CHAPTER I

LAND AND THE PEOPLE .

In the south-west corner of India is the Malayalam speaking region known as Kerala from very early times to this day. The area extends from $8^{o}4'$ north to $12^{o}48'$ north and $74^{o}53'$ east to $77^{o}35'$ east. Politically the pre-Kerala State divisions constituting this region were the States of Travancore and Cochin and the District of Malabar and the 'Taluk' of Kasargode of the district of South Kanara. The western ghats with an average elevation of 5000 feet with peaks occasionally rising upto 8000 feet runs as the eastern barrier cutting off Kerala from the Deccan and the east coast. Kerala thus stretching along between the ghats and the coast line for 340 miles has a width varying from 20 to 70 miles.

The district of Malabar, the northern part of Kerala extends 150 miles along the coast and has an area of 5790 square miles. The district is divided into ten taluks and it includes Fort Cochin, of two square miles in area, and the islands of Minicoy and Laccadives which

are off the Malabar coast.

As for the whole of Kerala the physiographic features of the district permit division into three natural parts: the coastal strip, the midlands and the highlands merging into the ghats. The midlands comprise of stretches of undulating land and low hills and valleys, and into the interior, it is increasingly laterite and loamy suitable for the cultivation of paddy and garden crops. Except in the talukas of Ponnani and Cochin 85% of the area is red and loamy soil. The coastal strip abounds in coconut palms with a sprinkling of paddy fields and it is the most thickly populated part of the district.

Along the major part of the length of the Kerala coast a series of inland lagoons or backwaters lie close to the sandy coast line and are connected by artificial and natural canals which permit transport by boat close along the coast from Calicut over 200 miles southwards. The rivers are navigable mainly at their mouth and they run their course from the hills westwards into the brackish waters. In the western ghats is the important Palghat gap 25 miles broad opening out into the district of Coimbatore and forming the main gateway by land for this closetted region. North of this gap and historically not insignificant are other small passes piercing the ghats and permitting access from the Coorg, Mysore and Nilgiris. On the 150 miles coast line Cochin is the only natural port, and the coast being shallow, ships anchor at a distance at the other ports of Calicut, Cannanore, Badagara, Ponnani and Beypore.

The highlands are thickly wooded with the lower ranges covered by cultivated fruit trees such as mango and jackfruit and the upper reaches clad in forests which get increasingly dense along the mountain heights.. The forest area, thickly wooded and harbouring wild animals such as elephants, tigers and bisons, according to the records of 1951, covers 2958 square miles.

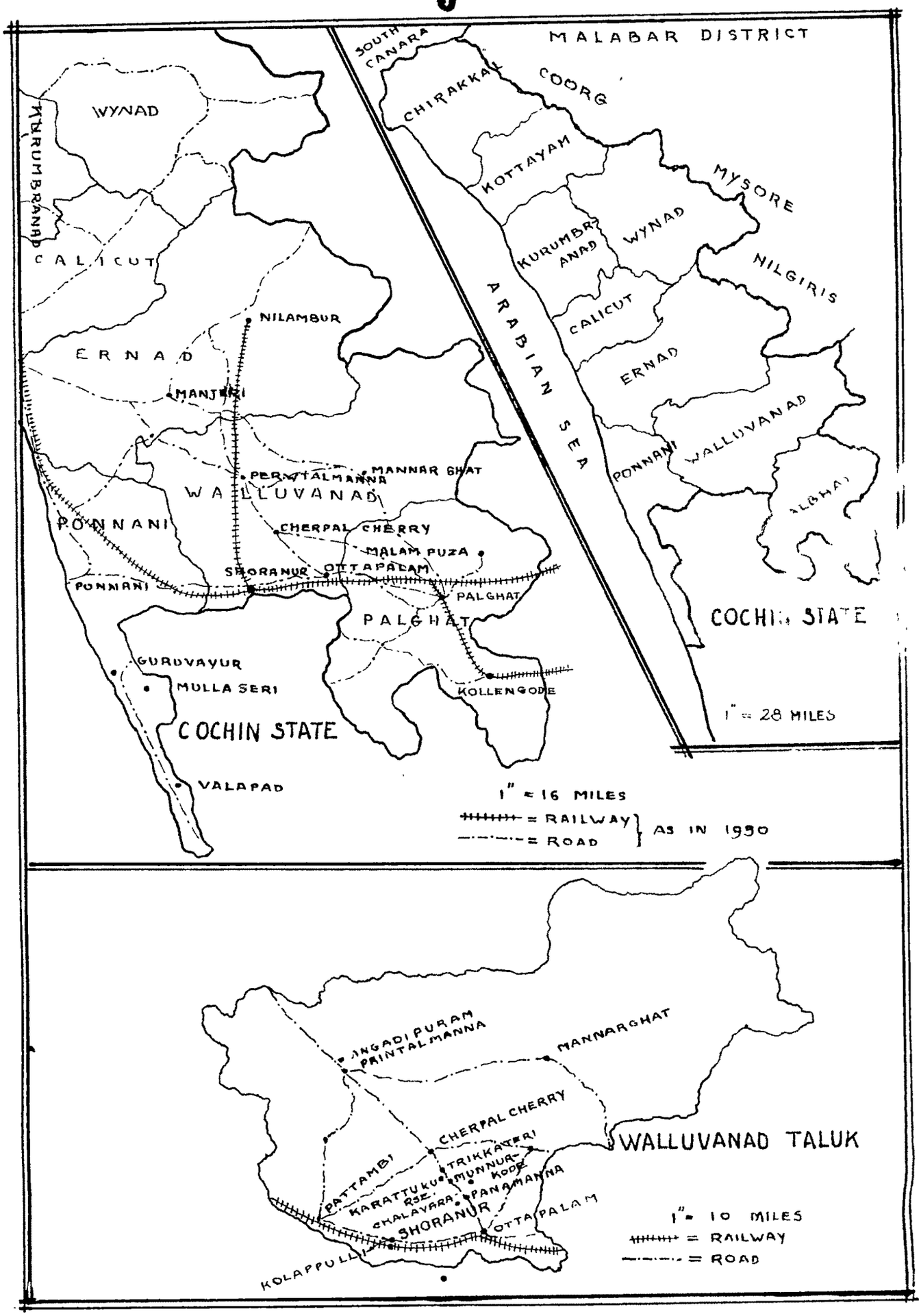
The temperature of the district has some uniformity, the minimum varying from 70.9 in January to 70.8 in April, and the maximum varies from 82.4 in July to 91.0 in April. The humidity is intolerable especially in the months of April and May when in the hot weather the first showers break in as a prelude to the intense monsoonish rains. The south-west monsoon brings in heavy and wide-spread rainfall from June to September and the north-east monsoon follows bringing the second and less heavy showers in October and December. There is a maximum temperature of 90° in the rainy season which is thus, in general, damp and chilly rather than cold. The dry weather follows and lasts from January to March.

The monsoon is regular and dependable except often for its heralding showers. Irregularity of these early showers upset the routine of the start of agricultural operations. The average annual rainfall varies from 88.76 in Palghat taluk to 146.19 in Kurumbranad taluk. The average rainfall for the district is 116" and the bulk of the rains fall from June to September.

Malabar has a good supply of building materials. Grey granite could be quarried in all talukas and laterite formations available in most parts of district can be cut into blocks and used for buildings. A range of timber such as teak, black wood, rose wood, iron wood and jack, each with varying characteristic properties, is used all over the district for building purposes and has been an important item of export from Malabar from very early times.

Transport in Malabar has had a restricted development. Except in the coastal margin where travel by boat is possible transport facilities, inspite of the development in the last two decades, are inadequate. Railway was introduced through the Palghat gap in 1880 A.D. and was extended upto Calicut in 1890 and further to Mangalore in 1906. This arterial line is fed by a Shoranur-Nilambur line built later to explore the timber wealth of Nilambur forests more economically. By 1931 the district had 1396 miles of metalled roads and 474 miles of unmetalled roads. Roads development has taken place within limitations of the topographical features of the district and often roads take circuitous courses thus leading to the desirability of cross-country walking even today to reach places of short distance of 3 to 6 miles or more.

Of the total population of 4,758,342 in Malabar in 1951, 3,009,723 are Hindus, 1,593,406 are Moslems, 1,53,916 are Christians, 1019 are Jains and 52 Buddhists.


