

Ownership and control of land in medieval Kerala: *Janmam*–*kanam* relations during the 16th–18th centuries.

K.N. Ganesh

Kerala State Gazetteer Project

The transformation of agrarian society in Kerala during the past two centuries has generated a lot of academic and popular interest. The nature of agrarian economy that existed in the colonial period has been examined in some detail, and the patterns of agrarian change in the more recent period have been subject to much discussion. However, the growth of traditional land rights has found a place in the scholarly or popular discussions only as a brief preamble or in introductory paragraphs, and the account given is mostly based on the available references by historians or commentators of modern Kerala.¹ Accounts based on secondary evidence are sketchy, and do not reveal a deep and objective analysis of land rights as they prevailed in pre-colonial Kerala.

Studies in pre-colonial Kerala history also do not help a great deal in our understanding of traditional land rights. The only attempt at a systematic and connected account of the growth of traditional land rights has been that of Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai.² However, Elamkulam's work is heavily based on the evidence from the early medieval period, i.e., from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, and does not contribute much towards a definitive understanding of the centuries immediately preceding British occupation. The conclusions of Elamkulam have also been thoroughly re-examined and revised by more recent research.³ Historians of Kerala from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries have been heavily dependent on European sources

¹ Numerous books and papers on land reforms in Kerala have been published, for example, Theodor Bergman, *Agrarian Reforms in India*, New Delhi, 1984; Ronald J. Herring, *Land to the Tiller, The Political Economy and Agrarian Reforms in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1983; T.C. Varghese, *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences, Land Tenures in Kerala 1850–1960*, Calcutta, 1970; P. Radhakrishnan, *Peasant Struggles, Land Reforms and Social Change*, New Delhi, 1989. The definitions and explanations of traditional land rights are based on the discussions on the subject by British administrators.

² Elamkulam P.N. Kunjan Pillai, 'Evolution of Janmi System in Kerala', in *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1970.

³ M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, 'The Traditional Land system in Kerala: The problems of change and perspective', (Mimeo) *Logan Centenary Seminar on Land Reforms in Kerala*, Kozhikode (Calicut), 1981.

for an understanding of political and economic developments in Kerala.⁴ Since the European sources, given their preoccupation with the features and possibilities of trade and commerce, did not give adequate importance to land rights, a history based on their information also fails to provide a complete perspective. Concrete work on the crucial position of traditional land rights in the developments in modern Kerala has not been forthcoming.

The object of this paper is to provide a preliminary account of the growth of land rights in Kerala in the two centuries prior to British occupation. Much research has already been done on the period up to the fifteenth century.⁵ Following the general direction of argument and conclusions of these researchers, this paper examines the changes taking place in the agrarian society of Kerala from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The paper is divided into three parts. The first deals with the structure of medieval land rights, the second on the processes of continuity and change in the land rights during the period under discussion, and the third briefly outlines the rights in land in the period immediately preceding the British occupation.

I

The traditional land system in Kerala has been called *janmi-kudiyansampradayam* or *janmam-kanam-maryadai*. These terms generally denote landlord-tenant relations, but an explanation of their nature depend on the interpretation of the terms *janmi*, *kudiyam* and *maryadai*.

The term *janmi* indicates a landlord in academic discussions, and in popular parlance, *janmam* means hereditary right or birthright (the term literally means birth) i.e., the right that the landlord comes to occupy by descent from his predecessor who held the land. Hence his ownership of the land does not imply any services or dues that he has to pay to an overlord for maintaining his right. In this sense his right over land is autonomous. The *janmi* loses this right only if he transfers or sells his land, and the new owner has to pay rent or dues because he does not come to own the land as a birthright. However, *janmis* could offer services to an overlord, the temple

⁴ The classic examples are T.I. Poonen, *The Survey of the rise of Dutch Power in Malabar (1603-1678)* Tiruchirappalli, 1948; Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade (1740-1800)*, Cambridge, 1967; K.M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala: 1498-1801*, Annamalai Nagar, 1960. The recent work by K.S. Mathew, *Portuguese Trade with India in the Sixteenth Century*, New Delhi, 1983 and K.K. Kusuman, *A History of Trade and Commerce in Travancore*, New Delhi, 1987 are also based on European sources.

⁵ Much of the research has remained unpublished, like M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Social and Economic Conditions during the Kulasekhara Empire', unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972; Kesavan Veluthat, 'Brahmin Settlements in Kerala 1100-1500' unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1977; Rajan Gurukkal, 'Socio-Economic Role of the Temple in Kerala (AD 800-1200)' unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1978.

or the ruler as an act of homage for political or economic reasons. They could acquire lands by paying the necessary rent or dues, which would be treated differently from their *janmam*.

The growth of the *janmam* right has been traced to the formation of a stratified agrarian society between the ninth and twelfth centuries, i.e., during the later Cera period.⁶ Agrarian settlements grew up in the river valleys and the brahmins came to establish hereditary rights over the wet lands. Rulers and *naduvالي* chiefs made land grants and other allotments as permanent rights to temples that were being established. The growth of the temples and brahmins as large landowners was manifest during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Lands held by these landowners were cultivated by large and small tenants. By the twelfth century, gradation of rights over lands had emerged, with the *naduvالي* chief at the top, followed by *uralar* (land owners and temple trustees), *karalar* (tenants and intermediary landholders), *kudiyar* (settled tenant cultivators), and the *adiyar* (bonded service classes) on the lowest rung. Legal codes (*kaccams*) were evolved that helped sustain the authority of the landowners over the tenants and the servile class.⁷

The ownership right of the temples, brahmins and the *naduvالي* chiefs were not specifically characterised as birthrights during this period, when hereditary land rights were in the process of formation. During succeeding centuries, Nambudiri brahmins and chiefs owned lands as *janmam*, as the rights that they held were devolved from their predecessors by matrilineal or patrilineal forms of succession. Temples as corporate institutions controlled by administrative bodies, where the members held their position as a hereditary right, also came to be classified in the same way.

Growth of the *janmam* right also resulted in the growth of new supportive institutions. *Kaccams* which were codified regulations instituted by temple managements and which ensured the sustenance of the authority of the emerging landowning class, declined after the twelfth century.⁸ From the fourteenth or fifteenth century, land rights were being related to traditionally accepted norms of the region or village (*kiliyakkam*).⁹ Rights of the

⁶ Kunjan Pillai, 'Evolution of the Janmi System' *op. cit.* p. 348. He argues that the term *janmam* originally meant lifetime and applied to the position of the temple *uralar* during the eleventh century. When the position became hereditary, the right also became hereditary.

⁷ For a discussion see M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, *op. cit.* The doctoral dissertation of M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Social and Economic conditions during the Kulasekhara Empire', revised and updated a number of original formulations by Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai.

⁸ Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman settlements in Kerala*, Kozhikode, 1978, p. 90.

⁹ The term *kiliyakkam* appears in the Kerala records regularly from the fifteenth century. The phrase *kiliyakkam konda komuraippadu* appears in the unpublished manuscripts housed in the Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, named *Matilakam Records* (for example, Curuna (Roll), 1686 Ola (Cadjan leaf) 38, AD 1498) *Kiliyakkam* appears in Malabar in the *Vanjeri Granthavari*, ed., M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut University Historical Series No. 1 Kozhikode, 1987, Nos. 1A (AD 1541), 2A (AD 1541), 3A (AD 1541), 17A (AD 1567), 23A (AD 1572).

landowner, along with the numerous privileges that he held including military and legal functions, became part of the accepted practice. Dues to the king were also similarly consolidated as *komuraippadu* (customary obligations from the land) which took the place of formal land revenue.¹⁰

Gradation of rights among the producing classes was also consolidated. The different strata of producers which had been formed during the later Cera period were transformed to form a class of leaseholders (*pattakkar*) who held lands from the *janmi* on the basis of payment of a share of the produce as *pattam* or *varam*. By the eighteenth century, *pattam* became a category that applied to all types of leases by landholders occupying different economic positions.¹¹ Variations of the form of rent depended on the established traditional and legal practices in the particular regions.¹² With the growth of *janmam* tenure along with the privileges associated with it, the settled cultivators in various regions became tenants paying rent or service to the *janmi*. *Kudiyar* became a generic term applied to different types of leaseholders.¹³ *Adiyar* (or *al*) still remained bonded slaves, attached to the

¹⁰ *Travancore Archaeological Series*, (9 Vols., Thiruvananthapuram 1910–1939) Vol. III, 1923, No. 59 (AD 1522), Vol. VI, No. 117 (AD 1517), *Mathilakam Records*, c. 1686–38 (AD 1498), c. 1721 0.176 undated.

