

Between the Indian Ocean and South Asia: State Formation in Early Modern Calicut

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The political formations of early modern South Asia have been studied considerably in the contexts of big empires, small states and stateless societies.¹ On the other hand, political formations have not been an important topic in the genre of Indian Ocean studies compared to other themes.² Malabar Coast (South Western Coast of India) was mostly studied as a part of the Indian Ocean, rather than as a part of South Asia.³ Political formations in early modern Malabar were not considered to be a serious point of discussion, certainly with some exceptions.⁴ Calicut was an important pepper production and exporting port town in the Indian Ocean network and a strong kingdom in Malabar. The economy and commercial developments of Calicut have been studied in detail compared to its political formation. This thesis attempts to look at the early modern kingdom of Calicut in the context of both the Indian Ocean and South Asia.

Historiography

The historiographical debates and discussions regarding this topic have been dealt with as a separate chapter. Hence, this section will briefly deal with some of the major conceptual issues regarding our topic. Discussions about political formations in Asia in pre-colonial times follow certain patterns and reproduce a particular spatial hierarchy. Primarily, imperial rulers like the

¹ There are several important studies conducted on big empires like Mughal Empire, Vijayanagara Empire. Small states like Nayaka successor states, Mughal Successor states, Maratha Kingdom etc. were also discussed in the historiography. Also, stateless societies like that of the hilly communities were also important in the new anthropological historical studies.

² If we look at the major works done on the Indian Ocean networks and littorals, the major themes were trade and commerce. The second important historiographical trend were religious and cultural connections and interactions. Political formations of the states who were actively participating were not an important theme compared to others.

³K. M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese: Being a History of the Relations of the Portuguese with Malabar from 1500 to 1663*, (Bombay: Taraporevala, 1929); Idem, *Malabar and the Dutch: being the history of the fall of the Nayar power in Malabar* (Bombay: Taraporevala, 1931); M N Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1984); Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in the Asian Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) and many more.

⁴ Binu John Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea: The Ali Rajas of Cannanore and the Political Economy of Malabar 1663-1723*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012); H. K s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin, 1663-1720: kings, chiefs and the Dutch East India Company* (New Delhi : Munshiram Manoharlal, 2000).

Mughals, the Shah of Persia and the Emperor of China have been studied extensively. The powerful kingdoms who on one hand had control over smaller principalities but on the other submitted to the big emperors find their place in the second tier.⁵ Kingdoms changing loyalties from one “greater kingdom” to another are considered to be next in the line of importance. On the last rung stand the petty rulers who submitted either to the sovereign rulers or non-sovereign rulers.⁶

If we compare the early modern South Asian polities, Malabar was mostly considered as one among “fragmented” polities as opposed to large empires like that of the Mughals and Vijayanagara. Most scholars argue that the eighteenth century was the most important politically formative period for Malabar after the twelfth century. In other words, a “chaotic polity” represented Malabar in the period between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries. In Indian historiography, the eighteenth century is characterized as the period of the rise of several successor states from big empires like that of the Mughals. Travancore (the southernmost kingdom of the Malabar Coast) corresponded to the Hindu Successor states of the eighteenth century.⁷ Most discussions of the newly emerged State of Travancore focus on the importance of land revenue in the process of state formation and the “Hindu” identity of the state. Even though most travelers of the early modern period mark Calicut as the most important kingdom of Malabar, the political formation of this kingdom has been neglected considerably.⁸ Calicut was neglected majorly due to scholarly presuppositions like “the state revenue was based on volatile trade” and the

⁵ Siam was an example for that. Even though it exercised power over smaller vassal states they usually submitted themselves to the emperor of China. Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom c. 1604-1765* (Boston: Brill, 2007).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ Susan Bayly, “Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion, State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1850,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1984): 178.

⁸ Most of the travelers including the VOC ones, mention Calicut as the most important kingdom on the Malabar Coast. Philippus Baldaeus, *A true and exact description of the most celebrated East India coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also of the Isle of Ceylon* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1996); Johan Nieuhof, *Voyages & travels to the East Indies 1653-1670*, ed., Anthony Reid (Singapore: Oxford university press, 1988); Wouter Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyage van Wouter Schouten*, ed. Michael Breet (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2003), 242-4.

cosmopolitan nature of its community.⁹ Hence, this thesis is also an inquiry into these historiographical problems.

There are three major levels at which the case study of Calicut can be contextualized. Firstly, is the question of how the kingdom of Calicut can be distinguished from the other local polities of the Malabar Coast? Secondly, how South Asian mainland kingdoms like the Vijayanagara Empire were important in understanding the Calicut state? Thirdly, how to contextualize Calicut in the Indian Ocean world? These three historiographical levels are important as the study of an early modern political formation cannot be done in isolation.

Research Questions and Chapterization

The major research question that the thesis is addressing is, what were the basic internal structures and patterns in which the kingdom of Calicut worked in the early modern period. The kingdom of Calicut needs to be dealt with in two contexts. Firstly, as a very important kingdom on the Malabar Coast which was continuously negotiating with the smaller kingdoms there. Secondly, as a kingdom which had to deal with external pressures in the realm of the Indian Ocean pepper trade. Hence, the concern of this thesis would be to explore how best to analyze the political formation of seventeenth and the eighteenth century Calicut in these contexts.

In addition to the above mentioned primary research question, there are some other sub-questions which make the research more nuanced: how was the power distributed in the court and the kingdom of Calicut during this period? Who were the major actors in this scenario? How were the local and the global relations of Calicut reflected in this context? In all, the kingdom of Calicut will be analyzed as a microcosm of the political structure of the Malabar Coast at that time. This thesis is divided into two parts in which there are five chapters in total. The first part talks about the background in which this study is situated. The first chapter discusses the major historiographical debates. The second chapter gives a brief account of the major events and incidents that the kingdom of Calicut had to face during our period of study. These chapters are

⁹Dilip M. Menon, "Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar, 1760-1800," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 34, No. 29 (Jul. 17-23, 1999), 1995-2003.

important in order to contextualize this study as the questions being dealt with are deeply rooted in this historical and historiographical background. The second part is concerned with the various human and non-human agencies involved in the making of the early modern kingdom of Calicut. The third chapter looks at the internal dynamics and the power structures of the court of Calicut. The second chapter widens the scope of the discussion and looks at the nature of the other important influences on the development of the polity, like that of the VOC. The third chapter will analyze the role of rituals and festivals in characterizing these developments.

Sources

The most important genre of sources used in this study are the VOC records and the palace records of the Zamorin (the title of the king of Calicut). Several selected VOC records have been published. *Nederlanders in Kerala* is an edited and published volume which contains *memoirs van overgaven* (a detailed report made by the VOC commanders of the Malabar Coast to their successors regarding the trade, administration and life in their area of governance) from 1664 to 1701.¹⁰ *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaalen Radenaan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* is a thirteen volume edited series consisting of communication between the VOC authority of different factories of the East Indies and the head office of Batavia and Holland.¹¹ *Corpus Diplomaticum* is a collection of treaties of VOC concluded with many Asian rulers.¹² Other than these there are several other interesting documents like *The Diary kept during the expedition against the Zamorin* (a detailed published report of the VOC regarding their war with the ruler of Calicut in 1716-1717).¹³ Other important document include *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, which is a collection of letters written by the king of Cochin in the vernacular language.¹⁴ Published travelogues and other European sources like the English factory records are

¹⁰ H.K. s' Jacob ed., *De Nederlanders in Kerala 1663-1701: de memories en instructies betreffende het commandement Malabar van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, ('s-Gravenhage : Nijhoff , 1976).

¹¹ Coolhaas, *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie Deel 1-3* ('s-Gravenhage : Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).

¹² J. E. Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum* ('s-Gravenhage : MartinusNijhoff , 1907-1955).

¹³P. Groot, *Diary kept during the expedition against the Zamorin from 4th December 1716 to 25th April 1717 = Dagboek der gebeurtenissen gedurende den oorlog met den Zammorijn* (Madras: Government Press, 1910).

¹⁴ V.K.R Menon, ed., *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia: Records in Oriental Languages, Cochin State, Book II.* (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1946).

used.¹⁵ Apart from these published sources, several detailed reports are available regarding the visits of the VOC officials to the kingdom of Calicut. These reports are unpublished and contain detailed information regarding the negotiations and discussions between the VOC officials and the king of Calicut.

The palace records of the Zamorin is a collection of both published and unpublished records. They were produced at the court of the Zamorin which covers major themes such as the details of both expenditure and income and details of the rituals and major events. However, an extensive use of these documents was not possible due to several reasons. Firstly, most of these do not clearly mention the actual date or even the year. Secondly, a large chunk of these genre of documents are already destroyed. The study plans to look at documents which are either codified or published by scholars or the other legible sources which provide the time frame of their creation.¹⁶

These sources are very important in terms of historical analysis but there is always a problem in transcribing the source without looking at it critically. The first set of documents that are being dealt with in this thesis is the VOC documents. They are extremely detailed about the power structure of the Malabar Coast during their period of rule. However, Calicut was never under the control of the VOC and often challenged the monopolistic ambitions of the VOC. This often gives a negative portrayal of the Calicut court in the VOC sources. On the other hand, indigenous records are highly court centric and do not provide an outward looking view of the kingdom. In other words, those records are concerned mostly with the ritualistic life of the king and the internal dynamics of the court. These documents mostly ignore the long-distance trade and other actors in Calicut. Therefore, this thesis also attempts to bring these different perspectives together and bridge the gap between them.

¹⁵ William Foster, *The English Factory Records in India -1661-64* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923); Schouten, *De Oost-Indische voyagie van Wouter Schouten*; Jacob Cantor Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, ed. and trans. Major Heber Drury (Madras: Adelphi Press, 1862). Baldaeus, *A true and exact description of the most celebrated East India coasts of Malabar*; Nieuhof, *Voyages & travels to the East Indies 1653-1670*.

¹⁶ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* (K.G), Palm leaves documents kept in Vallathol Vidyapeedham, Edappal; N M Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeedham, 2005). Idem, *Samoothiri Charithrathile kanappurangal* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeedham, 1987). V. V. Haridas, *Samoothirkalathe Kozhikkod: Kathayum Charitravum* (Thriuvanathapuram: Sign Books, 2009).

PART ONE: BACKGROUND

Chapter One

Historical and Historiographical Imagination of Early Modern Political System of Calicut

As elaborated in the introduction, my primary aim is to study the kingdom of Calicut in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. The peculiar nature of South Asian historiography was the primary motivation to conduct this study. In other words, this thesis is located in the historiographical debate regarding early modern state formation in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This chapter intends to look at those debates in order to address some of the problems and gaps therein.

1.1 Indian Historiography and creation of South India

Studies on princely courts and the political formations of pre-modern South Asia have a long history to tell. There are several discussions and debates regarding the political formations of South Asia from the Mauryas to the Mughal Empire. Many aspects of the Mughal Empire such as its economy, political formation, military organization, court culture, art and architecture have been studied by historians.¹⁷ On the whole, the Mughal Empire exemplified the grandeur and the powerful nature of a typical pre-modern South Asian polity.

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, there have been several attempts to study the non-Islamic political formations of South Asia like the Vijayanagara Empire and the Maratha state. Those works aspired to assert the non-Islamic/Classical Hindu nature of Indian polity.

¹⁷Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556-1707* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Catherine Blanshard Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Fisher, *Visions of Mughal India: An Anthology of European Travel Writing* (London: I B Tauris, 2007); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State, 1526-1750* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Subsequently extensive amount of work has been done on the South Indian kingdoms in terms of their political culture. Very important and pioneering works on the court culture and the political life of early modern South Asia came to be done, beginning with the South Indian kingdoms.¹⁸ Kingdoms such as Cholas, Cheras and Pallavas attracted several scholars to the study of court culture, symbolic power and representation.¹⁹ This trend has also been important in the case of the Vijayanagara Empire and the following Nayaka kingdoms.²⁰

However, the Malabar Coast was never an important subject of these discussions. One implicit notion behind this negligence is the understanding of pre-colonial South Asian courts as extremely sophisticated, elaborate and opulent. In other words, only kingdoms with such characteristics qualified for finding space in these discussions. Most of these surveys regarding the pre-modern political formation of South Asia do not discuss the Malabar Coast. Works like *States in India* do not touch the political formations of Malabar without even mentioning the reason for such negligence. The entity ‘*South India*’ was formed in the larger historiography of India mainly as a challenge to the North India-centric historiography. Largely the understanding of South India consists of four major modern states -- Andhra Pradesh (part of which is now Telengana), Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. However in the context of early modern historiography Kerala (Coast of Malabar) does not appear in the imagination of South India. *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* edited by Champakalakshmi and Kesavan Veluthat also ignores the political formations of Malabar until the eighteenth century.²¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam argues that the “fragmented polity” of Malabar could be the reason behind this laxity.²² In a nutshell, the general

¹⁸Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Dean Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of substance: Court and State in Nayaka period Nadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁹Frederic P. Miller, Agnes F. Vandome, John McBrewster, *Chola Dynasty* (New York: Alphascript Publishing, 2009); Vidya Dehejia, *Art of the imperial Cholas* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1990) and many more.

²⁰George Michell, Vasundhara Filliozat, *Splendours of the Vijayanagara Empire: Hampi* (Mumbai: Marg Publication, 1981). Burton Stein, *The New Cambridge History of India: Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Crispin Branfoot “Imperial Memory. The Vijayanagara Legacy in the Art of the Tamil Nayakas,” in Anila Verghese ed., *Krishnadevaraya and His Times* (Mumbai: K R Cama Oriental Institute, 2013) and many more.

²¹R. Champakalakshmy, Kesavan Veluthat and T.R Venugopalan ed., *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* (Thrissur: Cosmobooks, 2002).

²²Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Reflections on State-Making and History-Making in South India, 1500-1800,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* Vol. 41, No. 3 (1998): 382-416.

idea about the pre-modern polity of Malabar is that it was a “patch quilt of shifting chieftains and principalities”.²³ In this context, this thesis attempts to have a look at the political formation of early modern Malabar and attempts to question this assumption of “fragmented-small” polities.

1.2 Imagination of Malabar in the Indian Historiography

Malabar received a lot of attention in the context of Indian Ocean trade and trans-national history. However, in Indian historiography, it was often neglected since it did not fit well into the nationalistic framework which usually depicted pre-modern polities as “land-based” and their kings as “ritual figures”.²⁴

Colonial and nineteenth century histories argue that there wasn't any considerable change in the political formation of Malabar until the British rule.²⁵ The first attempt to write the history of Malabar took place in colonial times as a part of the process of accumulating knowledge of local societies and as a part of the administrative system. One good example of this is William Logan's *Malabar Manual* which became a basis for many later works.²⁶ Even though this idea of stagnant polity till the eighteenth century has been challenged in many recent studies, most of them focus on the rise of Travancore as an example to refute this proposition.²⁷ Dilip Menon argues that after the dissipation of the Chera kingdom which marked a major change in the political scenario in the twelfth century, the rise of Travancore was the next major important political shift. He adds that the states of Malabar were “volatile” since they were dependent on external/overseas trading. Most works on eighteenth century politics of Kerala focus on the rise of the Travancore State as part of the new *Hindu State* rising in the whole of India at that time. Later Binu John Mailaparambil makes a passing mention of the fact that the kingdom of Calicut existed with several essential characteristics of such a *state* much before the rise of the Travancore. However his further

23 Bayly, "Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community," 177.

24 Burton Stein, *Peasant state and society in medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24.

25 Robin Jeffrey, *The decline of Nayar dominance: society and politics in Travancore, 1847-1908* (London: Sussex University Press, 1976).

26 William Logan, *Malabar Manual* (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Gazetteers, 1998). It was originally published in 1887 as a colonial endeavor.

27 Bayly, "Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community," 177; Menon, "Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar," 1995; D Kooiman, "State Formation in Travancore: Problems of revenue, trade and armament," in *Ritual, State and History in South Asia*, ed. A.W Van Den Hoek, D.H.A Kolf and M.S Oort (Leiden: E.J Brill, 1992), 590.

arguments does not analyze the possibility of the kingdom of Calicut with a potential to be a model of a state formation pattern.

A typical understanding of the “pre-modern Indian State” manifests several characteristics like extensive land ownership, an exquisite palace system and sophisticated court etiquettes. On the other hand, the maritime kingdoms of India were generally studied as a “contact zone” between mainland India and the external powers. This too could be among the reasons for disregarding the political formation of early modern Malabar in Indian historiography.

However, there is an inherent issue with this understanding of the *contact zone*. This reinforces the idea of the landed kingdoms as being the traditional and classical examples of Indian political formations while the maritime kingdoms as being volatile polities.²⁸ This again highlights the dichotomy between the land and sea polities. In the case of the Vijayanagara kingdom, the Nayaka dynasty and other South Indian kingdoms, it has been argued by several scholars that they were constantly in dialogue with external cultures and ideas and not secluded by the “indigenous ritual symbolism”.²⁹ However, such an effort was not made in the context of the Indian port kingdoms. In a nutshell the internal dimensions of most of the maritime kingdoms were highly neglected in Indian historiography.

1.3 Imaginations about Early Modern Calicut

The political structure of early modern Calicut can be analyzed in various ways. However, there are two major strands in the historiography of this theme. The first major trend is to completely situate the kingdom of Calicut in the context of the Indian Ocean trade. In this genre, Calicut was mostly portrayed as a medieval kingdom which sustained its economy by exporting spices to the outside world. The history of Calicut usually follows a certain pattern in this kind of history writing. It generally begins with the growth of Calicut from the fourteenth century and marks its decline with the establishment of the European powers in the Indian Ocean. Even though there are disagreements between scholars on various points, this trajectory is more or less followed in most

²⁸ D Kooiman, “State Formation in Travancore: Problems of revenue, trade and armament,” 590; Menon, “Houses by the Sea: State-Formation Experiments in Malabar,” 1995.

²⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Lennart Bes, “Sultan among Dutchmen? Royal dress at court audiences in South India, as portrayed in local works of art and Dutch embassy reports, seventeenth–eighteenth centuries,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol.50, No. 6 (2016), 1792–1845; and many more works.

works. In this genre, the political structure of the kingdom of Calicut is only analyzed as a part of the larger naval and overseas contexts.³⁰ Mostly, the political formation of early modern Calicut is studied as a part of the “resistance to the Europeans”.³¹ Moreover, the “Indian Ocean” histories apart from these *nationalist stories* do not touch the question of the complex political system of Calicut.³² Consequently, early modern Calicut was portrayed as a small kingdom which surrounded the polity around the overseas trade.