MALABAR DISTRICT
SOUTH CANARA
COORG
MYSORE
NILGIRIS
WYNAD
CHIRAKKAL
KOTTAYAM
KURUMBRANAD
WYNAD
CALICUT
ERNAD
WALLUVANAD
PONNANI
ALGHAT
ARABIAN SEA
COCHIN STATE
1" = 28 MILES
KURUMBRANAD
WYNAD
CALICUT
NILAMBUR
ERNAD
MANJERI
PERINTALMANNA
MANNAR GHAT
WALLUVANAD
PONNANI
CHERPAL CHERRY
MALAM PUZA
SHORANUR
OTTAPALAM
PONNANI
PALGHAT
PALGHAT
GURUVAYUR
MULLA SERI
KOLLENGODE
COCHIN STATE
VALAPAD
1" = 16 MILES
= RAILWAY
= ROAD
AS IN 1950
ANGADIPURAM
PRINTALMANNA
MANNARGHAT
CHERPAL CHERRY
WALLUVANAD TALUK
TRIKKATERI
PATTAMBI
MUNNUR-KODE
KARATTUKU-RSE
PANAMANNA
CHALAVARA
SHORANUR
OTTAPALAM
KOLAPPULLI
1" = 10 MILES
= RAILWAY
= ROAD

Malabar's caste society has a complexity which has perhaps no parallel elsewhere in India. Not only the Hindus have caste but the Christians and Moslems also have features of caste-groups having divisions with regulation of marriage and restricted commensality. In the caste hierarchy the Nambudiri Brahmins, numerically a very small group forming about one per cent of the population, occupy the top place. Below them are the chieftain castes known by a generic term 'Samanthans' who were the pre-British chieftain families. Below them are the Nairs, a group of castes, numerically the largest constituting about 20% of the population. They can be regarded as of two categories, the military and the non-military, the former being trained men of arms and the latter mainly rendering services as retainers to Nambudiris and higher caste Nairs. The castes below may be broadly divided into two - an upper polluting group comprising of artisan castes, a few castes specialising in medicine, astrology, and the like and the caste of Iravas who were toddy tappers and agricultural labourers. Below them were the lower group of polluting castes comprising mainly the agricultural serfs attached more or less permanently to the land. A few immigrant castes, numerically very small and widely scattered, and a few castes of temple servants, most of the latter fitting in the hierarchy among the

castes of Nairs and above, complete the Hindu castes of Malabar.[1]

The population of Malabar has been steadily increasing. In the beginning of the 19th century, the estimated population of the district is 4,65,594 and this population, it has been pointed out, has doubled in the course of 30 years.[2] However, S. R. Iyergar in his Memorandum notes that throughout the 19th century Malabar was prosperous and completely free from famines. At the beginning of this century the density of population in Malabar was 483 while the province of Madras, of which Malabar was a district, as a whole had a density of 287. The comparatively very high density since the beginning of this century is evident from the following figures:-

Table .1. Density of population

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Madras Province	287	309	318	350	390
Malabar district	483	520	536	610	679

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1.In this broad division of castes, to serve the purpose of this chapter, I have used Eric Miller's division as given in his recent paper, "Caste and territory in Malabar," in American Anthropologists, vol.56, No.3, June 1954. Miller notes that the Hindus of Malabar are divided into upwards of two hundred castes and sub-castes.

2.The figures given are from S.R.Iyergar's Memorandum on population of Madras quoted by K.N.S. Nambudiripad in his study of "Occupational and Employment Structure of some Malabar Villages," a Ph.D. Thesis in Economics in the Bombay University, (1949).

The density of population for the whole district does not convey the actual pressure on land. Dr. Kurian notes that in 1931 in the three broad natural divisions of low land, foot hills, and high lands the density of population per square mile of cultivated area was about 2000, 1000 and 400 respectively. Dealing with some aspects of regional geography of Kerala he has also pointed out that the density of population was varying directly with the extent of rice cultivation.[3] In 1931 in the low lands nearly 90% of the cultivable lands has been cultivated while in the foot hills and high lands 50% and 40% respectively of the cultivable area was under cultivation. These figures speak, although rather broadly, about the pressure on land and limited scope for extending cultivation. According to 1951 Census Report the density per square mile of cultivated and cultivable area for the whole district is 1163 and the Report has pointed out that in the whole of Madras State, in this respect, Malabar occupies the first place, the second and third being N. Arcot (1110) and Tanjore (1081).[4]

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3. G.Kurian, "Aspects of Regional Geography of Kerala", in the Indian Geographical Journal, Jan.-March, 1942, pp.28-30. In Travancore and Cochin the low lands had, in 1941, a density of 2186 and 2783 respectively.

4. Census, 1951, vol.VIII, Madras and Coorg, Part I, p.24.

It is significant to note that increase of population in Malabar does not mean a marked concentration in the same area. It is an extension of population into less developed areas by immigration into the district and by spatial mobility of the existing rural population. This fact emerges from the brief explanation given in 1951 Census Report for the increase of population in the various taluks of Malabar. This aspect of increase has relevance in studying changes in social structure as will be pointed out in a later context.

The different taluks show considerable variations in the increase of population. The increase as recorded in the 1951 Census Report ranges from 15.6% in Ponnani taluk to 26.9% in Kozhikode. "The hilly interior areas in Kozhikode, Kurumbranad, Kottayam, Chirakkal, Ernad and Walluvanad taluks where there is considrable virgin land, have attracted emigrant population from Travancore-Cochin." The increase (18.2%) in Palghat taluk has been attributed to the major irrigation work and the increase in the northern taluks which is more than in the southern taluks has been mentioned in the Census Report as due to the existence of vast undeveloped areas and better transport and medical facilities obtaining in the northern part of Malabar. The increase in Malabar as a whole is also attributed to the return of emigrants on a large scale from Burma, Ceylon and Malaya, and further to the fall in

emigration. The immigration figure of Malabar is 23 per thousand of population. This small figure, as the Report says, is explainable in view of the fact that the heavy population and the food deficit of the district have led to considerable emigration rather than immigration. The immigrants include considerable number of persons who have migrated from Travancore-Cochin State and taken up cultivation in Malabar, particularly in taluks of Kurumbranad, and the persons who have settled under colonisation scheme in the hill tracts of Wynad.

In 1941 nearly 62% of the population of Malabar was supported by agriculture and only 18% was supported by industrial occupation. The urban-rural break up of the 1941 figures shows that for every 100 of population nearly 90 are rural.[5] In 1951 the rural population of 4,250,367 showed an increase of 19.6 over the figure for 1941, and the percentage of rural population was 89.[6] For the whole of West Madras Division which is a census division composed of Malabar and small areas of Nilgiri district and South Canara, 78% of population occupies 53% of the area and lives in taluks with a density of

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5. Census 1941, Madras.
6. Census 1951, op.cit., p.51.

600 and above.[7]

The increase in agricultural productiom in Malabar has been lagging behind increase in population. The settlement Commissioner noted in 1930 that in the thirties of this century there was a remarkable expansion of the area under cultivation as revealed by the figures of 27,000 acres of increase in paddy land and 12,000 acres of increase in garden land.[8] However, referring to the same decade a conservative estimate of Dr. Kurian in 1942 is that each person supported by agriculture has about 0.9 acres of land and he states: ".....neither the increase in the yield of crops nor the acreage under cultivation has actually kept pace with the growth of population, with the result that the pressure of land is now much greater."[9] The position as assessed in 1951 Census Report does not appear to have improved for the Report has pointed out Malabar as the largest food deficit area in the State. Within Malabar, as the Report points out, except Palghat and Wynad all taluks are deficit in food grains.[10]

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7. Census, 1951, Ibid, p.24. The Census Division known as West Madras Division is constituted of Malabar and the two small districts of South Canara and Nilgiris. The mean population of these three during 1941-50 was Malabar - 4,343,883, Nilgiris - 260,719, South Canara - 1,635,503.
8. K.N.S.Nambudiripad, op.cit., p.23.
9. Op.cit., p.31
10. Op.cit., p.95.

