

# SOME PROBLEMS IN KERALA HISTORY

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PUBLISHERS  
**The Educational Supplies Depot.**  
TRIVANDRUM.

PRINTED AT THE PRESS RAMSES,  
TRIVANDRUM.

1952



## THE AGE OF STHANU RAVI, THE CHERA EMPEROR

[*Read in the Patna Session of the  
Indian History Congress, held in 1946.*

*Vide the proceedings Vol. IX ]*

The regnal year of Sthanu Ravi has been mentioned in the well known Tarisappalli plates <sup>1</sup> by Ayyanadikal, one of his vassals. But the question of fixing his date has proved a knotty problem of Chera history. The late Mr. Gopinatha Rao has arrived at the conclusion that this King flourished in the 9th Century A. D. on the evidence of Tillaisthanam and Tirruvottiyur records<sup>2</sup> and this has now been confirmed by other sources recently discovered.

A manuscript copy of an unpublished commentary on Laghubhaskariya is available in the Oriental Manuscript Library, Trivandrum. It was written by one Sankaranarayana, a court astronomer of Sthanu Ravi. It throws considerable light on the history of the period. In the first verse, Sankaranarayana praises Sthanu (Siva) in words which are applicable by virtue of *double entendre* to the Emperor as well.<sup>3</sup> It is stated in this work that the King put a question to Sankaranarayana

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1. T. A. S. Vol. II, page 67.

2. T. A. S. Vol. II, pp. 76-77.

3 व्यासं मूर्तिभिरष्टभिर्जगदिदं यस्याखिलं दृश्यते  
सष्टा राजसभागवस्थितिर्विधौ सत्त्वाश्रितः शार्ङ्गधृक् ।  
संदारे तमसा युतो हर इति प्रोक्तो य एकस्त्रिधा  
स स्थणुर्जयति त्रिरूपसहितो लिङ्गेऽपि लोकार्चितः ॥

regarding a solar eclipse. <sup>4</sup> The date of the eclipse is given as Angartvambāra nandavedamanubhir yate dinanam gane i. e. after the expiry of 1449066 days from the beginning of Kali Yuga. This corresponds to the 25th of Mithunam 41 M. E. (June 5866 A. D.) The incidence of the solar eclipse on that day and its visibility in Kerala are authentically corroborated. In another place Sankaranarayana says that Jupiter and Saturn were in Dhanus (Sagittarius) when his patron completed his 25th year, <sup>5</sup> certainly, regnal year as the Emperor appears to be an aged man from other remarks found in the work; and every student of history and epigraphy knows that such references mean the regnal years of Kings. These planets were together in Dhanus only in 44 M. E. and in no other year in that century. [It is thus evident that Sthanu Ravi came to the throne in 19 M. E. (844 A. D.) As the Tillaisthanam record shows that Sthanu

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४ अङ्गर्त्त्वम्बरनन्दवेदमनु भिर्याति दिनानां गणे  
 ग्रस्ते तिग्ममयूखमालिनि तमोभूते पराङ्गे दिवि ।  
 पृष्टं प्रग्रहणद् द्वितीयधटिका ग्रासप्रमाणं रवे-  
 भर्त्रा श्रीकुलशेखरेण विलसद्वेलावृताया भुवः ॥

5. Anga 6; Rtu 6; Ambara 0; Nanda 9; Veda 4; Manu 14.  
 The Kali dates are always read in the reverse order. Hence the figure 1449066. The date of the Huzur Office Plate of Karunandadakkan is 1449087, i. e. 21st day after this eclipse.

6 श्रीरविधर्मदेवः कदाचिद् ग्रहयुद्धविज्ञानप्रकटनार्थमाह—  
 'चापप्रविष्टगुरुसौरिसमत्वकालम्  
 ....  
 ....  
 इत्युक्तवान् रविरशेषनृपाभिवन्धः ॥'  
 तदा पञ्चविंशतिवर्षाण्यतीतानि देवस्य ।

Ravi was a contemporary of the Chola Aditya I (871-907) it has to be presumed that he ruled over Kerala at least during the early years of Aditya and that his reign extended over 30 years beginning with 844 A. D. As the Tarisappalli plates are dated the fifth regnal year of this King the actual date of the record must be 849 A. D. Vijayaraga, the Koyiladhikari mentioned in the plates was a son-in-law of Sthanu Ravi. It could not be inconsistent if Nili, Vijayaraga's daughter i. e. grand daughter of Sthanu Ravi is found to be living in the year 935, the date of the Tiruvottiyur record.

