

CREDIT AND WORTH: COUNTRY-MERCHANTS, COMMODITY FRONTIERS AND THE LAND REGIME IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NORTH MALABAR

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This essay deals with the late eighteenth century political economy of North Malabar, with a focus on the historical aspect of a speculative economic activity, i.e. mercantile surety or the *havālātti*. Credit money, in its most ubiquitous form of cash advances, was deeply implicated in early modern political practice, both of its kingly and the anti-king verities. The merchants, especially those we find involved in transacting agrarian produce, used it to enhance their economic hold in the countryside by fabricating a convergence with the landholding, locally dominant peasant proprietorships. The inter-dispensational years witnessed a process of the merchant surety tilting away from the kingly world to the agrarian countryside. The local infrastructure of credit money and its better half, the interest-bearing capital, were successful in creating, what this paper calls; the commodity frontier. It represents a spontaneous situation of economic dispossession on the one hand and social hierarchies of market bound commodity on the other. When placed against the historiography of ‘the great (colonial) transformation’, it is found that the economic transition in the region was a slow and predictable process till the credit crisis of 1830s.

“There is a fellow, by the name of Mousa at Tellicherry who supplies (Paḷāṣṣi) Raja with rice, to my certain knowledge. A hint might be given to him that I am in the habit of hanging those whom I found living under the protection of the Company and dealing treacherously toward their interest; that I spare neither rank nor riches”

—The Duke of Wellington, 18 September 1800. Gurwood 1844: 1617

“Mahometans in those parts are more jealous to fill their coffers, and in frequenting the best market-towns, than their Mosques”

—Monsieur Dellon, M.D. Dellon 1698: 117

Writing from his war-time encampment in the Western Ghats in 1800 CE, the Duke of Wellington, Colonel Arthur Wellesley, issued a threat to Covvakkāran Mūsa, asking him to remain loyal under the East India Company’s otherwise precarious protection-orbit. However, Mūsa, the most opulent among the Tellicherry merchants of his times, continued to supply rebels with food and high-priced ammunition.¹ Certainly, he did not figure among the perpetrators put to death by the Company for high-treason. The Company did not sue him even once, for “aiding and abetting...those...in open arms against government” by “his indiscriminate purchases”!² Mūsa, like his late-seventeenth century Muslim brethren or those of the kind found by the Frenchman, Monsieur Dellon around Tellicherry and Vadakara,

¹ Abdurahiman 1974; Frenz 2003: 120.

² Letter from T. H. Baber, in ‘Inward Letters in the Political Department for March and October 1804’, Vol. 2275, 33 and 35, in Typed Script no 6 and 7, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut.

continued to fill his household coffers indiscriminately. Late in the eighteenth century, he applied to the company for permission to build a (cathedral) mosque outside the English town. Though the application was instantly turned down,³ a giant congregational structure was erected at Tellicherry later, in 1806, perhaps a year before Mūsa's peaceful death. This is the Oṭattil Jamāttū Paḷli or the cathedral mosque at Oarts, the 'oart' being a typical Malabar garden in Indo-Portuguese parlance. This was a fitting name for a structure sponsored by an insatiable merchant, whose prime interest, as we will see below, was in tropical gardens. But, this paper is not about Mūsa's personal career; neither is it concerned with the extraordinary processes through which a little known merchant or his 'medieval business family' successfully emerged under a favourable political regime as an ideal nineteenth century 'new-rich'.⁴ Instead, we examine a group of merchants active in the Coast of Malabar in the late-eighteenth century, especially in the areas earlier held by Mysore and ceded to the English Company in 1792. We will call them 'country-merchants' after their close institutionalized linkages with the contemporary country-trade carried out by European companies and various private individuals. Another theme of discussion will be the interests of these merchants in the immediate Tellicherry countryside. Both the war fatigued Irish Duke and the French doctor of physick, citing whom we have begun this paper, reflected upon it, although in ways appropriate to their own times.

Politics was marked by a great degree of uncertainty during this period. Most of the erstwhile kingly regimes had declined to a considerable extent, but the colonial regime had still not emerged as a decisive political presence. We may therefore designate this an inter-dispensational period, wandering between two worlds of politics, one (almost) dead, the other powerless to recognize itself as the paramount.

In the details recorded in late-eighteenth century Tellicherry bound correspondences, merchants from the ceded province of Malabar appear as flying too many kites on a single mercantile string. During the quinquennial settlement (1794-95 to 1798-99),⁵ they were active in many projects other than those conventionally assigned them. Merchants in medieval Malabar, we are told, were mere procurers of agrarian produce with little economic impact. They allegedly controlled symbiotic procurement networks. Their feeder-lines ran parallel to the interior localities from which they collected potential merchandise.⁶ After the peace treaties of Seringapatam (1792), we find them moving across different companies and enterprising contexts as if, according to a dominant trend in trade-historiography, there took place a great transformation, immediately and almost miraculously. Historians often associate their activities with the English Company, whose presence allegedly marked a new episode in the region's political regime. The country-merchants are taken for granted, and repeatedly regarded as easily forgotten nonentities, who had no choice, either in partnering private-trade or in supplying rural credit, other than working for certain underlying structures of realistic patronage.⁷

When Malabar was ceded, merchants perhaps located in contemporary port-centres like Tellicherry and Calicut were busy handling spice and cereal varieties, hard-timber and coir-

³ Northern Superintendent to Second Commission dated 1 November 1797, in Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission; Diaries-Public 1797, Vol. 1690, 329-30. Manuscripts (hereafter MSS), Tamilnadu Archives (hereafter TNA).

⁴ Jayawardena 2000.

⁵ Janaki 1980.

⁶ Kieniewicz 1986 and 1991; 80-81; Das Gupta 1967: 19-24.

⁷ Swai 1979 and 1985.

yarn.⁸ They were also functioning as what some commentators call ‘supply-contractors’ in ‘sundry’ or ‘miscellaneous provisions’ which, among other things, included coconut, bamboo, firewood and salt.⁹ Despite political uncertainty and turbulence, many involved in brokering labour-supplies and revenue-farming (or overseer) rights.¹⁰ However, the most important venture that the country merchants set about in inter-dispensational Malabar was their enterprise as providers of sureties in various fiscal deals. It had a direct bearing upon their individual as well as corporate economic capacities, and was to a large extent potent enough to produce new hierarchies of places, commodities and individuals. Merchants proved resilient when it came to taking responsibility for the performance of the monetary undertakings of other individuals. Malabar Chiefs, who had successfully retained their offices of revenue collection since the coming of the Mysore *nawāb*, Hyder Ali, but now placed under the Company Raj, were the first to avail these monied merchant’s securities or the *havālātti*.¹¹ In order to save their contracts (*karār*) of tribute and revenue from falling into arrears, they needed mercantile support, which inter alia included *havālāt* or suretyship. Unlike regular chartered activities, *havālāt* meant a cluster of fiscal possibilities for the country-merchants. It enabled them to create durable vertical relationships with propertied interests occupying the countryside, and through them, with regimes of contemporary agrarian production. In many instances, as we will notice below, surety-giving merchants were often found acquiring important mortgagee rights like *kāṇam*¹² in the existing tenurial grid. Though the long-term potentiality of mercantile acquisitions is a matter of debate, it is sure that they were reckoned as promising agencies of social prestige and economic accumulation.

Surety-Giving Merchants and the Politics of Country-Trade:

In an engagement signed on 4 December 1795, Covvakkāran Mūsa, described as “an eminent Mopilla merchant at Tellicherry,”¹³ attached himself and his heirs to a bond worth Rupees 10,000 on account of Āli Rāja and the Bībi of Cannanore. He agreed that this amount will be paid to the Company in a short period of twenty-five days from the date of the agreement¹⁴ He was already recognized as “a man of credit and (hence,) to be depended (up) on”. In 1793, the Cannanore officers were willing to accept the value assessed by Mūsa for their Bībi’s territories, those on the mainland as well as the island.¹⁵ Earlier, in 1784, the Bībi at Cannanore *musnad*, Jānummābī Āli Rājā Bībī,¹⁶ had mortgaged her principal source of revenue—the coir of her Laccadive Islands—to Mūsa after contracting heavy encumbrances. Mūsa is described here as a supply-contractor based in Tellicherry.¹⁷ This mortgage was

⁸ Parkinson 1966: 324; Bulley 2000: 89-101; Mann 2001

⁹ de Souza 1990.

¹⁰ Mohandas 2002; Raviraman 2002: 8.

¹¹ Gundart 1872: 84.

¹² For an introductory discussion on the *kāṇam* opportunity, see Ganesh 1991.

¹³ The Joint Commission 1862: 241. When Francis Buchanan visited him, Covvakkāran Mūsa stayed at Tellicherry and was quite old and weak. Yet, he continued to be ‘the most trusted and the chief supply-contractor for the Company’. See, Buchanan 1807: 531, 534; Gabriel 1996: 258-59; Kurup and Ismail 2008. He was first noticed by the Tellicherry Board in 1779 as ‘a supplier of 20 candy cardamoms’. Das Gupta 1967: 128. Contemporary Dutch sources identify him as ‘Muhammad Musa of Tellicherry...who owned 17 ships in North Kerala of more than 150 tons’. Barendse 2009: 469.

¹⁴ Entry No CIII, in Logan 1879: 124.

¹⁵ Entry No XXX, in Logan 1879: 45-46

¹⁶ Kurup 1975: 98.

¹⁷ The Joint Commission 1862: 94. In his *Minutes* on the reports prepared by The Joint Commission, John Shore indicated ‘a right of pre-emption’ that Mūsa “had some years before obtained to all the coir produced in [Bībi’s

placed subject to the condition that he repaid the Bībi's debts. Though we are not aware of the details regarding Mūsa's upkeep of this usufruct and the revenue-rights over it, he undoubtedly emerged as an urban monopolist¹⁸ in marine cordage controlling the workmen spinning coir.¹⁹ Islanders, probably those who were connected with coir production and its on-site management, had staged a revolt in 1786,²⁰ with important political consequences.²¹

In 1795, Kuññi Taṛi, a merchant from Koyilandi of uncertain origin, executed a bond for Rupees 70,000. It was for a pending revenue *kist* due from Māna Vikrama, the reigning Sāmūtiri Rāja of Calicut. Though Kuññi Taṛi agreed to a comparatively lower conversion at the rate of 3½ Calicut New Fanams a Bombay Rupee, the amount was stipulated to reach Calicut treasury in a month's time, or on 6 December 1795.²² Nearly eight months later, on 24 August 1796, the same merchant figured in another bond executed for the same Rāja. This time, it was signed at Pudiyaṅgadi, the principal town in Veṭṭattūnāḍū in southern Malabar, which was about fifty miles south of his usual business residence in the *kaccēri* town of Koyilandi. The payment for which Kuññi Taṛi offered his personal security was unusually high. It amounted to one hundred and thirteen thousand rupees, and had to be remitted in two time-bound instalments. Interestingly, the deed was signed in the presence of Murdock Brown, the most enigmatic of the adventurous private traders of the time.²³ Brown was possibly involved with Kuññi Taṛi in the contemporary market in bonded human labour, in addition to acting as a translator for the early Company establishment. By the close of 1798, he was seen moving Ceṛuma and Pulaya labourers to his newly obtained plantation at Anjarakkandy. These bonded workmen were purchased from an 'escheated estate' belonging to the Rāja of Veṭṭattūnāḍū, who was indebted to Kuññi Taṛi and Brown.²⁴ Brown had also purchased Pulayas from their masters through the *darogah* of Chavakkad, where Kuññi Taṛi held revenue rights.²⁵ Though we are not left with further information about whether Kuññi Taṛi was able to meet the commitments he made in the Sāmūtiri Rāja's bond, (the Second) Malabar Commissioners leave us with an important clue. They point to certain fiscal arrangements made in this direction. In their diary, one Oḷḷanāṭṭū Ikkaṇḍa Paṇikkaṛ, the revenue collector appointed by the Sāmūtiri Rāja in the southernmost *tālūks* of Chavakkad, Neringanad and Naduvattam, is reported to have stated that 'he handed over his collection to *alan*'²⁶ Kuññi Taṛi and two other fiscal stake-holders at the instance of the Sāmūtiri's minister'.²⁷

A communication received from Kuṛumpraṇāṭṭū Vīra Varma, the 'Managing Rajah' of Kuṛumpraṇāṭṭū²⁸ introduces Kuññi Taṛi (or the 'Hajee Taruvai' as he was called in the

islands]...[Coir] was to be sold to him by the Beeby at a low fixed price till such time as she had liquidated debt of two lakh rupees with other sum". Shore 1879: 28-29.

¹⁸ Innes 1908/1997: 455-56.

¹⁹ Sharma 1917: 11.

²⁰ Menon 1951: cclxxvi

²¹ Ellis 1924: 17-18.

²² Entry No CV, in Logan 1879: 125.

²³ Nightingale 1970: 38.

²⁴ Brown to Commissioners, dated 21 December 1798 in Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries-Public, 1798, Vol. 1695, 331-332, MSS, TNA.

²⁵ Murdoch Brown of Randeterah to Commissioners, dated 25 May 1798 in Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries-Public, Vol. 1693, 252, MSS, TNA.