The 1951 census classifies population into eight categories based on the main source of livelihood. The Census Report of Madras State commenting on the figures for livelihood categories of the Malabar population mentions some facts which are relevant in several contexts in this study. As the Report states "The concentration of land in the hands of a few is most marked in Malabar where lands are owned by fewer persons than in any other parts of the State"[11] Only 6.5% of the population of Malabar falls under livelihood pattern, Class I, that is, cultivators of land wholly or mainly owned and their dependants. 22% of the population in Malabar are lessees and their dependants and 25% are cultivating labourers. A few observations of the Census Report with reference to the West Madras Division, which as noted, is for the most part comprised of Malabar, are also worthy of mention here. In the Madras State this Division has the largest percentage of population (16%) under the category of people engaged in production other than cultivation, and this feature, as the Report notes, is chiefly due to certain conditions prevailing in the districts of Nilgiris and Malabar. In the State, West Madras Division is the least urbanised, and within it, Malabar has the least (10.7%) of urban population. This feature for

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11. Ibid, p.40. This fact has also been recorded in the Madras District Gazetteers -Malabar, (Madras 1915) p 238 which states that in South Malabar "the bulk of the land including the waste is the monopoly of a comparatively small class of land lords, tenacious of rights and privileges which are disputed by an influential class of Kanam tenants".

the Division as a whole is attributable to the dispersed nature of houses in agricultural farms and the consequent lack of compactness which is an important criterion of the census classification of an area as urban. Further, in the State the West Madras Division has the highest density (5037) in urban areas and within the Division Malabar has 6809 as urban density, the district thus becoming one of the few in the State where urban density is very high. Another feature of the Division, comparatively remarkable, is that among the rural population it has the largest percentage (47) under non-agricultural classes and has also the largest percentage of urban population under non-agricultural classes.[12] Malabar's plantations, coconut, textile, timber and fishing account for this feature. Further, dependancy is the largest in the West Madras Division where the percentage of non-earning dependants is 76 and that of earning dependants only 3. As the Report comments "these figures indicate that the lands are owned largely by persons who are fairly high up in the social scale and among whom it is not customary for dependants to work.[13]

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12. Ibid p. 82.

13. Ibid p. 83.

Some aspects of agricultural economy

All arable lands are divided into wet, dry and garden lands and the dry lands are further categorised as occupied and unoccupied. A sizable portion of arable lands are terrace formations worked up on the declivities of hills. This cummulative process of terracing out slopes for cultivation still continues in habitations of recent origin in the outskirts areas of villages where village boundaries merge into hill slopes. Occupied dry lands are generally house-sites and crops other than paddy - samai, ginger, plantains, vegetables and fruit trees - are grown on such dry lands. Such permanent crops as coconut and fruit trees assured by the heavy rainfall are more secure if the tenant lives on the spot to ensure constant attention and hence exists a more intensive cultivation of such crops in house-sites. Unoccupied dry lands are uncultivated hills, rocky and jungle areas which yield much of natural vegetation useful for green-leaf-manure in agriculture. Wet lands are used for cultivation of one to three crops in a year depending on their elevation and duration of moisture in the soil. The single-crop lands have a relatively high elevation and are locally known (in Walluvanad taluk) as 'Palliyal.' The double-crop lands are known as 'Padam' and in some places such lands retain moisture for more months permitting a third crop. The third

crop known as the 'Puncha' cultivation is confined to very small areas which also have some facility to supplement the water needs by lift irrigation or from perennial streams.[14] The major part of paddy cultivation is of the first two crops which are known as 'Virippu' and 'Mundakam'.[15] The former covers all wet lands suitable for paddy and is sown by the end of April. This is ready for harvest in September and is closely followed by the cultivation of the second crop which is ripe for harvest in February.

Of higher elevation than the single crop land (Palliyal) are the less fertile dry lands, usually not cut out as terraces and thus becoming the barren slopes of low hills. Such lands are used for dry cultivation of a kind of paddy known as 'Modan' once in two to five years. The variety of rice crops yield rice of varying quality modan being the markedly inferior and less used for consumption by families of well-to-do tenants and owners. Parts of

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14. The Malabar peasants expects rains in terms of 'Nattuvelas', a term denoting one of the 27 divisions of a year according to zodiac constellations.

15. Broadly, all cultivation is divided into two, Nanja and Puncha. The former means all paddy cultivation on wet lands and the latter consists of all other cultivation including garden crops.

single-crop wet lands (Palliyal) and the dry land sites of modan cultivation are used for seasonal crops such as ginger, plantations, pulses and vegetables of wide variety. Modan sites are also used for a rotation of crops, gingili, millets and pulses following the cultivation of modan in order.

The more extensively cultivated garden crops in Walluvanad taluk are areca, mango, jack, plantains and bananas, ginger and betel wine. Among spices chillies, tamarind, turmeric and pepper are grown chiefly for local consumption. Coconut, pepper, tapioca and cashew have been in recent decades steadily increasing in value as marketable crops and have since then become the most cared of the garden crops. The palmyra palms let to grow almost wild on dry lands and low hills and used for tapping toddy, extracting jaggery and roofing houses become less numerous today. Of this category are a few other trees currently getting neglected or used up to provide place for crops of better return and short term interest. Although the two monsoons do not entirely fail, the yield of crops compare unfavourably with that of other districts of the province of Madras.[16] In the wet

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16. A.C.Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, Oxford University Press, (1952), p.55. Mayer, in his comparative data based on crop reports of Madras and Bengal Governments gives the following as yield of paddy per acre:- Malabar - 1400, Cauveri Delta - 1750, Godavari-Krishna Delta - 1900, Bengal State average - 1050, Japan - 3,444, Burma - 1500 etc.

lands the yield in South Malabar is about twelve-fold in the first crop and about eight-fold in the second crop. Two acres of wet land produce 400 'Paras' of paddy and five acres of dry land may produce 500 paras of paddy. A total of seven acres of these two kinds of land was regarded by the Madras Government as an economic unit![17] K.N.S. Nambudiripad points out that even this acreage of seven cannot be regarded as an economic holding. The local expectations of the crops in the major part of Walluvanad taluk, an important paddy area, is less, an acre of paddy land producing around 150 paras in two crops in a year![18]

Palghat and Walluvanad taluks comprise of the main paddy producing areas in Malabar and the district has been becoming an increasingly deficit area depending on imports from other parts of India and South-East Asia.

Historical background.

The first period of Kerala history ends with 828 A.D. when the last of a line of kings known as Cheraman Perumals partitioned his kingdom among his

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17. A 'Para' is a unit of volume measure. In weight one para of paddy weighs about 37 lbs.

18. Op.cit., p.184.

dependants and is said to have left for Mecca on a pilgrimage![19] This is the period when Kerala's political unity broke up for ever, nobles and petty rulers assumed independance and there began a period of internicine wars which lasted throughout the middle ages. It was also early in the 9th century that Kerala emerged free from its connections with the Tamils particularly with the evolution of Malayalam as a language distinct from Tamil. The period 9th to 19th century, as one writer points out, may be regarded as the mediaeval period of Kerala history.[20]

By the beginning of the mediaeval period the Nambudiri Brahmins of Kerala had made themselves a powerful sacerdotal class. The Nairs had a civil and military organisation which resulted in the wide prevalence of feudal institutions. Both these castes, the Nambudiris with their attempted theocracy and the Nairs with their military organisation played an important role in checking the royal authority and kept off tendencies towards autocracy which was the system of government in some neighbouring countries such as Madura and Kanchipuram.

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19. The outline of political history presented here is chiefly based on the following works:
K.P.Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala.
Attur Krishna Pisharodi, Kerala Charitram, (in Malayalam). Part I, Ramanuja Printing House, (Trichur, 1932).
Dr.P.C.Alexander, The Dutch in Malabar, (Annamalai Nagar, 1946).
P.K.S.Raja, Mediaeval Kerala (1953).
K.V.Krishna Iyer, The Zamorins of Calicut, (Calicut, 1938).

20. P.K.S.Raja, ibid, p.7.

The Nambudiris did not want to wield secular power directly over the people but aspired to influence politics through religion. All land was regarded as traditionally belonging to them as a gift from their legendary hero Parasurama, and wherever land was in their actual ownership, the right of such ownership was regarded as absolute. The Nambudiri-royal family marriages and also their marriage alliance with women of aristocratic Nair families also increased their hold on the politics of the day.

The Nambudiris created numerous temples and endowed them with enormous wealth in land. The management of such temples was assigned to local chieftains who were to confine their rights to the maintenance of wealth and religious prestige of the temples. Temples with endowments were known as 'Devaswams' (God's own) and were getting enriched with the generous grants given from time to time by wealthy chieftains and other Nair families. Important Devaswams had their own Samkethams or independant jurisdictions when the temples were located in 'Gramams', the original term for Nambudiri settlements of early times. The Rajas or chieftains had no control over the jurisdiction of a Samketham except as protectors. As self-governing independent units their nature and authority varied from place to place but they were beyond any violation even by the Rajas who were autocratic rulers. The Nambudiris influenced politics through their Samkethams, and at times in several capacities, as ministers of Rajas, their officers, Generals in the field and their spiritual

preceptors. Although settled in Gramams the Nambudiris did not confine to any territory, and in course of time, scattered widely retaining only feeble links with their original Gramams. Nambudiris headed villages with retainers of a caste of Nairs were a common feature of South Malabar. The Samkethams began to decline in significance with the rise of secular power and the waning of religious influence but the power and prestige of temples owning large estates continued. The Nambudiris as well continued to be held in esteem and respect and they were free to move about any where even in times of hostility among rulers.

