body called the *etterayogam*. Along with the Kulashekhara Perumal, the *etterayogam* consisted of a *nayar* member and seven *potti* Brahmins, on a hereditary basis. In the temple records, there is reference to a *swamiyar* attached to the temple, as well, in the managing body of the temple.⁸⁹ Padmanabha Menon provides a list of the seven *sthanathil potti* families that were traditional trustees of the temple, 1) Kupakkara Potti 2)

⁸⁷ Ganesh, 'Process', pp. 21-22.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Mathilakam*, C.1720, O.157.

Vanchiyur Attiyara potti 3) Kollur Attiyara Potti 4)Muttavila Potti 5)Nayasseri Potti 6)Karuva Potti 7)Sri Kariyattu Potti and the *nayar* nobleman was called Karanatta Kurup.⁹⁰ The *sthanathil potti* were basically settlers from the Pandya land that comprised Tanjore, Tinnalvely, Trichnopoly and Madura. It is not been possible to discern why and how these seven *potti* families took on the trusteeship of the prime deity of the Travancore royal family.

However, for our period of discussion, it is certain that these *potti* Brahmins were holders of large tracts of land, and were vested with immense power. For a *muppu* to acquire the status of Kulashekhara Perumal, a cordial relationship with this body was an essential pre requisite, without which the necessary rituals and other activities, like the *hiranyagarbham* ritual⁹¹, institution of temple festivals, and the undertaking of renovation activities in the temple, associated with the position of Kulashekhara Perumal could not be performed. From the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, several elders of the *swarupams* were entitled with the ritual sovereign power of the Kulashekhara Perumal. It was common for the rulers and chiefs of the different *swarupams* to donate lands to temples and Brahmins, and such contributions to the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple was mandatory for a *muppu* to claim the title of the Kulashekhara Perumal.

Corresponding to a system of graded power over a land or region among the members of a *swarupam* and its *nayar* adherents, the temple lands too had its own gradation of rights. According to K.N Ganesh, the temple lands were divided into different categories finding regular mention from the fifteenth century like the lands for regular expenses (*nityanadai cherikkal*), lands for temple treasury (*sri pandara cherikkal*), *karuvelamkulam* lands, and lands for *kurumattur puja* and *Karumam divadesi*, and temple servants were appointed

⁹⁰ Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.3, p.607.

⁹¹ For a brief account of the ceremony of Tulapurushadanam and Hiranyagarbham, see, Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.55-57.

for collecting the dues or *Komuraippadu*, to hand over to the treasury.⁹² We have, from the fourteenth century, records pertaining to administration and collection of revenue from the temple lands. A record of the year 1460 provides details about the appointment of officers to the temple estate of Karuvelamkulam and details of the allowances to the officers under the sanction of Rama Martanda Varma of Jayasimhanad who is called as the Kulashekhara Perumal in a 1459 record.⁹³ By the late fifteenth century, instances of leasing out of temple lands and the collection of revenue through the lessees are found mention. A 1487 record refers to two lessees, Perinnavur Sankaran Sankaran and Kolamattattu Tevan Tevan of the temple lands in Mattur and certain other *desams*, who are addressed regarding certain arrangements for revenue collection.⁹⁴ Another document of late fifteenth century as well mentions about leasing out of certain lands in Viranarayanasserri that was given away to the temple by way of atonement by the senior Tiruvati of Trippapur, Sri Vira Iravi Udaya Martanda Varma.⁹⁵

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, along with the *naduvالي* chiefs, the temples and Brahmins too held large tracts of land called the *devaswom* and *brahmaswom* respectively, as *janmam* right.⁹⁶ These lands were leased out to settled cultivators who could be simple lease holders or large landlords who would get the land cultivated by others on lease. The obligations between the *janmi* and the tenants were in accordance with the local *maryadai*, resulting in different sets of relationship in different parts of Malabar. From the sixteenth century, there appears to be a considerable increase in land mortgages, or *kanam*, rather than lease from the *janmi* to the tenants, giving rise to the emergence of a new landholding class, who, even though did not enjoy

⁹² Ganesh, 'Process', p.23

⁹³ *Mathilakam*, C.1667, O.310.

⁹⁴ *Mathilakam*, C.1691, O.93.

⁹⁵ *Mathilakam*, C.2601, O.138.

⁹⁶ *Janmam* refers to hereditary or birth right of a landlord over a land, See, K.N Ganesh, 'Ownership and control of land', p.300.

customary ownership rights on the land, were authorized with the control over the production.⁹⁷

Pertaining to the *devaswom* lands of Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram, records from the sixteenth century give evidence to the rise of a group of the *pillamars*, who along with Kulashekhara Perumal, administered the estates of the temple and handled the revenue collection and accounts of these lands. Details regarding the appointment of *pillamar* for writing the accounts of the temple estates are found to be mentioned regularly in temple records from the early sixteenth century. A record from the year 1505 refers to the appointment of *pillamars* for writing the accounts of the temple estate of Viranarayanasseri, under the command of Sri Vira Iravi Iravi Varma of Trippapur Swarupam, which seems to be the first reference to such a body.⁹⁸ Similar records are found for the later years of sixteenth century.⁹⁹ These *pillamars*, who according to Ganesh were called *arukuttathil pillamar*, came from six powerful landholding families, and were in charge of money, ornaments and precious articles.¹⁰⁰ Their functions and power expanded considerably and was held on hereditary basis in time and the *pillamars* by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had become one of the most powerful groups in the region like the *madambimars*.

While, for Ganesh, these *pillamars* were known as the *arukuttathil Pillamar*,¹⁰¹ historians including Shungoony Menon talks about them as the *ettuveettil pillamar*.¹⁰² According to V. Nagam Aiya, the *pillamar* derived their names from the name of their locality, and he names them as, Mathandamatham, Ramanamatham, Kulathur, Kalakkuttam, Venganur, Chempalanthi, Kutaman, and Pallichal, even though he discounts Menon's argument that these *pillamars*

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ *Mathilakam*, C. 1722, O.4.

⁹⁹ *Mathilakam*, C. 1686, O.65; C. 1686, O. 36.

¹⁰⁰ Ganesh, 'Process', p.27.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.9.

¹⁰² Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.97.

were traditionally attached to the *devaswom* and the members of the *ettarayogam*.¹⁰³ De Lannoy, studying the records of the Dutch in South Malabar points towards the possibility of the *pillamars* being more than eight in number and speculates that they all are possibly *kshathriyas* in some manner related to any of the *swarupams* of the royal family.¹⁰⁴

1.1.2. The Commercial Interventions of the Portuguese and the Dutch

At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese on the Malabar coast, Calicut have already established its position as the most flourishing trade hub, with the Muslim Arabs largely dominating its commerce. The Portuguese efforts to thwart this dominance and to seize the Calicut trade had to face failure, due to the opposition from the Muslim traders with the support of the Zamorins. The unwelcoming state of affairs in Calicut, forced the Portuguese to look for another safe haven to establish its trade designs on the coast of Malabar. The Raja of Cochin, who was engaged in a perpetual warfare with the Zamorins of Calicut, exploiting the situation, allowed the European new comers to settle down and trade in his land in the Southern Malabar region. It is with the coming of the Portuguese that the port of Cochin rose into prominence rivaling the thriving ports of Zamorin.¹⁰⁵ For the new European settlers, Cochin became not merely their center of trade, but, as well, the base for their political designs in Malabar for ensuring monopoly of pepper trade on the coast. Their trade establishments in the Southern Malabar was to directly rival the northern ports and the dominance of the Muslim Arabs in the Indian Ocean commerce of the period.

¹⁰³ V. Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, p.304; p.311.

¹⁰⁴ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, pp.7- 8.

¹⁰⁵ Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity', p.85.

The emergence of the port of Cochin is attributed to the heavy flood of 1341 that brought down large volume of water from the Ghats, silting up the harbor of Kodungalloor and transforming the configuration of the extensive southern backwater. This flood, at the site of Cochin, opened up a new harbor, an outlet into the sea and a new Island of Vypin, where safe anchorage of the ships were possible. The shifting of the headquarters of the Perumpapaddu Swarupam to this new port city of Cochin from the land locked Vanneri, points towards the rise of Cochin into another center of maritime trade on the coast of Malabar. Nicolo Conti, the Venetian traveller who visited the port city of Cochin in the early fifteenth century says that “the city is five miles in circumference, and stands at the mouth of a river, from which it derives its name”.¹⁰⁶ Conti, as well, shares his experience of sailing through a river by the port of Cochin, and of sighting “many fires”, which the fisherman called “icepe”.¹⁰⁷ From the accounts of the Chinese travellers who visited Malabar in the fifteenth century, it could be established with certainty that by the beginning of the fifteenth century Cochin had secured the position of a prime port city.¹⁰⁸ The port city by then has also attracted merchant communities from diverse backgrounds.

It could be the raising trade prospects of Cochin that prompted the Zamorin to engage in a perpetual warfare with the kingdom, making its chief a vassal of Calicut and the port, a feeding port to Calicut. According to Duarte Barbosa, the Portuguese traveller, the king of Cochin before the arrival of Portuguese in the early sixteenth century was continuously threatened by the Zamorins of Calicut, and had no right to neither strike coins nor roof his palace with tiles.

¹⁰⁶ N.M Penzer, ed., *The Most Noble and Famous Travels of Marco Polo together with the travels of Nicolo De Conti*, 2nd ed., Adam and Charles Black, London, 1937, p.135.

¹⁰⁷ Nicolo De Conti offers a description of his journey possibly through any of the backwaters of Cochin or a tributary river to the backwater, See *Ibid.*, p.135

¹⁰⁸ It is in Zheng He's second expedition that we see the earliest reference to Cochin port in the Chinese accounts. Fe Hsin's third expedition in 1409-1411 gives note of the region's extensive pepper production. The fourth voyage of the notable Ming chronicler Ma Huan in 1414, as well gives an account of the port city. See, J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ma Huan:Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan, 'The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores'*, pp.8-19; Fei Hsin, *Hsing-C'a Sheng-Lan: The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, trans. J. V. G. Mills and ed. Roderich Ptak, Otto Harrassowitz, p.67.

The Cochin chief, as well, had to present before the Zamorin, a certain number of elephants every year. Moreover, the chiefs of the land, the Anchu Kaimals, who owned lands on the coast, were supporters of Zamorin, and were a hindrance to Cochin Raja's aspirations for an independent position. Barbosa, too refers to the "large and excellent river" that comes forth to the sea at Cochin, which could be the only outlet to the sea, of the extensive system of backwaters and lagoons that characterized the region.¹⁰⁹ Cochin too, like Kollam is connected to the markets in the interior and the hinterlands by a system of backwaters through which moved large amount of goods and people.

At the eve of the Portuguese arrival in 1500, the southern Malabar's political geography was characterized, apart from the territories ruled by the different *swarupams* of Travancore and the temple lands, by small chieftaincies, striving to make out a fortune from the Indian Ocean trade networks. The lands surrounding Cochin was in the hands of chiefs of the land, the Anju Kaimals, with little influence of the king over them. The Brahmin principality of Idapalli was to the east of Cochin and the Brahmin chief of the land maintained a cordial relationship with the Zamorin of Calicut. Other important principalities were those of Porcad, Vadakkenkur, Thekkenkur, Mangatty and Parur. Finding an ally in the King of Cochin provided the Portuguese with double opportunities, firstly, to transform the port city of Cochin into a Portuguese establishment that at the same time, being isolated from the mainland by the backwaters, could be defended from the sea, and could also be connected through the same backwaters to the great pepper producing regions like Kollam, Kayamkulam, Thekkenkur, Vadakkenkur and Porcad. And secondly, the discontent and helplessness of the Raja of Cochin at the hands of the Zamorin could be converted into pressing the *raja* to oblige to all demands put forward by the

¹⁰⁹ Duarte Barbosa, Vol.II, pp.92-95.

Portuguese, including the setting up of garrisons and forts and establishing a monopoly of trade.

In its initial years on the coast of Malabar, in order to establish their right to trade on the coast on their own terms and conditions, the Portuguese were engaged in perpetual warfare, seizing of loaded ships, bombardment of port cities and interventions into the local political configuration through a series of treaties with local chiefs and kings.¹¹⁰ With the defeat of the forces of Zamorin, and with successfully establishing cordial relationship with the polities of Cochin, Quilon and Cannonore, the Portuguese in the very early years of the sixteenth century, had established itself as one of the actors in the Indian Ocean trade network that ran through the coast of Malabar. The immediate policy of the Portuguese, after this, was the setting up of fortifications that could function, not as factories or trade garrisons alone, but as the seat of Portuguese political power on both the land and sea of Malabar.¹¹¹ These newly built fortresses were to become permanent establishments with a bureaucratic set up that would control the affairs of its residents and as well, the affairs on the coast. However, there is a consensus among historians that the Portuguese despite their hundred years of efforts to establish their supremacy over land and sea, over the collection and trade of pepper, miserably failed to anytime establish a strict monopoly. K.N Panikkar analyzing the Portuguese policy in Malabar writes:

¹¹⁰ For detailed study of the history of the Portuguese on the Malabar Coast, See M.N Pearson, *The Portuguese in India :The New Cambridge History of India, Vol.1.1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987; Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime trade of India, 1500-1663*, Doctoral Dissertation, Pondichery University, Pondichery, 1998; K.M Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese: Being a History of the Relations of the Portuguese with Malabar from 1500-1663*, Kitab Mahal, Bombay, 1929; Frederik Charles Danvers, *The Portuguese in India Being a History of the Rise and Decline of their Eastern Empire*, Publishers to the India Office, London, 1894.

¹¹¹ Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, p.65.

“The Portuguese commercial monopoly and political authority did not affect the area between Cannanore and Cranganore, and nowhere did it extend beyond the ports in which they had built fortresses of their own”¹¹²

And of the ruler who was in alliance with the Portuguese, the Raja of Cannanor, who was the most powerful were indeed careful to not lose his sovereignty and supremacy to the supremacist intentions of the Portuguese. Despite its fort at Cannonare, the Portuguese possessed no power in the region and had to witness the fort besieged and the trade from it put to an end.¹¹³ Unlike the Raja of Cannanore, even though the Portuguese allies in Southern Malabar were ready to lay itself subordinate to the power of the Portuguese, the powerlessness of the *rajās* themselves who had in their possession only small tracts of lands around the port and the sea did not allow the Portuguese to convert their subordinate positions to their perpetual subjugation in the region. The Portuguese power, for almost a century, until it was challenged by the Dutch and the other European powers like the English was confined to the cities of Quilon, Cochin and Porcad, even though, it had maintained cordial relationship with the chieftaincies of the pepper producing hinterlands like Vadakkenkur, Parur and Mangat.¹¹⁴ Despite its own limited power, the Portuguese and their trade endeavors in the Indian Ocean in general and the Southern Malabar in particular have prompted two sets of major transformations, on the sea and the land.

On the sea, according to K.N Chaudhuri, the pioneer in Indian Ocean studies, “the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean abruptly ended the system of peaceful oceanic navigation that was such a marked feature of the region”.¹¹⁵ The systematic and continued violence that erupted, between merchants, the new merchants and the locals, the merchants and kings, from the early years of

¹¹² Ibid., p.163.

¹¹³ Ibid., p.164.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.167.

¹¹⁵ K.N Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p.63.

Portuguese presence in the Malabar Coast, points towards the disruptions caused with the arrival of the Portuguese. The instigation of violence in the sea and the land was followed by claims of exclusive rights on the sea, most of which was reflected in these words of Barros,

It is true that there does exist a common right to all to navigate the seas and in Europe we acknowledge the rights which others hold against us; but this right does not extend beyond Europe; and therefore the Portuguese as Lords of the Sea are justified in confiscating the goods of all those who navigate the seas without their permission.¹¹⁶

The permission of the Portuguese and their claims of supremacy in the sea was elaborated into an extensive pass system, called the *cartaz*¹¹⁷ system that made it mandatory for the Asian ships passing with merchandise to acquire Portuguese passport. The *cartaz* system that ensured passes are collected from the Portuguese ports with lightly militarized forts, could redirect trade into Portuguese ports and ensured a steady supply of revenue. Pyrad de Laval, elaborates about the system thus,

The Portuguese and the Viceroy of Goa are wont every year at the beginning of summer which is in the month of September to equip two fleets of a hundred galleons along with three or four large galleys. Half of the fleet they send to the north as far as Diu or Cambaye and thereabouts to guard the coast and hold the power over the sea, and prevent anyone from sailing there without their passport. The other half they send south as far as Cape of Comorin for the same purpose but principally to purge the seas of Malabar corsairs¹¹⁸

Even though it is clear that the effects of Portuguese interventions on the long range networks of Indian Ocean trade was limited and not comprehensive, the Portuguese had successfully introduced onto the sea, elements and systems that were unknown in the medieval Asian trade. Systematized violence, drive for

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, p.171.

¹¹⁷ The Cartaz system was the major Portuguese intervention in the Indian Ocean Trade established through the system of naval policing and fortifications, See, Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation*, p.69; Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.9.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Das Gupta, 'Malabar in Asian Trade', p.10.

extra ordinary profits, claim of supremacy, efforts towards monopoly were the features that characterized the Portuguese arrival in the Indian Ocean.¹¹⁹ The desire for monopoly and unwarranted profits, however, was not easy to acquire in Malabar. The kings and chiefs with whom the Portuguese entered into trade and political agreements, had little power over the merchants to dictate the terms of trade including the prize of the commodities. The locals naturally went for those merchants who paid a higher prize for their products. However, the interventions of the Portuguese on the sea and on the land raised the prospects of a different idea of trade and polity, the empire of Portugal and the rules set by it gradually being integrated into the structure of Asian trade.¹²⁰

The greatest challenge to the Portuguese was the coming of the other European powers, the Dutch and the English, by the seventeenth century taking on the Portuguese models of trading in Asia through fort and the factory as a workable model. According to K.N Chaudhury, the constitution of the Verneinigde oost-indische Compagnie, or the Dutch VOC, “symbolized one of the most powerful and prestigious combination of trade and political objectives that the commercial world of Asia had witnessed”.¹²¹ It is the Dutch capture of the Portuguese fort at Cochin in the year 1663 that is marked as the fall of the Portuguese power in Malabar. Like the Portuguese, the Dutch too, initiated treaties and agreements with the local rulers, in order to ensure pepper monopoly, for prices lower than the market price. However, despite the battles fought, treaties concluded and maintaining an expensive establishment, the Dutch could not effectively enforce their monopoly, raising from the Dutch quarters itself, doubts about their right to do the same, and also about the extent of the local kings’ authority over the people who resided within the kings’

¹¹⁹ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.11-12.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹²¹ Chaudhury, *Trade and Civilization*, p.83.

territories.¹²² The reflections of Adrain Van Rheede in his 1675 memoir is a clear reflection of this:

If the Malabar Company wants to procure pepper in Malabar, they must behave as merchants and follow the market. Since pepper belongs to the merchants and not to the kings or the landed gentry, no more is gained by an exclusive contract than the right of 'expropriation'. All the forts, castles, watch posts, and expensive establishments...will not make pepper and penny cheaper for us nor guarantee that it would not fall into the hands of the English and the Muslims.¹²³

The Dutch East India Company that was formed in the 1602 was an amalgamation of a number of different companies into a joint stock company, vested with the authority to build forts and factories in the eastern lands. Canter Visscher's letters give details about the early organization of the company on the Malabar Coast. According to Visscher, a ship of 145 feet would be needed to provide the Dutch settlements with provisions required for a year. Apart from this, the maintenance of garrisons, its servants and ammunitions, costs a good amount which Visscher calculates to 1200 souls at the time of his writing the letter. The other expenses that the company had to incur at the coast includes the maintenance of the different establishments like the dispensary, hospital, rice ware house, fort at Chetway, new factory at Porcad, and the occupied forts of Cannanore and Quilon, apart from the expensive wars that they had to fight to establish monopoly control over pepper.¹²⁴

Besides all these, Malabar for the Dutch was a strategic settlement. The withdrawal of the Dutch from the Malabar Coast could lead to the Portuguese reasserting their claim over pepper monopoly and the English striving to get hold of it. The port of Cochin also served for the Dutch a major transshipment point, from where could be gathered provisions for the vessels travelling from

¹²² Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.15.

¹²³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.14

¹²⁴ Jacob Canter Visscher, *Letters From Malabar*, p.39.

Batavia to Mocha, or returning from Surat and Persia to Batavia. For the Dutch, its control over Cochin served the purpose of an outpost to protect Ceylon, from the interventions of other European nations, mainly the English. Visscher in his letter puts forward five rules to ensure a successful management of the country of Malabar, which point towards an idea of trade and polity different in fundamental ways from what was practiced by the Portuguese.¹²⁵

According to K.N Chaudhury, with the arrival of the English and Dutch East India Companies,

The emerging principle of capitalism found in the formal constitution of the chartered companies was not their sole contribution to innovation. After 1600 the trans-continental trade of Eurasia was no longer the exclusive preserve of either of royal monopoly.....An increasing share of it was taken over by bureaucratic economic organizations which possessed very different values and different concepts of economic behavior. These resulting changes involved not only increase in the magnitude of trade between Europe and Asia but also major structural discontinuities.¹²⁶

Unlike the Portuguese, the general ethics of these new bureaucratic economic groups, striving for pepper monopoly was that “the worst of peace was better than the best of war”.¹²⁷ Moreover, fundamental structural discontinuities was incurred from the logic of the individual merchants pursuing separate economic interests to that of a national organization with a system of collective decision making and delegated powers and operational hierarchies.

However, the attitude of these bureaucratic trading companies towards the trade and polity in Malabar drew largely from the rules set down by the Portuguese, by entering into treaties with the local princes, pressing for monopoly control over the produce of the land, and forcing upon the Asian ships the collection of safe conduct passes issued by the European companies. Even though, both the

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp.39-41.

¹²⁶ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization* , p.82.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

English East India company and the VOC, resented the use of force for the commercial ventures in the land for the heavy cost it incurs, in practice, war and violence against the locals and the other European powers remained an integral part of their efforts in garnering super profits like the Portuguese.¹²⁸ Apart from these, the VOC extended from the *Estado da India*, its jurisdictional power over the native Christians of the various Southern Malabar regions and partial authority over the Jews, Moors and the Canarese inhabitants of the territories of the Cochin raja and his princes.

In short, despite its designs of controlling and procuring the pepper produced in the lands of Malabar through a system fundamentally different from what was followed by earlier Arab or Chinese merchants, both the Portuguese and the Dutch could not extend their authority beyond the coastal towns and a few miles of their naval bases. For the Portuguese, the areas between Cranganore and Cannanore were wholly independent of their authority and its constant war with the Zamorin for establishing land power and naval supremacy never turned completely to its side. Even though the Portuguese possessed forts in Cannanore, Cranganore, Cochin, Porcad and Quilon, these forts could not help in establishing any kind of a political suzerainty over the pepper producing lands. If anything Portuguese could lay claim over, it was the monopoly of Indian Ocean trade based on naval supremacy for almost a century. This too could be established only over other European powers, and was continuously contested and resisted by the local powers and as well, by the ordinary merchants.

By the time the Dutch East India Company had established itself at Cochin, other European powers including the English and French were active competitors in the Asian trade, making it impossible for the Dutch to put forward the claim of naval supremacy like it was done by the Portuguese. The

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp.86-87.

Portuguese policy of complete policing of navigation was also not enforced by the Dutch.¹²⁹ Even though, the Dutch had exercised some sort of a political supremacy and legitimacy in Cochin, the lands to the north of it including the Zamorins were independent of its authority and to the south, the petty chiefs even before the formation of Travancore had maintained friendly relationship with the English. The Dutch designs of conquering and directly controlling the pepper producing lands of Vadakkenkur and Peritally, was thwarted by the ascendance of Martanda Varma and his efforts towards building a unitary state of Travancore. Anything that Dutch could claim in Malabar was some amount of political authority over Cochin, and Quilon, and the position of being one of the many powers in Malabar and an active competitor in its commercial world.

The coming of the Portuguese and the Dutch in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though did not undermine the local power structure and the authority of the *rajās* and chiefs, it had stimulated and aided some important transformations in the society, polity and economy of the region. The rise of Cochin into the pivotal Malabar port from the status of a feeding port, undermining the political and commercial supremacy of Zamorin and the Calicut port was one of the major shifts stimulated by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and taken forward by the Dutch. Works on pre-Portuguese trade centered on the coast of Calicut, have already discussed the exodus of the *paradesi* Muslims with the advent of the Portuguese and the coming up of other mercantile classes to fill in the gap. The shift of the prime commercial center from the Northern Malabar port of Calicut, dominated by the *paradesi* Muslims to the southern port of Cochin and Quilon dominated mostly by St. Thomas Christians and other South Indian trade groups, including the Chetties and the Canarese, and the transformations in the structures of commercial relationships

¹²⁹ K.M Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p.115.

have pushed and helped some structural changes in the organization of land based power in the interiors of the southern Malabar region.

We have already discussed the mercantile inclinations of the post-Chera political formations of Malabar and the major *swarupams*' shifting of their power bases from riverine regions to the coastal areas, setting up towns and exploiting the revenue thus generated. We have as well looked into the expansion of the caste based Brahmin centered social order into this new political and economic context, through the gradation of rights over land and its produce, with the *naduvالي* chiefs, temples and Brahmins exercising *janmam* right over lands that were cultivated by settled cultivators. The customary authority of the *janmis* that granted him certain rights and authority over the lands and its produce was set down by *kiliyakkam* and *maryadai*, where the former expressed the rights of the *janmi* and later the obligations of the tenants. With the increase in the intensity of trade and demand for commodities, especially in Southern Malabar, we see an expansion of agricultural lands by clearing forests and by also extending the customary land right system to more and more regions. The growth of Elayadathu Swarupam and the Perkattayvali in the period between sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in region away from *nadus* of the Chera period, indicates this kind of an agricultural expansion.¹³⁰

With the augmenting revenue prospects, the clearing of forest lands into *parambus*, and the springing up of new *janmams*, *swarupams* and centers of political authority, it also became pertinent for the chiefs to protect these revenue generating lands from outside encroachments, leading to frequent clashes among the chiefs. Though customary rights checked the infringement of a chief over the rights of others, political authority and military power became important for asserting and protecting one's customary rights over land. According to K.N Ganesh, it is these features along with the growth of cash

¹³⁰ Ganesh, 'Ownership and control', p.305.

economy with increased trade that aided the development of land mortgages in the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The *kanam* holders now exercised greater control over the land and its produce, often challenging the customary authority of the temples, Brahmins and *naduvails*.¹³¹

It is in this backdrop of the new interventions in the commercial structure, and the breaking down of the medieval system of graded rights based on customary obligations and rights around nodes of caste power, that we can locate the conflicts and tensions that were characteristic of the region two centuries preceding the formation of Travancore. The kingdom of Travancore that formed out of the fragmented polities and temple lands of the region between Quilon and Cape of Comorin, increasingly imbibed the novelties introduced by the European new comers, for a reorganization of the traditional land based system of rights and obligations. In the backdrop of the breakdown of the customary ways of revenue gathering and military consolidation, the claimants to the position of Kulashekhara Perumal, resorted to untraditional means of military interventions and commercial engagements that found its fruition only from the third decade of the eighteenth century, with the ascendance of Martanda Varma, the Trippapur *muppu*, to the throne of Venad.

1.2 Towards the Making of Travancore

The temple estate of Viranarayanasseri illustrates in best ways, the strained relationship between the Travancore princes and the temple servants of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram from the closing years of the fifteenth century. A 1491 document, talks about the amercements paid by the Senior Tiruvati of Trippapur, for the crime of destroying a *matham* at Viranarayanasseri leading to

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.309.

the death of certain Namputiri Brahmins.¹³² Even though, the record is damaged, it is speculated that the ruler in question is Sri Vira Iravi Iravi Varma, who was controller of the affairs of the temple from 662 M.E/1487 A.D to 687 M.E/1512 A.D. Another document of the same year gives mention of the high handed acts against the servants of Sri Padmanabha temple, in charge of the estate of Viranayanasseri that was meted out under the orders of the prince, who was the senior Tiruvati of Trippapur.¹³³ Deliberations on the incident were held from the Putiyetattu Koyikkal palace at Srivirakeralasvaram in Kayamkulam and were attended by the members of the *yogam*, the king, the officers, and the tenants of the temple lands of Nityanatai.¹³⁴ In two separate documents we get information about the amercements paid by the prince for the death of certain *namputiris* due to the destruction of the *matham*, and of the compensation paid for high handed acts committed against the temple servant at Viranarayanasseri.¹³⁵ A document of 667 M.E/1492 A.D, mentions death penalty inflicted on certain persons for murdering the *nambutiris*.¹³⁶ A later document possibly of 1492 or 1493, mentions the leasing out of certain lands in Viranayanasseri that were originally given to the temple of Sri Padmanabha,¹³⁷ and another one of year 1505, mentions the appointment of *kanakku pillamar* or accountants for writing the accounts of temple estate of Viranarayanasseri under the command of Sri Vira Iravi Iravi Varma.¹³⁸ The temple estate of Viranarayanasseri next appears in the sources only in 744 M.E/1569 A.D, in relation to a quarrel between Aditya Varma, the senior Tiruvati of Cheravay and the tenants of the temple estate.¹³⁹

¹³² *Mathilakam*, C. 2601, O.148

¹³³ *Mathilakam*, C. 96/9, O.2

¹³⁴ *Ibid*

¹³⁵ *Ibid*; *Mathilakam*, C. 1722, O.30-31.

¹³⁶ *Mathilakam*, C. 1722, O. 3.

