



E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
www.historyjournal.net
IJH 2024; 6(2): 108-114
Received: 11-06-2024
Accepted: 19-07-2024

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The Kavalappara swaroopam: Interplay of power, culture, and colonialism in Kerala's history

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2024.v6.i2b.299>

Abstract

The Kavalappara Swaroopam was a feudal kingdom in Kerala associated with the Nair community, particularly the Moopil Nairs, known for their martial prowess and political influence in the Malabar region. The Swaroopam was involved in various political alliances and conflicts, especially with both Hindu and Muslim rulers, reflecting the complex and evolving relationships between the Moopil Nairs and the Muslim community, particularly the Mappilas. These relationships were marked by a mix of alliances, conflicts, and cultural exchanges, shaped by political expediency and religious sentiments. The arrival of colonial powers, notably during the rise of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, further complicated these dynamics, with the British exploiting tensions between the communities to maintain control. This abstract encapsulates the intricate historical interplay between the Kavalappara Swaroopam, the Moopil Nairs, and the Muslim community within the broader context of Kerala's history.

Keywords: Kavalappara Swaroopam, origin and early history, Kerala history

Introduction

The Kavalappara Swaroopam, a feudal kingdom in Kerala, stands as a notable example of the complex interplay between regional powers, cultural communities, and colonial interests in South India. Associated with the Nair community, particularly the Moopil Nairs, the Swaroopam was an influential entity in the Malabar region, known for its martial prowess and political acumen. This kingdom's history is marked by a series of alliances and conflicts with both Hindu and Muslim rulers, reflecting a dynamic and multifaceted political landscape.

The Moopil Nairs, recognized for their military capabilities and political influence, played a crucial role in the Swaroopam's affairs. Their interactions with the Muslim community, particularly the Mappilas, were characterized by a complex mix of cooperation and rivalry. This relationship was not static but evolved over time, shaped by shifting political needs, religious sentiments, and cultural exchanges.

The arrival of colonial powers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, notably during the rise of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, further complicated the regional dynamics. The British, adept at exploiting existing tensions, manipulated these relationships to strengthen their foothold in the region. By playing various communities against each other, the colonial powers were able to maintain control and influence, altering the traditional power structures and contributing to the decline of the Kavalappara Swaroopam.

This historical narrative encapsulates the intricate and evolving relationships between the Kavalappara Swaroopam, the Moopil Nairs, and the Muslim community within the broader context of Kerala's history. It illustrates how political expediency, religious affiliations, and colonial interventions shaped the historical and cultural landscape of the region, leaving a lasting impact on its socio-political fabric.

Methodology

The study focuses on the origin and development of the Kavalappara Swaroopam, a feudal kingdom in Kerala, using a descriptive and analytical research design. Data collection includes archaeological records, oral histories, and epigraphic evidence. Literature review and historical accounts are also used to analyze existing studies and texts on the Kavalappara

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Swaroopam, Moopil Nairs, and their interactions with the Muslim community. The collected data is organized chronologically, tracing the Kavalappara Swaroopam's development from its origin to its decline under British rule. Thematic analysis is conducted to identify key themes such as political alliances, conflicts, cultural exchanges, and the impact of colonial intervention. Comparative analysis is conducted to highlight the unique aspects of the Kavalappara Swaroopam's political and cultural evolution. The findings are interpreted within the broader context of Kerala's history, focusing on how the Kavalappara Swaroopam was influenced by regional political dynamics and the historical interplay between the Moopil Nairs and the Muslim community. This provides a nuanced understanding of their relationships and the impact of colonial intervention on the region.

Origins and Early History

Kavalappara Swaroopam was a Hindu Nair feudal city-state situated in Malabar, South India, between the Kalladikkodan hills and the Ponnani-Purang seashore villages. Local Nair leaders, including the Kavalappara Nayar, established it during the late 15th century amid political instability under the Chera dynasty. These leaders capitalised on the weakening authority of the Chera regime, declared their independence, and sought support from the Cochin kingdom to counter the power of the Zamorin of Calicut. This strategic move marked the beginning of Kavalappara Swaroopam's prominent role in regional politics.

Geographical and Political Context

Kavalappara Swaroopam was a Hindu Nair feudal city-state in Malabar, South India. It was one of the several feudal entities during the Chera dynasty, located in the region between the Kalladikkodan hills and the Ponnani-Purang seashore villages. During the late 15th century, Nedunganad, a district under the Chera regime, experienced political instability. The Kavalappara Nayar, along with other Nayars, gained significant power, eventually leading to a declaration of independence and seeking support from Cochin against the Zamorin of Calicut.