In some parts the Nambudiris did take to arms as a profession and there were very rare instances of Nambudiri rulers in the south of Kerala, in the principalities of Edappalli and Ambalapuzha. P.K.S.Raja notes "In the small district of Thiruvalla alone there were ten Brahmin families who ruled with as much authority in their petty principalities as other chiefs elsewhere in Malabar."[21] In central Kerala those who took to arms were known as 'Chattirar', a native version of the sanskrit term 'Kshatriya'.[22] In course of time the Nambudiris of Kerala were divided into two hostile camps in 'Kurmatsaram' which was a war between two Nambudiri villages of Panniyur and Chovaram in Ponnani taluk. This hostility of uncertain

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21. Ibid, p.263.

22. K.V.Krishna Iyer, op.cit., p.48.

date and duration, as Krishna Iyer remarks "was a long and relentless war...drawing into its vortex every noble and chief of Kerala."[23]

The village communities of the Nairs were called 'Taras' and the local community of some of the lower castes was known as'Cheri.' The Tara organisation of the Nairs looked after the interests of themselves and their dependant castes in the locality. The relation of this organisationt to broader spatial units is not clear but it appears, atleast in some parts of Kerala, a few taras formed a 'Desam.' The nature of this unit will presently be described in its relation to wider territorial units. Nearly all taras had a gymnasium (Kalari) to equip the Nair men with military training and each gymnasium was under the aegis of a female deity.[24]

Historical accounts are unanimous in pointing out the importance of the Tara Assembly (Kuttam) and the assembly (Kuttam) of the 'Nadu,' the wider political unit and of the 'Grama Samkethams' of the Nambudiris in

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23. Ibid, p.49.

24. The term 'Tara' had perhaps only a limited distribution in Malabar and in many places the 'Desam' in actual practice is regarded as tara. In a foot note the Malabar District Gazetteer (p.350) states "in Palghat taluk the word Tara is used for a collection of Nayar houses round the 'foot' of an ancient chief. The word means literally 'mound,' 'site of houses,' hence Tarawad, house, family. In the deeds collected by Mr. Logan the lands and the parties to the deed are always described as being in, or of, such a Desam or Ur." 'Ur' is a Tamil term meaning village.

checking the head of the Nadu, or the higher authority, the Raja. The periodical assemblies of the nadu could take decisions against the ruler if he committed unwarrantable acts. This sanction usually worked in the form of withdrawal of allegiance by the Naduvari the head of the nadu, thus depriving the ruler of the services of large quota of soldiers kept under the command of the Naduvari. Once in 12 years assemblies of units in Kerala met at Tirunavai at the 'Mamankam' festival and conducted an All-Kerala-Assembly presided by the most powerful of the monarchs. Rather speculatively, some historians attribute to this assembly the power to remove a reigning monarch and install a new one in the interests of the people. For nearly eight years the Zamorin Raja of Calicut presided over this festival as its protector and the central figure in Kerala.[25]

The number of rulers among whom the last of the Perumals divided his kingdom is uncertain but we come upon historical accounts that there were thirteen independent large territories and over 300 principalities at the time of his disappearance. The numerous rulers, large and small, throughout the mediaeval period were dependent upon the willing allegiance of their feudal nobility, the Nairs. The nobles, de-facto sovereigns over their jurisdictions obeyed the rulers but rebelled against them if they infringed the established customs. In times of war the defeated ruler was reinstated as a feudatory.

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25. The last celebration of Mamankam festival was in 1743 A.D.

In the 14th century the most important of the kingdoms in Kerala, from south to north, were Travancore, Cochin, Calicut and Kolathiri. A large number of local chieftains and nobles under these rulers enjoyed partial sovereignty. In the 14th and 15th centuries, as one writer points out, the country was so full of small independent States that "though two steps might be made in one territory the third must inevitably cross the boundary.[26] In the 18th century Kolathiri's kingdom disintegrated and Zamorin's power was established in the area which the Britishers later administered as the district of Malabar.

The career of the Portuguese in Malabar lasted from 1498 A.D. to 1663 A.D. followed by the Dutch who held the Fort of Cochin from 1663 A.D. to 1795 A.D. Both these foreign powers, particularly the Portuguese, overstepped their trade interests and influenced politics but with little far reaching significance. Portuguese, however, in their missionary zeal and their efforts of conversion to Christianity were a check against the steady increase of converts into Islam.[27] The Mysorean invasions by the

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26. Malabar District Gazetteer, p.43.
27. P.C.Alexander, The Dutch in Malabar,(Annamalai Nagar, 1946), p.202. Alexander states "The Dutch rule in Malabar did not leave any permanent marks as the Portuguese did. The Portuguese language is even today known to some parts of Malabar and many Portuguese words have crept into the Vernacular. The religion of the Portuguese continues in all vigour and force on the Malabar coast... The most indelible mark of the Portuguese rule in Malabar is the mixed casre of Topasses who even today follow the old Portuguese traditions."

Moslem ruler Haidar followed by his son Tippu kept Malabar restless and frightened from 1773 to 1792 A.D. The Moslem invaders wanted to conquer, to proselytize and to terminate the power of the nobles and the militia. However, Tippu had to retreat to defend his own capital against the British. The British success over Mysore brought about the transfer of Tippu's claim on Malabar to the British and from 1792 Malabar entered an era of peace in the hands of the British.

Under the mighty and short-lasted Moslem conquest and rule, lands were for the first time surveyed and taxes introduced by Tippu. He destroyed temples, converted thousands forcibly and exacted heavy taxes. Brahmins numbering 30,000 had to flee from Calicut district to Travancore for refuge. However, the roads Tippu built, his surveying and assessing of land and the consequent course of action resulting in a more centralised rule than the hitherto feudal systems, paved the way for the Britishers to start their constructive programme of administration.

Under the British the peace of Malabar was disrupted only by the Moplah (Moslem) revolts the most serious of which took place in 1921. These risings were chiefly spread over in South Malabar where Moslems were the poorest. These revolts have been attributed to religious fanaticism, poverty and agrarian discontent of the poor tenants among Moslems. However, the British suppressed it with a firm hand giving them no future opportunity for any militant agitation.

It is now profitable to turn to such aspects of political history which resulted in the emergence of large number of wealthy families of rank ~~who~~ who, as centres of power, have their roles in the rural social structure even in the present century.

The relatively stable pattern of political units and their interrelations from about the 12th to the 19th century is described in outlines in several works on Malabar history. Desam, the smallest unit, approximates to the modern desam of Malabar for which the term village is applied. Several desams formed a nadu or chiefdom which was either independent or enjoyed near sovereignty within a larger territory usually ruled by a Kshatriya ruler. Each desam was headed by a Desavari who was the commander of Nair troops of the village and rendered military service to the Naduvari. The Desavari's power was limited by the possibility that the Nair troops could withdraw their allegiance to him for his failure to command their respect and faith. In places where there was tara organisation of the Nairs within a desam this was done through a decision taken by the Tara Assembly. In a similar manner, as noted, the periodical assembly of the Nairs of a nadu could check any tendency on the part of a Naduvari to encroach beyond his customary rights and privileges. Villages which had no Desavari came under a Naduvari or were the private property of the Raja who administered them through personal officers. Subject to

the sanctions pointed out, the offices of the heads of desam and nadu were hereditary. In the office of the Desavari was vested the directions of the civil, religious and military affairs of the village. He was to decide petty suits, and in police and judicial matters, he was assisted by one to five or six respectable residents of the village, belonging to the higher castes, who were called 'Pramanies'. As the police, judicial and revenue officer of a district and commanding a minimum of hundred Nair soldiers from his district, the Naduvari was a powerful ruler. The Raja could not for any reason abolish his office or confiscate his property. The Raja usually depended upon the quota of soldiers of his districts for the military power and prestige of his kingdom. Thus the military services of the Nairs were the only connection between the Raja and his subordinate rulers, the heads of districts and villages.