²⁶ The term '*alan*' appears to be a professional title. It may be localized version of *aḷattakkāran*, 'the measurer'. Gundart 1872: 89.

²⁷ Entry No CXXXII, in Logan 1879: 148-149

²⁸ Kuṛumpraṇāṭṭū Vīra Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 6 June 1797, No. 375 G&H, Talaśśēri Rēkhakaḷ (hereafter TR), Skaria 1996: 167-68.

documents) as a nephew of the famous Capocate²⁹ merchant, Tālēppurakkal Pakrikkuṭṭi³⁰. While, the latter was the Managing Rajah's havālāti for revenue collection from Thamarasserry, a disputed hōbīli in interior Kuṟumpranāṭṭu, Kuñṇi Tārī was entrusted with transferring his uncle's collections to the Company's centre at Tellicherry. He might have gained a level of acquaintance with some bigger players like Murdock Brown, and those from the Covvakkāra syndicate. Letters from contemporary collection-contractors like Paḷēviṭṭil Candu³¹ and Kūṭṭāṭṭil Nāyar³² point, among other things, to the extended fiscal reach of Capocate merchants in their respective revenue domains. For Paḷēviṭṭil Candu, the renegade *rajadore* from the Kōṭṭayam chieftaincy, Tālēppurakkal Pakrikkuṭṭi was the ideal surety (mūnnān)³³ in all of his monetary dealings. We know that Tālēppurakkal Pakrikkuṭṭi was later employed in revenue collection at Kuṟumpranāṭṭu-Thamarasserry, i.e., the part of Thamarasserry falling under the control of Kuṟumpranāṭṭu. Kūṭṭāṭṭil Nāyar, the Payyoomala Chief of some standing as a local lord over twenty-three *taṟas* [taraf (?)] in northern Kuṟumpranāṭṭu,³⁴ seems to have had longstanding transactions (eṭavāṭṭu) with him in various commodities. Other than buying agrarian produce from Kūṭṭāṭṭil Nāyar's realm, Pakrikkuṭṭi regularly transferred funds to markets like Tellicherry and Calicut. By the final quarter of the quinquennial settlement in Kuṟumpranāṭṭu, Kuñṇi Tārī was able to emerge in his own right from the shadows of his uncle's business. When Covvakkāran Kuñṇi Pōkkar wanted to free himself from the havālatti of the district Kuṟumpranāṭṭu "due to his various other occupations, preventing him from giving proper attention to the matter", Kuñṇi Tārī was instantly ready to give him a security-bond. This was sufficient to cover the outstanding debts Kuñṇi Pōkkar had incurred. He reportedly agreed to remit an amount of Rupees 15,481 and seven reas within a month's time, 'in good coins' and not in Ikkēri or Tuḷu Rupees.³⁵ Despite his repeated assurances, Kuñṇi Pōkkar was not able "to liquidate the first kist from Kuṟumpranāṭṭu" for which he had been the havālātti on behalf of the Managing Rajah since 1794.³⁶ In a representation made to Malabar Second Commission in April 1799, Covvakkāran Mūsa had already hinted at an ongoing dispute in the Tellicherry syndicate in which one of its familial factions, headed by a certain Valiya Pakki, ventured to ruin his supply-enterprise.³⁷ Though he disowned their activities as 'not authorized', many of the contractors from Mūsa's southern fold wanted to work on private, individual terms. It was possible that when Mūsa began to limit his activities to the north of river Kotta, those like Kuñṇi Tārī occupied his place in the south.

By the end of 1796, Mūsa along with his familial associates from the Covvakkāra syndicate were active in various *hōbīlies* of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, a chieftainship lying next to French Mahe. In

²⁹ In the latter half of nineteenth century, 'Capacote' was noted as "an insignificant minor port" located about eight miles north of Calicut. However, 'it was put on open coast...where country crafts sometimes come to lade with bulky country produce'. Logan 1951: 73

³⁰ Kuṟumpranāṭṭu Vīra Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 16 June 1797, No 387 G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 172-73.

³¹ Paḷēviṭṭil Candu to Christopher Peile, letter dated 6 October 1796, No 15B, Paḷaśśi Rēkhakaḷ (hereafter PR), Skaria 1994: 11-12.

³² Kūṭṭāṭṭil Nāyar to James Stevenson, letter dated 27 June 1798, 958 I, TR, Skaria 1996: 431-32.

³³ Gundart 1872: 773. Also, see Paḷēviṭṭil Candu to Christopher Peile, letter dated 6 October 1796, No 15B, PR, Skaria 1994: 11-12.

³⁴ Entry No CLXVIII, in Logan 1879: 179-180.

³⁵ Entry No CXCV, in Logan 1879: 207-208.

³⁶ Commissioners to Mr. James Stevens, dated 19 February 1799 in Malabar District Records, Malabar Commission Diaries-Revenue 1799, Vol. 1716, 190, MSS, TNA.

³⁷ Mr. Torin, Commercial Resident Tellicherry to the Commissioners, dated 24 April, 1799, in Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission, Dairies-Public 1799, Vol. 1696, 480-81, MSS, TNA.

an economy of monetized contracts, they mainly functioned as credit-giving merchants, catering to various fiscal services like ready-money advances and monied sureties (*jāmīn*)³⁸ to an extended, often unconnected, network of heterogeneous clientele. At the tail end of the network, rooted in the spice gardens of North Malabar, we find a class of evolved peasant-proprietors increasingly attached to a jumble of cash-advances. These advances were variously called as *vāyppa*, *kaṭam* or *kāṇappaṇam*³⁹ and were capable of ensuring a cluster of share-cropping and usufructuary opportunities in different avenues of agrarian commodity-production. On its leading end, extending as far as Bengal and Mocha⁴⁰ we see agency houses from contemporary English private-enterprise. Covvakkāran Mūsa was not only tendering his ketch rigged boats to English private-traders, but also lending money on (respondentia) bonds. In December 1793, he was reported as instructing his agent in Bombay to pay Mr. John Forbes, who established the first agency house in India⁴¹ “a sum of rupees 64,708...being the amount of Mousa’s certificates”. The agent was further asked to obtain government promissory notes from Forbes for the sum he had advanced.⁴² Five years later, in November 1798, Covvakkāran Makki became the security for Mr. Alexander Mackonochie who had secured a loan worth £10,000 from the Court of Directors.⁴³ In Malabar,

³⁸ Gundart 1872: 398

³⁹ One often encounters these terms in the historiography of West Coast land tenure. However, the nature of the relationship between ‘the janmakkār’ (or ‘the mulwargadar’, as they were known in Tulu speaking areas) possessing ancestral property and the kāṇam cash-advances has been a matter of serious academic dispute since the early nineteenth century. For the early observers, this relationship approximated to that between a ‘mortgagor’ and a ‘mortgagee’. See, Wigram 1882: 100. The Malabar Land Tenure Committee of 1885 mentioned the class of kāṇam rentiers as ‘mortgagee capitalists’ with some fiscal characteristics of ‘commercially ordained farming’. Government of Madras 1887: 601. But, by obsessively detailing the jurisprudential birth, in the English Company’s courts, of ‘absentee landlordism’ and ‘land-monopoly agencies’, later agrarian studies almost neglected the Malabar kāṇam-holder or his *economic* history. This neglect is particularly felt for a period when the Company state itself was unsure of its unfolding juridical/legal status! It will, then, be interesting to look at certain early ‘official’ references where kāṇam initially figured. According to the Second Malabar Commission, “the practice of rising money in mortgage of lands” in this region was “more usual and almost universal”. Though “this tenure had numerous modifications and some (were) entirely local... [the] principle, however [was] simply to make the land answerable for [the] interest of money advanced”. See, Spencer, Smee and Walker 1910: 59. J. Smee, one of its members, had later noted, from “the middle and southern divisions of the district Malabar... a distinct garden tenure of ‘Kury Kanom Jenmker’ which signified “the proprietor of a freehold estate, if the estate was cultivated by him”. Smee 1871: 2. In 1799 Murdoc Brown, then working as the surveyor for the district of Randattara in North Malabar, noted that “the power of redemption [against kāṇam mortgagees] was...seldom exercised, and the lands were permitted to remain in the possession of mortgagee families’. Strachey 2010: 66. William Thackeray, writing after a couple of years from the cessation of Cotiote Rebellion in North Malabar, made an important point. “*Lands are so deeply involved and alienated* by [those contracts involving cash-advances under various names] that in many cases, the original proprietor only receives a handful of grain or a measure of ghee as an acknowledgement of his title [...] *The Mappillers are the great purchasers and mortgages*; their industry, wealth and habits of business seem to give them advantage over the Nairs; however it is perhaps in a great measure, *the money of the Moppillers which gives such a value to the lands in Malabar*”. Thackeray 1911: 7 (emphasis added). Eight years later, in 1815, Thomas Warden saw that “the greater proportion of the proprietary rights is intrinsically vested in ‘the tenants in possession’...on a tenure, nearly equivalent to a freehold”. Warden 1916: 5. In fact, Warden had earlier noted (in 1801) certain instances of ryots “holding a species of tenure resembling a mortgage...becoming the rightful owners of landed property by purchase”. Warden n.d: 7. Even after the so-called “long depression of 1830s”, the Malabar Collector, F. P. Clementson, was able to stick on to Thomas Warden’s opinion by indicating that “the greater proportion of [the] proprietary rights [in the district, as still] vested in the tenants in possession” (Clementon 2010: 15). For a standard explanation of the so-called long-depression, see, Thomas and Natarajan 1936.

⁴⁰ Bulley 2000: 42 and 51.

⁴¹ Riddick 2006: 132 also, see Nightingale 1970: 21; 25.

⁴² Tellicherry Board to Bombay Government, dated 7 December 1793, in Malabar District Records, Factory Records, Tellicherry- Diaries (General), 1793, Vol. 1513, 217-19. MSS, TNA.

⁴³ Nightingale 1970: 100 also, see Pathak 2002: 29-30.

Mackonochie's career started as a private-agent in Bombay-bound military sundries, in addition to some minor interest in the Calicut-Tellicherry pepper-traffic. But, he suddenly emerged as a 'naval architect'⁴⁴ and became the 'owner' of an ambitious sawmill project on the Baypoor River.⁴⁵ Covvakkāran Makki received pepper from Mackonochie on account of the loan, and was responsible for paying the Company in several instalments".⁴⁶ In 1802, the Commercial Resident of Calicut spoke of a huge investment of rupees 228280 that Covvakkāran Mūsa had recently made in the Company's account.⁴⁷ Despite the diverse nature of their clientele, the Covvakkāra merchants and their scaled-down contemporaries appeared to maintain a common, internally coherent, feature. They were operating in an extended space of speculation where interest-bearing wealth (whether in the form of landed property, saleable prebends, coined-specie and freight) was being increasingly embroiled, not merely in the circulatory or the 'notional' aspects of multi-headed commerce as it is concluded in the 'portfolio-capitalist' argument,⁴⁸ but in the real, the exploitative, opportunity of economic reproduction.

Ruchira Banerjee takes note of the landed emergence of the Covvakkāra merchants in the pepper-rich Randattara. By the 1770, "they had become the richest and the most powerful *leasees* of the district".⁴⁹ In 1792, when the province was ceded to the English Company, Covvakkāran Mūsa "wanted to have Randattara *farmed* to him".⁵⁰ However, the sole reason Banerjee attributes for the expansion of mercantile influences in inter-dispensational Malabar is political patronage, but of a new kind, viz. the one offered by the English Company. Bonaventure Swai on the other hand holds that the Company's eighteenth century presence had a strong native political tinge in it that it was accepted as an Indian power; an overlord of some vassals or as an equal to the Hindu king of Kōlattunāṭṭu.⁵¹ His position on the post-treaty collaboration between the merchants of Tellicherry and the English Company⁵² converges with a dominant historiographic orthodoxy, represented for instance by the works of K.M.

⁴⁴ Alexander Mackonochie's work 'Prospectus of a Work, entitled, a Philosophical and Experimental Inquiry into the Laws of Resistance of non-elastic Fluids and Cohesion of fibrous Solids, as far as either is connected with the Theory or Practice of Naval Architecture; also political and commercial Strictures on Comparative State of Naval Architecture in Great Britain and India [...]', known to the English academic audience in 1805 created an immediate enthusiasm. "Few English works on naval architecture contain so much valuable matter and certainly none take so enlarged a view of the subject". Morgan and Creuze 1827: 440. The two volume *Prospectus*, especially its parts 2 and 3 { 'A View of the Timber Trade in India [...]' and 'A View of the Present State of Naval Architecture in India [...]' } was much applauded for containing "much useful information... respecting ship-building and the management of forests, both in England and in India. Anonymous 1805: 854.

⁴⁵ In the year 1799, 10,000 teak trees were brought down Bēpūr River. "This was the produce of several years; but it is estimated that from 2 to 3000 trees may be annually procured". See, Milburn 1813: 328.

⁴⁶ James Stevens to Commissioners, dated 8 November 1798, in Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries-Revenue, 1798, Vol. 1715, 450-51; and Commissioners to James Stevens, dated 9 November 1798, Vol. 1715, 455. Six days later, James Stevens, the Northern Superintendent reported that Chovvakkāran Makki had delivered an amount worth rupees 9189 on account of the Mackonochie's loan; "surprisingly, the amount was delivered in lump-sum". James Stevens to Commissioners, dated 15 November 1798, Vol. 1715, 470, MSS, TNA.