*Kulasekhara-dynastic title.* It is seen that the full name of the King was Sthanu Ravi Kulasekhara, Ravi i. e. Ravi Varma being his name and, Sthanu and Kulasekhara titles. The word Sthanu is seen to have been used only in the first verse and in the body of the text the King is referred to either as Ravi or as Kulasekhara. Many of the rulers of this dynasty have been mentioned as Kulasekharas.<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, but natural to infer that this was a dynastic title and that the Empire was founded by one Kulasekhara, most probably the celebrated author of Perumal Tirumozhi and Mukundamala.

*Mahodayapura, the Capital.* The capital of Sthanu Ravi and other Sovereigns of this Empire was Mahodayapuram. It was commonly called Mahotai in inscriptions. Kottakkakam, Senamukham, Balakridesvaram, Jayaratesvaram, Kodungalloor etc., were parts of the city. The city was protected by high fortresses. The science of astronomy had reached great heights in

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7. The author of three Sanskrit dramas and the patrons of Vasudeva Bhattatiri and Prabhakara Bhatta were Kulasekharas. Inscriptions also mention more than one Kulasekhara.

Kerala at that time and the system of Aryabhata was generally being followed. The Emperor was himself proficient in Astronomy and a patron of Art and Science. He had a well equipped Observatory at Mahodayapuram about which many a detail is given in the aforesaid commentary.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that there were satisfactory arrangements for recording correct time and for announcing it to the public by the tolling of bells at intervals of a ghatika (24 minutes) from different stations.<sup>9</sup>

The King has been mentioned in many places as belonging to the Kerala dynasty.<sup>10</sup> The term Kerala is only a sanskritised form of Chera and so the reference may be to his being a descendant of the Early Cheras.

The system of inheritance in Kerala was Makkattaya even at that period. The matriarchal system began only after the Chola war which lasted for about 100 years from 1000 A. D. onwards. The compulsory military training which resulted in the formation of the *Chaver*<sup>11</sup> army (suicide squads) might probably have been the cause of this change.



8 “गोलान्महोदयपुरे रविवर्मदेव-

सम्बन्धियन्तवल्याङ्कितराशिचक्रात् ।”

“.... .... सममण्डलरूढसूर्य-

च्छायावशात् कथय शक्रजलेशसूत्रम् ।”

सुरपतिदिशि दृष्टं गोलयन्त्राद्विलम्बम् ।

9 “बालक्रीडेश्वरस्यैरधिकृतघटिकास्ताडिताः ... ..” ।

“— दिशतिताडितासु घटिकासु” ।

10 ‘उक्तं केरलवंशकेतुरविणा’

‘केरलवंशप्रदीपेन कुलशेखरेण ।’

11 Cholapuram record. T. A. S. Vol. VI, pp. 16-20.

# THE SUICIDE SQUADS OF KERALA (11TH-18TH CENTURY)

[Read in the Bombay Session of the  
Indian History Congress held in 1947.  
*Vide the proceedings Vol. X*]

Suicide squads became famous during the last War when those of Japan figured widely in the news, notably after the sudden destruction of the Prince of Wales and Repulse, the supposedly invincible men-of-war of the British Navy and during the surprising victories won by the Japanese army in the course of their occupation of Singapore and the Malaya Peninsula. An attempt is made in this paper to bring to light some details about similar suicide squads that existed in Kerala from the 11th to 18th Century A. D.

We have many references in the accounts of foreign travellers about the suicide squads of Kerala of the medieval period from the 15th to the 18th Century. They are called Amoucos or Amochi in the Portuguese accounts and this word has been explained as a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Amokshya*.<sup>1</sup> The Malayalam term for the suicide squad is *Chavettu Pada*. *Pada* means 'army, squad' and *Chaver* 'one who vowed oneself to death,' of course, for the honour of one's King and Country. The word *Chaver* itself has been used by Castenheda<sup>2</sup> to denote a member of the suicide squad. "The

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1. Kerala History by K. P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol I. p. 511. But it may be explained more correctly as a corruption of the Sanskrit word 'Amogha' meaning unfailing, efficacious.

2. A manuscript account of Malabar. See Kerala History ol. I, p. 51Vo.



Amochi had vowed not to return from the battle-field without victory" says Purchas. Again, "The King of Cochin hath a great number of gentlemen which he called Amochi and some are called Nairi. These two sorts of men esteem not their lives anything, so that it may be for the honour of the King".<sup>1</sup> "If the Prince is slain, the Amochi who are numerous would avenge him desperately. These are soldiers who swear to defend the King's life with their own."<sup>2</sup> De Gubernatis records "Their forces consist in a kind of Nair soldiers whom they call Amochi, who are to die at the King's pleasure or when they lose him in war."<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which the *Chaver* army served the rulers and the part they played in medieval polity are well illustrated in the incidents noted below.