In Sir Thomas Munroe's Report of 1817 the picture of territorial divisions of kingdoms is clear, the district head being the middle officer between the Raja and the village head.[28] It has, however, to be noted that a much earlier period must have seen many of the district heads or Naduvaris as independent. One account shows that when the last of the Perumals (845 A.D.) left the country divided there were thirteen important rulers and about 300 chieftains ruling independently over small territories.[29]

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28. Quoted in Malabar Gazetteer, p. 351.
29. Attur Krishna Pisharodi, Kerala Charitram, Part I, op. cit., p.63.

As Eric Miller states in a recent study "Although the boundaries of the chiefdoms were relatively stable, the history of Kerala is the history of the rise and fall of individual chiftain families."[30] Hostile relations between neighbouring chieftains might often lead, not to annexation, but to the subjugated being held as a feudatory. It has also to be noted that as one writer remarkdd "the line of demarkation between a Desavari and a Naduvari was so thin that sometimes a successful village headman ripened into a Naduvari. The minimum qualification for a Naduvari was that he could have atleast one hundred Nairs attached to his range."[31]

The political prestige and rank of Naduvarisin Kerala were reflected in the titles used to designate them such as Raja, Talachennavar, Achan, Kaymal, Kartavu, Nambiyar and Nair. These titles, it appears, were in widespread use in Kerala and their differential significance recognised. True to their traditional rights and privileges the most powerful ruler in the South of Kerala, in 1137 A.D., redefined their degree of independence, rights and privileges. For this purpose they were divided into three categories, Swarupi, Prabhu and Madambi in descending order of superiority. During the rule of the Zamorins and their career of aggressive conquest similar distinctions, reflected in titles of a similar range, emerged in his kingdom in the north, (the Malabar district of later times). The

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30.Op.cit., p. 414.

31.P.K.S.Raja, op.cit., p.274.

Swarupis were recognised as having the power over life and death; the Prabhus did not have this power, and the Madambis had more limited powers and had to pay an annual tribute to the king. The Madambis with their armed retainers not exceeding hundred were not much different from the Naduvaris.

The lineages of these lesser rulers of power and wealth and the descendants of the commanders and ministers of the Zamorin became more and more widely distributed in course of time in areas where they held their joint family property in lands. Thus existed in Malabar district of this century the large number of title holding wealthy families of power, prestige and royal ancestry or of traditions of martial service to Rajas of historical fame.

The Zamorin's power was on the increase from 826 to 1766 A.D. The designation of the rulers under him varied reflecting the degree of independence they enjoyed and the authority they held. The chieftains under the Zamorins were of two kinds, the Naduvari and the Swarupi, and within each, were graduations reflected in the titles such as Kartavu, Nampidi, Nedungadi, Nair, Tirumulpad and Eradi. The Naduvari was a hereditary governor of a district holding office originally under the sovereignty of a Raja while the Swarupis under the Zamorin were feudatories holding territory by virtue of the original grant of kingdom by the Perumal. Under the

Zamorin the Swarupis had near sovereignty and they were not to fear of any intervention by the ruler in any matter of internal administration.[32]

The important Naduvaris under the Zamorin were grouped into five categories in terms of the number of soldiers they could command to the field. The number of ranged from five thousand to one hundred and there were in all twenty seven such Naduvaris designated as commanders of 5000, of 1000 and so on, falling in five categories. Thus among the Naduvaris it appears that the title of Kartavu or Nair in itself was not significant but the grading as commander of a certain number of troops. There is for instance Ayyayira Prabhu Kartavu as commander of 5000 and Tekkum Kutti Kartavu as commander of 100.[33] K. V. Krishna Iyer in his valuable study of the Zamorins of Calicut lists thirteen feudatories (Swarupis) in addition to the twenty seven commanders who were also district Governors (Naduvaris).[34] Each feudatory had to supply to the Zamorin his quota of troops when needed but such feudatories were not graded in terms of the five categories of Naduvari commanders.

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32. K. V. Krishna Iyer, op.cit., p.272.
33. Ibid, p.278.
34. Ibid, p.279.

The Zamorin recognised or sometimes granted hereditory distinctions such as Achan, Kaymal, Patanayar, Paranambi, Menon and Koya and also granted special titles and privileges for meritorious services or to create important offices. Moslems were given the title Marakkar, the artisan castes received the title Muppan, and Arayan was conferred upon fishermen. Among the privileges formally granted by the Zamorin were the use of specified ornaments and some kinds of lamps, of special conveyance like palanquin, roofing of the house with tiles instead of leaves, and having cloth spread on the ground to walk over at ceremonial occasions.

The small chieftains and some powerful Desavaris in an area of about 10 miles radius around the villages in which I did field work were brought under submission by the Zamorin in the 15th century. The conquest of this area shows that the powerful Desavari had sometimes to be individually brought under submission even if the ruler of the Kingdom did not offer resistance. Different versions of the story of this conquest known as the capture of Nedunganad Kingdom exist as could be gathered from a few elderly informants of this area. A few low caste untouchables were given titles by the Zamorin during this conquest. The area subdued by this relatively peaceful capture comprises of a major part of the modern Walluvanad taluk. According to K. V. Krishna Iyer

this conquest was in its course only a procession since the opposite camp was not prepared to face the march of the Zamorin's troops. During the march of the Zamorin's commander to Nedunganad a few small chieftains offered submission. Among them were Karakkattu Muthavan an ancestor of Kavalappara Nair, The Tharakkal Variyar, Vakkata Nair, Veettikattu Nair (alias Kannambra Nair) and Trikkateri Nair. Eroma Menon of Chunangad joined him to march forward, and in the whole course, resistance was offered only at two places, one by a Naduvari ruler under Vellatri Raja and the other by the untouchable low caste of Cherumans and Panas settled near Karimpuzha under the Raja of Vellattiri. The Zamorin's general won them by gifts and titles and in the conquered areas the chieftains were allowed to hold parts of their lands as his vassals. The ruler of Nedunganad, for his displeasing behaviour, was deprived of his principality and was given an allowance with some rights over the temple of Cherpalacherry.

Instances of such conquests in which local superiority of some chieftains was recognised, rights of some chieftains or even Desavaris were redefined, rights over temples of vedic and non-vedic gods and tutelary deities of Nairs were transferred or created, gifts and titles awarded and managerial rights over personal estates of rulers, Naduvaris and even Desavaris were assigned, or rarely transferred, appear to be numerous

in the history of hostile relations among the chieftains as well as among the feudatories and Naduvaris under the Zamorin and in the career of conquest of the Zamorin himself. But at present, published accounts of history appear to be far from being adequate to make an exhaustive study of the process by which fortunes of families accruing from political power of varying degrees fluctuated. A broad outline of this process emerges from the foregoing accounts and it will further become illuminated in the light of discussions on field data in the subsequent chapters. The curtailment or loss of political superiority, shift of loyalty to a new power, unconditional submission to a hostile power and consequent feudal dependancy, loss of some of the traditional rights and privileges, would all mean substantial downfall to heads of political units of all description. But under the British, whatever remained as their assets, could become firm foundations on which their subsequent power over people could be built up. The nature of the system of land ownership and tenure as recognised by the British could become an important, perhaps the most important, factor in building up this power which in course of time, as will be seen later, with divisions of joint families and hypergamous marriages, could get increasingly diffused.

How hypergamous marriages among chieftains and feudatories could temper down potentialities of political

rivalries and could become a force of cohesion within a kingdom will be a study of considerable value.[35] This can be pointed out here on facts which can be gleaned from books on political history. From every early times a few of the chieftains were recognised as of Kshatriya rank, and all other chieftains known by the term Samanthans who were some time or other independent rulers, were of Samanthan rank, a shade below the Kshatriyas but definitely higher than Nairs. On the principle of hypergamy, therefore, members of a Samanthan Royal family would sometimes have to accept husbands from a Kshatriya Royal family of even a feudatory if Nambudiri husbands, the usually more preferred choice, were not available. Most of the chieftains including the Raja of Walluvanad and the Zamorin were of Samanthan rank and Kshatriya chieftains were relatively very few. There were a few feudatories of Kshatriya rank under the Zamorin and sometimes men of the lineage of such feudatories were uxorilocal husbands of the women of the Zamorin's lineage. Alliances also took place between men of the Cochin Royal family of Kshatriya rank and some Samanthan feudatories under the Cochin ruler.[36] The frequent and widepsread

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35. Eric Miller, op.cit., p.415 briefly points out this fact. He states "The Unity of the chiefdom was to some extent secured by hypergamous marriages of the chieftain family.....Their marriages took place outside caste but normally within the chiefdom, Nambudiris being accepted as husbands and Nayar women(often from families of village headmen) being taken as wives."