¹¹ This is shown by the different forms in which leases or *pattam* appear. This included *pattam* or simple lease for one year, *ulavupattam* which implied cultivating rights, often received by payment of a certain amount in cash or kind as surety, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records*, Lease Deed of AD 1621, permanent lease or *Marayapattam* (*Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. IV, Thiruvananthapuram, 1916, pp.93–6) and *Varam-padangal pattam* which also had a permanent nature (*Mathilakam Records*, c. 1595 Ola 213 AD 1754). Records of eighteenth century show still other forms like *Kuttagaipattam* (*Matilakam Records*, c. 1056 0.207 AD 1740). Details of these documents also showed that whereas the simple leaseholder occupied a low economic position, the holders of *marayapattam* and *Varam-padangal pattam* were wealthy landholders of the area.

¹² This is shown by the comparison between the dues paid from two adjacent regions in Southern Kerala, Kuttamangalam–Punnathala and Navaykulam, both in the Northern Part of Thiruvananthapuram District (*Matilakam Records*, c. 1686 0.38, AD 1498 for the former, and *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. III, pp. 215–16, Thiruvananthapuram Museum Copper Plate, AD 1522 for the latter). The dues in the former case included *ottidaikadamai*, *onachelavu*, *karkata-kachelavu*, *kalathenga*, *maramorakalchagal*, *alipilai antarayam*, *anaimurai*, *chemkompu*, *podiyadi*, *pulaiyarai* from *Channar & Meni Irai*. The latter included *sengoma*, *talaivilai*, *mupparamunnali*, *anchumulam*, *ettukuntu*, *angam*, *taragu*, and *cungam*. In both cases, the dues were collected by the ruler. The variations were much greater if northern and southern Tiruvitamkur are compared. Compare the above documents with the inscription from Parakkai, Kanyakumari District of AD 1465 (*Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. VI, Thiruvananthapuram, 1927, pp. 110–11).

¹³ The term *kudi* originally appear to have denoted a settler who laboured in the land of the landlord (See reference to *kudis* of Ilavar in Tarisappalli Copper Plates of AD 849, M.G.S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1972, Appendix-IV. However, by the sixteenth century, *kudigal* or tenants are distinguished from *aladiyar* (bonded labourers). *Kudigal* and *kudimakkal* referred to in *Matilakam Records*, c. 1715 Ola 19 AD 1565, c. 2601 0.16 undated. c. 1719 0.31 AD 1551, c. 1656 0.226 AD 1542 etc.). The identification of *kudiyar* as tenants is clear in the land survey and settlement in Tiruvitamkur, where *kudiyar* were set apart for providing rent to various temples, *Matilakam Records*, Therattu dated AD 1746.

soil in food crop producing areas.¹⁴ Different communities involved in garden land cultivation and other occupations also came to be termed *adiyar*.¹⁵

At the beginning of the sixteenth century the basic organisation of land rights was as follows. The temples and brahmans, along with *Naduvai* chiefs who were consolidating their position in different parts of Kerala, held most of the available land, wet lands as well as garden lands, as a permanent, hereditary right.¹⁶ Such lands were classified as *devaswam*, *brahmaswam* and *cerikkal* lands respectively. They were being cultivated by settled cultivators who paid a share of the produce to the *janmi*. These cultivators were not a monolithic class, they included large landholders who got lands cultivated by others on lease and simple leaseholders.¹⁷ The rights of the *janmi* over the land was expressed by *kiliyakkam* and the obligations of the tenants were determined by custom (*maryadai*).¹⁸ Unlike *kaccams* of the early medieval period, *maryadai* had no standardised form applicable throughout Kerala.¹⁹ The use of the term *maryadai* shows that its application was localised. The actual form of the privileges and rights exercised by the

¹⁴ *Al* or *adiyar* are referred to from all over Kerala, for example *Matilakam Records*, c. 1722 0.17 AD 1488, c. 2601 0.29 AD 1587, c. 2600 0.84, AD 1588, c. 1719 0.19, AD 1565, c. 1408 0.48 AD 1721.

¹⁵ *Matilakam Records*, c. 1719 0.5 (AD 1565) refers to the Channar caste in South Tiruvitamkur as *Adiyar* c. 1722 0.17 (AD 1488) refers to 'Perumal Adiyar Nadaanmar (*Nadar*)'. Saltmakers and fishermen of the coast were also considered *Adiyar*. *Vanjeri Granthavari*, Doc. 8c (undated) refers to transactions among *Adiyar* of Vettamutaya Mutta Kovil and Vettamilaya Kovil (Princes of Vettattunadu).

¹⁶ The phrase used in the *danam* or *attipper* documents, involving, land grants to temples and brahmans was *achandratarame santatipravesame* (for the descendants as long as moon and stars last) showing the permanent, hereditary nature of the grant. *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. III, pp. 215–16 *op. cit.* dealing with a grant in sixteenth century repeats this phrase. Land grants recorded in *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. V, Part II Thiruvananthapuram, 1:26, No. 27, pp. 97–99 (AD 1697); No. 41, pp. 138–40 (AD 1603) also repeat the phrase.

¹⁷ *Matilakam Records* contain several documents mentioning the assignment of different villages held by Thiruvananthapuram Padmanabhā temple as *pattam*, where the *pattam* holder was expected to collect dues from the cultivators (for example, *Matilakam Records* c. 1722 0.6 (AD 1483), c. 1720 0.128 (AD 1491), c. 2601 0.200, c. 1686, 0.26, c. 1721 0.176 (AD 1546), c. 1727 0.80 (AD 1577). Large-scale *pattam* holdings have been mentioned in other records from Central Kerala, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram *Show Case Records* No. 3 *Ulavupattam* deed of AD 1621, No. 9 Teerukuri document of AD 1728). Powerful landlords could hold lands under *Otti*, as in the case of Samutiri's (Zamorins) minister Mangat Achen (N.M. Nambutiri *op. cit.* Appendix 2.2 AD 1550).

¹⁸ The term *maryadai* begins to appear widely from the fifteenth century, denoting customary payments. Thus, *Kulikkannam* was paid on the products of certain *paramba* according to *Desamariyadai* (*Desamaracati*). *Vanjeri Granthavari* Doc 27A, AD. 1581, No. 34A, AD. 1599, complaint lodged before Trikkandiyur Yogam on the abduction of a person from the temple *sanketam* was settled according to the *sanketamaryadai* (Doc.43A AD 1603). The term appears in other documents belonging to the period, like *Kozhikode Granthavari* and *Matilakam Records*. For an assessment on the growth of this form See M.R. Raghava Warrier, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian Society: Socio-economic Structure' in *Kerala State Gazetteer* Vol. II, Part II (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Later Cera inscriptions from all parts of Kerala mention *mulikkalam kaccam* as an accepted code for temple management (M.G.S. Narayanan, *op. cit.*, pp. 325–30). This

janmi and the obligations of the tenants were also becoming localised.²⁰ Disputes regarding the application of the custom, or land transactions on the basis of the *maryadai* were settled by local eminent persons called *natuvar* or *naluper*.²¹

The localisation of the conditions regarding land rights and obligations could be seen in the use of the terms *kilmaryadai*, *nattumaryadai*, *desamaryadai*, *sanketamaryadai* etc., showing the customary form as applicable to the respective local units *nadu*, *desam* or *sanketam*. Even the brahmans could exercise control over the land rights only within the limits set by local *maryadai*. The localised traditions were clearly the result of the decentralisation of politico-economic power after the decline of the later Cera kingdom, when different parts of Kerala came into the hands of different *naduvalli swarupams* or kingdoms.²² The stipulations of the localised landowning class including temples and brahmans and the territorial chiefs (*naduvallis*) were handed down hereditarily to form localised traditional customs. Like the *kaccams*, traditional practice and custom was considered inviolable, to be followed by the temple-brahmana-*naduvalli* axis that created them and the producing classes. The politico-economic authority of the landowning class had become customary authority with *kiliyakkam* and *maryadai* being the social and legal binding force.

The customary authority that came to be established by the beginning of sixteenth century was not a static entity. Changes in the agrarian economy were taking place within the customary framework. Forest areas were apparently cleared and used for agriculture, particularly along the coast.²³ By the

universality cannot be attributed to *maryadai*, which were referred to as those of a particular regional unit. See *infra*.

²⁰ See the documents mentioned in footnote 12 *supra*. In one document, the overlord has claims over coconut and timber produce, payments for *onam* and *karkatakam* ceremonies and dues from communities like Channar. In the second case, the dues also include those from paddy fields (*mupparamunnali*), fee for maintaining a militia (*angam*) tolls from trade (*cungam* and *taragu*). These variations were clearly based on the available resources in each area.