¹³⁷ *Mathilakam*, C. 2601, O.138.

¹³⁸ *Mathilakam*, C. 1722, O.4.

¹³⁹ *Mathilakam*, C.1719, O. 2.

This account of Viranarayanasseri, shows that the scuffles between the royal authority and the temple servants regarding collection of rent and management of land, had already broken out by the end of the fifteenth century. Leasing out of the land and appointment of the *arukkuttathil pillamar* appears to be the measures the royal authority undertook to resolve the crisis, through a reorganization of the management of temple lands. Throughout this period we have various instances of scuffles between the royal authorities, the temple servants and the tenants of the temple estate. The 676 M.E/1501 A.D, document issued by Sri Vira Iravi Iravi Varma, prohibiting the bringing of weapons into the temple premises, and commanding other caste prohibitions points towards increased militarization, and troubles in the existing systems of customary rights.¹⁴⁰ It is in 726 M.E/ 1551 A.D that we have the first document that relates to disturbances in the performance of *pujas* in the Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple.¹⁴¹ Iravi Varma of Trippapur Swarupam, in the year 1552 makes arrangements for the punctual performance of the *pujas* as there was no *pujas* held in the temple for a period of two years.¹⁴² The crisis in procuring the means for meeting the expenses of the daily *pujas*, point towards failures in proper channeling of the revenue gathered from produce of the *cherikkal* and temple lands.

By the second half of the seventeenth century, the scuffle between the temple servants and administrators of the temple lands and the royal household, have reached an extent, that the central thrust of the medieval power structure which is the interdependence of the ruler and the temple, began to gradually break down. The temple had to be closed down due to lack of funds and the post of the Kulashekhara Perumal was left vacant.¹⁴³ Records from this period mentions constant sightings of bad omen inside the temple premises like the oozing of

¹⁴⁰ *Mathilakam*, C. 1686, O. 70.

¹⁴¹ *Mathilakam*, C. 1719, O. 31; C. 2546, O. 328.

¹⁴² *Mathilakam*, C. 1727, O.157.

¹⁴³ Ganesh, 'Process', p.25.

blood from the temple wall, and sight of snakes.¹⁴⁴ The temple authorities complained about the new state of affairs and the royalty's inability for the normal conduct of the affairs of the temple. The ruler in turn could not raise the funds that were necessary to run the affairs of the temple and to claim the title of the Kulashekhara Perumal. The temple lands too stopped providing the wanted necessities for the offerings in the temple.

According to Shungoony Menon, by the second half of the seventeenth century, the extensive *devaswom* property which is called the *sripandaravaka*, was solely under the control of the *yogakkars* and the *pillamars* who rose into power and importance to become, along with the *madambimars*, the lords of their villages. The king had little power or authority over these groups, and any effort to assert the royal authority led to direct encounter between the royalty and the landed nobility.¹⁴⁵ Our sources however, present a much more complex picture, rather than a neat strife between the royalty and the nobility. What appears is a crisis in the medieval socio-political and economic order of the region that is revealed through various layers of scuffles and tensions.

The records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contain many instances of clashes among the elders of the different *swarupams* of the royal family. In a 743 M.E/ 1568 A.D document, both Aditya Varma of Trippapur and Aditya Varma of Desinganad is given the title of Cheravay *muppu*, the ruler of Venad.¹⁴⁶ A later document refers to the senior Tiruvati of Trippapur, Udayamartanda Varma laying siege to Kuttamangalam, for avenging the murder of one of his *nayars* by a minister of the ruler of Desinganad.¹⁴⁷ In the early years of the sixteenth century we have instances of the Trippapur and Desinganad *swarupam*, holding joint rights over the Sri Padmanabha Swamy

¹⁴⁴ *Mathilakam*, C.1602, O.15.

¹⁴⁵ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.96-98.

¹⁴⁶ *Mathilakam*, C. 1673, O. 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Mathilakam*, C. 1719, O. 37.

Kshethram.¹⁴⁸ By the seventeenth century, Elayadathu *swarupam* and Perakattayvali too come to forefront of the succession strives of the Travancore royal family that was becoming more and more complicated by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.¹⁴⁹ A 783 M.E/1608 A.D, document mentions military strives between Iravi Iravi Varma Kulashekhara Perumal of the Trippapur branch and the Elayadathu *swarupam*.¹⁵⁰

It was in the final years of the seventeenth century, when a succession strife exposed the weakest points of medieval socio-political and economic organization in the Southern Malabar region, the initial trends towards the formation of a powerful unitary kingdom, based on economic reorganization, bureaucratization and political unification, started showing itself. With the death of Aditya Varma in 1677 and the absence of a legitimate heir, the Trippapur *swarupam*, that held Venad at the period, was to become extinct. Ravi Varma, the son of Aditya Varma's sister, Aswati Tirunal, was a minor, and was unable to force from the *pillamars* the dues from the lands under their control.¹⁵¹ Aswati Tirunal realizing that the title of the Kulashekhara Perumal and reinstatement of the traditional relationship between the temple and the royalty could alone solve the crisis forced upon the *pillamars* the customary rights of the royal house.¹⁵²

The strives between the different branches of the royal family to claim the throne of Venad and the benediction of the titular deity, however, added to the crisis, making it possible for the *pillamars* and *madambimars*, whose subservience was a pre-condition for the *muppu* to claim the title of the Kulashekhara Perumal, to play off the situation, to serve their own interests,

¹⁴⁸ In *Mathilakam*, C. 2602, O. 202-205, the senior *tiruvati* of Desinganad, Udaya Martanda Varma, appears to be the controller of the temple affairs while in a document of the same year *Mathilakam*, C. 2601, O. 124, the Trippapur Kizhperur Udaya Martanda Varma is described as the controller of the affairs of the temple.

¹⁴⁹ Ganesh, 'Process', p.19.

¹⁵⁰ *Mathilakam*, C 1673, O. 71.

¹⁵¹ See Ganesh, 'Ownership and Control', p.315; De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.10.

¹⁵² De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.11.

challenging and undermining the system of graded rights. The happenings in this latter part of seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century shows that the customary authority of the ruler and the temple could be asserted only when those who were administering and controlling the lands theoretically in accordance to rules of *kiymaryadai*, were willing to acknowledge the customary authority.¹⁵³ The fragmented political structure that provided the princes of the different branches only with minimal source of revenue, and the augmenting revenue prospects through trade, forced the *muppu* and other princes of the different *swarupams* to infringe upon the revenue generating lands that was not well-demarcated or compartmentalized. For this the *muppu* had to increasingly depend on the *nayar* militia under the *desavalis*, making it possible for the *desavali* to dictate the terms of the relationship in unprecedented manner.

The succession crisis in the Trippapur Swarupam was exploited by the other swarupams, who clasped hands with the *pillamars* against the Trippapur Swarupam and also against the efforts of Rani Aswati Tirunal to save the title of Kulashekhara Perumal to the Trippapur *muppu*. In the ensuing fight, three princes of the Trippapur Swarupam tried to strengthen their hold over the other collateral branches and the new nobility; prince Kerala Varma of Kottayam belonging to the Kolathiri royal family, adopted to the Trippapur Swarupam by Rani Aswati Tirunal, and Aditya Varma and Rama Varma, who too, was adopted by Aswati Tirunal from the Kolathiris of Cannanore. The commercial and political measures of these princes, by increasing the taxation on merchandise, introduction of new currency, encouragement of trade relations with the European East Indian Companies by entering into treaties and alliances, and by involving the European powers into the political struggles of the region, displayed the initial trends towards the formation of a unitary state in Travancore. The efforts of these princes to reinstate the customary rights of the

¹⁵³ Ganesh, 'Ownership and Control', p.317.

king and the temple, by exploiting the other new players in the commerce and politics of the region, was however undermined by the *pillamars* and *madambimars* in alliance with the other *swarupams* of the royal family. It is these efforts that ultimately found fruition in the interventions of Martanda Varma who ascended the throne of Venad in the third decade of eighteenth century. It is to a discussion of this formation that we would turn to in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

From Cape Comorin to Cranganore: Making of Travancore as a Military–Fiscal State (1729-1805)

This second chapter intends to look at the formation of the kingdom of Travancore from the third decade of the eighteenth century from the standpoint of military innovations, and the interventions into the medieval martial culture of the region. The chapter tries to pry out the process of the development of this military state in Southern Malabar that reaches its apogee in the military contestations with the Mysore Sultanate in the last decades of the eighteenth century. The chapter uses the records kept by the rulers of Travancore, as well the records kept by the Dutch and English companies operating on the coast. The initial section of the chapter provides a brief historiographical account of the military endeavors of Martanda Varma in the starting years of his reign until the 1734. By then, Martanda Varma had dealt with the two major internal challenges to his claim to the throne of Venad. The section would look at how Martanda Varma's military accomplishments of this period went beyond the contours of medieval military endeavors and institutions, and the traditional martial culture of the region. The second section that looks at the period of the contestation with the Dutch East India Company and of rigorous military conquest tries to trace the growth of Travancore as a military-fiscal state. The final section looks at the period after Martanda Varma that is marked by the rise of Mysore and of the consolidation of the English colonial power. This period saw the apogee of Travancore's military might and its development into a significant military power of the eighteenth century South India, a position no other Malabar *rajās* could hitherto claim.

2.1 The Early Years of Martanda Varma: Prelude to the Formation of Travancore as a Military-Fiscal State (1729-1734)

Martanda Varma inherited the throne of Venad at a time when the medieval socio-political structure of Southern Malabar that was based on a fragmentary system of customary rights and obligations was continuously thwarted by the new elements that were gaining more and more power independent of the royal family. The efforts of his predecessors towards forming a new political order were in despair. Martanda Varma, was born in 881 M.E/ 1706 A.D to the youngest of the princesses who were adopted along with Rama Varma and Aditya Varma from the kingdom of Kolathunad and a prince of Kilimanur.¹⁵⁴ In the year 1715, as part of the scuffles between the different branches of the royal family, Aditya Varma, the first prince of Travancore had had his sister and her two sons, Martanda Varma and the prince of Neyyatinkara adopted to Karunagapalli.¹⁵⁵ The prince of Neyyatinkara and Martanda Varma were made the second and third prince respectively during the time of Rama Varma, but however, with further adoptions from Kolathiri family of the Prince of Tellichery and his sister, Martanda Varma was made into the fourth prince, Prince of Tellichery being the first and Neyyatinkara, the second.¹⁵⁶ Martanda Varma became the first prince of Travancore, in accordance to the rules of seniority with the deaths of three princes that happened consecutively in a years' gap.¹⁵⁷

As a prince Martanda Varma has been active in the administration of the country, assisting the ruling raja, his uncle, in consolidating his position against the other collateral branches of the royal family and the *pillamars* and the *madambimars*. The *madambimars*, *kanakku pillamars*, and the *yogakkar* have

¹⁵⁴ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.45.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁵⁷ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., pp. 114-133.

already found in Martanda Varma, a growing threat. Shungoonny Menon, reports a number of instances where Martanda Varma as a prince had to escape the designs of the confederates to put an end to his life. In one of these instances, a *koil thampuran*, who was escorting the prince and the Rani, from Attingal to Trivandrum, was murdered by the assailants and it is in recognition of this conduct of the *thampuran* that his family was granted the whole village of Kilimanoor. The *koil thampurans* of Kilimanoor held an important position in the latter history of the Travancore royal family.¹⁵⁸

It was on the behest of Martanda Varma that Rama Varma, in 1726, signed a treaty with the Madurai Nayaks, obtaining a force under the command of Venkatapathy Naiken, in return for the payment of a certain sum of money annually. The Trichinopoly forces were stationed to subdue the *madambimars* and the *pillamars* as the royal house could no more rely on the *nayar* warriors whose royalty was doubted to rest with the local landlords. At the time of Martanda Varma's ascendance to throne, the payment of these troops of the Madurai Nayaks was in arrears leading to skirmishes between the contingent and Martanda Varma's Dalawa, Arumugam Pillay. Arumugam Pillay was held captive by the force, upon which he had to borrow money from the merchants of Kottar to meet some of the pressing demand. It was only after dispatching a force of *maravars* under Cumaraswamy pillay, Martanda Varma's commander in chief, that Arumugam Pillay could be released and the Trichinopoly contingents sent back.¹⁵⁹

Martanda Varma's claim to the position of the first prince of Travancore was challenged from different quarters, exposing the weakest points of the political structure of his times. The first major challenge came from the Thampi brothers, Pappu Thampi and Rama Thampi who according to the authors of the

¹⁵⁸ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.110.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.115.

Travancore State Manual were the sons of the late *maharajah*, Rama Varma, now claiming the throne of their father for them.¹⁶⁰ However, a letter of Martanda Varma to Paliyath Achan, on 23 March 1742, talks about the Thampi brothers as sons of Martanda Varma's late brother, the Prince of Neyyatinkara.¹⁶¹ In the Mathilakam records, the Thampi brothers are said to be sons of Rama Varma Mootha Pandarathil, who most possibly could be the Prince of Neyyatinkara.¹⁶² This information, then explains the designation, '*ilaya panadarathil*' alluded to Martanda Varma in many of the records.¹⁶³ The Thampi brothers were instigated by the *madambimars* and *pillamars* who, with the withdrawal of the Trichinopoly troops found a favorable ground to once again rebel against the royal house. The Thampi brothers to lay down their claim over the throne of Venad, held a meeting with the Pandyan governor, seeking their help to throw off the usurper, Martanda Varma. The Pandyans already annoyed by the failure in the payment of annual tribute and the dismissal of the Trichinopoly forces, dispatched a small force under Alagappa Mudaliar to enquire into the complaints of the Thampis. The Thampi brothers, even before seeking the help of the Pandyan governor, had laid their control over some of the southern regions including Nanjinad and over the palace and fort of Kalkulam to which Martanda Varma retaliated by gathering a force from Kollam and recapturing the fort and palace. There are references to a series of battles fought between the forces of Martanda Varma and that of the Thampis and the Pandyans at places like Thirupathi and Suchindram.¹⁶⁴ Soon after the battles, however, Alagappa Mudaliar on learning the rules of succession of the Travancore royal family, dismissed the claims of the Thampis, and entered into

¹⁶⁰ See Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.116; Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. 1, p.334; T.K Velupillai, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, p.271.

¹⁶¹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.45.

¹⁶² Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133.

¹⁶³ M. Doc. CXXVIII, in, T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., p.105.

¹⁶⁴ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App, pp. 114-133.

a new agreement with Martanda Varma and went back to Madurai leaving behind half of his force at the disposal of Martanda Varma.

The Thampi brothers, but continued rebelling and remained a constant threat, joining hands with the *madambimars*. On 906/1730, both Ilaya Thampi and Kunju Thampi were subjected to punishment at the Nagercoil palace. There are references to an uncle of the Thampi brothers, Kochukumara Pillai, who was also punished along with the Thampi brothers.¹⁶⁵ According to the historians on Travancore, the Thampi brothers were slain to death by the adherents of Martanda Varma, while they were paying their visit to the king, in his palace at Nagercoil.¹⁶⁶ No mention is however made by the writers of the *Manual* or Shungoonny Menon, about the uncle of the Thampi brothers. De Lannoy, but, referring to the Dutch documents talks about seizing of a concubine of the Prince of Neyyatinkara, who was also the mother of Rama Thambi, at Iranyal.¹⁶⁷ Possibly, Rama Thambi and Pappu Thambi could have been helped and supported by their relatives from their mother's side.

The other collateral branches of the royal family as well, posed serious challenges to the territorial claims of Martanda Varma. Rifts among the various lineages on claims and counter-claims regarding the correct order of succession and adoptions have appeared within the royal family, even before the ascendance of Martanda Varma as the ruler of Venad.¹⁶⁸ In the year 1730, Desinganadu joining hands with Kayamkulam laid claims over and seized the Eastern Kallada region, which according to the Mathilakam records rightly belonged to the Trippapur Swarupam. This Cheravay-Desinganad alliance against Martanda Varma was supported by Koduman Pillai, Vanjikkootathu

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp. 123-124 ; Nagam Aiyya, *State Manual*, Vol. 1, p.337.

¹⁶⁷ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.46.

¹⁶⁸ Ganesh, 'Process', pp.4-5.

Pillai and Kalakkulathu Pillai.¹⁶⁹ The *pillamars*, ensured their sovereignty over their little territories by playing off the rivalry between the royal contenders for power in order to maintain the balance of power within the royal family and to stop any single prince from becoming too powerful. A fierce war was fought against the forces of Karakkulathu Pillai and Martanda Varma in which the Pillai was slain and in what followed, Desinganadu had to come to a truce, wherein Martanda Varma's army under Dalawa Arumugam Pillay razed the Desinganad fortifications of Western Kollam to ground and was stationed at Eastern Kollam, collecting tribute. The Desinganad prince, on the other hand, was lodged at Trivandrum Valiyakoyikkal.¹⁷⁰

These developments however alarmed the Kayamkulam *raja*, who now allied with the Raja of Cochin and sent secret emissaries to the Desinganad prince lodged at Trivandrum. In the war that ensued, the Travancore army was forced to retreat in front of the combined military power of Quilon, Kayamkulam and Cochin supported by the European fire-arms procured from the Dutch at Cochin. Martanda Varma had to once again accept the suzerainty of the Desinganad prince over Quilon¹⁷¹ and the balance of power between the collateral branches was restored. A series of battles were fought until 1734, between the contending parties, mainly over the question of the pepper granaries of Southern Travancore, Nedumangad and Karunagapally.¹⁷² Karunagapally, which was sometime before seized by Martanda Varma by giving an Attingal princess in adoption, was invaded by Kayamkulam causing assault to the Attingal Rani, who had to take refuge within the temple *sanketam*.¹⁷³ In course of the 1734 wars, Nedumangad and Kottarakaray, under

¹⁶⁹ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.127.

¹⁷² At the time, Nedumangad and Kottarakaray were in the possession of Elayadathu Swarupam. See T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, p.279.

¹⁷³ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App, pp. 114-133; Gollennesse, 'Memoir', p.56.

the sway of the Elayadathu Swarupam, were seized by Martanda Varma, thwarting all the efforts to form a larger alliance of other collateral branches against him. The royal members of the Elayadathu Swarupam were taken to captivity and lodged at Trivandrum from where a princess could accomplish her escape to Thekkenkur. This princess of the Elayadathu Swarupam was to later become the major bone of contention between the Dutch and Martanda Varma.

Several battles were fought between Martanda Varma and the Desinganad-Cheravay alliance without any decisive result. Meanwhile, the Desinganad prince had died and Quilon was taken possession by the Kayamkulam *raja*, in accordance to the rules of adoption of 1731 further exasperating Martanda Varma. Seeing that his army of *maravars* and *nayars* were insufficient to defeat the joint force of the Desinganad-Cheravay alliance, Martanda Varma enlarged his force by adding into the infantry and procuring arms and ammunitions from the English at Anjengo and French at Mahe.¹⁷⁴ The seizing of Kottarakaray and Nedumangad also might have helped Martanda Varma with an additional supply of *nayars*, under the command of Arumugam Pillai and Thanu pillai. In course of the 1734 war that went on without a definite victory on both sides the Kayamkulam prince was slain but the war continued with his brother on the warfront and *chavers* were sent to revenge the death of the prince. Dalawa Rama Iyen seeing that the Travancore army need further reinforcements to ensure victory over the other side, collecting a regiment of *maravars* from Tinnevely under the command of Poonam Pandya Devan and sepoy from among the Poligars, marched through the hill roads of Kottarakaray, and gained ground slowly advancing into the Kayamkulam territories forcing the Cheravay prince to enter into a truce.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, p.279.

¹⁷⁵ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133.

According to the Mathilakam records, the new prince of Kayamkulam, reinforced by the contingents from the Dutch at the fort of Thengapattanam, advanced up to Attingal where a powerful siege was put forward by heir-apparent of Trippapur Swarupam, Rama Varma. The army of Kayamkulam *raja* was disbanded by a joint effort of Rama Varma and Martanda Varma, who soon joined the warfront with an army collected from Chirayinkeezh and Trivandrum.¹⁷⁶ The references to cavalry force in the records point towards the presence of non-*nayar* warrior groups in Martanda Varma's military expeditions. On the *nayars* of the Malabar the Dutch man Visscher wrote in the early decades of eighteenth century,

“They are all foot soldiers knowing nothing of horsemanship. I have never seen a Malabar on horseback; not even do their princes possess steeds”.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, it is doubtful that Martanda Varma could gain a victory over his enemies relying merely on the men of the land, whose loyalties kept shifting among the collateral branches. Also, in another instance Mathilakam records mention ‘*Annava Karyakkarar*’ collecting cavalry from Tirunalveli and entering the warfront through Aryankaavu-Kottarakaray, finally gaining victory against the Kayamakulam *raja*.¹⁷⁸

To play off the rivalries between the collateral branches of Travancore royal house and to prevent any single prince from becoming too powerful was in the interest of the Dutch too. This alone could help the Dutch enter into treaties and agreements with the different princes for a monopoly of pepper at a price below the market, and without maintaining an expensive military establishment.¹⁷⁹ The Dutch presence in Malabar, since its capture of Cochin from the hands of the Portuguese, was defined by two major tensions. The first was whether the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Visscher, *Letters From Malabar*, p.124.

¹⁷⁸ Mathilakam, C.34/83, O. 33, collected from, Travancore State Archives, Trivandrum.

¹⁷⁹ A.Galletti, *Dutch in Malabar*, p.23.

treaties and agreements they had entered into with the Malabar princes really enabled them to procure the pepper at a price that suited their interests and, secondly would it be possible for them to establish their sovereign power over the land and into the pepper producing hinterlands, beyond the walls of their coastal fortifications, without stepping into the politics of the land as a superior military power.¹⁸⁰ By the time Martanda Varma had started showing unpleasant signs of an ambitious prince, the Dutch was already caught deep in this tension between being merchants as all others or else establishing monopoly by maintaining expensive military establishments. Martanda Varma's seizing of Karunagapally and the pepper producing Nedumangad and Kottarakkaray only exacerbated the precariousness of the Dutch. For them, both, the growing power of Martanda Varma, and the wars and instabilities that were ravaging the region due to the Trippapur-Cheravay conflict, were detrimental to their trade interests. Moreover, while the Dutch was striving for monopoly over the pepper trade of Southern Malabar, and claiming to be sovereigns of the land, the English and the French were establishing, more firmly, their commercial ventures in the region, by maintaining a friendly relation with Martanda Varma. Martanda Varma, in turn, was supplied with arms and ammunitions from the English merchants trading at Anjengo.¹⁸¹ Thus, what decided the Dutch response to Martanda Varma in the coming years of his reign were the administrative discussions within the VOC around establishing itself militarily or not, for ensuring its monopoly of trade and sovereign power in the affairs of the kingdoms of Malabar.

The *pillamars*, who have lost their pretenders for kingship after the extermination of the Thampi brothers, now found an ally in the Kayamkulam *raja* and carved out a plan to murder Martanda Varma on the day of the

¹⁸⁰ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.15.

¹⁸¹ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.180.

Painguni Auratt festival.¹⁸² The Painguni festival of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple that begins with the hoisting of the festival flag followed by a series of days long rituals, and concludes with the *auratt* procession from the temple to the Shungumugam sea shore carrying the idols of the deities, was an integral one for enhancing and establishing the position and prestige of the ruler as the *kulashekhara perumal*. The temple *yogam* would perform these rituals only if the Trippapur *muppu* maintained cordial relationship with the temple fulfilling all the financial requirements and the temple offerings.¹⁸³ The procession where the king along with his retinues would be marching on foot to immerse the idols in the sea, served the perfect context to plan a blow on the royal power. The plot of the *madambimars* of the Trippapur Swarupam and the *pillamars* was to attend the festival along with their militia pretending to be partaking in the festival and to strike a blow on Martanda Vama.¹⁸⁴ The plan was however thwarted by the spies of the Maharajah who reported to him the secret meeting that was held at Erumbumkaal Ambalam. The *ola* that was sent to the Kayamkulam *raja* was confiscated and the persons carrying it were held without the knowledge of the others. On the day of the Auratt, not able to see the Kayamkulam troops assembling before the festival as it was planned, and not having received any reply from the Kayamkulam chief, the *madambimars* and *pillamars*, escorted the king and the idol to the sea, obediently taking part in the festival.¹⁸⁵ According to Shungoonny Menon, on the Auratt day, “an unusual force” escorted the idols in the procession and the conspirators were awestruck by the exhibition of the Maharaja’s military might.¹⁸⁶

Soon after the ceremonies were concluded, the *pillamars*, who conspired against the *maharaja* were seized and punished. The records here speak of the

¹⁸² Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., p.114-133.

¹⁸³ Ganesh, ‘Process’, p.20

¹⁸⁴ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.166.

¹⁸⁵ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133.

¹⁸⁶ Shungoonny menon, *History of Travancore*, p.167.

Ettuveetil Madambimar and Aarukuttathil Pillamar separately.¹⁸⁷ The women and children of the Ettuveetil Madambimar and Aarukuttathil Pillamar were either banished from the country or sold to the fishermen. Their land and property were measured and confiscated.¹⁸⁸ Of the captive guilty, the records give names of eight *madambimars*, Shankaran Pandarathu Kuruppu, Kochu Mathevan Pandarathu Kuruppu, Thekkeveetil Eechambi Kuruppu, Vadakkeveetil Eechambi Kuruppu, Chirayinkeezh Mundakkal Kaamachotti Pillai, Makizhancheri Iravikutti Pillai, Thekkeveetil Cherupalli Nambu Kaalipillai, Valiya Pillai Kajirayiman Pillai, and also, others like, Idatharai Thiruvikkiraman Thiruvikkiraman, Ilambel Mathandan Iravi, and also the six of the *arukkuttathil pillamar*. The little *madambimars* of areas like Arumanai, Karakkottu, Pallichal, Karakulam, Chirayinkeezh were also punished likewise.¹⁸⁹

With the extermination of the *pillamars* and *madambimars*, Martanda Varma resolved the most vexing question that has been crushing the Travancore royalty for years now. The uprooting of the landed nobility necessitated the rise of new groups, social formations, political establishments and economic organization, and laid the prelude to the formation of an early modern state in South Malabar through military conquest, trade monopoly, and administrative centralization and bureaucratization based on religious reorganization. This founding of a new form of state that could be called an early-modern state was made possible by incorporating into the process of state formation, the discrete socio-economic and political developments that characterized the region of the time. It brought out marked transformations and innovations in to the ways in which the military, economic and religious spheres were converged into the political body of the region, fostering a thorough social reorganization.

¹⁸⁷ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II , App., pp. 114-133.

¹⁸⁸ Showcase Records, Vol.2, Record No.94, collected from Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

¹⁸⁹ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II , App., pp. 114-133.

2.1.1 The Medieval Martial Culture of the Region and the New Military Labor Market

The growth and expansion of a military class was one of the fundamental developments of the socio-political order of medieval Malabar. However, the dearth of ethno historical studies that traces the origins of the growth and development of fixed caste or ethnic groups and on the expansion and consolidation of settlements in medieval Malabar does not allow us to develop clear formulations about the nature and form of the growth and consolidation of warrior castes in the region. One view about the origin of the *nayar* warriors holds that the *nayars* were a distinct tribe or clan associated with the Indus valley civilization and had migrated to the southern peninsula.¹⁹⁰ This view, however, is contested by later historians of early medieval Kerala who holds that the *nayar* caste was a by-product of the Brahmin settlement and was formed out of the native groups recruited for military service during the Chera period. Made powerful out of the land grants, proximity to political power, and the hereditary nature of their occupation, these groups could have developed into a distinct caste group with its own position and functions in the caste hierarchy. This could have helped them to consolidate and strengthen their position in the changed political order of post-Chera period.¹⁹¹

The origin of these warrior communities is as well traced to the ‘Hundred Groups’ that often appear in the sources of the Chera period along with the mention of the governors of the different *nadus*. Against the understanding that the Hundred Group refers to an assembly of *nayars* that acted as a democratic body and check to arbitrary application of royal authority, M.G.S Narayanan

¹⁹⁰ A linear history of migration from the Indus valley, and of conflict and compromise with the later Brahmin settlers finds espoused in, Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, p.215; C. Achuta Menon, *The Cochin State Manual*, Cochin Government Press, Ernakulam, 1911, pp.31-32; Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Volume I TO VII, Library of Alexandria, 2020, Vol.V, p.293; T.K Krishna Menon, *Dravidian Culture and its Diffusion*, Cochin Government Press, Ernakulam, 1937, pp.33-43.

¹⁹¹ M.G.S Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, p.273.

holds that, the groups referred in the Chera sources as the *arunnuravar* of Venad, Valluvanaadu or Ramavalandu, *anjooravar* of Puraikilanadu, *munnuravar* of Nanrulainadu, and the other Hundred Groups associated with the different *nadus*, denote groups firmly attached to the office and body of the ruling prince of the *nadus*. The words like *kaval* and *raksha*, around which the mention of the Hundred Groups revolves, denote kinds of military service.¹⁹² The *arunnuravar* of Venad, Manigramam and Anjuvannam, appears in the sources as being asked to protect the Tharisa Christian church at Kollam (*tharisa palli*) and the properties granted to it.¹⁹³ The sources of the period contain many other examples of the Hundred Groups being employed for the purpose of *kaval* and *raksha* of the *cherikkal* or temple lands. Taking into account the fact that these groups were maintained in close proximity to royal power and as well the religious centers, being allowed entry inside the precincts of the temple, Narayanan contends that they could only have been the forerunners of the *nayars* that appear in the later medieval sources as the prime military and ruling class of the region.¹⁹⁴ The mention of the Hundred Groups in Graeme's *Glossary of Terms* produced in the nineteenth century according to which every *naduvalli* of Kerala had at least one hundred *nayar* military men attached to his land, attests to the continuation of this organization in to later medieval and early modern period.¹⁹⁵

The expansion of settlements, the rapid growth of cash economy and maritime trade, and the scrambles for the meager resources, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, might have resulted in increased militarization of the agricultural tracts of the medieval Malabar region from within the fragmented political structure of the *swarupams* and *naduvalis*. In the South Malabar

¹⁹² M.G.S Narayanan, 'The Hundred Groups and the Rise of Nayar Militia in Kerala', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 44, 1983, pp. 113-119.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.117.