⁴⁷ Correspondence, Chovvakkāran Mūsa and Commercial Resident dated 20 September 1802 and 15 October 1802 in Malabar District Records, Factory Records, Calicut; Diaries-Commercial Resident, 1802-1803, Vol. 1651, 411-12, MSS, TNA.

⁴⁸ See, Subrahmanyam and Bayly 1988.

⁴⁹ Banerjee 2003: 99 (emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Abercrombie to Taylor 31 August 1792, TD (Tellicherry Diaries), (Vol.) 1512, TA (Tamilnadu Archives), cited in Swai n.d: 137, emphasis added.

⁵¹ Swai n.d: 52, 66 and 80.

⁵² Swai 1979: 136-37.

Panikkar,⁵³ which attaches the fate of merchants to the (historiographically imagined) disposition of political regimes. This view, apart from disqualifying “the pre-colonial merchant capital as incapable of perpetuating itself”,⁵⁴ does not also help us in explaining mercantile assertions, especially from those regions and periods where clear signs of an overarching political authority is either absent or less intensively felt. For example, when the Māppīla rentiers of Iruvaḷināṭṭu (“who had fortified themselves in the villages of Panoose and Peringature”)⁵⁵ resisted the homecoming Nambiyār chiefs late in 1766, few other than an elusive *amildāri*-defector, Bābaccēri, had supported them politically. Moreover, the thesis of patronage or the alleged parallelism between pre-modern trade and politics will remain conceptually insufficient or banal when one tries to account for a phenomenal presence of agrarian rentiership. In the case of localities lying interior to the coastal political centres, this insufficiency will be easily felt if some attention is paid to contemporary documents.

In this connection, the Poṛḷātiri kingdom of Kaṭattanāṭṭu presents an ideal case. By the second half of the eighteenth century, its senior dignitaries were known by the title of Poṛḷātiri which, at least in their immediate political sphere, was agreed upon as conveying a kind of endemic kingliness. Since ME 942 (i.e., 1766-67), successive Poṛḷātiris had held offices of tribute or revenue collection, first under the Mysore nawāb and subsequently, from 1792, under the English East India Company. The creation of what in the early Company parlance was called a prebend-holding Rāja or the ‘Managing Rajah’ was occasioned by the military-fiscal presence of Mysore.⁵⁶ This was followed, as in many other regions of eighteenth century southern India, by a series of revenue assessment and collection drives⁵⁷ marking an episode of unprecedented political centripetalism.⁵⁸ In Malabar, this process appears to have been extremely complicated and difficult, if the way in which the period between 1766 and 1792 was later remembered, especially by the local or subordinate lordships, is any indication. In a number of instances, it culminated in serious anti-king insurgencies (*kalakkam*) in which a strong group of propertied principal occupants (*mukhyastan*) stood against the prebend-holding Rāja and his revenue-agents.

In July 1798, the anti-king party (*praṇā-pakṣam*) of Kuṛumpraṇāṭṭu chieftaincy, comprising of twenty-five mukhyastans of various capacities, was found in possession of 4412 personnel

⁵³ Panikkar 1929 also, see Varier 1997.

⁵⁴ Subrahmanyam 1990a: 11 and Subrahmanyam 1990: 298-99

⁵⁵ Dale 1980: 82.

⁵⁶ After it was taken over by Hyder Ali in 1766, Kaṭattanāṭṭu Ḳaya (or the junior) Rāja, Rāma Vaṛma, *leased* Kaṭattanāṭṭu, now as a revenue district under Mysore, for Rupees 50,000 “which was paid by means of *securities*”. Graeme 1898/2010: 252(Emphasis added). In early 1774, when Hyder descended down the Ghauts for a second time into Northern Malabar, Māna Vaṛma, the senior Rāja of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, consented to become a tributary of the Khudādādi state. Māna Varma was restored to his territory upon paying two lakh rupees as *nazrana*, and agreeing to pay Rs. 50,000 as annual *jama* in the future. The Joint Commission: paragraphs 22 and 13. There was a coup in the ruling-line in 1779. Śaṅkara Vaṛma, an in-house claimant who was granted five hundred men as an auxiliary force by Hyder’s general Balvant Rao, was installed in the Kaṭattanāṭṭu *musnad* with a future *jama* of rupees 130,000 annually. Graeme 1898/2010: 255; The Joint Commission: paragraphs 28 and 20. In 1784, Arshad Beg Khan, the khudādādi revenue official of some posthumous fame in Malabar, forced the Rāja of Kaṭattanāṭṭu into a settlement of Rs. 50,000 as *jama*; a fine for fighting Mysore, and Rs. 170,000 as arrears of tribute. See, Ibrahim Kunju 1975: 29.

⁵⁷ In order to defray the amount of the tribute for ME 942 and ME 943, a survey of plantations was carried out in Kaṭattanāṭṭu in 1768-69 and the value of all garden produce, including pepper was collected. The rice-producing lands remained unassessed, though. Later, in ME 949 (1773-74), another assessment survey of gardens followed, in which “an indiscriminate levy of rupees 10 on each of them” was levied. This was “in order to make (up) the arrear of tribute for six years preceding ME 949, amounting to three lacs of rupees”. See, Graeme 1898/2010: 252 and 255.

⁵⁸ Stein 1985: 408.

and 1522 matchlocks at its immediate disposal.⁵⁹ These recalcitrant factions (or *durjjanam*, ‘bad people’ as they were abused by the Rajah) often showed their interest in building unmediated or direct revenue relationships with an authority believed to be potentially paramount or, at least, dependable.⁶⁰ Although their material prerogatives were seriously truncated, these local big-men were successful in subscribing to the commendable services of the country-merchant capital, which had remained functional in spite of the political turbulence. In the context of war or ‘war-like predicament’, the Tellicherry Board of 1793 noticed that the ‘parties of country-merchants’ remained active. They traded in everything from pepper to saltpetre⁶¹ and sulphur.⁶² While replying to a series of questions from Francis Buchanan on pepper and cardamom, the Commercial Resident underlined the wartime commerce of “individuals from Tellicherry and thereabout”. He observed that during the “late war, they handled about a half the pepper produced in the province, with the other half resting in the Company’s trade with Europe, China and Bombay”. They maintained heavy commerce to “Bengal, Arabian Ports, Bussora, the Coromandel Coast, Goa, Surat, Sindh and Porebunder”.⁶³ Cardamom was sent to Europe by Tellicherry merchants’ who bought it from agents posted in Wynaad, Kaṭattanāṭṭu and Thamarasserry, in spite of the fact that this article was not handled by the Company since 1797.⁶⁴

Surety-giving merchants figured even in the contemporary highpolitics, but certainly not as mute receivers of the political goodwill. Some of the major revenue-stakeholders found merchant *jāmīn*-ship an affordable means of settling the current political disarray (*miśram*). For instance, late in 1796, Kuṟumpraṇāṭṭu Vīra Vaṛma hinted at a standing resolution (*mupē niścayam*) to solve a general revenue-collection conflict in the hill-country Kōṭṭayam. The proposal was to involve a merchant *jāmīn* for the arrears outstanding from its Rāja, Kēraḷa Vaṛma.⁶⁵ As expected, he preferred Covvakkāran (Mūsa), and wanted the Chief of Tellicherry, Christopher Peile, to give instructions in this regards. Mūsa was expected to offer his security with retrospective effect, as revenue-arrears were outstanding from Kōṭṭayam since ME 960 (i.e., 1785).⁶⁶ But, when contacted in January 1797, this otherwise famous *havālāṭṭi* was unwilling to accept the *jāmīn*-ship of Kōṭṭayam. It appears from his letter addressed to a certain Puttan Vīṭṭil Rayiru⁶⁷ that he wanted to stay away from what might have appeared to him an almost irreconcilable familial rivalry.

⁵⁹ A statement received in Tellicherry on 5 July 1798, No. 980 I, in TR, Skaria 1996: 445. In 1792, when a candy of pepper fetched well above rupees 200, a matchlock was priced at rupees 3 or, if we calculate 5 faṇams a rupee, 15 faṇams a piece! Joseph 1988:435. This was dangerously cheap, indeed! Also see, Letter dated 9 Kaṛkkaṭakam, ME 977, in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 95 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-185), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut.

⁶⁰ The Government of Bombay was seen sending to Malabar Second Commission ‘detailed copies of anonymous complains’ against the Managing Rajah of Kaṭattanāṭṭu. These letters, complaining oppression and undue exactions, were believed to be written by “a legion of *principal inhabitants* close to the Honourable Company since the last war”. From the Government to Malabar Commission dated 11 March 1798, in Malabar Second Commission, Diaries-Political, 1798, Vol. 1726, 435. MSS, TNA (emphasis added).

⁶¹ Tellicherry Board to the Bombay Government, dated 19 December 1793, Malabar District Records, Factory Records, Tellicherry: Diaries-General, 1793, Vol. 1513, 235, MSS, TNA.

⁶² Christopher Peilie to Second Commission, dated 3 January 1798, Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission: Diaries-Political, 1798, Vol. 1726, 22-23. MSS, TNA.

⁶³ The Resident Supplies Answer to the Questions, dated 25 February 1801 in Malabar District Records, Factory Records, Tellicherry; Diaries-Commercial, 1801, vol. 1529, 62. MSS, TNA.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 65, MSS, TNA

⁶⁵ Kōṭṭayam-Kuṟumpraṇāṭṭu Vīra Vaṛma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 16 November 1796, No 63B, PR, Skaria 1994: 46-47.

⁶⁶ Letter Addressed to Paṭiññārē Kōvilakattū Unṇi, dated 1 January 1797, No 140B, PR, Skaria 1994: 94; also see, No 150 A&B and 151AB, in PR, Skaria 1994: 101.

⁶⁷ Covvakkāran Mūsa’s letter to Puttan Vīṭṭil Rayiru, dated 6 January 1797, No 154 A&B, PR, Skaria 1994: 103.

The principal cultivators of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, if its Managing Rāja Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma is to be believed, were “unanimous in agreeing (*orē bhāṣakkū parañṇu*) to their *nigiti* (tax) in the presence of his merchant sureties, Covvakkāran Mūsa and Marco Antonio Rodrigues”.⁶⁸ In fact, a local *paimāṣi* official, Kanungo Celavu Rāyan corroborates this statement by pointing to the fact that cultivators in Kaṭattanāṭṭu were unwilling to have their land assessed if the assessors were not accompanied by merchants.⁶⁹

In Kaṭattanāṭṭu, merchant havālātti seemed firmly linked to the *pārbatti* or the lower-rung offices of native revenue assessment and collection. At its most elementary level, merchant-sureties were involved in transferring revenue from a prebendal centre to the places where the circuit-collectors concerned had been stationed. Bhaṇḍārī⁷⁰ and Capacote merchants carried funds to Cannanore, Tellicherry and Calicut. As early as 1782, Murdock Brown sent one of his Tamil Brahmin servants, Kakkampallī Ayyār Kuṭṭi Paṭṭar, with a *huṇḍi* (*uṇḍiya*) worth Rupees 2000 to the Rāja of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, who by this time was holding an office under the Khudādādi.⁷¹ More complex were their operations when grafted on to an improvised revenue machine. They supplied credit. In return for the amount advanced either to the Managing Rājah or, on his behalf, to the Tellicherry treasury⁷² the country-merchants were entitled to obtain money from various revenue circles or *hōbiḷies*. Their credit was increasingly repaid by the Rājas in the form of rights, given out in distant, often recalcitrant, localities of active peasant proprietorship. These rights, in the context of the late eighteenth century, were predominantly economic and often left unattended by any definite privileges of the political or sociological varieties whatsoever.⁷³ In other words, though the *jāmīn* merchants were contractually assured of a continued presence in the garden localities, especially in the ones producing pepper, coconut and cardamom, their command over the available surplus was less politically ordained or ‘patronized’.

In Thamarasseri, merchant havālāttis like Pakrukkuṭṭi and his nephew Kuñṇi Tārī were seen collecting paddy, paṇam and goods through their stationing agents.⁷⁴ Kaṇṇampalattū Nāyar, a country-lord of the six *taṛa*-units in Payyooṛmala, spoke of merchants coming with row boats (*tōṇi*) and people into his holding in the interior locality. His cultivators (*kuṭi*) met them and sold their produce; and only a part of it, on the basis of a statement or *kaiyāyitam* that he had previously signed, went as revenue.⁷⁵ In 1799, Dēvaraśśan Bhaṇḍārī, the merchant-*jāmīn* for

⁶⁸ Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 15 November 1796, No. 59B, PR, Skaria 1994: 44.

⁶⁹ Celavu Rāyan to Christopher Peile, letter dated 15 November 1796, No. 59B, PR, Skaria 1994: 45.

⁷⁰ Cērakal Ravi Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 10 January 1797, No 170B, PR, Skaria 1994: 113.

⁷¹ Monsieur (Murdock) Brown Captain-Mahe to Raja of Kadathanad, letter dated 20 Eṭavam ME 967, in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 2 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-30), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut.