²¹ *Vanjeri Granthavari*, Doc. 41A (AD 1602) mentions *natuvar* Doc. 77A (AD 1631), 86A (AD 1642) for *naler* (*naluper*). The functions of the *natuvar* is indicated in an eighteenth century document, 'If any dispute is brought before the Mandapattumvattukkals, four panams each should be charged as *nadukkanam* for (appointing) four persons as *naduvar* and one panam be charged as *nadukkanam* for the *anaival* (policeman) appointed from the Mandapattumvathukkall and the matter should be settled on the basis of the hearing by four persons....' (*Matilakam Records*, c. 2252 0.837-8 AD 1741).

²² For a general description of the different *swarupams*, see P.K.S. Raja, *Medieval Kerala*, Annamalai University, 1953, Chapter IV.

²³ *Unnunilisandesam*, a poetical work of the fourteenth century notes that the stretch of Vempolinad in Central Kerala was covered by forests (i. 126) Parts of this area had come under agriculture at least by the seventeenth century as shown by the records from Vaikom and Udayampooror Devaswom, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records*, No. 118, AD 1645 Cadjan Roll 1 Ola 2 (AD 1748) Ola 3 (AD 1697). *Kattil Kovilakam* of Chaliyur Tayvali, a branch of the Kochi (Cochin) family was also established through clearing forests, *Perumpadappu Swarupam Granthavari*, Kochi, 1950, Appendix 5, *Chaliyur Tayvali Rajavamsam*.

seventeenth century, cultivation was extending to the Western Ghats also.²⁴ This process indicated the growth of new *swarupams* in regions away from the Nadus that were part of the later Cera Kingdom.²⁵ Expansion particularly took place on land, growing garden crops like coconut and pepper. Coconut spread in the coastal areas, where the sandy soil was extremely suited for the crop, and pepper along with other spices and fruit bearing trees were grown in *parambus* and *thottams* (gardens) on the coast as well as the interior.²⁶ *Parambus* were bordering on forests and were often converted from the forest lands.

This form of expansion indicated that new sections of the population were probably becoming agricultural producers, new chiefs were developing in interior areas, and new *janmam* rights were being established. It appears that brahmans also played a major role in this expansion, but non-brahman chiefs and land owners were also growing in importance. The geography of Kerala, with its hill slopes, terraces and valleys, dictated a localised pattern for this expansion with several independent, isolated settlements emerging and growing into self-contained units of authority which followed their own *kiliyakkam* and *maryadai*.

However, this form of localised expansion had its disadvantages. Resources at the disposal of each unit were limited and had to be protected at all costs. Fertile regions with more resources attracted the attention of rival chiefs which led to frequent quarrels. Although customary obligations played a major role, they were enforced through the exercise of political power also. This gave rise to a military class, which was maintained by the agricultural produce of the area. Another problem was the structure of the customary authority itself. Lands were held by large matrilineal joint families with a number of segments or *tayvalis*, each of whom held a share of the rights and privileges.²⁷ The process of expansion also helped these segments to expand their authority which also increased the militarisation and gave rise to a number of clashes. These clashes affected agricultural production and disrupted the payment of customary dues.²⁸

²⁴ An interesting case is the establishment of Sasta temple of Ariankavu, near Western Ghats in Kollam (Quilon) District and the extension of paddy cultivation in the area, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records*, No. 228 AD 1654.

²⁵ Examples of such families are Kollemkode, Taruswarupam Palakkad (Palghat) Kadathanad, Nileswaram, Punjar and Elayedattu Swarupam (Kottarakkara), all established in various periods during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²⁶ *Vanjeri Granthavari, passim*, refers to a large number of lands growing coconut, apart from *parambas* and *thottams*. Also see the description of coconut 'plantations' by the Dutchman Niehoff on his way to Kollam (J. Niehoff, 'Voyages and Travels into Brazil and East Indies', in *Churchill's collection of Voyages and Travels*, London, 1803).

²⁷ The distribution of privileges in medieval Tiruvitamkur is given in M. Rajarajavarma Raja, 'Some Travancore Dynastic Records' in *Kerala Society Papers*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1928-33 series I, Doc. VIII, (AD 1575), Doc. X (AD 1581), Doc. XI (AD 1587).

²⁸ Examples of such clashes in Venad are given in *Matilakam Records*, c. 1439 0.10 (AD 1507), c. 2546 0.201 (AD 1568), c. 1719 0.37 (AD 1572).

Another feature was the growth of cash economy, which was visible from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries itself. The growth of trade with the Chinese, Arabs and then with the Europeans resulted in the inflow of cash into the economy, which went to the rulers, temples, militia and producers of garden crops.²⁹ This cash in hand was often converted into investment in land, and often cash was commuted into payment in kind and vice versa, particularly in temple transactions.³⁰ There is little evidence that the cash was consciously utilised to increase the productivity of land. However, the possibility of acquiring cash facilitated production for overseas trade, particularly in spices and garden crops. Overseas trade had already developed by the sixteenth century.

These features aided the growth of land mortgages. Mortgages called *otti* or *kanam* were already visible in the later Cera period. Evidence from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries show that their number had considerably increased.³¹ Lands were being held in mortgage from one to twelve years on payment of a certain amount in cash or kind as *artham*, on the condition that the interest on the *artham* would be deducted from the rent paid.³² The *artham* paid by the mortgage indicated previously accumulated wealth in hand, and located him a step above from the ordinary tenant cultivator who could not convert his lease into mortgage. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, lands were being mortgaged in larger numbers, generous amounts were being paid as *artham*, the duration of the mortgage and the

²⁹ For a detailed discussion on the growth of trade during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Raghava Warriar, 'Further Expansion of Agrarian Society' *op. cit.* It should be pointed out that the impact of the growing trade has to be looked at from the background of the changes taking place in land relations, a point that will be examined below.

³⁰ This form known as *ubhayam* has been found in the temple records from Tiruvitamkur and Central Kerala, for example, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. VI, p. 102 (AD 1570). Also Vol. VII, pp. 89–91 (AD 1619), Vol. V, p. 228 (AD 1724), *Vanjeri Granthavari*, Doc. 1A (AD 1541), 15A (AD 1565), 23A (AD 1572), 25A (AD 1572), 41A (AD 1602).

³¹ *Otti* was a major tenorial form in Nancinadu region in Kanyakumari District before the fifteenth century (*Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. VI, pp. 25–26, AD 1253, Vol. III, pp. 83–84, AD 1220, Vol. III, pp. 91–92, AD 1316 etc.). Documents mentioning mortgages increase in number after the fifteenth century and they appear in other parts of Kerala, which is seen in *Vanjeri Granthavari*, *passim*, and the records published by N.M. Nambutiri. N.M. Nambutiri, *Samutiricharithratile Kanappurangal*, Sukapuram, 1987, Appendix-I, Documents of AD 1543, AD 1553, AD 1570. Mortgage transactions are recorded in Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records* No. 1 (AD 1435), No. 2 (AD 1547), No. 3 (AD 1699), the last being termed as *Pattayolakaranam* although it is a mortgage deed.

³² Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records* No. 5 (AD 1621), records the mortgage of lands with the sowing capacity of 10 *para* of paddy, for three years after receiving 105 *para* of paddy as loan (*vayppa*). In *Show Case Record* No. 118 (AD 1649), 7600 *puthenpanam* is given as loan, which carried interest of 2½ per cent per year. This interest was calculated as 190 *para* of paddy and an adequate extent of land that would yield 190 *para* of paddy as *pattam* was handed over by the recipient of the loan to the donor. Numerous such cases are recorded in the documents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, where the amounts paid as loans were treated as cash surety for the lands transferred.

extent of land being mortgaged increased.³³ By the eighteenth century, mortgages with thousands of fanams as *artham* paid for a duration of 30 to 48 years were not uncommon.³⁴ The number of permanent mortgages were also growing.³⁵

Direct dealings in cash were also growing. Money was pledged with land as security (*panayam*).³⁶ Long standing debts were converted into land mortgages, with the interest realised as extra cess on land (*padukalam*).³⁷ If the debt was not repaid, the land would be forfeited to the creditor. Arrears of rent were also treated as a debt bond and the lands were confiscated if the arrears were not paid along with interest.³⁸ Direct money-lending (*kadamvayppa*) with interest paid in cash or kind from land (*nerpalisa*) was also common.³⁹

The incentive to expansion of cultivation is seen in a new form of land transaction. If a land is brought under paddy cultivation, or a new tree planted, the land would be treated as *kulikkanam*. *Kulikkanam* indicated a holding, where a reduction in rent from one-third to one-fourth was given as *naduvukkur* or *kulikkur*, which would cover the expenditure for the gestation period when the trees are growing or the ground prepared for food crop cultivation. Expansion of *kulikkanam* indicated the great thrust

³³ The increase in the quantity of *artham* paid and the extent of land mortgaged is shown in several documents in *Matilakam Records*. Four pieces of lands near Thiruvananthapuram were held as *otti* for 1000 *panam* (c. 2293 0.46, AD 1674). A Potti brahman family in Thiruvananthapuram held lands for 2900 *panam* (*Ibid.*). Such big transaction extended to other parts of Kerala. One Tamil brahman paid 12700 *puthuppanam* to Kavalappara Mooppil Nayar for holding certain lands under mortgage (K.K.N. Kurup, ed., *Kavalappara papers*, Calicut University Historical Series No. 2, 1984), *Vanjeri Granthavari* records a mortgage for 10001 *puthuppanam* (Doc. 105A, AD 1696).