¹⁹⁵ William Logan, *Malabar District Manual*, Vol. II, App. XIII, p.CCXI.

region, in what were to later become the kingdom of Travancore, as we have already seen, this period was marked by conflicts and quarrels over revenue collection and ownership and control of land. The increased revenue generation possibilities opened up by new trade prospects and the rise of the landed intermediaries, who would frequently infringe on the temple lands, *brahmaswom* and the *cherikkal* lands of other princes, increased the reliance over armed military men for *kaval*. The armed militia of the chiefs of Tiruvitamkore appears in the sources as the *arisippadi jenam*, and the princes of the *swarupams* had to rely on the intermediary landlords to avail the service of this military body in times of need.¹⁹⁶ We have, in the previous chapter, already discussed the implications of this for the Travancore royalty and its power, since the fifteenth century.

The prominence of the *nayar* caste group in the distinctive warrior tradition of Malabar and its centrality in the political and cultural formations of the region is ethnographically well explored.¹⁹⁷ Less is however studied about the central place Christian and Muslim communities have occupied in this martial culture and their different affiliations and associations with the ruling houses on the coast. These communities are understood as predominantly commercial groups engaging in the region's maritime and inland trade and little is studied about their significant position and interventions in the local political context.¹⁹⁸ The military *kalaris* of the St. Thomas Christians and the Christian Panikkars under whom both the *nayars* and Christians got trained in martial arts and the employment of Christian soldiers in the kingdoms of Cochin, Diamper,

¹⁹⁶ Ganesh, 'Ownership', p.312

¹⁹⁷ See, for instance, C.J Fuller, *The Nayars Today*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1976; F.Fawcett, *Nayars of Malabar*, Asian Educational Services, Madras, 1985; David M. Schneider, David Murray Schneider, Kathleen Gough, eds., *Matrilineal Kinship*, University of California Press, 1961; C.J Fuller, 'The Internal Structure of the Nayar Caste', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 31 (4), 1975, pp. 283–312.

¹⁹⁸ Even though in general historiographical narrative the Muslim and Christian communities of the Malabar coast appear as primarily commercial groups, there are studies that had tried to bridge the gap between the studies that deal with their role within the Malabar polities and outside it, See Sebastian.R.Prange, *Monsoon Islam: Trade and Faith on the Malabar Coast*, Cambridge University Press, 2018; Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*.

Vadakkencur and Thekkencur is well documented and mentioned also in detail in Portuguese sources including *Jornada*.¹⁹⁹ With the coming of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Muslims of North Malabar have formed themselves into a distinctive community sharing the martial spirit of the region and fighting the new comers along with the *nayar* force of the Zamorin. The Kunjali Marakkars, a prominent Muslim family who migrated from Cochin to Calicut to join the Calicut Muslims' and the Zamorins' fight against the Portuguese, have for almost one century served the Zamorin as the hereditary leaders of his naval force.²⁰⁰ For the period before the sixteenth century, the *Keralolpatty* offers reference to a naval force of Muslims under a certain Koya, an Arab Muslim, aiding the Zamorin in his conquest of Tirunavaya, the site of the festival of *mamankam*.²⁰¹ However, taking into account that we are not provided with any other evidence, suggesting Muslims' military assistance to the Hindu rulers of Malabar and dubious character of the *Keralolpatty* text and its sixteenth century origin, Prange concludes that militarization of the Muslim community on the coast and their involvements in the region's martial culture happens only in the sixteenth century with the coming of the Portuguese.²⁰²

However, in the South Malabar region, the Syrian Christians, the most dominant Christian community on the coast, as early as the fifteenth century, had risen to be important actors in the martial tradition and political formations of the

¹⁹⁹ Pius Malekandathil, ed. and trans., *Jornada of Dom Alexis Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar*, LRC Publications, Cochin, 2003, pp.116-118; 252-3.

²⁰⁰ For more on Kunjali Marakkar, their relationship with the Zamorin of Calicut and their role in the anti-Portuguese struggle, See Sebastian.R.Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast, twelfth to sixteenth century*, Phd Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2008, pp.250-252; Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, pp.136-147; O.K Nambiar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut*, Asia Publishing House, 1963.

²⁰¹ Prange, *The Social and Economic Organization*, p.96.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p.96; Kesavan Veluthat understands *Keralolpatty* as an expression of historical consciousness rather than history itself, see Kesavan Veluthat, 'The *Keralolpatty* as History', *The Early Medieval in South India*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-46. Also refer, Veluthat, 'History and historiography in constituting a region: The case of Kerala', *Studies in People's History*, 5, 1, 2018, pp.13-31.

region.²⁰³ According to the tradition, the Syrian Christians of South Malabar is a native community; the descendants of Brahmins converted into Christianity by the apostle St. Thomas who had arrived on the Malabar Coast in the first century A.D. Unlike the Muslims, the Syrian Christian warriors have occupied a considerable proportion of the warrior body of the medieval Malabar *rajās*, even before the coming of the Europeans and have also been part of the *chaver* force. They, like the *nayars* had occupied a ritualized relationship with these *rajās* and were receptors of royal grants and privileges for the strategic military service they performed. In the ritual caste hierarchy that determined the political role of communities in the region, this Christian community was held in equivalence to the *nayar* warrior caste group and was integrated into the martial culture of the region like no other communities.²⁰⁴

Apart from its political implications, the medieval martial tradition of Malabar region have given rise to different cultural and other practices that have remained vibrantly live even after the monopolization of military power by colonial and native states in the early modern and subsequent periods and the gradual dying out of political structures that supported it. The practice of *chaver*, for instance, finds reference in most of the medieval foreign travel accounts and the later colonial writings.²⁰⁵ The *chaver* was the suicide squads attached to the body of the king or *naduvāli*, who would willingly endure death in loyalty to their master. The *chavers* of Valluvanadu who died fighting with the guards of the Zamorin on the eve of the grand festival of *mamankam* have attracted much attention. Every twelve years these *chaver* men come at the

²⁰³ Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1800', p.182.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.182-183.

²⁰⁵ Duarte Barbosa early in sixteenth century itself has written about the *chavers* who as a rule die for the princes and *rajās* of Malabar. Reference about *chaver* is also found in the eighteenth century account of Italian traveller Pietro Della Valle, who refers to them as *Amoko*. In 17th century, Dutch captain John Niehoff wrote about the determinedness of *chavers* in front of the fire and sword of their lord's offenders. See, V.V Haridas, 'Dying for a Cause: Caver of Medieval Kerala', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.61, 2000, pp. 492-500.

festival site of *mamankam* to avenge the death of their master in the war with the Zamorin, and embrace death.²⁰⁶ *Chavers*, also appears in the Travancore sources of the time of Martanda Varma. The Mathilakam records provide references to the *chaver* men sent to Venad, to avenge the death of their master, the Kayamkulam prince, who was slain in the war against Martanda Varma. The *chavers* set out for their mission consuming *kanjav* or *bhang* to intoxicate themselves, and were feared for their fearlessness in front of the enemy's sword and their readiness to embrace death.²⁰⁷ A rich corpus of ballads and folklores were produced around the life and martyrdom of the *chavers* and around the different aspects of the martial tradition, its heroes, deeds and deities.²⁰⁸

The distinctive martial tradition of Malabar was sustained through an institutionalized system of military training that seems to have been maintained with rigor even into the modern times. The accounts of early European travellers and later colonialists provide glimpses into this institution called *kalari*, the military training ground attached to the *nayar tarawads* of medieval Malabar from where from the age of seven; the members of the household are trained in weaponry and other sciences, by teachers who are generally called *kurup*, *asan* or *panikkar*.²⁰⁹ It was also the space where the family deity was placed and venerated.²¹⁰ *Keralolpatty* holds that the practice of *kalari* was initiated by Parasuram himself, for imparting into the *nayar* youth the knowledge on warfare and weaponry. Though we are not supported with any significant

²⁰⁶ The *Kozhikodan Granthavari* is the only source material that gives details of the *chaver* who died in the *mamankam* festival, See, Haridas, 'Dying for a Cause', p.494.

²⁰⁷ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.63; Padmanabha Menon writes about *chavers*, "They...pursue(their enemy) with so much tenacity that they stop neither at fire nor sword to take vengeance of the death of their masters, but like madmen run upon the point of their enemies' swords, which makes them be generally derided by all." See Padmanabha Menon, *History*, Vol.3, p.251.

²⁰⁸ The Northern Ballads or the *Vadakkanpaattukal*, a rich corpus of ballads of North Malabar sings about the heroism and exploits of heroes such as Tacoli Othenan and Aromal Cekavar. On *vadakkanpaattukal*, See M.R Raghava Varier, *Vadakkanpaattukalude Paniyala*, Sukapuram, 1982.

²⁰⁹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.9; For a detailed account of military training of the *nayar* youths and the institution of *kalari*, See Padmanabha Menon, *History*, Vol.3, pp. 343-347.

²¹⁰ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.9.

historical evidence for tracing the roots of *kalari* to ancient or early medieval period, we can be certain that by the sixteenth century, the institution was in full swing.²¹¹

For the rulers and princes of medieval Malabar, the highly militarized countryside and the established system of martial training made readily available a body of trained militia that is placed within the system of customary authority around nodes of caste and ritual power. However, in the context of the breakdown of this customary authority, and the political consolidation of an intermediary class in the Travancore region, this militia, whose loyalty lied with their respective *nadualis*, started becoming increasingly unavailable for the royal princes. Military power, along with the financial reserves were concentrated in the hands of these landed intermediaries, nullifying even the ritual power of the *rajas*, necessitating interventions that could restore the royal authority. The Travancore *rajas* were left with no means, military or financial; to subdue this militarized powerful peasantry and to construct a reconfigured powerful state structure. The armed peasantry of the Indian countryside that the early-modern pre-colonial state formations in the subcontinent had to confront has recently attracted much scholarly attention. Their role in building and bringing down empires and regimes presents a revisited image of Indian peasantry as agents in empire building rather than the subjects of empires.²¹²

²¹¹ Reference to the institution of *kalari* is found mention in detail at least from the sixteenth century in the accounts of the foreigners in the Malabar Coast, See K.P Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.3, p.343-347.

²¹² Dirk Kolff, in his work, portrays the armed militant peasantry of found everywhere in early modern South India which gave rise to an immense military labour market before the colonial rule and a pool of military labours to the early modern state formation in the region. In a later work published along with Jos Gommans, Kolff argues for a revisited military history that would look at the implications of new military technology and the new military labour market on the societies of the subcontinent. See Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market of Hindustan, 1450-1850*, Cambridge University Press, 2002; Dirk Kolff, Jos J.L Gommans, *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, Oxford University Press, 2003; Jos. J.L Gommans, *Mughal Warfare Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire 1500-1700*, Taylor and Francis, 2002.

It is in this context that Martanda Varma sets out to carve out a new political organization in Malabar basing majorly on a reconfiguration of the medieval military system by reaching out to new skills, technologies' and groups being made available in the eighteenth century South India. Like the new Maratha, Sikh and Jat warrior 'successor states' of the Central and Northern India, sustained warfare and rigorous military program through incessant conquest, increased fortification, and adoption of most novel military technologies and modes of warfare were central features that determined the formation of the Travancore state under Martanda Varma. The materialization of this new political system introduced particular forms of military organization hitherto unknown in the region. To draw a clear picture of the composition and organization of Martanda Varma's army in the initial years of his rule, we are not provided with adequate information or sources. However it can be rightly assumed, that the elimination of the *madambimars* and *pillamars*, in the year 1734, could have made it possible for him to channel along with a steady flow of revenue, consistent military service of the men of these lands.

Though we are not provided with adequate information or sources to draw a clear picture of the composition and organization of Martanda Varma's army in the initial years of his rule, through a closer look into his military campaigns until 1734, one can be certain that, Martanda Varma, unlike his predecessors was successful in ensuring military might right from the initial years of his reign. According to Shungoony Menon, Martanda Varma, on the Painguni Auratt festival was escorted by "an unusual force", forcing the conspirators to drop their plan of assassinating the king.²¹³ Moreover, Martanda Varma, despite the rebellious spirit of the *nattar*, had led fierce wars against the other collateral princes of the royal family and had instigated a well-planned mission towards the elimination of the powerful intermediaries, which would not have been

²¹³ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.122.

possible with a weak military system. As a prince, it was Martanda Varma, who had urged his uncle and predecessor Rama Varma to seek the help of the Trichinopoly forces of the Pandyan king for an annual tribute of 3000 rupees to subdue the rebellious spirit of the *madambimars* and *pillamars*. Upon his ascendance to throne this force was sent back and instead an army of *maravar* was raised under the supervision of Cumaraswamy Pillai, the commander-in-chief and his assistant Thanu Pillai.²¹⁴ Apart from the irregular army of *maravars* and *nairs*, a standing infantry was formed and maintained and were garrisoned in detachments at the new fortifications constructed at all important frontiers.²¹⁵

However, in the series of wars of 1734 against the collateral branches of the royal family, and in the face of the fortifications and the joint attack of Quilon and Kayamkulam supported by the Dutch and the *madambimars*, Martanda Varma's army of *maravars* and *nairs* were proving unsuccessful.²¹⁶ It was in this context of the 1734 war that Martanda Varma, by reorganizing the army, recruiting the *maravar* cavalry of Madurai and the Poligars from Tinnevely, and employing European military specialists, started stepping in as a key player in the emerging military labor market of eighteenth century South India, from which the different contenders for power could recruit men and procure weaponry on providing adequate payment, and commenced changing the rules of medieval warfare in the region. The breakdown of large imperial states in the Northern and Southern India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and consolidation of numerous regional polities and the protracted and armed conflicts this process entailed opened up for the traditional warring communities opportunities for resource accumulation in exchange for the supply of manpower for aspiring princes and kings with weak standing armies. For the

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.118.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.127.

successor states of the Mughals and the Vijayanagara and other early modern state formations like that of Travancore, this provided a dynamic and rich military labor market of infantry and cavalry.²¹⁷ Along with the Indian kings and princes, the European trading companies were also active players in this military labor market, employing the free floating mercenaries in their army, and entering into military contracts with the native princes. For the native rulers, the individual deserters from the European armies provided a new pool of military labor, trained in European warfare technologies and stratagems. Apart from entering into treaties with European companies these rulers could procure guns, cannons and other war ammunitions from individual European traders striving to make a fortune, independent of the companies.

It was the chances in engaging successfully in this military labor market in the face of the absence of support from the traditional militia of the land that defined Travancore's survival against the internal and external threats in the initial years of Martanda Varma's reign. For the Malabar princes of Martanda Varma's time, recruiting Europeans into their military service, employing European warfare technologies and entering into military agreements with the various European outposts on the coast were not novelties. Since the coming of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, European settlements and their trade interests have been central in the wars and skirmishes between the different *swarupams*, as best illustrated in the case of Cochin and Calicut. It was by playing off the age old rivalry between the Perumpadappu and Nediyruppu Swarupams that the Portuguese could first establish themselves as a political and military power in the region. In 1502 war between Cochin and Calicut, Europeans were employed in the army on both sides, along with the traditional *nayar* militia. Zamorin, seeing the weakness of his traditional militia of *nayars* and *mappilas*, had employed two Italian lapidaries Antonio and Maria, who

²¹⁷ See Mesrob Vartavarian, 'Warriors and States: Military Labour in Southern India, circa 1750-1800', *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 1-26.

would train the *mappilas* in firing guns.²¹⁸ Similarly in Zamorin's war with the Dutch over the fort of Chetwa, he was supplied with ammunitions from the English at Calicut and had employed English officers and Portuguese deserters to man the fort of Paponetty between Chetwa and Cranganore.²¹⁹

However, it was with Martanda Varma that the incorporation of various South Indian warring communities and European technologies in to the process of state formation on the coast of Malabar first entailed a reorganization of the system itself, beyond necessary strategic advancements in times of war. Conscious efforts at intertwining trade interests and military advancements to a degree never before seen among the Malabar *rajās* were already setting the contours of Martanda Varma's campaigns. In this regard, he resembled the Portuguese and the Dutch establishments on the coast rather than the native chiefs and *rajās*. The traditional income of the royal houses on the coast chiefly consisted of the profits and revenues gathered from their hereditary private possessions, the dues collected out of the transport of merchandise, and other taxes and royal privileges like the *Purushantharam*, *Kazcha*, *Dattu Kazcha*, *Anappiti* etc.²²⁰ These sources generated only meager profit and revenue that it was common for chiefs and princes with larger hereditary estates to be richer than the ruling *raja*.²²¹ Even though consistent warfare was the norm of the region, the lack of sources for generating exorbitant revenue have always checked the range and intensity of wars between the royal houses of Malabar. According to Visscher,

The wars which the Rajahs wage among themselves are not productive of much bloodshed. A battle in which twenty lives were lost would be considered a very serious

²¹⁸ K.V Krishna Aiyer, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, Norman Printing Bureau, Calicut, 1938, p.173.

²¹⁹ Visscher, *Letters From Malabar*, p.27.

²²⁰ For the different categories of sources of revenue of the medieval *rajās* of Malabar, See Padmanabha Menon, *History*, Vol.2, pp. 324-35.

²²¹ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, p. 73.

affair. The deaths in the course of a whole war often do not amount to that number, therefore these hostilities excite but little of our attention.²²²

The question of revenue posed a major challenge for the Malabar *rajās* to constructively engage in the new military labor market of South India for the free floating mercenaries were attracted towards sources that provide them with regular payments. Failures in payments always invited revolt and mutiny from the military contingents against the masters themselves.²²³ Therefore, the number of Europeans and other non-native military groups enlisted in armies of the Malabar *rajās* were always limited to materialize any structural changes in the military organization itself.²²⁴ Martanda Varma too had to deal with this challenge and in the initial years of his reign. Europeans did not constitute any considerable proportion of his military strength. However, owing to his territorial proximity to the lands of the *maravars* and Poligars, from his ascendance to throne, as evident from his military campaigns, Martanda Varma could ensure a regular supply of cavalry and infantry from among the *maravars* and Poligars of the Tamil country. Under his commander Arumugam Pillay and later on Rama Iyen, Martanda Varma also maintained a standing army stationed at strategic and nodal points of revenue gathering and territorial integrity.²²⁵

In the context of the revolting landlords who prevented the proper channeling of traditional sources of revenue, payments for these forces were ensured by entering into arrangements with European companies seeking trade benefits on the coast.²²⁶ The Dutch sources provide evidence to considerable rise of *chunkam* in the domains of Martanda Varma as early as 1735. The Dutch at Cochin have also by this time made the connection between Martanda Varma's

²²² Ibid., p.126.

²²³ De lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.151.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ After razing Desinganad fort an army was garrisoned in Quilon under the commander Arumugam Pillay.

²²⁶ Martanda Varma entered into agreements with the Dutch and English companies by farming out of *chumkams* and establishing *changatam* relationship. *Changatam* was a source of royal revenue wherein guards were sent to protect the possessions of the European companies on the coast.

military designs and financial interventions. It was recorded, "...the king of Travancore has cash problems and nevertheless wants to keep up a large standing army. So, he levies heavy duties on all ships passing his kingdom, which has evoked great unrest among the Malabar merchants".²²⁷ From the beginning of his reign, Martanda Varma has strived over the control of the southern regions of Kottar, Nachilnadu and Kalkulam, where the trade in rice and cloth were concentrated. The recapturing of Kottar and the Kalkulam fort from the hold of the Thampi brothers was one of the most significant developments in the early years of Martanda Varma's reign that enabled him to put forward a sustained struggle against the internal threats to his royal power.²²⁸ Incessant warfare and military measures adopted to subdue the rebelling elements however necessitated more developments in the field of military and further more generation of revenue and capital.

Right from his early military engagements it was, thus, made clear that Martanda Varma is not here to obey the rules and limits of medieval warfare in Malabar, but to defy it. It was the custom of the land that in a war, the defeated prince only had to admit subjection by paying an annual tribute agreed upon by both the parties and could not be dispossessed of his land and possessions. The lands or rights of a prince was thus never annexed or invaded, rather the contending parties would only enter into a truce in which the winning side could claim some privileges from the defeated prince. This made incessant warfare a norm of the region, where we see defeated princes continuously defying the terms of the truce and entering into war again and again. In Martanda Varma's initial wars against the collateral branches of the royal family we have seen Desinganadu and Kayamkulam continuously defying the conditions of peace

²²⁷ Cited in, De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.152.

²²⁸ For details on the war over Kottar, See, Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133; For Kottar as a strategically and financially important location, See De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.46. De Lannoy claims that the party who controls the cloth industry at Kottar was considered an attractive ally for the European companies and thus the district helped in raising tax for the payment of the troops.

treaty concluded with Martanda Varma and entering into frequent wars. Martanda Varma's invasion of Nedumangadu and Kottarakaray and the overthrowing of the Elayadathu warupam, however, marked a breach in this custom and displayed that Martanda Varma's designs were not within the region's traditional idea of political power and warfare.

Similarly, as Visscher wrote, "The death of a rajah or grandee in war tends to improve the condition of his party: for the enemy who has been the cause of his death must immediately quit the field, and pay a fine either in goods or lands to the family of the slain prince...This law is of service in protecting the lives of these princes",²²⁹ it was the custom of the land that the enemy should quit the field upon the death of a prince in the war. However, what we see in Martanda Varma's war with Kayamkulam is that upon the death of the Kayamkulam prince, the Travancore army rather than quitting the field, rigorously fought with additional manpower collected from the *maravars* and Poligars. The recruitment of professional warrior forces from outside the land made the defying of the traditional norms of war much easier. The Dutch efforts to force an agreement between Desinganad and Travancore was in vain as Desinganad claimed that the custom enforced him to avenge the death of the Kayamkulam *raja* while Travancore maintained that the king was slain through his own imprudence and the war would continue until the enemy agrees to come to terms with Martanda Varma.²³⁰

In short, from the early military endeavors of Martanda Varma, we can discern conscious efforts at reorganizing the medieval military organizations of the South Malabar region. In the backdrop of royalty's failure in ensuring the support of the customary military system and traditional military groups of the region, Martanda Varma, from his initials years strived to step in as a key player

²²⁹ Visscher, *Letters From Malabar*, p.126.

²³⁰ *Press List of Ancient Dutch Records from 1657 to 1825*, National Library of the Netherlands, 1825, p.21.

in the emerging military labor market that was the marked feature of eighteenth century South India, by incorporating into the process of state formation strategic groups and the different formations in the region. It is only in the coming years of his reign by rivaling the supreme power of the Dutch in the polity and economy of the South Malabar region, that we find a fruition of this process of military reorganization.

2.2 Rivaling the Dutch: The Emergence of Travancore as a Military-Fiscal State (1739-1757)

With the extermination of the *thampis* and the expulsion of the *madambimars* and *pillamars* Martanda Varma was now relieved of the two major internal threats to his power and could now reestablish the long thwarted relationship between the royal family and the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple. Having channeled the revenue gathering options hindered by the rising power of the middlemen to the royal treasury, he could now fulfill the royal obligations to claim the title of the *kulashekhara perumal*. For the other collateral branches of the royal family who were engaged in continuous scuffles with the Trippapur Swarupam, the annihilation of the royal pretenders for power and the powerful intermediaries of the Trippapur Swarupam, meant the termination of an internal bulwark to Martanda Varma's rising ambitions and lose of an ally in the campaigns against him. It was in the course of the rigorous expansion policy which Martanda Varma undertook in the years that followed the annihilation of these internal threats, that the kingdom of Travancore was formed. Territorial expansion through military expeditions by incorporating into the process of state formation the strategic service groups and the different military innovations available in the eighteenth century South Indian context, was key to the formation of this new form of state on the Malabar Coast. The kingdom of

Travancore, by the end of his reign in 1758, extended from Tovala in the south to borders of the Cochin Kingdom in the north.

In the year 1740, Martanda Varma's dominion was attacked from the south by a group of invaders under Chanda Sahib, the son-in-law and minister of the Nawab of Arcot, assisted by Bada Sahib. In the process of the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the sprouting up of independent successor states in South India, the Nawab of Arcot had strengthened his hold over the Carnatic region. Overthrowing the Thirumalai Nayaks, the Mughals have established their power over Madurai since the 1736. This force of invaders entered the Travancore territory through the Aramboly lines taking possession of the eastern towns of Nagercoil and Kottar and plundering the temple possessions of Suchindram and burning the temple car.²³¹ Ram Iyen Dalawa seeing that his force was no match for that of the invaders and knowing that the attackers' intention was not territorial invasion but pecuniary gains, successfully made them retreat with valuable gifts.²³²

Soon after this an extensive project for renovation of fortifications at strategic locations was undertaken. The mud fort of Tovala was strengthened, along with those of Kalkulam and Puliurkurichi, with stone bastions under the supervision of Thaikattu Nambuthiri and the Tovala-Agastheeswaram fort was extended from Kadukkara to the end of Kaniyakumari. A garrison was placed at this newly built fort and a large tract of land near Suchindram was allotted for its maintenance. This attack from the south exerted more financial and military pressure on Martanda Varma, who was already in war in the north with the Dutch and the collateral branches of the royal family, for establishing his supreme power in the political landscape of the South Malabar region.

²³¹ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., pp. 114-133.

²³² Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.138.

By 1738, the Dutch at Cochin had become increasingly alarmed of the rising power of Martanda Varma and was slowly abandoning their policy of non-interference in the scuffles between the principalities of Southern Malabar. When the Kayamkulam *raja*, an ally of Dutch in 1733, sent Ishwara Battathiri, his minister, to Adrian Matten, the then governor of the company at Cochin, seeking assistance in their campaigns against Martanda Varma, the Dutch refused any support and cited the resolution of the Batavia government in 1721 by which the company was not allowed to interfere in the wars of the local princes.²³³ The Dutch was however soon realizing that the rising power of Travancore and the constant wars between the collateral branches were detrimental to their commercial interests in the region. Seeing that it was no more possible to remain mute spectator in the changing political landscape, Matten sent an envoy to Martanda Varma asking to put a halt to further aggressions on Kayamkulam and Quilon and remonstrated against the annexation of Elayadathu Swarupam. What the Dutch received was a reply that questioned its claim of political supremacy in the affairs of the principalities of Malabar. It was asked not to bother about affairs that were not its concern and to keep aloof from the internal matters of Travancore. It was also reassured that Martanda Varma would always respect and promote the commercial interests of the Dutch.

However, the Dutch were already losing their ground in terms of trade and procurement of pepper and piece goods. At Calicut, the price of pepper was at its heights making it harder for the Dutch to establish its trade monopoly and procurement of pepper at a cheaper price. With the annexation of Karunagapally, Neduamangad and Kottarakaray in to the domains of Martanda Varma and the absorption of Attingal, that was related to Trippapur Swarupam through the female line, in about 1737, the Dutch had lost access to much of the

²³³ P.C Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar*, p.45.

pepper producing lands in the Travancore region. Nothing could be procured from Kollam and Kayamkulam and demands made on the queen of Karunagapally and Vatayattu Pillai, *kurup* of Travancore were equally of little effect. Apart from Thekkenkur, the Dutch was left with little hope of establishing any monopoly over pepper procurement in the Southern Malabar region.²³⁴

Van Imhoff, the Dutch governor of Ceylon who had visited the Malabar Coast in 1739, worried about the changing balance of power in the region, has remarked, “After two notable revolutions, the first inside, the second outside his kingdom, and also by two profitable wars this king (of Travancore) has grown to ascendancy and is now by his neighbors looked at with increased worries”²³⁵. The Dutch was thus resolved to break its policy of non-interference and a military intervention was considered a necessity. Van Imhoff arrived at Cochin in 1739, the year Stein Van Gollenesse was appointed Malabar commander, decided to ensure a favorable trade condition for the VOC and to curtail the power of Travancore, rising at the cost of Dutch trade interests. Van Imhoff’s meeting with Martanda Varma met with a failure, and the conditions of draft-treaty put forward were outrightly rejected. The Dutch now had to choose from the two options available to them, as Gollenesse wrote in 1743,

At last we were convinced that all political and mercantile measures were vain and that no diligence on our part could check the profit-seeking merchant when he is able without danger to make more money elsewhere than with the Hon'ble Company. Then the liberty was taken to lay before their Eight Worshipfuls the only two ways that still remained to restore the trade, namely either to follow the market or adopt extreme measures.²³⁶

²³⁴ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.29.

²³⁵ Cited in, De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.67.

²³⁶ Gollenesse, ‘Memoir’, p.72.