⁷² Cīrakal Rāja to Christopher Peile, letter dated 17 May 1796, No 4 C&D, TR, Skaria 1996: 2. (Christopher) Peile to Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma, latter dated 31 January 1796 (19 Kaṛkkītakam 971) in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 24 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-2), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut. It contains a receipt worth Rupees 6333 remitted to Tellicherry treasury by Covvakkāran Mūsa. He remitted this amount on behalf of the Rāja of Kaṭattanāṭṭu. Covvakkāran Mūsa appears in another document, where he agrees to give an amount of Rupees 38,333 in Cīrakal Rāja’s account. Cīrakal Ravi Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 17 April 1797, No. 321 G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 146; also see, No. 340 G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 153.

⁷³ For a socio-political or an ‘all is well’ communitarian picture, see Malekandathil 2007.

⁷⁴ Kuṟumpranāṭṭu Vīra Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 15 June 1797, No 386 G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 173

⁷⁵ Payyūṛmala Kaṇṇampalattū Nāyar to Christopher Peile, letter dated 7 November 1797, No 621 H&L, TR, Skaria 1996: 268-69.

Nambiar Narangoli of Perinkulam and Kariyad *amśams*⁷⁶ in the Tellicherry countryside, referred to an almost similar procedure. But here, his engagement with cultivators was on the basis of another, perhaps more impersonalized, document, the *paimāśī*.⁷⁷ On several occasions, apart from advancing ready-cash in several instalments⁷⁸, merchants were also found executing interest-bearing security-bonds (*pramāṇam*) with the Company for the unsettled accounts of their clients.⁷⁹ On such occasions, the establishment at Tellicherry repaid them when office-holding Rājas made revenue remittances into its treasuries.⁸⁰ In some cases, they were empowered to settle their credit-accounts directly with the Managing Rajah or with his agents or *kāryakkār*, who were also his fiscal councillors. We often hear these Rājas complaining of the persistent dunning (*muṭṭū*) by surety-merchants for their outstanding dues.⁸¹

In 1802, Udaya Varma, the *tehsildār* Poṟlātiri of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, represented an interesting, possibly the culminating, phase of kingly involvement with contemporary merchant jāmīnship. In a letter to the Malabar Principal Collector, Major William Macleod Udaya Varma pleaded to stop what he earnestly felt was “an undue deduction (*kiḷivū*) from his otherwise insufficient *mālikhāna*” or the residual revenue allowance for maintenance.⁸² The deduction was ordered by Mr. Strachy, the collector for the northern division of Malabar, in a legal suit of foreclosure filed by one of Udaya Varma’s credit-giving merchants, Murdock Brown. Some time ago, Brown had executed a pepper-contract for Rupees one lakh⁸³ with Subban Paṭṭar, the chief *kāryakkār* of Udaya Varma’s elder brother, the late Kaṭattunāṭṭu Kōta Varma, through a *ceṭṭi* representative, Appu Ceṭṭi.⁸⁴ But, this contract turned out to be total a failure. Neither the quantity of pepper contracted, nor the money advanced for the purpose reached Brown or Appu Ceṭṭi. Though Udaya Varma denied the association of his late brother in this failed deal, Brown’s accountant (kaṇakkappiḷla) produced strong positive evidence when the suit was called at the Tellicherry Court in 1801. This was an ‘account of undertaking’, prepared on behalf of the King by one Kūśala Bhaṭṭan, possibly a Konkani merchant, who had been referred to as ‘the King’s man’ (*rājāvinṛre āḷu*).⁸⁵

Covvakkāran Makki, despite his syndicate’s ongoing rivalry with Murdock Brown, gave a statement against the Kaṭattanāṭṭu Rāja, which, among other things, advised full-fledged revenue recovery in favour Mss Brown and Co. We find Udaya Varma facing difficulties in

⁷⁶ Logan 1879: 5.

⁷⁷ Dēvaraśśan Bhaṇḍārī to James Stevenson (Jr.), dated 12 January 1799, No 1055 J, TR, Skaria 1996: 482.

⁷⁸ Entry No CLIII, Logan 1879: 162.

⁷⁹ Christopher Peile to Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma, letter dated 24 May 1796, No 9 C&D, TR, Skaria 1996: 4-5.

⁸⁰ Entry No CLVIII, Logan 1879: 166-167.

⁸¹ Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 6 February 1797, No 160 F&G, TR, Skaria 1996: 85; Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 31 May 1797, No 372 G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 166; Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 19 June 1797, No 387, G&H, TR, Skaria 1996: 173-74; Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 30 December 1796, No 135B, PR, Skaria 1994: 90.

⁸² Kaṭattanāṭṭu Poṟlātiri Udaya Varma Rājāvū to Major (William) Macleod, letter 9 Kaṟkkitakam ME 977 in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 185 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-95), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut., 3 pages

⁸³ Kōta Varma in a letter addressed to the Tellicherry chief Christopher Peile (5 January 1797) indicated that his debts (kaṭam) from merchants amounted to rupees one lakh. See, No 155B, PR, Skaria 1994: 103-104.

⁸⁴ His death was reported to the Second Malabar Commission on 23 May 1798, Malabar District Records, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries- Public, 1798, Vol. 1693, 227, MSS, TNA.

⁸⁵ Śēṣayyan to Kṛṣṇan, letter dated 7 Kaṟkkitakam ME 976 in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 125 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-73), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut., (3 pages): 2.

approaching the appellate tribunal, the *sadar adālat* at Channapatanam (Chennai), as no one was willing to provide the Poṟḷātiri King with further jāmīn-ships!⁸⁶ The unwillingness on part of the havālātti individuals in Kaṭattanāṭṭu was similar to Covvakkāran Mūsa's 'unwillingness' in the Kōṭṭayam case, and we would consider these instances as critical acts of (conscious) economic disassociation. By moving away from their former niche of false kingly promises and collaterals, the jāmīn or surety-giving merchants of Malabar endorsed a direction in which the interest-bearing capital, in the form of credit or ready-money advances, had been moving. Inter alia, it also indicates a fundamental political transition in which kingship, especially in its early-modern fiscal varieties, had become less and less practicable. In North Malabar, this process was increasingly felt during the political movement of countryside proprietors towards the Company rule. However, if we look at the local and regional histories of money-based political alliances since 1730s, this transition comes through as a gradual, internal process, and not as one violently imposed by external intervention. The country-merchants and havālāttis had their own reasons for realigning their activities towards another, but equally promising world of cultivators and contemporary agrarian-commodities. We would soon look at this agrarian world more closely, and would argue that the late eighteenth century explanations for this mercantile realignment was more contextual and valid than the reasons usually offered in some of our regional agrarian histories.

The Commodity Frontier in Tellicherry Countryside:

Now, we will proceed to an intermediate and interior revenue-locality (hōbiḷi) in North Malabar, named Pārakkaṭavattū. Despite its territorial and trade proximities to the factory sites of Tellicherry and Mahe, Pārakkaṭavattū is absent from the regional the economic historiography. It lies, almost like an unknown place, in the vast and an allegedly timeless countryside around Tellicherry. It is worth noting that none of the major players in the eighteenth century high-politics came from here. It was attached to the tālūk of Kaṭattanāṭṭu during the Mysore rule of the late eighteenth century. Since then, Pārakkaṭavattū as an administrative unit remained more or less compact up to 1836. The following discussion Pārakkaṭavattū is mainly based on paimāṣī or the early revenue-assessment, documentation preserved in the Regional Archives at Kozhikode, but towards the end, a handful of land-deeds and revenue receipts from another interior locality, Kūṭāḷi (which is about thirty miles north of Pārakkaṭavattū), will be consulted.

The hōbiḷi Pārakkaṭavattū is about thirteen miles south-east of Tellicherry, and about twelve miles east, as the crow flies, from Vaṭakara, where its Rāja, the Poṟḷātiri of Kaṭattanāṭṭu, attracted a brisk private-trade. This trade was by no means new or triggered by the Company initiatives. As early as 1703, Alexander Hamilton had seen the Poṟḷātiri maintaining "barn-like warehouses, full of black-pepper and cardamom".⁸⁷ From the coastal French out-post of Mahe to the south of Tellicherry, Pārakkaṭavattū was at a navigable distance of twelve miles upstream, and the perennial tidal-river Mayyaḷi drained Pārakkaṭavattū in all seasons.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ However, about six years later, one of his erstwhile subjects, a Brahmin widow from the hōbiḷi Vaṭakara, successfully approached the Madras *sadar adālat*. This was in order to sue the Poṟḷātiri kingship in a serious property dispute. The Brahmin widow felt that the king was 'oppressive and unjust' against her person and property. See, petition dated 25 Mēṭam ME 983 in Kadathanad Manuscript Letters, Serial No. 133 (Number Clipped on the Document: KML-65), MSS, Research Library, Department of History, University of Calicut, 3 pages.

⁸⁷ Hamilton 1744: 303

⁸⁸ Varkey 1997: 295

Towards the west, it had the up-river bazaar of Peringature or Peringalam at a walking distance, where in 1738, a group of fifteen Māppiḷa rentiers had entered themselves into an important ‘treaty of protection’ with the Compagine de France.⁸⁹ In 1735, the French Company erected a station at Peringature, which, as the Tellicherry factors feared, would take away the produce of the ‘Boyanores country’,⁹⁰ i.e., the produce from Pārakkaṭavattū. When it was visited by Captain B.S. Ward and E. P. Conner of the Madras Survey Establishment, this outpost was still “a populous village, inhabited by Moplahs, many of them opulent merchants”.⁹¹ In the south-east, some of Pārakkaṭavattū’s subordinate revenue-units merged with another old market centre or *aññāṭi*, Nādāpuram,⁹² “which had two streets of bazaars or storehouses.... kept by Moplahs”.⁹³ During the Khudādādī state, this region was of such (military) labour mobility that one Cheotta Kuññi Pōkkar of Peringature, referred to as ‘a special ally of Rāja’, was sent there to collect 250 Māppiḷas to fight the rebels [who opposed the tehsildāri office of the Rāja and also the Mysore rule].⁹⁴ Despite political turbulence, Pārakkaṭavattū might have been frequented by merchants and bañjāris shuttling between Tellicherry and the plateau of Wynaad.⁹⁵

Pārakkaṭavattū was almost a no man’s land by the late eighteenth century, although it maintained a nominal attachment with the Rājaship of Kaṭattanāṭṭū. During the quinquennial settlement, this hōbiḷi was listed among the localities where recalcitrant factions of the principal inhabitants or mukhyastans opposed the Managing Rajah. Although small in number, the mukhyasthans were internally differentiated as a group. “Some of them had extensive property holdings, some trifling”.⁹⁶

Known as the Kaṭattanāṭṭil Mūvāyiram Nāyar or the three thousand Nāyars of Kaṭattanāṭṭū, this faction with lordly aspirations was successful in creating its own centres of property and political influence in the Kaṭattanāṭṭū countryside. As early as 1725, the factors of Tellicherry had rightly indicated their economic significance vis-à-vis the commercial transactions that the Company intended in Kaṭattanāṭṭū. They tried to maintain a ‘strict and firm union’ between the three thousand Nāyars and the Poṟlātiri as it was crucial for all successful purchases, especially pepper.⁹⁷ This ‘respectable establishments’ of agrarian property in countryside Malabar made Major Alexander Walker to recall the proprietors and farmers of his own country of Scotland.⁹⁸ Such opulent inhabitants “have number of hired servants and often a karrigar or superintendent, who directs the labour of the rest, but does not work

⁸⁹ Martineau 2004: 176, 203-204; also see, Dale 1980: 82.

⁹⁰ Tellicherry Board to John Horne, dated 17 November 1735 in *Letters from Tellicherry*, Vol. IV, 1734-35, 41; also see, 44 and 48. Boyanores, or *vāḷunnavar*, is a generic term for a ruler, in the present context, the Poṟlātiri.

⁹¹ Ward and Conner 1840: 51.

⁹² Ho 2009: 407; Mathew 1979: 29, 45-46.

⁹³ Ward and Conner 1840: 56.

⁹⁴ Gabriel 1996: 252.

⁹⁵ A ‘loop line’ from Tellicherry to Manantavadi (passing through Perinkulatur, Nadapuram, Kuttiadi ghaut, and Corote Angadi’) crossed the southern revenue units of this hōbiḷi. See Logan 1951: lxxxvii.

⁹⁶ Mr. Coward to Malabar Commission, dated 6 April 1799, in Records of Malabar District, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries- Revenue Vol. 1717, 14, MSS, TNA.

⁹⁷ Tellicherry Board Consultation dated 9 November in *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. I, 1725: 3.

⁹⁸ For one of the early admirers of the Malabar picturesque, the “natives sitting at their superior hamlets” appeared exactly like the ‘rustics of Tuscany’. Burton 1851: 190.

himself”.⁹⁹ Mr. Coward, the revenue assistant in Kuṛumpranāṭṭū, had seen them employ their own pārbattis for revenue collection.¹⁰⁰

In their letters to Tellicherry, the Mūvāyiram Nāyars claimed a political status independent of the Poṛḷātiri kingship. Interestingly, this claim of ‘independence’ was allegedly occasioned by the depredatory entry and fast routinization of the Mysore mulkigiri.