The second trend places Calicut in the context of Malabar which mostly ignores its overseas connections. K V Krishna Iyyer’s work *Zamorins of Calicut* initiated a political history of the kingdom of Calicut. Iyyer explained the rise of Calicut as a pure political process by overlooking the long distance pepper trade. Even though this work resembled a eulogy, this paved a path for several further investigations by introducing a new category of sources. He used several sources in the vernacular, Malayalam, including palace records of the Zamorin (*Kozhikkodan Grandhavari*) and other literature. Scholars like Kesavan Veluthat and N M Namboodri attempted to use indigenous sources and bring out a political cultural history of Calicut in the early modern period.³³ The works looked at themes such as rituals, literature and the role of local politics in building Calicut. V. V. Haridas’ works are the recent major contribution to this discussion. He

³⁰ A. Sreedhara Menon, *A Survey of Kerala History* (Kottayam: DC Books, 2008); M N Pearson, *The New Cambridge History of India: The Portuguese in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), and so many other writings.

³¹ Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*; Idem, *Malabar and the Dutch*; P. C Alexander, *The Dutch in Malabar* (Madras: Annamalai University, 1946); T. I. Poonen, *A Survey of the rise of the Dutch power in Malabar* (Trichinopoly: The University of Travancore, 1948); M. O Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala* (New Delhi: Mittal publications, 1989).

³² Gupta, *Malabar in Asian trade*; Ashin Das Gupta and M.N Pearson ed., *India and the Indian Ocean* (Oxford University Press, Calcutta: 1987) ;K.S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar Books, 1983); Pius Malekandathil, “Portuguese Cochin And The Maritime Trade Of India: 1500 -1663,”(PhD Dissertation, Pondicherry University, 1998); idem, *Portuguese Cochin and the maritime trade of India, 1500-1663* (New Delhi : Manohar,2001) ; Geneviève Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea: Cannanore’s Response to Portuguese Expansion 1507–1528* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Sanjay Subrahmanyam has worked immensely on this area, not only focusing on Malabar, but on a larger perspective. For example- Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Political Economy of Commerce-South India,; 1500-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1990).

³³Kesavan Veluthat, *The political structure of early medieval South India* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993); Namboodiri, *Samutiri Charitrattile Kanappurangal*, 12.

argued that the ritualistic world was the structural basis for building the kingdom of Calicut.³⁴ Interestingly, these studies place the kingdom of Calicut in a completely local context where the Indian Ocean pepper trade does not matter at all. Contrary to the first trend which claim overseas trade to be the primary basis of the development of Calicut, these works emphasize on local political developments as being the most important factor.

1.4 Bridging the Gap

The primary problem that the thesis is planning to address is that of the huge gap within the different historiographical imaginations of the political formation of Calicut in the early modern period. As we saw above, many works on Malabar and especially on Calicut focus completely on its inner political culture without placing it in the context of overseas trade.³⁵ This genre was developed by completely ignoring the interactions not only with the European merchants but also the local Islamic community. Rather, it selectively reproduces information from the indigenous records (mostly produced in the court) without scrutinizing them from a historical perspective. These works completely ignore the cross-cultural dynamics of the history of Calicut. On the other hand, the studies which highlight the role of the global context in Calicut ignore the local dynamics and local political contexts in which the system worked.

This historiographical situation arises from the nature of the sources itself. Calicut being acknowledged as an emporia of the early modern period by most of the external sources, does not appear as a “global-space” in the indigenous sources. On the other hand, the Dutch sources which provide enormous details about the local courts of other south Indian dynasties do not mark Calicut as a place of sophisticated court culture. This dilemma in placing a city or court in the local-global spectrum is exemplified very well in the case of Calicut.

To complicate the scene furthermore, it is important to look at the time period in which these ideas of Oriental kingship are being strengthened. While many European accounts of the sixteenth century, especially the travelogues, spill quite a lot of ink on the political culture of

³⁴ V. V. Haridas, *Samoothirkalathe Kozhikkod*; *Idem, Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2016).

³⁵ N M Namboodiri has considerably worked on the kingdom of Calicut and the local rituals with the help of the existing palace records kept in Calicut. V. V. Haridas’ recent book on Political culture of the Zamorin does not talk about the global context of the kingdom but only focuses on the local political system.

Calicut, the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century documents mostly remain silent about the subject. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Europeans began to identify themselves as superior to non-European societies which was also supported by scientific advancements being made at the time and the Enlightenment ideas in circulation.³⁶ This contributed to the change in the description and perception of the local courts and kings. The phase of curiosity and exoticism had come to an end by then. This shift is the primary problematic for this study. However, it is not easy to conclude that there was always a clear dichotomy between “European understanding” and “Asian Societies”. Scholars like Rubies argue that the “cultural distinction/strangeness” attributed to the European travelers while writing about the Oriental societies are mostly constructed.³⁷ On the contrary, he argues that the cultural difference was not reflected in the understanding of the “other” society. But analysis of several cases related to Calicut will show the changing nature of European understanding of the Asian societies. Hence, it is also important to look at these questions regarding sources and perspectives.

It is not an easy job to bridge the gap between these two different strands of historiography. However, to look at the political structure of early modern Calicut, it is necessary to examine both corpus of works and both genres of sources. Hence, this thesis is addressing this gap in the sources and historiography even though a definite resolution of this gap is hard to arrive at.

³⁶ Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company merchants at the court of Ayutthaya*, 8-9.

³⁷ Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Introduction.

Chapter Two

Events and Contexts: The origin and development of the political structure of Malabar

This chapter intends to look at the major political developments and events that took place in Calicut during the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. The VOC played an important role in characterizing the political formation of early modern Calicut. Hence, the major incidents that took place between Calicut and the VOC are important in order to analyze the nuances of the kingdom of Calicut.

2.1 Organization of the Political Structure in Malabar

The term Malabar denoted the South Western area of the Indian Subcontinent, comprising of Malayalam speaking areas. Geographically, it stretched from the Western Ghat to the Arabian Sea including both the hinterlands and the ports. This more or less corroborates with the modern day state Kerala. However, in many sources the northern area comprising of mount Eli from the South of Canara is also included in the imagination of Malabar. However, for the current study, the focus would be on Calicut and the areas immediately south and north of it being more significant in defining the politics of the kingdom.³⁸

As was discussed in the introduction, from the disintegration of the *Chera* kingdom until the eighteenth century, political formations in Malabar were perceived as “fragmented polities”. The whole area of Kerala was under the rule of the *Chera/Perumals* from 800 AD to 1124 AD.³⁹ Most studies agree on the fact that the disintegration of the centralized *Chera* kingdom created several small kingdoms. The legend of the *Cheraman Perumal* was quoted by most foreign travelers in the later period.⁴⁰ This legend is about the traditional power divisions in the coast of

³⁸ Calicut has attempted to expand southwards rather than northwards. Hence the focus will be on the area from Calicut to Cochin including the areas in between them like Chetwai, Thrissur, Cranagnore and Parur etc.

³⁹ MGS Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala: Brahmin Oligarchy and Ritual Monarchy-Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cera Perumals Makotai* (Kerala: Calicut University Press, 1996).

⁴⁰ The VOC travelers mentioned above- Schouten, Baldaeus, Nieuhof.

Malabar. According to this story, the founder of Malabar Coast, *Cheraman Perumal*, divides the state into three and gives the upper authority to the Zamorin by giving his sword. The three kingdoms were Cannanore (Kolathunadu), Calicut (Kozhikkod) and Venad. (Map 1).⁴¹ These major kingdoms received more attention in the historiography also because they were taking part in the long distance pepper trade.

Cannanore was located at the northern end of the Malabar Coast, then known as the kingdom of Kolathunad. It was ruled by the lineage of Kolathiris at least from the fifteenth century onwards.⁴² Calicut was located south to Cannanore and north to Cochin. Travancore was located at the top south of the Coast. *Swaroopam* is an important concept to understand the political system of Malabar in the early modern period. The term *Swaroopam* in its large sense means “self-form”. Even though there is no specific meaning attached to this term, this was identified as an indication of the presence of an important political formation in Malabar. There were four major *Swaroopams* by the fifteenth century. One was the *Kola Swaroopam* in Cannanore ruled by the Kolathiri family. *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* was based in Calicut under the rule of the Zamorins. The kingdom of Cochin was ruled by *Perumbadappu Swaroopam* and Travancore was under the *Venad Swaroopam*.⁴³ These were the major political systems present in Malabar by the fifteenth century. These *Swaroopams* were basically characterized by matrilineal joint families. These *Swaroopams* were legitimated by Brahmin priests and offered the position of *Raja* (king) to the eldest male of that family.⁴⁴

However, there were several petty polities and small towns throughout the Malabar Coast which have received very little attention in the existing historiography. For example, Ponnani was located south to Calicut and was under the rule of the Zamorins and is also known as their second capital. The kingdom of Cranganore (Kodungallur- located between Cochin and Calicut) was highly important from the strategic point of view. Cranganore was an important point which influenced the political strength of these two major kingdoms at several points of time.

⁴¹V.V Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala: The Zamorins of Calicut (c. AD 1200-1767),” (PhD Thesis, Mangalore University, 2003), 31.

⁴²The name of the lineage who ruled the kingdom of Kolathunad was Kolathiri who was also supposedly descended from Cheraman Perumal.

⁴³John, *Lords of the Sea*, 29.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Chetwai was also located between these two kingdoms, north to Cranganore and south of Ponnani. Similarly, Parur was a small kingdom between Cochin and Calicut, but also significant in terms of the political developments of Malabar (Map 2).

2.2 Origin and development of Calicut through Ages

One of the most important shifts in the development of the kingdom of Calicut was the rise of the lineage of the Zamorins.⁴⁵ According to scholars like Krishna Iyyer, the Zamorins originally possessed a land locked kingdom. Later they moved to the sea-port and expanded the kingdom of Calicut. They belonged to the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* who were supposed to be the primary descendants of the *Cheraman Perumal*.⁴⁶ They conquered the city of Calicut from Polathiris' rule and the spice hinterland from the Ernad rulers.⁴⁷ Therefore, the conquest of Calicut by the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* was seen as the benchmark in the development of Calicut as the most important political formation in the area.⁴⁸ On the other hand, some historians argue that the rise of Calicut should be seen in terms of the rise of the long-distance pepper trade which led to its political strengthening. According to this perspective, the shift in the local polity and the capture by the *Nediyiruppu* were not important in explaining the rise of Calicut.

By the fourteenth century, the city of Calicut was an important center for commercial activities as mentioned in several sources.⁴⁹ The political system of Calicut was also an important factor in its development as a major commercial hub. Some Arab travelers before the fourteenth century had mentioned that it was not easy to sail to Malabar due to two main reasons: firstly, there is no strong harbor in Malabar which could resist the dangerous monsoon. Secondly, there was no security for the ships to remain offshore.⁵⁰ Contrary to this experience, Ibn Battuta describing conditions in the fourteenth century says that the development of the secure and strong harbor

⁴⁵ Works like that of K V Krishna Iyyer do not have much proper sources to articulate their arguments. K. V. Krishna Iyyer, *A history of the Zamorins of Calicut* (Calicut: Ramakrishna, 1929).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁹ Local sources such as "Unnineeli Sandesham" and "Kokilasandesha" mention the importance of Calicut as an urban port. Elamkulam P. N. Kunjan Pillai, Ed., *Candrotsavam* (Kottayam, Reprint 1955)p. *Idem*, Ed., *Kokasandesam* (Kottayam, Reprint 1972); *Kokilasondesa of Uddonda*, (Trivandrum, Reprint 1997), 74.

⁵⁰George Fadlo Hourani and John Carswell, *Arab Seafaring: in the Indian Ocean in ancient and early Medieval times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 14.

invited many Arab and Chinese merchants to Calicut.⁵¹ This shows that both, commercial development and the development of political strength took place hand-in-hand.

Indigenous sources point out to the acquisition of both, temples and agricultural lands as the major reason for the development of Calicut. The Zamorins of the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* also took control of the major temple of Calicut named *Tali* Temple.⁵² The *Tali* temple was the center of many scholarly activities. The Zamorin also patronized many scholarly debates and rituals in the temple.⁵³ Along with *Tali* temple, the Zamorin took control of several other important temples in the surrounding areas such as Trikkavu, Thirunavaya and Guruvayur.⁵⁴ The annexation of Tirunavaya also gave the Zamorin the right to conduct the festival *Mamankam*, which is considered to be the most important festival of Malabar.⁵⁵ Many scholars argue that, winning this right was the most important in the development of the political power of the Zamorin.⁵⁶ Likewise, the Zamorin also annexed several pepper growing and rice growing areas near Calicut.⁵⁷ Along with pepper cultivation, the paddy fields were also important for Calicut with respect to earning revenue.

Efforts to write a political history often look at the military or diplomatic history of a kingdom where its other aspects are generally neglected. The growth and expansion of the kingdom of Calicut happened over several years by incorporating ports, river belts, pepper growing hinterlands, rice cultivating fields and temples. All these areas are important in order to understand the political formation of Calicut in the early modern era. Therefore, in the following chapter these different aspects of kingship and state would be analyzed.

2.3 Major Political Developments till the seventeenth century

In the sixteenth century, Calicut held the leading position in Malabar. The king of Cochin submitted himself symbolically and economically to the Zamorin. The king of Cochin was deprived of

⁵¹ Ibn Battuta, *The travels of Ibn Battuta*, ed. and trans. Samuel Lee (London: The oriental translation committee, 1829), 172.

⁵² Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 35.

⁵³ Scholarly debates were the philosophical discussions conducted by the Brahmins. This is explained in the last chapter.

⁵⁴ Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 36.

⁵⁵ The details of this festival is described in chapter 5.

⁵⁶ This has been argued by scholars like Krishna Iyyer and Haridas and many other scholars.

⁵⁷ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari (KG)* Vol. 12.

several rights like using tiles for the palace or minting his own coins.⁵⁸ These rights were exclusively kept for the Zamorin.⁵⁹ After the arrival of the Portuguese ships in Calicut under the command of Vasco da Gama in 1498, there were several changes in the political equations.

The Portuguese attempted to form a pepper monopoly in Calicut which did not see any success. After that, they shifted their focus to the kingdom of Cochin and the king of Cochin accepted their demands in order to fight against the supremacy of the Zamorin. By 1500, the Portuguese strengthened their presence in Cochin and also waged many wars against the Zamorin. The relation between Cochin and Calicut was controlled and mediated by the Portuguese commanders. They built factories in places like Cochin, Cannanore and Quilon.⁶⁰ The Portuguese attempted to control the land of Cochin both politically and commercially. The sixteenth century witnessed a series of wars between the Portuguese and Calicut over pepper trade and territory.⁶¹ The Portuguese even attempted to block the ships carrying pepper from Calicut.⁶²

It is important to mention the nature of trade and traders in Calicut in this context. When the Portuguese arrived in Calicut, it was a cosmopolitan hub of Indian Ocean trade. Portuguese travelers themselves describe Calicut as a very vibrant and cosmopolitan city. There were merchants from all over the world present in Calicut. Muslim merchants from Yemen, Arabia, Egypt etc. were very important in conducting the long-distance overseas pepper trade of Calicut. The local Muslims (Mappila Muslim Community⁶³) were also important in connecting the hinterlands and the market and in carrying out the peddle trade.⁶⁴ The primary aim of the Portuguese was to gain control of the pepper monopoly and expel these merchants. The Zamorin did not agree to this idea which triggered their shift to Cochin. A significant group of Muslim

⁵⁸ Durate Barbosa, *Description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, ed. and trans. Henry E. J. Stanley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 134.

⁵⁹ Ibid.,

⁶⁰ Malekandathil, "Portuguese Cochin and the maritime trade of India," 247-8.

⁶¹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese trade and settlement in the Bay of Bengal 1500-1700*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123.

⁶² Michael Feener and Ternjit Sevea ed. *Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).

⁶³ Mappila community is the indigenous Muslim community developed through conversion of local people and inter marriages with Arabs.

⁶⁴ Malekandathil, "Portuguese Cochin and the maritime trade of India," 247-8.

merchants known as the *Marakkar* community left Cochin for Calicut in 1525.⁶⁵ This shift was due to the continuous confrontations between them and the Portuguese in Cochin. After this, the *Marakkar* community became important in the political formation of Calicut. Their leaders became admirals of Calicut who controlled the naval force of the Zamorin.⁶⁶

This was the time when the Dutch arrived at the Coast of Malabar. The major available sources show that Calicut was the primary destination for the Dutch in the Malabar Coast, majorly due to two reasons. The first one was the anti-Portuguese position taken by the Zamorin. Secondly, pepper was abundantly available in Calicut which was the greatest interest of the Dutch.⁶⁷ Dutch relations with the Zamorin began with their first journey to the east onwards.

2.4 VOC and Calicut: An Early Stage

Steven van der Haghen was the commander of the first Dutch fleet to the East. They reached the port of Calicut on October 29, 1604. From then onwards, they maintained cordial relations for several decades. Both parties made several treaties with mutual benefits regarding the pepper trade. The Zamorin offered the Dutch a place in his kingdom and help to fight against the Portuguese in Cochin. Onward from the 1610s, there were several wars going on between the Zamorin and the Portuguese. This intensified the bond between the Dutch and the Zamorin.

In 1625, when Van Speult visited Calicut, there was an ongoing war between the Zamorin and Cochin. The Zamorin was camped in Chetwai and the meeting with the Dutch official took place there itself.⁶⁸ This was the time when the Dutch were fighting against the Portuguese beyond the Malabar Coast as well. By this time, there was a mutual agreement between the Zamorin and the Dutch to fight against the Portuguese. Treaties with similar agreements were made also during the following years. Even though there was a contract between the Zamorin and the Dutch on paper this seems to have been restricted only to an abstract level.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 248.

⁶⁶ O.K Nambiar, *Admirals of Calicut* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963).

⁶⁷ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum Part 1*, 30-31.

⁶⁸ M O Koshy, "The Dutch in the East: Case study of their relation with the Zamorin of Calicut," *Journal of Kerala Studies* Vol.XIII , (1986): 128.