The Travancore-Dutch war that followed was to seal the fate of both Travancore and the Dutch in the political landscape of the region. By 1743, it was becoming clearer that the Dutch was losing and Martanda Varma was carving out his kingdom out of the petty principalities that jotted the region. Gollennesse wrote,

Since he strongly insists upon a promise from the Honorable Company to remain neutral in case he goes to war with the Malabar chiefs, which sufficiently shows his ambitious intentions, and though it will be some time before his finances are re-established and besides most of his Cunjecutas [Kunjukuttakars] or picked Nairs have fallen, still I do not believe that he has altogether abandoned his high-flying design to make himself master of the whole of Malabar, and even if peace should be made, your Worship will have to watch his conduct carefully, and avoid cautiously whatever may give rise to fresh troubles. It will be sufficient for your Worship to keep Their Right Worshipfuls properly informed and to wait for their orders with regard to him.²³⁷

Peace was concluded with Travancore and a halt was put to the incessant warfare of four years, by then, Travancore forming itself into a unitary state consisting of “Travancore, Attingal, Elleda Surovan, Peritally and Signatty”.²³⁸

The Dutch war with Travancore over ascendancy on the Malabar Coast was triggered in 1739 by the Dutch’s sudden change in policy regarding its involvement in the political affairs of Malabar. The Dutch took up the cause of the princess of Elayadathu Swarupam, who was overthrown by Martanda Vama against the custom of the land, and openly supported Desinganadu, large tracts of whose territories were occupied by Martanda Varma, for a renewed war against Travancore. A military alliance was concluded between Dutch and the *rajās* of Desinganad, Cochin, Purakkad and Thekkenkur. For Cochin and Desinganad, this served their interest to drag the Dutch and their military power into the affairs of Malabar as a bulwark against the rising power of Martanda

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.54.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.53.

Varma, and for the Dutch, the alliance assured the support of these principalities that could anytime slip into the Travancore camp.²³⁹

A joint attack was planned against Travancore. While Desinganadu would attack from Quilon, the Dutch with the reinforcements received from Ceylon would occupy the Travancore territories from the south.²⁴⁰ The joint force proved successful for a while, occupying much of the southern territories from Kottar to Collachel, re-conquering Kottarakaray and Nedumangad and reinstating the princess of Elayadathu Swarupam who had fled from the captivity of Travancore to Vadakkenkur. The Dutch strengthened Collachel into its military base from where it could control the cloth industry of the south and the transport of arms and pepper along the sea, and was contemplating an attack on the chief palace at Padmanabhapuram.²⁴¹ Gollenesse later recalls, “From the letters dispatched from here, the Campaign Journal and other papers kept here at the Secretariat your Worship may learn the origin of the late war with that king and how at first the Honorable Company was pretty successful against him, but later on for want of men and other necessaries had to leave him master of the field”.²⁴²

It was the siege of Collachel by Martanda Varma that made him the “master of the field” and turned upside down, everything for the Dutch in Malabar. Collachel was subdued in August 1741 by a strong force of cavalry, infantry and artillery commanded by the new commander Rama Iyen, and the Dutchmen and their allies captured were sent to the Udayagiri fort at Puliyoorkurichi.²⁴³ It was after Martanda Varma’s visit to Adi Kesava Perumal temple at Tiruvattar and receiving the royal sword from the deity after a *kanikka* offering for defeating the Dutch force on the month of May of 1741, that an intensive siege

²³⁹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.75.

²⁴⁰ Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p.68.

²⁴¹ Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, p.341.

²⁴² Gollenesse, ‘Memoir’, p.53.

²⁴³ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App.,p.126.

of the fort was initiated by the Travancore army.²⁴⁴ Along with the Dutch failures and weaknesses, it was Martanda Varma's strategic involvement in the military labor market of the region by incorporating into the process of kingdom making strategic groups and military technologies that had made it possible for him to challenge the supreme power of the Dutch in Malabar. By 1739 itself, when the Travancore's war with the Dutch commenced, Maratanda Varma was financially strengthened by his conquest of the pepper rich lands and the trade agreements with the European companies to constructively engage in the military labor market by increasing recruitment of European specialists and enlisting deserters.

The Dutch records mention a certain German Carl August Duijvenschot who deserted the Dutch company in the February of 1741 at Kanniyakumari and became the main military advisor of Martanda Varma, entitled to command the already recruited 22 Europeans of the Travancore army. These European soldiers each had supervised a force of 1000 soldiers to lay the siege of Collachel, imposing European style discipline amongst the *nayar* and *maravar* troops.²⁴⁵ Martanda Varma was as well supported by the English at Anjengo through a supply of arms and naval help of the French at Mahe was sought, though, never availed. According to Shungoonny Menon, it was the cavalry force of Travancore that have been most decisive in its success against the enemy for this threw the Dutch army with no cavalry to utter confusion and anarchy, forcing a retreat.²⁴⁶ After ensuring the withdrawal of the enemy the arms and ammunitions left at the fort were collected and sent to Kalkulam and a reconstruction project of the Udayagiri fort and Kalkulam fort were undertaken renaming the Kalakulam fort as the Padmanabhapuram fort.²⁴⁷ The renewed efforts of the Dutch to subdue the Travancore forces from the northern side

²⁴⁴ Showcase Records, Vol.3, Record No. 177, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

²⁴⁵ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.157.

²⁴⁶ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.35.

²⁴⁷ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., p.126.

combining with Quilon were also crushed with the help of the additional manpower and arms collected in the siege of Collachel.

For the Dutch, the failure marked an end to their desire to control the hinterlands of Travancore. The Dutch had, in fact, failed in fully envisaging the weak points in the alliance they had built with the different princes of Malabar and the role played by the *madambimars* of these regions in thwarting the efforts for an effective alliance building by constantly changing sides according to political circumstances.²⁴⁸ These principalities and the different factions in their courts were embroiled in a politics that had to check the growth of any one *raja* or faction at the cost of the other. For Travancore, along with subduing its prime rival, the siege of Collachel provided an additional pool of European military specialists who in the coming years were to bring significant improvisations in the organization and nature of Travancore army. Among the 24 Dutch prisoners, a name that stands out in the military history of Travancore is that of the Flemish Eustache De Lannoy who was to serve the Travancore army as Venattu Kappittan, or the captain of Venad.

After Colachel and the subsequent conclusion of peace with the Dutch a rigorous policy of annexation of the northern principalities was followed. Kayamkulam *raja*, too, after offering a strong resistance under his Karyakkar Achyutha Varyar, with the help of the Dutch, finally entered into peace with Travancore in 1742. Kottayam and Vadakkenkur were attacked and occupied for assisting the anti-Travancore alliance. Quilon and Kayamkulam constantly forged alliance of the northern principalities which gave Martanda Varma an ample reason to move northwards beyond the lands of the collateral branches of Travancore into the lands of the tributaries of the Cochin king. Kayamkulam *raja* finally fled through the Ashtamudi Kayal, emptying his palace and carrying the possessions. Ambalapuzay, Vadakkenkur and Thekkenkur, who were

²⁴⁸ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.117.

attacked for conspiring with the Kayamkulam chief, had to accept the suzerainty of Travancore.

In the course of around fifteen years, by 1753, the domains of Martanda Varma extended from Agastisvaram and Kanyakumari in the south to the Periyar in the north subjecting the *rajās* of all the petty principalities of the Travancore region and those of the territories lying to the north and south-east of the Cochin *raja*'s domains, with the exception of Paravoor and Alangad. All the lands and populations south of the Dutch fort of Cranganore thus were incorporated into the kingdom of Travancore yet in formation.²⁴⁹ This new state of affairs forced the Dutch too to reconsider its relation with Travancore. Gollennesse' hopes and confidence, "However should the Honorable Company have a great force at any time in India and occasion permit us to push the matter energetically my opinion would be that it would suffice to make ourselves completely masters of the states of Peritally and Berkencur; this would be sufficient for the Honorable Company together with the supplies which the other states would furnish of their own accord. I say "make ourselves completely masters,".....However the Honorable Company having right on her side should once for all bring those two kingdoms under her sway", was slowly losing ground.²⁵⁰ With the fall of Quilon and Kayamkulam, the entire expedition against Martanda Varma was regretted and it was realized, that "the Company in either case, whether Travancore alone remained in possession of Malabar, or the Company continued to support the other kings, would equally have no hope of more pepper and equally have to bear excessive burdens; that therefore to make a treaty, profitable to both the Company and Travancore, would be the best and the most certain plan".²⁵¹ A treaty was, thus, concluded in the August of 1753 between the Dutch Company and Martanda Varma at Mavelikkaray that

²⁴⁹ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.155.

²⁵⁰ Gollennesse, 'Memoirs', p.72

²⁵¹ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.106

ensured Dutch recognition and neutrality and arms for further Travancore conquests in return for an annual supply of pepper from the current Travancore domains and the domains to be conquered.²⁵² The treaty thus established and foregrounded the new political order in the lands south to the southern borders of Zamorin, ending the Malabar system of multiple fragmentary states

It was significantly, by reconfiguring the military system that supported the medieval political organization that Martanda Varma could carve out a new political order in the Southern Malabar region. By the 1753 treaty of Mavelikkaray, Travancore had formally established itself as a state structure claiming sovereign and monopoly power over the produce and populations of the territories brought under its sway. The British at Anjengo, by 1749, seeking orders on how the company should act in this changed context, have recorded this transition and its implications on the company's trade interests on the coast. It is recorded in the *Anjengo Consultations* of September 1749,

His Majesty also demanding large annual supplies of warlike Stores, We request instructions on that head as the King is determined to be the Pepper Merchant having engrossed all the Pepper, what quantity we are to insist on annually & at what Price...Likewise whether we must insist on the Honorable Company's Ancient Privileges of seizing all the Pepper we find afloat, as his Majesty's Dominions are near ten times [as big as] the Queens were when she made that Grant to the Honorable Company. Also if we come to any Contract with the King whether we must advance him any money or insist on paying for the Pepper when it is delivered.²⁵³

The tension that vexed the Dutch about the Malabar kings' real authority over its subjects expressed by Van Rhee in 1677, "No king of Malabar has the power to make contracts which are prejudicial to the interests of landlords, noblemen or Nairs ; such a king would run the danger of being expelled and

²⁵² For detailed account of the Mavelikkaray Treaty between Travancore and Dutch, See Shungoony Menon, pp. 149-50; For a primary copy of the treaty in the Mathilakam records, C.V.R. Doc. CXXXVI, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., p.137.

²⁵³ *Anjengo Consultations, 1744-1750*, Vol.2-B, p.10.

rejected by his subjects, etc."²⁵⁴, and Gollennesse in 1743, "I confess to have made a mistake more than once in stating in the Company's papers that kings and chiefs alone can and should stop the export of pepper, and having examined the subject more carefully, I have come to the conclusion that their power in this matter is small if they do not wish to bring the hatred of the whole nation upon their head ; since the kings have indeed with the knowledge of their subjects promised to supply the- company with pepper but not at any particular price",²⁵⁵ seems to have completely subsided by the time the English at Anjengo in later years of 1740's were recording their consultations with Martanda Varma. It was at the king's order and in accordance to the rules of the contract between the king and the company that the merchants made their deliveries of merchandise.²⁵⁶ The treaty of Mavelikkaray was in fact a culmination of Martanda Varma's intertwining of trade and military interventions and a formal laying down of the basic precepts of this new political formation on the coast.

It is evident from the Anjengo Consultations that as early as 1744, the sovereign power of the king over the produce of the land and over the Pepper Contracts with the merchants, was strategically employed on a much extensive level, for procuring additional supply of arms and service of specialists like engineers. For any timely procurement of pepper, the European companies had to comply with the Travancore's pressing demands for the supply of arms and other military services to quell the disturbances in both the south and the north.²⁵⁷ In an instance, in the year 1745, the chief at Anjengo was approached to keep and ship the forty ring leaders responsible for raising disturbances against the King.²⁵⁸ Also significant in the advancement of Travancore military was the service of the brokers on the Military market through whom a consistent supply

²⁵⁴ Gollennesse, 'Memoirs', p.52.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p.51

²⁵⁶ *Anjengo Consultations 1744-1747*, Vol. 1, pp. 8-10.

²⁵⁷ Ibid; *Anjengo Consultations 1749-1750*, Vol.2-B, p.61; *1747-1749*, Vol.2-A, p.92; p.125.

²⁵⁸ *Anjengo Consultations* Vol.1, pp. 63.

of military specialists and deserters were ensured.²⁵⁹ From among the natives, it was the Syrian Christians and the Roman Catholics who majorly worked as brokers for recruiting military specialists for the Travancore army, as their common religious denomination with the Europeans helped them to act as a bridge between the Hindu princes of Malabar and the European labor market.²⁶⁰ The Syrian Christians were traditionally associated with the native princes as their subjects and military service men and were never brought under the jurisdiction of either the Portuguese or the Dutch company.²⁶¹ The Roman Catholics maintained a hostile relationship with the Protestant Dutch which Martanda Varma could rightly exploit. The Dutch were very apprehensive of the Roman Catholic priests whom the Dutch continuously accused of helping and assisting the deserters. They were even suspected of being paid by Travancore for recruiting and bringing soldiers to the Travancore camp through safe passages, making it even more difficult for the Dutch to control and arrest such deserters.²⁶² The large scale employment of foreigners into military service, for Martanda Varma, served the purpose of checking the consolidation of a native military class and challenging the concentration of military power in pockets other than the royalty.

By the end of his reign, Martanda Varma had ensured the establishment of a military system that has no precedence among the medieval kings of Malabar. The service of the European deserters and military specialists were employed for organizing the army in accordance to standards of a modern standing army that was to become a common feature of the warrior successor states of the eighteenth century North, Central and Southern India. Martanda Varma's campaigns in the northern principalities and the multiple wars he could fight by garrisoning forces at different fortifications and strategic locations of the north

²⁵⁹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.157.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.162.

²⁶¹ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.180.

²⁶² De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.163.

and south is a testimony to the strength and expense of the Travancore army. By 1750, Martanda Varma had a powder house of his own at Kayamkulam with around twenty five barrels of gunpowder and European engineers working in his service.²⁶³ The records also suggest that by the end of Martanda Varma's reign, the king's *kunju kuttukars* were in European style military uniforms²⁶⁴ and the army was paraded in the market and in the public all under arms during important occasions.²⁶⁵ In 1750, Travancore seems to have purchased from the English at Anjengo large quantities of red cloth for military uniforms.²⁶⁶

It was after the siege of Colachel, under the supervision of De Lannoy, this complete re-organization of the Travancore army on European lines was undertaken. The Udayagiri fort where De Lannoy was stationed served as defense for the palace fortress of Kalkulam that was renamed after the siege of Collachel as Padmanabhapuram. Here, De Lannoy served as the head of Martanda Varma's palace guard, reforming it on European lines, upon which he was promoted to be the Valiya Kappitan of the Travancore army. Apart from the training of the soldiers improvements in fortifications were also embarked on under De Lannoy. The Udayagiri fort was developed; its mud walls replaced by brick ones, so as to contain the heavy artilleries purchased from the European free floaters and companies. The southern defense lines of Travancore known as the Aramboly lines, that served the purpose of defending the Travancore lands from incursions from the south, was as well improved on modern lines with arsenals and defended by artilleries.²⁶⁷

This reconstruction of the military system of the South Malabar region under Martanda Varma, however, needs to be understood in more complex terms than as an expression of 'superiority' or 'inferiority' of native or European military

²⁶³ *Anjengo Consultations*, Vol 2-B, p.86.

²⁶⁴ Showcase Records, vol.1, Record No. 84, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

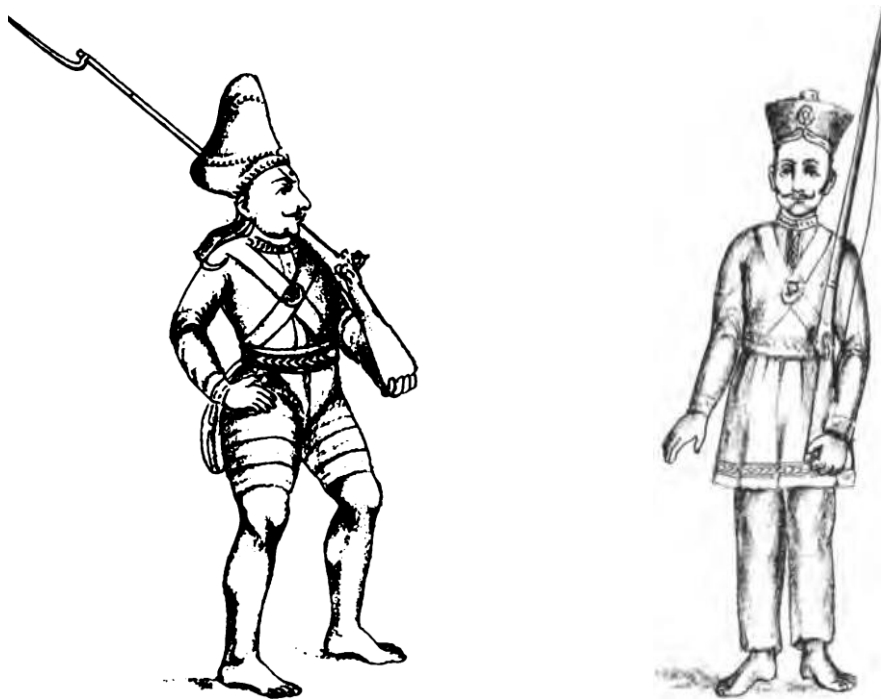
²⁶⁵ *Anjengo Consultations*, Vol 2-B, p.14.

²⁶⁶ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.168.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.171-172.

technologies and organization, around which much of the discussion is surrounded. What need to be looked into is the ‘actual complexities of the introduction of a new technology and new military organization and the ‘rethinking, refocusing of resources, and other sorts of stress’ this causes in a society thus, revealing ‘the complex, changing and often contradictory symbolical systems which surround and embed both the existing and the challenging military systems.’²⁶⁸ This as well enables us to historically explain, why despite most of the Malabar princes adopting cavalry, European specialists, technologies and modes of warfare and even after winning wars with the European companies, didn’t form itself into the structures of an early modern state like we see in the case of Travancore.

FIGURE 1: Military sepoy of De Lannoy²⁶⁹



²⁶⁸ Stewart Gordon, ‘The Limited Adoption of European-Style Military Forces by Eighteenth Century Rulers in India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 35, 1998, pp. 229-45.

²⁶⁹ Reproduced from Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.136.

With Travancore the reconfiguration of the military system through introduction of new military technology and organization was supported by and triggered larger rethinking and refocusing of resources. In the context of the breakdown of medieval social organization and the hierarchies of power associated with it, reclaiming of the diminishing power of the royalty necessitated reimagining of the political system itself by exploiting and incorporating the different systems, groups and technologies available in the dynamic world of eighteenth century sub-continent. Moreover, it is also the development of new economic possibilities, and a social system that could sustain and reinforce the new military system that enabled this reconfiguration of the military system in Malabar. The process of the formation of Travancore, thus, initiated, in the region, the bifurcation of military system and military power from the social and civic society into an organ and institution of the new form of state. Shungoonny Menon, writing about Martanda Varma's conquests and military reforms states, "The inhabitants of the kingdom between the Periar and Thovalay were relieved from forced military service implements and cultivate their lands which had been laying waste for ages past".²⁷⁰

However, it would be too naïve to conclude that Martanda Varma's military reform was based on a complete rejection of the medieval military organization and that the remnants and challenges of the old order have completely subsided by the end of his reign. In his study about the adoption of European military system by Indian rulers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Stewart Gordon reflects that one of the major qualitative differences between European and native military organization is the pace of advancement and honors available for ordinary military service men. Unlike the rapid advancements, ceremonial honor grants, recognition of personal bravery and leadership that marked the native military organization, in the new infantry/artillery system

²⁷⁰ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.155.

there was no scope for individual bravery and initiation, or ceremonial grants of honor or rewards for special personal achievements that might attract the notice of the king.²⁷¹ For the Dutch deserters, this bureaucratic nature of the military organization of the company that based promotions merely on seniority and provided little scope for expressions of personal bravery was a significant push factor.

The case of Ilampayil Balamartandan Krishnan shows the persisting significance of valor and loyalty, associated with the local practice of *chaver*, in Martanda Varma's military organization. In the year 1750, Balamartandan Krishnan of Ilampoyil and his *kunjikudis* were rewarded with honors like Palanquin, temple positions, and lifelong family grants for sacrificing life to save the king in the skirmishes that happened at the Kollam fort. The grants and positions were to be enjoyed by the generations to come and this proclamation was to be used to gain the favors of the successors of the king in times of any difficulties to the Balamartandan Krishnan's *taravad* and *kunjikudis*.²⁷² In the Mathilakam records too, there are references to many instances in the later period of Martanda Varma's reign, about the recognition of the service of the *chavers* and rewards granted to the family.²⁷³ Along with introducing novel ones, it is also by incorporating the existing military practices and strategic groups into the process of the formation of a new political organization that Martanda Varma carved out an extensive and unitary kingdom from the remnants of the older system. Invoking of the martial symbols of medieval Malabar ensured the enforcement among his *kunju kuttukars* the ritualized loyalty to the royal house which they are accustomed to under the medieval order of military organization. By giving special royal honors to the old *panikkar* lineages and reviving

²⁷¹ Gordon, 'The limited adoption', p.242.

²⁷² Showcase Records, Vol. 1, Record No.39, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

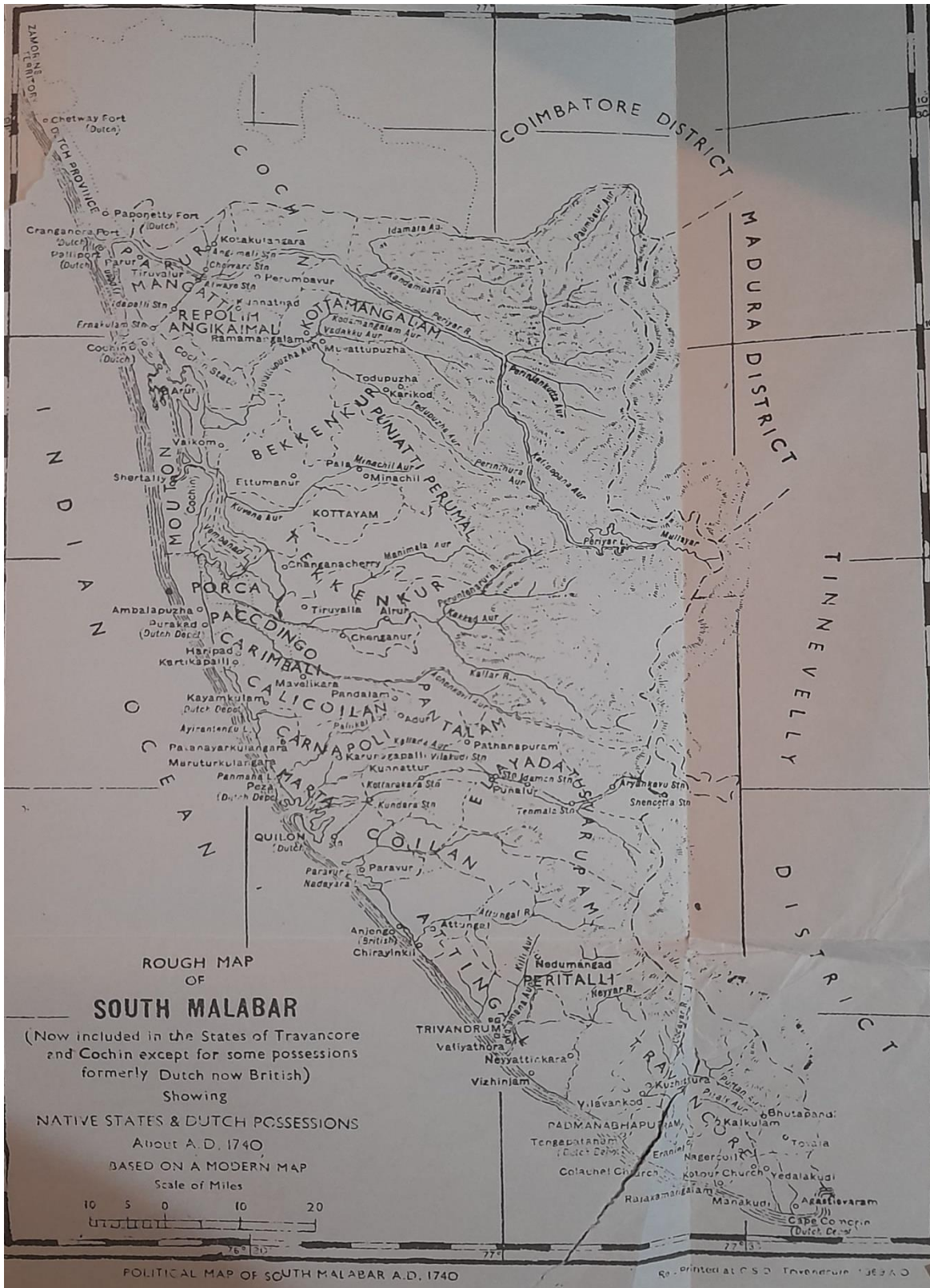
²⁷³ Mathilakam, C.1292, O.576, collected from, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

kalarie, Martanda Varma made sure that traditional martial symbolisms were constructively incorporated into his kingdom formation.²⁷⁴

In spite of these efforts, Martanda Varma, until the end of his reign, had to face constant contestations and challenges from the remnants of the medieval political system. In 1754, Martanda Varma had reached verge of defeat by a renewed alliance of the exiled princes of the northern principalities to capture their lost territories. The Cochin, Dutch, and various local factions and elements who had lost out in the new political formation, were resolved to make use of every single opportunity to reestablish the medieval political world. It was only through strategic alliance building with the different elements of this waning world and building up of a larger narrative of a unitary kingdom that Travancore kings in subsequent years could hold the lands acquired through military conquest together. This aspect of Martanda Varma's kingdom formation will be examined in detail in the coming chapter.

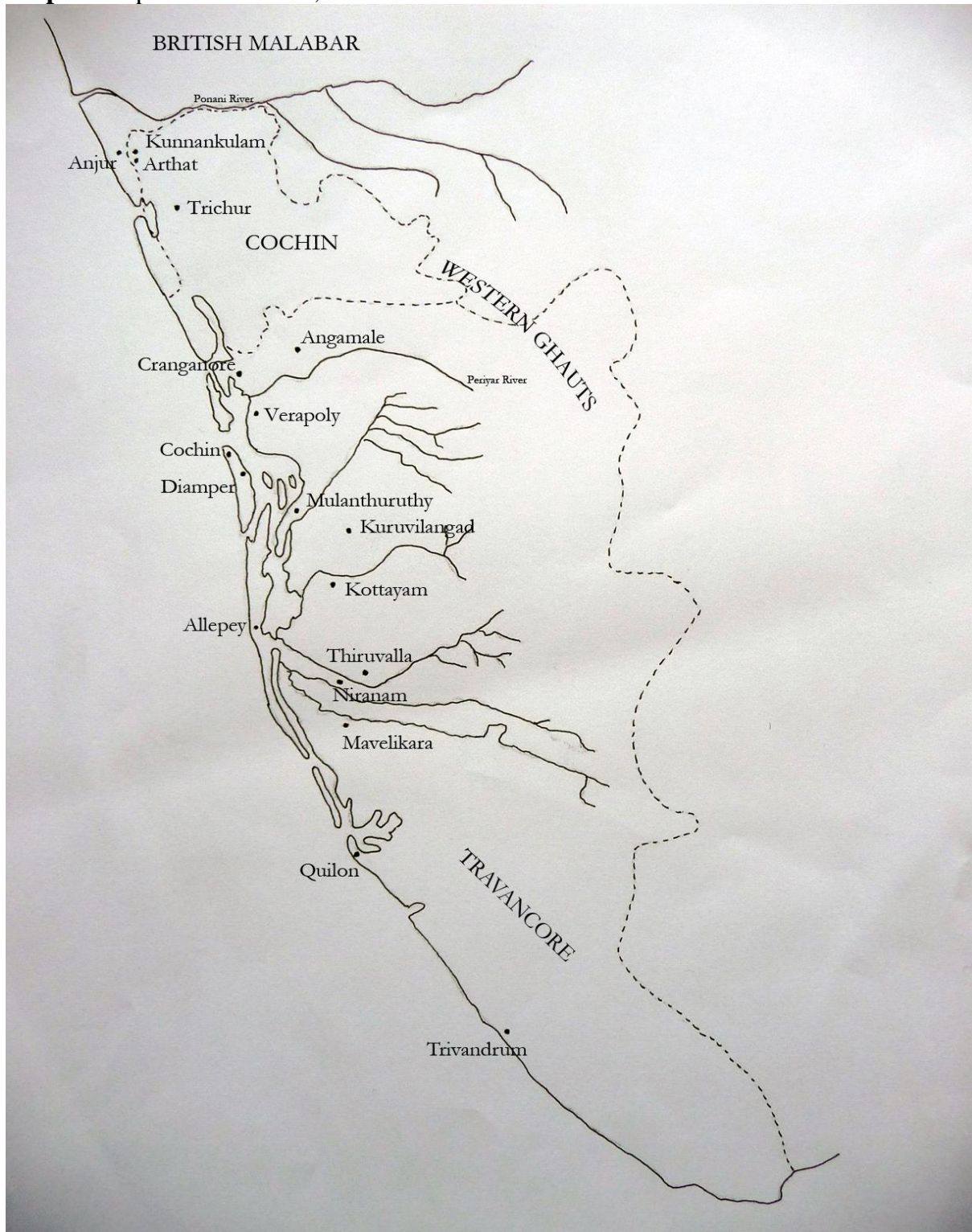
²⁷⁴ Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship', p.187.