Mythological and Medieval Influence

Lineage and Status

The Kavalappara Nairs claimed descent from Karakalamma, the child of the Brahmin saint Vararuchi and a Pulayar woman. This connection linked them with the Kadambur Brahmins and emphasised their historical significance. They were considered independent chieftains from the latter stages of the Chera dynasty until the Zamorin's influence increased in the 18th century.

Political Dynamics

The Kavalapparas, while enjoying relative autonomy, were ultimately subject to the Zamorin's authority. They capitalised on regional unrest and European intervention to negotiate their position, aligning with Travancore against the Zamorin. By 1760, they secured a deal with Travancore, granting them independence from interference but ceding control of pepper production.

Colonial Period and Governance

British Relations: During the British colonial era, the Kavalapparas participated in the Third Anglo-Mysore War

alongside East India Company forces, contributing soldiers and grain. Post-war, they faced disputes between the British and Cochin authorities regarding their territorial control. By 1794, the British East India Company granted them a lease on their lands but eventually took over revenue collection, leaving the Kavalapparas as landowners with diminished political influence.

Cultural and Architectural Legacy

Kavalappara Palace

The palace was a significant site, featuring a Nalukettu (quadrangle) and associated structures like a Shiva temple. Today, it is under the court's management due to family disputes.

Notable Figures and Events

Kavalappara Komban

A revered but stubborn figure in local folklore, known for his strength and bravery. His story is celebrated in the Koodal Manikyam temple of Iringalakkuda.

Appukkuttan Nair

An astrologer and healer reputed for his expertise and service to the Zamorin and other local rulers. His legacy includes a tradition of offering rice to the Naga virgin in the Kavalappara Palace.

Eruppe Shiva Temple

Founded by Kavalappara Moopil Nair, this temple is noted for its unique design and powerful deity. It is associated with local legends and a significant site of worship. The Eruppe Shiva Temple, located near Kavalappara Palace, is a significant and revered site, built by Kavalappara Mooppil Nair. The temple is renowned for its unique architectural style, characterized by round sculptures.

Historical Background and Construction

Site Acquisition

The temple was established on land formerly owned by the Kummini Mana Namboodiris, a prominent landlord in the region. This area, which included a mosque and paddy fields, was acquired by Kavalappara Mooppil Nair, who then repurposed it for the temple. Initially, Nair resided in the forest while the land was prepared for construction.

1. Excavation and Discovery

During the construction phase, a pond was dug on the west side of the site to elevate the sunken ground. During the excavation, a bamboo tree was disturbed, resulting in the appearance of blood, which led to fears of a serpent being harmed. The word "Erappayi" was shouted, signifying the discovery of the blood. Subsequently, the excavators were startled by the sight and one of them, a fugitive, fell ill and died after running from the site.

2. Divine Revelation

The discovery of blood led to concerns that it might be an indication of a Shivalingam (a sacred symbol of Lord Shiva). An astrologer was consulted, who confirmed the presence of a divine Shivalingam, suggesting that the site was sacred. Kavalappara Mooppil Nair decided to address this as an Ashta Mangalya problem, a significant issue in Hindu rituals. To honor the divine revelation, four fences were erected around the area where the blood was found.

Temple Features

Sanctum Sanctorum

The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is under the management of the Kummini Mana Namboodiris, highlighting their ongoing role in its upkeep. Due to the perceived power and energy of the Shiva idol, devotees are only allowed to enter through the back door of the sanctum sanctorum, avoiding direct contact with the idol.

Naming

The temple is named "Erapai" in memory of Mundan Mulaiyan, a member of the local community who was associated with the site during its early history. The Eruppe Shiva Temple stands as a testament to Kavalappara Mooppil Nair's devotion and the rich traditions surrounding its construction and continued veneration.

Nedunganad, during the Cera regime, was a historical district located between the Kalladikkodan hills and the coastal villages of Ponnani-Purang. The chieftain of this district, Nedungethirippad, was considered an ineffective ruler. This led to local leaders like Kavalappara Nayar and his allies - Thrikkateeri Nayar, Vattakkavil, and Veettikkad Nayar - gaining significant power and influence.