The mid-seventeenth century witnessed an intensification of the bond between the Zamorin and the Dutch. Several Dutch ships left the port of Calicut with huge amounts of pepper in 1642.⁶⁹ All the treaties with the Zamorin made by the Dutch addressed him as the “emperor of the Malabar”. Also, in these communication, the Zamorin was mentioned as the ruler of the Malabar Coast and the most powerful king.⁷⁰ Once a Company official wrote that “There was an attempt to do an independent pepper trade by the company, even by competing with “the Great Zamorin””.⁷¹

In 1662, the first attack against the Portuguese took place. The initial plan was to attack Cochin from two sides, where one side would be covered by the Dutch and the other by the military of Calicut. The Zamorin demanded Van Goens (the VOC commander of the Malabar) to attack the Portuguese fort of Cranganore before attacking Cochin. As we saw above, Cranganore was an important strategic location between Cochin and Calicut. The Zamorin also demanded Cranganore as a reward for his participation in the war. In 1663 January, Cranganore was attacked.⁷² This siege was conducted by Dutch soldiers with the help of the soldiers of Calicut.⁷³ In 1663, the Portuguese were expelled from Cochin and the Dutch took over the city. However this led to several changes in the political equations of the Malabar Coast.

2.5 The VOC and Calicut after the conquest

The conquest of Cochin by the VOC very evidently changed their policies and demands. This had a huge impact on the political setup of Calicut as well. Primarily, when the Cranganore was handed over to the Zamorin, all the possessions and forts were destroyed by the Dutch already. This gave a new tone to the Calicut-Dutch relations. The conquest of Cochin made the Dutch officials consider themselves as protectors of the Cochin royal family.⁷⁴ The idea that the Cochin royalty was weak and they had to be protected from encroachers like Calicut, was frequently produced in

⁶⁹ Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven, Deel 2*, 158.

⁷⁰ The VOC travelogues mentioned above mention the Zamorin as the most powerful kingdom also in the *Corpus Diplomaticum* we see such mentions.

⁷¹ Coolhaas, *Generale missiven Deel 2*, 145.

⁷² K.K. Nair, *By Sweat and Sword : Trade, Diplomacy, and War in Kerala through the Ages* (New Delhi : Manohar Publishers, 2013), 167-180.

⁷³ Schouten, *De Oost-Indischevoyagie van Wouter Schouten*, 221.

⁷⁴ Most of the VOC records mark themselves as the “protectors of Cochin”.

the historiography as well.⁷⁵ In other words, the VOC replaced the Portuguese in Malabar to some extent. From here onwards we see that the Cochin kings were always represented at the Calicut court either by Dutch officials or merchants employed by the VOC.

However, the discordance between the Zamorin and the Dutch regarding territorial division also reflected in the political activities of both the parties. Since the displeasure of the Zamorin regarding the demolition of Cranganore was so strong, he did not extend his contract with the Dutch regarding the pepper trade.⁷⁶ On the other hand, he invited the English merchants to come and open up a factory in Calicut in order to oppose the Dutch.⁷⁷ There was a war between the Cochin king and the Zamorin in 1670.⁷⁸ The major problem was again that of territorial possession. The Dutch were involved in this conflict and they smashed an effigy of Cranganore which intensified the contention between them. In 1670 Van Reede was appointed as the VOC commander of the Malabar Coast and his major aim was to strengthen Cochin as an important port as well as a strong kingdom against the Zamorin.⁷⁹

Van Reede demanded Chetwai from the Zamorin and sent several envoys to the court of Calicut regarding this issue.⁸⁰ Chetwai was one of the other important strategic points which connected the kingdom of Calicut and Cochin. Van Reede himself went to Ponnani in 1678 with the same demand.⁸¹ The period from 1670 to the 1680's was one of several negotiations between the Dutch (on behalf of Cochin) and the Zamorin regarding the possession of these two strategic areas: Cranganore and Chetwai. The major shift in this period is the intensification of the rivalry between these two parties as a sharp contrast to the period of the conquest of Cochin in 1663.

⁷⁵ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*. 84.

⁷⁶ Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala*, 12.

⁷⁷ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 266.

⁷⁸ Idem, *The Rajas of Cochin*, 50-1.

⁷⁹ Idem, ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 188.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 84-90.

⁸¹ Kozhikkodan Grnadhavari gives a detailed description of the details of the gifts carried by Van Reede at the time of his visit. KG Vol. 1.

2.6 From Peace to War: Politico-Military Transformations from 1691 to 1720

Due to practical word limit constraints, it is important to focus on a certain period in order to make more coherent points. The period from 1691-1720 is an important period for the Dutch in the terms of balancing the power on the Malabar Coast. Interestingly, this is the period we have increasing amount of the palace records as well.⁸² This period also witnessed three *Mamankam* (the main festival of festivals which also provide a different category of sources. Therefore, in the following chapters, more focus will be given to this period.

Most literature on Calicut argues that from 1691 onwards, the position of Calicut was highly advantageous due to several reasons.⁸³ One major reason was that in 1691, the Zamorin and Van Reede concluded a treaty which gave the possession rights of Chetwai to the Zamorin. Moreover, there was a special concession allowed for the Zamorin to sail any number of ships carrying pepper from his port.⁸⁴ Otherwise, the Dutch attempted to control the selling of pepper on the Malabar Coast through both negotiations and force. In return, the Zamorin also agreed to provide a space for the company in Ponnani. To understand this political change it is important to look at the contexts which led to these changes.

As we saw above, there were several lineages within the kingdom of Cochin who claimed their right to the throne. Succession of the princes was always a problem in the Cochin kingdom and by the end of the 1680s there was a threat of a rebellion in Cochin by the Vettatu lineage.⁸⁵ This forced the Dutch governors to keep good relations with the Zamorin in order to seek his help to deal with the rebellion. The governor at that time in Cochin was Van Dielen and he preferred keeping good relations with the Zamorin until the arrival of Van Reede. He also hoped that Van Reede would make the relation better once he was appointed. The major motive of the Dutch

⁸² It does not necessarily mean that this time there was an augmentation in the production of the sources. Because a lot of records were lost due to several problems. However, it is important that we do have sufficient indigenous sources for this period compared to the earlier period.

⁸³ V. Thanumalayan, "History of the Zamorins of Calicut (A.D. 1500 – 1800): A Politico – Cultural Study," (PhD Thesis, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 2007).

⁸⁴ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* Part 3, 569-70.

⁸⁵ s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin*, 65; There are several lineages and there was a clash between Van Reede and Van Dielen regarding the succession of the cochin king.

behind keeping these relations was the need of the military support from the Zamorin.⁸⁶ Not only was the Chetwai fort given to the Zamorin but the Dutch even agreed to take responsibility of its primary maintenance.⁸⁷

These issues will be dealt in detail in the following chapters in relation to the changes in the court and the political structure of Calicut. However, this episode shows a distinct change in the political relations between Calicut and the Dutch. By 1691 the Zamorin possessed both the strategic places: Cranganore and Chetwai. After this treaty, Van Reede left the Malabar Coast and he died on his way to Surat. The Dutch attempted to maintain peaceful relations with the Zamorin in the decade after the 1690s even though there were tensions regarding territorial control.⁸⁸ In 1700, the demand from Cochin to take back those strategic areas became stronger. In 1700, we see multiple envoys being sent to the Zamorin on the part of the VOC.

In the 1700s, there were attacks from both sides in terms of claiming the lands between both the kingdoms. In the beginning, the Dutch attempted to prevent these wars in order to reduce the military cost. However, since the local chieftains and other landlords were also involved in this scene, this went to a different level by 1701. On the one hand, there was an increasing competition in the pepper trade taking place in Malabar. The Zamorin had granted rights to trade pepper and lodge in Ponnani to the English merchants, Baniya merchants from Gujarat, Muslim merchants from Persia, as well as the local Mappila merchants. Magnus Wichelman, who was the VOC commander of the Malabar Coast at that time points out that this was the source of the wealth and prosperity of the Zamorin.⁸⁹ Therefore, Wichelman first attempted to send a diplomatic mission to the Zamorin before getting involved in the war.⁹⁰ The king of Cochin complained to the Batavian

⁸⁶ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 194-7.

⁸⁷ s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin*, 83.

⁸⁸ The VOC documents show to some extent that the officials tried to maintain peace between the kingdoms of Cochin and Calicut. These developments are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

⁸⁹ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 366.

⁹⁰VOC 1634, "Mission to the Zamorin of Calicut, 1700 (report); VOC 1649, Mission to the Zamorin at Ponnani", 1700 (report), National Archives, Netherlands. Inventory Number: 1.04.02. Wichelman sends two envoys, one to Calicut and one to Ponnani. Both were intended to discuss the issue of these territorial possessions. These missions to the Calicut court would be discussed in the following chapters in detail.

authority that the Company was not acting in their favor.⁹¹ Hence, soon after those diplomatic missions, the VOC had to participate in the war.

In 1701, the war between the Zamorin and the king of Cochin began. The Zamorin was supported by local rulers of Porkkad and Parur. The Porkkad ruler was an ally of the VOC at that time. This affected the VOC-Porkkad relations as well. The changing alliance cannot be explained in a simple way. This process could be the reason for terming the Malabar polity as being “chaotic”. This war continued for several years with the frequency and intensity of the attacks in changing conditions. The company sent several envoys to the Zamorin in the meantime to warn him about their “aggressive actions” towards the territories of Cochin. The company portrayed itself as the “protector” of the fragile royalty of Cochin. Throughout this period, there was a constant discussion going on about the development of Cochin to compete against Calicut.⁹² However, by 1710, there was once again a peace treaty signed regarding Chetwai and this time it was given back to the VOC by the Zamorin.⁹³ Territorial issues were still going on between the Zamorin and the Raja of Cochin regarding the area of Chetwai and its surroundings. In 1714, again there was a war between both the parties regarding the issue of territories. The Zamorin captured Chetwai, which again threatened the political stability of Cochin. He was also helped by several other rulers of the Malabar Coasts like the Kolathiris and Ali Rajas of Cannanore. There were several aids also provided from Batavia to recapture the fort of Chetwai in 1715. However, this ended up in a failure. Following this failure, the Dutch attempted to put a blockade on Calicut in 1716.

This ongoing war created problems on both the sides.⁹⁴ Constant negotiations were taking place around this time, even though they did not have any fruitful results. In 1717, a defense treaty was concluded between the Zamorin and the Dutch. The Chetwai fort was again taken by the Company along with several areas in the surroundings like Pappenissery. Even though the wars

⁹¹ Menon, *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, 10.

⁹² In 1696 Van Ommen proposed an idea in order to make progress in the city of Cochin. This plan was again revisited by Wichelman in 1700. s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 367.

⁹³ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* Part 4, 340.

⁹⁴ The palace records of the Zamorin of that period show that the expenses of the war affected the festivals and the rituals conducted by the Zamorin at that time. Also, the communication between the VOC officials clearly state that the war created a huge loss which cannot be made up by even the most profitable pepper monopoly.

and the discordance between the Zamorin and the Dutch continued, this could be considered as the end of an important phase in their relations.

2.6 Major Concerns and Themes

As we saw, the peace treaty between the Dutch and the Zamorin centered on the handing over of Chetwai. The same reason also contributed to the war between the Zamorin and the Dutch in 1717. In other words, the territory and possession of this strategic location played an important part in determining the political scene of Malabar. As we saw above, there were several attempts to secure political superiority over the Malabar Coast by both the VOC (on behalf of Cochin!) and the Zamorin. Many times the negotiations over territory were also related to these attempts to establish the superiority of either party over the region. On the other hand, there was a constant attempt to conduct festivals and rituals from the side of the Zamorin along with other economic and political initiatives. These were not merely the acts of legitimization or expressions of superiority. Instead, they had a complex relation with the other political-economic activities of the king. As we can surmise from the events described above, it is evident that major festivals also coincided with attempts at war and peace. Therefore, these festivals were also an important aspect of the Zamorin's kingship in the early modern era. To conclude, there are several themes which became important for our research. The major themes which came up with regard to understanding the early modern court of Calicut were territoriality, political superiority and the role of cultural and spiritual activities like rituals and festivals.

PART TWO: ACTORS: KING, INTERMEDIARIES AND PRIESTS

Chapter Three

Zooming into the court of Calicut

3.1 Background

The kingdom of Calicut has not been studied in detail, especially when it comes to its internal power structure. According to scholars like V.V Haridas, the Zamorin was the king of a small kingdom and only did better than a local chieftain. Hence, it was a “poor imitation of the imperial court”.⁹⁵ The power in the court was shared by several members or groups which further weakened the power of the king. The major idea which will be analyzed in this chapter is that of the “weak polity”. To begin the analysis, this chapter attempts to take a close look at the court and the political functionaries of Calicut in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Firstly, we will look at the internal setup of the court and the organization of the power.

3.2 King: Issues of Position and Centrality in the court of the Zamorins

As we saw in the previous chapter, the establishment of the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* was an important milestone in the political setup of Calicut. The King held the central position in the court and was involved in discussions with both the merchants as well as the royal members. The placing of the king in the court of Calicut is an important point from which to start the discussion. First we will look into the epistemological development of the titles of the king of Calicut, rooted in the political setup.

Interestingly, all the Zamorins had only three names. They had to change their original names and choose from the following three names - Manavikraman, Manadewan and Virarayan. These three names represent honor, bravery and heroic actions which were considered to be the important characteristics for a ruler. This pattern is found throughout their rule. Two major strands of explanation of the origin of the term “Zamorin” (*Samuthiri* in Malayalam) point towards the huge historiographical difference between the different trends in understanding the nature of the

⁹⁵ Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala: The Zamorins of Calicut,” 115.

Calicut kingdom. A majority of the writings argue that the term *Samuthiri* came from the term *Samudra Raja* which means the king of the ocean.⁹⁶ These explanations attempt to show that the origin of the lineage is related to the long distance oceanic trade. On the other hand, some historians argue that the name Samuthiri came from *Swami Thirumulppadu* (this means something like “early lord”) which has certainly originated from a local context.⁹⁷

Apart from the major title “the Zamorin”, there were several other titles given to the ruler of Calicut. One important title was *Poonthurakon* which was even found in the inscription from Muccunti Mosque from the thirteenth century.⁹⁸ The well-known interpretation of this title is again the “lord of the harbor” since the word Poonthura means harbor. But there is another interpretation of this title, arguing that it indicates the place Punthura near Tamil Nadu which shows the Tamil origin of the Zamorins.⁹⁹ This interpretation can be clearly seen as an attempt to remove the Zamorin from the context of the overseas trade and weave its history into the Indian subcontinent. However, the contexts in which this term has been used in later periods clearly connect this term to the harbor and the sea trade. The title of Poonthurakon is also found in the palace records of Calicut.¹⁰⁰ For example, in one record he was addressed as “Poonthurakon” in a context of controlling the port.¹⁰¹ Hence it is evident that the records produced in the court itself wanted to assert his control over the port and the sea. In other words, there was a clear attempt by the Zamorin himself to create an identity related to the sea-world as opposed to the arguments of scholars suggesting otherwise.

Most analyses on the Zamorins of the eighteenth century assume that their position and strength had decreased by that time. Also, scholars argued that the Zamorin conducted more rituals and festivals during the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries and used the title of *Poonthurakon* more than ever at that time. This was considered to be an effort to legitimize his

⁹⁶ Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*; Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 194; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500-1700* (UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Sebastian Prange, “The Social and Economic Organization of Muslim Trading Communities on the Malabar Coast, Twelfth to Sixteenth centuries,” (PhD Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2008).

⁹⁷ Thanumalayan, “History of the Zamorins of Calicut,” 30;

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Kozhikkodan *Grandhavari*, Vols. 38 & 63.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

power in a situation where his strength was decreasing.¹⁰² Scholars like Ashin Das Gupta and Pearson also argue that the city of Calicut lost its importance in the Indian Ocean due to its constant wars with the Europeans.¹⁰³

However, these assumptions could be questioned with the evidence we have. If we look at the pepper trade in the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century, the role of Calicut was very important and the Zamorin was still central to the Malabar pepper export. Calicut offered a significant challenge to the VOC's attempt to monopolize the pepper trade of Malabar. It was an alternate space for the pepper merchants of Malabar (including the English, the French and the Persian Merchants and Gujarati Baniya merchants) who were not cooperating with the VOC. The VOC could not block most of the pepper cargos sailing from the port of Calicut.¹⁰⁴ Even though the help of the merchants such as the English was available, the strengthening of the army of the Zamorin was an important factor in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

If we examine the military system of the courts of Malabar, it is evident that the Zamorin possessed the largest number of soldiers compared to the other chiefs in Kerala.¹⁰⁵ The earlier version of the legend of *Cheraman Perumal* says that *Perumal* gave the Zamorin the sword as a symbol of his being the primary authority in Malabar. However, later versions of the legend coming up by the seventeenth and the eighteenth century mention that the sword was given to “kill or annex”.¹⁰⁶ This shows that the expansion of the Calicut kingdom becomes important from the seventeenth century onwards. Philip Baldaeus, a Dutch minister of Malabar, complains in his travelogue that the Zamorin has made extensive encroachment in many places in Malabar. He also praises his army for their training in the artillery.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, these titles were not being

¹⁰² The Modern-Marxist interpretations analyze the rituals and festivals as a form of power assertion and legitimation. They argue that those processes were necessarily conducted in order to portray power and strength of the rulers. Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala”, 45.

¹⁰³ Gupta, *Malabar in the Asian Trade*, 6; Pearson, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ The author of this thesis has done research on this theme. Archa Neelakandan Girija, “Challenges Offered by and Alternate Space: Calicut and the VOC Pepper Trade from c.1604-1750 A D,” (BA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 198.

¹⁰⁶ Hermann Gundert Ed., *Keralotpatti* in Scaria Zacharia, Ed., *Keralotpattiyum mattum* (Kottayam: National Bookstall, 1992), 190-1.

¹⁰⁷ Baldaeus, *A true and exact description of the most celebrated East India coasts of Malabar*, 625.

highlighted in order to camouflage the “actual weakness” of the king. On the contrary, such constant affirmation through titles was important in the context of the expansion of the territory.¹⁰⁸

3.3 Human Agency: Successions and Power Allocation

As we saw in the previous chapters, the *Swaroopam* was the power structure mainly prevalent in the Malabar Coast. The matrilineal system was the valid basis of succession in all *Swaroopam*. Theoretically, the eldest male member of the lineage would become the next heir of the family.¹⁰⁹ However, the system was more complex and complicated in its practice. Apart from the position of the king, the other major positions were also held by the members of the family.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, royal functionaries were not complex and elaborate. The royal house was more a close-knit unit, stationed at Calicut.¹¹⁰ However, as the lineages expanded with time, there was an attempt to clearly delineate functions and duties within the royal household. There are four major positions under the Zamorin which were also reserved for members of the family by the mid-seventeenth century.