In the war that took place between Cochin and Calicut, three Cochin Princes including Marumahan Rajah the heir-apparent were killed in 1504 at Edappalli. Thereupon two hundred *Chavers* of the heir-apparent, who survived their master, 'shaved off all their hair, even of their eye-brows'. They made their way to the enemy's territory and slaughtered all they met. Twenty of them managed to reach the neighbourhood of Calicut, killing as many as possible. In turn, they were killed off one by one to the last man by the army of the Zamorin. But it took five years to achieve this.<sup>4</sup>

1. Purchas—His Pilgrims.

2. See Kerala History, Vol. III, p. 230.

3. P. 154, also Kerala History, Vol. I, p. 511.

4. Rise of Portuguese Power in India by Whiteway. p. 96 A. D. 1545.

In 1510 the Portuguese suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the *Chaver* army of the Zamorin. Albuquerque as advised by Marechal Dom Ferdinando. Cutinho made a sudden attack on Calicut, while the Zamorin was away from the capital. The garrison in the city consisted only of a few hundred soldiers. The Portuguese without much opposition reached the city. They began to pillage and desecrate the Palace. This naturally roused the *Chavers*. In the fight that followed, most of the Portuguese including the Captain Marechal perished. Only Albuquerque and a small party escaped. As Sardar K. M. Panikkar observes, this ended 'in the greatest disaster that overtook Portuguese arms in the East.'<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion the Portuguese attacked Vadakkumkur whose Rajah was 'the most powerful of the Nair Chiefs'<sup>2</sup> at that time. In the battle that took place at Vaduthalai (1550) the Rajah who led the army in person died. Then appeared on the scene the *Chaver* army of *Vadakkumkur*. The Portuguese force had to flee with much loss and the captain himself was killed. Not being satisfied with this, the *Chavers* 4000 in number<sup>3</sup> 'all sworn to avenge the death of their king entered the territory of Cochin, killing a large number'.<sup>4</sup> The Portuguese and their ally, the Rajah of Cochin were forced to take refuge in the fort. Again another army of *Chaver* consisting of *Mappilas* was sent by the Rajah

1. Malabar and the Portuguese.

2. Malabar and the Portuguese.

3. 5000 according to K. P. Padmanabha Menon. Cochin History Vol. I, p. 373.

4. The Portuguese in India by Danvers Vol. I, pp. 489-90, also Whiteway p. 323.

of *Vadakkumkur* and they succeeded in killing the king of Cochin in 1561 A. D.

Thus we have sufficient records during the Portuguese period. A good number of the *Chavers* might have perished by the firearms of the Portuguese. But the system was in existence even at the time of Marthanda Varma, the maker of Modern Travancore. In his war with Kayamkulam, the King who commanded the Kayamkulam army in person was killed (1734). To avenge the death of the Rajah about 300 *Chavers* entered Venad and made great havoc till they were all killed <sup>1</sup>

If any *Chaver* was killed, his family would be given lands free of taxes to be enjoyed for all times. These tenures were called *Chavettuviruththi*. The Revenue accounts of the States of Travancore and Cochin used to show *Chavettuviruththi* lands as a separate class. But they are, now, brought under *Inam* lands leaving their origin in obscurity. It would appear that military service was compulsory for the holders of these lands, even at the time of Dharma Rajah. An official order of the year 1760 says 'those who held Viruththi lands and did not go to the battle-field should be deprived of those privileged possessions' <sup>2</sup> There are such families even now and I have personal knowledge of some such families whose major male members all died in the battle of Aykotta in which Travancore fought against Tippu (1789,) and they hold *Chavettu Viruththi* lands even now.

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1. Old records of the Sri Padmanabha Temple at Trivandrum, brought to light by the eminent scholar Suranad P. N. Kunjan pillai. Recently published Travancore State Manual Vol. II, Appendix p. 120.

2. Travancore State Manual, Vol. II, Appendix p. 163.

The materials available at present show that the *Chaver* army had three functions—those of the standing army, of the Police and of the Scout. We have been dealing with the first of these functions. We shall now refer to the other two.

Whiteway says that the Portuguese used to engage a company of *Chavers* in each and every fort they owned. These companies were called *Changathams*. Most of the important temples in Kerala had *Changathams* attached to them. In 1544 De Sousa, the notorious Portuguese Governor led an expedition to attack the temple at Thevalakkarai. There were two *Changathams* attached to it. But one of the Captains with almost all the guards was absent. The temple authorities offered £12000, on condition that De Sousa should return without plundering the temple. But it was of no use. Everything in the temple was looted and plundered, and he was returning when 'a Nair, dressed with scrupulous care, with all his ornaments, followed by 10 or 12 others flung himself on the Portuguese ranks. It was the remaining *Changatham* who thus tried to wipe out by their death the stain upon their honour.'<sup>1</sup>

Another duty assigned to the *Changathakkar* was to render help to travellers who were to be safely conducted from one place to another without receiving any remuneration. This practice was in vogue until the present police system came into force.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from the above that there existed suicide squads in Kerala from the beginning of the 16th

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1. Whiteway p. 284

2. Cochin History by K. P. Padmanabha Menon Vol. I, p. 58.

century to almost the end of the 18th century. We shall now try to find out whether there are earlier records to prove the existence of this type of army before the 16th century.