To regain control and strengthen his position, Nedungethirippad sought assistance from the Zamorin of Calicut. The Zamorin's support involved a notable event called the "kottichezhunnallathu," which was part of the Eralppad procession. In addition, the Zamorin constructed a palace at Karimpuzha around 1487 CE to assert his influence in the region.

Nedunganad was a region during the Cera regime, an important dynasty in Kerala's history. This district was located strategically between the Kalladikkodan hills and the coastal villages of Ponnani-Purang, which placed it at the intersection of trade routes and local politics.

The Chieftain: Nedungethirippad

The chieftain of Nedunganad, Nedungethirippad, was noted for his ineffective rule. His leadership faced significant challenges from local power centers, particularly from influential Nayar leaders. His lack of effective governance made it difficult for him to maintain control over his territory.

It seems that Nedungethirippad's inability to maintain control created a power shift in the region, leading to the rise of local Nayar leaders who took advantage of the situation. The leaders you've mentioned - Kavalappara Nayar, Thrikkateeri Nayar, Vattakkavil Nayar, and Veettikkad Nayar—appeared to consolidate their influence and control over Nedunganad. This shift would have likely altered the political and social dynamics of the region, impacting everything from local governance to alliances and conflicts. Seeking Help from the Zamorin

To address the growing power of the Nayars and restore his position, Nedungethirippad appealed for assistance from the Zamorin of Calicut. The Zamorin, a powerful ruler in the region, had a vested interest in maintaining influence over Nedunganad, both for strategic and economic reasons.

Kottichezhunnallathu and the Eralppad

In response to Nedungethirippad's plea, the Zamorin organized a significant event known as kottichezhunnallathu. This event was part of the Eralppad procession, a traditional ritual that marked the Zamorin's support and intervention in regional politics. The procession

was a display of power and ceremonial significance, aimed at reinforcing the Zamorin's influence and assisting Nedungethirippad.

Construction of the Palace at Karimpuzha

In addition to the ceremonial support, the Zamorin built a palace at Karimpuzha around 1487 CE. This palace served as a strategic and symbolic gesture of control over the region. It helped solidify the Zamorin's presence and influence in Nedunganad and underscored the importance of the district in the broader context of regional politics. The intervention of the Zamorin and the construction of the palace marked a significant shift in the political landscape of Nedunganad. It demonstrated the complexities of local power dynamics and the role of external rulers in shaping regional governance during this period.

When the Zamorin's procession reached Karimpuzha, the three Nayar chiefs of Nedunganad, came and received him. Kavalappara refused to attend the meeting of the Eralppad at Karimpuzha. He declared independence and asked the help of Cochin. He was so fortunate, because his land was situated on the banks of River Nila, adjacent to the boundary of the King of Cochin.

The Moopil Nairs, a prominent family in the Malabar region, have a rich tapestry of mythology and history that blends legend with historical realities. Here's an elaboration on their background:

Mythological claims

The Moopil Nairs assert their descent from Karakalamma, who, according to local legend, was a child of the Brahmin saint Vararuchi and a Pulayar woman. This narrative links them to Vararuchi, a revered figure in South Indian folklore, and signifies a mix of Brahminical and indigenous heritage. Through this connection, they also claim kinship with the Kadambur Brahmins, another community that acknowledges a shared ancient heritage through various rituals.

Historical Context

The Kavalappara Nairs have historically claimed to be independent chieftains from the later stages of the Cera dynasty until the arrival of the Zamorin of Calicut in 1748. This claim, however, is contested by historians. K. K. N. Kurup, a noted historian of the Malabar region, argues that their prominence during this period is overstated. The detailed historical records of the time do not mention the Kavalappara Nairs as significant independent rulers. Instead, Kurup suggests they were more accurately described as "dependent landed aristocracy."

Role and Status

The Kavalappara Nairs served as naduvazhi under the raja of Palghat. As naduvazhis, they were local governors or feudatory rulers who managed their territories on behalf of the raja. While they had certain political powers and responsibilities, they were ultimately subservient to the raja of Palghat. Their role was hereditary, passing down through family lines, and involved managing local affairs while adhering to the authority of the Palghat ruler.

The Arrival of the Zamorin

The arrival of the Zamorin of Calicut in 1748 marked a significant shift in the region's power dynamics. The

Zamorin's influence extended over various territories, including those previously controlled by local chieftains like the Kavalappara Nairs. This transition underscored the changing political landscape and the diminishing autonomy of the local aristocracy in the face of more centralized power.