When the navābha [Hyder Ali] approached Kaṭattanāṭṭū, the king of our country (*nāṭṭil tampurān*) proceeded for exile, and his people followed. Later, [in the king’s absence] Mūvāyiram Nāyar secured a standing settlement (*nilpān nila*) from the navābha by paying a good amount of money (*ērekkorayāyitṭulla ḍṛavyam*).¹⁰¹

Despite the asymmetries of confrontation with navābi revenue-soldiery and, later, with the nazrāna-paying (Managing) Rajah, the Mūvāyiram Nāyars remained formidable in their ‘fortress-like houses’ and ‘well-stocked gardens’.¹⁰² Lordly houses in the interior war-torn hōbiḷis of the late eighteenth century Malabar, as Dilip M. Menon has suggested, did experiment with some ephemeral forms of political autonomy and statehood.¹⁰³ However, if we situate these state-formation experiments against the backdrop of a general (or, less-parochial) political-conflict in early modernity,¹⁰⁴ it helps us to identify a more unambiguous dimension. As evolved possessors of agrarian-property and workmen, these local lords might have generated a near permanent, kulak-like, conflict with the King, especially when the later had reincarnated as an exclusive holder of carpet revenue-prebends.¹⁰⁵ An everyday concern over substance and material accumulation could have provided a strategic site where the local lords: the so-called principal inhabitants, tied their interests to that of the country-merchants.

According to the garden paimāṣī for the year 1798-99,¹⁰⁶ the hōbiḷi Pāṛakkaṭavattū had a total of 3249 janmam proprietorships (or *janmāṛi*), territorially scattered in about twenty-one ‘basic’ revenue-units or the dēśa-taṛa. Out of these proprietorships, a significant portion i.e. 22 per cent, numbering 714 proprietorships, was classed as *tanatū*¹⁰⁷ or *tanatū-naṭappa*, pointing

⁹⁹ Walker 1983: 195.

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Coward to Malabar Commission, dated 6 April 1799, in Records of Malabar District, Malabar Second Commission, Diaries- Revenue Vol. 1717, 16, MSS, TNA.

¹⁰¹ Kaṭattanāṭṭū Mūvāyiram Nāyar to Christopher Peile, letter dated 5 October 1796, No 13B, PR, Skaria 1994: 7-11.

¹⁰² Welsh 1830: 83-84. For Colonel James Welsh, “the Naires’ houses”, like the one he found occupied by a family of ‘principal farmers’ about twelve miles south of Calicut, “might be defended by a twenty resolute men, against thousands without guns, and even for days against field-pieces only”.

¹⁰³ Menon 1999.

¹⁰⁴ Stein 1985; Perlin 1985

¹⁰⁵ In his *Report on the Condition of Palghat...*, Collector Thomas Warden speaks of the “happy spirit of self-confidence which appeared to glow among inhabitants” against “the baneful authority of the Atchin Family” who had been exercising “amazing degree of power and sway” over the ryots. See Warden n.d: 2. As T.H. Baber reported from the district Perawaye, Malabar ryot chieftains “when used in coalition, are so strong and formidable” that “they never could be brought into any subjugation in either the reign of Hyder or Tippoo. Their sole safety rested in the fastness of their country. [They subsist] on plunder or the more adventitious aids of their vassals”. Baber n.d: 8. When the Company government assumed the revenue collection from the Managing Rajah of Cērikkal, “the higher classes of inhabitants actuated, probably, by a love of novelty, and the poorer ryots smarting under the daily speculation and wanton extortion practiced upon them by the servants of the Raja... made little or no opposition”. Hodgson n.d: 46.

¹⁰⁶ Kaṭattanāṭṭū Tālūk, Pāṛakkaṭavattū Hōbiḷi, Pāramba Paimāṣī Kaṇakkū for the year ME 974, Paimāṣī Records, Bundle No. 32, Serial No. 1 (188 pages) and Serial No. 3 (225 pages), The Regional Archives Kozhikode, MSS.

¹⁰⁷ For Herman Gundart, the word *tanatu* meant ‘one’s own...personal property’. See Gundart 1872: 417.

to an important, perhaps an emergent, feature of garden holdings. They were either in possession of, or were cultivated by, their respective proprietors (*janmakkāraṭ*). Notably, in all scheduled instances of tanatū, sub-tenures, which otherwise figure regularly in village-level revenue-settlement registers of this period and later, were not mentioned. At the same time, the paimāśī record indicates that the whole of tanatū-naṭappa property was distributed among 169 individuals. As was the case with the mukhyasthans, these tanatū holders were also internally differentiated in terms of the number of tanatū proprietorships they held. For example, while a proprietor named Pōtikkaṇṭi Cokkru possessed ninety tanatū holdings in nine dēśa-taṛa units, the Nambūtiri of Karuvana held only a solitary tanatū, perhaps in his resident dēśa-taṛa of Koṭiyattūr. Īccali Kuṭṭiyāli, Coññi Tuppi, Eṭakkāṭan Attan Pōkkaṛ and Kōḷikkōṭan Centu held many paṛamba gardens, classed as under tanatū and spread across several revenue-units.

Interestingly, almost all prominent tanatū holders of this hōbiḷi were connected with the ongoing mercantile processes in various and varying capacities. Īccali Kuṭṭiyāli and Coññi Tuppi were the famous ‘Burgorah Merchants’ who had successfully acquired both rentier and tanatū property rights in various other hōbiḷies of the region.¹⁰⁸ Īccali Kuṭṭiyāli was probably employed (by the Managing Rajah) in occasional fund transfers to Tellicherry.¹⁰⁹ In one occasion, Covvakkāran Mūsa was stated “as conducting his affairs on Īccali Kuṭṭiyāli’s footing (*avastha*)”.¹¹⁰ Eṭakkāṭan Attan Pōkkaṛ and Kōḷikkōṭan Centu were non-locals.¹¹¹ So was Covvakkāran Mūsa who had three tanatū estates in the hōbiḷi Pārakkaṭavattū which, as mentioned above, was close to his regular, perhaps more peaceful, business residence the port- town of Tellicherry.¹¹² Pōtikkaṇṭi Cokkru, the largest tanatū holder in the hōbiḷi is a rather unknown figure. Paimāśī records underline his local prominence in achieving numerous share-cropping and kāṇāri rights both in garden lands and paddy-fields.¹¹³ An undated pepper-

¹⁰⁸ See for instance, Kaṭattanāṭṭū Tālūk, Kurrippurattū Hōbiḷi, Paṛamba Paimāśi Kaṇakkū for the year ME 974, Paimāśī Records, Bundle No 1, Serial No. 4 (from Nālutaṛa to Kuttippuratta; 13 dēśa-taṛa units). Kaṭattanāṭṭū Tālūk, Tōḍannūr Hōbiḷi, Paṛamba Paimāśi Kaṇakkū for the Year ME 974, Paimāśī Records, Bundle No 1, Serial No. 3 (two dēśa-taṛa units, Kottappalli and Kannampath). The Kozhikode Regional Archives, MSS.

¹⁰⁹ Kaṭattanāṭṭū Porḷātiri Kōta Varma to Christopher Peile, letter dated 13 January 1799, No 181 B, PR, Skaria 1994: 117.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Peile to Covvakkāran Mūsa, letter dated 13 February 1797, No 192 F&G, TR, Skaria 1996: 96.

¹¹¹ While the former, as his name indicates, perhaps belonged to a continuum of merchants from the town of Agar or Eṭakkaṭṭu near to the island of Dharmapatanam, the latter, Kōḷikkōṭan Centu had some connections with the port of Calicut or Kōḷikkōṭṭu which, despite the increasing East India Company trade at Tellicherry, exerted a dominating influence on contemporary commercial processes (Das Gupta 2001: 63). Ashin Das Gupta presupposes a general decline in the commercial prospects at Calicut after the 1760s, “that had begun with the Mysore Invasion” (Das Gupta 1967: 111, 122). However, as in Surat—for which he had suggested a similar fate occasioning from an analogous political debacle (Das Gupta 1979)—the alleged commercial crisis in Calicut assumed ‘a dual aspect’ (Subramanian 1987: 482). Kōḷikkōṭan Centu might have had connections with those economic interests at this port-town who—unlike an ideal ‘medieval merchant’—had been resilient and speculative enough to manipulate various political orders to their favour. It has to be borne in mind that even in times of acute political confusion, merchants showed their willingness to supply for the Company and other commercial stakeholders. In December 1793, Tellicherry Board took note of an enormously huge pepper-contract for 4000 candies by an Arab merchant named Essab at the rate of Rupees 200 a candy. It was agreed to be delivered at Calicut. See, Consultation dated 21/12/ 1793, Factory Records, Tellicherry Diaries- General 1793, Vol. 1513, 238-40, MSS, TNA.

¹¹² By this time, Covvakkāran Mūsa became ‘very infirm’ as he was getting old (Macleod 1911: 12). Though Mūsa continued to live in Tellicherry up to 1807, he was reported ‘extremely unwell’ and perhaps, awaited a pious death amidst ‘a protracted property dispute’ within his so-called ‘business family’. See Factory Records, Tellicherry-Diaries: Commercial 1807, Vol. 1533, 57-59, MSS, TNA.

¹¹³ For instance, see Janmāri No. 75, in ‘Kaṭattanāṭṭū Tālūkkū, Cērapuram Amśattile Mahārāṣṭrakam Aḷavā Paimāśi Kaṇakkinṇe Malayaam Taṛijama Bukkū (An Account Book Containing the Malayalam Translation of

vine paimāṣī for the revenue-unit Kuttippuram introduces him as the largest among the ‘rentiers of pepper-orchards’ who had leased paṛamba plots from the royal demesne (*kōvilakam*) of Kuttippuram.¹¹⁴ But indeed, this kingly connection is not enough to limit him to an extended shadow of political patronage. Rather, Cokkru and the other cash-advancing rentiers of Pāṛakkaṭavattū should be seen as active participants in an ongoing wave of mercantile activity in its multifaceted local agrarian adaptations. If one closely follows Alexander Walker’s description of Malabar land-tenure and transfers,¹¹⁵ it is in fact possible to argue that the affluent rentiers (at least, an exemplary section among them) converted their usufructs and share-cropping leases into alienable landed property (*janmam* or *aṭṭippērū*). As Rajat Datta has argued for the deltaic Bengal, the participation of traders and other speculators in agrarian commodity and labour was startlingly rational (in anticipating profits) and modern (in designing possible avenues for re-investment), and were often left unattended by contemporary political centres.¹¹⁶

The *dastūr* statistics annexed to the paimāṣī records reveal the presence of a set of local infrastructures and customized monetary procedures which could facilitate, as it was noted by Frank Perlin for the southern Maratha country, an alternate access to the rural tenurial grid.¹¹⁷ The hōbīlī of Pāṛakkaṭavattū had 115 shops (*pīṭika*) in its *dastūr* registry. Often classed variously as *māṭa pīṭika* and *vāṇibha pīṭika*, they were primary institutions of rentiers’ and cash-advancing merchants’ engagement with the agrarian commodity-production.¹¹⁸ Apart from these, the hōbīlī housed forty-one oil-presses (*cakkū*) and 287 moturpha-paying toddy-drawers.¹¹⁹ In the whole of Kaṭattanāṭu, which was 150 square-miles in extent, the total population was estimated to be 33,683 in 1806-1807, with a density of 224 persons per square-mile.¹²⁰ As per the 1826 survey, the hōbīlī contained twenty two deśams or villages,

Assessment (originally) written in Mahārāṣṭrakam or the Modi Script), dated 13 December 1862’, Paimāṣī Records, Bundle No. 29, Serial No. 17 (255 plots in two deśams), MSS, The Regional Archives Kozhikode. In the ceded province of Malabar, a large portion of the Company Paimāṣī was continued to be tabulated in Modi script as the Company had been employing those scribes and other revenue specialists who had once manned similar offices under Mysore rule. Also, see Raman 2012: 12-13.

¹¹⁴ See, Kaṭattanāṭū Tālūkkū, Kuttippuram Amśam Muḷaku-Paimāṣī, Paimāṣī Records, Bundle No. 41, Serial No. 8 (44 pages), The Kozhikode Regional Archives, MSS.

¹¹⁵ Walker 1879: 1-7.

¹¹⁶ See, Datta 1986 and 1989.

¹¹⁷ Perlin 1978.

¹¹⁸ For a diametrically opposite view, see Ganesh 2002: 39, 40. Ganesh argues that “there is *little evidence* to show that the traders were directly involved in land transactions”, and wherever ‘traders and middlemen became landholders’ “there is *nothing to show* that this was their strategy to further their trading interests”. Rather, “it was part of their effort to find a means of subsistence as their trading activities were declining”. Further, “there is *nothing to show* that traders and their middlemen directly intervened in the process of production as such”. Though “there was attestable expansion in the cash-crop production”, he continues, “there is *nothing to show* that this resulted in the transformation of production relations.... The *relations* of *janmam* and *kanam* subsumed the emerging monetization and ensured that the power of the *janmis* and *naduvazhis* was not affected by the growing cash-crop production”. For early instances of a similar formulation, see Thomas 1929 and Shea 1959. For Ganesh, the relations of *janmam* and *kāṇam* were regulated by an ideological/cultural mechanism, i.e. the *maryāda*. Similarly, in Shea’s formulation, ‘ethnic impediments of caste’ own the key position in the history of tenurial development. Deriving largely from the ‘stationary-system’ premise of Kieniewicz 1985, Ganesh concludes that ‘political changes and the changes in *geo-economic configuration* played a *determining role* in producing regional places, and also the hierarchies among them’. Emphases added.