*Payyannur Pattola*, a very ancient Malayalam work makes mention of suicide squads<sup>1</sup>. The date of the work cannot be fixed with certainty. But it is believed to be a poem of the 13th century. Going further back, there are references about the *Chaver* army of Kerala in the inscriptions of the period of Kulottunga I, the Chola King (1070-1120). His Cholapuram record of the 30th year<sup>2</sup> says "While the whole of the *Chaver* army of Kerala<sup>3</sup> ascended to heaven, he was pleased to fix the boundaries of Tennadu"<sup>4</sup>. These boundaries have been suggested as Podiyil hills, Sahya mountains and Kanyakumari, all in his kingdom. It is further said that garrisons were posted on these boundaries and Kottar

1. 'Chavalarai pole ni yakalappovum.

Changatham venam perikayippol'. Here the words "Chavalar" (plural form) and Changatham are used.

2. Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. VI, p. 15.

3. 'Kadalmalainadu' in the inscription means Kerala north of Nanchinadu. It excludes Kudaku which also is included in the general term Malainadu. That Malainadu did not comprise the territories south of Quilon contained in the recently published Travancore State Manual regarding the history of the period is erroneous. Thirunandikarai and Thiruvattar, more than 70 miles south of Quilon, are often referred to in inscriptions as places in Malainadu.

4. The word Chaver has been translated inaccurately as 'heroes' by Mr. A. S. Ramanatha Iyer (T. A. S. VI, p. 18) and as 'veteran soldiers' by Professor K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (Studies in Chola History and Administration, p. 191) owing to the unfamiliarity of these Tamil scholars with a word of undoubted import in Malayalam.

has been specified as the most important outpost. Prof: Raghava Iyengar of the Travancore University has informed me that the contemporary Tamil literature contains references about the Chavers of Kerala and that he could see no earlier reference in Tamil.<sup>1</sup>

In this connection we have to bear in mind a picture of the last phases of the Hundred Years' War<sup>2</sup> between the imperial Cholas and the Kulasekharas of Mahodai<sup>3</sup> which began about the fifteenth year of Rajaraja (985-1014)—the year in which the Cholas were able to defeat the Chera army for the first time—the year which Rajaraja thought 'worthy of being worshipped by all other years in the whole of eternity.'<sup>4</sup>

1. The Chavers of Kerala are mentioned in the well-known Thiruvadi record also. It is stated therein that Naralokavira, the best known of Kulottunga's lieutenants, fought against the Chavers. (Chavettin thin cerikkei'. But earlier inscriptions of the period of Kulottunga make no mention of them.

2. It is one single war from our point of view which began in Circa 1000 A. D. and ended in Circa 1100. The Kulasekharas did not yield even to Rajendra who inflicted many a crushing defeat on their armies, devastated their capital Mahodai and demolished Kanthalur, the southern most military stronghold. (Kanthalur which was famous for its Vedic College in the 9th century becomes a strong Chera military centre during the Chola War and disappears after that from history along with Mahodai.) It is true that Rajendra appointed his son Sundara Chola-pandya as the Viceroy of 'western countries' too. But he could rule only southern Travancore. It may be noted that no Chola inscription has been till now discovered nor any vestige of Chola rule to the north of Trivandrum, which formed the Kulasekhara Empire proper. A careful study of all the materials of the period shows that the war continued, though the Empire was shattered about the time of Rajendra.

3. See the papers contributed to the IX Session of the Indian History Congress by Prof. V. Narayan Pillai and myself.

4. 'Uzhiyil ellayantum thozhuthakavilamkum yante'.

About the time of Kulottunga's accession, the Cholas lost their hold not only in South Travancore, but Tirunelveli and Madura Districts. Kulottunga had to lead an expedition against the Cheras and the Pandyas. He set fire to the fortress at Kottar,<sup>2</sup> smashed the *innumerable forces* of the Keralas<sup>3</sup> and erected a pillar of victory on the sea coast. Proceeding north Kulottunga attacked Vizhinna and Kanthalur.<sup>4</sup> But his first attempt ended in failure. So he had to reinforce his army a second time and capture Kanthalur.<sup>5</sup> This time the defeat was final and the whole of South Travancore passed into the hands of the Cholas again. Encouraged by this victory Kulottunga proceeded further north and attacked Quilon<sup>6</sup>. All these conquests were effected a few years before the Cholaapuram record with which we are dealing.