³⁴ *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. V, Thiruvananthapuram, 1916, has several documents in which lands were given as *otti* for long periods. See for example, Agasteeswaram Taluk Records, *Therattu* for AD 1746 and AD 1748 in which *otti* deeds were made for 2½ *vyalavattams* (30 years). Vilangipper document of AD 1751 refers to a previous document (executed in AD 1741) assigning a land as *otti* for 48 years. Another document in the collection of unpublished manuscripts called *Periaveettu Mudaliar Manuscripts*, pertaining to Nancinadu (abstracts of which are available in the Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram) refers to a mortgage for 72 years (Ola no. 84 AD 1618).

³⁵ An interesting case of such a mortgage is the granting of Aruvikkarai temple near Thiruvananthapuram along with the land and gardens as *chora otti* to Ramayyan Dalaway, a Minister of King Marthanda Varma of Tiruvitamkur, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram, *Show Case Records*, No. 273 Doc. 19, AD 1745.

³⁶ *Panayam* appears in numerous records from Kochi. For example, see the records pertaining to the eighteenth century in a *Blue Book* containing *Important Papers relating to the Land Revenue Settlement in Cochin State, Vol. III, Part III*, Ernakulam, 1917.

³⁷ *Matilakam Records*, c. 531 0.267 (AD 1743), c. 2473 0.126 (AD 1694), *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. VI, 1927, p. 102 (AD 1570).

³⁸ *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. V, 1926, pp. 215–17 (AD 1703).

³⁹ *Therattu* on Vanchiyur Adhikaram dated 921 K.E. (AD 1745–46), *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. V.

towards expansion of garden crops. *Kulikkanam* was found in association with mortgaged lands showing that the *kanam* or *otti* holders showed more interest in the expansion of cultivation.⁴⁰

The expansion of *kanam* and *kulikkanam* lands showed the impetus of the growing overseas trade in agricultural produce and by-products after the coming of the Europeans. Coconut, arecanut, ginger and pepper were some of the crops grown in these lands, and all of them were items of export. There are indications that local bazaars, called *angadis* and *chanthas* were growing, but they appear to have been used for bartering local produce and procurement activities of the representatives of the merchants at coastal towns.⁴¹ The inflow of cash from these developments went into acquisition of lands through mortgage and bringing new lands, particularly cash crop areas, into cultivation. An indigenous merchant class was well developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as there are references to Christian and Muslim merchants operating from interior regions.⁴² However, their major sphere of operation was apparently in the procurement of commodities for overseas trade.

The growth of *kanam* and *kulikkanam* tenures was within the customary framework. There are very few cases of land mortgages being converted to sales. Even for lands held as *kanam* for a very long duration, and for *kulikkanam* lands, customary right of the original owner was recognised.⁴³ There are instances of *janmam* lands alienated on payment of a *vilaiartham*, which again shows that the right to alienate lands was vested with the customary owner.⁴⁴ The *kanam* holder, however could sub-mortgage the land (*chittotti*) or get the lands cultivated on lease.⁴⁵ Even when production

⁴⁰ *Matilakam Records*, c. 596 0.242 (AD 1768, transformation of Land held as *otti*), c. 1698 0.52 (AD 1766, deed executed in AD 1738), c. 2522 0.21 (AD 1773); also the numerous *Matilakam Records* giving details of the land settlement of AD 1739.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* c. 1595 0.8 (AD 1746) gives details about the *chanthas* in and around Thiruvananthapuram. These included *Nellaman Chantha*, *Iravipuram Chantha* at Pattam, *Vettiyrkavu Chantha*, *Thonnakkal Chantha* apart from the major market at Chalai (Mudukkittankadai) and *Karamanai Chantha* (c. 1595 0.9). Documents give details about the merchants, articles traded, tolls and *kuttagai* (monopoly) *panam* collected from merchants.

⁴² Merchants of Chathanur in Kollam District, Mappilas of Peringottur and Manjeri in Malabar, Christian merchants around Aluva and Angamali near Periyar river are examples.

⁴³ *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. V, pp. 4-7 refers to a land under mortgage for 175 years (from AD 1565 to AD 1739) on which the original owner still exercised certain rights. Similar cases of lands held by Ramanamatham attached to the Padmanabha temple, Thiruvananthapuram are recorded in *Matilakam Records*, c. 1458 0.2, 37 (AD 1738).

⁴⁴ *Vanjeri Granthavari*, Doc. 55A (AD 1608), 86A (AD 1642), 89A (AD 1644-45), 92A (AD 1648), 96A (AD 1649), 99A (AD 1650). In these documents, the lands were transferred as *Attipperum Nirum* on payment of *artham* fixed by four adjudicators (*Naluper, Naler*).

⁴⁵ *Matilakam Records*, c. 1544 0.93 (AD 1755); *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. V, pp. 32-34, extracts from the Vilangipper of AD 1749-50. The latter record mentions a land held under *otti* in AD 1608 sub-mortgaged in AD 1702 and again in AD 1735.

increased to meet the demands of overseas trade, the customary right of the landowner over the produce was considered inviolable.

The nature of the *kanam* tenure and its identification with the circulation of money and extension of cultivation reflects a new phase in the growth of land rights in Kerala. The land relations growing in the early medieval period provided sufficient scope for expansion, as shown by the emergence of new land holdings. However, the authority exercised by the landlords was mainly in the form of customary rights enforced through armed militia that raided the territory and the ritual authority of the temples and brahmins.⁴⁶ These groups played a major role in actually directing the expansion in the early staged. However, this expansion was limited merely to providing for the upkeep of the temples and its expenditure, the daily consumption of the rulers and brahmins and maintenance of their militia.

Growth of the *kanam* tenure clearly denoted the rise of a new intermediary landholding class who had access to wealth. They were temple servants, militia and persons in the royal service, who could dictate more favourable terms and conditions with the *janmis* than ordinary cultivators. The customary owner also found it easier to leave the lands in the hands of these persons than take the trouble of directly managing the lands. This was also due to the increased militarisation, scramble for available resources by the local chiefs, which forced the customary landlords to enlist their own protection force to manage lands. The *kaval* system in Trikkandiyur temple and *manushyam* in Thiruvananthapuram temple were such institutions.⁴⁷ The temples and royal family of medieval Venad developed the institution of the *kanakku*, who acted as accountants, collectors of dues and managers.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The role played by temples and brahmins has been discussed in Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman settlements in Kerala*, Chapters VI and VII. The role of the armed militia *Akampadijanam*, *arisippadijanam* is evident from the available documents. *Matilakam Records* mention them as raiding houses, suppressing cultivators and taking away their produce and clashing with temple servants. c. 1720 0.175 (AD 1451), c. 96/9 0.1 (AD 1492), 0.2 (AD 1491), c. 2601 0.148 (AD 1492), c. 1408 0.6-7 (AD 1500). Sometimes princes were directly involved in such incidents like the robbing of Vempaykunram Village, near Thiruvananthapuram by three princes (c. 1656 0.226 AD 1542). *Arisippadijanam*, thus functioned as an internal repressive force.

⁴⁷ For a discussion on *kaval* or *cangatam*, see M.G.S. Narayanan, Introduction to *Vanjeri Granthavari op. cit.* pp. xxiii. The three persons entrusted with the *Kaval* of Trikkandiyur were Urakattu Panikkar, Chandratil Panikkar and Mukkutil Unni Ravi, who were important landholding families and servants of Samutiri and Vellattiri. In Thiruvananthapuram Temple, potti brahmins were deployed as *Manushyam* and were involved in the management and protection of temple lands. *Matilakam Records* c. 1722 0.18 (AD 1469), 0.26 (AD 1483) describe their functions.

⁴⁸ A number of references to *melkanguni kanakku*, *urkanakku*, *sripandarakanakku*, *idam-udichil kanakku* and other similar posts are available in the inscriptions and records of Southern Kerala. The importance of the institution of the accountant is seen by the inclusion of the chief accountant *srikananam palliyati* in the *yogam* of Padmarabha temple. *Srikananam* Mampula Ayyappan Vikraman played a crucial role in reorganising the management of Padmanabha temple towards the end of the fifteenth century (*Matilakam Records*, c. 1686 0.39 (AD 1487), c. 1691 0.33 (AD 1487)).