- 1) Eralppadu which can be expanded into Eranadu Ilamkur Nambiyadiri
- 2) Eranadu Munnamkur Nambiyadiri (Munnalppattu)
- 3) Etatturanattu Nambiyadiri (Ettralppadu)
- 4) Netuvirippil mutta Erati (Nettutalppatu).¹¹¹

Since matrilineal families had several lineages expanding over a period of time, each lineage had its own head. The eldest male of each family was appointed as the head of that particular lineage. Each of them had their own palace and servants.¹¹² We do not have much evidence to prove that these roles were taken care of exactly in keeping with theoretical principles. Yet there are no references in any of the travelogues, the VOC documents or in the palace records pointing out any issues regarding succession and usurpation of power. As we saw above, the major

¹⁰⁸ If we look at the pre-modern kingdoms like Mughal Empire it is evident that at the stage of expansion of the territory, there are several attempts done by the rulers to focus on their legitimacy. Reference include- I.A Khan, “Turko-Mongol Theory of Kingship,” *Medieval India: A Miscellany* 2 (1972): 8-18. Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ Haridas, *The Zamorin and the Political Culture*, 188.

¹¹⁰ Most of the royal families stayed in Calicut. Only after Ponnani was annexed the second prince moved there.

¹¹¹ Iyyer, *A history of the Zamorins of Calicut*, 38; Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala”, 54.

¹¹² *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Volume 7 and 13.

problem for the kingdom of Cochin was the internal rebellions of all the lineages. Since it was a matrilineal system it was not easy to fix the rule for determining the next heir. If we look at the patrilineal system, mostly the son of the king inherits his position.¹¹³

Compared to Cochin, where all lineages were always trying to capture the hereditary right over the throne, this was not possible in Calicut. No lineage could possess the right to the throne permanently. Age was the primary criteria to get royal power. When a king dies, the eldest male in the family, irrespective of his lineage (tavazhi) receives the opportunity to rule next. There was no rotation or permanent occupation of royal positions by the members of the *Swaroopam* like in Cochin. But in Calicut, no lineages were preferred over the other. The age was important. In one record it is mentioned that, the age was the criteria therefore no lineage could possess the throne for two subsequent tenures.

This system has been discussed and legitimized by the major Brahmin families of Calicut. These positions were made, re-integrated and legitimated throughout the period. First evidence of this is the conduct of a Brahmin gathering in order to fix the issue of succession in *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* by the second decade of the seventeenth century. There is a separate set of *ola* regarding the meetings which took place in order to fix the rules of succession. This was patronized by the king himself and took place in the temple of *Tali*.¹¹⁴ We will look at the details of the scholarly discussions of the Brahmins in the last chapter. It is important to note that there was a conscious attempt on the part of the Zamorin to create well-structured rules of succession.

It is not clear if the issues related to succession in Cochin influenced the king to make such decisions. However, it is evident that there was an industrious effort from his side to fix the rules. The above mentioned four positions (sometimes one more) were the only royal designations received by the members of *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam*. By the seventeenth century, we see a division between the “senior lineage” and “junior lineage”. Clearly, the junior lineage could not access the throne. Lineages which came among the “junior lineages” took control of small territories outside the capital.¹¹⁵ Purusantaram or “succession” fee was a tax specially collected from the

¹¹³ There are several works explaining the patrilineal system of succession in India. For example, John F Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁴ Kozhikkodan Grandhavari, Vol.8.

¹¹⁵ V.K.R Menon Ed., *Perumpatappu Svarupam Granthavari* (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1943).

royal chieftains. This tax was meant to be their contribution to the processes of succession not only for the throne but also for other royal functions. All eldest members of the “senior lineages” had to contribute to this in order to affirm their royal status.

We will look at the first royal function as an example. The position of *Eralppadu*, was an important royal position with a separate portion of land to collect revenue from, along with a separate treasury.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, this did not give them an exclusive right over the land. By the end of the century, we see an expansion of these lineages along with changes in their positions. An important festival called *Taippuyam* was conducted under their leadership. This festival was conducted from the revenue collected from their land and this was conducted in the honor of the Zamorin.¹¹⁷ During the festival, the Zamorin would symbolically renew their rights and legitimate their rule. The expansion of royal lineages always creates a threat to the kingship. But by expanding the land in order to distribute it to each lineage and by restricting the ritualistic functions of each lineage, the Zamorins could restrict their reach to the central seat of power. The genre of *Manipravalam* literature is important to understand the changing nature of *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* in the seventeenth century. These were important vernacular literatures which were produced in the early modern period. In the primary level it deals with the theme of eroticism and romance. However, in the deeper levels, it gives the idea of the expansion of agricultural lands and newly developed settlements under the *Swaroopam*.¹¹⁸

However, two important things came up with these developments. Firstly, the distribution of distant lands to members of the royal lineages and keeping them as “feudatories” was important for a hassle free process of succession and governance. Hence, the expansion of the kingdom and taking over more land were significant for this process. In the later sections we will see how the expansion of the territories was important for other reasons besides maintaining the centrality of the king. Secondly, we see that there was a conscious attempt to keep away members of the royal family from the central seat of power. A question then arises, that is, how else the governance was carried out in the court of Calicut in the early modern period.

¹¹⁶ Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala,” 66.

¹¹⁷ If we look at the palace records, it is evident that the presence of the Zamorin was the most important factor in conducting the festival.

¹¹⁸ M. R. Raghava Varier, “State as Svarupam: An Introductory Essay,” in *State and Society in Pre-modern South India* ed., R. Champakalakshmy, Kesavan Veluthat and T.R Venugopalan (Thrissur: Cosmbooks, 2002), 126.

The right of central governance of Calicut in the case of the absence of the Zamorin was not given to these royal members but to other servants.¹¹⁹ This custom was probably introduced in order to restrict the reach of the royal family members into central power. Keeping these claims in mind, we shall look into the natures of the various important human actors in the kingdom of Calicut. The title of the prime minister of the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* was Mangat Achan.¹²⁰ The position of the Mangat Achan was mentioned in both the *Cheraman Perumal* legend and *Keralolpathi* tradition.¹²¹ Most of the travelers from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who visited the Malabar Coast mentioned his significant role in Calicut.¹²² His part is important in weaving the image of the early modern Calicut court because he was the *sarvadhikari karyakkar* (the manager with all power).¹²³ The most important thing about the position of the Mangat Achan is that, he had both the responsibility of the military as well as the control over the local chiefs.

If we look at sixteenth century records, it is evident that Mangat Achan held an important position. Barbosa marks that “He is also chief treasurer of the Kingdom, and the King cannot draw forth aught thence unless he is present, nor can he draw forth anything without great necessity, nor without the advice of this man, and others. And all the laws of the Kingdom also are in this man’s possession”.¹²⁴ His position continued to be important in the kingdom of Calicut throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.

An overall inspection of the existing literature on Calicut clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding about the nature of the power hierarchy in the court and the kingdom of Calicut. Most works refer to soldiers and the ministers as Nairs.¹²⁵ This partly comes from an oversimplified understanding of the nature of the Malabar polity. The political functions and military

¹¹⁹ If we look at the instructions of the *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari*, it is evident that once the Zamorin is absent from the capital (due to war or any other emergency) it was the prime minister who was supposed to rule the kingdom and not these royal members.

¹²⁰ William Logan, *Malabar Manual*, 165.

¹²¹ Cheraman Perumal legend portray the origin of the family of Mangat Acchan as directly founded by Perumal. Hermann Gundert, *Keralolpathi*. 191.

¹²² Barbosa, *Description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, 132-134.

¹²³ Kozhikkodan Grandhavari gives him the title of *Sarvadhikari Karyakkar* and portrays him as an important actor in the functioning of the Calicut court.

¹²⁴ Barbosa, *Description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, 135.

¹²⁵ Most of the work concerning the political history of Calicut do not look into the complicated power structure within the caste of Nairs. Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*; Stephen Dale, *Islamic Society on the South Asian Frontier: The Mappilas of Malabar*.

duties evidenced in the sources are far more complicated than most of the literature portray. A recent work among the very few which touch the power structure of Calicut is that by V.V Harids. However, his major argument is that the local chiefs were mostly landlords and he claims that some of them were even close to gaining royal status by the seventeenth century. These affirmations also contribute to the idea of the “weakening” power of the Zamorin in the early modern period.

These ideas are partly the result of the inability to understand the change in the political situation of Malabar in the early modern period. Bhawan Ruangsilp who studied the VOC merchants in the Ayuttaya court of Siam argues that the understanding of the power elites in the Siamese court did not help the VOC to participate in it. The overemphasis on the elites for having control over the king’s decisions is quiet misleading. Sometimes kings themselves choose to be a part of the elites which is not a weakness of power.¹²⁶ It is true that the central rule of Calicut was handed over to Mangat Achan in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century when the Zamorin was away for war. However it is evident that even at the time of the conquest of Thirunavaya in the fifteenth century, when the Zamorin was involved in the war, Mangat Achan was the person who was taking decisions on behalf of the Zamorin.¹²⁷ This was important also to prevent any usurpation to the throne by the other members of the royal family. It is important to note that the power of Mangat Achan was not a novel phenomenon. The restriction of the access of royal members to central power was an important way in which usurpation and conspiracies were sought to be avoided. This brings us to a new issue of the moving court of the Zamorin in the seventeenth century. As the movement of the king was inevitable in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, the idea of the court was also influenced by that.

3.4 Moving Courts: Expansion and the changing landscape of the kingdom

Kovilakam indicates a palace in Malayalam. According to the local sources, Kovilakam denoted the place where the Zamorin resided. It is important to look at the nature of the courts in their physical structure to look at the role played by them. If we look at the sixteenth century descriptions

¹²⁶ Bhawan, *Dutch East India Company merchants at the court of Ayutthaya*, 11.

¹²⁷ Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, 120.

of the Calicut court and palace we find a lot of detailed descriptions. The landscape of Calicut city was highly influenced by the palace and the royal quarters around that.

Ludovico di Varthema, (c. 1470 – 1517) was an Italian traveler and diarist who came to Calicut in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He gives a detailed description of the palace of the Zamorin at that time. The palace marked the royal quarters which were not considered a part of the city of Calicut.¹²⁸ The palace was really big with several chambers.¹²⁹ Sixteenth century descriptions of the Zamorin are highly interesting. Pietro Della Valle (2 April 1586 – 21 April 1652) was an Italian traveler who visited Asia during the European Renaissance period.¹³⁰ He and Durato Barbosa had marked that the palace was full of clerks who made accounts of its daily activities. Della Valle claims that the king had different courts in the same building which were designed for different kinds of meetings. For example, when Della Valle reached the court of Calicut in 1624, he was asked to wait in a small court for the arrival of the king while some Brahmins were invited to a different place in order to meet the king. He also stresses on the importance of the palace of the Zamorin in the city of Calicut.

Most historians argue that by the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, descriptions of the Calicut palace were absent from the travelogues which proves the declining importance of Calicut.¹³¹ Moreover, writers like Cantor Visscher portray Calicut as a declined city with no proper fortified palace and streets.¹³² This strengthened the idea of Calicut as a ‘typical medieval city’.¹³³ However we need to consider several things in this context. For example, it is true that travelers like Della Valle give a detailed description of the court but also focus on the fact that it was not built in a symmetrical or “aesthetical” style.¹³⁴ Also to connect with the argument made in the previous sections, the changing nature of the kingdom of Calicut is important to understand this change.

¹²⁸ George Percy Badger ed., *The Travels of Ludovico Di Varthema A.D 1503 to 1508* (London: Hakluyt society, 1863) 155.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 174

¹³⁰ Della Valle, *The travels of Pietro Della Valle to India*, (London: Haklyut Society, 1889), 355.

¹³¹ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 190. Koshy, “The Dutch in the East: Case study of their relation with the Zamorin of Calicut,” *Journal of Kerala Studies* Vol.XIII (1986): 123-135.

¹³² Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, 158.

¹³³ Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, 6.

¹³⁴ Valle, *the travels of Pietro Della Valle to India*, 364.

If we look at the indigenous sources from the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, there were three major palaces within Calicut city itself in which the Zamorin resided. Apart from the primary palace which has been mentioned in the travelogues, there were three other palaces: *Puthiya Kovilakam, Pattinnar Kovilakam and Ambadi Kovilakam*.¹³⁵ The Zamorin did not have restrictions on his place of residence. He was allowed to reside in any of the palaces (Kovilakam) under his control and even the houses of the regional chiefs. This is an important point to be noted in this discussion because, the residence of the king was mostly based on the political situation and does not always reflect the splendid nature of the residence. This could have been difficult for historians to understand, as there is always an aspect of sophistication and formality attached to the residence of the king, ie, a palace. However, in the context of Calicut, the term palace is not to be taken in the sense of an extravagant building but simply refers to the place where the king resided.

The series of wars between the Portuguese and the Zamorin led to changes in the territorial concerns of the Zamorin. He moved more towards the south and areas like Chetwai and Cranganore became important nodes of the territorial debates. This also changed the nature of the royal quarters. It was important for the Zamorin to move southwards of Ponnani more frequently. Ponnani was the first strategic point in the south which was annexed by the Zamorin. This also led to the growing importance of the moving courts.

The movement of the court of the Zamorin itself is an important indicator of the changing political situation of Malabar. First we have to look at the rise of Ponnani in the sixteenth century. Ponnani was the second capital of the Zamorins and the most important place for them after Calicut. It was very well located between the major river of Malabar (Nila-Bharathappuzha) and the port. It connected the main land to the hinterlands and made the transport of agricultural products including pepper easier. Also, Ponnani was an important center for Islamic learning and knowledge development.¹³⁶ Annexation of Ponnani was an important development for the rise of Calicut both economically and politically.

¹³⁵ Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala: The Zamorins of Calicut," 63.

¹³⁶ There are quite a lot of literature which focuses on the importance of Ponnani as an important trading center as well as Islamic cultural center of early modern Malabar. M. Vijayalekshmy, "Trade and trading centers in Kerala (A.D 800-1500)," (PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of Calicut, 1997), 204; Prange, "The social and economic organization of Muslim trading communities on the Malabar Coast," 98.

The expansion of the kingdom was an important need for the Zamorins in the sixteenth century due to various reasons. Firstly, the Portuguese attempted to capture the pepper hinterlands and the trade monopoly of Calicut through various means. After the Portuguese attack on Calicut in 1503, when they burned two ships in the port of Calicut, the military was strengthened in Calicut.¹³⁷ Hence the relocation of the territory of the kingdom was important at that time in order to protect the city of Calicut. If we look at the series of fights that took place between the Portuguese and the Zamorin, most of these took place in Ponnani. When the Dutch arrived in Calicut for the first time in 1604, the Zamorin was in Ponnani, busy fighting the Portuguese.¹³⁸

There were only very rare and special occasions when the European merchants received permission to build a factory in the city of Calicut. On the other hand, Ponnani became the center where the European merchants built their factories with the approval of the Zamorin. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese received consent from the Zamorin to settle down in Ponnani. Apart from that, several other important settlements were also built there by other European merchants.¹³⁹ Most of the VOC-Zamorin contracts show that most of the Dutch factories in areas under the rule of the Zamorin were located at Ponnani.¹⁴⁰ In 1701, Wichelman complains that the Zamorin allowed the French, English, Portuguese and also the Persian and Gujarati merchants to settle down at Ponnani.¹⁴¹

Most of the literature talks about the importance of Ponnani in conducting the pepper trade and developing Islamic connections throughout the Indian Ocean. However, there is another important role of this town which should be studied. Ponnani was not only the second capital of the Zamorins but also their military capital. The *Marakkar* merchants who were working as the *shah bandar* of the Zamorins were located at Ponnani.¹⁴² More importantly, Ponnani was the major entry point to Calicut from the south from the sixteenth century onward. We see that the

137 Unknown Author, *Calcoen: A Dutch Narrative of The Second Voyage of Vasco Da Gama to Calicut*, ed., J. Ph. Berjeau (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1874,) 18.

138 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imarat and Tijarat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 to 1750," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, (1995):770.

139 s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*,

140 In 1626, the Dutch commander demanded a big factory at Ponnani. Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum*, 205-8.

141 s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 366.

142 Shah Bandar was the title in Arabic given to the Officer who were in control of the port. He was in charge of the activities conducted at the port and the safety of the port of Calicut and also Ponnani.

major attacks by the Portuguese were restricted only up till Ponnani and very rarely entered (for war or attack) the city of Calicut after the mid-sixteenth century.

Ponnani continued to be an important seat of the Zamorins from the sixteenth century onward. In the 1700, there were two important VOC visits to the kingdom of Calicut regarding the southward expedition of Calicut. One visit was to meet the Zamorin at Calicut, and the next one was to meet the second prince of Calicut who was stationed at the Ponnani court. Apart from this, most of the palace records of the Zamorin also highlight the significance of Ponnani in maintaining the political superiority of the Zamorin.¹⁴³ The Zamorin patronized many temples and festivals in Ponnani as well. The rise of the *bhakti movement* in Malabar in the sixteenth century also originated from Ponnani under the patronage of the king.¹⁴⁴

If we look at the sixteenth century, the building up of the city of Calicut was an important task for the rulers. However, after the building of the city, the next task was the slow expansion of the kingdom. As we saw above, the conflicts with the Portuguese characterized the kingdom of Calicut in the sixteenth century. The Zamorin expanded their territorial control with the help of their military and the *Marakkar* merchants as a challenge to the Portuguese army.¹⁴⁵ Ponnani was the major war zone where the Portuguese and the army of Calicut fought at that time. The journey of the Zamorin from Calicut to Ponnani was highly symbolic and ritualistic until the sixteenth century. They were probably important in the initial stage for establishing the structure of the kingdom. However, by the mid sixteenth century, it was important for the Zamorin to move southwards for military purposes. However, this symbolic movement from Calicut to Ponnani was no longer important in the seventeenth century. By this time, this symbolic procession of the Zamorin was visible only during the festivals and rituals.

This pattern is important in order to understand the kingdom of Calicut in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Along with the expansion of the lineages the strengthening of the kingdom of Cochin also compelled the Zamorin to expand his territories. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the expansion of the kingdom of Calicut continued. This expansion was mostly southward in order to capture more strategic places between Calicut and Cochin. This

¹⁴³ Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala: The Zamorins of Calicut," 67.

¹⁴⁴ Malekandathil, "Portuguese Cochin and the maritime trade of India," 122.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

pattern of expanding territories and imagining a larger kingdom was important in the seventeenth century.

One important place is Cranganore as we saw in the second chapter. Cranganore was an independent kingdom till the sixteenth century. After that, both the Portuguese and the army of the Zamorin attempted to capture it. As we noted in the second chapter, most of the treaties between the VOC and the Zamorin handled the ownership of Cranganore. Cranganore was a politically volatile place where both the armies were on the alert.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, it was very important for the Zamorin to stay there in times of emergency.