Not let us study the inscription in the light of the above mentioned facts. It is stated therein that the Chola army killed all the Chavers of Kerala i. e. that the Cheras suffered defeat. If so, why did Kulottunga give a considerable portion of his kingdom—the whole of South Travancore north of Kottar which the Cholas

1. The Cholas Vol. II, Part, I, p- 15.

2. “दग्ध्वा कोटारदुर्गं तृणमिव स यथा खाण्डवं पाण्डुसूनुः ।”

(Chidambaram record)

3. “पिब्या तत् केरलानां बलमस्त्रिदहलम् ॥” (Chidambaram record.)

4. Kalingattupparani—‘was it not this army that destroyed’ Vizhinna and Salai.’

5. Vikramacholan Ula.

6. The Cholas Vol. II, Part I, p. 21.

were practically enjoying ever since the disappearance of the Ay Kings about 925 A. D.—to his inveterate enemy the Chera King. Certainly not a voluntary gift. And moreover military outposts were established on the boundaries including the one at Kottar. Naturally one is led to conclude from these data that the Cholas suffered heavy loss at the hands of the Chaver army, sometime after their attack on Quilon. Not only 'the Chavers who formed a considerable section of the forces'<sup>1</sup> of the Cheras succeeded in driving out the Cholas from the Chera country, but conquered South Travancore from the Cholas. Kulottunga became alarmed at this and established military outposts in Kottar and other places with a view to preventing the advancing Chavers,<sup>2</sup> and not 'to strike terror into his enemies.' The subsequent history too helps us to this conclusion. The Cholas had to leave Kottar very soon. On the 11th of Avani<sup>3</sup> 295 M. E. (August 1119) the invincible Chavers conquered Kottar and annexed the remaining portions of Nanchinadu to the Chera Empire. The Cholapuram record<sup>4</sup> of 1126 proves beyond all doubt that Nanchinad had passed into the hands of the Cheras by that time.

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1. Studies in Chola History and Administration p. 191. The Pandyas are also said to have had the Chavers in their Army. But this statement seems erroneous. It appears that the Pandyas who lost their kingdom, were staying in the Chera country because of their intimate relationship with the Kulasekharas of Mahodai. The Pandyas, about this period began to use the title Kulasekhara; the Kulasekharas who were of Solar dynasty became of Lunar dynasty like the Pandyas and the Ay Kings. The reason for all these is not clear. Some branches of the Pandya Royal Family permanently settled down in certain parts of Kerala and in course of time became local rulers.

2. The Nilaipadai stationed at Kottar is referred to in his 39th year inscription also. T. A. S. I. p. 246.

3. This record was published by the writer in 'Dharmadesam' Birth Day Special 1946 (Malayalam).

4. T. A. S. IV p. 17.



Before the time of Kulottunga, we have no record about the Chavers of Kerala. The circumstances created by the long Chola War might have provided an incentive to the establishment of the system of Chavers by the Kulasekharas. It is possible that compulsory military training, which was in vogue till Kerala became subject to the British, was first introduced during this war. But it is evident that that did not produce the desired effect because of the overwhelming strength of the Chola army. So in the last stage of the War, possibly after the first wars of Kulottunga, Rama Varma Kulasekbara<sup>1</sup> the founder of the Venad Royal family, and the then sovereign of Kerala organised a huge army of Chavers who succeeded in driving out, first from Quilon,<sup>2</sup> then from South Travancore and lastly

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1. T. A. S. V. 44. The record shows that he was staying in Quilon with four Talis. From the Perunna record of this King (T. A. S. V. 38) we understand he was in Nediatali at Kodungallur for some time. That his palace was burned to ashes and the capital Mahodai ruined, is clear from Chola inscriptions. We do not come across the Kulasekharas at Mahodai after 1102, but we do see them ruling at Quilon. The rulers of Venad, a small principality between Quilon and Trivandrum up to the beginning of the 12th century sided with the Cholas during the war and nothing is known of them afterwards. These circumstances lead to the conclusion that Rama Varma Kulasekhar moved his capital from the ruined city of Mahodai to Quilon, the headquarters of the old Venad Governors. It is probable that the Ramacharita was written by this King to provide inspiration to his Chaver army. The language of the work is similar to that of the inscriptions of the period north of Quilon.