These accountants were drawn from the powerful landholding families of the region.⁴⁹ These developments resulted in the growth of a dichotomy of ownership and control where the customary landowner, including temples, brahmans and traditional ruling families, held the ownership rights and the new landholders came to acquire the actual controlling rights. This dichotomy was expressed in the relationship between the *janmi* and the *otti* or *kanam* holder. The controlling element in *kanam* holders are shown by the association of the tenure with *kulikkanam* which would imply direct intervention in the process of cultivation.

The rise of this dichotomy should be viewed from the geo-economic and socio-political background of medieval Kerala. The geographical features of Kerala prevented very large territorial expansion for the rulers and other customary landlords. The greater part of the land surface was still covered by forests, and the coastal region had a tendency to become water-logged and unsuitable for cultivation.⁵⁰ Hence intense conflict broke out among the various *naduvalli* chiefs for establishing their rights over the available territory.⁵¹ In this conflict the actual task of controlling lands, collecting dues, enforcing custom and ensuring the sustenance of territorial authority came into the hands of the intermediary classes including temple and royal servants and militia. Growing overseas trade from the fifteenth century encouraged the spread of garden crops as an additional source of income. This facilitated agrarian expansion.⁵² However, the process of production was mainly technologically backward and labour intensive, which meant that increase in productivity to augment wealth was virtually

⁴⁹ Members of the Panayurai and Cheruvalli families mentioned above had occupied this position. (*Ibid.*, c. 1719 0.31, AD 1551, c. 2601 0.132, AD 1505). Ilampel Pandarattil, another powerful landholder suppressed by Marthanda Varma was appointed *Sripandarakanakku* of Suchindram temple in AD 1630. N. Kasinathan, ed., *Kanyakumari Kalvetutuka!*, Madras, 1968, No. 228.

⁵⁰ Ward and Conner, *Memoir of the Survey of Travancore & Cochin States 1819-20*, Madras, 1863, shows that the total cultivated area in Tiruvitamkur, during the early nineteenth century was 32.7 per cent of the land surface, including temporarily cultivated area. The permanent cultivable area came only to 18 per cent. This gives a rough indication of the extent of cultivation in the State.

⁵¹ For a description of the growth of these conflicts in different parts of the state, K.V. Krishna Iyer, *Zamorins of Calicut*, Calicut 1938; K.P. Padmanabha Menon *Kochirajyacaritram*, Calicut, 1989; K.N. Ganesh, 'State formation in Travancore', *Studies in History*, Vol. VI, No. 1 January-June 1990, pp. 15-33.

⁵² This is shown by the numerous cases of *kulikkanam* transactions in *parambu* lands which indicated expansion in the cultivation of coconut, arecanut and pepper, *Vanjeri Granthavari* Doc. 34A (AD 1599), 21A (AD 1568), 88A (AD 1644), 27A (AD 1581), 28A (AD 1593). The *otti kulikkanam*, and *pattam kulikkanam* documents compiled in *Matlakam Records* also are concerned with garden lands growing mainly coconut and arecanut, for example, the documents in c. 2301, c. 2369, c. 2470, c. 2552.

impossible.⁵³ Hence, it became important for the customary landlords to ensure that their resources are fully safeguarded from outside intervention. Moreover, the customary landlord was continuously in need of additional resources for political and military purposes, maintaining a large body of servants, etc. These requirements forced the customary landlords to mortgage their lands, which could be held by intermediaries who would serve the landlord while sustaining the production and collection of dues. The growing intermediary class whose opportunities for occupying new territories was limited chose to serve under the customary lord, while preying into his territories and actually controlling them.⁵⁴ Thus, the dichotomy of ownership and control became a mutually convenient, though tenuous arrangement between the landowners and intermediaries.

II

The growth of the new relationship and its consequences are particularly important for understanding the politico-economic processes in the later medieval Kerala. This process is best illustrated by the case of medieval Tiruvitamkur whose development from sixteenth and eighteenth centuries brings out the various features of the change in land rights.

The politico-economic order in Tiruvitamkur region had consolidated by the beginning of sixteenth century. The region that stretched from Kollam to Cape Comorin was ruled by various *swarupams*, which were related to one another by a complicated order of succession. Each *swarupam* had its separate land holdings, landlords at their service and militia. Feuds and open conflicts among the various segments were common. The major temples, with large landholdings and a corporate form of authority were Thiruvananthapuram Padmanabha temple and Suchindram Temple, and there were a number of other temples which held authority over land and *sanketam* rights. The *potti* and *nambutiri brahmana* were *janmis* in various parts, and also played crucial roles in temple management.⁵⁵ The customary land

⁵³ The information regarding technological development is scanty and scattered, mentioned in a few texts like *Krishipattu*, *Krishigeetha* and a few works on architecture. The available evidence shows that cultivation was dependent on rainfall, done with a few accessories like ordinary plough. Irrigated lands were rare, and even oxen and bullocks were not plenty. Cultivation on waterlogged areas was an arduous process involving heavy labour from the *pulaya* slaves (Ward and Conner, 'Memoir', pp. 66-68). The presence of a large number of bonded labourers probably acted as a deterrent in the development of technology.

⁵⁴ This process is illustrated in the case of Tiruvitamkur, in the crisis that developed in Tiruvitamkur towards the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. The nature of the crisis is shown in contemporary documents, related to padmanabha temple, *Kshetrakaryam Curuna* published as 'Matilakam Document' No. C XXIII in T.K. Velu Pillai, *Travancore State Manual* Vol. II Appendix. Also see A.P. Ibrahim Kunju 'Umayamma Rani', *Journal of Kerala Studies* Vol. II, Part I, March 1975, pp. 17-24; K.N. Ganesh. 'State Formation in Travancore'.

⁵⁵ Important *janmis* like Mampalli Pandarathil and Pullaman *Potti* were appointed as

ownership of these groups had become well entrenched by the sixteenth century.

Problems in the collection of rent and land management were already being experienced by the end of the fifteenth century. Quarrels broke out among the temple servants and tenants which disrupted the payment of rent and temple services for long periods.⁵⁶ Collection of rent was apparently the major issue in such quarrels. These disruptions necessitated a reorganisation of temple land management by which *tirpu* and *pattam* for organising cultivation and collection of rent over a certain part of temple lands was assigned to one person for a period of one year. Similar problems were experienced by the ruling family also. During the beginning of sixteenth century a group of accountants (*kanakku*) who were expected to supervise the collection of dues and maintain accounts were appointed. These accountants were called *arukuttathil pillaimar* who held their occupation on a hereditary basis.⁵⁷

The Tiruvitamkur chiefs had their armed militia called *arisippadi jenam*. Each segment had their *janmam* and most of the royal servants apparently rose from the *janmam*.⁵⁸ Royal servants and representatives (*pandarakaryam cheyvar*) also appear from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Brahman landlords in service of rulers are also mentioned.⁵⁹ These intermediaries began to acquire positions of *kanakku* under rulers and temples. Evidence from sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show that they were expanding their land holdings, normally under mortgage tenures for long periods.⁶⁰ The mortgage transactions also show that the intermediaries were also in possession of large sums of cash.

The various segments related to the ruling family also tried to develop a class of landowners who accepted the overlordship of the ruler and remained completely loyal to him. Their homage was normally received when a prince gained his senior position within the family. It appears that becoming a

adhikarapadartham in Tiruvananthapuram temple, *Matilakam Records*, c. 2600 0.28 (AD 1459). Members of the *yogam* of Tiruvananthapuram temple like Athiyarai, Neydasseri and Kupakkarai Pottis were *janmis* by their rights.

⁵⁶ *Matilakam Records*, c. 96/2 0.1, c. 96/3 0.2, c. 2601 0.148 (AD 1491–92) give details of the quarrel and the settlement arrived at.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* c. 1722 0.4 (AD 1505), c. 2601 0.132 (AD 1505) are the first references to this body. These accountants belonged to six houses and were originally in charge of money, ornaments and precious articles coming to the treasury. Later, their functions expanded. A separate *karuvakarappura* (godown) was located at Sivagiri (near Varkallay in Tiruvananthapuram District) in the seventeenth century, under their charge (T.K. Velu Pillai, *op. cit.*).

⁵⁸ One of the families that served the ruler in later centuries, Cheruvalli Pillai is mentioned as a member of the *janam* in the documents referred to in footnote 56 above.

⁵⁹ *Vanjipuzha* and *makilanjeri*, major brahman landlord families were holding the title *madampi*, which was normally awarded in lieu of service to the ruler (*madampikur*).