Map 1: Map of South Malabar 1740²⁷⁵



²⁷⁵ Reproduced from *Perumpadappu Granthavari, ed., S.Raymond, Kerala State Archives Department, 2005.*

Map 2: Map of Travancore, Cochin and British Malabar Circa 1800²⁷⁶



²⁷⁶ Reproduced from, John Fenwick, 'Map of Travancore, Cochin and British Malabar circa 1800', in *The Forgotten Bishops*, Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2009, pp. xlix-l. <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463216818-007>

2.3 Confronting Mysore: The Height of Military Might and the End Phase of Conquests (1758-1805)

On inheriting the throne of the newly found kingdom from his uncle, Rama Varma was to continue the policy of expansion and military empowerment. In terms of military might, Travancore has already overpowered all the principalities of Southern Malabar, reduced Cochin into insignificance, challenged the Zamorin, fortified and garrisoned the southern border, and has established itself on par with the European companies. Travancore was now assuming the position of a powerful arbitrator in the affairs of Malabar and forming larger alliances in the region foregrounding itself as a rising South Indian power. In the north of Travancore, Zamorin was vexing the Cochin Rajah with further encroachments on his territories and Cochin was turning towards Travancore for military aid. In 1761, an agreement of friendship was concluded between Travancore and Cochin declared in front of the deity at the sacred temple of Suchindram.²⁷⁷ In the military expedition that followed against the Zamorin of Calicut, Zamorin had to retreat from the territories of the Cochin *raja* and entered into an agreement of perpetual alliance with Travancore. According to the stipulations of the treaty with Cochin, Travancore annexed to its domains, the territories of Alangad, Paravoor and Karapuram recovered from the Zamorin, and all the privileges Cochin *raja* had previously enjoyed in these districts.²⁷⁸ The event established Travancore as a powerful arbitrator in the affairs of the chiefs of Malabar and the master of the large expanse of land between Cranganore and Cape of Comorin, except for the insignificant piece of land allowed for the Cochin *raja* that would amount only for his subsistence.²⁷⁹ Both Cochin and Calicut were also now to hold no animosity against the Travancore *raj*as or to assist any military alliance against the kingdom. The

²⁷⁷ Showcase Records, Vol. 1, Record No. 17, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

²⁷⁸ Ibid

²⁷⁹ Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, p.372.

Dutch, from its desperate position at the fort of Cranganore could now only wish, “that Travancore had not become so exceedingly large, and Cochin as small as they are at present”.²⁸⁰

In the south, Travancore was forming a military alliance with the English and the Carnatic Nawab against the refractory governors of the Nawab stationed at Trichinopoly, who had descended on and occupied the eastern districts of Travancore including Kalacaud and Shencottah. The event though ended up in skirmishes over these districts with the Nawab himself and the signing of a tributary agreement with him in 1766, Travancore’s alliance with the two great military powers of South India points towards its rise into a significant military power in the region, a recognition no Malabar chiefs have hitherto earned. The Dutch were even perplexed at why, despite its disproportionate military strength vis-à-vis the other *rajās* of Malabar, Travancore “has not extended his conquests farther, and completely subjugated the king of Cochin”.²⁸¹ In spite of Travancore’s claims that Cochin and the dominions that lay beyond are saved only out of regard and respect for the Dutch Company,²⁸² Meons has rightly remarked, “At present it is all to his advantage to keep quiet, and preserve what he has for fear of Nabab Hyder Ali Khan who has long been hungering for his kingdom, and will undoubtedly attack him some time or other as soon as he sees a Chance.”²⁸³

Two major historical developments that determined the military consolidation of Travancore in the coming years was the rise of Mysore as a military-fiscal state in the close neighborhood of the northern parts of Malabar, and the growth of English from a body of merchants into a powerful political actor in the region. Through a gradual seizing of power from the Wodeyar rulers, Hyder

²⁸⁰ Meons, ‘Memoirs’, p.109.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p.113.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.140.

Ali, from 1762, was carving out for himself an independent position and was asserting, within and without Mysore, his self-made position as the ‘sultan’ of the sultanate of Mysore.²⁸⁴ Mysore’s rise under Hyder and later under Tipu Sultan coincides with the early consolidation of the English power in South India. The English East India Company, in the series of Carnatic Wars fought against the French Company, from the same decade of the eighteenth century, established its dominance over the other European trading companies in South India and began asserting over the native states, their new found political position.

In 1766, Hyder Ali, enraged at Zamorin’s conduct of not paying the annual tribute due to him in accordance to the treaty of 1756, with his infantry and cavalry descended on to the lands of Malabar through Chirakkal, though was resisted all his way by gangs of *nayar* warriors. Calicut was occupied and the reigning Zamorin was to commit suicide.²⁸⁵ The Dutch, Cochin and Travancore from the south were closely watching Hyder’s proceedings at Calicut. The Dutch were resolved that Hyder “was not a man with whom the Company, following their existing policy, could work”, and adopted a policy of neutrality.²⁸⁶ Cochin, out of fear of losing his territory, entered into a tributary relationship with Mysore paying two lacks of rupees and eight elephants. Travancore, but, against Hyder’s demands to enter into a tributary relationship and payment of money, maintained that he is already a tributary of the Carnatic Nawab and proposed a settlement in the affairs of Malabar wherein the ousted *rajās* of Kolattiri and Zamorin would be reinstated after paying a substantial sum.²⁸⁷ Owing to the pressing demands in the northern parts of his kingdom, Hyder, but retreated from Malabar and after effecting some defeats at the

²⁸⁴ For a history of Mysore, See Mark Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India: In an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor; from the Origin of the Hindoo Government of that State, to the Extinction of the Mohammedan Dynasty in 1799*, 3 Vols., Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, and Brown, London, 1817.

²⁸⁵ K.V.K Aiyyer, *Zamorins of Calicut*, p.240.

²⁸⁶ Meons, ‘Memoirs’, p.152.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.154.

warfront against the English entered into a treaty with the English in 1769, wherein was a clause that ensured the safety of Travancore. It was only in 1774 Hyder was to march towards Malabar again, this time too, enraged at Zamorin's reluctance to pay the annual tribute due to him. Calicut that was now placed at the power and protection of the French against the forces of Hyder Ali was once again occupied and the royal family withdrew to the south in a native vessel, into the kingdom of Travancore.²⁸⁸ This put Travancore once again in loggerheads with Hyder and Travancore joined the Dutch in a defensive military operation to check the progress of Hyder's forces beyond the Dutch territories and the fort of Chetwa. The Nawab of Carnatic and the English were soon to step in as players in the happenings in Malabar, and Travancore joined with the English and the Nawab in the military operations against Hyder Ali at different parts of South India. The war that was to continue even after the death of Hyder by his son Tipu Sultan, ended with the signing of the Treaty of Mangalore, in the year 1784, between the English East India Company and Tipu Sultan. The treaty ensured the safety of Travancore from the aggressions of Tipu Sultan.²⁸⁹

The Mysorean threat has posed considerable pressure on Travancore's military, forcing further expansion and consolidation of military strength. Rama Varma had commenced the construction of a northern frontier fortification at the very early years of his reign when Hyder's military advancements were challenging much of the South Indian powers. The northern frontier fortification known as the Travancore lines or the Nedumkotta, ran through a straight line from the Travancore territories on the backwaters opposite the Cranganore fort, until the foot of the Western Ghats²⁹⁰, and was built under the supervision of De Lannoy and the Dalawa Ayyappan Martanda Pillai. The territories of Cochin Raja, now

²⁸⁸ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.156; *The Joint Commissioner's Report on Malabar, 1792-93*, p.32, para. 21.

²⁸⁹ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.201; Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1., p.384.

²⁹⁰ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.I, p.461.

a tributary of Hyder Ali, lied to the north and south of the Travancore lines, the regions in the immediate vicinity of the *raja's* palaces at Tripoonitharay and Mattancheri lying to the south and the rest, to the north of it.²⁹¹ Along with adopting rigorous military constructions to check the possible advance of the Mysorean army, military garrisons were stationed at the newly acquired territories in the north and at the new fortifications built along the breadth and length of the kingdom. In the last decades of eighteenth century, Fra Bartalomeo has observed, “The military forces of the present king of Travancore consists of 50,000 men, disciplined according to the European manner; and 100,000 Malabar Nayars and Cegos, armed with bows and arrows, spears, swords, and battle-axes.... The troops are always marching up and down through the country, to change their cantonments, to enforce the collection of the taxes, and to preserve peace and tranquility”.²⁹² The practice of military parade was introduced by De Lannoy in order to keep in subjection the populations of the kingdom, especially those of the newly acquired lands to the north and to thus check any insurrection of the powers of the medieval political order.²⁹³

The treaty of Mangalore of 1784 restored Malabar to Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Sultan, through his governor Ashad Beg Khan, governed the northern parts of his Malabar possessions by entering into tributary relationship with the different native *rajās* and the southern part that comprises Calicut through direct administration.²⁹⁴ Tipu's administrative and economic reforms, that incorporated the fragmented medieval political order of North Malabar into the centralized bureaucratic structure of the Mysore state, initiated a period of

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.459.

²⁹² Fra Paolino Da San Bartolomeo, *A Voyage to the East Indies: Containing an Account of the Manners, Customs, &c. of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country, Collected from Observations Made between 1776 and 1789*, Fra Paolino Da San Bartolomeo, Tran., William Johnston, J. Davis, United Kingdom, 1800, (Henceforth cited as Fra Bartalomeo, *Voyages*), p.173

²⁹³ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.265.

²⁹⁴ *The Joint commissioner's Report on Malabar*, pp.46-49, Para.32-39.

transition in the region.²⁹⁵ What we can discern from Malabar districts under Tipu is a transition on lines similar to that of Travancore in the early decades of eighteenth century under Martanda Varma²⁹⁶ the breakdown of medieval customary authority in the process of the formation of a centralized early modern state system based on military-fiscalism, albeit in different forms. The groups most hit of these economic and political developments were the earlier power holding classes of the Brahmins and the *nayars*, who on large scale fled to the kingdom of Travancore that had emerged in the course of the new political developments as the protector of the Brahmins and *nayars* against the aggressions of the Musalman chief.²⁹⁷

A significant formation in the North Malabar districts under Hyder and Tipu was its increased militarization and the development of a new military labor market in the region,²⁹⁸ similar to what we have seen in Travancore under Martanda Varma. We have already seen how Martanda Varma's military interventions have fostered in the South Malabar region the growth of a new military labor market comprising of military men, specialists, and military brokers, from among the traditional warrior communities of the Syrian Christians and the *nayars*, and as well the Roman Catholics and Topasses. The North Malabar communities that hastily responded to the demands of the Mysorean military interventions were the Muslims and the lower caste Hindu groups who saw in the current political turmoil, chances of mobility and resource accumulation. It was this context of increased militarized conflicts that

²⁹⁵ For details on Tipu's reforms in Malabar, See C. K. Abdul Kareem, *Kerala Under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, Phd Dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 1968; Mohibbul Hasan, *History of Tipu Sultan*, Aakar Books, Karnataka, 2005.

²⁹⁶ In his doctoral thesis C.K Kareem has looked into how the reforms of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in North Malabar and of Martanda Varma and Paliyath Comi Achan in Kochin, shares some common features like unification of the fragmented polities, modernisation of polity, economy etc. Kareem contends that Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan is seen to be criticized by the same historians who hold Martanda Varma and Komi Achan as makers of modern Kerala, See C. K. Abdul Kareem, *Kerala Under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan*, pp.121-22.

²⁹⁷ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.212.

²⁹⁸ Dilip menon holds that it is with the advent of Hyder that the militarization of the regions of North Malabar happens, See Dilip.M.Menon, 'Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar, 1760-1800' *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 29, pp. 1995-2003.,p.1999.

led to the emergence of Mappila *mooppans*, who were the military brokers who acquired wealth by responding to the need for military men and through soldiering in times of demand. Moreover, the expansion of the zone of conflict in North Malabar attracted military labor from Carnatic and other northern regions.²⁹⁹ Tipu's military interventions, as well, worked along with administrative and economic centralizing thrusts that worked by incorporating the fragmented political localities into a bureaucratic administrative structure through means of standardized land tax and state monopoly over trade.

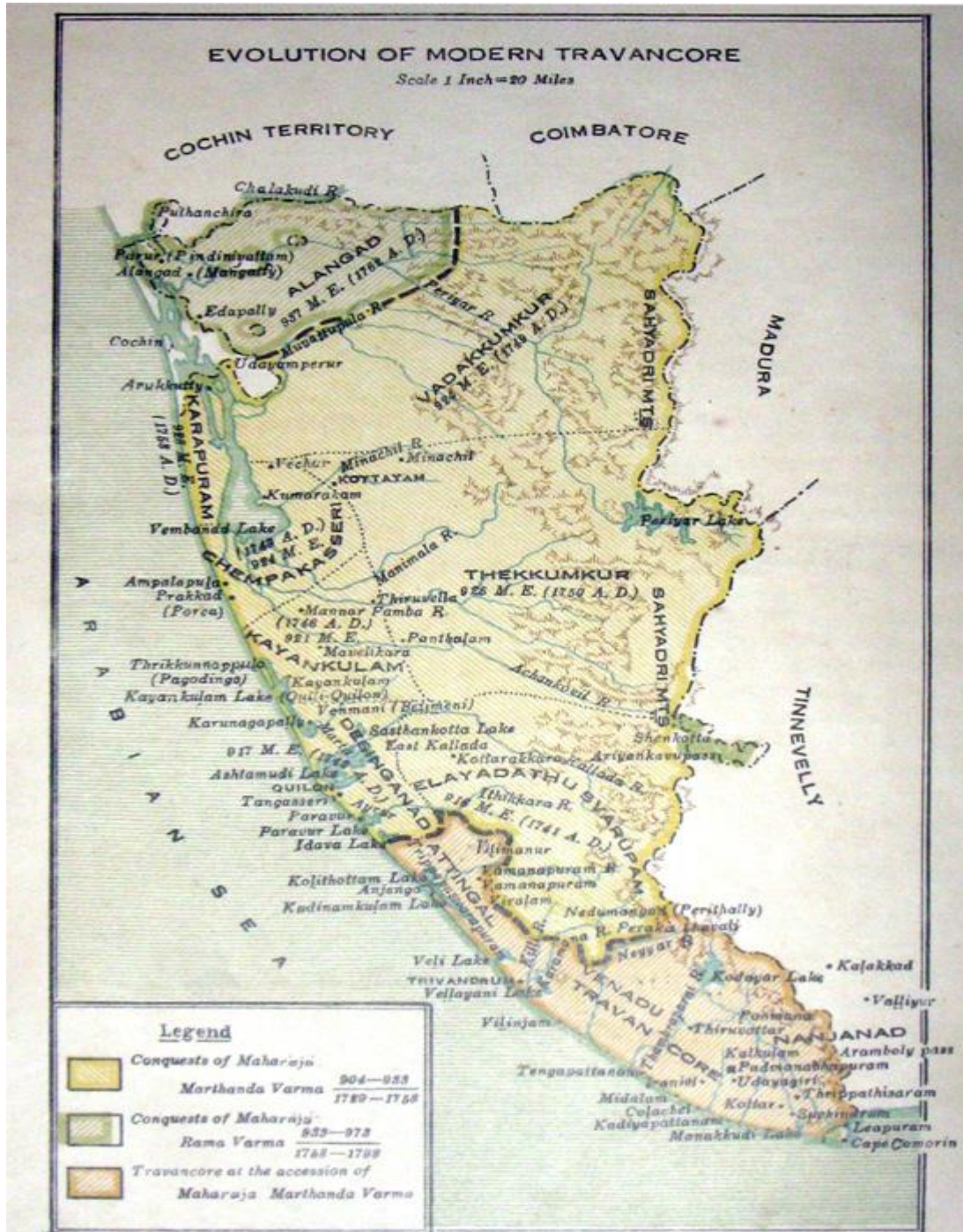
These developments in the Northern Malabar region were viewed by Travancore in apprehension, for it unsettled the ways in which Travancore had managed the powers of the medieval political system and established its position as the unchallenged supreme power of the coastal region. Moreover, Tipu, despite the assurances of the Mangalore treaty was waiting for an occasion to march towards the Kingdom of Travancore. Logan relating the events of late eighteenth century Malabar have remarked, "The conquest of Travancore had been the goal of Mysorean ambition ever since Hyder Ali's first raid through Malabar".³⁰⁰ In 1790, Tipu demanded from Rama Varma, withdrawal of his troops from the fort of Cranganore, demolition of the Travancore lines and the surrendering of the Malabar *rajās* of the north kept under his protection. Seeing that the demands were not received with warmth a military operation over the Travancore lines soon ensued. Rama Varma, at this point pleaded to the English to take the command of his army, which the company politely refused to and in turn ensured the service of company's troops to protect the northern frontiers of Travancore. The drift in the English attitude towards Travancore was already visible by this time. From operating as merely merchants at the factory of Anjengo, whom Martanda Varma could easily and

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.2000.

³⁰⁰ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.IV, p.457.

continuously manipulate, by the late eighteenth century, British were establishing itself as the supreme military power in South India.

Map 3: The Evolution of Modern Travancore³⁰¹



³⁰¹ Reproduced from Ulloor.S. Parameswara Iyer, 'Dutchmen in Travancore', Dutchinkerala.com, accessed from <http://dutchinkerala.com/article16.php?id=06> (Accessed on 06/06/2021).

The Dutch, on the other hand have sold what little was left of its possessions in the South Malabar region to Travancore³⁰² and the fate of the French was already sealed by its failure in the Carnatic wars and loss of Pondicherry. Rama Varma, though an ally of the English was caught between the expansionist thrust of the Mysorean army and the colonial tendencies of the company. David Washbrook writing on the colonial transition in South India reflects, “It was also against the highly volatile political background of the eighteenth century that the English company rose to power...Its conquest on land was certainly wrought out of any obvious technological or military superiority...Rather, it rose to power by supplying a number of key resources-commercial and military-to the main contending regional states, who thus fell fatally to reliance upon it”.³⁰³

Though the trained and organized Travancore army, its military infrastructure and the blessed monsoon drove away the Mysorean forces from its frontiers and territories,³⁰⁴ joined at a later stage by the army of the English and the Nawab of Carnatic, the expanse of Travancore territory and the military establishment that materialized it, was now to reach the culmination of its progress. After the complete withdrawal of Tipu from Northern Malabar, Travancore in lieu of the protection it had offered to the Northern Malabar *rajās*, chiefs and Brahmins, was assigned with the task of reinstating the medieval political order in the region and of managing their affairs through its officers.³⁰⁵ The withdrawal of Tipu and the downfall of the economic and administrative structure he had built had resulted in a sudden opening up of resources and trade routes in the Northern Malabar region, leading to increased militarized conflicts and grab for

³⁰² The Dutch Company in 1789 sold to Travancore the Cranganore fort, Munampam and the lands and appurtenances thereon for three lakhs of rupees; Showcase Records, Vol.1, Record No. 19, Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum.

³⁰³ David Washbrook, ‘South India 1770-1840: The Colonial Transition’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 38, No.3, pp.479-516, p.504.

³⁰⁴ For a detailed account of the war between the Mysore forces and Travancore, See Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.227-238.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.242.

resources.³⁰⁶ The interventions of the Travancore *raja* and his officers in reinstating the *nayar* chiefs and *rajas* only exacerbated the situation giving rise to a number of claims and contestations over land and property in Malabar. It is into this conflict ridden context that the English finally stepped in, by occupying Cochin from the Dutch and setting limits for the Travancore kingdom, as the supreme arbitrator in the affairs of Malabar. The treaty of perpetual alliance entered into by Travancore with the English in 1795 fixed the limits and borders of the Travancore kingdom and sealed further expansion and military expeditions. It was stated in the treaty stipulations, “it is therefore to be clearly and distinctly understood between the parties that the Rajahs, present and future, are not to commit any hostile aggression towards any other state, Indian or European; and in the event of the *raja* or his successors having any disputes of a political nature or tendency, it is necessary that the same shall be transmitted by the latter to the Honorable Company’s Government who will determine thereon according to justice and policy and mutual concert”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Dilip Menon, ‘Houses by the Sea’, p.2000.

³⁰⁷ Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1.,p.402.

Chapter Three

The Black Pepper Kingdom: Trade and Economy in the Formation of Travancore

The third chapter is an attempt to look at how the formation of an early modern state in South Malabar is deeply intertwined in the complexities of the commercial realm and the medieval agricultural economy of the region. It tries to investigate the process of the Travancore state's commercial expansion through a series of strategic commercial interventions that worked hand in hand with military conquest and territorial expansion. For this, the chapter majorly uses the records kept by the European companies and those maintained by the Travancore kings. In the initial section, the chapter provides a historical background of the complex and dynamic commercial world of the early eighteenth century South Malabar and shows how the beginnings of the formation of the kingdom of Travancore were deeply located in the complexities and the possibilities it offered. The section will show that it was Martanda Varma's strategic engagements in the commercial world and the agricultural economy of the region that enabled him to maintain a rigorous and consistent policy of war and military aggressions against internal and external threats from the very beginning of his reign. The second section traces the Travancore king's first major commercial strike; the establishment of monopoly in the trade in pepper. The section shows that the gradual commercial expansion of the Travancore kingdom, into the entire expanse of land in the South Malabar including that of the Cochin *rāja* was made possible through the establishment of a centralised bureaucratic structure that eliminated all the intermediaries in trade and agriculture, and the royal interventions into the agricultural economy of the region. The third section looks at how land and religion were intertwined in the medieval political order, and the ways in which the royal interventions

into the land economy through centralization and bureaucratization entailed the reformulation of the religious order of the region. Martanda Varma's efforts at claiming the title of the *kulashekhara perumal*, and the donation of the entire kingdom of Travancore to the Lord, Sri Padmanabha, an unprecedented religious gesture, involved, in novel ways, the conflation of the religious and the political. These efforts at religious reformulation necessitated the alteration of the structures of land organization in the medieval South Malabar region. The final section looks at the development of Travancore from a land power into a power at sea achieved by the establishment of the port city at Alleppey and its gradual rise into the most pivotal port of the coastal Malabar catering to the demands of the Indian Ocean Trade.

3.1. Trade and Commerce in the Formation of Travancore: The early decades of Eighteenth century.

By the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch and the English had firmly established bases for their commercial endeavours in the southern part of the Malabar Coast. At the commencement of the century the English possessed three factories in the region, at Anjengo, Vizhinjam and Kovalam.³⁰⁸ Anjengo was one among the two major fortified English settlements on the coast, the other being Tellicherry.³⁰⁹ At Cochin, Visscher had noted seeing at least thirty small and large vessels and three or four ships belonging to the English, the vessels put in mainly for the purpose of provisions and transit between the neighbouring regions.³¹⁰ The private English traders and the English company were already making an impression on the trade in pepper and piece-goods, and

³⁰⁸ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.I, p.339.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.341.

³¹⁰ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, p.44.

the settlement at Anjengo in Attingal was being increasingly dragged into the local political strifes.

The power of the *pillamars* of Attingal in the early eighteenth century had reached an extent to which the Attingal throne had been laid vacant for some years, for the *pillamar* prevented another sister of the prince of the then Venad *raja*, Rama Varma, from succeeding as the Attingal *rani*. The *pillamars* instead supported the sister of Desinganad to the throne of Attingal, and by executing a planned massacre of the English retinue who had arrived to pay their respects and annual gift to the new Attingal *rani*, dragged the English into the strifes between the different collateral branches of the Travancore family. The notorious Attingal massacre of 1721 gave Rama Varma a chance to secure the help of the English against the *pillamars*, who changed sides to play off the different Travancore princes against each other, and the other collateral branches. The English, instead, was offered a factory at Collachel, and a chance to take revenge on the perpetrators of the Attingal massacre.³¹¹

It is doubtful if the Dutch at Cochin have completely envisaged the implications of this event. After settling an expensive war with the Zamorin over the fort of Chetwa, the Dutch were increasingly realizing the discrepancies in the expense and income of the Dutch company on the coast. The question about profitability of maintaining expensive settlements and garrisoned forts on the coast of Malabar was a vexing one for the Dutch from early years of their establishment. In the Southern Malabar region, after occupying Cochin from the Portuguese, the Dutch had entered into agreements and alliances with the chieftains of the various principalities around Cochin and the different princes of the Travancore royal family. Their position at Cochin was firmly established by intervening into the internal political tensions of the royal family and by maintaining a considerable force and fortifications at different strategic points. However,

³¹¹ Padamanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.I, p.406.

despite these efforts, the Dutch designs at establishing territorial sovereignty, political supremacy and pepper monopoly on the coast were continuously thwarted by the strategies of the Malabar princes and the competition from the other European companies. From the 1680s, resolutions were adopted to undertake measures for reducing the coast of the Dutch establishment on the coast, which included withdrawing of the military garrisons except at Porcad and Paponetty, and reducing the strength of the forts at Cochin, Cranganore and Cannanore.³¹²

By the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch had become fully aware of the fallacy of the agreements that they had entered into with the different princes of Travancore and with the other chieftaincies around Cochin. Soon after the capture of Quilon in 1660, Captain John Nieuhoff had entered into treaties with Vatayattu Pillai, and the *rajās* of Karunagapalli, Quilon, Kundra and Venad that stated that the pepper of these lands were not to be sold to anyone other than the Dutch company. Similar stipulations were formulated with the kings of the principalities of Thekkenkur, Ambapalapuzha and Porcad. Visscher had noted that the Dutch annually purchased an average of 200,000 lbs of pepper from the factories of Cochin and Chetwa in the north, and in south from those of Quilon, Kayamkulam, Pesa, and Porcad. The agreements entered into were renewed annually when two members from the company fixed the price of pepper with the merchants at the presence of the kings of Porcad, Kayamkulam and Quilon.³¹³ Visscher's claim that attempts at 'exporting pepper by stealth'³¹⁴ was prevented by the Dutch check posts around the sea coast however seems unfounded.

³¹² See Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.1, pp.361-62; Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.I, p.342; For more details on 1697 resolutions, See Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp.113-14.

³¹³ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, pp.154-55.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.155.

In 1700, the Dutch from Malabar had written to Batavia that the King of Travancore and the Queen of Attingal possessed little authority over their kingdom and the affairs were in the hands of powerful nobility, the *pillamars*, who controlled all royal privileges including collection of *chumkam* and control of trade. They even resorted to violent exactions of tolls using the *nayar* militia under their control.³¹⁵ As we have already seen, the Dutch presence in Malabar by the early eighteenth century was defined by apprehensions about whether the enforcement of monopoly against the interests of the merchants was possible at all. The unprofitable war with the Zamorin and the desperate state of affairs regarding the procurement of pepper below the market price posed serious challenge to the method of trade through force that was first introduced in the coast of Malabar with the coming of the Portuguese. The Dutch failure in inheriting the Portuguese designs on the coast can be attributed, along with the Holland's attitude towards Indian Ocean trade, as well, to the dynamics and complexities of the political and commercial context of the region in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

In the first chapter we have already looked at the increasing conflict in the South Malabar region from the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries between the customary authorities on land, and the growing intermediary class who held the actual control over the production process. On the one hand, the breakdown of customary authority in the low lying regions that by the end of the seventeenth century was completely abating the expressions of royal power of the Travancore princes was making it difficult for the European trading companies to enter into successful alliances and agreements with the princes and rulers for pepper procurement. On the other hand, the increasing incorporation of highlands and hilly ranges along the Ghats into the trade networks between the different South Indian regions was exasperating the coastal control system that

³¹⁵ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.18.

the Dutch, like the Portuguese had established along the coast.³¹⁶ As already seen, the period was also marked by the expansion of agriculture into the forest areas and into the Western Ghats giving rise to different chieftaincies and *swarupams* in regions away from the *nadus* of the Chera period.³¹⁷ These developments have aided the growth of an indigenous merchant class in the interiors by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as evident from the references to Christian and Muslim merchants operating from the interior regions.³¹⁸ This activation of the upland regions of Malabar due to the expansion of cultivation, majorly in pepper, and the intensification of Ghat-route trade, had created a terrain of commercial and political processes away from the reaches of the commercial and political establishments of the European companies.

The Ghat-route trade in pepper into the inland regions of Tamil Nadu that thrived despite the agreements entered into with the native princes on monopoly over the pepper supply was posing a severe problem for the Dutch trade in pepper. The princes and chiefs of the fragmented political units were making common cause with the merchants to earn maximum revenue out of the rising traffic in pepper trade. The merchants naturally went towards options that provided them higher price for their goods rather than abiding to the agreements the *rajās* made with the Dutch company which rated the pepper below the market prize. Ezechiel Rabby, a prominent merchant at Cochin, was informing the Dutch about this amount of ‘smuggling’ that was happening under the ‘illicit’ alliance of the Princes and the merchants. He suggested that the Dutch should once look at the toll-books of the princes to rightly understand the

³¹⁶ For more on the highlands and hilly ranges of Kerala in the South Indian trade network, See Pius Malekandathil, ‘High ranges and trade in pre-modern Kerala’, https://www.academia.edu/42274482/Highranges_and_Trade_in_Pre_Modern_Kerala_, accessed on 16/04/2021; ‘Trading Networks and Region Formation: The Making of South India, 1500-1750’ in *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean : Changing Imageries of Maritime India*, Primus books, New Delhi, 2013, pp.85-106

³¹⁷ Ganesh, ‘Ownership’, p.305.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.308.

amount of ‘smuggling’ that was happening across the land route.³¹⁹ The retiring commanders of the Dutch company had always made it a point to advise and warn their successors about this greatest challenge to their claims of monopoly that was putting the company in a desperate situation, wherein, despite the costly military establishments on the coast the company could not lay hands on the entire produce of pepper.³²⁰

With the increased competition between the European companies, and the presence of individual European traders, the merchants could also now take their pepper into the factories and warehouses of any of these competitors in pepper procurement. By the early years of the eighteenth century, the Dutch were growing increasingly weary of their European competitors, the English and the French, who were behaving in the ways of the market and attracting the supply of pepper and cardamom. Due to the heavy price the English and the French paid for the fine cardamom of North Malabar in the districts of Kolattiri, the Dutch had to completely give up their trade in the cardamom of Cannanore, gradually withdrawing from trade of North Malabar itself.³²¹ The English, on the other hand, was determined to check the Dutch monopoly over the pepper trade in Malabar for that would cause England to lose the trade in pepper in whole, bringing great damage to its treasury. Even though, the English East India Company was not backed by its respective government back home like the VOC, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was striving hard to break in through the Dutch claims of monopoly, which the English found being more vigorously asserted with the war fought with the Zamorin and the conditions of peace that were safeguarded.³²² The English factors at Cochin and Porcad were

³¹⁹ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.19.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.18; When Hendrik Zwadercroon was the Malabar commissary it was ordered that the pepper on the coast should be sold at a premium of 25 per cent, to attract more buyers and reduce the profit in ‘smuggling’. However, the premium was raised to 50 per cent in 1725 and 100 per cent in 1733. See Meons, ‘Memoirs’, p.71.