2. In the Quilon record of the King it is said that the King gave expiatory donation to the Temple as he offended the temple authorities. (Aryar means Sabhayaryar i. e. the assembly managing the temple affairs.) Most probably his army entered the Sanketam during his fight with the Cholas.

from Kottar and Kanyakumari the Cholas who were harassing the people of Kerala for about a century. Thus did the Chavers save Kerala from further Chola aggression.<sup>1</sup>

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1. On the data available at present it would not be wrong to make the hypothetical statement that the women army of Kerala, recorded in the accounts of the Portuguese in the early 16th century, (The King always has in his guard four or five hundred women trained from girls to be archers; they are very active.' Description of the East African and Malabar Coasts by Barbosa, Hakluyt Society's Publication, p. 173.) had their origin in the critical days of the Hundred Years' War. This was a turning point in Kerala History. All the records of the period clearly prove that the Patriarchal system was followed in Kerala as in other parts of the Tamil country. Inter-marriages between the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas were common. The language of the west coast had only dialectical difference from that of the East Coast. A gradual change to the matriarchal system is noticed from the 12th century onwards. It is, I believe, an after-effect of the compulsory military service and of the constitution of the Chaver system. I am glad to point out that Mr. K. P. Padmanabha Menon, even in the absence of many materials available to us, had arrived at the conclusion that the matriarchal system was introduced late in Kerala owing to some peculiar circumstances.

## THE GENESIS OF THE MATRIARCHAL SYSTEM IN KERALA

Some writers like MacLenan and Morgan have expressed the view that the human race originally followed the matriarchal system of inheritance and later on with the growth of civilization adopted the patriarchal system.<sup>1</sup> They hold that matriarchy is a stage in the evolution of all human societies. But according to Sir, Henry Main,<sup>2</sup> succession in early society was traced through the sons and the descent through the sister's children came to be adopted in certain countries owing to special reasons of environment. He is also of opinion that the matriarchal system which came to be adopted under certain peculiar circumstances, is of temporary duration and is liable to be changed subsequently. This paper purports to show that the matriarchal system was unknown to Kerala till the 11th century and that it might possibly be an after-effect of the formation of the suicide squads.

An example of how people under special circumstances would discard the Makkaththayam<sup>3</sup> system and embrace Marumakkaththayam is furnished by the punnar family, a branch of the Pandya Dynasty which after its establishment in Kerala continued the former system for a long time until finally it adopted the latter system of inheritance in the 11th century.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the Im-

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1. See 'primitive marriage'

2. Early Law and Custom, p. 202. See also History of human marriage by Westermarck and Evolution of marriage by Laterneau.

3. Malayalam words for patriarchal and matriarchal systems.

4. See Kerala History by K. P. Padmanabha Menon Vol. 11, pp. 86-91.

perial Cheras of the Sangam period were followers of Makkaththayam and the Travancore Royal House which claims its descent from the Cheras is following the Marumakkaththayam system.

Kulasekhara Alwar who ruled over Kerala sometime before the commencement of the Malabar Era as well as the powerful Kulasekhara Perumals who succeeded him on the throne, were followers of Makkattayam. This fact is borne out by the commentary on *Laghubhaskariya*, a work of Sankaranarayana who adorned the court of Sthanu Ravi Varma Kulasekhara of the ninth century.

The transition from Makkaththayam to Marumakkattayam is clearly visible in the *Musaka Vamsa*, a Sanskrit Kavya dealing with the history of the Kolaththunad Royal family. The geneology of the Kolattiris is traced from father to son till the 11th century and then for the last two or three kings through the sister's son<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Kulasekharas and the Kolattiris were following Makkaththayam till about the 10th century. It is very difficult to get direct evidence regarding the law of inheritance of the common man. The records hitherto available mostly refer to kings and chieftains, and no trace of Marumakkaththayam is discernible from them before the 11th century. On the contrary, many of the records prove that Makkaththayam was the prevailing law.

Intermarriages among the royal dynasties of Pandya, Chera and Chola were common during the early centuries of the Malabar Era. If the law of inheritance

1. T. A. S. Vol. 11. pp 87-105 The *Musaka Vamsa* was written by Atula a court poet of Srikantha who ruled Kolam in the 12th century. His elder brother Vallabha led an army to the South with a view to helping the Chera King in his war against the Cholas. From the inscription of the period, it seems that the war referred to must be one of the last wars of Kulottunga I.

in Kerala had been different from that of the others, these marriages would have led to various conflicts. Vanavan Mahadevi, the wife of the Pandya King Parantaka Vira Narayana, was a member of the Chera Dynasty. Her son, Rajasimha, was not heir to any part of the Chera Kingdom, but inherited only the crown of the Pandyas.<sup>1</sup> If the Chera Kings had then followed the Marumakkaththayam system, the result would have been that Rajasimha would have inherited the Chera crown too. Similarly, Arinjaya, son of the Chola King Parantaka I by his Kerala queen, does not inherit the Chera Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The daughters of the sovereigns of Kerala were regarded as members of the royal family during the early centuries of the Malabar Era. Kokizhanadikal, the wife of Parantaka Chola, is mentioned as the daughter of Paluvettarayar.<sup>3</sup> Kizhanadikal, the wife of Vijayaraga, is described in an inscription at Tirunandikkara as the daughter of Kulasekhara Deva. Tribhuvanadevi, the wife of the Pandya King Sri. Vallabhan Maravarman, was the daughter of the Venad King Udaya Marthanda Varma who reigned in the 12th century A. D.