36. Miller, loc.cit., speaks of this fact as well, but

hypergamy was that in which the wife belonged to a family of lower social status--(social status being understood here as accruing from several sources, chiefly caste rank and wealth in land). This kind of hypergamy existed among Kshatriya Rajas, Samanthans, Naduvaris and Desavaris and wealthy Nair families. In such marriages in most of the cases the wife had a more or less permanent virilocal residence with the husband and she and her matrilineal joint family members enjoyed a reflected prestige and potential power the nature of which will be considered in a later context.

Another factor led to be a cohesive force in the large kingdoms as can be seen in the instance of the Zamorin's rule. In his matrilineage four male members below him, in order of seniority, held under their direct rule, parts of the kingdom as chieftains or powerful village heads (Desavaris). Further, segments of the royal lineage were located in four different parts housed in palaces. These features could be recognised as of cohesive influence in the large kingdom of a ruler. Even under the British the Zamorin's political pension

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does not bring about the consequence of or nature of marital residence which, I shall, in more details, consider in a later chapter.

included allotments to nine heads in all in his lineage. Similar practices obtained down to the level of important Desavaris among whom, during the British rule and upto this day, income from a specified part of the joint family property was allotted to two or three heads in order of seniority and they could have residence in different parts where their lands were leased out. Although the political significanee of such features disappeared under the British their importance from the point of view of de-facto power and authority over people, particularly by virtue of large estates held by the pre-British territorial heads and rulers of all categories, continued into the present decade.

With the Zamorin's agreement with the British in November 1806 commenced his relations with the British as a receipient of political pension (Malikhan).[37] The Zamorin's estate in 1938 consisted of his domain lands spread in South Malabar, Devaswams and Brahmaswams (Brahmin endowments) under his command and superintendency, and the annual net malikhan. Under agreement with the British heads of nine segments of his lineage receive malikhan annually ranging from ₹ 4000 to 60,000. There are also 12 feudatories under him getting malikhan ranging from ₹ 57 to ₹ 4995. Zamorin's personal domain lands are spread over the taluks of Kurumbranad, in North Malabar and in the taluks of Ponnani, Walluvanad and Palghat in South Malabar. His twenty-nine wealthy Devaswams are scattered in six taluksand Brahmaswams

under his protectorship exist in three taluks in South Malabar. Further, the three successors to the Zamorin, in order of seniority, have also estates in different parts to keep up their standard of regal life.

Land Ownership and Tenure.

Several writers, perhaps nearly all, who have written on the system of land tenure in Malabar have been impressed with it either as unique or astonishingly complex.[38] The origin of the various categories of tenures

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37. K.V.Krishna Iyer, op.cit., pp.269 and290.

38. Baden-Powell, an authority on Indian Land Tenures, states in his 'The Land Systems of British India' vol.III (London) pp.151-152 - "The District of Malabar will always have singular attraction for the student of Indian Land Tenures; it presents a unique history of land holding customs..."

The complex nature of land tenure and ownership, its history, the still controversial nature of the diverse possibioities of the origin of the various tenures, have been discussed with varying amount of details in other works as well. Among these works may be cited A.Aiyappan, Iravas and Culture Change, (Madras, 1945), Malabar District Gazetteer, Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, vol.I, 1940., A.C.Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, (1952).

In a more recent study of land tenures in the different states of India Daniel Thorner states "Travancore-Cochin and Malabar District of Madras can boast of the most intricate agrarian structure in the whole of India. In this region, a many tired edifice of interests in the land - Janmis, Kanamdars, Verumpattamdars - rests on a mass of landless labourers known as Cherumas, Pulayans or Poliyans. The pressure on land is so intense that one cent (i.e. one hundredth of an acre) of good double-crop paddy land is in some areas worth as much as Rs 200/-..." Daniel Thorner, The Agrarian Prospect in India, Delhi University Press, (Delhi, 1956), p. 35.

is still a matter of disagreement among the writers who have attempted to explain it.[39] Although much has been

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39. The writers are those cited in foot note 38. Inspite of all that has been written about the origin of tenures it has been controversial as to how far the Intermediary Kanam tenant had original proprietory rights over the soil. There is also not a conclusive opinion about the original nature of Janmam rights. A few recent articles in Malayalam, perhaps the latest and most scholarly attempts at handling this controversial subject, are particularly worthy of mention here. A reputed Kerala historian, Professor Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai, in a series of articles published in the Malayalam Mathrubhumi Weekly in 1958 brings out the following points: The story of Kerala as a gift given by Parasurama to the Nambudiris is only five or six centuries old. Until 12th century A.D. the owners of lands in Kerala were the earlier or rather original inhabitants such as Pulayar, Idayar, Villarar etc. Ownership of their lands became concentrated first ~~in~~ under the authority of temples and later in the hands of the temple managers, the Nambudiris. Thus Pillai is inclined to believe the Nambudiris as responsible for all the ownership which they managed to extract from others. Pillai's findings have been shown as exaggerated and not plausible, in his article by Dr. K. Kunchunni Raja on janmis of ancient Kerala published in Mathrubhumi Weekly of 18th May 1958. Raja appears to have more successfully demonstrated a few points: At no time in Kerala were lands owned exclusive by Nambudiris. Their ownership was a matter of slow evolution and can be understood in the light of their religious and political significanee. Nambudiris themselves did not attach much authenticity or importance to the Parasurama story and they recognised the ownership of lands by Nairs, Samanthans and Naduvaris and others. The Janmis were an important link in the pattern of interdependance among groups in the village life. Their marriage alliance with Nairs and their generous and considerate attitude towards dependants and others who thus enjoyed several benefits kept the Janmi system in Kerala enduring through centuries or outliving adverse conditions at times. The arguments raised by Kunchunni Raja seems to be more worthy of acceptance.

written on its legal aspects, as Aiyappan remarks "scant justice has been done to its social aspects."[40] The social aspects which are of relevance in this study are mainly the inter-relations between the categories of tenants and the caste groups as seen in the pattern of inter-caste relations thus emerging. Inspite of the more recent studies[41] there is scope to bring out in details the pattern of inter-caste relations as shaped by one of its important bases in the system of land tenure. An attempt is made to do this in a later chapter with reference to two of the villages in which I conducted field work. The land tenure system is described below with a view to providing an introduction to discussions in chapters to follow which deal with inter-caste relations and the workings of power accruing substantially from the ownership of land.

In Malabar the owners of land and the categories of holders of different kinds of land tenure form a hierarchy. The ultimate ownership of any kind of land

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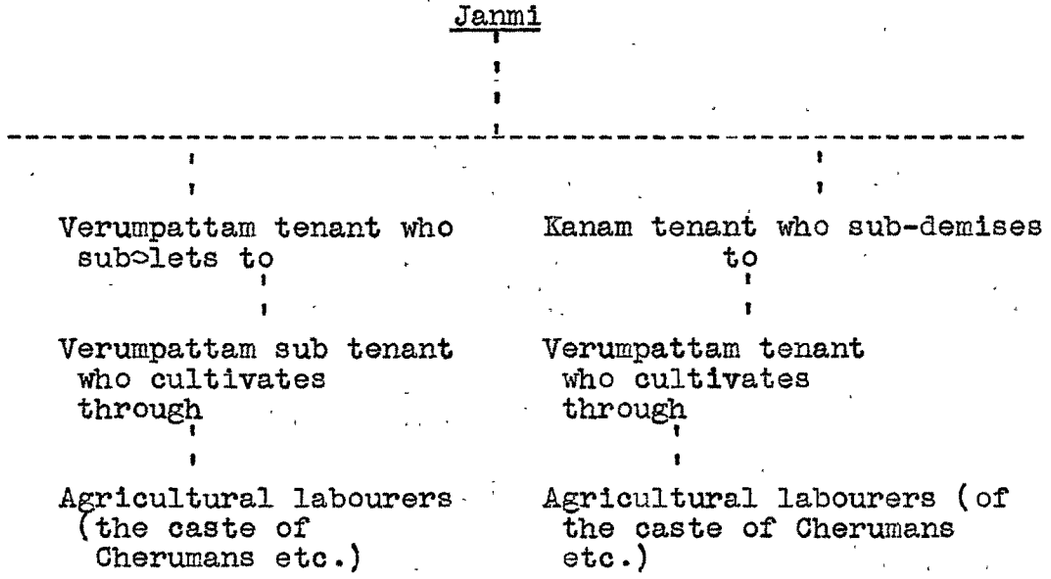
40. Op.cit., p.34.
41. Of the most recent studies which touch upon the subject of land tenure are the two works on Malabar, already cited, by M. S. A. Rao and A. C. Mayer. Rao does not deal with the social aspect in a manner defined as relevant here. Mayer does handle the problem but apparently with a wider coverage and his findings leave enough scope for a more localised investigation into more details and to bring out the significance of the social aspect as pointed out here.

is known as 'Janmam,' (literally birth-right) a form of overlordship, or as some would call it, absolute ownership. The 'Janmi,' the one who holds this form of ownership, leases his land either on a simple lease known as 'Verumpattam' or on the form of tenure called 'Kanam.' The verumpattam tenant who is a lease holder directly under the janmi sublets it again on the same form of tenure and has thus a verumpattam tenant under him, who cultivates the land himself or through hired labourers. The kanam tenant has under him either a sub-kanam tenant who sublets the lands on verumpattam tenure or he has a verumpattam tenant directly holding tenure under him.