In 1670, there was a war going on between the VOC and the Zamorin, he stayed in Cranganore. It is important to note that he did not build a palace or a special stay for himself. On the other hand, he resided with the chiefs of Cranganore who supported the Zamorin.¹⁴⁷ From there, he sent letters to the major officials of Calicut to help them with the war. After winning the war against the Dutch, the Zamorin invested more manpower in Cranganore.

The next important place which we saw throughout the discussions is Chetwai. Chetwai was an important place which was conquered frequently by both the Zamorin and the Company. Thalappilli *Rajas* controlled the space from Ponnani to Chetwai before the seventeenth century. He had obtained the fort of Chetwai in 1691 by the treaty with Van Reede.¹⁴⁸ However, due to the intensifying war, the Zamorin captured Chetwai and built a fort there. From both the VOC records and the palace records of the Zamorin, it is evident that after the VOC conquest of Cochin, the Zamorin was present in Chetwai for military purposes.

Apart from these major areas, the Zamorin also lived in several other places between Cochin and Calicut in the period between 1690 and 1720. In 1694, the year when Louis Taispel visited the Zamorin for the first time, the Zamorin was stationed at “Sjawelcattoo”.

¹⁴⁶ Consult the chapter section 2.5 for detailed discussion about Cranganore.

¹⁴⁷ *Kozhikkodan Grandavari*, VOL 2.

¹⁴⁸ Refer second chapter section 2.6 for more details.

(Chavakkad/Chowghat)¹⁴⁹ in order to plan the movement further south. He was planning to go to Cranganore after the visit of the VOC official.¹⁵⁰

The change in its political and territorial scenario in the seventeenth century is very important to understand the nature of the court of Calicut. Once the kingdom had reached the stage of expansion after consolidation, the needs and the preferences of the court were automatically reallocated. We can see this pattern in many other discussions about other early modern South Asian polities.¹⁵¹ We can see a similar process of expansion of the kingdom and a move away from capital in the case of Calicut as well. This does not reduce the importance of Calicut city, but strengthens the kingdom of Calicut.

The movement of the court is also visible in many other early modern courts including that of the Mughal Empire.¹⁵² Even though the moving capital of the Mughal Empire and the temporary moving court of Calicut are incomparable, the idea of the movement as creating a connecting network is very important here. On the one hand, the expansion of the Calicut kingdom and the movement of its courts resulted from a compulsion being created from the side of the competing European powers and the kingdom of Cochin. On the other hand, the expansion and consolidation of the kingdom was also related to the increasing pressure on the Indian Ocean pepper trade. Increasing his control over the overland routes in order to export pepper and import opium was important for the king of Calicut.¹⁵³ Hence, the changing political setup of Calicut and the whole Malabar necessitated the moving courts.

¹⁴⁹ Sjawelcattoo is Chavakkad/Chowghat which was located between Ponnani and Chetwai. s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 301.

¹⁵⁰ VOC 1547, "Mission to the Zamorin at Chowghat by Louis Taispel, 1694 (report)", ff. 186-97. Inv.No. 1.04.02. NA, The Hague.

¹⁵¹ If we look at the discussions about the Mughal Empire, the idea of the moving court and the expansion was important after the mid- seventeenth century.

¹⁵² For example, we see a detailed discussion on the moving capital of the Mughal Empire throughout the centuries. For example, in the earlier historiography, the expansion of the Mughal Empire in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century to the southern India was considered as the reason for its decline. However, in the recent historiography, there has been several new interpretations about the moving capital and the expansion of the empire. One of the most important interpretations is the role of the moving capital along with the whole financial and military network in integrating the empire - Jos Gommans, *Mughal Warfare : Indian frontiers and high roads to empire 1500-1700* (London: Routledge, 2002), 130.

¹⁵³ Girija, "Challenges offered by an Alternate Space," 27.

3.5 Conclusion

The nature of the kingdom of Calicut in the early modern era was much more complex and sophisticated than it is generally understood to be. Firstly, the kingship and the rules of succession were consciously created and ritually legitimized. We see no traces of any attempts made by any other lineages to take away the position of the king. On the other hand, we mostly see a smooth and peaceful succession. Such smooth succession and the assignment of lands to all royal lineages were also possible because of the expansion of territories. Secondly, the change in the conception of the kingdom itself owed to this expansionist policy. The symbolized nature of movement of the king from one place to another changed to a constant moving of the court, reinforcing the constant political presence of the Zamorin.

One of the most commonly agreed upon aspects of early modern kingship is the presence of structured and strong rules of succession.¹⁵⁴ The idea is not to argue and try to fit Calicut into a Marxian-Weberian model of strong kingship on the one hand, and on the other, to look into an encompassing methodology for the study of early modern South Asian courts. But it is important to stress these ideas regarding the court and its royal functionaries in order to question the typical ideas of a “petty kingdom” and “fragmented polity” which are being applied in the case of all Malabar kingdoms without analyzing them comprehensively. These aspects of the expansion and the movement of the royalty lead us to a wider sense of the court of Calicut. As we saw in the previous chapter, the issue of territoriality and the political superiority of the Zamorin was an important characteristic of the court. Therefore, the next chapter will zoom out of the court of Calicut in the context of the Malabar Coast.

¹⁵⁴If we look at the Marxian-Weberian debates about the degree of the “kingship” in the early modern India, the major concern was the reservation of the central power and the power allocation. For Example- I A Khan, “Turko-Mongol Theory of Kingship”.

Chapter Four

Zooming out of the Court of Calicut

“If the Zamorin cedes all lands which he possesses of others, he will become an unfledged bird”

Magnus Wichelman (1701)¹⁵⁵

4.1 Background

In the previous chapter, we saw that the expansion of the kingdom and the movement of the throne characterized the seventeenth and eighteenth century court of Calicut. Also, the major political developments which affected the court of Calicut were related to both the kingdom of Cochin and the VOC. This triangular relation considerably affected not only the political formation of Calicut but also the imagination about the polity in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Malabar. Therefore, this chapter will look at the role of Cochin and the VOC in characterizing the kingdom of early modern Calicut.

Due to spatial constraints, the chapter will take a specific time period in order to see the primary developments. The period of 1691 to 1720 is interesting because it shows the changing relation between the VOC and the court of the Zamorin as well as the transition between two centuries. A peace treaty was concluded between the VOC and the Zamorin in 1691.¹⁵⁶ However, by 1716 there was a major war taking place between the two parties.¹⁵⁷ This time period also takes us through a shift in the perspective of the VOC documents on Calicut. First we shall look at the four major important VOC visits to court of the Zamorin and the character of the VOC during this period and then analyze the major concerns of the two parties.

4.2 Babba Prabhu, Van Reede and the Zamorin

As we saw in the second chapter, due to the threat of an internal rebellion in Cochin, Van Reede agreed to make a treaty with the Zamorin by ceding Chetwai in 1691. The major intermediary between the VOC and the Zamorin was a merchant named Babba Prabhu. He was a Konkani

¹⁵⁵ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 365.

¹⁵⁶ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum: Neerlandico-Indicum* Part 3, 569-70.

¹⁵⁷ Groot, *Diary kept during the expedition against the Zamorin*, 85.

merchant who was settled in Malabar and was involved in the pepper trade.¹⁵⁸ He was born in Cannanore and worked for the VOC from the time of the conquest of Cochin.¹⁵⁹ Several Konkani merchants were active members of the long distance pepper trade in Malabar.

It is interesting to note that, Babba Prabhu not only accompanied Van Reede on his visits to the Zamorin, but was also sent alone in order to speak to the Zamorin. Babba Prabhu was an important character, who was a major concern of the discussion of the VOC officials of Malabar in the second half of the seventeenth century. Different VOC officials treated him differently. For example, Van Goens considered him to be a trustworthy envoy and broker whereas the next commander Huseart called him a “deceitful Brahmin”.¹⁶⁰ Van Reede not only trusted him but also entitled him with several important tasks. He was also granted several special privileges in trade. After the departure of Van Reede from Malabar in 1691, no “outside” merchants were sent as envoys to Calicut. The later missions were always conducted by the VOC officials themselves. But in this case, it was important to employ a merchant from outside the VOC in order to create a *neutral* image since the VOC needed help from the Zamorin.

The major reason behind the acceptance of Babba Prabhu was the interest of the Zamorin in the pepper trade. The Muslim merchants, who were actively participating in the trade, held an important position in the court of Calicut. Babba Prabhu helped them in many ways to divert pepper from Cochin to Calicut.¹⁶¹ He was considered to be the assistant of the Zamorin in 1684. Some of the palace records of the Zamorin even mentioned that many higher officials of Cochin were his spies.¹⁶² Also, the king of Cochin considered him to be a “spy” of the Zamorin and did not trust him.¹⁶³ However, the role of merchants like Babba Prabhu were important in order to manage these interests on both sides.

Clearly, the long-distance pepper trade was an important concern for both the Zamorin and the company. The primary interest of the VOC was to monopolize the pepper trade which

¹⁵⁸ s' Jacob, “Babba Prabhu: The Dutch and a Konkani Merchant in Kerala,” in *All of One Company: The VOC in Biographical Perspective* ed., Robert Ross and George D Winius (Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1986), 136.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁶¹ Girija, “Challenges offered by an Alternate Space,” 31.

¹⁶² Iyyer, *Zamorins of Calicut*, 224.

¹⁶³ Menon, *Letters from the raja of Cochin*, 12.

pressurized them to take over Cochin from the Portuguese. However, this strengthened the local roots of the VOC and the political superiority of Cochin became an inevitable obligation for their future in Malabar. On the one hand, it was important to strengthen Cochin against Calicut in order to monopolize the pepper trade because, Calicut continually challenged the monopolistic ambition of the VOC in this period.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, the heavy military investment in Malabar was not preferred by the authority in Batavia.¹⁶⁵ This dilemma of the company influenced the Zamorin and his court from the mid seventeenth century onward.

Interestingly, if we look at the arguments of Van Reede in 1678, it is clear that his major vision was to build Cochin as an important space in order to resist the growth of Calicut.¹⁶⁶ The treaty made in 1691 focuses on the renewal of the friendship between the VOC and Calicut. The first concern of this treaty was to help each other in case of enemy attack through water or land and other emergencies. In the contract it was said that, since company is the protector of the kingdom of Cochin and Moetadavil (the lineage in Cochin which the Company and the Zamorin helped in order to attain power) they should fight against the enemies of Cochin as well. In that case also, the Zamorin should help them in waging war. This treaty possibly gave the Zamorin an upper hand in their relation at that time as the VOC needed his help to quell the internal rebellion in Cochin. The details from the report and the treaty shows that the palace in Cranganore (Padinjattekoi) and the fort of Cheralayam were given to the Zamorin.¹⁶⁷ The 1691 treaty was highly influential and a copy of that written in gold is still available.¹⁶⁸ The treaty also officially recognized the right of the Zamorin to store pepper in storehouses and export the pepper without the consent of the Dutch.¹⁶⁹ At this point of time, the Zamorin had taken the right over the small landlords of Cranganore, Chetwai and Cheralayam with the consent of the VOC. In other words, these areas came under the rule of Zamorin by negotiating with the VOC and not through a war. This expansion of the kingdom contributed to changing power relations within the Malabar Coast.

¹⁶⁴ Girija, "Challenges offered by an Alternate Space," 50.

¹⁶⁵ If we look at the communications between the commanders of the Malabar Coast and the Batavian authority or the Gentlemen XVII it is evident that the higher authority considered the military investment in Cochin as a loss. One example- Coolhaas, *Generale missiven* Deel 3, 772.

¹⁶⁶ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 146.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 244; Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum Part 3*, 569-70.

¹⁶⁸ The original copy is still kept in the British Library, London.

¹⁶⁹ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum Part 3*, 572.

From the next sections we shall see how these expansionist policies were handled throughout the time by both the Zamorin and the VOC and how it changed the political formation of Calicut.

4.3 Keeping the Equation: Louis Taispel and the Zamorin

A VOC mission to Calicut was organized in 1694, when succession problems in Cochin were resolved.. After the death of Van Dielen and Van Reede, there was no official governor or commander appointed by the VOC in Cochin.¹⁷⁰ Louis Taispel was a provisional official of the VOC and was sent to the court of the Zamorin at Sjawelcotta (Chawakkad/Chowghat) in 1694. The mission report prepared by him after that visit is vital to understand the nature of the negotiations between the VOC and the Zamorin at that time.

The informal and simple nature of the meeting is evident from the report. However, this informality is also related to two things. First among them was the rank and position of the VOC official who visited the Zamorin. This is exemplified by the difference between the visit of Van Reede in 1678 and this official. In 1678, when Van Reede visited the Zamorin at Ponnani, it was an important event. The detailed description of the event and the lists of the gifts provided by Van Reede have been recorded in the palace records of the Zamorin. These gifts included many luxury items like various kinds of silk, gold and sandal wood etc. This has been considered as an important visit by the VOC as well.¹⁷¹

Unlike many VOC officials who came to the East Indies from Holland, Taispel was born and brought up in Malabar. He was born to a European father and an Indian mother in Kayamkulam (south of Cochin).¹⁷² He was accompanied by six Dutch soldiers and one corporal for this visit to the Zamorin. It is interesting to note that, Sergiant Pieter Claarsz also joined Taispel for this visit. It has been said that “he wished to meet the Zamorin so he joined us”.¹⁷³ This points out to the fact that, meeting the Zamorin was neither a difficult nor a complicated process. Probably, prior appointments were not needed to visit the king. On the other hand, meeting the Zamorin in Calicut

¹⁷⁰ s' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin* , 173.

¹⁷¹ The 1678 visit of Van Reede was an important event for the VOC as well. The officials expected this could make some effect on the expansionist policy of the Zamorin.

¹⁷² s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 267.

¹⁷³ VOC 1547, “Mission to the Zamorin at Chowghat by Louis Taispel”, Ro. 187.

in the earlier period was quite a complicated and long process which was handled by a series of intermediaries.¹⁷⁴ This also shows the changing nature of the idea of the “court”. The second reason for the informality of the meeting could be the place. For example, in Calicut where the Zamorin had a large palace and more paraphernalia, the processes were also different. Moreover, since it is the capital of the kingdom, more processes and rituals could be observed before the meeting.¹⁷⁵

Territorial concerns in Malabar were an important matter for both the VOC and the Zamorin. The complicated nature of the VOC-Cochin relations also reflected in the political formation of Calicut. Interestingly, most of the court visits by the VOC dealt with the issue of the territorial expansion of Calicut rather than issues pertaining to the pepper trade. The major issue which was discussed during this meeting was the shift in the loyalty of a chief named Aynikkutty Nambetty. He was the chief of the area near Chetwai and under the jurisdiction of Cochin. However, in 1694, he submitted himself to the Zamorin and joined the kingdom of Calicut.¹⁷⁶ The issue of Aynikkutty Nambetty is an example which portrays the nature of the political formation in Malabar. This problem was an important consideration, not only in this visit but also in the report made by the commander De Roo in 1695.¹⁷⁷ This shift has been considered as an important change in the political balance of Malabar, especially by the VOC and Cochin.

Several points pertaining to this issue are important for our study here. Firstly, the Dutch officials considered this as an act of deceit and noted that “he left his lawful master and went to the Zamorin.” The European understanding of the loyalty of the feud to the master must have contributed to the creation of the idea of a chaotic polity in the early modern Malabar. Unlike the European serfs who are indebted and connected to a lord and the king by birth, there was no such idea of fixed loyalty present in Malabar. The worry about the corruption of royal power by these chiefs was always a problem in the perspective of the VOC. Hence the depictions of the court of Calicut were also influenced by these apprehensions.

It is important to look at the way in which this shift took place. As we saw in the second chapter, by 1691, the Zamorin had expanded his kingdom southwards, his armies had started to

¹⁷⁴ If we look into the journal of the Vasco da Gama, he points out that it was not able to talk to the king without the consent of these long series of the intermediaries.

¹⁷⁵ Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, 62; Valle, *the travels of Pietro Della Valle to India*, 355.

¹⁷⁶ VOC 1547, “Mission to the Zamorin at Chowghat by Louis Taispel,” 190 Vo.

¹⁷⁷ S' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 264.

station themselves in several places and he used to visit those places occasionally. In 1693, there was a clash between the soldiers of the Zamorin and Aynikkutty Nambetty. The Zamorin was highly displeased with this act of Nambetty and requested the help of the Company and Cochin in order to fight back Nambetty since he was their chief, but there was no positive response from their side. Hence the Zamorin attacked the area and burned the town down to ashes.¹⁷⁸ The inhabitants of the town fled in order to save their lives and Nambetty was left without any choice other than surrendering himself to the Zamorin.¹⁷⁹

This is not an exceptional incident in early modern Malabar. The expansion of the Calicut kingdom was also based on these developments. For example, the major worry present in those negotiations as well as in the reports was the expansion of Calicut. Predictably, both the parties attempted to blame the other for their actions. The Zamorin said that he had lost his trust in the VOC because they never kept their promises. The issue of 1663 was repeatedly mentioned by the Zamorin for fighting against the VOC.¹⁸⁰ Likewise, the Zamorin argued that the negligence from the side of the company caused this summoning of Nambetty. However, Taispel attempts to convince the Zamorin by saying that the Company could not help the Zamorin at that time as their commander had just died and there was a state of confusion among them. Although these arguments reflect only the general nature of the negotiations, the major concerns of these missions revolve around the issue of territoriality and the political superiority of Calicut.

Taispel always focused on the point that, the “intervention of the bad people like Nambetty” caused the distress between the Zamorin and the Company. It is interesting to note that, unlike the commander’s reports which blame the Zamorin directly, he never complained about the Zamorin in his report. This is very essential to understand the nature of the many layers in the official spectrum of the VOC. Also, a look at the later history of Taispel reveals that he was punished for being a double agent and was transported to Batavia.¹⁸¹ This was caused by the company’s worries regarding his strengthened local roots. Hence the deportation was primarily meant to cut his local roots in order to prevent an act of “deceit”.

¹⁷⁸ VOC 1547, “Mission to the Zamorin at Chowghat by Louis Taispel”, 189.Ro.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁰ In 1663, after the conquest of Cochin, the VOC did not keep their promises to the Zamorin which made a huge break in their friendship. For more details, please consult chapter two.

¹⁸¹ S' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 267.