⁶⁰ *Matilakam Records*, c. 2293 0.46 (AD 1674), refers to large-scale *otti* holdings by several families holding positions under the ruler.

ruler required the presence and homage of these landowners.⁶¹ The title awarded to such landowners and chiefs was called *madampikur*. It appears also that specific families were attached as *madampis* to each *swarupam*.⁶² In the present state of information it is very difficult to say whether all those who received this title were *janmis* in their own right. There were brahman chiefs, temple and royal officers (*pandarakaryam*) and presumably persons who rose from the rank of the *janam* to higher positions. The histories of a few families could be traced from the available evidence and they show that at least a few of them might have risen from relatively low positions.⁶³

Quarrels among the different *swarupams* forced each *swarupam* to preserve and expand its militia and access to resources. Such quarrels were visible throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and this made the ruling family more and more dependent on intermediaries for military strength and resources. Similarly, large temples tried to preserve their landholding from these quarrels. Infringements on temple lands by the intermediaries resulted in increased conflicts among temple and royal servants.⁶⁴ By the seventeenth century, this had become a regular feature of land transactions and caused repeated disruption of temple-related activities. This also resulted in the disruption of the sanctity and inviolability of the institution of *sanketam*, by which the autonomous, self-governing nature of temple properties was accepted as an unquestioned fact. An indicator for such disruptions is the stoppage of *pujas* and other offerings in the Padmanabha temple from time to time.⁶⁵ The chief ceremony of the Padmanabha temple, the *alpassi* festival had also to be stopped because the ruling family did not provide compensation for the disruption of the *sanketam*.⁶⁶

The disruption of temple expenditure, and quarrels among the royal servants, tenants and temple servants showed that customary authority of the landowner was coming under strain as customary obligations were often violated. Details of the various incidents that led to such violations show that the intermediary land holders who rose in politico-economic

⁶¹ *Kshetrakaryam Curuna*, deals with the political affairs of Venad during the late seventeenth century 'Matilakam Document' No. CXXIII; T.K. Velu Pillai, *op. cit.*, mentions this procedure.

⁶² A document in which a certain prince becomes the ruler of Kollam (Desinganad), mentions 24 persons as *madampis* and *pillamar* attached to the *swarupam*. M. Rajarajavarma Raja, 'Some Travancore Dynastic Records', *Kerala Society Papers Series 6*, 1931, Doc. AD 1668.

⁶³ For a discussion, see K.N. Ganesh, 'Agrarian Relations and Political Authority in Medieval Travancore, 1300-1750' (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1987), Chapter IV.

⁶⁴ *Matilakam Records*, c. 1721 0.46 (AD 1542), c. 1727 0.243 (AD 1593), c. 2601 0.29 (AD 1587), c. 1727 0.216 (AD 1592).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* c. 1727 0.157 (AD 1552), such documents relating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are numerous.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* c. 2601 0.179 (AD 1606), c. 2600 0.84 (AD 1632), although this was an annual festival directly attended to by the royal family, the festival was held only on AD 1588 and AD 1633 during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

power played a major part in them. Evidence from Nancinadu, the dry cultivation area on the way to Cape Comorin indicate attempts by intermediaries to extract dues and services in violation of customary obligations. They even resorted to distraint of cultivation (*ertadai*) and confiscation of lands if their demands were not met. Such outrages resulted in frequent collective protests by the landholders of Nancinadu, including stoppage of cultivation and fleeing from lands.⁶⁷

Customary authority was almost on the point of being undermined in a series of incidents in the late seventeenth century.⁶⁸ During AD 1674 the Padmanabha temple was closed down due to lack of resources. The princess of Attingal, in an attempt to reopen the temple, ordered the realisation of arrears of rent and additional resources from the tenants, which was resisted by a group of intermediary landholders, who acted as accountants and collectors of dues, and who fled to Kalkulam in Kanyakumari district and mobilised an army.⁶⁹ The revolt was joined by a relation of the princess, the chief of Nedumangad among others. The combined forces threatened to destroy Attingal but backed down after mediation by other members of the ruling family. The incident showed that both the major pillars of customary authority—the ruler and the temple—could be seriously challenged and undermined. The intermediary landholders, growing within the customary framework, were beginning to undo the very framework itself.

Evidence from Venad towards the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of eighteenth centuries showed that conditions of politico-economic crisis prevailed in the region. Both the Dutch and English mention conflicts in the area.⁷⁰ The crisis conditions were manifested in the murder of Kerala Varma of Kottayam who aided the princess of Attingal in the revolt discussed above,⁷¹ Rama Varma, the ruler during the beginning of the eighteenth century, was forced to maintain a Tamil cavalry for his own safeguard, as the traditional militia no longer served.⁷² The Padmanabha temple authorities

⁶⁷ *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. V, pp. 215–17, pp. 217–19, (AD 1698) pp. 219–20 (AD 1719) describe actions by Nancinadu Vellalas. These documents are in the form of *oppuravu mara moli ola*, inviolable declarations where a detailed 'grievance sheet' was prepared on those who were plundering and obstructing cultivation, including royal servants and landlords and a decision was taken by the *nattar* of Nancinadu to stop cultivation until the authorities redressed their grievances.

⁶⁸ Kshetrakaryam Curuna, T.K. Velu Pillai, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ The rebels included two major landholders in royal service Idathara Potti and Ilampal Pandarattil. Arukuttathil Pillaimar who were in charge of royal accounts and the landholders of Kalkulam, showing a direct confrontation between the intermediaries and the ruling family.

⁷⁰ *Letters to Fort St. George*, Vol. IV, 1686–87, *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. I (1726–28), Madras, 1934; letter dated 18 November 1727. Dutch records mention the role played by Armen landmen in Travancore (Ashin Das Gupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade*, p. 23 footnote no. 3).

⁷¹ M. Rajarajavarma Raja, 'Some Travancore Dynastic Records', *Kerala Society Papers Series I* - Doc. H (AD 1696).

⁷² *Matilakam Records*, c. 2600 0.85 (AD 1721). References to *arisippadi jenam* as serving the

complained of inability to collect rent from their lands, and resisted the attempts by the ruler to impose a *rajakaram* on temple lands for maintaining the cavalry. The temple authorities even resorted to *pattini* (a protest fast) to force the ruler to pay compensation for the offences done by him and his predecessors to the temple, to no avail.⁷³ Although Rama Varma asked the *pillamar* and his representatives to observe *kilmariyadai*, there is no indication that the instruction was followed.⁷⁴ All these point to a situation when the principles of *kiliyakkam* and *kilmariyadai* no longer functioned.

The above outline shows that various factors contributed to the development of crisis conditions in the politico-economic order of late medieval Tiruvitamkur viz., the segmentary character of political power, where authority was in the hands of number of *swarupams* who were interrelated but quarrelling among one another, crisis in the management of temple lands and growth of intermediary landholders who rose to become temple and royal officials and were conferred *madampikur* by the rulers. However a single thread runs through these changes. The temples, brahman landlords, and segments of the ruling family held customary ownership of lands, and the intermediary landholders, although they had no customary rights, held the actual controlling rights. The period of crisis towards the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century showed that customary authority functioned only insofar as those who controlled the land allowed it to function. This situation could be resolved only by a complete restructuring of the politico-economic order that would provide upper hand to the ruler and lead to the consolidation of state power, as was attempted in Tiruvitamkur during the eighteenth century.⁷⁵

Although a definitive picture of other parts of Kerala is lacking, a process similar to that of Tiruvitamkur could be delineated. Numerous new chiefs were emerging in central Kerala like the *kaimal* and *kartha* families holding lands around Periyar river, and the chiefs of Karappuram. Their authority is indicated by the efforts by the Dutch to enter into separate agreements with these chiefs.⁷⁶ Similarly several major royal servants like Paliyath Achen,

ruler disappear by the end of the seventeenth century. By then, the *kuruppus* and *pillamar*, the groups that were part of *janam*, began to be identified with the intermediaries.

⁷³ *Ibid.* c. 28 0.105, c. 81 0.179 (AD 1722).

⁷⁴ *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol. V, pp. 220–21 (AD 1721), 222–27 (AD 1723).

⁷⁵ Various aspects of this process has been discussed in Dick Kooiman, 'State Formation in Travancore, Problems of Revenue, Trade and Armament', paper presented at the Eleventh European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Amsterdam, 2–5 July 1990; P.K. Michael Tharakan, 'Control over trade and temples, standing army and public works: A study of state formation in Travancore, 1729–1798', paper presented to the Indian History Congress, 47th session, Srinagar, 1986; Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship and Origins of Community: Religion, State & Society in Kerala (1750–1850)', *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. XVIII. 2, 1984.