³²¹ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, p.157; Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, pp.143-44.

³²² Padmanabha Menon, *History of Kerala*, Vol.1, p.389.

driven out when the Dutch, with their military force first established themselves in these regions in the 1600s.³²³ From then on, the English had concentrated their trade of South Malabar in the regions of Travancore, though it was found highly unfavourable for trade due to the uncertain and highly volatile political conditions.³²⁴

Apart from pepper, the English held a lucrative trade at Anjengo, of piece goods produced at the Southern Travancore regions of Kottar and Iranyal.³²⁵ Kottar from the seventeenth century had been a significant textile-town on the Arabian Sea that produced mainly for the internal market trading via Colachel to the Madurai Coast.³²⁶ The trade in cotton cloth of Kottar and Iranyal was of interest for the Dutch too where the company bought the piece goods from the weavers through their agents.³²⁷ From the account of Gollennesse, it is however clear that though piece-goods occupied the second among the products of Dutch trade interest in Malabar, a clear policy of monopoly on its procurement was never intended nor materialized.³²⁸ This inland trade in piece goods of Kottar was significant in the subsequent commercial and political developments of the region for it was from the revenue generated out of the control over these Southern Travancore regions, that Martanda Varma, in the initial years of his rule, could safeguard and protect his royal claims and territories. It was the ascendance of Martanda Varma as the first prince of Travancore that, in fact, stimulated, the spectacular developments that transformed what was much in way for the Dutch, the English, and the ‘illicit’ alliance of the petty princes and the merchants of South Malabar in the subsequent years of the eighteenth century.

³²³ Ibid., p.385.

³²⁴ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, Vol.I, p.375.

³²⁵ Logan, p.350.

³²⁶ R.J Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century, Asia and the Pacific, 1700-1763*, Brill, Netherlands, 2009, p.1087.

³²⁷ Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, p.143.

³²⁸ Gollennesse, ‘Memoirs’, p.74.

At around the same time when Martanda Varma had ascended to the throne of Venad, the English were showing a keen interest in the textile industry of Kottar and investing considerably by liberally handing over large amount of money as advance to the weavers of the region and by entering into contracts with the *chetty* merchants.³²⁹ The English investment along with the unrest in Madurai due to the succession strife of 1731, attracted artisans and weavers to Travancore giving further impetus to the textile industry. A Dutch merchant, Daniel Overbeek, is noted to have reported merely four years after Martanda Varma's succession that the British by giving huge advance payment to the weavers of Kottar was snatching whatever they laid their hands on, and was pulling in weavers from Madurai damaging the Dutch trade in Tuticorin. The new impetus to the Kottar textile industry was of utmost advantage to Martanda Varma. The significant role of the Kottar textile industry and the networks around it in the development of the kingdom of Travancore is, however, largely overlooked.

For Martanda Varma, who had inherited a dismal state of affairs from his uncle, the networks around the commercial town of Kottar had been his only reliance to fall upon in the early years of his reign. We have already seen that it was by borrowing money from the Kottar merchants that Martanda Varma's minister Arumugam Pillay could pay off the Trichinopoly contingent of the Madurai Nayak that was stationed at Travancore during the period of his predecessor. Barendse in his work mentions a particular Kunjan Chettyar, a prominent *chetty* merchant of Kottar, who had over the years through marriage and partnerships created a network of trade in the region. Kunjan Chettyar improved his trade prospects by entering into agreements with English company and as well, with Martanda Varma, from whom permission was obtained for the building of a warehouse in Kottar that could accommodate painters and bleachers. Martanda

³²⁹ R.J Barendse, *Arabian Seas*, p.1088.

Varma, on the other hand, sustained his power against his early rivals, the *thampi* brothers and the Madurai Nayaks by taking loans from Kunjan Chettyar, and garnering revenue out of the thriving trade of Kottar.³³⁰

Recapturing the Kalkulam fort and the southern regions of Kottar and Nanjinad, from the *thampis* and establishing himself firmly in these regions, Martanda Varma ensured the support of the English, and entered into alliances of trade with the Dutch.³³¹ Control over the Kalkulam fort and Kottar, against the designs of the *thampis* might have brought the fertile lands of Nanjinad under Martanda Varma's effective sway. Soon after settling the affairs with Tirumala Nayak, Martanda Varma turned towards improving the irrigation system of Nanjinad, constructing the Poymanay and Punthenu anicuts. Along with the purpose of irrigation, ensuring a supply of agricultural produce twice annually, these anicuts also guaranteed a regular supply of drinking water to the inhabitants of Padmanabhapuram.³³² The interventions at Nanjinad were Martanda Varma's initial attempts at laying claim over the agriculture based economy of medieval Venad.

Some years later, in 1737, following the extermination of the *pillamars* and *madambimars* and after confiscating their lands and properties, a land settlement or *kandeluttu* was undertaken under the supervision of a single accountant Mallan Sankaran. The details of the land survey and tenure point towards efforts at centralization of the control over the land economy through establishment of a bureaucratic structure. The entire expanse of the land that was measured was divided *into devaswom, brahmaswom, pandaravaka, chever viruthi, kudumbaviruthi, kudijanmam, rekshapokam, chanthirachilav etc*, and the dues that could be realized by the ruler from these lands were fixed as

³³⁰ Ibid., pp.1088-1089.

³³¹ Martanda Varma entered into relation of *changatam* with the Dutch, by which two guards were sent to protect the Dutch factory at Tengapattanam for one *Venetian ducat* for a guard. See De Lannoy, *Kulashekharaperumals of Travancore*, p.56.

³³² Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.119; Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.I, p.336.

ayacut. A fixed system was drawn for meeting the expense of the affairs of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram to be remitted from the lands put under the category, *sripandaravaka*³³³. The physical extermination of the intermediary class, who held the actual controlling power over land as against the customary power holders, and the structural reorganisation of the land economy through the land survey and settlement, show initial trend towards systematic efforts at forming a new power structure in Southern Malabar. This new power structure that was showing itself up more clearly by the fourth decade of the eighteenth century was resolving the tension between customary authority and actual control of land, by imposing state ownership and control over the agricultural economy of medieval Travancore region.³³⁴

By the time the *kandeluttu* was conducted, Martanda Varma, through military aggressions had the pepper rich lands of Nedumangad and Kottarakkaray under his sway. We are not provided with ample evidence to draw a clear picture of the response of the indigenous pepper merchants to the changing power dynamics of the region in the early years of Martanda Varma's reign. However, from the records of the Dutch on the coast, it can be ascertained that by the 1730s the price of pepper was tremendously rising and the article was becoming more profitable and in greater demand among the 'smugglers'. The supply of pepper to the Dutch was facing a steady decline, and nothing could be procured from the regions now under Martanda Varma's sway, and it was concluded that "all political and mercantile measures were in vain that no diligence on our part could check the profit seeking merchant when he is able without danger to make more money elsewhere than the honourable company".³³⁵ In these early years of the formation of Travancore, the merchants still, seem to have been at freedom to 'smuggle' the pepper to markets that gave them the maximum profit. By

³³³ Showcase Records, Vol II, Record no. 94; Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.II, App., p.123

³³⁴ Ganesh, 'Ownership', p.318.

³³⁵ Gollennesse, 'Memoirs', p.72.

doing away with the landed intermediaries who extracted all the royal privileges including the collection of *chumkam* over the merchandise carried through land, Martanda Varma could reclaim the revenue from pepper transporting, further enhancing his treasury.

In short, from Martanda Varma's very early interventions in the political landscape of Southern Malabar region, a formation quite untraditional in Malabar could be clearly discerned. The strategic incorporation of the trade networks formed around the thriving textile industry of Kottar provided the *maharajah*, with ample financial reserves to initially ground him firmly against the other contenders for royal power and the other collateral branches of the royal family. The undeterred power of the landed intermediaries was resolved by a complete reorganization of the land based economy and effecting internal centralization through a process of bureaucratisation. The transformation that Martanda Varma had set in motion, in his relentless pursuit in protecting his royal claims, however demanded further strategic advancements and massive interventions into the economic organization of the coastal region. As we have already seen, for the medieval Malabar *rajas* who lived off their humble revenue and income, the building up of an expensive state structure was unimaginable and never sought. It is to these interventions of Martanda Varma into the commercial world of South Malabar and into the land based medieval economy of the region in the subsequent years of Martanda Varma's reign that the chapter would now turn to.

3.2 Towards Monopoly in Pepper Trade: The Commercial Expansion of Travancore

At around the same time when Martanda Varma was eliminating the power of the landed intermediaries of Venad and annexing into his dominion the pepper

rich lands of Travancore, merchants from around the coast were reporting a tremendous hike in the price of pepper. A Calicut merchant, Chattoo Chetty, in July 1728, was unwilling to comply with the contract of 500 candies he had entered with the English company at Rs.61. Instead, he reported a sudden hike in the demand for pepper at Calicut and it was impossible to supply anymore below Rs.62½ per candy.³³⁶ By September 1730, the factory at Tellicherry was willing to contract with Chattoo Chetty at Rs.65 a candy, and still doubted the chances of further procurement as the French were already paying Rs.67 to 68 even for purchases of small quantity. The English at Tellicherry held the ‘unmercantile way’ of the French responsible for the current hike in the pepper price.³³⁷

The new demand at Calicut kept the price of pepper at steady increase for around two decades to come. Chattoo Chetty, at the opening of 1733, was not ready to supply any more than the 1500 candies agreed upon with the company at 69 ½ for a candy and it was expected that the prize would again witness an increase and the commodity would go scarce. A broker from Calicut had offered supply of more than hundred candies at the rate of Rs.85 per candy. It was reported with alarm, “At Calicut, the price is greatly advanced...Your honours will please to observe a part of the pepper in the Present Invoice purchased at Calicut, is inserted at a very high price”.³³⁸ By 1736, English at Tellicherry had lost hope that their sending of large quantities of pepper to Calicut in order to curb the rising pepper price at that place was of little effect as ‘there is so constant a resort of buyers’.³³⁹ The export of pepper to Calicut by land was by the time posing a big challenge that the company’s procurement capacity was undergoing a steady decline. Even Chattoo Chetty, the company’s merchant and the Muslim merchants of the bazar were reluctant in fulfilling the

³³⁶ *Tellicherry Consultations 1727-28*, Vol.II, p.110.

³³⁷ *Tellicherry Consultations 1729-31*, Vol.I, p.63.

³³⁸ *Tellicherry Consultations 1732-33*, Vol.II, p.41.

³³⁹ *Tellicherry Consultations 1736-37*, Vol.V, p.25.

contracts entered into with the company.³⁴⁰ The French at Mahe were equally perplexed at the continuing rise of demand at Calicut that both English and French had considered submitting to the price demanded by the new market.

TABLE 1: Price of pepper through the years as noted by the Dutch Commander at Cochin, Caspurus de Jong³⁴¹

Port	Time	Quantity	Price (Rs.)
Calicut	1722-30	A Candy of 560 lb.	60-62
	1731-4		70-78
	1735-9		88-90
	1740-50		80-78
	1751-3		100-95
	1754-6		125-105

The effect of the trade boom at Calicut was being felt at the south, at Cochin and Travancore. The northern vessels coming down from Calicut to Cochin provided an exemplary commercial opportunity for the Dutch to reverse their fate in Malabar. However, at the closing of the 1730s, the Dutch system of compulsion was finding it more difficult to hold on under the pressure of the trade boom at Calicut, and a war was made unavoidable against the company's general policy of non-interference in local politics. Adriaan Maaten's 1735 memoir written for the guidance of his successor Stein van Gollenesse contains an account of the measures the Dutch company was undertaking to combat the pull of Calicut through its chain of watch-posts and fortifications. Maaten however, was well aware of the impracticality of policing all the little land route

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p.55.

³⁴¹ Reproduced from Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.25.

to Calicut and that the Dutch efforts at preventing ‘smuggling’ were far from being effective.³⁴²

Gollennesse’s times were tougher that almost nothing of pepper came out of the regions around Cochin to the Dutch warehouses. Increasing the price from what was fixed under the contracts with the different princes also would not help, as by carrying the pepper by land the merchants could make even more profit. The chiefs and princes were either powerless to control this huge amount of ‘smuggling’ or were themselves complicit in this ‘illicit’ trade.³⁴³ The rise in price had made ‘smuggling’ only more rampant and dearer and the quantity available for the Dutch company scanty than ever.³⁴⁴ Codachery Caimal, on being compelled to comply with the pepper contract made with the company retorted, “If my neighbours supply their pepper to the Honourable Company I shall do the same, but I have become a laughing stock because I have sold this product to the company for 13 ducats while the other chiefs have received 24 ducats; this I cannot any longer consent to”.³⁴⁵ Against these state of affairs Gollennesse had only one resolution which was to conquer and bring under the company’s sway the pepper rich lands of Peritally and Berkeneur, for this only could provide the company with a regular supply of pepper and resolve the weaknesses of the company’s coastal fortification that in no way could check the transport of pepper via land to Calicut and across the mountains.³⁴⁶

The Dutch had already lost a war with Travancore and Martanda Varma had re-established himself in the Southern Travancore regions that the Dutch laid siege to in the late war. Nedumangad, and Kottarakaray, as already seen, too could be re-conquered from the joint force of the Dutch and Desinganad. The *nayars* and

³⁴² Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.28.

³⁴³ . Gollennesse on giving an account of various principalities illustrates that despite the agreements entered into with the princes, the pepper is carried elsewhere See Gollennesse, ‘Memoirs’, pp.58-63.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.72.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.61.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72.

madambimars of the Elayadathu Swarupam had sided with Martanda Varma and the Dutch had reflected, ‘if this little nation had only offered the slightest resistance, the Raja of Travancore would never have advanced so far’.³⁴⁷ Ashin Das Gupta’s *Malabar in Asian Trade*, understands this ‘advancement’ of the *raja* of Travancore as an upshot of the turns in the northern trade. If not for the new prospects of exorbitant revenue generation through trade in pepper and the royal interventions for channelling this to the treasury, it would have been impossible for Martanda Varma to create a bureaucratic state built upon military power and technology.³⁴⁸ It was by gradually establishing a strict monopoly over the trade in pepper and by sealing the fate of the Dutch and their dreams about a revived monopoly that Martanda Varma had fattened his treasury and initiated transformations in the traditional order of polity and economy in the coast of Malabar.

The English at Anjengo was closely recording the proceedings of Martanda Varma and his officials. On the August of 1744, the chief at Anjengo made it clear to Crisna Annavy, the king’s man, that the English company’s trade is ruined after the king took the pepper trade in to his own hands last year, under the pretence of measuring the produce of his lands.³⁴⁹ It was also made known that the English company desired to carry on their trade as it had been ‘customary time out of mind’, that they are allowed to enter into contracts with any merchant they pleased and expressed their expectation that the king would protect and assist the company’s merchants in procuring their annual share of pepper.³⁵⁰ A new contract of pepper was soon formulated, where in, the company was granted all the pepper produced within a fixed limit of territory of the Travancore kingdom. The pepper could be weighed at the bankshalls of

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p.55.

³⁴⁸ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.21.

³⁴⁹ *Anjengo Consultations, 1744-47*, Vol.I, p.6.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

Vizhinjom, Anjengo and Eddova, at the presence of the king's officers.³⁵¹ It, however, soon became clear for the English that despite their expectations of purchasing double the quantity as usual, the company had not procured even half of it. The English were complaining about the carrying of their share of pepper to Pondy, under the direction of the king himself.³⁵²

The taking over of the pepper trade by the king was done only gradually. The English in the years between 1744 and 1746 strived hard to make sure that the pepper produced in the limits allotted to them reached their warehouses and their merchants were left at freedom and unmolested. In a meeting with Crishna Annavy on the September of 1744, the English chief insisted that no particular merchant could be insisted on them like the Chitty, who is described as 'a creature of the Annavy' that the Annavy was strenuously recommending.³⁵³ Though reluctantly, the chief could gather some assurances about the merchants being allowed to come and contract with the company, orders on which was finally sent to all the merchants only by mid of next month.³⁵⁴ The merchants, too, enjoyed some amount of freedom to bargain their own terms and conditions to enter into a contract. The Anjengo factory's efforts at persuading the Chattanore merchants to a favourable trade contract in the November of the same year failed for the merchants insisted on the Eddova measure being lowered or the price increased at Rs.2 for a candy. The merchants would also not heed to the threatening of the company that, they would be reported to the king who would force them into a contract at terms worse than offered by the company. However, against the expectations of the company Annavy responded that if the Chattanore merchants did not comply to the orders of the minster that

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p.9.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21.

he would look and send for other merchants to enter into contract with the company.³⁵⁵

It is evident from the *Anjengo Consultations* that the company in the years between 1744 and 1747 were contracting with the local merchants, even though the king and his ministers had assumed some control over the terms and parties of the contracts. The company in these years had insisted hard on sticking to the ‘Ancient Method of Contracting for Pepper’, and had expressed their delusion over the perplexing state of affairs where the company was kept under constant intervention of the officers of the king, while the contract put them at freedom to procure any pepper from their ‘limits’ and from the merchants of their choice.³⁵⁶ The English were also greatly concerned of the state of the merchants who were being subjected to increased ‘oppression’ from the officers of the king, further depriving the chances for company’s easy procurement of pepper. At a consultation on August 1746 it was concluded that the deficiency in pepper was produced ‘entirely from the impositions of the government on the merchants’, who, to escape the excessive exaction of the government, rather than sending it to the company warehouses under the supervision of the kings’ officers, either hid it or carried it clandestinely over the hills to Pondy.³⁵⁷ At the closing of the year, the point was made clear to Annavy that on merchants being made parties of a contract, the disputes could be resolved by the government and if government itself was to become party of a contract, disputes could be solved only by the sword, a method of trade that the company would not submit to. When made known on tough terms that the company would have to send for higher orders if the usual manner of pepper trade on the coast was hindered, Crishna Annavy promised to send merchants to make the pepper contract.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p.23.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p.36.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p.152.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p.187.

Martanda Varma, at this time, after seizing Collachel from the Dutch, was making his advancements towards the northern principalities that had conspired against Martanda Varma's expansionist moves, along with the Dutch and the *raja* of Kayamkulam. Frequent military aggression from the east was also putting considerable financial pressure and a pressing need for military men and tools. As we have seen, the English at Anjengo was Martanda Varma's primary supplier of European war appliances and pepper was the chief point of bargain. At the early years of state intervention into the trade in pepper, merchants enjoyed some say and still remained merchants. The role of the officers of the king was mainly in controlling this trade by acting as powerful mediators in the contracts between the different European companies and the merchants. Intervention at this stage mainly meant stepping into the terrain of merchants and regulating through arbitration and application of power, the actors and terms of the trade contracts formulated within the domain of the king. The tie-up between the king and the merchants continued, both profiting from carrying pepper by land route to the north or across the Ghats.

At this stage of commercial intervention, the inland duty imposed upon the transport of produce remained the king's major source of revenue. In place of the toll booths of the various chiefs and princes, the system of *chowkeys* were introduced for levying fixed duty on all articles transported from one place to another.³⁵⁹ The English, in 1744, record an exorbitant rise in the inland duty collected on pepper from what used to be four *fanams* formerly to thirty six³⁶⁰ and in subsequent letters and consultations with the officers of kings, had made it a point to press for lowering the duty.³⁶¹ It was out of the financial resource raised thus, Martanda Varma, as Gollennesse wondered could keep up the war with the Dutch company, the superior military power of South Malabar, for four

³⁵⁹ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.166.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.18; p.20; p.131.

years and soon march towards the other collateral branches and the northern principalities around Cochin.³⁶² In the pepper contracts the English company entered into with the merchants, advances were made to the merchants by reducing the fixed inland duty, which was at 30 *fanams* in the November of 1744.³⁶³ The coming year a merchant, Thoma or Omoomo, however insisted on being paid the advance money without deducting the king's inland duty, which was agreed by the company on certain terms and conditions.³⁶⁴ To ensure the regular collection of the tolls and a more effective control on the products exported and imported, Martanda Varma had even had a tax-collector stationed at the gate of the Anjengo fort.³⁶⁵

These initial interventions were, however, soon giving way to a full-scale monopoly. In the coming years, the merchants were gradually disappearing from the commercial world of the Travancore region. The English at Anjengo was pressing hard to have the merchants at their factory to make the year's pepper contract as usual. No merchants, however, arrived; and the chief, at the opening of the season in 1748 wrote to Crisna Annavy that he had not yet received a clear answer on if the king was now determined to be the Pepper Merchant himself or whether the merchants would be permitted to come and contract with the English company as usual.³⁶⁶ Practically, the English were deprived of pepper and debarred from their trade for whole two years and on enquiries the merchants stated that it was the *dalawa* who was to be approached regarding the affair and merchants were powerless unless an order was delivered to supply pepper to the company's warehouses.³⁶⁷

³⁶² Gollennesse, 'Memoirs', p.53.

³⁶³ *Anjengo Consultations, 1744-47*, Vol.1, p.24.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.87.

³⁶⁵ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.56.

³⁶⁶ *Anjengo Consultations, 1747-1749*, Vol.2-A, p.75.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.144.

After whole two years without merchants and pepper, Anjengo was informed in the August of 1749, that the king was willing to allow the company to have some pepper at a much advanced price,³⁶⁸ which was let known through the linguist Domnigo Rodriguez to be Rs.75 per candy.³⁶⁹ After series of consultations, it was resolved that an *ola* was immediately sent to the *dalawa* and *annavy* from Anjengo stating that the English were willing to strike a deal at Rs.72 ½ a candy,³⁷⁰ to which it was informed that the Dutch presently was paying Rs.85 for a candy and the price offered to the company was already ten rupees less.³⁷¹ Despite all remonstrations, the company had to comply with the terms offered by the king, that is, 2000 candies of Eddova pepper for price not exceeding Rs.75 a candy, along with the delivery of the annual present to the Attingal queen.³⁷² According to the records of the consultations at Anjengo of year 1750, the contract was never met and the king's officers were now arbitrarily demanding an 'extravagant price' of Rs.85 for a candy, which the company was not ready to agree. The chief made it clear to the *dalawa* and *annavy* that it would be better to declare in rather direct terms that the company would have no more pepper from the lands of the king of Travancore.³⁷³

The Dutch at Cochin were equally depressed of the declining supply in pepper. Meons' memoir later reported that during the governorship of Siersma, who succeeded Van Gollenesse in 1743, the supply of pepper was almost nothing.³⁷⁴ The siege of Collachel by the Travancore army had proved the Dutch experiment at military intervention to ensure monopoly supply of pepper, a failure. With the expansion of Travancore, routing out the other collateral branches of the royal family, into the northern principalities around Cochin, the

³⁶⁸ *Anjengo Consultations, 1749-50, Vol.2-B, p.7.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p.32.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.18.

³⁷⁴ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.105.

Dutch gradually lost even the last semblance of power that they were striving to maintain in South Malabar. The pull of Calicut at the north and the devouring of the pepper rich lands by an expanding Travancore in the south put the Dutch in an unprecedented situation. Considerations on the ‘new system’ led them to an agreement with Travancore through which ‘the old system was discarded and the chief rule of Malabar administration became, as it still is, *keep friends with Travancore*’.³⁷⁵ In the 1753 treaty concluded at Mavelikkaray, Martanda Varma offered the Dutch an annual supply of 5000 candies of pepper in two parts: 3000 candies from current Travancore domains at Rs.65 per candy and 2000 candies from future acquisitions at Rs.55 per candy. In return, Dutch military aid and neutrality in the affairs of Travancore with other princes of Malabar was sought.

The treaty of Mavelikkaray was a political bargain that rightly exploited the newly acquired commercial and economic power of the king that the formation of Travancore had expounded. It is clear from the fact that the Dutch at this stage had entered into an agreement that was to adversely affect ‘the prestige of the company’,³⁷⁶ that a stipulated supply from the king of Travancore was the only option left to continue the trade in pepper on the coast of Malabar. The officers of Martanda Varma, on many occasions in their consultations with the Anjengo factory in the 1740s had mentioned the high price the Dutch were willing to pay for procuring pepper from Travancore.³⁷⁷ For Martanda Varma, the treaty not merely ensured Dutch neutrality in Travancore’s military aggressions over its neighbours, but, as well, offered an official declaration of the shift in the balance of power on Southern coast of Malabar. Offering pepper at a rate that was about half of the market price without any consultations with the merchants also made the terms of the new commercial system more clear;

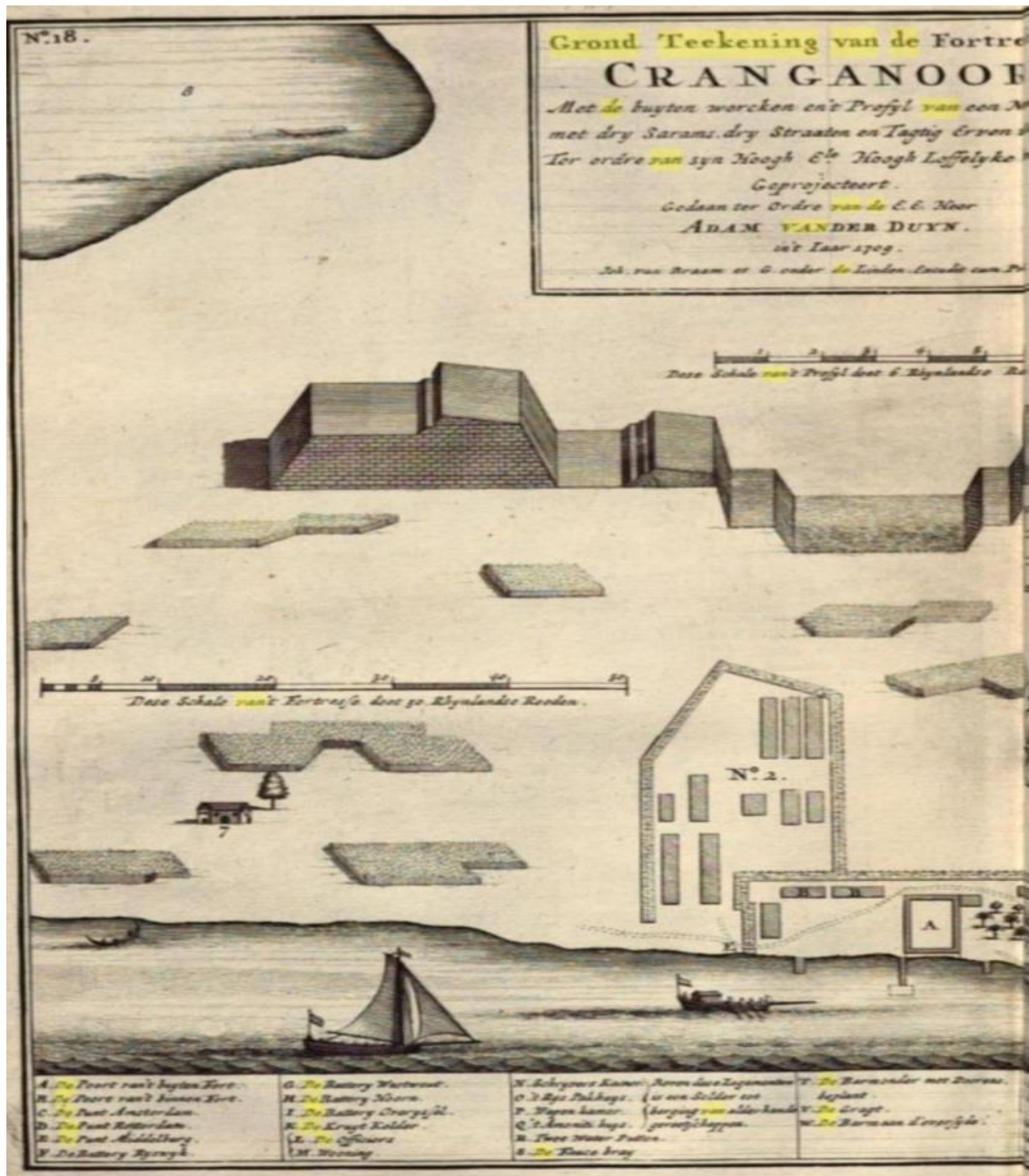
³⁷⁵ Ibid., p.106.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.106.

³⁷⁷ *Anjengo Consultations, 1747-1748*, Vol.2-A, p.135-136; *Anjengo Consultations, 1749-1750*, Vol.2-B, p.10; p.23; p.32.

that it was the king and his officers, rather than the merchants, who would now procure and supply pepper in the territories of Travancore.