4.4 Territorial Concerns of 1700

In 1700, we see two major missions to the court of the Zamorin. Two VOC officials, Cornelis Blicklant and Gerrit Mulder visited the Zamorin at Ponnani twice, in October and November.¹⁸² There was another visit made to the second prince of Calicut who was permanently stationed at Ponnani in the same year. By, 1700, we can see that the army of the Zamorin moved further south and was stationed at Thrissur. The primary discussions and negotiations in this period were regarding this movement of the army. In 1700, the main issue was the rumored attack on Cochin by the Zamorin. The Zamorin answered this question of Wichelman's by saying that the army will not go further from Thrissur and would not create hostilities as far as the Cochin army shows a friendly attitude.¹⁸³

However, from the second report we can understand that this did not happen. Firstly, there was a problem created by Hoekonda Nair in the territory of Cranganore which helped the Zamorin to capture that area. Hoekonda Nair was one hereditary power holder in the area of Cranganore who had submitted to the king of Cochin. However, by 1700, he had created a rebellion there and this created an opportunity for the Zamorin to capture Cranganore, which was very important from a strategic point of view.¹⁸⁴

However, the VOC had several dilemmas and confusions at this stage. The first problem was their apprehension about investing in a war against the Zamorin. Secondly, since the Zamorin's army was close to the pepper growing area of Cochin, they feared that the Zamorin might hinder their pepper collection. This created a tussle between the king of Cochin and the company. The report written by Wichelman after his reign in Malabar clearly points out to the fact that the VOC attempted to curb the expansion of the kingdom of Calicut but did not succeed. The dilemma of the VOC in getting involved in this situation is evident from this report. He notes that the VOC could never make peace between Cochin and Calicut as these territorial issues were deeply rooted. Wichelman argues that the Zamorin has wrongly captured the areas near Trikkur and Veluthanad (25 or 30 miles long area South to Thrissur).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² "Mission to the Zamorin of Calicut, 1700 (report); VOC 1649, Mission to the Zamorin at Ponnani".

¹⁸³ VOC 1634, "Mission to the Zamorin of Calicut", 505 Ro.

¹⁸⁴ VOC 1649, Mission to the Zamorin at Ponnani", 100 Ro.

¹⁸⁵ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 365.

In 1700, Goekonda Achan, Cousin of Tottacherri Talacchannavar (who was a part of the kingdom of Cochin) submitted himself to the Zamorin. The Zamorin took over the area near Thrissur which was under Goekonda Achan. Even though Wichelman attempted to meet the Zamorin to negotiate this issue his attempts were not successful.¹⁸⁶ The greatest fear of Wichelman was that the landowners in the northern part of Cochin would start moving over to the side of the Zamorin.¹⁸⁷ This was a time when the dilemma of the company between meeting both the global and local needs intensified even further. Hence this pattern of attracting or capturing the lands of the small chieftains was important in the expansion of Calicut.

Paliyetter was a supporter of the kingdom of Cochin and the company, and was offered the position of the *Ragiadoor* by the VOC in Moelacarra. But it seems that he was not willing to take that position. One important incident which was reported along with this information is that, Paliyetter was trying to cheat the Company by offering Thrissur to the Zamorin. It was important to note that it was Mangat Achan who adopted Paliyetter and offered him help even though Paliyetter did not directly refuse the offer of the VOC, he did not accept the offer either. At the same time, the Zamorin had stationed his army at Thrissur. Paliyetter did not want to oppose the Zamorin. Paliyetter attempted to send a secret message to the Zamorin and tried to submit his territory to the Zamorin. After the official report made by Blicklant and Mulder in 1700, there were some appendices attached which presented several rumors.¹⁸⁸ The company had received some information from the interpreter regarding the relationship between the Zamorin and Paliyetter. The VOC translator Louis Perrera gave the information that Paliyetter had secretly written to the Zamorin via his brother in law (while Hoekonda was engaged in a rebellion).

The company's complaints about the expansion of the kingdom, and the role of other Europeans in the Calicut court was readily increasing during this time. A report made by Wichelman talks about the European presence in the court of Calicut in 1700. The English merchants were present in the court of Calicut and Ponnani along with other Muslim merchants. Wichelman frets about the role of the English in the court of the Zamorin. The English and the French were given space for factories in his territory without respecting the protests made by the Dutch. On the other hand, he points out that the Zamorin allowed all nationals in his court and

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 377.

¹⁸⁸ VOC 1649, Mission to the Zamorin at Ponnani", 100 Ro.

knew how to balance their roles there.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, he points out that this alliance with the European nations has made him superior among the Malabar princes. This spills quite a lot of ink on the fact that the court of the Zamorin in the early modern period widened its scope both locally and globally. On the other hand, the role of the VOC restricted the scope of Cochin rather than strengthening it. This is evident from the complaints of the Raja of Cochin in the eighteenth century.¹⁹⁰

4.5 Changing Scenario in the Next Decades

Obviously, the temporary indifference of the company towards getting involved in the war against the Zamorin did not last very long. By 1710, the Zamorin erected another fort near Chetwai and conquered nearby areas like Pappnissery.¹⁹¹ These developments took place around 1710 and were significant to all three parties involved in this Calicut-VOC-Cochin triangle. For example, a tussle took place between the king of Parur (Parur is a small place located between Calicut and Cochin, who was a “feudatory” of the king of Cochin).¹⁹² In 1710, as a result of this tussle, the Raja of Parur submitted himself to the Zamorin. Along with that, the Zamorin also invaded Irijnalakkuda (a place near Chetwai), while the present VOC commander became seriously ill.¹⁹³

This shows that the pattern of attracting/capturing the lands of small chieftains was repeating again and again. This pattern is significant not only to understand the expansion of Calicut but also the political setup of the Malabar Coast in the early modern period. However, the letter of the king of Cochin to Batavia seriously expressed his discontent about the situation. The growing tension between the Zamorin, the Cochin king and the Company finally led to a severe war between them. In 1716, a war started between the Zamorin and the Company. This war continued until 1719. During these three years, there were several changes that took place in the political situation of the kingdom of Calicut.

¹⁸⁹ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 366.

¹⁹⁰ Menon ed., *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, 12.

¹⁹¹ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 200.

¹⁹² The term feudatory does not convey the meaning of the context completely. However, the idea is to notify that the Raja of Parur had submitted himself to the king of Cochin both symbolically as well as economically.

¹⁹³ Menon ed., *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, 4-5.

The major reason for the war was the pressure on the company from both the authorities in Batavia as well as the king of Cochin. The Batavian authority advised the commander in Malabar in 1715 to take over Chetwai and secure the kingdom of Cochin. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, we see a rising contrast between the expenditure and the profit of the VOC in the Malabar Coast.¹⁹⁴ It was important to secure the kingdom of Cochin in order to protect monopoly rights over pepper. Therefore, by 1714 the company attempted to build a new fort in Chetwai and decided to wage war against the Zamorin in 1716. This war was one of the strongest and most influential wars waged by the Zamorin with the Dutch.¹⁹⁵

The *dag register* kept on the war against the Zamorin gives us hints about the role of the VOC in characterizing the developments in the kingdom of Calicut. The war period witnessed a long series of missions sent by the VOC to the Zamorin. As we saw in the last chapter, people like Mangat Achan were important in making major decisions of the kingdom of Calicut. He represented Calicut in several negotiations during the war period. For example, we see a report of the negotiations that took place in 1717, between the accountant and the head translator Cornelis van Meekeren and Malpa Pooij (he was a merchant from Canara, like Babba Prabhu) with Mangat Achan regarding the issue of the expansion of the Calicut kingdom. If we look at the report, the deeds of Aynikkutty Nambetty and other *Ragiadoors* of Calicut were once more the primary points of contention. In a nutshell, the primary demand of the company was to expel Nambetty from Calicut and to stop the expansion of Calicut after Chetwai.

Joannes Hertenberg was the commander of the Malabar Coast from 1716-1723. The war caused several difficulties on both sides. If we look at the expenses of the Company from 1716-1720, we see a steep increase in the expenses and a decrease in profit.¹⁹⁶ After 1678, when Van Reede had visited the Zamorin, we see another direct visit by the governor to the Zamorin in 1718. In 1700, Blicklant had said to the Zamorin that, according to the VOC rules, the governor was not permitted to visit the king in person.¹⁹⁷ He does not give any further explanations regarding this matter. Also, memoirs by commanders stationed in Malabar from 1700-1716 are no longer

¹⁹⁴ George D Winus, Marcus P.M Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 158.

¹⁹⁵ Groot, *Diary kept during the expedition against the Zamorin*, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Winus and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 158.

¹⁹⁷ VOC 1649, Mission to the Zamorin at Ponnani" 101 Vo.

available. After the report left by Wichelman in 1701, the next available report was by Hertenberg, written in 1723.¹⁹⁸ However, we see that Hertenberg visited the court of the Zamorin in person in 1718 and left a long report.¹⁹⁹

The report says that even though it was not possible to win over the Calicut army, the commander did not fail in concluding a truce between both the parties. This treaty also repeated the demand to expel all the Europeans from the country of the Zamorin like all the other previous treaties. Since we see this demand come up in both, the earlier and the latter treaties, it is evident that this did not become the subject of much change. Especially, even in the years 1742 and 1743, we have ample evidence of the presence of Europeans in Calicut.²⁰⁰ Other than this, a major concern of the treaty was the ownership of the lands between Cochin and Calicut. The primary demand of Hertenberg was to expel Aynikkutty Nambetty from the kingdom of Calicut.²⁰¹ However, from the report it is clear that the Zamorin did not give any direct answer to this insistence. This again takes us back to the scenario prevalent in 1694 and points to the same pattern.

4.6 The Power Triangle and the Court of Calicut

As we saw in the previous chapter, the expansion of the kingdom was the primary feature of Calicut in the early modern era. This chapter gave a detailed review of how the VOC had also participated in this process. The practice of conquering small areas which were either independent or under Cochin was important for this process. For that, the Zamorin either attacked those chieftains or allied with them. In both ways, the VOC and the kingdom of Cochin were challenged. This aspect of the expansion challenged this triangular relation. Also, there was often a dilemma for the officials, where to place themselves among these local-global issues. The use of intermediaries to negotiate with the court of Calicut was always a great problem for the VOC. For example, even though Babba Prabhu provided a neutral image in front of the Zamorin, the VOC had to allow

¹⁹⁸ S' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, XIII.

¹⁹⁹ VOC 1928, "Mission Report about the visit to the Zamorin by Joannes Hertenberg", ff. 20-64.

²⁰⁰ V. Stein van Gollennesse, "Memorandum on the Administration of Malabar by his worship V. Stein van Gollennesse" in *The Dutch in Malabar*, ed. and trans. A. Galletti and P. Groot (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1911), 72; Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, 44.

²⁰¹ VOC 1928, "Mission Report about the visit to the Zamorin by Joannes Hertenberg", 22 Ro.

several special rights for him in order to convince him. Also, he was considered to be a spy of the Zamorin by many VOC officials and the king of Cochin.²⁰²

The role of VOC officials like Taispel, who were locally rooted was significant in carrying forward negotiations, but there was also a threat of deceit. The local roots of the VOC officials or the intermediaries were always a problem for the structural existence of the company. Taispel is a great example of that and this could be the main reason for deporting him to Batavia where it would have been difficult to build some local roots. On the other hand, if we look at the later missions by the Dutch officials to the Zamorins, the major complaint was the selective translation and interpretation by the translators present at the court. The officials often complained that, the interpreters and translators conveyed only what they wanted, which often created several misunderstandings. This dilemma of the VOC was manipulated especially in the spaces like Calicut. If we look at the later activities of Babba Prabhu, we can see that he was helped by the Zamorin to conduct his trade. Likewise, Taispel attempted to convince both the Zamorin and his commander in order to take over the place of Babba Prabhu as an envoy to the Zamorin.

Several scholars argue that the weakness of the kingdom was reflected in its interaction with the foreigners.²⁰³ The main idea behind his argument is that sixteenth century travelers gave a detailed description of the huge amount of jewelries that the king was wearing while those meetings, whereas later travelers do not give such descriptions. If we look at travelers like Varthema, one thing is clear that the king does not wear those jewelries on an everyday basis. On the other hand, the special dress and jewels were used only on sacred occasions or for public appearances.²⁰⁴ Also, the contexts in which the Zamorin interacted with the early sixteenth century Europeans and the early eighteenth century Europeans are different. By 1700, the Dutch officials or merchants were considered to be a part of the local political system rather than being foreign merchants.

One important problem with foreign sources of the seventeenth century, especially the VOC documents was their inability to understand the complex nature of the functioning of the

²⁰² Menon, *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, 6.

²⁰³ Some scholars have argued that the kingdom of Calicut was not treating the foreigners with the level of sophistication in the seventeenth century as we see in the time of Da Gama. For example, Thanumalayan, "History of the Zamorins of Calicut," 112.

²⁰⁴ Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, 62.

court. In these reports and other travelogues there are several mentions about the “corruption” of the royal powers by “non-legitimate” people. Unlike the sixteenth and early seventeenth century sources, the later ones consciously attempt to portray a “weak king”. For example, if we look at descriptions in the VOC reports, they attempt to make a clear distinction between the Muslims of Calicut who were involved in the trade and the Nairs of Calicut who were involved in running the military and the administration. However a close analysis of indigenous sources would help us in questioning these categories. Firstly, the distinctions between those positions were not made according to the community. We see several Muslim officials who were holding important positions as judges and land administrators in Calicut in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.²⁰⁵ For instance, the Zamorin had provided the areas near Ponnani to a particular Muslim community who were largely known as *Kozhikkodu Koyas*.²⁰⁶ In the seventeenth century, the title of the military head who trains the warriors was Shabatra Koya which could be either a Nair or a Muslim.²⁰⁷ Writers like Stein van Gollennesse (governor of the Malabar Coast in the mid eighteenth century) argue that the Muslims showed “over-freedom” which led to the decline of this “ancient powerful kingdom”. Muslims were present in the court of Calicut at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.²⁰⁸ The concept of the ‘traditional pagan court’ was often challenged by these intermixing political categories.

Secondly, the involvement of women in the court was also considered to be a reason for the weakness of the kingdom. The clear division between the private space and the public sphere was mostly a yardstick for the Europeans. The writings arguing for the role of the harem to be seen as a reason for the weakness of kingly power in the Oriental courts are not rare.²⁰⁹ Recent studies on women in the Mughal court criticize this conception by arguing that the above mentioned distinction was not always present in the early modern Eastern courts. On the other hand, the inability of the westerners to understand the intermixing nature of the private-public sphere was the reason for this confusion.²¹⁰ As we saw, all the courts on the Malabar Coast in the early modern period followed the matrilineal system of descent. Especially in Calicut, several women held

²⁰⁵ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Vol 13 and Vol 7.

²⁰⁶ Kozhikkod is the Malayalam name of Calicut and Koya denotes the elite section of the Malabar Muslims.

²⁰⁷ Krishnanadar, “Nayar Militia in Travancore,” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Kerala, 1983), 25.

²⁰⁸ Glenn J. Ames, ed., *The Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama to India* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 87.

²⁰⁹ There are many writings. For example, K. S Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988).

²¹⁰ Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

important positions in the court. Hence the idea of the “weak king” or “weak polity” in the context of early modern Calicut can be challenged with these ideas. It is evident from the sources that the kingdom was expanding southwards which challenge both the economic and political authority of both the VOC and Cochin.

In this context, it is also important to look at the individual agency of the Zamorin. In other words, the policies of expansion and annexation were also dependent on the individual perspectives of the kings. Even though the decisions were made out of a complex system, the individual decision of the Zamorin was also important. However, there are some issues when we attempt to resolve this issues. Firstly the VOC sources hardly talks about the individual agency of the Zamorin. Apart from the title "Sammorijn", there are no references about the personal character of different kings and their impact on the policy making. Secondly, many sections of the indigenous sources are either lost or decayed. Also, the personal descriptions of the kings were not an important theme in the available sources. However, with the limited information available, we can reach to several important remarks.

Firstly, the Zamorin of 1691 was considered as a person with appreciable ability and foresight in the records. The decision to help the VOC to quell the internal rebellion and annex Chetwai and Cranganore as reward for that, was considered as the most important milestone in the history of *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam*. According to several Indian mythologies a mighty steed was used a symbol of strong king with imperial ambitions. In the case of the Zamorin of 1691, this example was used. On the contrary, if we look at the palace records of the early eighteenth century, it is evident that the king himself wanted to portray him as “peaceful”.²¹¹ He was ascended to throne around 1707-8. According to the palace records, in several places he focused on the idea of having a “peaceful kingdom” instead of being the “emperor of the coast”. He took initiative to conclude the war regardless of the protests from the other higher officials like *Eralppadu*. On September 8th, 1708 he sent an envoy to the Company requesting a negotiation meeting.²¹² If we look at the VOC sources it is evident that there was a meeting between both the parties and the Zamorin handed over the areas like Chetwai to Company by 1710.²¹³ It was considered as an act

²¹¹ Iyyer, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, 364.

²¹² P.K.S Raja, *Mediaeval Kerala* (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1953).

²¹³ Heeres, *Corpus Diplomaticum* Part 4, 346.

by the “peace-loving king” in the court records.²¹⁴ However, there could be other pressures on the king like the approaching Mamankam festival etc. Even though, these imageries and claims were created or patronized under the king himself, it is important to understand that the king himself was important in the decision making process.

4.7 Conclusion

The VOC played an important role in building the political landscape of Calicut in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From this chapter it is clear that the expansion of Calicut was not always done through wars. On the other hand, there were several ways in which the king annexed these areas. The loyalty of the landowners were not fixed and they were not bound by any birth obligations. This offered the Zamorin several opportunities in order to attract them. However, this pattern of extension did affect the politics of the VOC also, as they were highly involved in the local politics of Malabar. When we compare court visits by merchants like Vasco da Gama in the sixteenth century with those VOC missions, it is very evident that the nature of interactions between the Zamorin and the Europeans have changed considerably. The VOC officials were not considered always as a “foreign power” by the Zamorin. On the other hand, most of these negotiations were characterized by a predominance of local requirements and the local development of the Malabar Coast. In other words, the integration of the VOC into local politics had an important function in defining the nature of the political culture of the Malabar Coast in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

If we look at the discussions on the nature of the VOC in the east, the major conclusion which comes up is the non-interventionist policy of the Dutch.²¹⁵ However, this chapter opened up several questions regarding the nature of VOC policies in Malabar. Firstly, the Dutch were much more deeply involved in the local political system compared to all other European powers like the English and the French in the early modern period. They attempted not only to patronize the kingdom of Cochin in order to control its territories but also to manipulate political issues on the Malabar Coast. Secondly, in many cases we do not see an attempt by the VOC to differentiate

²¹⁴ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari*, Vol 3.