The Moopil Nairs' claim to ancient and independent lineage is intertwined with mythological and historical narratives. While their storied descent and role as chieftains are celebrated in local lore, historical evidence suggests that they were more accurately positioned as local aristocrats serving under the greater authority of the Palghat raja and, later, the Zamorin of Calicut. Their history reflects the complexities of regional power structures and the evolving nature of political authority in medieval Kerala.

During the tumultuous period marked by frequent clashes between the Zamorin of Calicut and the king of Cochin, coinciding with the arrival of European powers in the region, the Kavalappara Nairs adeptly maneuvered through the instability to their advantage.

Strategic Alliances and Independence Exploiting Unrest

The Kavalappara Nairs capitalized on the political instability caused by the ongoing conflicts between the Zamorin and the Cochin raja. Their strategic positioning allowed them to form alliances with neighboring forces, particularly those from the kingdom of Travancore.

Alliance with Travancore

By around 1760, the Kavalappara Nairs had successfully allied with Travancore forces and negotiated a significant deal. This agreement granted them independence from interference by both the Zamorin and the raja of Cochin. In exchange for this autonomy, the Kavalappara Nairs ceded a monopoly on the pepper cultivation from their lands to the Travancore kingdom.

Construction of the Kottaram Symbol of Independence

Unhindered by the previous objections from the Zamorin and the Cochin raja, the Kavalappara Nairs constructed a kottaram (residence). This structure was a distinct form of palace commonly used by the royal family of Travancore, contrasting with the traditional kovilakam palaces of the Malabar rulers. The kottaram served as a tangible symbol of their newfound independence and their close ties with Travancore.

Relations with Travancore

Close Ties: The relationship between the Kavalappara Nairs and the royal house of Travancore remained strong. When the Mysorean forces occupied Malabar, displacing the Kavalappara Nairs from their properties, they sought refuge in Travancore. This move reinforced the ongoing support and protection they received from the Travancore royal family.

The Kavalappara Nairs skillfully navigated the political chaos of the 18th century by leveraging alliances and strategic agreements. Their alliance with Travancore not only secured their autonomy but also led to the construction of a kottaram as a symbol of their independence. Their continued close relationship with Travancore provided them with protection and support during subsequent conflicts,

such as the Mysorean occupation. This period highlights the dynamic interplay of regional politics and the impact of strategic alliances in shaping the fortunes of local leaders.

During the Third Anglo-Mysore War, the Kavalappara Nairs played a significant role by aligning with Kesava Pillai and the forces of the East India Company (EIC). They contributed soldiers and grain to the war effort. In recognition of their support, Kesava Pillai, acting for the Bombay Presidency and in his capacity as the Diwan of Travancore, reinstated the Kavalappara Nairs to their position as chieftains.

Conflict and Settlement Dispute with Cochin

The reinstatement of the Kavalappara Nairs by Pillai created a conflict with an existing agreement between the king of Cochin and the Madras Presidency. According to this arrangement, the king of Cochin was supposed to have control over the Kavalappara territories. This led to a dispute over the rightful authority and control of these lands.

Compromise Arrangement

In 1792, a Joint Commission established by the EIC in the Bombay Presidency intervened. They granted the Kavalappara chieftain a one-year reinstatement in a subordinate role, covering Kavalappara and surrounding areas like Edatara, Kongad, and Mannur. This decision was contested by the king of Cochin, who argued that the Kavalappars were his acknowledged dependents and paid tribute to him. Despite this challenge, the arrangement continued with some financial adjustments made in 1793.

Changes in Land Tenure and Revenue Collection Janmi System

The traditional land ownership system in Malabar, known as the janmi system, led to a concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few families. The EIC decided to modify this system for revenue collection purposes. Under the new system, janmis, like the Kavalappara Nairs, were granted leases on land and were responsible for collecting revenue based on agricultural produce.

Sub-leasing and Tenure

Janmis sublet their lands to kanakkarans, who had some security of tenure, and these kanakkarans could further sublet to Verumpattakkars, who were tenants-at-will. This system of land tenure provided a structured approach to revenue collection and land management.

Transition of Power Quinquennial Lease

In 1794, the EIC granted the Kavalappara family a quinquennial lease on their lands. However, the Kavalappara Nairs were disbarred from certain feudal privileges, including collecting death taxes from the Mappilas and some festival offerings.

Loss of Revenue Collection

By 1796, the EIC took over all revenue collection responsibilities directly. Despite this, they returned a portion of the collected funds through the system of Malikhana, acknowledging the loyalty of ruling families like the Kavalappara Nairs.