⁷⁶ *Dutch Records, Treaties* Vol. 1, quoted in K.M. Panikkar, *A History of Kerala 1498–1801*, p. 200.

Naykkaruveettil Achen were also independent landholders rendering services to the rulers. The Dutch control over the Kochi royal family towards the end of the seventeenth century was resented by the land holders who rebelled against the authority of the ruler.⁷⁷ By the eighteenth century, *kanam* holdings had become the major form of landholding in central Kerala and several communities, including Christians and Muslims, are mentioned as *kanam* holders.⁷⁸

Evidence regarding the growth of *kanakkar* and a class of intermediaries are found from Malabar. Forms of *kanam* and *otti* had become the predominant form around Kozhikode.⁷⁹ In south Malabar the temple lands were managed and protected by local landholders as *kaval* or *cangatam*. The share of the produce received by these landholders was called *kavalpalam*.⁸⁰ Large *kanam* holders were growing under more traditional *janmis* in other places also. The available evidence also shows that the customary authority of the *swarupams* and *janmis* were being broken by intermediary classes. Thus Randattara Achens, Iravanattu Nambiar and the Mappilas of Peringottur undermined the authority of Kolathunad in their areas. Internecine quarrels within the customary lands also demonstrated their weakness like the quarrels between *Tekkilamkur* and *Vadakkilamkur* in Kolathiri Kingdom and between *Patinjare Kovilakam* and *Kilakke Kovilakam* in the Samutiri Kingdom:

The growth and extension of *kanam* tenure and its numerous variations and extensions including *kulikkanam* and debt bonds had resulted in a new type of landholding where the landholder gained relative freedom and ability to extend his occupation of land for long periods, thus enabling him to increase his controlling rights over land. *Kanam* and its variations were found in association with the growing intermediary class who held positions as servants, militia and accountants. This form of association indicates that although the land ownership stayed with the traditional landlords, the entire process of ensuring that the customary ownership was actually sustained lay with the intermediaries. This dichotomy between customary ownership and actual control is found throughout Kerala. This enabled the latter to gain privileges (including *madampikur*) and make themselves indispensable. When their rights were threatened, then they could organise themselves and try to undermine customary authority itself as happened in Tiruvitamkur and Kochi at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 203–4.

⁷⁸ Several instances of *kanam* holdings by Christians and Muslims towards the end of the eighteenth century are found in the *Blue Book op. cit.* See escheat case related to Paleli Kilmana Illam, Kanayannur Taluk.

⁷⁹ Nambutiri, 'Samutiri Caritrattile Kanappurangal' Appendix 2.2, 2.3 (AD 1548–52). Out of the 24 transactions mentioned in these documents 18 are *otti* deeds associated with Mangat Achen, the chief official of Samutiri.

⁸⁰ M.G.S. Narayanan, 'Introduction', *Vanjeri Granthavari*, p. xxiv. The remuneration for *kaval* was paid by each landholder with a fixed share piece of land (*Talaviri Kavalpalam*) Docs. 1A, 2A, 3A (AD 1541), 11A (AD 1549), 13A (AD 1565) etc., mention *kavalpalam*.

III

The *janmam-kanam* relation described by the British officials was thus not a static entity, but was embedded in a dynamic process. Medieval land-ownership based on *kiliyakkam* and *kilmayadai* was undergoing a serious crisis during the eighteenth century. In Tiruvitamkur, the customary forms of politico-economic power had given way to a unitary formal kingship supported by a new politico-legal apparatus.⁸¹ The power of intermediaries including *madampis* and accountants was destroyed, and along with it went the autonomous character of the temple *sanketam* and the autonomous authority of the brahmans. The customary privileges of the *janmi* were restricted to limited territories, that too under the politico-legal apparatus of the new state formation. The land survey and settlements of 1739–40, 1751–54 and 1773 enforced a proper revenue administration where all types of lands except those specifically exempted from taxation, were expected to pay revenue and the privileges of temples, brahmans and other landowners were formally fixed. Finally, the State itself owned most of the lands (called *pandaravaga*) but enforced formal control, instead of depending on customary obligations.⁸²

Similar processes were taking place in Kochi also. The Kochi Rajas were able to extend the tenure of customary authority only with the military and political backing of the Dutch. As Dutch authority waned they were unable to hold on, and could not offer resistance to the expansionist designs of Tiruvitamkur and Samutiri, and later the Mysore rulers. In this background, a major effort at suppressing recalcitrant nobles and intermediaries was attempted by the minister of a Kochi Raja, Paliyath Achen during the middle of the eighteenth century.⁸³ This process was completed under Rama Varma

⁸¹ It would seem that this would fit into the model of 'Low State demand and high stratification' advanced by Christopher and Susan Bayly. 'Eighteenth century state forms and the Economy' in Clive Dewey, ed., *Arrested Development of India*, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 66–90 who state that 'by dispossessing rivals and seizing their *janam* rights the new dynasty succeeded in building up a huge royal demesne which was cultivated by predial serfs' (p. 83). However, the 'aggrandizing monarch' was the product of intense conflict between the traditional landowning class and the growing class of intermediaries. The result of this conflict was also that the customary landownership, including that of the ruler was destroyed, and state control over land was established on a new basis.

⁸² A brief survey of the salient features of the Land settlement in the eighteenth century Tiruvitamkur could be found in *Travancore Land Manual*, Vol. IV, pp. 89–143. This formal control was given a politico-religious authority, through placing the entire lands controlled by the king to the deity of Thiruvananthapuram temple (*Trippadidanam*). For the significance of *Trippadidanam* Susan Bayly, 'Hindu Kingship and origins of community'.

⁸³ C. Achyutha Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, Ernakulam, 1911, pp. 118–19. These steps included the confiscation of the properties of the chiefs, Muriyanad Nambiar and Velos Nambiar and partly those of Thalappalli Raja and Koratti Kaimal. An administrative structure similar to Tiruvitamkur was also introduced. See K.P. Padmanabha Menon, *Kochirajyacaritam*, Kozhikode 1989, Chapter 11.

'Saktan Thampuran' who controlled the administration towards the end of the eighteenth century, when he uprooted the power of a number of nobles.⁸⁴ Preliminary efforts at a land settlement was also made during this period.⁸⁵

The pattern of changes taking place in Tiruvitamkur and Kochi showed that the ownership/control dichotomy in the medieval land relations was being transformed. In Tiruvitamkur, the king held 'ownership' rights, in the medieval sense, over *pandaravaga* lands and the temples held such rights over *sreepandaravaga* lands. However this 'ownership' was no longer customary, dues were fixed and pattern of payment was also determined. Nor could the tenant occupy his lands under customary rights. Permanent leases and mortgages were converted into birthright of the cultivator (*kudijenmam*).⁸⁶ Lease transactions were documented and brought under the state organisation. *Kulikkanam*, with *naduvukkur* was encouraged, particularly in garden crops and lands recently brought under cultivation.⁸⁷ Thus the land surveys apparently resulted from a two-pronged strategy. The first was to organise tenurial holdings in order to maximise the resources mobilised by the state which would enable it to maintain the new state apparatus, and the second was to encourage productivity in cash crops and extension of cultivation which would enhance the state financial reserves and create a marketable surplus, that would facilitate export trade.⁸⁸ These features indicated that ownership-control dichotomy was giving way to state ownership and control and personal initiative by the cultivators as a guided activity by the state.

This form of consolidation of the state did not take place in Kochi. The evidence from the late eighteenth century showed that ownership rights of the *janmis* had not been fully marginalised and only a part of the lands were

⁸⁴ C. Achyuta Menon *op. cit.* p. 133; K.P. Padmanabha Menon *op. cit.* pp. 683-84; also the biography by Puthiezathu Raman Menon *Saktan Thampuran*, Kozhikode, 1958.

⁸⁵ A *ketteluttu* (Survey based on Oral testimony) was attempted in AD 1762 and the dues from the paddy fields were fixed in AD 1789. Padmanabha Menon *op. cit.* p. 719.

⁸⁶ Agastheeswaram Taluk Records Vilangiper of AD 1750, *Travancore Land Revenue Manual*, Vol. V. Lands settled as *chora otti* (Permanent mortgage) in AD 1738 was resettled as *kudijenmam*. See also *Show Case Records No. 78, AD 1780*.

⁸⁷ *Mailakam Records* c. 2252 O. 834 (AD 1743) gives details regarding rent from garden crops and also the provisions for *naduvukkur* (concessions given for fresh planting).