Map 4: Floor plan of Cranganore fort by Francois Valentyn, 1726³⁷⁸.



³⁷⁸ Old map of Kodungallur fort (Cranganore fort) by Francois Valentyn published in his *In Ooud en nieuw Oost-Indien*, 1724-1726.

By the end of his reign in 1758, Martanda Varma had had his commercial expansion not only engrossing all of the northern principalities now under his sway, but also a portion of the territories of the Cochin *raja*, as well. The treaty entered with Cochin in the face of Zamorin's attack over Cochin principalities in 1757, was repeated in the Travancore-Cochin treaty ratified in 1761 by Rama Varma, the successor of Martanda Varma. The treaty not only ceded to Travancore a large chunk of Cochin's tributary lands, it, as well, claimed entire produce of pepper produced in the lands of the Cochin *raja*, except a meagre 500 candies to be kept for the raja's subsistence. The Dutch governor Meon²s in 1781 grieved over the fate of Cochin who 'is our oldest ally and sufficiently rooted into us'.³⁷⁹ At the time when Meons was writing the Dutch had little business with Cochin as nothing of pepper was to come out of it.³⁸⁰ Even though, Cochin was never territorially annexed wholly to the kingdom of Travancore, the expansive thrust of Travancore's commercial interventions had not spared this kingdom. The pepper grown in the territories of Cochin *raja* could now reach the Dutch only through the Travancore *raja* under the conditions of the treaty stipulated at Mavelikkaray. In effect, in course of around five decades the king of Travancore had become the sole master of all the pepper produced in the entire expanse of land in the southern coast of Malabar.

3.2.1 State and the Contours of Monopoly in Travancore

The transformations in the commercial world of South Malabar that the formation of Travancore had elaborated along with its territorial expansion were not a simple process. In 1807, Buchanan, retrieving some information from a 1757 manuscript in his possession concerning Travancore, had summed up the lessons on monopoly that Travancore offered to the English company's

³⁷⁹ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.109.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.121.

commercial policies in the newly acquired territories in Malabar. Buchanan wrote,

As the pepper trade of Travancore has always been more flourishing than any other, we may fairly infer that this is the way in which a tax may be levied from it with the greatest advantage to the extent of cultivation. The whole pepper raised in the dominions of Travancore amounted to 11,752 candies. For this the raja gave to the cultivators' 50 rupees a candy, amounting to 3, 52, 560 rupees. The amount of the sales, even including 2000 candies that were given to the English company at the low price of 82 rupees, came to 13,12, 260 or on an average 111 ½ rupees a candy. The raja did not therefore allow the cultivators 27 per cent of the produce; and yet we know the cultivation was carried on with the greatest spirit. But were the company to monopolize the pepper and allow the farmers 50 per cent of the value or 60 rupees a candy, I am persuaded that their profit would greatly exceed the amount of any revenue which they can derive from the present plan.³⁸¹

From the records of the European companies discussed in the previous section, it can be concluded that for the period prior to English colonial establishment, the example of Travancore remained the most fruitful attempt at establishing monopoly of pepper procurement on the coast of Malabar. In a span of five decades, the Travancore kings had materialized what the Portuguese and later the Dutch had strived to through their superior military and commercial strength at the sea. In this initial phase of Travancore's commercial intervention the accomplishment of this unique success rested on two fundamental formulations: the abolition of free trade and the turning of merchants into the employers of the state, and a system of control and compulsion imposed upon agricultural economy that ensured centralized procurement of agricultural produce at price fixed by the state. Monopoly control of pepper thus entailed an administrative programme that eliminated the intermediaries between land and sea, exercising control over both agricultural production and the trade in its produce.

³⁸¹ Francis Buchanan, *A Journey*, Vol.II, p.437.

Reading Gollennesse's and Meons' memoirs alongside each other, one cannot escape being struck by a fundamental transformation that had happened between the 1740s and 1780s: the whole scale disappearance of merchants as a group from the commercial engagements on the Southern Malabar Coast. The world from which Gollennesee was writing was abounding with profit seeking merchants trading pepper and other goods, and princes etching out considerable revenue out of it. Neither the Malabar princes nor the Dutch could stop the merchants from moving to the most profitable market. It was the ways and terms of the market that determined the amount of pepper that the Dutch could procure every season. In 1780s when Meons was writing, the desperate state of Dutch' pepper procurement continued. Then too, the officials complained of the pepper transported along the land escaping the passes and coastal watch posts of the Dutch. But here, it was no more the merchant; rather it was the king himself who was 'smuggling' in pepper. Meons recorded that, despite all remonstrance, Travancore had never fully complied with the agreement of 5000 candies of pepper. The officers of the king was carrying pepper to the Coromandel and supplying to the English at Anjengo at a much advanced price. On seeking explanations, the merchant king either defied the question or complained about the low level of pepper production of his conquered territories.³⁸² In the memoirs of Meons, merchants never once appeared as a group that the company had to anymore deal with on the coast. Rather it was the king, the new pepper merchant that was the only centre of all the commercial dealings of the company on the southern coast of Malabar.

The role of the merchants was taken over by the commercial department of the new state that was set up by Rama Iyen Dalawa under the direction of Martanda Varma. The commercial department instituted a centralized system of pepper procurement by establishing *pandikasalas* or storehouses at various locations

³⁸² Meons, 'Memoirs', p.113.

like Padmanabhapuram, Trivandrum, Quilon, Mavelikkaray and Arakkuzha in Muvattupuzha that were kept under an officer called the *vijaripukaran* or *thorakaran*, and guarded by military men. In these *pandikasalas* or *thoras* were stored the monopolised products like pepper, areca, cassia and cardamom, that were purchased and sold by the commercial departments at rate fixed by the king.³⁸³ The orders regarding the appointments to these offices of the commercial department were generated through royal *neettus* that are transferred swiftly by the assigned officials. A *neettu* of 1769 appoints Kunjathissa Pillai as the Vijaripukaran of Tobacco storehouse of Kottayam and communicates certain arrangements regarding the payment due to the merchants bringing the tobacco to the storehouse of the government. It is interesting here that the payment of the tobacco merchants was fixed in pepper and orders were despatched to Shiva Mooppan to send 100 candies of pepper from the pepper granaries in this regard.³⁸⁴ The record shows how the commercial department networked the state monopoly in different products into a centralized administrative arrangement. The payments of the officers appointed through the royal *neettus* were done in centrally fixed monthly salaries, which in the 1800, for the accountant of Mavelikkaray pepper granary had amounted to 254 *kaliyan panam*.³⁸⁵

Mavelikkaray for its strategic location that facilitated commercial activities, majorly the procurement and storing of pepper produced in the neighbouring regions was selected to be the centre of the new commercial department. The place was made the headquarters of the *dalawa* and construction programs including building of spacious and large store houses were undertaken in the

³⁸³ See Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.165; Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, p.359.

³⁸⁴ Showcase Records, Vol.2, Record No.145

³⁸⁵ Neettu Records, Vol.3, C.2, 974.3.6, p.191, Collected from Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

region.³⁸⁶ In 1758, a fort wall measuring 1357 dhanoos was constructed from Kollakadavu at Mavelikkaray, instructions regarding which was sent from Thiruvananthapuram to Mavelikkaray through a royal *neettu*, as an illness was preventing the king from personally attending and supervising the construction process.³⁸⁷ The instructions and rules set by the commercial department regarding the central procurement and distribution of monopolised products were brought to effect through special royal proclamations. A *neettu* of 1758 provided detailed instructions on the pepper transaction procedures to be followed and to be executed by the concerned officers. To measure the pepper for the current year, it was instructed to carry the pepper of the eastern regions to the Mavelikkaray *pandikasala* for sale and of Porcad to the two *pandikasalas* at Porcad. Similar instructions were given for the pepper produced at Kottarakaray, Karungapalli, and Kayamkulam. Interestingly, the order also contained details of the measures to be adopted to evade the pepper supply to the English company. It was instructed to put none of the pepper at Pethiri as it would have to be supplied to the company people, more information on which was sent by person through the *marakkar*.³⁸⁸ This proves the apprehension of the Dutch and the English that the commercial department of Travancore would supply pepper to them only when the king of Travancore considered it politically expedient and only to an extent that suited his interests.³⁸⁹

The successful implementation of the innovations and reforms introduced by the commercial department demanded the submission and compliance of the subjects of the vast expanse of territory that was now under the jurisdiction of the king of Travancore. In 1774, the Dutch envoys at Travancore were told that king of Travancore now possessed wide territories and it was not always

³⁸⁶ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.168.

³⁸⁷ Showcase Records, Vol. 2, Record no. 158.

³⁸⁸ Showcase Records, Vol.3, Record no.193.

³⁸⁹ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.59.

possible to know and control what was happening everywhere.³⁹⁰ Despite this fact, one can be certain that from the fourth decade of the eighteenth century until the consolidation of the British colonial power, Travancore kings had pursued a rigorous and consistent economic policy that was to transform the economic and commercial organisations and relations of the South Malabar region. This was made possible by the imposition of a punitive system that severely punished those who defied the rules and regulations set by the commercial department and tried to disregard the monopoly of the Travancore state over the different produce of its territories. The Dutch in 1750 reported that noses and ears of twelve people of Thekkenkur were cut off for trying to ‘smuggle’ in pepper.³⁹¹ Similar instances are found in the Mathilakam records where instructions regarding the punishments for those defying the rules of the commercial department were given. Chanjamuttiveetil Pathamanabhan Ayyappan, a resident of Vanjiyoor Adhikaram was fined for hiding the pepper grown in his lawn from the merchants of the state in the year 1769.³⁹² Similarly, the following year a Muslim merchant was fined for not putting the pepper bought from the farmers into the state storehouse.³⁹³

The commercial department and its system of centralized procurement, as well, worked hand in hand with the advancing military might of the Travancore kingdom. Not only was pepper made the chief point of bargain with the European companies for acquiring war materials, the expansion of the various establishments and the centralized commercial system was made possible by employing the military system, wherein garrisons were placed in close proximity to *pandikasalas* and military stationed at strategic locations of pepper procurement and supply.³⁹⁴ The records as well show that apart from the

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p.55.

³⁹¹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p.155.

³⁹² Mathilakam Records, C. 2031, O. 22, collected from Kerala State Archives.

³⁹³ Mathilakam Records, C. 2024, O.5, collected from Kerala State Archives.

³⁹⁴ Ganesh, ‘Process’, p.28.

officers of the commercial department *nayars* were deployed on large scale for collecting pepper from the production centres at the hinterlands. A *neettu* of 1771 that provides instructions regarding the methods to be adopted to procure the monopoly products directs the head accountant, Veera Chuvaran Raman, to collect twenty five *kunjukuttukar* for the purpose of assisting the officers collecting the tobacco arrears and cardamom, the payment for whom was ordered to be arranged from the tobacco revenue at fifteen *kalyan* a month.³⁹⁵ In an instance of tension between the king's officials and the English over the question of 'smuggling' Ramana Annavy was seen as assuring the English that he had set *nayars* at the houses of the Chattanore merchants to make sure the pepper to be delivered to the company was not carried across the mountain and was brought to the factory.³⁹⁶

These instances while pointing towards the punitive and policing power of newly formed kingdom, as well, exposed that those groups losing out of the new system had attempted to overcome and resist the encroachments of institutions of the new state in to the different domains of the socio-economic organisation of medieval Malabar. The *Anjengo Consultations* contain several instances wherein the merchants of South Malabar were striving hard to maintain their seminal position in the networks of trade in pepper. In the initial phase of Travancore's rigorous pursuit towards pepper monopoly, the *Consultations* speak about the merchants carrying on their own little arrangements with the officers of the commercial department conducting clandestine trade with the coast of Coromandel. In 1745, English Company had complained to the king of the *dalawa* who was acting against his orders by letting the merchants to carry the pepper bought from the 'limits' of the company to Tovala and Pondy. The company held it against the *dalawa* that the company's Chattanore and Paru merchants who were given advances for

³⁹⁵ Neettu Records, Vol.76, C.1, P.279-280

³⁹⁶ *Anjengo Consultations, 1744-47*, Vol.1, p.72.

purchasing pepper at the Velinellur fest held in the limit of the company, were hindered from buying pepper at the fest.³⁹⁷ Instead, the entire amount was all carried to Pondy by Nelly Nadin Chetty, who declared that he was paying a tax ‘for the liberty for sending the pepper to Pondy’,³⁹⁸ which the company inferred to be a case of bribing the officials for ‘smuggling’ in pepper.

Ramana Annavy, an officer dealing with the commercial affairs had later informed the linguist Domingo Rodriguez that Crishna Annavy was also complicit, along with the *dalawa*, in this network of smuggling making the merchants of the company pretend that they had not got any pepper.³⁹⁹ Objections about the ‘smuggling network’ of the king’s officers and the merchants were raised several times in the subsequent years, and allegations were made against Ramana Annavi as well.⁴⁰⁰ Against an *ola* of the king, despatched on march of 1746 that regretted the deficiency in pepper supply due to want of rain, it was noted, “we have had great rains this last year and a very good crop of pepper produced, if the Government’s officers did not carry it off clandestinely”.⁴⁰¹ Cunja Naina, a pepper merchant in the south of Travancore, had had for some time most of the merchants of the south under him, and put a fight against the commercial expansion of Travancore, by exporting pepper to the Coromandel and entering into contract independent of the king’s officers.⁴⁰²

The commercial department but was tightening its grip against all such recalcitrant efforts of the merchants. In 1745, Crishna Annavy had had a Muslim merchant who supplied pepper to the company in Cunja Naina’s account imprisoned, which according to the company had deterred all the merchants from bringing into the company warehouses the new crop of pepper.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p.58.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p.67.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p.72.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p.124; p.126.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p.127.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p.35, p.87, p.105.

The ‘illicit’ affair between the king’s officers and merchants also seems to have died off with the gradual expulsion of the merchants from all domains. In a consultation of the February of 1749, the English recorded an agreement entered in utmost secrecy with some private merchants who offered to deliver some pepper to the company at the same rate contracted with the king. The delivery of the pepper was agreed to be done in the darkness of night to escape the officers of the commercial department and the warehouse keeper was ordered to make the reception of the pepper in utmost private manner, “to prevent any accident happening to the merchants or their families by its getting to knowledge of his majesty who seems determined to punish any of his subjects detected therein with the utmost rigour”.⁴⁰³

In a *tirattu* of 1748 produced regarding the sale and accounts of pepper, merchants figure out as the royal agents appointed for purchasing pepper from the producers in the interiors.⁴⁰⁴ These royal purchasers who tried to dispose the pepper collected in any means rather than submitting to the *pandikasalas* were subjected to serious punitive measures. It was now the state, through its bureaucratic structure that appointed the purchaser for collecting the monopolised products from different production centres.⁴⁰⁵ Many of these ‘employees’ of the commercial department were erstwhile merchants of which we have at least two significant names; that of Poku Mussa and Govinda Poy.⁴⁰⁶ Poku Mussa who held important post under Rama Varma was executed in 1758

⁴⁰³ *Anjengo Consultations, 1749-50*, Vol. 2-B, p.57.

⁴⁰⁴ Showcase Records, Vol.2, Record No. 105.

⁴⁰⁵ Neettu Records, Vol.76, C. 1, p.265; This *Neettu* gives instructions regarding the appointment of merchant for collecting cardamom from mountains of Thodupuzha Mandapathumvathukkal. It was ordered to remove Madapally Kammathu from the assignment and in place appoint some other merchants under the *karyakkarar* of Thodupuzha.

⁴⁰⁶ A *neettu* record of 1771 names the merchants of different regions that the commercial department had engagements with as, Kuttiyali Kunjun Kammathu of Quilon, Piriyaithu Marikkayar Kunju Kammathu of Karunagappally, Vaappu Kunju and Thangal Veettil Kunju Kathar, Kunji Pokkar and brothers of Kayamkulam, Rama Kartinnan Narayanan of Arippaatt, Kongini Vitappan of Purakkad, Mundayveetil Veeratharakan of Kothamangalam, Kottayathu Chankaran of Kottayam, Kunju Tharakan Eerayi of Kattoor Petta, Muthu Vairavan Chetty of Ochira etc. which shows that it was the merchant communities of the earlier period who were to get into the offices of the commercial department. See, Neettu Records, Vol. 76, C.1, p.281.

after continuous complaints from the Dutch, for mishandling the pepper accounts. Govinda Poy who succeeded Mussa had been an important merchant of the little kingdom of Porcad.⁴⁰⁷ For the commercial department the networks and skills of the groups and communities engaged in trade in the older structure were integral for its successful functioning

In effect, by the mid-decades of eighteenth century, the commercial department and the institutions set by Rama Iyen Dalawa had laid the foundation for the integration of the commercial world of South Malabar into the bureaucratic structure of the newly forming state. The system introduced by Martanda Varma seems to have functioned intact well into the nineteenth century. An 1819 record gives detailed information about the appointment of *Vijarippukar* and *Thorakkar* for the supervision of Tobacco storehouses at Quilon and for supervising the *thuram chumkam* from Chirayinkeezh to Eerattu petta.⁴⁰⁸ Travancore was in fact the earliest South Indian case of successful state monopoly of merchandise established through a centralized commercial system. By the later years of eighteenth century, many of the South Indian kingdoms were to follow Travancore's example, the most ambitious being the commercial reforms of Tipu Sultan in Mysore.⁴⁰⁹ Of the Malabar kingdoms, Cochin was the only principality to adopt the centralized bureaucratic system introduced in Travancore. The efforts of Paliyath Achan, minister of a Kochi Raja, during the middle of eighteenth century in suppressing the nobility and the landed intermediaries were followed at a more rigorous level by Rama Varma 'Shaktan Tampuran' through land settlements and imposition of a land tax.⁴¹⁰ The consolidation of an early modern state in Cochin however was not a fruitful endeavour as it happened in Travancore. The pressure of the incursions of

⁴⁰⁷ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.110.

⁴⁰⁸ Showcase Records, Vol.3, Record No.166.

⁴⁰⁹ Prasannan parthasarathy, *The Transition to a Colonial Economy: Weavers, Merchants and Kings in South India, 1720-1800*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2001.

⁴¹⁰ K.N Ganesh, 'Ownership', p.317

Calicut and the later Mysorean occupation by the end of the century had thwarted the efforts at political consolidation. Moreover, by the treaty entered into with Travancore, Cochin was already giving away its pepper and was deprived of its major financial reserve to sustain a centralized bureaucratic administrative system as in Travancore.⁴¹¹

3.2.2 Land and Religion: Being the Kulashekhara Perumal

In Travancore, the successful encroachment of the centralised institutions of the newly formed kingdom into the relatively free domain of the merchants and the market of the coastal polities was made possible only through sustained interventions into the agricultural economy of the region. As we have already seen, the land based graded social organization of the medieval Travancore region was built on nodes of caste and religious power and it was the ritual sovereign power granted by the Brahmins that actuated kingship. As discussed in the previous chapters, the new formations and possibilities in the agricultural and commercial realm of South Malabar region of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were thwarting and challenging the privileges and power of the royal household and were putting the temple authorities in loggerheads with the royal family. Moreover, the predecessors of Martanda Varma, with their shrinking revenue gathering options, couldn't full fill the necessary conditions for claiming the position of the *kulashekhara perumal* and the antagonism between the temple authorities and the royal family was putting affairs of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram in crisis that could ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the royal power.

⁴¹¹ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.48.

From the very year of his accession to power Martanda Varma, thus, was undertaking measures to resolve the royal family's strained relation with the prime temple of its titular deity. After exterminating the *thampi* brothers and fighting a war with the Desinganad-Cheravay alliance, Martanda Varma ordered the construction of an *ottakkal mandapam* for Sri Padmanabha Swamy Perumal.⁴¹² The stone for the construction of the *mandapam* was brought to the site of construction from the Ottakkal Tirumala by the *nattar* of ten *desams* that included those of Thiruvananthapuram and Nanjinad.⁴¹³ At this point, Martanda Varma had not yet consolidated his power in these regions and the *madambimars* and *pillamars* were still plotting against any royal assertion to power. According to Shungoony Menon, the reconstruction and renovation projects that Martanda Varma was undertaking at the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram from the very beginning of his reign was continuously checked by the temple authorities who feared that the normalisation of the relation between the royal house and the temple would undermine their newly acquired power and resources.⁴¹⁴ Soon, some renovation works and *kalasham* at the temple were considered of utmost urgency and Martanda Varma, midst of the war with Kayamkulam, presented himself at Trivandrum to personally overlook the stone works, wood works and bronze works at the various portions of the temple. After the completion of the renovation works a *kalasham* was conducted at the month of *painguni* and preparations had begun for the *auratt* procession to be held.⁴¹⁵

It was due to the significance of the Painguni Auratt procession for the consolidation of Martanda Varma's royal power that the *pillamars* and *madambimars* had planned a regicide on the sacred occasion. The plan that was shattered by the timely military intervention of Martanda Varma gave the

⁴¹² Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., pp.118-119.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁴¹⁴ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.118.

⁴¹⁵ Mathilakam, C. XXX, in T.K Velupillai, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. II, App., pp.118-119.

maharaja a legitimate context to break the power of the intermediaries of the region, physically and socially exterminating them and confiscating their wealth and properties. The annihilation of the landed intermediaries as already seen was followed by the land settlement of 1737 that laid the basic contours of the new civil, political and religious order that was to form in Travancore. Soon after, royal *neettus* were despatched ordering to set apart the taxes collected from certain lands for different *pujas* at the temples in the domain of the Travancore king.⁴¹⁶ After eliminating the *madambimars* and *pillamars* of the Trippapur Swarupam, and raising a resilient military force, Martanda Varma could easily subdue the other royal contenders for power and the landed intermediaries of the newly acquired territories. The control over the land thus acquired was enforced by a centralised bureaucratic system that incorporated into its structure, the land based medieval social organisation based on nodes of caste power. In this process, the customary dues received by the Brahmins, temples and the royal relatives were converted into fixed royal allowances and the landed intermediaries were replaced by officials of the state receiving fixed salary.⁴¹⁷ The civil and military officials who rose to prominence through their service to the crown were called by the king dearly as *chempakaraman*, a title directly assigned by the king.

The expulsion of the powerful intermediary class who controlled land of all categories and the revenue generated from it, created a vacuum that was to be filled by the new administrative apparatus that Martanda Varma was gradually building up out of the revenue generated through his military, commercial and other economic interventions. By the time Gollennesse was writing in 1743, the bureaucratic structure through which Martanda Varma was to consolidate his power seems already functioning. Gollennesse wrote,

⁴¹⁶ Showcase Records, Vol.1, Record No.11; Record No. 48.

⁴¹⁷ Ganesh, 'Process', p.28.

..at present however matters are so well regulated and carried out with such regularity and fitness that the like is not seen with any chief in Malabar. All the great men of his kingdom called 'Anavies' are men of common Nair origin and their rank is not inherited by their descendants; accordingly they depend entirely upon the ruler, they owe everything to him and they obey him with a slavish submission; and as their welfare depends entirely on the favour of their master, the king is served with great promptitude and from them he never need fear conspiracies against his person or possession.⁴¹⁸

It was through the channel of these loyal officials of the state that the efforts toward land measurement and the calculation and imposition of land tax were undertaken in the year 1750-54 under Martanda Varma and in 1774 under Rama Varma. The first extensive land assessment of 1750-54 was carried out in Travancore under the supervision of the able minister, Ramayyan Dalawa. The survey framed regular accounts and rules for determining permanent tax on lands and gardens and installed the first *ayacuttu* account in Travancore.⁴¹⁹ The second extensive land survey of 1774 was conducted under the supervision of the Valia Saravdhikaryakkar, Mallan Chempaka Raman Pillai and the survey was followed by an expansion of agriculture and settlements.⁴²⁰

The new bureaucratic apparatus of Martanda Varma was built up on two fundamental premises. Initially, it incorporated into its structure strategic groups and service communities, experts in commercial enterprises, accountancy, diplomacy and military exercises. Secondly, it was ensured that the administrative system formed out of these groups owed its allegiance only to the royal power and is dependent on it for the acquisition of wealth and position.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ Gollennesse, 'Memoirs', p.54-55.

⁴¹⁹ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.172.

⁴²⁰ Showcase Records, Vol. 2, Record No. 97, provided some details on the second land survey of 1774 at the Alangad Mugham. For more on the agricultural expansion in Travancore, See Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.202-03; Ganesh, 'Process', pp. 9-30, Ganesh in the article says that expansion of agriculture in Travancore is indicated by two features; the first one being the different public works undertaken by the Travancore kings including construction of canals, development of irrigation facilities etc. and the second one being the expansion of land under cultivation through *kulikkanam* tenure.

⁴²¹ De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, p. 150.

An examination of the career of Rama Iyen Dalawa, the most important statesman in the early years of the formation of Travancore would be helpful here. Rama Iyen was a Tamil Brahmin⁴²² who was born in the year 1713, in the village of Yervadi at Tirunalveli. Settled in his sixth year in the southern part of Travancore, Rama Iyen was a *kuttipattar* under one of the *yogakkar* of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple.⁴²³ It is not clear when and how Rama Iyen came known to Martanda Varma. However, it is well documented that from the very beginning year of his reign, Rama Iyen had served Martanda Varma as his secretary, while Arumugam Pillay, who was the *dalawa* of Martanda Varma's predecessor continued in the post assisted by Thanu Pillay. With the deaths of Arumugam Pillay and Thanu Pillay, Rama Iyen was assigned to jointly serve under the posts of commander-in-chief and prime minister. It was Rama Iyen, all through his carrier, who had rigorously carried on Martanda Varma's military, economic, commercial and administrative ventures that was to transform the political and social organisation of the region of Travancore.⁴²⁴ Shungoonny Menon notes that from the time Rama Iyen had entered the service of Martanda Varma he had kept aloof from familial connections and remained an unmarried man. Menon states that upon asked about the significance of matrimonial state to a Hindu Brahmin Rama Iyen had observed that "service to his sovereign" was still more important and primary for him.⁴²⁵ The high proportion of foreign Brahmins in the administrative structure of the new state, of which Rama Iyen is a representative, shows Martanda Varma's efforts at

⁴²² The Tamil Brhamins have formed an important power group integrated into the process of state formation in Travancore, especially after 1730, working under the different departments of the new administrative and commercial system formed under Martanda Varma. See De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*. p. 150; The Tamil Brahmins, the most significant of the *paradesi* Brahmins who settled in Travancore functioned as traders, money lenders, cloth dealers, stock brokers, and grain merchants, and as able administrators, See A. Shaji, *Politicisation of Caste Relations in a Princely state: Communal politics in modern Travancore (1891-1947)*, Zorba books, 2017, p.20. In the late nineteenth century census report the *paradesi* Brahmlns accounts to 1.22 percent of the total population while the *namburi* Brahmins only, 0.48 percent, See, V. Nagam Aiya, *Report on the Census of Travancore 1891*, Vol.II, Addison and Co., Madras, 1894, p.637.

⁴²³ A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and its Makers*, D.C Books, 2001, p. 135.

⁴²⁴ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p. 179, Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.1, pp.363-364.

⁴²⁵ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.179.

incorporating in to the process of state formation skilful groups located outside the region's medieval order of customary authority. As against the high proportion of Tamil, Canarese and Telugu Brahmins in the administrative service, the *nambudiri* Brahmins kept themselves aloof from the affairs of the state and maintained an aversion towards government service of the newly forming Travancore state.⁴²⁶

By the *ayacutt* land settlements the autonomy of temples and the *nambudiri* Brahmins were considerably curtailed through the allocation of fixed royal allowances and enforcement of centralized revenue administration. This way the nodal points of medieval customary socio-political power were incorporated into the politico-legal apparatus of the new state.⁴²⁷ In this process, as we have already seen, the entire expanse of land came under the formal control of the king without the intercession of the intermediaries. However, the sustenance of the sovereignty and power of the king over the land and population acquired by military conquest, commercial and administrative reforms demanded a larger narrative drawn from within the regional political culture. For the kind of the military-fiscal state and the power of the sovereign presiding over it, forming in Travancore under Martanda Varma, were the first of its kind on the coast of Malabar, Travancore was devoid of a historical precedent to construct a legitimizing narrative of kingship akin to that of the Nayakas and the Mughal successor states. Unlike the other south Indian warrior states of the eighteenth century, Travancore was forming a unitary state out of an excessively fragmentary system rather than the vice versa.

If the myth of the legendary Cheraman Perumal who had divided his kingdom and left for a pilgrimage, had provided the post-Chera *swarupam* polities with a legitimating narrative that we find being extolled in the *Granthavaris* of the

⁴²⁶ For the position of non-malayali Brahmins in the Travancore state, see, A. Shaji, *Politicisation of Caste Relations*, pp. 59-62.

⁴²⁷ Ganesh, 'Ownership', p.19.

different *swarupams*, the sustenance of the new political order of unitary kingship that Travancore was building up in the southern part of the coast demanded a much larger narrative. Even though the temples and the Brahmins were integrated into the political-legal structure of the new state, the incorporation of these centres of moral and religious power into the process of state formation could only provide Martanda Varma with a standing in the Hindu system.⁴²⁸ Martanda Varma's tensed relationship with this religious power centre of the region could be absolved only by crafting a new idiom of sacred kingship by ritual enacting of kingly piety. The ideals of Hindu kingship offered by the South Indian kingdoms of the past and the present, and the local variation of *bhakti*, provided Martanda Varma with forms and symbols to construct the image of a pious Hindu King located within the Hindu sacred order.⁴²⁹

It was to this end that soon after the siege of Collachel, preparations had begun for the conduction of a grant *badradeepam* and *murajapam* ceremony at the temple of Sri Padmanabha Swamy. The *badradeepam* ceremony entails the lighting up of a holy lamp after seven days of continuous chanting of Vedic prayers by learned Brahmins during ritually specified period for five consecutive years. And the *murajapam*, that is 'chanting in turns' is performed in the sixth year for a continuous eight weeks at the end of which is lighted one thousand lamps. The grant ceremony that commenced with the *badradeepam* of 1744 and concluded with the *murajapam* in the 1750 was the first of it to be held at the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Other temple like those of Tiruvattar, though is recorded to have conducted *badradeepam* and *murajapam*, it was not held on a scale so grand like the one initiated by Martanda Varma at the temple of the royal family's titular deity. For its grandeur and scale the

⁴²⁸ Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship', p.190; De Lannoy, *Kulashekhara Perumals of Travancore*, pp.179-180.