²¹⁵ There are several works pointing at the “non-intervention” policy of the VOC at many places. For Example, Chris Nierstrasz, *In the shadow of the company: the Dutch East India Company and its' servants in the period of its' decline* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), Introduction.

themselves from the local power, on the contrary, they mostly attempted to represent the kingdom of Cochin. It is important to contextualize the development of the court of Calicut in this context. As we saw in the first chapter, the expansion of the kingdom of Calicut in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century characterized the courtly developments of Calicut. As this chapter showed, the VOC (also on behalf of Cochin) had an important role in those changes.

Chapter Five

The Ritual Cosmos of Calicut

5.1 Background

There are several ways in which rituals and festivals have been studied in connection with the State in the premodern era. These rituals have been seen as an essential part of pre-modern kingship in both the Western and the Eastern courts. For instance, scholars argue that these rituals and festivals were carried out in order to symbolically represent the power and sovereignty of the king.²¹⁶ On the other hand, scholars like Clifford Geertz argue that these states were working as base for the organizing of these festivals as they were important for the regular functioning of society.²¹⁷ In the context of pre-colonial India, the issue of legitimation through rituals and festivals was very important for kingships.²¹⁸

It would have been easy to conclude the thesis with a detailed discussion of the various actors within and outside Calicut participating in the making of its kingdom. Yet it is important to complicate the role of the non-human agencies in the kingdom of Calicut in order to reconsider the idea of “South Indian Kings as Ritual figures”.²¹⁹ As we saw in the introduction, scholars like Burton Stein argue that the South Indian kings were generally “ritual figures”.²²⁰ Also, many works on Calicut argue that these rituals and festivals were very important in order to understand the ‘declining state’. Nicholas Dirks in his work “Hollow Crown” argues that the king of early colonial Madurai had lost his actual power, which was sought to be covered by the extensive investment in rituals and festivities.²²¹ Scholars like V. V. Haridas who have used the palace records extensively,

²¹⁶ David Cannadine and Simon Price, Eds., *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

²¹⁸ There are several works on this theme. For example, Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²¹⁹ Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, 24.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 120.

argue that the enormous amount of rituals and festivals organized by the Zamorin was an indication of his “declining” power. Because, this “symbolic representation/legitimation” of power was important for the king in order to obscure the weakness of his kingdom. After seeing the layers of events that have characterized the development of the Calicut court, we would look at these festivals and rituals of that time in order to complicate such an understanding.

This is important because, most works on such rituals and festivals have studied them as exclusive and isolated processes. They were not read against the other socio-political events taking place at the same time. Most of the studies on the theme restrict the topic to the domain of local events. This chapter attempts to read these developments against the issues of expansion and the political superiority of the Zamorin in the early modern period.

5.2 Mamankam- The Grand Festival of Malabar

Mamankam was the most ostentatious festival of early modern Malabar. This festival was inseparably tied up with the political formation of the Calicut kingdom in many ways. Like the palace records kept by the Zamorin, there is a separate record section kept only about Mamankam.²²² They have been transcribed and published by scholars, opening up a lot of issues regarding the political formation of Calicut in the early modern period. The Mamankam festival was conducted in Tirunavaya on the banks of Bharathapuzha.²²³ It was conducted under the kingdom of Valluvanadu till the fourteenth century. Valluvanadu was located to the South of Calicut and to the east of Ponnani. The Zamorin attacked Valluvanadu in order to get the right to conduct this festival. The kingdom possessed large agricultural tracts.²²⁴ Hence, along with the right over the festival, the agricultural lands were also important for the king. After this annexation, the Zamorin received the title of *Raksha Purusha* (savior man).²²⁵ Hence, most scholars argue that the Mamankam festival was one of the major ways in which the Zamorin portrayed his political superiority.²²⁶

²²² Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, 118.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ M. R. Raghava Varier, "The Rise and Growth of the Calicut City" *Malabar Souvenir*, February (1994): 57.

²²⁵ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 95.

²²⁶ Iyyer, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, 92; Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 286; Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, 17; Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 34.

Before inspecting the role of the festival of Mamankam in determining the political shifts in the early modern Calicut, it is important to look at the nature of this festival itself. Interestingly, this was considered to be the biggest festival on the Malabar Coast by both the travelers and indigenous writers.²²⁷ It was conducted only once in every twelve years. This festival was conducted in the years 1683, 1694-95, 1707, 1719 etc. Most available indigenous records pertain to the ones conducted in 1683 and 1695. Even though there are several interpretations regarding the origin of this festival, by the seventeenth century, it had acquired a specific nature.

This festival was completely patronized by the Zamorin. The long and detailed list of the expenses for this festivals has been recorded by the accountants of the Zamorin.²²⁸ This was a twenty eight days long festival. The complete river bank with the temple at its center would be decorated and filled with ornamentation, flags, silk cloth and elephants.²²⁹ There were both religious ceremonies and other games and fairs organized during these days. The Zamorin stood on the central stage carrying the traditional sword which was believed to have been received by him from *Cheraman Perumal*.²³⁰ He was protected by his body guards and the military. There were also several military fights organized by the king which gave an opportunity for new comers to demonstrate their fighting skills.

5.3 Mamankam and the Calicut Court

Compared to the descriptions available of the Mamankam festivities conducted in 1695 and 1719, the one held in 1708 is scantily described. It is not easy to conclude anything from this because of the absence of documents, given that so many palace records were destroyed in the late eighteenth century by the Mysorean invasion of Calicut.²³¹ Apart from that, the Zamorin of 1684 to 1705 patronized the composition of a poem on Mamankam called *Mamankam Kilippattu*. It was written by Katancherri Namboodiri, who was a courtier of the Zamorin.²³² Compared to earlier times, the Mamankam festival was conducted with much greater splendor and care in the seventeenth

²²⁷ Kozhikkodan Grandhavari Vol.3; Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, Vol. I (Edinburgh : John Mosman, 1727) 306-12. Pyrard Laval, *The voyage of François Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 409.

²²⁸ Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, 102.

²²⁹ Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, 309-11.

²³⁰ Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 58.

²³¹ Prange, "The social and economic organization of Muslim trading communities on the Malabar Coast," 262.

²³² Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 281.

century.²³³ According to scholars like Haridas, this shows the increasing splendor attempting to hide the growing weakness of the kingdom. Even though scholars do not specify the reasons behind this understanding of the decline, the idea behind this assumption was that the increased number of the wars in this period led to the decline. However, if we closely look at the nature of the Mamankam, it is evident that the expansion of the kingdom is closely related to its splendor. To illustrate this point we will look into the ways in which the festival was prepared for and conducted.

The preparation for this festival was a tedious and complicated process.²³⁴ There were several aspects which were important for the preparation. Each aspect was given to a different landlord under the Zamorin. Cutting trees and gathering wood was the most important part of the preparation. It was important to collect bamboo in huge quantities in order to make the *pandal* (marquee) and the stages. Around 200 or 300 carpenters would work at the same time in order to complete the *pandal*, tent, temporary palace and the central stage.²³⁵ Interestingly, it was not only important for fulfilling the material requirement but also symbolically. The wood cutting would be inaugurated in the presence of the Zamorin and it was always done from the border of the kingdom. In other words, the site of the inaugural wood cutting was considered to be the farthest border of the kingdom. For example, in 1682, the wood was cut from Kalati (near Chirakkal) under the supervision of the local chieftain. This is important because in 1680 a negotiation took place between the VOC and the Zamorin regarding the issue of the territory near Chirakkal.²³⁶ Even though it did not produce any results, this act of cutting trees could be considered as an assertion of the authority of the Zamorin in Kalati. In 1694, the duty of arranging the inaugural wood cutting was assigned to the newly acceded landlord named Tharakkal Iremma Menon. This was considered to be an honor by the landlords. The Zamorin received a letter from him expressing his gratitude and honor. This was also because, these chieftains received several titles and incentives in return for their duties. For example, Menon had requested the Zamorin to send gunpowder and

²³³ Mamankam festival was not a great attraction in the earlier times. This is evident because seventeenth century travelers like Pyrrard Laval and Alexander Hamilton write about it in a great detail.

²³⁴ Haridas, "King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala," 282.

²³⁵ Namboodiri, *Samoothiri Charithrathile kanappurangal*, 100-101.

²³⁶ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 94.

musketees to bring these bamboo woods to the festival.²³⁷ The collection of wood for Mamankam from a certain area denoted the symbolic submission of the chieftain.

As we saw in the third chapter, by the seventeenth century the Zamorin had started to move his court due to various political needs. Likewise, during the Mamankam festival it was important for him to stay near that area. In 1695 we see an instruction issued by the Zamorin to build a “temporary palace” under the supervision of Kalattil Ittikarunakara Menon who was a small landlord near Ponnani.²³⁸ There is a detailed list in the palace records regarding the large amount of money that was given to this person in order to build this palace. There is also a detailed list of other landlords who received salaries during this period. These are only two small examples to prove the significance of the participation of the local chieftains and landlords in the festival. Therefore, we need to understand the expansion and the annexation of other areas in this context as well.

The detailed description of the activities of the Zamorin during the days of Mamankam has been recorded in the palace records. The effigy of the goddess would be carried by the Brahmin groups in front of the Zamorin with lighted golden lamps. The Zamorin would be accompanied by a group of musicians along with his military guards. By the seventeenth century, one section of the indigenous Muslim community received an exclusive right to play this music.²³⁹ These acts were done in order to extend support from the trading community as well. Also, it is important to note that the Mamankam also granted an opportunity for ship building. As a part of the Mamankam, around seven ships were made under the patronage of the Zamorin. The construction was done in the area between Ponnani and Thirunavaya. The collection of wood was not only important for the festival but also for ship building. This act of ship building reflects the significance of Indian Ocean connections in the making of the kingdom of Calicut. This part of the festival exemplifies the role of the Indian Ocean in the “local rituals” and questions the idea of an exclusively local nature of the rituals. The primary supervisors of these constructions were the Muslim ship builders of Malabar and Chettis from Coromandel.²⁴⁰ We can see clear differences if we compare these traditions with that of Cochin and Travancore. Even though there were Muslims

²³⁷ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Vol 3.

²³⁸ Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala,” 297.

²³⁹ Iyer, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, 108.

²⁴⁰ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Vol. 2

who were prominent in the realms of trade and commerce, courtly or ritualistic roles were hardly assigned to them. But the Muslim community took an active part in the Calicut court and its political formations. These activities are important in the context of the European challenge to the free trade of Calicut and the challenge to his political superiority faced by the Zamorin in the early modern period.

5.4 Chaver and the Threat to the kingship

Chaver was an important part of the Mamankam festival. Chaver literally means suicide bombing. During each Mamankam there would be several attempts made by different warriors to kill the king, knowing that he would be killed soon after that.²⁴¹ These were sacrifice rituals sponsored by small chieftains who were not happy with the superiority of the Zamorin. We do not have evidence of any successful Chaver even though many warriors were killed during their attempts to murder the king. It is important to look at this activity since it directly challenged the kingship and the authority of the Zamorin.

These suicide squads have been an important theme for popular literature and there are several works which romanticize and eulogize them.²⁴² Both the palace records and the travelogues give a detailed account of these Chaver activities. Mostly the local chieftains who sponsored them were the representatives of small kingdoms like Valluvanadu which were annexed by the Zamorin. These warriors were given their last meal in great splendor and their relatives used to send them with their blessings.²⁴³ This attempt was made in order to protest against the imperial annexations of the Zamorin.

The tradition of Chaver should be studied along with the issue of political expansion and the superiority of the Zamorin. The description of the Chaver in 1683 points out to the intensity and magnitude of this tradition. The suicide attackers came in small groups of five, eighteen, ten etc. from the morning onward.²⁴⁴ In all, there were fifty five warriors who attempted to kill the Zamorin on the first day of the Mamankam in this year.²⁴⁵ Even though the Mamankam festival

²⁴¹ Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*.

²⁴² Iyyer ed., *Rantu Chaver Pattukal* [Two Chaver songs]. Publication Details are not available.

²⁴³ Nair, *By Sweat and Sword*, 96.

²⁴⁴ Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, 307.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. and Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, 42.

was an important occasion for the Zamorin, it also threatened his life. Therefore, the army was very important in order to keep his life safe. According to the account of Alexander Hamilton, there were around 3000-4000 soldiers present in order to provide protection to the Zamorin.²⁴⁶ Many of them were killed and many were wounded. In 1695, the younger nephew of the Zamorin was also killed during the festival.²⁴⁷

The transportation of jewelry and ornaments from the palace of Ponnani to Thirunavaya was also an important part of the festival. It was a public royal procession which was guarded by a large number of soldiers. Around 20 chiefs with their armies would be present with the Zamorin holding gold or silver shields. The selection of the chiefs was not fixed and it varied each time. Hence, it was important for the chiefs to prove their loyalty and interest by providing their manpower and revenue. Therefore the years before the Mamankam festival were important in terms of the expansion of the kingdom.

The 1694-95 Mamankam demonstrated the presence of a really strong kingship, also because by 1691 strategic areas like Cranganore and Chetwai were with the Zamorin which secured the borders of the kingdom. It is very important to note that, chieftains like Aynikkutty Nambetty submitted themselves to the Zamorin at the time of Mamankam.²⁴⁸ On the other hand, if we look at 1719, there was a war going on just before the Mamankam had to be celebrated. From the previous chapter, it is clear that the Zamorin had to give back areas like Chetwai in 1719. Since the Mamankam festival was the major concern for the Zamorin. Hence, it is understandable that by 1719 it was very important to end the war and conclude a treaty.

It is very interesting that the Dutch never got involved in this festival even though there was a great chance to threaten the sovereignty of the Zamorin. Mamankam was not a major issue of concern for the VOC officials. If we look at the palace records of the Zamorin from 1694-5, the major concern for them was the preparation and the conduct of Mamankam. On the other hand, the VOC documents of the corresponding time period do not talk about Mamankam. As we saw in the fourth chapter, the shift made by Nambetty was the major concern of the VOC officials at

²⁴⁶ Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, 307.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 308

²⁴⁸ Refer chapter two and four for more details.

that time. We can find only very rare instances of discussion about Mamankam in the VOC documents.²⁴⁹

Interestingly, in 1695 De Roo noted that the Zamorin was collecting wood from places like Mapranam (near Thrissur) in order to prepare for the Mamankam festival. But the Raja of Cochin was highly dissatisfied with this activity. De Roo wonders “how the Raja of Cochin can be so ungrateful and forget the help provided by the Zamorin in the time of rebellion and complains about some woods”.²⁵⁰ The VOC officials were unable to understand the importance of the worries of the Raja of Cochin with regard to the collection of wood from Mapranam. As we saw above, the collection of wood under several chieftains also implied a symbolic submission to the Zamorin. Therefore, the king of Cochin was apprehensive about this act while the VOC official thought this to be of negligible significance. Even though the VOC officials understood the expansion of the kingdom by the Zamorin as encroachment, they did could not understand the significance of this festival and the symbolic importance of collecting wood.

5.5 Temple and Related Rituals

If we look at existing discussions on early modern South Indian kingdoms, temples play an important role therein. Temples were important nodal points for both economic and cultural activities.²⁵¹ Arjun Appadurai mentions the importance developing a cultural understanding of authority in South India which also reinforces the ideas of obedience through the caste system. The temples have a great role in explaining South Indian polity. The temples are considered as the nodal points for wealth, political economy and redistribution in South India.²⁵² In the study of kingship in pre-modern South India, Appadurai argues that temples were the most important space for the maintenance of rituals. But an inspection of works on early modern Malabar, bring forth only very few references about the role of temples. This is partly because of the assumption that, unlike other South Indian kingdoms, temples did not carry an important function in the economy

²⁴⁹ s' Jacob ed., *Nederlanders in Kerala*, 267.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁵¹ Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of substance*, 12.

²⁵² Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). 8-9.

or society of the Malabar region.²⁵³ However, in the story of the kingship and court of Calicut, several temples have had an important role to play.

Many Zamorins had built and patronized temples and many cultural and intellectual activities related to these temples. Most historians argue that the Zamorin patronized temples as a symbol of prosperity and for legitimation.²⁵⁴ But interestingly, there were two kinds of visits made by the Zamorin to the temples. One was for religious ceremonies and for conducting the prayer. The second would be as a guest for *secular* activities. This is called as *Virunnamitt* which literally means a “guest visit”.²⁵⁵ This guest visit was meant for collecting revenue from the temple authority.²⁵⁶ The temples were always attached to a piece of agricultural land which generated a good amount of revenue.²⁵⁷ In 1700, the report to Wichelman points out that the Zamorin’s army has surrounded the temple of Thrissur and it was the most important source of wealth there.²⁵⁸ The local sources point out to the fact that the Zamorin was keen to control the temple. Not only did he annex it militarily but also appeased the Brahmins in order to achieve his objective.²⁵⁹

Apart from this aspect of revenue collection, the temples played an important role in determining the political formation of Calicut. The building or annexation of temples was significant in territorializing the kingdom. For example, in 1720 some chieftains from the kingdom of Cochin approached the Zamorin with a request regarding the renovation of a temple. They were from an important Brahmin family in the kingdom of Cochin who were dissatisfied with the royal patronage being provided by Cochin. They requested the Zamorin to renovate the temple and they promised their loyalty in return.²⁶⁰ We should also see this in the context of the recently concluded war and the Mamankam festival. The submission of a temple also meant the submission of the area under the temple. This also reminds us of the pattern of attracting landlords that we saw in the above chapter. The lands and other possessions under the temple were known as *Devaswam*, which literally means that under the ownership of God. These lands could not be taken away from

²⁵³ Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, 12.

²⁵⁴ Haridas, “King, Court and Culture in Medieval Kerala,” 212-24.

²⁵⁵ Kozhikkodan Grandhavari Vol 1.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol 1 and 2.

²⁵⁷ Visscher, *Letters from Malabar*, 153.

²⁵⁸ VOC, 1634, Mission to the Zamorin of Calicut ff. 508 Ro.

²⁵⁹ Padmanabha Menon, *Koccirajyacaritam* (Calicut: Calicut University, 1989), 475-76.