Under the Marumakkaththayam system the male members adopt as surname (Irattaper) the name of the Karanavan (maternal uncle) and the females the mother's name. On the other hand those who follow Makkaththayam use only the name of the father in both cases. The latter practice obtains throughout India except Kerala. Up to the 13th century the practice in Kerala too was not different. The females used as surname only the name of the father. The inscriptions

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1. The Pandyan Kingdom by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri p. 179.

2. The Cholas by K. A. N. Sastri p. 168.

3. Anbil plates of Parantaka II and also Tirunamanallur inscription. Ep. Ind. Vol. VII, p. 133.

of the period do not show a single instance of the use of the mother's name. It may be argued that the surname represents the name of the Karanavan and not of the father. But there is no evidence to substantiate this contention. Women under the Marumakkattayam system use only the mother's name and never the Karanavans name. Besides, it is distinctly stated in certain records that it is the father that is referred to. Murukan Chenti, the wife of Vikramaditya Varaguna who ruled South Travancore during the latter half of the 1st century M. E., is specifically mentioned as daughter of Tenganattu Kizhavan Caththan Murukan.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of women using the father's name as surname continued up to the 13th century A. D. The wife of Sri Vallabhan Kotha is referred to as Adichchan Umayamma.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Iraman Mathevi of Munnunadu<sup>3</sup> was the daughter of Kunran Iraman. The daughters of the Venad kings were always mentioned in the above manner. Manikantan Madhavi<sup>4</sup> Iraman Umayamma<sup>5</sup> and others are well known names in the inscriptions of the 12th and 13th centuries.

The males too made use of the father's and never the Karanavan's name as surname. This was the practice even in the 13th century. There is a lithic record dated 393 M. E. in the Kandiyur Temple at Mavelikkara,<sup>6</sup> to the effect that the temple was renovated by Iraman Kotavarma, the ruler of the Odanad, under orders from Iravi Kerala Varma, the Venad King. Whether the first name in Iraman Kothavarma

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1. The Huzur Office Plate of Vikramaditya Varaguna T. A. S. Vol. I p. 18.

2. Mamballi Plate of Srivallabhan Kotai T. A. S. Vol. IV p. 9

3. Tiruvalla plates T. A. S. Vol. II p. 202.

4. Kilimanur Records T. A. S. Vol. V p. 80.

5. Kadinamkulam Inscription.

6. T. A. S. Vol. I p. 290.

signifies the father's or Karanavan's name is made clear by the Sanskrit portion of the text 'Yaduvarasabho ramajah Kothavarma' which dispels all ambiguity.

Now let us consider the situation as it developed in the Royal House of the Kulasekharas. They were ruling over Kerala till 1100 A. D. with their capital at Mahodayapura which was completely devastated during the Hundred Years' War of the 11th century.<sup>1</sup> Thereupon, the capital was moved to Quilon, the headquarters of the old district called Venad.<sup>2</sup> The Makka-ththayam system of the early Cheras was continued uninterrupted till the reign of Jayasimha the father of Sangramadhira Ravivarma, whose inscriptions are found at Kanchipuram, Srirangam and Tiruvadi. After Jayasimha, there appears to have arisen a dispute for the throne between his sons and nephews. Jayasimha's son Ravivarma, got the upper hand of the situation and ruled triumphantly for a few years. But after that, Jayasimha's nephew Udaya Marthanda Varma Vira Pandya became the king of Venad; and here commenced the system of Marumakkaththayam. Hence the tracing of the ancestry of all later kings from Jayasimha.

The hypothesis that Jayasimha was a Koiltampuran and Umadevi a Princess of Venad would be contrary to the records. The inscriptions of the Sangramadhira clearly state that his father Jayasimha was a powerful king<sup>3</sup> who ruled over Kerala

1. See the paper contributed by Prof. V. Narayana Pillai to the Patna Session of the Indian History Congress.

2. See the preface to 'Beginnings of Travancore History' part I by the present writer.

3. स्वस्तिश्री जयसिंह इत्यभिहित. सोमान्वयोत्तमको  
राजासीदिह केरलेषु विषये नाथो यदुक्षमाभूताम् ।

जातोऽस्माद्दिविर्मभृपतिरुमादेव्या कुमारः शिवाद्  
'देहव्याप्य'शकाब्दवाजि समये देहीव वीरो रसः॥