The tenure classes under the janmi as regards wet and dry paddy lands may be represented as shown below:-



The form of ownership as noted, regarded as the highest and absolute is known as Janmam. Janmi, the owner, cannot be deprived of his land by any authority

and he is at liberty to lease or mortgage his land. The kanam tenure is generally a lease for twelve years and is held by the same tenant continuously by renewal at the expiry of every twelve years by payment of a fee. To obtain this form of tenure the tenant advances a sum of money to the landlord and realises its interest through deductions from the annual rent payable in kind. The money advanced for this tenure varies from place to place but in the earliest tenures granted as seen in the cases of tenants who have been holding the same land on tenure for generations, this advance was so small and out of all proportion to the value of land. In many places in the latter part of the last century, the kanam advance or deposit as it is called was 30 to 40 percent or more than the value of land at the time of tenure was granted. The simple lease of verumpattam tenure (bare rent) is usually for one year when no term is specified and is generally confined to paddy lands. All categories of tenants who cultivate a part or the whole of their land have usually the bulk of agricultural labour hired. However, verumpattam tenure, the less valued of the two, particularly in South Malabar where it is held in most cases under kanam tenants, is often held by families of the polluting castes of Tandans and Cherumans. They employ their own labour often on co-operation among them to complete the seasonal work in time.

The more common practice and the more widespread

in South Malabar is to have only one intermediary between the janmi and the actual field labourer. This intermediary may be a kanam tenant or a verumpattam tenant who holds the lands on lease directly from the janmi. A sub-tenant under either of these categories is much less common, and where he exists, is himself the cultivator. Large holdings in the hands of janmis and the majority of tenure of the kanam category are features of the South contrasting with those of the North Malabar.[42]

Extensive areas of permanent garden lands, developed on dry and waste lands, with houses of farmers surrounded by garden crops fenced and maintained, are held under other forms of tenure known as Kuzhikanam, Kudiyiruppu and Inam. All lands in Malabar belong to one janmi or another and therefore even the waste lands have to be held on lease for cultivation. Kuzhikanam tenure under which garden crops are cultivated is for twelve years but is renewed by paying a renewal fee at the end of the period. Gardens and waste lands which are being converted into garden lands are held under this form of tenure. Kutiyiruppu, the term implying house settlement, is the lease under which house sites are held, the tenant or his representative usually having his house located on the site. Inam, a kind of lease, is a perpetual one granted as a gift thereby bringing the holder of the tenure under obligation to render

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42. A.C.Mayer, op.cit., p. 84.

services of a specified nature. It is also sometimes granted for services of merit rendered to wealthy land-lords.

About the beginning of this century janmis in Malabar were Devaswams (temples), families of Nambudiri Brahmins, of pre-British chieftains and rulers of political divisions such as desam and nadu, some wealthy families of Nairs, some Moslem families, and much less, of families of the caste of Tiyas. The majority of janmis belonged to the Nambudiri and chieftain(Samanthan) castes, and temple lands were in the hands of hereditary managers of the chieftain families or of Nair castes. The data collected by Malabar Tenancy Committee in the thirties show that in 1939, out of a total of 1,506,992 acres of cultivable land in Malabar, the janmis had under their direct cultivation 171,662 acres of land, the rest being leased out on different forms of tenure.[43]

In the matter of ownership and tenure there are significant differences between North and South Malabar. In the South the bulk of the land including waste lands is owned by a comparatively few number of janmis while in the North ownership is diffused and many of the Janmis are also cultivators of their lands. The line between the categories, land-lords and tenants, in the North, is less defined.[44] Again, in the South is a predominance of

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43. Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 1940.
44. Malabar District Gazetteer, p.238.

kanam over verumpattam tenure while in the North kanam is not so important and extensively found as in the South.[45]

The numerous aspects in which these categories of tenants and the janmi are interrelated can be presented only in the course of a few chapters. However, as a preliminary to later discussions, it is necessary to outline here the nature of payments of rent and rights of eviction as characterised in this system of land tenure.

The share of the net produce as prevailed in the beginning of the 19th century was the customary kind of which became modified in some places since the Tenancy Act of 1930. The customary sharing of the last century was that in the case of kanam lands the actual cultivator took one third and the remaining two third was paid to the kanam tenant. The actual cultivator who got one third was usually of the polluting caste of Cherumans and he held land on verumpattam tenure granted orally and renewed from year to year. The kanam tenant receiving two third paid to the janmi one third of it or even less. In the case of verumpattam tenure held directly under the janmi the latter got two third and the tenant's share was one third. With increase in the value of land and new janmam lands acquired at higher costs, landlords raised the rent and in many cases kanams were redeemed by the janmi and lands were leased on verumpattam tenure

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45. A.C.Mayer, op.cit., p.85.

which even formerly brought two third as rent, and often this rent was further raised. It is therefore rare that a uniform scale of rent within a small area of about five miles radius existed during the latter part of the 19th century. Cases of verumpattam tenants who got hardly any return except the hay and a pittance from the produce were not uncommon.

The forces of this gradual shift to higher rent effected by the janmi were powerful and far reaching that the Tenancy Act of 1930 could not in effect relieve the tenants. This Act particularly protected the verumpattam tenant by giving him fixity of tenure and held him entitled to one third of the net produce. But the high former rents continued, and until quite recently (1953), in the villages of South Malabar, there were many cases of tenants paying about 90% of their produce to the janmis.

It is probable that, as some writers content, the janmi of the pre-British times was possessing absolute right over his lands but the right was not utilised. The rent he collected was, until the turn of the 18th century and for years later, in many parts, what the tenant could reasonably offer, and due consideration was given to the improvements effected by the tenant.[46] The tenant

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46. This appears to have been the fact as can be gathered from the Tenancy Committee Report of 1940, and the article by Dr. Kunchunni Raja cited in foot note 39.

according to customary law invariably got compensation for the improvements effected by him. With the British system of law and rights as enforced by the law courts the janmi began to be aware of his possible rights as a possessor. The British administrators recognised the janmi as a proprietor and kanam tenure as a mortgage that could be redeemed. Thus in the 19th century, when the demand for land was increasing with the gradual increase of population and decay of rural industries, the janmi began to take advantage of the situation. He could evict the tenant, or increase the rent, or give the land on what is known as 'Melcharthu' (which may be translated as super lease) by which a new tenant who is granted kanam or verumpattam tenure cultivates or sublets it after evicting the former tenant. The melcharthu which is a lease granted with a right to oust the former tenant might fetch to the janmi a higher kanam amount or a higher rent or both.[47]

The agrarian discontent arising chiefly from the momentum of the tendency of exploitation on the part of the janmis led to the beginnings of tenancy legislation in 1881. The history of tenancy legislation since then makes impressive reading, for hardly is there a single legislation that did not fall short of its aims in implementation. The reason for this lies in the local

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47. When the tenant sought to be evicted is a kanam tenant melcharthu is known as melkanam.