¹¹⁹ Moturpha was ‘a tax on professions and implements’ dating back to the Mysore rule. In the case of toddy drawing, it was levied as an Abkary Tax and named *katti*, after ‘a peculiar sharp knife’ with which ‘the toddy drawers cut across the spathe’. Those toddy-drawers who were making (palm)-sugar, vinegar or spirit from sweet-toddy, were permitted to do so, but after the payment of another imposition, a tax for the use of the sugar pot or the *caṭṭi*. See, Clementson 1848: 386 and 395.

¹²⁰ Graeme 1898/2010: 262.

out of the 146 dēśams of the then Kaṭattanāṭṭū Tālūk.¹²¹ Assuming that revenue villages were more or less equal in size in terms of the number of inhabitants and cultivable area, and that the increase in population between 1807 and 1820 was marginal, the hōbiḷi of Pārakkaṭavattū might have had a resident population of 5000 at the time of the dastūr calculation. They were perhaps living in an area of less than thirty square miles. Even if this rough estimate has a margin of error of over 25 per cent, the shops, oil-presses and moturpha-paying toddy-drawers are too many in number to be ignored. They are of critical importance for the processes under examination.

Prima facie, the case of Pārakkaṭavattū appears to be exceptional. This is particularly so when one tries reckon its high-density hosting of merchant shops and their possible keepers with the economic historiography of the region, which still believes in the centrality of political patronage (or its apparent lack) and hence, in inter-dispensational discontinuity. There might be an amount of exaggeration in the figures estimated at paimāśī *daftars*, which is of course not specific to them or any of the existing late-eighteenth century documentation. However, the scheduled number of shops in the hōbiḷi shows an impeccable correlation with some of its neighbouring localities. For instance, a contemporary paimāśī of the hōbiḷi of Mahe gives ninety-three ‘shops of individuals’, and seventeen ‘(big)shops’ in its revenue list. Similarly, when the hōbiḷi of Randatarra was assessed by a certain Kanungo Rāmāyā in 1794, five years before the paimāśī of Pārakkaṭavattū, fifty-four shops, forty-six weaver looms, fifty-nine oil-presses and 478 moturpha-paying Tiyya toddy-drawers were identified. While Mahe housed 934 gardens and 726 taxable houses, Randatarra had 5053 gardens and 1907 tax-paying houses.¹²² When the latter was assessed for a second time by Murdoch Brown in 1799-1800, the institutional presence of the rentier-mercantile agency was shown to register a noticeable enhancement. The number of shops had risen to seventy-four. This, interestingly, was accompanied by a significant increase in the units of ‘revenue paying oil-men’, which were 101 in number.¹²³

It is misleading to conclude that these changes took place overnight with the political ascendancy of the English East India Company or its revenue-hungry administration. Equally premeditated is the other view which regards these shops (or any other fiscal aspects, prior to the nineteenth century) as peripheral, and structurally embedded in a cultural economy of ritual and prestations. Shops in the hōbiḷi of Pārakkaṭavattū might have had more functions in a many-headed economic region like North Malabar. When the prospects of cash advance and rentiership moved with an improvising agrarian frontier, merchants could not remain semi-itinerant or the peddling procurers looking for patronage.¹²⁴ In the course of the long eighteenth century, shops no longer continued as mere collection points. Rather, in several instances, they were successful in asserting as key centres of locally-defined speculator activity, which oftentimes transcended (or indeed, redrew) their immediate, sometimes the arbitrary, political limits.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ward and Conner 1906: 47-50.

¹²² Strachey 2010: 49-52.

¹²³ See, ‘Abstract of the Revenue Survey of Randaterrah, Made by Murdoch Brown in the Malabar Years 974-75 A. D. 1799-1800) with a Comparative of the Former Survey’, in Strachey 2010: 56-59.

¹²⁴ See Buchanan 1807: 516 and 523-24 for a contemporary description of mercantile cash-advances

¹²⁵ As early as 1750, shopkeepers formally doing business in the Tellicherry Factory limits and in its bazaar dependencies such as Agar and Dharmapatam, appeared as forming an extremely problematic entity vis-à-vis the English Company’s institutionalized purchase mechanism. Shops were frequently looked upon with fear and suspicion for their capacity to turn the otherwise unsettled commodity prices through indiscriminate purchases. For instance; see Monsieur Louet to Thomas Dorrill, 23 December 1750, *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. XX, 1750-51, 66 and Thomas Dorrill to Mr. Lovet, 12 December 1750, *ibid.* They were often accused of siphoning

In comparison with the shops, information on oil-pressers and toddy-drawers are much more scanty and indefinite. But, their *paimāṣī* occurrences against the backdrop of contemporary *hōbīli*-level population produce certain interesting statistical ratios. On an average, a mill in the late-eighteenth century *Pārakkatavattū* employed a maximum of 122 individuals for pressing edible or lamp-oil. The mill which they installed was the traditional wooden *cakkū* or *ghani*.¹²⁶ Whether powered by draught bullocks or by hand¹²⁷ the whole oil-pressing installation was a fine piece of specialized carpentry. “It consisted of a fixed mortar with a pestle, bearing against the side of the mortar. A village mill [of pre-expeller times], could deal with 50 *lbs* of coconut per hour and between 25 and 35 *lbs* of other seeds”.¹²⁸ A toddy-drawer lived in a tiny group of about eighteen persons. The group certainly included a significant number of teetotallers for whom the toddy-drawer was the local seller in palm sugar (*jaggery*) and vinegar. His principal products, though, were a couple of intoxicating liquors, viz., toddy and arrack. The latter was known as Calicut Arrack or Malabar Arrack. There was a secular non-local demand for toddy and arrack, especially for the latter.¹²⁹ Some of the toddy-drawers possessed, other than their regular tapping tools,¹³⁰ a distilling-unit or *caṭṭikkūṭṭū*,¹³¹ perhaps similar to the one that the amateur British chemist John Davy had reported from the tropical coconut-economies of Ceylon.¹³² Made mainly of earthen-ware, this simple ambix-type distillery apparatus was often improvised with copper-tubes and/or bell-metal refrigeratory capitals. In 1825, despite all *muchilika* rulings and prohibitionist regulations, there were “not less than 2 arrack stills for every 13 toddy-knives” around Tellicherry.¹³³ A tax was introduced during Hyder’s times, which included an impost on knife and pot (or the calabash) used for extracting toddy and distilling arrack,¹³⁴ but the oil-presser was apparently left untouched although a great volume of his produce, especially oil from copra or dried Coconut kernel was meant to be exported.¹³⁵ Other than the received-wisdom of presenting these groups as ‘the constant occupational elements of a *taṛa*-bound village-community’,¹³⁶

off money and other strategic commodities (especially, pepper, gunpowder, lead and rice) and moving them from one political cluster to another. Mercantile shops therefore turned out to be one of the most favourable targets of lordly brigandism and pillage. See, Document nos. 34B, 97B; and 214A in PR. 23-24, 63-64 and 156-57.

¹²⁶ Chitra 1946: 127.

¹²⁷ *Malabar Gazetteer* indicated an internal division among the Malabar caste of oilmen. “They are said to be divided in some parts according as per they work their mill by hand or by bullocks”. See, Innes 1997: 121

¹²⁸ Tyabji 1995: 54-55.

¹²⁹ For instance, in April 1748, the East India Company’s commercial resident at Calicut, Mr. Alexander Douglas purchased 2522 ½ bottles Calicut Arrack at a rate of 2 to 2.2 fanams a bottle. A little later, his successor Richard Seckner was able to ship towards Tellicherry from the same station, 800 bottles containing ‘sprints of palm wine bought for 2 fanams each. See, *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. XVIII-B, 1747-48, 106 and Vol. XX, 1750-51, 63. All these were ad-hoc purchases; effected from the local market without a prior supply contract.

¹³⁰ Thurston 1913: 117.

¹³¹ Gundart 1872: 340.

¹³² Davy 1821: 248.

¹³³ ‘Letter Sent by the Collector 1825, dated 9 September 1825’ in The Records of the Malabar District 1714-1835, Vol. 4937 (File of Originals: Letters), 595. MSS, TNA. By contemporary estimations, a common toddy-still was capable of producing potable spirit, about one-fourth its toddy-wash. Bennet 1843: 85. If put into rectification by a second course of distillation, toddy gives wholesome arrack at a rate of one-eighth the whole toddy put into distillation. Hamilton 1828: 385. On an average, a toddy-tapper could tap from 15 to 20 trees a day with each tree yielding about one quart of toddy per diem. Stuart 1895: 139 and Lawson 1861: 160. Thus, on an average, the 287 toddy-tappers of *Pārakkatavattū* were capable of, in case of full-employment, producing 1076 gallons (or 4305 quarts) of toddy every day. On the basis of the available *abkari* statistics from the region, one cannot assume that this quantity (or even a half of it) was consumed locally. See Buckland 1888.

¹³⁴ Anonymous 1874: 7; Smee 1871: 31.

¹³⁵ Ward and Conner 1840: 57

we know little about their late pre-colonial existence. However, it is certain that these groups, at the time of the paimāṣī, were economically visible and affluent enough to be enumerated in the *dastūr*. It is also possible that some of them were practicing their traditional caste-occupations as full-time professions. This was particularly true of oil-men from North Malabar whose industry, unlike the part-time gingelly pressers of South Malabar,¹³⁷ was predominantly coconut-based.¹³⁸ Though some toddy-drawers were successful in renting tapping rights over the Sago Palm (*Caryota urens*) trees,¹³⁹ their trade mainly centred on a single tropical-palm variety, the coconut palm. Given the bimonthly nature of its yield, the supply of coconut remained stable and assured round the year. Pāṛakkaṭavattū and the localities thereabout (or “thriving inland amsams of the *firka* Nadapuram”) were known after the inland or dry method of coconut-growing¹⁴⁰ which in the long course of the eighteenth century had been expanding into erstwhile swidden-tracts and terraced ‘rising-grounds’.¹⁴¹

As the littoral Malabar became implicated in the early-modern lowbrow-trade, agrarian commodities were the first to feel its impact. The price-rise in the case of pepper, as indicated by Ashin Das Gupta,¹⁴² was unprecedented. He connected it with the collapse of the Safavids (1722) and the political uncertainty in Gujarat (1730s), which forced groups of merchants to look towards Malabar.¹⁴³ Holden Furber and later, perhaps more meticulously, Lakshmi Subramanian, have emphasized the ‘country-element’ in this trade boom,¹⁴⁴ and argued positively for its carryover into the latter half of the century. In fact, this phenomenon of bristling country-trade is testified by a contemporary observer, Adriaan Moens, the Governor

¹³⁶ See, Varier 1994: 15, 18-19. In a formulation reminiscent of Leach 1959 and Neale 1957, Raghava Varier identifies ‘the village community’ of pre-colonial Kerala as a system like ‘*structural whole*’. It was ‘*the basic production unit*’, and its ‘*diachronic*’ functioning “could *only* be understood with a reference to the spatial organization of regional human settlements”. The pattern of habitation in the settlements was defined simultaneously by the operation of unique geological (such as the availability of ground-water, topography and *in situ* fertility) and cultural (such as ‘*tara* organization’) aspects. For him “it is doubtful whether there existed *any hierarchy* among settlements on the basis of size”. He also refers to an (extreme) case where a settlement in French Mahe “remained *without change in size* from the 10th to the 19th century” though his sources do not positively substantiate this alleged changelessness. Varier 1994: 12 and Varier 1990: 109-110. In its ‘*total structural aspect*’, Varier continues, the ‘village community’ has two basic elements i.e. ‘the constants and the variables’. The ‘constants’ are essential and permanent to the ‘village structure’. It refers to those occupational groups (such as toddy-tappers/coconut pluckers (*sic*) and oil-pressers) without whom “a village community cannot carry out its functions”. The ‘variables’ are optional; “they may vary from community to community or from settlement to settlement implying that their presence in the community is not essential”. Some of the constant elements “were responsible for establishing a linkage between...village community and the outside world”. But, this “could not bring any change in the condition of life of occupational groups” as “the raw material for their *medieval industry* was controlled by the landowning groups”. Although Varier’s is supposed to be a critique of “stereotypical notions of old (village-)studies”, his formulation of the so-called ‘*structural whole*’, retains a timeless and static Malabar village in its background. In fact, the same analytical categories or idioms—the constant and the variable—had appeared in some of his early works (Varier 1982 and 1991). But, these were his analyses of literary techniques of crafting oral poetry, and not studies of a specific diachronic assemblage like the village. (Emphases added).