Udaya Marthanda Varma Vira Pandya succeeded Sangramadhira to the Venad throne in the year 1312 and we have inscriptions of Sangramadhira in the very same year. It is not possible to state at present whether Ravi Varma Sangramadhira died in 1312 or whether during his life time itself the western parts of his Kingdom was wrested from him by his father's nephew Udaya Marthanda Varma Vira Pandya. His claim to the throne of Venad might have been whole-heartedly acclaimed by the people who had by that time embraced the Marumakkathayam system. It is significant that all the later rulers of Venad omit to mention as their ancestor the name of Sangramadhira, great and powerful as he was. They trace their ancestry from Jayasimha for the reason that he was their first Karanavan according to the Marumakkaththayam law, while Ravivarma Sangramadhira was the last king in the Makkaththayam line of succession.

All the accounts of foreign travellers support the view that Marumakkaththayam was not in vogue till the 13th century. None of the early travellers or geographers<sup>1</sup> has left us any record of this strange custom in Kerala, while they have given detailed descriptions of the Kings and the country. If there was any noticeable peculiarity in the law of inheritance at that time, surely that fact would not normally have escaped their notice. The omission by them of any reference points to the conclusion that the law of inheritance was the usual Makkaththayam as everywhere else. The earliest

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1. Solyman ... 851 AD,  
 Albiruni ... 970.  
 Benjamin ... 1166 AD.  
 Al Kazwini... 1270.  
 Marco polo ... 1298 AD.



mention of the Marumakkaththayam system is by Friar Jordanus who came to Quilon in 1324 as a Roman Catholic missionary to recover the heretical Nestorians to the true Roman fold. In his work entitled *Mirabilia Descripta* he gives an interesting account of the country and says: "In this India never do the legitimate sons of the great Kings or princes or barons (refers to the Nayars) inherit the goods of their parents, but only the sons of their sisters."

It would thus be evident from the foregoing that Marumakkaththayam was an innovation which came into existence after the 11th century. A radical change in the system of inheritance of a people, such as that from Makkaththayam to Marumakkaththayam, is not an easy thing. Mr. K. P. Padmanabha Menon believes that it was under special compelling circumstances that the people of Kerala embraced the Marumakkaththayam succession. He was not able to realize what really those special circumstances were. But it is possible for us to infer from the records of the first few centuries of the Malabar Era those special circumstances and causes.

In the 11th century, the Kulasekhara kings were engaged in a life and death struggle to protect Kerala from the invading Cholas whose army far outweighed the defenders in number. It seems that during this long war of hundred years the Kulasekharas instituted the Kalari system of military training whereby even women were trained in the art of warfare.<sup>1</sup> To meet a desperate situation, desperate remedies were resorted to; and

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1. See the paper by the writer in the proceedings of the 10th session of the Indian History Congress.

hus were formed the suicide squads; and the Cholas, were driven out.

The formation of the suicide squads comprising the adult male population of certain communities made it incumbent on the men to cultivate a certain degree of detachment in their marital relation and its consequences. The stringent rules of their new code of martial order permitted no diversion of their interests and activities. The management of the family properties, therefore, came naturally to be vested in the female members. It became necessary for the recruits to the suicide squads who had dedicated their lives at the altar of the country's freedom and decided to spend the best part of their time in the field to forego their rights to property<sup>1</sup>

It would appear from the records of the later period that the suicide squads comprised only Nayars. Foreign travellers make no distinction<sup>2</sup> in their reference between the suicide squads and Nayars. It is but natural that Kshatriyas who were intimately allied and akin to the Nayars<sup>3</sup> followed the social customs, laws and practices of the Nayars. In point of historical fact many of the ruling chiefs were Nayars and this is evidenced by several records. The term Nayar itself

1. Castenheda and Montaigne who wrote their accounts by the middle of the 16th century were inclined to think that the Malabar system was devised to maintain the military habits of the people.

2. Kerala History Vol. I p. 510 and Vol. III p. 230 See also Vol. III pp. 338 - 340.

3. Ma Huan (A. D. 1949) ; 'The Nayars rank with the King' In the words of Mr. Logan they were 'the ruling race' who ought to belong to the Kshtriya caste.

is used to denote a ruler in ancient inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> Some Brahmins like the Ammomans of the Payyannur Gramam also might have joined the suicide army and they too embraced Marumakkaththayam. Izhavas, Ambalavasis and others followed the majority community and adopted the new system to a certain extent. They never followed Marumakkaththayam exclusively like the Kshatriyas and the Nayars.

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1. Tirukkattittanam record T. A. S. Vol. V, p. 175. It may be pointed out that the words Nair, Nayan and Nayattiyar make their appearance in records only after 11th century.