⁴²⁹ Mary Beth Coffman Heston, 'Images from the Past, Vision of the Future: The Art of Martanda Varma', in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, eds. Catherine.B.Asher and Thomas Metcalfeds., American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi and Swadharma Swarajya Sangha, Madras, 1994, pp.199-210.

murajapam ceremony was akin to the annual *mahanavami* festival of the Vijayanagara Empire that too served the purpose of presenting the image of the pious Hindu king.

Brahmins from the whole of South India was invited to reside at the temple precincts for conducting the *badradeepam* and *murajapam* and for the chanting of the Vedic prayers. The *oottupura* system was mainly intended for this population of *paradesi* Brahmins who formed an important segment of the “specialist collaborating population” that Martanda Varma strived to incorporate into his state structure.⁴³⁰ More significantly, the *murajapam* of the Brahmins conducted for the welfare of the kingdom and for expiating the sins incurred in wars, provided the military-fiscal state of Travancore and the new form of kingship that it propounded a Vedic sanctity and recognition. The *tulapurushadanam* that was held in 1749 as part of the *shodasha mahadanam*, the sixteen gifts to be performed by a Hindu king to the temple, as well, was to resolve the strained relationship between the king and the Brahmins of the land. The ceremony involved weighing the king against gold and the distribution of the amount of gold to the temple and Brahmins.⁴³¹ Through this lavish expression of piety that was performed out of the wealth accrued by the various commercial and military interventions, Martanda Varma was claiming the position of the *kulashekharaperumal*. The performance of the *shodasha mahadanam* was completed only in the 1753 and the total expense amounted to around eight and a half lakhs of *fanam*.⁴³² The temple inscriptions at Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram and the Adikesava Kshethram of Tiruvattar

⁴³⁰ Susan Bayly, ‘Hindu Kingship’, p.191.

⁴³¹ For an account of the *tulapurushadanam* ceremony, see *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review and Oriental and Colonial Record*, 10 Vols., Oriental Institute, Asia, 1894, Vol.3, pp.164-167; Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.90-91, Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History*, p.170.

⁴³² Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History*, p.170.

provide reference to historical precedents to the performance of the *shodasha mahadanam* in the Travancore territory in the sixteenth century.⁴³³

The *hiranyagarbham* ceremony held in 1751 is the best documented and symbolic of the temple rituals initiated by Martanda Varma in this later period of his rule. The ritual involves the symbolic rebirth of the Travancore king from the womb of a cow at the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple in the presence of the prayers and hymns of the Brahmins from across the South India. The cow is represented in the form of a large golden vessel, that is half filled with *punchagavyam*, a holy water that contain ghee, milk and other substances from the cow.⁴³⁴ On the ceremony, Da San Bartolomeo writes in his *Voyages*,

Before Vira Martanda undertook this expedition, he celebrated, at Tiruivandaburam, a horrid festival, which I have described in my Systema Brahmanicum. He caused several of the Pagan temples to be burnt; and this crime, one of the most heinous according to the principles of the Indians, could no otherwise be atoned for than by a very peculiar kind of purification. He was obliged by the Brahmans to get a cow made of gold, under which he was forced to creep in order to be freed from his sins. Niebuhr and Anquetil du Perron are therefore in a great error when they assert that the object of this ceremony was to raise the king to the degree of nobility. Both these authors ought to have reflected, that this tale was invented by the conquered people, to whom the king behaved with great severity, merely for the purpose of ridiculing him.⁴³⁵

Shungoonny Menon, too, in his History discounts the “erroneous notion” that the performance of *hiranyagarbham* is for rising in caste and attaining the status of the twice-born. Instead Menon claims that both *hiranyagarbham* and the *tulapurushadanam* are *danams*, or charity, that the Travancore kings are bound

⁴³³ *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. I, 10, 1910-1913, pp. 175-78; Vol.II, 6, 1920, pp. 28-30.

⁴³⁴ For an account of *hiranyagarbham*, see *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol. 3, pp.168-171; Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, pp.90-91.

⁴³⁵ Fra Bartolomeo, *Voyages*, p.172.

to perform as coronation ceremonies with historical precedents in the Travancore royal family itself.⁴³⁶

The late nineteenth century account of Samuel Mateer, however, records about *hiranyagarbham* as a ritual initiated by the Travancore *rajahs* for rising in caste order and attaining ritual purity. According to Mateer, “the object of the “Hiranya Garbham” rite is to raise the rajah from the ranks of the Sudra caste, to which he properly belongs, to the position and dignity of a Brahmin, or as near this as it is possible for him to become”.⁴³⁷ In this sense, the ceremony is considered to be an adaptation of the Maratha ritual that symbolically enacts the rebirth of the *sudra* ruler into a twice-born.⁴³⁸ Taking into account the influence of the South Indian Brahmins in the court of Martanda Varma, the large scale ritual and religious adaptations from the South Indian Hindu Kingdoms of the past and the present, and Martanda Varma’s conscious efforts at presenting a new ideal of Hindu kingship in the political culture of the Malabar coast, it is highly probable that the ceremony was performed by Martanda Varma as a measure to raise himself above the other royal contenders for power and in par with Brahmins of the land. The symbolic birth from the womb of a cow, attached a sacrality to the body of the king that was new to the kingly ethos of the chiefs and *rajahs* of medieval Malabar. This way, Martanda Varma conflated the realm of the sacred and the political into the body of the king.

This conflation of the religious and the political was achieved to its fullest in Travancore by an unprecedented religious and political gesture called the *trippadidanam*. In the event held in the 1750, Martanda Varma dedicated his entire kingdom to Sree Padmanabha Swamy by laying down his sword on the newly built *ottakkal mandapam* on which rests the Swamy, the incarnation of

⁴³⁶ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.90.

⁴³⁷ Samuel Mateer, “*The Land of Charity*”: *A Descriptive Account of Travancore and Its People, with Especial Reference to Missionary Labour*, J.Snow and Company, United Kingdom, 1871, p.169.

⁴³⁸ Susan Bayly, ‘Hindu Kingship’, p.190.

Vishnu, in the reclining posture. The entire expanse of land acquired through conquests and prudence was now to become *sripandaravaga*, the property of God, and Martanda Varma and his successors were now to rule as *sri padmanabha dasa*, ‘the servant of Sri Padmanabha’. From then on, speaking ill about or acting against the king in Travancore was considered to be a heinous sin known as *swamy droham*, which meant doing harm to the Swamy. The memory of the largest dedication made to Vishnu was commemorated every year by the conduction of the *trippadidanam* festival wherein the Travancore *rajas* accompanied by his entire retinue, the soldiers, courtiers, priests and other state officials, marched towards the temple to celebrate Martanda Varma’s dedication of the kingdom to the deity. It is highly significant that in the later years in Travancore, kingship was never seriously challenged in spite of the squabbles and disputes that had developed within the bureaucracy and royal family.⁴³⁹

The *trippadidanam*, apart from its religious and symbolic significances was as well, an administrative effort that altered the structures of land organization of the medieval Travancore region. By transforming the entire kingdom to the chief deity of the new kingdom, the entire expanse of land was brought under a uniform system as the *devaswom* property of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram, and eliminated the distinction between the *cherikkal* and *devaswom* lands. Now a sacred domain, ruled by the Lord Padmanabha himself through the sacred body of the king, Travancore could construct a legitimate narrative against rebellions and insurgences. Through *trippadidanam*, Martanda Varma’s incursion into the land based medieval economy of the region was complete. The entire expanse of the land of the kingdom was now most effectively brought under the centralized administrative system of the new state. Moreover, the series of land assessments and the transformation of agriculture as a state

⁴³⁹ Ganesh, ‘Process’, p.30.

prerogative provided a more detailed account of the volume and extent of agricultural production majorly in pepper and other cash crops, enabling a more effective control over its centralised procurement into the state *pandikasalas*. The pepper producing hinterlands and the transport routes including the inland waterways were policed by military detachments for the successful enforcement of the centralised procurement of pepper. This process of centralized pepper procurement into the state *pandikasalas*, as well stagnated the regions of the Ghats that were economically activated by pepper cultivation and its integration into a south Indian network of trade.⁴⁴⁰ These economic activities of these hinterlands were incorporated into the commercial system of Travancore through its system of bureaucratizing into the new state, the older strategic groups and formations.

3.3. Towards the sea: Establishment of the new port city at Alleppey

On assuming the throne of the newly formed kingdom, Rama Varma had rigorously followed the commercial policies of his uncle. The commercial department had by then become the backbone of the state providing sufficient economic resource for the military and the administrative structure of the kingdom. It was majorly by taking over the thriving South Indian trade network across the Ghats, in pepper and other forest produce, between the regions of South Malabar and the coasts of Madurai and Coromandel that the Travancore

⁴⁴⁰ Pius Malekandathil traces the activation of the highlands and hilly ranges of Kerala from the sixteenth century by developing an economy and commercial world of its own, which by eighteenth century gets stagnated with the expansion of the Travancore state, the establishment of the Alleppey port and the English take over. See, Pius Malekandathil, 'Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000-1800 AD', in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol.50, No.2-3, Brill, 2007, pp.259-286.; Buchanan in his journey through the hilly countries between Travancore and Madurai talk of a man called malaya *pudi*, who rents to the hill people called *cader* the exclusive right for collecting drugs in the hills south of Ani-Malay, on account of the Travancore kings. Buchanan reports citing renters in other products as well at Ani-Malay, like the Tamarind renters who is given exclusive right in collecting honey, tamarind, wax and other forest produce. These renters held important position in the matters of the hilly tribes and made sure the produce of the hilly ranges travelled down to the ports and *pandikasalas* of Travancore. See, Buchanan, *A Journey*, p.534; p.537.

kings had profitably channelled the monopolised merchandise acquired from his territories. The *neettu* records contain various documents that substantiate the lucrative network of trade of the Travancore rajas with the eastern coasts.⁴⁴¹ The merchandise carried from the state *pandikasalas* to the east were transported by putting on the Pandy seals on the products. The pepper collected at the *pandikasalas* were despatched to the men of the *chetty* and *ravuthar* merchants of the eastern regions by putting on the Pandy seal.⁴⁴² In 1769, a merchant Gopalan Ayyakutta was fined for illegally putting on the Pandy seal on the pepper bought from Kottayam.⁴⁴³

In this endeavour of controlling the Ghat route trade, the economically activated domains and actors of this South Indian trade network were incorporated into the process of state formation in Travancore. The merchants appointed by the commercial department collected pepper and other produce from these pepper producing hinterlands and the groups and communities already engaged in the trade in the interiors were to take up the different posts of the state commercial department. With the establishment of the commercial department in Travancore, these communities of merchants were largely recruited into its different organs as the networks and skills of these groups were highly important for the successful implementation of the commercial expansion of the state into the till than independent domains.⁴⁴⁴ The Syrian Christians were in this sense a strategic group whose service was seminal in the formation of the new kind of state in Travancore.⁴⁴⁵ The Syrian Christians were already well established as a significant trading community on the Southern Malabar Coast, by amassing considerable amount of wealth out of the control over the spice

⁴⁴¹ Neettu Records, Vol. 76, C. 1, p.111; p.113.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Matilakam Records, C.2031, O.207.

⁴⁴⁴ Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship', p.188.

⁴⁴⁵ Susan Bayly's works look at integral role of the Syrian Christian Community of South Malabar in the eighteenth century political formations of the region and how they were incorporated into the formation process of the 'Hindu' states of the eighteenth century. See Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship'; *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*.

producing regions of central upland Kerala and the increasing traffic in pepper trade.⁴⁴⁶ A 1759 *neettu* document refers to an Itticheriya Tharakan of Chathannoor, who seems to be an employee of the commercial department conveying to the king the grievances reported by the merchants regarding their payments.⁴⁴⁷ The Parayil Tharakans of Shertalai were the most acclaimed of the Syrian Christians whose years of service in the commercial realm of Travancore had gained them great influence and power. Mathu Tharakan who had gained control over the trade in the salt and tobacco monopolies in Travancore by the end of the century, was one of the most influential and respected statesman of Travancore.⁴⁴⁸ He had occupied a position very close and intimate with the king himself and the *dalawa* of Rama Varma. In the early years of the nineteenth century, during the reign of Bala Rama Varma, who succeeded Rama Varma, Mathu Tharakan was dragged into the internecine succession strives for the post of the *dalawa* and met with a miserable end at the hands of Velu Thampi.⁴⁴⁹

The orientation towards eastern trade of the Travancore kings majorly stemmed from their incapacity to successfully cater to the northern demand that was still escalating at Calicut. The English and the Dutch had effectively kept the ports catering to the northern demand free from the intrusions of Travancore.⁴⁵⁰ Trade at the ports of Southern Malabar was however facing a decline. The coastal merchants who had to procure the pepper for export from the commercial department at the fixed high price also had to pay for the Dutch passes.⁴⁵¹ With the giving away of the pepper in the territories of Cochin *raja* to Travancore, the wealthy merchants of Cochin turned jobless and the port of Cochin was

⁴⁴⁶ Pius Malekandathil, 'Trading networks and Region Formation: The Making of South India, 1500-1750', in *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean : Changing Imageries of Maritime India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, pp.85-106.

⁴⁴⁷ Neettu Records, Vol.76, C.1, p.47.

⁴⁴⁸ Showcase Records, Vol. 3, Record No.197.

⁴⁴⁹ Nagam Aiyya, *Travancore State Manual*, p.419.

⁴⁵⁰ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.59.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.110.

striving for survival.⁴⁵² The Dutch had a plan for the revival of Cochin that could be implemented keeping Travancore on friendly terms. Taking into account that the Travancore kings' eastern trade mainly involved pepper that was exported to Coromandel and the Jaffnapatnam tobacco that was procured on the way back, Meons suggests of trying to get hold of the pepper transported to Coromandel by offering the king as much Jaffnapatnam tobacco as he used to receive through his eastern trade. For this the Dutch would have to procure all the tobacco from Jaffnapatnam except from the country's use. The pepper thus collected in return for tobacco could be made available for export at the port of Cochin thus attracting more trade into Cochin, and improving the chances of the Dutch survival in Malabar's trade in pepper. This plan, however, never seems to have been implemented nor put for consideration of the Travancore king.⁴⁵³

The Dutch were well aware that the commercial department of Travancore was coveting a free play at the ports on the Arabian coast and the king, too cunning, could easily understand that the Dutch plan would only lead to the game slipping away from his hands.⁴⁵⁴ Shungoonny Menon has recorded that Rama Varma's chief minister or *dalawa*, Dewan Keshawa Pillay, had undertaken in Travancore, a project for the improvement of its seaports for the purpose of increasing traffic. Accordingly, Keshawa Pillay had visited all the seaports of Cape of Comorin to the north and gave orders for the certain improvements at the port of Collachel and for the establishment of a new port in the neighbourhood of Vizhinjam. For the development of the new port, various construction programs including that of a warehouse, store house and a bungalow were arranged, and in course of some months the new port was attracting other private enterprises.⁴⁵⁵ The English however were resolved to

⁴⁵² Das Gupta illustrates this point by looking at the career of the chief merchant at Cochin, Ezhechiel Rahabi and his successors, See, Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, pp.103-123.

⁴⁵³ Meons, 'Memoirs', pp. 114-15.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Shungoonny Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.248.

protect their domains from the intrusions of the Travancore's commercial development programs. Stringent efforts were adopted to safeguard the interests of the English company at the port of Collachel and to prevent the English private traders from purchasing in the kingdom of Travancore. In 1764 itself it was decided to forcefully check the operations of English private traders at the ports of Travancore.⁴⁵⁶ Vizhinjam, as well, fell under the domain of the English in Travancore and the Dutch were strongly established at Quilon and Cranganore. The Dutch officer Jan Rossier, in the 1760s itself have warned the Malabar Council of Travancore's designs about the evacuation of the Dutch from Quilon, through which only could Travancore assume direct control over the trade at the Arabian Sea.⁴⁵⁷

In the 1780s, the consolidation of the Mysore rule in Calicut and the policies adopted by Tipu Sultan effected sweeping changes in the traditional economy of Northern Malabar. Tipu's centralization thrust endangered the free trade that the merchants of Calicut had enjoyed and the system of monopoly procurement of pepper enforced led to considerable shrinking in the cultivation of black pepper.⁴⁵⁸ In place of the multiple actors and competitors on the commercial world of Calicut, the centralized bureaucratic system of Tipu that functioned through a number of native agents controlled both the production in the interiors and trade at the coasts. The plight of the merchants of Calicut was recorded by Meons in 1781 from Cochin.⁴⁵⁹ Much later, in the early nineteenth century Buchanan recounts the declining prosperity of the merchants of Calicut thus,

About fifty years ago the Moplays of this place were very rich, and possessed vessels that sailed to Surat, Mocha, Madras and Bengal; but the oppression of Tippoo has reduced them to great poverty, and most of them are now under the necessity of acting

⁴⁵⁶ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.60.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.60-61

⁴⁵⁸ Buchanan, *A Journey*, Vol. II, p. 455.

⁴⁵⁹ Meons, 'Memoirs', p.161.

as agents of Mussa, a Musalman merchant Tellicherry. They have, however a few small boats, that go to Tellicherry and Calicut for supplies of European and Bengal goods.⁴⁶⁰

The port of Calicut gradually was witnessing the end of the decades of prosperity and traffic it had enjoyed. It was Travancore that was to make most out of the decline of trade at Calicut. In the face of the advancing Mysorean army, Rama Varma and his *dalawa* made significant commercial interventions aimed at regulating and dictating the trade at the ports on the coast of Malabar. It was to this effect that a new port was established at the sea at Alleppey, a little village located between Porcad and Cochin. Under the supervision of Dewan Kesava Pillay, the beach was cleared, and the village was turned into a centre of trade by inviting merchants to visit the port. Various construction projects including that of warehouses, bankshalls and shops were undertaken to facilitate trade for the visiting merchants. Alleppey was, however, never to become a centre of free trade like that of Calicut. The trade at Alleppey was strictly supervised and controlled by the commercial department through the *vijaripukar*, who was appointed for the purpose.⁴⁶¹ The details of the trade and accounts were maintained through a centralized system of record keeping at the Alleppey port office.⁴⁶²

The establishment of a new port at close proximity to Cochin was a direct trade offensive targeted against the Dutch. Cochin, which was already dissected from pepper-producing hinterland with the formation of Travancore, was now to lose the little traffic it was striving to maintain as the major outlet of southern Malabar. The demands of the northern trade, the coastal watch posts and the system of passes were earning some revenue for the Dutch. The merchants of Malabar also visited the Cochin port to sell to the foreign merchants, products

⁴⁶⁰ Buchanan, *A Journey*, Vol.II, p.420.

⁴⁶¹ Shungoony Menon, *History of Travancore*, p.248.

⁴⁶² The Alleppey port records kept at the Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, provide details of the trade and transactions of the medieval port of Alleppey. The palm leaf records, however, are not copied into paper and are thus inaccessible for researchers.

like copra, areca nut, coir etc.⁴⁶³ Until its final withdrawal from Cochin the Dutch had kept up all efforts to maintain its long established prerogative to tax all ships passing through Cochin, and Travancore was all the more resolved to break through the Dutch power in the sea and directly participate in the trade of the Arabian sea. However, gradually, in the changing hierarchy of the ports on the coast of Malabar, Alleppey was rise to dominance as a culmination of the interventions the process of the formation of Travancore had prompted in the commercial world and the land economy of the South Malabar region.

By the end of the century brisk trade was reported at the port of Alleppey. *Dhows* and ships from different ports on the Arabian Sea frequented the port for the exchange of commodities.⁴⁶⁴ The port was to become the focal point of the expanded commercial realm of Travancore, connecting it to the hinterlands and the *pandikasalas* through a network of roads and inland waterways. The other ports of Travancore like that of Vizhinjam, Collachel, Anjengo and Quilon were made into feeding ports to Alleppey.⁴⁶⁵ Trading groups and agents like that of Mathu Tharakan were to take up the trade in Alleppey, helping a more effective integration of the hinterlands and hilly ranges into the bureaucratic and commercial structure of the new state through trade in timber, cardamom, pepper and other hill and forest products.⁴⁶⁶ The establishment of Alleppey and its rise into the pivotal port on the Malabar Coast reflected the extension of the sweeping transformations wrought by the formation of Travancore in the coastal political structure and agricultural economy of the region into the structures of Indian Ocean trade itself.

⁴⁶³ Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p.62.

⁴⁶⁴ Neettu Records, Vol. 4, p.104; p.99.

⁴⁶⁵ Pius Malekandathil, 'Coastal Polity and the Changing Port-Hierarchy', p.89.

⁴⁶⁶ For the pivotal role of Mathu Tharakan in the trade at Alleppey, See Neettu Records, Vol.3, p.209; Showcase Records, Vol.3, Record No.197; Showcase Records, Vol.2, Record No.143.

Conclusion

This work is a study of the formation of the kingdom of Travancore, at the southern end of Malabar and on the shores of the Arabian Sea, from the state of being a number of fragmented political units into the structures of an early modern state. The study explores the formation as a multi-layered process from within the dynamic social, political and commercial world of South Malabar of the period. The prime argument of the study is that the structures of an ‘early modern’ state were formed in southern Malabar region, in the context of the breakdown of medieval social organization based on the system of graded rights around caste groups, by incorporating into the process of state formation the different service groups and discrete elements that characterized the medieval social order, and by imbibing the novelties introduced by the European newcomers and the changing political landscape of South India. The setting up and sustenance of a centralized administrative structure based on bureaucratization, monopolization of military power, trade and commodity procurement were made possible by constructing an idiom of sacred kingship, taking cue from the South Indian Hindu warrior states of the eighteenth century and reaffirming the caste social order of the region based on the tradition of *bhakti*.

To trace the formation of the kingdom, the study provides an account of the historical background of the region by exploring the transformation in the medieval political and social order which by the last decades of the seventeenth century started manifesting itself into conflicts and tensions between the different contenders for power. In the period after the fall of the Chera kingdom, the southern Malabar region, as it appears in the accounts of the travellers, was marked by fragmented political units that strived for ritual sovereign power granted by the Brahmins and the temple, through the mechanism of *bhakti*. In

Travancore political power was held by the different *tayvalis* of the Travancore royal family, of which the *muppu* of Venad could claim the title of the *kulashekhara perumal* that carried with it a ritual sovereign power over the entire region. The work has explored the breakdown of this power of the royal family, in the context of the rise of the landed intermediaries that pocketed the revenue generated out of the expansion of agriculture and flow of commodities by way of trade. The shrinking revenue gathering options, along with the tensed relation with the authorities of Sri Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram made it impossible for the *muppu* of the Trippapur Swarupam that held Venad to fulfil the requirements for being the *kulashekhara perumal*. Exploring into the rich repository of the temple records of Padmanabha Swamy Kshethram called the Mathilakam records and taking insights from the works of Ganesh, De Lannoy, Menon, and the writers of the *Travancore Manual*, the study attempted to sketch out these developments that marked the Travancore region from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A brief discussion of the advent of the European trading companies that served as a catalyst and a benefactor of these transformations in the land based economy of the Travancore region is also undertaken. The Europeans are understood as, in particular ways, breaking away from the norms and conditions of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. The relentless pursuit for exorbitant profit, monopolization of trade in certain commodities, and use of military power, and the violence that started disturbing the local merchants are pointed out as the departures that the European companies introduced in the culture of Indian Ocean trade.

Locating the formation of Travancore within this dynamic world of late seventeenth century southern Malabar, the foregoing discussion showed the failed attempts of the predecessors of Martanda Varma towards the formation of a unitary state in Travancore. The efforts of Rama Varma and Aditya Varma to reinstate the customary rights of the king and the temple, by exploiting the other

new players in the commerce and politics of the region like the European trading companies, was undermined by the *pillamars* and *madambimars* in alliance with the other *swarupams* of the royal family. The reign of Martanda Varma is vital in the history of the region for it was with his ascendance to the throne of Venad in 1729, that the efforts towards the formation of a unitary state in Travancore found fruition. The elimination of the powerful intermediaries, the *madambimars* and *pillamars* and of the claimants for the throne of Venad, the Thampi brothers, was the first strategic strike of Martanda Varma. The contours of a military fiscal state in Travancore started showing itself from the early years of his reign, in the rigorous military expeditions that was carried on, supported by interventions in the commercial world of the region. In the initial years it was by incorporating the trade networks around the city of Kottar and entering into alliances with the European companies that Martanda Varma had ensured essential financial reserves for his military expeditions against the *pillamars* and *madambimars*, the Thampi brothers and the other collateral branches of Travancore royal family. The new political system introduced expanded and sustained itself through a reconfiguration of the medieval military system by reaching out to new skills, technologies' and groups being made available in the eighteenth century South India. In his early years, it was the chances of successfully entering into as a key player in the eighteenth century military labor market of South India that determined Travancore's survival against the other contenders for power.

The elimination of the landed nobility necessitated the rise of new groups, social formations, political establishments, and economic organization. By the fourth decade of the eighteenth century, as Gollennesse writes, the new political organization based on centralized bureaucratic system of administration was already found functioning. In the context of the breakdown of medieval relations of power, the populations of the lands acquired through military

conquest was administered by the new bureaucratic apparatus set up by Martanda Varma. The transformation that Martanda Varma had set in motion, in his relentless pursuit in protecting his royal claims, however demanded further strategic advancements and massive interventions into the economic organization of the coastal region. For the medieval Malabar *rajās* who lived off their humble revenue and income, the building up of an expansive state structure was unimaginable and never sought.

In the foregoing chapters, the study explored Martanda Varma's interventions in the commercial world of central and south Malabar and in the land based medieval economy of the region by reading closely the administrative and trade accounts of the European settlers on the coast and the records of the Travancore state. It is shown that by the end of his period, Martanda Varma had established a centralized pepper procurement system through series of land survey and assessment and a system of control and compulsion imposed upon the agricultural economy. Procured through the centralized bureaucratic system at rate fixed by royal proclamations, pepper and other monopoly commodities were carried to the state *pandikasalas* to be sold by the king's officers to the European companies and other merchants through arbitrations and negotiations. One major implication of this commercial expansion was the abolition of free trade and the turning of merchants into the employers of the state. The next important commercial strike of Travancore was the establishment of the port at Alleppey in the closing decades of the eighteenth century under the supervision of Rama Varma's chief minister Dewan Kesava Pillay. The port was established in view of becoming a key player in the Indian Ocean trade at the coasts of Arabian Sea. By the end of the century, brisk trade was reported at the port of Alleppey. Dhows and ships from different ports on the Arabian Sea frequented the port for the exchange of commodities. The port was to become the focal point of the expanded commercial realm of Travancore, connecting it with the

hinterlands and the *pandikasalas* through a network of roads and inland waterways. The establishment of Alleppey port thus enabled a more effective integration of the hinterlands and the hilly regions of the ghats that were economically activated through the brisk South Indian trade networks of the previous decades, into the bureaucratic and commercial structure of the kingdom of Travancore.

The interventions in the land based medieval system of power through military expeditions, centralization and monopolization entailed a reformulation of the Hindu religious socio-economic order of the region that was based on the complimentary relationship between the temple and the royal house, wherein, in return for the lavish expressions of piety through donations and grants to the temple and the Brahmins, the Brahmins bestowed on the *rajas* the ritual sovereign power over his territory. The study discussed the efforts of Martanda Varma to correct the strained relationship between the royal house and the Sri Padmanabha Swamy temple and to claim the title of *kulashekhara perumal*. It has shown that along with fulfilling the requirements for being the *kulashekhara perumal*, Martanda Varma as well, was incorporating the temple and the strategic groups around it to the bureaucratic structure of the newly forming state. The interventions in the realm of the religion was achieved to its fullest in Travancore by an unprecedented religious and political gesture called the *trippadidanam* in which in the year 1750, Martanda Varma dedicated his entire kingdom to Sri Padmanabha Swamy and adopted the title of *sreepadmanabha dasa*. From then on, the entire territory of the Travancore *raja*, now the property of God, was made sacred, aggression on which was to become an act of sin. Moreover, it as well, foregrounded more firmly the idiom of sacred kingship that Martanda Varma was propounding from the early years of his reign. The gesture, by the conflation of the political and the religious into the sacred body of the king, most importantly, enabled the annihilation of the intermediaries,

and accomplished an effective integration of all the realms of the medieval social order into the structures of the new state that Martanda Varma was building up in Travancore.

In grappling with this question about the formation of Travancore, the research had to face a number of difficulties and in its final form too is constrained by many limitations. The research had to mainly rely on published sources for reasons of the difficulty of making extensive travels in search of source materials and because of the incompetency in the use of Dutch language. All of the Dutch sources for the period are used in translation. The study, thus, should be approached as an initial step towards raising larger questions and further researches on early modern Kerala and on the seminal role of the different early modern political, economic and religious formations in shaping Kerala's modernity.

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