¹³⁷ Wariyar 1918: 174

¹³⁸ “The Malabar method of extracting oil, is, by dividing the kernel [of Coconut] into two equal parts, which are arranged on shelves made of laths of Areka palm, or spit bamboo, spaces being left between each lath of half an inch in width; under them, a charcoal fire is then made, and kept up for about two three days, in order to dry them. After the process they are exposed to the sun on mats, and when thoroughly dried (called Koppera) are placed in an oil-press or Siccoor (*sic*)”. See, Bennett 1834: 333.

¹³⁹ Nambiar 1923

¹⁴⁰ MacEwen 1930: 12.

¹⁴¹ See, Hamilton 1820: 273-276.

¹⁴² Das Gupta 1967: 25, 31-32

¹⁴³ Also see, Om Prakash 1998: 230 and Om Prakash 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Furber 1965 and Subramanian 1981

and Director of the VOC on Malabar Coast. In 1781, Moens left an informative memorandum for his successor. Despite the ‘unhappy events’ caused by the invasion of Hyder Ali, local trade was certainly on a ‘good footing’. Far from being a burden, Malabar provided a lucrative trading environment for the trade-books had shown profits far exceeding the expenditure. “That trade flourishes here better than in former times appears not only from the sale of cloves...but also from *higher prices*...which is a true test whether trade flourishes or not”.¹⁴⁵ It is highly unlikely, unless we believe in ‘the epistemological wall between hinterland and the coast’,¹⁴⁶ that “these trends were not correlated either with the growth and development of an independent mercantile group in Malabar or increasing revenues to Malabar’s ruling elite and an increased influx of specie into its economy”.¹⁴⁷ Along the coast, eighteenth century price-rise must have moved in all directions, influencing even the coolie Muckuas and stone-cutters around Tellicherry to demand ‘better wages and diet’. All wanted their ‘wages and [toni] hire to be paid in [Bombay] rupees’.¹⁴⁸ If we take serious note of some observations from the Company’s southernmost trading post, Anjengo, this rampant fascination for high-priced liquid funds or *dravyam* was occasioned by a drastic depreciation in the value of fanam or the base specie of the countryside, and possibly the local silver issues by the Company.¹⁴⁹ The factors at Anjengo provided no answers to its possible cause. But they took note of the ‘money coming from northward’¹⁵⁰ and the “rupees being coined by Moors at Trichnopolly”¹⁵¹ creating precarious fiscal contexts where their regular coinage along with the fanam of Malabar became ‘less dear’.

From (*Strychnos nux-vomica*) to wax candles, Western Indian coasting-trade had carried almost everything from the Malabar countryside.¹⁵² Interestingly, in 1750, the Sāmūtiri’s ministers were found insisting the Company’s agents for “paying customs on all wax-candles and means” that they intend to take from the port of Calicut.¹⁵³ These articles were until then piled as ‘untaxed sundry’. It is improbable that the economies of Malabar coconut and pepper were immune to this general and contagious price-rise and attendant efforts of fiscalization.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁵ Moens 1911: 217-226. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶ See, Perlin 1980

¹⁴⁷ Gopinath 1999: 51. Also, see Kurup 1979: 347-348, 354 and 1985: 27-29.

¹⁴⁸ Alexander Douglas to George Dudley, dated 22 February 1747, in *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. IX, 1746-47, 36. For a detailed complaint by the masons and stone-cutters employed in building a fort at Dharmapattanam, see William West to John Geekie, dated 3 November 1743, *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. VII, 1743-44, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Fanams were offered for exchange at the current price of Silver Rupees at the rate of six fanams 4 maggonneys ($\frac{1}{16}$ of a fanam). See, Consultation dated 1 December 1749 in *Anjengo Consultations*, Vol. 2-B, 1749-50, 25. Early in November 1749, a Ceṭṭi merchant was found saying, “the price of (silver) rupees is now fallen”. He insisted that the factors should make their payments in gold (for printed ‘piece goods’) and in venetians or pagodas (for woven cloth), Consultation dated 2 November 1749, in *Ibid*, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Anjengo Board, Consultation dated 9 July 1745 in *Anjengo Consultations*, Vol. I, 1744-47, 73. ‘The money coming from north’ might have referred to an influx of gold coins minted in the late-Safavid era. See, Matthee 2000.

¹⁵¹ Anjengo Board, Consultation dated 8 April 1747, in *Anjengo Consultations*, Vol. I, 1744-47, 212. There could possibility the high-valued golden pagodas of Arcot Nawab, Muhammad Ali, struck from the Tiruchirapalli mint. See, Jackson 1913: 384.

¹⁵² Lockyer 1711: 279

¹⁵³ Thomas Dorril to Richard Seckner, dated 27 May 1750 in *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. XIX, 1749-50, 178.

¹⁵⁴ While discussing the Portuguese country-trade of the eighteenth century, Celsa Pinto had mentioned Malabar coconut and coconut-oil (especially, those loaded from Calicut and Mahe and from other ‘southern ports’) in the Goa-bound inventory. She gives us interesting table (Table no 8.1) containing information on “Goa’s Imports and Exports of Coconuts and Copra from and to the South 1765-1778”. See Pinto 1990: 194 and Pinto 1994: 41, 209-210. Similarly, M.O. Koshy found this article among ‘the piece-goods’ handled by the V.O.C. in its eighteenth century ‘bombara trade’. Koshy 1989: 170. For E.I.C., copra had already become a desired merchandize by 1720s. By mid 1729, a *candy* (600 lbs) could be purchased at Tellicherry by paying twenty-

In this sweeping tidal-wave of commerce, oil-men and toddy-drawer groups might have operated in close proximity with local rentier-groups and merchants. This was not only to gain accesses to raw materials for their respective rural-industries but also to sell their produce. As early as 1743, we hear of a Beepore based merchant-contractor purchasing fresh coconut-toddy to fill his arrack stills,¹⁵⁵ and in 1747, the native toddy-drawers were employed in Calicut for wage to distil palm-spirit for the English Company.¹⁵⁶ About a year later, when the Company instituted one of its earliest arrack-farming agreements, the toddy-drawers around Tellicherry were given a major exemption. The “wretched” Tiyya mercenaries bearing arms in the factory limits were granted an official permission “to sell arrack of this place and the country hereabout”.¹⁵⁷

By the second decade of the eighteenth century, oil-pressers made their social presence felt in the Tellicherry countryside. The Kalliāṭan lords, based in the gardening locality of Kūṭāḷi, were found forging vertical economic relationships with this workmen group. The lords of Kūṭāḷi were among the leading chieftain conglomerates in the whole of North Malabar. As early as 1731, the Tellicherry Board found one Kalliāṭan Kōra Nambiyār mediating (or rather, buying up) a successful peace-deal between the Āli Rāja’s household and the prince of Cīrakkal, and this deal, as if in a standard mulkigiri truce, involved the payment of an amount of cash as indemnity.¹⁵⁸ By the early 1740s, the Kalliāṭan lords were actively involved in succession disputes of the Kōlattiri Rājas. Later, when threatened by the prince of Cīrakkal named Kuñṇi Hōmō with annexation, the then Kalliāṭan lord, the rebellious and renegade Nambiyār chief named Kēḷu, placed his faith in the English Company.¹⁵⁹ In their family history found in the Mackenzie Collection, they claimed a sui generis political designation, and called themselves a *svarūpam*¹⁶⁰ and seemed to have maintained a rigid dominance over their interior agrarian domain.

Kūṭāḷi was twelve miles north-east of Tellicherry, and could be traversed in a single day on a tolerable cart road going into the upcountry Cotiote. In 1826, Kūṭāḷi had “three or four different rows of Moplah bazaars with a mosque, and it was on the high-road from Cannanore to the Pudacherrum Pass”.¹⁶¹ At a distance of about four miles, as the crow flies from Kūṭāḷi towards west, there was the old pepper-plantation-amśam of Anjarakkandy, where in 1803 Major Macleod estimated a motarpha (or the poll-tax on profession) bill of Rupees 270. Interestingly, this amount was reckoned at 37 per cent of the total revenue expected from the local ‘rice-lands’, and possibly indicates a significant density in the Kūṭāḷi neighbourhood of a

eight silver rupees or 140 Calicut *fanams*. See, ‘Price current of goods at Tellicherry with the rate of coins at ditto and Calicut in exchange, and merchandize taken 13 September 1729 and forwarded to the Honourable Court of Directors September 24 1729 per ship Morrice’, in *Letters from Tellicherry*, Vol. I, 6. In the next year, a mill of coconuts in Calicut (containing about a thousand unhusked coconuts) was sold at fifty-five *fanams* or eleven silver rupees. See, ‘Prices Current at Calicut’ dated 29 May 1730, in *Letters from Tellicherry*, Vol. I, 36-37. This was, indeed an exorbitant rate but, it hardly went down. In 1739, E.I.C’s *munchua* had to return empty from the Anjengo Road “not being able to procure coconuts...at the prices (that the chief of Tellicherry) mentioned”. See, *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. III, 1738-39, 17.

¹⁵⁵ George Jenkinson, Beepore to John Geekie, Tellicherry, dated 22 November 1743, in *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. VIII, 1743-44, 11

¹⁵⁶ Alexander Douglas to George Dudley, dated 8 May 1747, in *Letters to Tellicherry*, Vol. IX, 1746-47, 48.

¹⁵⁷ Articles of Agreement to be Entered into by Such as May Happen to the Renter of the Arrack-Farm’, dated 30 July 1748, in *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. XVIII-B, 1748-49, 152-53.

¹⁵⁸ Tellicherry Board, Consultation, dated 9 June 1731 in *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. IV, 1730-31, 92.

¹⁵⁹ Ola from Kūṭāḷi Kēḷu Nambiyār, dated 8 December 1749 in *Tellicherry Consultations*, Vol. XIX, 1749-50, 92.

¹⁶⁰ Mahalingam 1972: 287.

¹⁶¹ Ward and Connor 1840: 50.

professional class of labouring, the wage-earning, experts living submerged among the rural resident population.¹⁶² Towards east, Kūṭāḷi was close to the interior up-stream bazaars of the old fame such as Irikkuṟ and Śṛikanthapuram.¹⁶³ Moreover, a Dutch trans-mountain trade mission from the eighteenth century noticed Kūṭāḷi as one of the transit-toll-collection points in the Cannanore-Irikkur-Mysore route.¹⁶⁴ Thus, though located in different directions from Tellicherry, both Kūṭāḷi and Pāṛakkaṭavattū shared a similar topographic and agronomic profile; they were both undulating in territorial architecture, predominantly lateritic, forest-clad and located physically distanced, as if a cast-away periphery, from the coastal polities of kings, and of the central places. Yet they were marked, among several other things, by an exploitative presence of monied stakeholders in the different levels of economic activity, and these activities were highly resilient and, as we saw in the tanatu-naṭappa holdings in Pāṛakkaṭavattū, were capable of producing marketable surplus against a wide-ranging array of possessions in land, labour and in liquid assets.

It is in this regards, that the case of a Kūṭāḷi oil-presser named Kōman-Kōran Cantu of Patiññā Vaḷappil acquires some importance. It provides us a critical opening into the working of credit in the interior Malabar. As we have already noted in our discussion havālātti that the money credit was one of the most important, and also an extremely familiar, mediums of accumulation in the eighteenth century countryside. Kōman-Kōran Cantu is rather an unimpressive figure, but makes an important appearance from the ‘village’ (*ūr*) of Vēśāla, which belonged to the lordly realm of Kūṭāḷi, as a borrower (*kaṭavan*) of money in the year 1715. Kōman Kōran Cantu was “the son (*suta*) of Rāmar: the *peruvāṇiya* oil-presser and an inter-generational resident in the village of Vēśāla. In that year, in a typical mortgage deal of money credit, Kōman-Kōran received 600 Cannanore New Paṇams from one of his Kalliāṭan overlords namely, Otēnan Nambiyār.¹⁶⁵ In return for this credit and its annual interest, Kōman Kōran Cantu mortgaged an *ulpatti* plot that he owned. The said collateral had a seed capacity worth 300 paṛa measures of paddy, and it was not located in Kōman-Kōran’s own *ūr*-village. Rather, according to the mortgage-deed, the plot was a raised wet-land ground situated in the village (*ūr*) of Kāñcirōṭṭu which was an important weaving-centre; an old market, lying two miles to the south-west of the mortgagor’s village, Vēśāla. In addition to the land, the oil-presser had also alienated his cultivating rights (in the said property) in favour of the Nambiyār mortgagee. This alienation, as in the case of the customary kāṇam arrangements,¹⁶⁶ was not permanent or absolute. The collateral could be redeemed if the borrower repaid his debts. But, in the case of the Vēśāla oil-presser, things did not take the customary course. In another transaction of the year 1770, fifty-five years after the first deed, the Vēśāla oil-presser was made to sell the same property to another Kalliāṭan lord, Kēḷu Cāttu,¹⁶⁷ who apparently succeeded Otēnan Nambiyār in the Kūṭāḷi lordship. Kōman-Kōran, now at his old age, and was titled as the *peruvāṇiya* or master oil-presser, effected, after receiving the current price and performing the *janma-nīr* ceremony,¹⁶⁸ the final transfer of property rights, in favour of the purchaser.

Though the sale-deed did not indicate that it was an act of standard foreclosure, later documents underline the economic control that the Kalliāṭan lords had achieved over local

¹⁶² Clementson 1840: 40.