²⁶⁰ Namboodiri, ed., *Vellayude Charitram* (Sukapuram: Vallathol Vidyapeedham, 1998), 33-38.

the authority of the temple management even though it was conquered by the king. Therefore, theoretically it was important to appease the Brahmins who were in charge of the temple and related property. Also, the temple in Thirunavaya was the center of the Mamankam festival. It was not built by the Zamorin, but annexed when he invaded Valluvanadu. Apart from the importance of the Mamankam festival, the temple was one of the major *Vaisnava* pilgrimage centers of Malabar.²⁶¹

The Zamorin provided a lot of royal grants for these temples, especially for the major Brahmin groups in Calicut. This was important in order to receive legitimation from the Brahmin community. In the early modern period, this was very important in order to possess royal power. It is important to look at the role of the four fold caste system in this context.²⁶² Compared to other parts of the sub-continent the caste system in Malabar was highly complicated.

Firstly, the merchant class did not exist within the indigenous Hindu community in Malabar. The merchants mostly came from either Coromandel or Konkan or belonged to the Muslim community. More interestingly, the warrior class (Commonly known as Nairs even if there are a variety of sub-groups which exist within them) came from the inter-mixing of Brahmins and the lower castes. They could never place themselves in the four fold caste system in the context of early modern Malabar and were considered as *Sudras*. Many Muslims were also trained in the army of the Zamorin and given high ranks. Most importantly, the Zamorins could never claim Kshatriya status as they possibly came from a sub-category of Nairs.²⁶³ It is evident from the sources that the rulers of Calicut did not claim *Kshatirya* (Warrior Caste) status unlike the Cochin royal family. Therefore it was very important for them to have legitimation from the Brahmin community. However, this was not a special case in the history of South Asia. For example, Shivaji of the Maratha kingdom could not claim Kshatriya status either and had patronized Brahmins for legitimizing his status as ruler.²⁶⁴ This was a necessary step for the Zamorin as well.

²⁶¹ Vaisnava sect was the worshippers within Hinduism who worship the God Vishnu. From the ancient times, there were two major sects in South India: Vaisnavas and Saivas (who worship Shiva).

²⁶² The *varna* system of India is four-fold caste system where the status and the job is decided by birth like Brahmins on the top (priests), Ksatriya (Warrior class), Vaisya (merchant class) and Sudra (menial labours).

²⁶³ In the palace records of the Zamorin, there are no claims of the Ksatriya status. Moreover, *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Vol. 12 (which could be dated around 1710).

²⁶⁴ Gordon, *The Marathas*, 69; Rosalind o Hanlon, "Contested Conjunctures: Brahman Communities and "Early Modernity" in India," *The American Historical Review* Vol. 118, No.3 (2013): 766.

Several scholars argue that Brahmanism as an ideology received a great attention in the colonial period as it was an integral part of the colonial rule as well.²⁶⁵ Similarly, scholars like O'Hanlon argue that the Brahmanical legitimation was important for the newly emerging Maratha State as the ruling class did not belong to the Ksatriya caste. Therefore, in the seventeenth century we see an increasing patronage for the Brahmins as well.²⁶⁶ This is visible in the case of *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* as well. However, a careful study of these rituals are important in order to understand the specific case of Calicut.

This is the context in which the patronization of temples becomes important. The main temple of Calicut was named *Tali* and it was patronized by the Zamorin. He attacked the Polanadu rulers in order to get control over this temple.²⁶⁷ The major attraction of this temple was the centrality of its location. A palace was also constructed near this temple. If we compare rituals from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with earlier ones, it is evident that the Zamorin had increased the number of sacrifices. Apart from the major deity in the temple, he also consecrated many more statues of gods in the *Tali* temple. By 1679 the Zamorin introduced a feast for the Brahmin community who were among the temple functionaries.²⁶⁸ Following this feast, the Brahmins received special gifts from the king. The Zamorin proclaimed after such a feast that “the most gracious blessing would be given by God if we feed the Brahmins”.²⁶⁹ This tradition remained strong even through colonial times.²⁷⁰ The rising role of Brahmins in the making of state power in the early modern period is a major theme in South Asian historiography. Scholars argue that Brahmins and Brahmanical rituals became more significant in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. If we look at the case of Calicut, the expansion of the kingdom went hand in hand with Brahmanical patronage.

5.6 Other Major Rituals in the Seventeenth Century Calicut

As we saw above, with the patronage given to both the temple and the Brahmin community the Zamorin managed to strengthen his power both politically and economically. However, when we

²⁶⁵ There has been a lot of work on the role of Brahmanism in the colonialism. For example, Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*.

²⁶⁶ O Hanlon, “Contested Conjunctures,” 765-8.

²⁶⁷ Gundert, Ed., *Keralotpatti*.

²⁶⁸ *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari* Vol.2.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Logan, *Malabar Manual*, 165.

look at the seventeenth century, there were quite a lot of changes happening in this process of legitimization compared to earlier periods which are ignored by most historians. A major change was the removal of the taboo associated with the ruler going out of his capital. If we look at the history of early modern Malabar, the rulers had a lot of physical restrictions.²⁷¹

In the sixteenth century the Zamorin only had permission to go out of the capital (that too only from Calicut to Ponnani) escorted by a great procession and a royal display. The same applied to the king of Cochin as well. Due to increasing wars with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Zamorin attempted to change this taboo and conducted rituals in order to legitimize this change. The Brahmins changed the rules by making a lot of sacrifices in order to enable the king to go out of the capital and the palace. The royal procession was changed into fulfilling a different function all together and was converted into a separate ritual. According to this, the Zamorin had to go to Ponnani palace once in a year with the entire royal procession carrying the sword. Otherwise, he was allowed to move out from the capital at his convenience.²⁷² In other words, the restrictions on the king with regard to moving in and out of the capital were made into rituals with the help of the Brahmin priests. This not only provided him the right to travel but also *privacy*.²⁷³ As we saw in the third chapter, this was related to the expansion of the kingdom. On the contrary, if we look at the situation of the king of Cochin in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, he was still restricted by such rules. In the letter written by the king of Cochin to the VOC authority in Batavia, he has mentioned that he could not accomplish the wish of the company because of his inability to move around and also because of his disobedience family members.²⁷⁴

Apart from the importance of the Brahmins in the ritualistic realms, the scholarly and philosophy debates conducted by them were also becoming important at that period. The parallel (non-Brahmanical) or Bhakti literature were patronized under the Zamorins in the sixteenth century.²⁷⁵ However, by the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century we see an increasing

²⁷¹ Barbosa, *Description of the coasts of East Africa and Malabar*, 137; Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, 156.

²⁷² *Kozhikkodan Grandhavari*, Vol3; VOC 1634, 1649 Inv.1.04.02.

²⁷³ By the seventeenth century, he could move without the escort and public proclamation which helped in planning many strategic attacks.

²⁷⁴ Menon, *Letters from Cochin Rajas to Batavia*, 12.

²⁷⁵ Bhakti was a free form of devotion emerged within the Hindu religion but which challenged several traditional norms like Caste system with in the Hinduism. *Adhyatma Ramayanam* etc.

patronage to the Brahmanical scholarly debates and literature.²⁷⁶ An interesting tradition that was invented by the Zamorin in the seventeenth century was that of the intellectual debate called *Pattathanam* in the *Tali* temple. The one who won the debate was honored with the title “Bhatta”. The first evidence of such debates can be found in the year 1679. The main aim behind these gatherings was to provide gifts and money for Brahmins. Brahmins from several places within South India would be invited to the temple. However, this was not an exceptional process in Calicut. For example, Ganeri shows the rise of a *new rationality* in North India with increasing Brahmanical discussion and rejuvenation of Sanskrit.²⁷⁷ This also increases and got strengthened in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

This was not only a way to expand the Brahmin gatherings but also to make the temple more famous in order to collect more revenue. Likewise, from the seventeenth century on ward, we see that the Zamorin’s army carried a ritualistic emblem (*pallimaradi*) which symbolized the goddess *Thirumanthamkunn Bhagavathy* which is a sanction for victory against enemies, especially the ones who were annexed by the Zamorin.²⁷⁸ Apart from Mamankam, there was another festival which was conducted in Thirunavai. It was an annual festival patronized by the Zamorin called *Thaippoyam* as we saw in the earlier chapter. The years when the Mamankam would be celebrated this would not be celebrated.²⁷⁹ *Thaippoyam* is still a metaphor for the most splendid festival in the vernacular language. This was also conducted in the temple grounds of Tirunavaya with both religious and secular activities. This was also an important space for trading communities since trade was an important part of the festival. Therefore, it is important to note the role of commerce in the rituals of Calicut.

5.7 Conclusion

The legitimization and smoothening of the process of expansion and strengthening of the kingdom of Calicut were highly dependent on the temples, festivals and rituals organized by the state.

²⁷⁶ We see an increasing patronage to the Brahmanical literature in the court of Calicut at this period. We saw an example of *Mamankam Kilippattu* written by Katancherri Namboodiri who was a Brahmin. Two other major works by Brahmins- *Sukasandesham* by Lakshmidasan and *Kokilasandesham* by Uddanda Sastri- are compiled. Kesavan Veluthat, *Randu Sandeshangal* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 2014).

²⁷⁷ Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason : Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Introduction.

²⁷⁸ John, *Lords of the Sea*, 31.

²⁷⁹ Namboodiri, *Mamankam Rekhakal*, 98.

Mamankam, Pattathanam, Thaipoyam and the patronization of temples are only some examples among many. As we saw in the first chapter, bridging the gap between the sources and existing historiography is an important aim of this thesis. The details in this chapter show that the rituals and festivals of Calicut were highly rooted in the local society of Malabar which probably confused the VOC officials at that time. It is not exactly right to claim that the “foreigners” did not understand the local culture. On the other hand, it were the internal dynamics of these rituals which were unclear to the VOC officials.

The understanding that these rituals were completely symbolic and separated from the socio-economic conditions forming their context cannot be validated in the case of early modern Calicut. On the other hand, the understanding that these rituals were used only in order to strengthen the political power and economy of the state and did not have any “symbolic” meaning can also not be authorized. The ritual manifestation and the actual activities manifesting state power were not completely separate. The ritualistic legitimization process was a part of the political process.²⁸⁰ The complex and intermeshed nature of rituals, polity and commerce can be exemplified from the case of Calicut. Rather than arguing how rituals helped the polity symbolically or how the polity helped in carrying out the rituals, we see a dialogue between the two in this case.

²⁸⁰ John, *Lords of the Sea*, 31.

CONCLUSION

The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries witnessed several important changes in the process of State formation in India.²⁸¹ Even the preliminary findings of this thesis question the idea of the “chaotic polity” of Malabar in the early modern period as well as that of its static nature till the eighteenth century. There were clear thought processes and actions behind the changing nature of the polity and the state-formation of Calicut in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In Malabar, there were small and big political formations which continually negotiated with several structures. If we look at the case of the Calicut kingdom, we can see different layers of interactions taking place. Firstly, there were major challenges from the larger kingdoms like Cochin and commercial companies like the VOC. Secondly, the small chieftains and landlords were significant in this negotiation process as they bore no fixed allegiance. Thirdly, the different lineages of the royal family were important as the power of the court was not restricted to any particular lineage. Finally, the priests and the Brahmin community were important in the context of reviewing the rules of the court and establishing new ones. Hence, the history of state formation of Calicut will not be complete without taking into account all these elements.

Before we come to a conclusion, we shall briefly look into the major findings of this thesis. *Swaroopam* was an innovative form of ruling structure which was important in the context of the Malabar Coast. However, this was not the same in all kingdoms. The policies and rules of the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam* were reconsidered and reintegrated into the system in the early modern period. For example, the issue of succession was taken seriously and there were steps taken in order to prevent internal clashes both ritually and economically. There were Brahmanical scholarly discussions patronized by the Zamorin in order to reconsider the rules of the *Swaroopam*. Territorial expansion became the priority for the Zamorin also due to this issue. The division of farther lands between different lineages was also another way to keep them away from the capital and central power.

Secondly, this territorial expansion became significant due to several other reasons too. Primarily, the continuous war with Cochin and the European powers compelled the king to expand the kingdom and secure the city of Calicut. Also, after the consolidation of the kingdom and the

²⁸¹ Seema Alavi, *The Eighteenth Century in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

capital city of Calicut, the expansion and movement of the royalty became important for the Zamorin in order to secure more support from the distant landlords. Unlike the sixteenth century, when the Zamorin was not allowed to move freely out of the capital, by the seventeenth century we see a frequent movement of the court. Hence, in short, the expansion of the kingdom and its territorial possessions was the major motto for the particular process of state formation of Calicut in the seventeenth century.

Thirdly, the expansionist ambitions of the Zamorin were also related to the Indian Ocean pepper trade and the role of the other parties involved in it. For example, the VOC was one of the most active participants in issues related to the expansion. The kingdom of Cochin was mostly represented by the army and the officials of the VOC. The expansion of the kingdom of Calicut was mostly southwards which directly affected the territorial control of Cochin. Control over the pepper growing areas and routes was also involved in this issue of expansion of the kingdom. In short, the Calicut-VOC-Cochin triangle is important to understand the major challenges faced by the Zamorin in the process of state formation.

Fourthly, the most important aspect of this process was the pattern in which the expansion was done. The changing nature allegiance of the small chieftains and landlords were well-exploited by the system. The Zamorin tried to attract the landlords by offering them security and positions. In other cases, these lands were attacked and the chieftains were left with no option other than surrendering themselves. The areas between Cochin and Calicut were constantly under negotiations. Their possession was the most important concern of both the Cochin and Calicut kingdoms at that time.

Finally, non-human agencies also had an important role in this process. Important festivals like Mamankam which were under the control of the Zamorin helped to secure his territories and also enhance trading opportunities. These festivals were important in order to proclaim the authority of the Zamorin and also to strengthen the borders of the kingdom. We see an increasing patronage to temples and the Brahmin priests during this time. These actions were important for the theoretical legitimation of the rule of the *Nediyiruppu Swaroopam*.

Several anthropological studies have demonstrated the significance of “rituals” and “symbols” in attaining the actual power of the king.²⁸² According to this perspective, these symbolic or ritualistic representations were the only way through which the abstract power of the king could be corroborated.²⁸³ On the other hand, several scholars argue that these ritualistic demonstrations were important in order to magnify the weakening power of the Zamorin.²⁸⁴ Especially in the case of Calicut, the argument of the “weak polity with increasing power demonstration” has been a strong one. However, this thesis makes it evident that rather than being a “pretension of strength through these festivals”, these rituals and the strength of the king had a complex mutual relation. These have a dialogic mutual relationship rather than one being merely dependent on the other.

To come back to our question of bridging the gap between the perspectives of different sources, it is important to read these developments together. There are no clear answers on how to bridge these gaps, but we can see that the process of state formation was related to both the mainland and the Indian Ocean contexts. For example, the expansion of the kingdom was not only problematic in the context of the local negotiations but also in the larger scene of the pepper trade and the Indian Ocean connections. On the other hand, the increasing focus on the Brahmanical presence in the polity was not detached from the developments in mainland India.

²⁸² One Example- Kim Siebenhiiner, “Approaching Diplomatic and Courtly Gift-giving in Europe and Mughal India: Shared Practices and Cultural Diversity” , *The Medieval History Journal*, 16, 2 (2013): 525–546.

²⁸³ Shelly Errington, *Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 10.

²⁸⁴ Haridas, *Zamorins and the Political Culture of Medieval Kerala*, Introduction.

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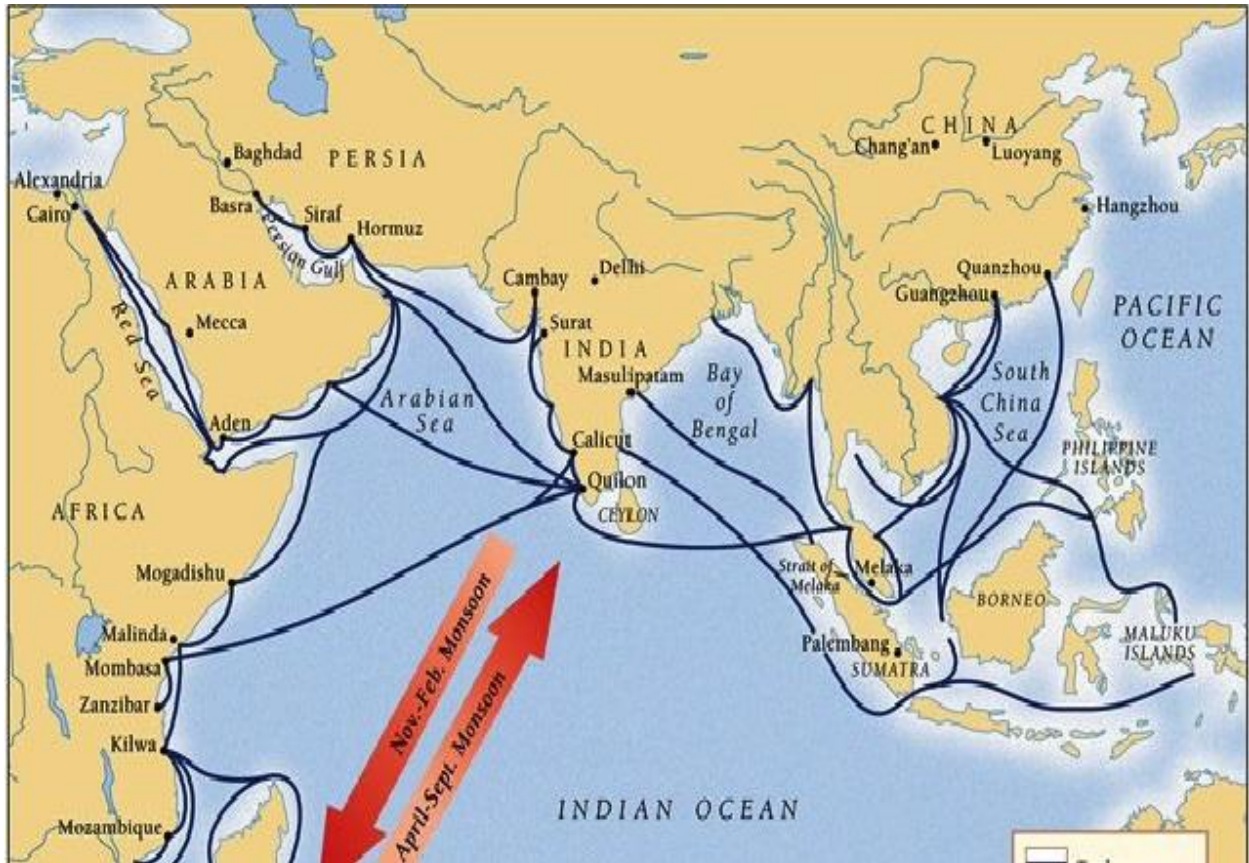
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Map 1: Calicut in the Indian Ocean Trade



Map two: Political Landscape of Malabar in the early modern period