⁸⁸ This would bring back the role of trade in the eighteenth century transformation, which has been forcefully argued by Kooiman, 'State Formation in Travancore: Problems of Revenue...'. The role of trade in the transformation cannot be denied but its impact can only be studied in relation to the transformation of indigenous economic relations of production and distribution and the articulation of cash transactions in these relations. The transformation of Tiruvitamkur from 'a vague segmentary state' to a 'strong militarily and fiscally more developed power' is a complex politico-economic process that had been taking place for about a century. Trade did act as a necessary condition, but the transformation has to be studied taking into account its other variables also in which transformation of land relations appears to be crucial.

held as *pandaravaga* or State lands.⁸⁹ The land surveys only systematised the collection of rent, like the payment of *mupra* and *kettuthengu*, and the tenurial forms.⁹⁰ However, this form of intervention by the state was a violation of the *maryadai* based on local traditions, and hence the dues received by the land owner could no longer be termed as customary. Land mortgages were being used to develop new land holdings as shown by several transactions with Konkani brahmans, Christians etc.⁹¹ However, *kanam* holders had become powerful with the traditional *janmi* only retaining nominal rights.

The situation was apparently different in Malabar, where no effort to intervene in customary land rights or conduct a land settlement took place under the local rulers. An explanation of this feature may be crucial not only for understanding the land relations that existed during British occupation but also in answering the question of why Kozhikode, which was apparently the most powerful Kerala kingdom, could not effect a transformation of politico-economic order similar to that of Tiruvitamkur.

Evidence from Malabar during the eighteenth century, shows that large scale *kanam* transactions were taking place, particularly in the region around Bharatapuzha.⁹² Lands were being held under *kulikkanam* tenure. However, the spread of *kulikkanam* tenure was limited, and *kulikkanam* did not acquire the importance that it had in Tiruvitamkur. This was presumably because the terrain in Malabar, with its hills and valleys and elevated regions, did not permit large-scale expansion of cultivation. Even by the end of the eighteenth century more than two-thirds of the land surface in North Malabar was filled with forests.⁹³ Extension of cultivation was possible only in South Malabar, where *kanam* and *kulikkanam* holdings developed and which became the focus of contention among various chiefs and rulers prior to British occupation. The Samutiri himself was looking to this region as his resource base.

Because of these features, a conflict between the growing intermediary class and the customary owners did not develop as in the case of Tiruvitamkur and Kochi. Conflicts were manifested in the quarrels between the two brahman factions *panniyur kur* and *chovvara kur* in the Bharathapuzha basin, in which numerous non-brahman customary lords played their role.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Documents collected in the *Blue Book*, *op. cit.*, mention that *pandaravaga* and *janmam* lands, and major *janmi* families like Paliyath Achen remained powerful.

⁹⁰ *Blue Book*, Inam cases No. 1 & 2 of village No. 1 Chennamangalam Cochin Taluk Documents of AD 1780 and AD 1781.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* Escheat case No. 6 of Kanayannur Taluk. A number of *kanam* holders of Paleli Illam were Christians.

⁹² See documents in *Vanjeri Granthavari* and K.K.N. Kurup, ed., *Kavalappara papers*, Kozhikode 1984, for the preponderance of *kanam* holdings.

⁹³ F. Buchanan, *A journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara & Malabar*, Vol. II. Delhi, 1988, pp. 501–2.

⁹⁴ This conflict called *kur matsaram* had obscure legendary origins, see K.V. Krishna Iyer *Zamorins of Calicut*, Kozhikode, 1938, pp. 97–102. Even in the eighteenth century, families

The intermediary classes could sustain themselves in this conflict by allying themselves with one customary ruler or the other. The conflict resulted in the breaking of the authority of Valluvanad *swarupam* which controlled the Bharatapuzha basin. Although the Samutiri technically won the conflict, real control was vested in the hands of several *janmis* and intermediary land holders.⁹⁵ This resulted in the parcellisation of authority and resources in the Bharatapuzha region. This became crucial in the ensuing conflict between Samutiri and Kochi. The presence of the Europeans, first the Portuguese and then the Dutch meant that the sustenance of a political allegiance on the basis of customary right was important for both sides. This conflict also meant that *ideal conditions for agricultural expansion and the control exercised by the intermediaries did not exist in the region.* The intermediaries could not mobilise enough resources to break the customary rights on their own. The weakening of Kochi due to internecine quarrels among various Tayvalis, inability to ensure the allegiance of intermediaries and the waning of Dutch power, enabled Samutiri to annex large territories during the middle of the eighteenth century. But this did not imply a transformation as in the case of Tiruvitamkur, and merely an extension of customary political authority. The intervention of Haider and Tipu, the rulers of Mysore, during the second half of the eighteenth century prevented a consolidation of even this form.

Northern Malabar did not have the same level of agrarian expansion as in South Malabar. Although customary authority of the *swarupams* was being undermined, the intermediaries did not have the opportunity for economic expansion as in other parts. Even *kanam* and *kulikkanam* tenures were less developed.

Hence, despite the growth of *kanam* and *kulikkanam* tenures, the forms of ownership and control in Malabar did not have the necessary dynamism. Benefits from the overseas trade at Kozhikode and Kannur augmented the resources of their respective rulers, but it did not aid the process of transformation of agriculture, because of internal constraints. The expansion of garden crop cultivation to provide for increased overseas trade was comparatively less, and there was no incentive from customary authority. Hence, the objective conditions that assisted the transformation in Tiruvitamkur did not exist in Malabar.

The sway of the customary authority in Malabar was disrupted by Mysore invasions. The revenue settlement under Haider Ali and Tipu imposed an

and *swarupams* were identified by their *kur*. J.V. Gollennesse, in his Memorandum of the administration in Malabar refers to the king of Cochin as the 'head of Chodircur' (*Chovvarakkur*) and Samutiri as the head of 'Pandircur (*panniyurkur*)' faction (A. Galletti, *The Dutch in Malabar*, Madras, 1911, pp. 60, 65).

⁹⁵ This included Vettath Raja, Kavalappara Nayar, Pannathoor Nambidi, who held crucial positions around Bharatapuzha, and who shifted their allegiance from one ruler to the other. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

uneven, and often heavy, revenue assessment on the cultivators.⁹⁶ This assessment not only did away with the customary payments and obligations but also forced the *janmis* to pay dues, which went against the traditional concept of *janmam* itself. The revenue assessment also showed that the rights of the cultivator over the land were recognised.⁹⁷ However, the heavy revenue assessment and state monopolies over trade introduced by Mysore rulers did not facilitate expansion and transformation of agriculture.

It is clear that by the end of the eighteenth century, the traditional land rights were undergoing changes all over Kerala. The ownership-control dichotomy that developed within customary relations resulted in the formation of a new landholding class that occupied the intermediary position in the politico-economic order. The growth of land control by the intermediaries resulted in changes in the nature of customary authority itself, which, in turn gave rise to crisis conditions in the medieval order by the eighteenth century. In Malabar the growth of the intermediaries, which was slowed down by geo-economic factors and political exigencies, could not facilitate the breakdown of customary authority itself.

However, with the growth of ownership-control dichotomy and the intervention of Mysore, customary authority was on the wane, and land control in south Malabar passed into the hands of *kanam* and *kulikkanam* holders. The *janmis*' position had become precarious on account of the new revenue assessment, and he could survive only by seizing the real control over the lands.⁹⁸ Otherwise he would face extinction as in Tiruvitamkur; even in Kochi the authority of the customary *janmi* had been undermined. However, with British occupation, the *janmis* were transformed from customary to statutory landowners, and new privileges, including the right to enhance rent and legal eviction enabled them to sustain themselves as a class, and improve their position.

⁹⁶ The share of the *pattam* levied by Haider Ali's officials in South Malabar ranged from one-tenth to one-third. Tree tax was fixed on garden lands usually at the rate of two annas for every bearing coconut, four annas for jack, and twelve annas for every peppervine producing fifteen *seers* of green pepper. In North Malabar a different form of assessment was followed, where the Rajas had to pay the revenue from their lands as a lump sum. C.A. Innes and F.B. Evans, *Malabar*, Madras, 1951, pp. 324-27.

⁹⁷ W. Logan, *Malabar* Vol. I, Madras, 1951, p. 623.

⁹⁸ An analogous situation has been discussed in the case of Bengal towards the end of eighteenth century where the agrarian economy at the base was constituted by the creditor employers class of 'peasant landlords' (*jotedars*) and at the apex by the revenue collecting, peace-keeping class of zamindars. The changes in the agrarian economy during the second half of the eighteenth century had resulted in the decline of the power of the Zamindars, but with the Permanent Settlement of 1793, they were integrated to the bureaucratic coercive apparatus, whereby they were able to extend their authority (Ratnalekha Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society c. 1760-1850*, Delhi 1979). This formulation regarding zamindars and *jotedars* has been criticised recently by Rajat Datta, 'Agricultural production, Social participation and Domination in late 18th century. Bengal: Towards an alternative explanation' *Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol. 17, No. 1, October 1989.