¹⁶³ Logan 1951: 234 and Logan 1951b: cclxvi-vii.

¹⁶⁴ Binu John 2006: 216.

¹⁶⁵ Document No. 93, Cadjen No 68, Sides 1-2, in Section C, *Koodali Granthavari*, Kurup 1995: 70

¹⁶⁶ Panikkar 1990: 172.

¹⁶⁷ Document No. 157, Cadjen No 12-13, Sides 2-1, in Section C, *Koodali Granthavari*, Kurup 1995: 97.

¹⁶⁸ Walker 1879: 4.

cakkāla or the oil-men population. In fact, a *mēlāma* account¹⁶⁹ from Kūṭāḷi Tālattū household for the year 1797 introduces a certain Uṇiccā Nambiyār as the (perhaps the new) peruvāṇiya of Vēśāla, the village where Kōman-Kōran and his ancestors lived.¹⁷⁰ In the light of our current understanding of the Nāyar jāti titles prevalent in Malabar, it is highly unlikely that Uṇiccā Nambiyār belonged to the ‘low’-status “Vattakkad clan [of Nāyars] whose proper metier was producing...oil with the oil mill”.¹⁷¹ If the Uṇiccā Nambiyār represented a new peruvāṇiya of Vēśāla, and, as his jāti title indicates, belonged to the Kalliāṭan lords of Kūṭāḷi, two possibilities could emerge from this sequel of property transactions, and both of them, as we may propose, communicate a set of fundamental, but slow, transitions in the north Malabar countryside. Firstly, the parvenu peruvāṇiyaship of Uṇiccā could indicate a corresponding dispossession (both of landed property and of the title) on part of Kōman-Kōran; the traditional oil-presser of Vēśāla. Though it is not certain whether Kōman-Kōran, or rather his successors, had been pushed into the faceless *cakkāla* crowd of labour living in the locality or not, the Kūṭāḷi records, as we could see below, suggest towards an upward moving, if not a stable, trend in the local production of market-bound coconut oil. Secondly, because he did not possibly belong to the traditional jāti of the Malabar oil-men, the peruvāṇiyaship of Uṇiccā Nambiyār, at least in principle, indicates an unfolding, or an already emergent, asymmetry in the given paradigm of jāti labour. In other words, in a scenario of intensified production (coupled with the ‘low technology’ of the native oil-pressing ghani), it is hard to assume that the labour was condensed in the jāti ((also read as *the jājmāni*) apparatus.

Significant quantities of coconut oil did appear in the *mēlāma* documents of Kūṭāḷi. In most cases, they accompany a more definite payment in the paṇam media. For instance, an undated account from the late eighteenth century mentions 53¹/₄ kurri measures of oil as *mēlāma* or fee imposed on garden property.¹⁷² Though this account provides information about seventy-nine individuals paying a total amount of 156 paṇams, the payment in oil was due from thirty-one properties of varying nature. A majority of them were seemingly well-instituted in paṇamba gardens and residential plots. Another document of 1797, while listing thirty-six payers of *mēlāma* and *palīśa* (the interest on kāṇam or cash-advances), cites oil-measures in five out of its seven *mēlāma* contexts,¹⁷³ all respective remitters being local paṇamba holders. None of these documents indicate the local oil-men (vāṇiya) as making their *mēlāma* or *palīśa* payments in oil-measures; instead, their remittances were in paṇam or in the current (golden) specie in circulation. Interestingly, out of the thirty-one oil-paying propertyships, twenty-nine were held by trading and paṇamba-holding Māppiḷas, as their personal names from the schedule indicate. An older *mēlāma* account¹⁷⁴ from the same locality brings to light the fact

¹⁶⁹ Herman Gundart defined *mēlāma* as “the property in tress and fruits” (Gundart 1872: 781). This, in a lordly context like Kūṭāḷi, could denote a titular fee on garden proprietorship claimed by the local political establishment, i.e. the household of Kūṭāḷi Tālattū. This can also be a localized expression for ‘mēlvāram’ which according to William Logan was the tax on pāṭṭam or vāram which local Rājas levied before the time of Hyder to pay off their tributes to the Bidanūr or Ikkēri kings. See, Logan 1951: ccxx.

¹⁷⁰ Document No. 10, Cadjen No. 95-96, Sides 1-2 and 1, c 1797, ‘Kūṭāḷi Dēśam Mēlāma Palīśa in Section D, Koodali Granthavari, Kurup 1995: 117.

¹⁷¹ Fawcett 1915: 188.

¹⁷² Document No. 34, Cadjen No. 53-53, Sides 1-2 and 1-2, ‘Kūṭāḷi Dēśathe Mēlāma Tālattē Vīṭṭil Vaka’ in Section E, Koodali Granthavari, Kurup 1995: 132-134. Kurri was one of the native measures of liquid substances like oil and toddy. In the case of former it was about four to five nāḷi or sixteen palam, Gundart 1982:278.

¹⁷³ Document No. 10, Cadjen No. 95-96, Sides 1-2 and 1, 1797, ‘Kūṭāḷi Dēśam Mēlāma Palīśa, in Section D, Koodali Granthavari, Kurup 1995: 117.

¹⁷⁴ Document No. 2, Cadjen No. 59-62, dated 1767, Kūṭāḷi Kāvil Mēlāma, Section D in *Koodali Granthavari*, Kurup 1995: 109-112. This account has a total of 28 *mēlāma*-paying pīṭika establishments. They were mainly distributed in two different market centres (or aṇṇāṭi) in the lordly realm of Kūṭāḷi.

that many of the Māppīḷas were successful in instituting pīṭika establishments, perhaps several years before the Khudādādi state in 1766.¹⁷⁵

The Māppīḷas reached Kūṭāḷi from adjacent market-centres like Vaḷarpatṭaṇam, Dharmapattāṇam and Cannanore in the late seventeenth century. This movement might have been contemporaneous with the Kūṭāḷi lordship's acquisition of revenue-rights over countryside toll-house or *cuṇkam*, possibly in the busy Cannanore-Irikkur route.¹⁷⁶ Meanwhile, some Māppīḷas were successful in combining kāṇam rentiership with mercantile activities, and thus provided an objective or wealth-based institutional framework for the management of local agrarian-surplus. In 1801, J. Smee took note of the fact that numerous Māppīḷa merchants had oarts, some of them very extensive, which gave them an advantage over non-trading Māppīḷas as well as Nāyar and Tiyya cultivators.¹⁷⁷ In 1817, Captain James Welsh noticed them at Koyilandi in an "unsociable disposition of having little charity", and grabbing "all the wealth of the country...amidst of filth and misery".¹⁷⁸ Half a decade later, Thomas Munro, perhaps sounding a variety of Romanticist opposition to 'the huckstering with landed property',¹⁷⁹ found Māppīḷas purchase much of the land on sale, and transferring it to their possession from the Nāyars.¹⁸⁰ Contrary to what many later scholars have held, this business-trait was not specific to the Māppīḷas community. Rather, it was shared by many commercial classes meddling with rural-credit and kāṇam-rights. What we find by the end of the eighteenth century is a busy world of countryside fiscalism where greedy paṭṭar Brahmins, ceṭṭi merchants, chicanery shroffs and cardamom sāhukārs straddled from one end to another in their hunt for wealth.¹⁸¹ They connected the āṛruveppū gardens of Chavakkad with the Cardamom farms of the Koḍava country. Some of their brethren sailed *pattēmāri* boats from Malabar to the port of Maandvee in the Kutch¹⁸² where they met merchants from Muscat and Abu Zaidi Zanzibar.¹⁸³ More enterprising were those who steered their private vessels to the late Safavid ports of Basrah and Bushire in the Persian-Gulf and returned to Malabar with plenty of cash and little merchandise.¹⁸⁴ The most important aspect of this trade was that it covered almost all products from a Malabar tropical home-garden.

Given its structural opposition to janmam-based land control,¹⁸⁵ the kāṇam right was increasingly secured by monied agents trying their luck in early-modern accumulation. This was true not only of country-merchants but also the more embedded lordly establishments of the Malabar countryside. Of 251 land-deeds included in the Kūṭāḷi annals, a large segment, 158 in number, are concerned with the local lords' interest in kāṇam-right in its common usufructuary variants. Interestingly, the paimāśī documents allude to some oil-pressers with naṭappa cultivating rights (or perhaps, sharecropping-rights) distributed in different and discontinuous taṛa-units.¹⁸⁶ However, other than these cursory details, both the paimāśī *daftar*

¹⁷⁵ Māppīḷas mentioned in the Kūṭāḷi Record are the following i.e., Cāran Sūppi, Pakki, Ātan Mūsṣa, Caṭayan, and those from the Narōn household.

¹⁷⁶ Document No.77, Cadjen No.11, Side 1, dated 1696, Section C, in *Koodali Granthavari*, Kurup 1995: 64.

¹⁷⁷ Smee 1871: 20.

¹⁷⁸ Welsh 1830: 80.

¹⁷⁹ Marx 1979: 30.

¹⁸⁰ Munro 1881: 72.

¹⁸¹ See, Baber nd: 11; Drummond nd: 32; Ludlow 1871: 11-12, 17; Leech 1837: 212.

¹⁸² Leech 1837: 212.

¹⁸³ Risso 1986; Bhacker 1994.

¹⁸⁴ al Qasimi 1999: 321.

¹⁸⁵ See Ganesh 1991.

¹⁸⁶ Pārakkaṭavattū oil-presser peruvāṇiyan Kēlu secured naṭappa rights in two taṛa-units. In taṛa Vaḷayata, he maintained eight holdings with naṭappa rights from two different janmāris (janmāri nos. 40, 41, 43, 111, 217, 220, 233 and 273 in Kaṭattanāṭṭu Taluk, Pārakkaṭavattū Hōbiḷi Paṛamba Paimāśī for the year ME 974, Paimāśī

and the Kūṭāli chronicle give no further information concerning the economic relationships among and between oil-pressers, merchants and the local lordship. What we know is an early nineteenth century estimate on marketable oil-production from the Cērikkal district in which Kūṭāli was a subordinate revenue-unit. In 1801, the annual production of coconut oil was around fifteen to twenty thousand cootties or 67500 lbs, each cootty priced between 21/2 to 5 silver fanams.¹⁸⁷ In 1830-31 or *fasli* 1240, the value of coconut products exported by sea and land from Malabar exceeded the value of its pepper-remittance by Rupees 130529.¹⁸⁸ If these represent stable tendencies in the rural production regime, the countryside relationships within which workmen like oil-pressers and toddy-drawers were entangled into would appear as belonging to an uninterrupted wealth-making continuum. The havālātti's choice of the agrarian countryside was predicated upon this material continuum over which the Malabari political authority, despite its early modern specimen variety, had exerted very little material effects.

Conclusion:

Although the period was characterized by rampant centripetalism and swinging tribute and tax collections on the political frontier, the merchant havālātti of Malabar was not a secondary phenomenon. Rather, it worked as a natural development from within an economy that was historically deficient in its principal staple, the wetland rice. During the late eighteenth century, surety-giving merchants were certainly fed from an economy of revenue-prebends but, their commercial practices weren't merely usurious, or subordinate to the contemporary regime(s) of political patronage. In an early-modern coastal environment characterized by bristling country-trade and commodity-based remittance, they expanded the scope of money-credit or interest-bearing capital. However, this was not at the expense of trade, which was their prime concern. In fact, the non-Company commercial sector was almost under their firm control. Even in the most traditional tenurial arrangements of North Malabar, a lumpsum payment of credit or the kāṇam cash advance triggered an inverse relationship with the customary ground rent. A bigger cash advance was often met with a progressive weakening, or in some cases complete absorption, of real rent. When the prospects of jāmīn-ship to the Kings waned, merchants drew themselves close to the countryside and contracted business with local lordships and their subjects. As the case of the garden economy around Kūṭāli attests, local lords were successful in dispossessing resident workmen of their professional rights. At the hōbiḷi of Pārakkaṭavattū, merchants acquired important tanatū rights, while toddy-drawers and oil-pressers produced more than what were required for consumption in their immediate localities. Though what happened to these relationships in the course of the nineteenth century, especially after the credit-crisis and economic depression of the 1830s, awaits research, historiography need not deny or defer its blessings on the proprietors of late eighteenth century interest-bearing capital in Malabar merely to serve the cause of prejudiced grand-narratives on colonial transformation and its discontents.

Records, Bundle 32, Serial No. 3, 69; 73; 89 and 93, MSS, Regional Archives Kozhikode). In taṛa Cānēri, Kēḷu had a single holding from the janmāri numbered 137, 137, Ibid. Another oil-presser, Kuṇkan maintained holdings in taṛa Tūṇēri and in taṛa Irinṇaṇṇur. See Paimāṣi Records, Bundle 32, Serial No 1, 62 and 179. MSS, Regional Archives Kozhikode.

¹⁸⁷ Hodgson nd: 53.

¹⁸⁸ Tabulated from 'Statement Showing the Value of Articles, the Produce of the Garden only, Exported by Sea and Land from, Fusly 1235 to 1242' in Appendix No. 6 (2), Papers Delivered in by Frederick F. Clementson Esq., and Referred to in his Evidence of 5 May 1848. See, Clementson 1848a: 520-21.

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