structure of power of the janmis who had enough resources - wealth and time-honoured superiority - to manipulate matters to their advantage when a new legislation meant injury to their interests. The reason in part also lies in the docile nature of the tenants in which they themselves enjoyed a sense of security that would fritter away if they could not adjust to the demands of the janmis. The exploitation by the janmis in its gradual beginnings was due to the recognition of [illegible]etory rights by the Britishers. [illegible]out "The story of British malad[illegible]gling in the matter of land tenure[illegible]t has a more than theoretical in[illegible] moral and contains a grave warning[illegible]fere carelessly in native economic[illegible] one has ever questioned the hone[illegible]erity of these early British administ[illegible] who introduced catastrophic and expropriatory reforms in land tenure under the belief that they were doing the right thing. These unconscious changes spelt the ruin of a prosperous peasantry..."[48]

According to some writers evictions of tenants increased alarmingly and increase of renewal fees for kanam tenure and rack renting were scaring threats to the tenants. In 1881 Logan found that even the customary share of a minimum of one third of the produce was hardly allowed to be retained by the cultivator. Of the 98 estates he examined only 2 or 3 were getting a fair share and the kanam tenants had to borrow money at interest rates of 12 to 30% to pay the increased

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48. Op.cit., p.35.

renewal fees for fear of the threat of eviction. From Logan's account we learn that in the five years ending 1886 the average annual number of suits for eviction was 2039 which increased to an annual number of 4983 during the four years ending 1880. In the same period was an increase from 1891 to 8335 in the average annual number of persons against whom decrees were passed for eviction.[49]

When Inns the collector of Malabar investigated and reported in 1915, the situation had not improved inspite of a few Acts passed before that year. He was convinced that grievances such as insecurity of tenure, rack renting, exorbitant renewal fees and the like did exist in some measure and there was need for remedial measures. However, no legislation of any significance was passed till 1930 although kanam tenants had their earliest champion in Logan, and officers of note such as Inns reported strongly for remedial measures in favour of the tenants.[50]

Records of the history of tenancy legislation including the Malabar Tenancy Committee Report of 1940 do not satisfactorily account for the deplorable slackness of remedial legislation until 1930. However, it

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49. Logan's opinion and findings did not gain uncritical acceptance as will be seen in a later context.

50. Tenancy Committee Report, p.5.

can possibly be inferred, particularly from the Tenancy Committee Report, that the British administration was well disposed to favour the janmis who were virtually territorial overlords over their tenants and the various castes rending agricultural services or depending on their lands. Further, the janmis also formed the aristocracy and intelligentsia of the district and they could considerably condition the reformist attitude of the British officers in their favour.[51]

The Tenancy Act 14 of 1930 gave qualified fixity of tenure to the various categories of tenants, held the kanam tenants rightful to demand renewal and fixed the renewal fees and the maximum of fair rent. According to this Act kanam tenants were to pay only a fair rent which was not to be fixed by the Act for reasons of regional variations in the customary rates. Verumpattam tenants were to pay only one third of the net produce and they were given security of tenure. Rent of garden and dry lands was also fixed judiciously in the light of customary rates.

The act of 1930, however, did not find implemen-

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51. Baden Powell, op.cit., p.154 states "Practically, no doubt, when our (British) rule began, the 'janmis' had by prescription, a sufficient title to make it equitable for Government to acknowledge their pretensions - without allowing them large areas of waste beyond their reasonable requirements....."

tation in all its provisions for it is known that many of the verumpattam tenants paid even upto 90% of the net as rent to the janmis until recent years.[52] Further, a few other defects of the Act necessitated amendments and the Government found it necessary to have an Act of a more comprehensive nature. The Tenancy Committee was therefore appointed and it reported on all aspects of the agrarian problems of tenure in 1940. The findings of this committee led to a few amendments to the Act of 1930.

From the history of tenancy legislation it is easily discrnible that although the janmi was recognised in law as the highest owner, the kanam tenant also had his champions from 1880, the first of them being Logan. The Act of 1930 and the Tenancy Committee upheld the right of the kanam tenant as an irredeemable tenure-holder with no historical fact to justify his eviction. Since the Act of 1930 the verumpattam tenant as well began to be recognised atleast in law as one with specific rights. However, as will be seen in later chapters the legal recognition of rights could not in any serious and far-reaching manner adversely affect the control of the janmis over the kanam tenants and of the latter over the verum-pattam tenants. Broadly speaking, the reason lies in the fact that the janmi and the categories of tenants

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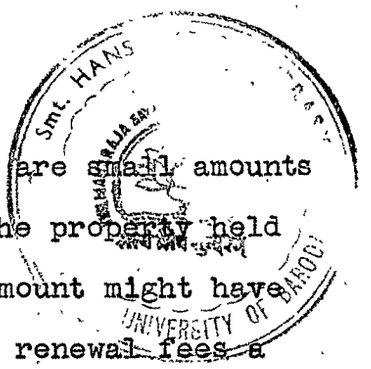
52. This fact has also been observed by K.N.S.Nambudiropad (op.cit., p.64) during his study of six villages around the town of Shoranur.

were interdependent in several ways and the relationship arising from varying interests in land was only one important strand of the total interrelationships obtaining among them. These interrelationships formed a system in which alterations in one category of relationships led to adjustments in the others, the system being thus maintained in balance. Therefore the kanam tenant or the verumpattam tenant could not enforce his legalised right except by slow degrees, if ever he did. The tenants, particularly who were poor, were the last to put up claims against the janmis or wealthy kanam tenants to whom they were conventionally paying respect and unconditional obedience.

The traditional interdependence of janmi and tenants which did not entail any exploitation of one by the other has been recognised by some who have investigated into or studied the tenancy system of Malabar. In Logan's opinion, for instance, the kanam tenant was in a balance of power. Logan examined a number of deeds and was convinced that the janmi had no right in the soil but only a position in the society. The old kanam deeds do not speak of redemption and the kanam tenant was a supervisor under whom the cultivator worked on the soil. Logan's view gets further support from two facts on which no writer has disagreed. Many kanam



amounts, in South Malabar in particular, are small amounts out of all proportions to the value of the property held under the tenure. The original kanam amount might have therefore been a token of fealty and the renewal fees a token of continuation of the relationshop.[53] A few Malayalam proverbs, as the Tenancy Committee pointed out speak about the high value in which kanam rights were held, and such a value would not be attributed to a redeemable tenure. The majority of the members of the Tenancy Committee held the view that janmam in its original form must have meant only a kind of overlordship and not absolute right to the soil and the kanam tenant who must have been the original owner came under systematised and reciprocal working relations with the janmi who was powerful to offer security in the turbulous times of hostile relations among petty chiefs and rulers.[54] In a dissenting minute to the report of the Committee E. M. S. Nambudiripad adds "The Janmi of pre-British times was not a mere landlord ... he was the centres of a system around whom the people of the locality gathered to regulate their social conduct. He collected around him a host of scholars who provided the cultural centre for the whole society. That centre itself functioned as the place wherefrom justice was meted out to the people. He was also the agent of the Raja ..... he was in short not a rent-receiving landlord, but the head of a social system based on feudal relationship which regulated not only the economy but social, political and cultural life of men. He was more of a Naduvali or Desavali than a landlord."[55]

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53. Malabar District Gazetteer, p.45.
54. Report of the Committee, p.12.
55. Ibid, p.73.

If the traditional system was one of interdependence how could there be so many evictions? To answer this it has to be noted that the right of the janmi recognised by the British account for the evictions but this right in a sense only compensated for the removal of juridical and political rights which many of the janmis enjoyed. The janmi could use the power of eviction as a potential one to maintain command over tenants, a fact which will be borne out from discussions in the chapters to follow. It is also important to note that Logan's account of exploitation and eviction by janmis has been criticised by Inns, Collector of Malabar in 1910, as exaggerated and based on enquiries confined to Moslems of Ernad and Walluvanad taluks. Inns has also pointed out that the conditions of tenants in Malabar compared favourably with those of other districts. My enquiries show that the fear of eviction was real although in the beginning of this century it was rarely practised except when tenants became defaulters in payment of rent.

Thus we see that inspite of tenancy Acts the former pattern of superiority and subordination could work as a feature of interdependence between groups holding different interests in land.

However the superiority-subordination feature had to work in a restricted manner since the tenants, particularly the usually literate Nair kanam tenants, since the act of 1930 began to be aware of their legal rights

to seek protection of law if the janmi made extravagant demands on them. Almost upto this day, for different reasons in different periods, the categories of tenants did not like to provoke retaliatory attitude in the janmis for the fear that they would by some means make the offending tenant's life unhappy or cease to help him at critical occasions. Factors which contrinuted to such a relationship will emerge from discussions in later stages in the course of this study.

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1. The more common landscape in interior Malabar (Walluvanad).

2. A river scene in coastal Ponnani taluk (Valapad).

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