Arrears and Reduced Influence

The Kavalappara chieftain, like many of his peers, had accumulated significant arrears in revenue payments. As a result of the EIC's direct control over revenue collection, the Kavalappara Nairs lost their political influence and effectively became landed aristocrats without substantial power.

Retention of Feudal Rights

Despite losing their administrative and revenue collection roles, the Kavalappara family retained some feudal rights, such as control over certain temples. However, by the end of the 19th century, their estates were administered by the Court of Wards, remaining under its control until 1910.

The Kavalappara Nairs' strategic alliance with the EIC during the Third Anglo-Mysore War temporarily restored their position and autonomy. However, subsequent administrative changes and revenue reforms by the EIC led to their loss of political influence. Despite retaining some traditional rights, their role transitioned from active regional rulers to more symbolic landed aristocrats, with their estates managed by external authorities until the early 20th century. Kavalappara, now part of Malappuram district in Kerala, has a rich historical and agricultural background. The name Kavalappara may stem from kavilippara, meaning "halfed bunch of rocks," reflecting the region's rocky terrain, or from Kavalappara Nair, denoting local chieftains. The term Eruppe, written as ERUPPE in English, means "red-soiled area," indicative of the region's distinctive soil. Geographically, Kavalappara is located on the northern bank of the Nila River in Valluvanad taluk, bounded by Kulapulli to the north, Koonathara and Trangali to the east and south, and Karakkad to the west. Historically, the area was known for its diverse agricultural practices, including paddy, sesame, grapefruit, coconut, and jackfruit cultivation. According to the British census of 1891, the Karakkad area had significant livestock, including 676 bulls and cattle, 517 cows, 16 buffaloes, 264 calves, and 265 sheep. The presence of 12 bullock carts, 320 plowshares, and 5 oil bags underscores the region's agrarian nature. With a total land area of 736 acres (79 cents), Kavalappara and its adjacent regions like Thrangali and Karakkad were central to the local economy, reflecting a deep-rooted agricultural tradition.

Kavalappara Swaroopam was a notable Hindu Nair feudal city-state in Malabar, South India. The Kavalappara Nairs, as vassals of the Zamorins of Calicut, governed various regions including Ottappalam, Chittur, and Palakkad. At the height of its power, the Kavalappara kingdom ruled over approximately 96 villages, stretching from Muttungal to Thottungal and from the Bharathappuzha River to Mandakkottukurasi near Shoranur. The ruler of Kavalappara Swaroopam, known as Kavalappara Moopil Nair, had his headquarters at the Kavalappara Palace. Like other chiefs of South Malabar, the Kavalappara ruler was a subject of the Zamorin and participated in the Zamorin's campaigns against the Cochin kingdom. The junior members of the royal family were referred to as Unni Elaya Nair, while the female members were called Nethiyar. A major highlight of Kavalappara's cultural life was the grand "pooram festival", held at the Arayankavu Temple in Shoranur, which was owned by the Kavalappara Swaroopam and dedicated to their family deity.

Kavalappara Palace was the historic seat of the oldest royal

family of Valluvanad. Located near Shornur Railway Station, the palace complex spans approximately 10 acres and includes a Malika (the main residential area), a Nalukettu (a traditional quadrangle structure), and a Shiva temple. The grounds feature a pond and a snake barn adjacent to the quadrangle. Currently, the Kavalappara Palace is managed by the court and receiver due to ongoing family disputes.

The tomb at Kavalappara Palace was a significant feature of the royal complex. Measuring more than 8 feet in depth and about 6 feet in height, it had a door designed as a two-square cubicle that was flush with the floor. This tomb was used as a method of execution by the Kavalappara Mooppil Nair, who held the authority to administer severe punishments.

Execution Practices

Punishment for Minor Crimes

For offenses such as theft, robbery, encroachment, and verbal abuse, the standard punishment was whipping.

Severe Crimes

For more grave offenses like rape, murder, and treason, the punishment was more extreme. The guilty were sentenced to be thrown alive into the prepared tomb. Before being sealed inside, their wounds from whipping were treated with salt and chili powder to exacerbate their suffering. This method of execution was both a deterrent and a grim testament to the authority of the Kavalappara ruler. This practice illustrates the harsh and often brutal justice system that was employed to maintain control and discipline within the realm.

Kavalappara Komban was a renowned and formidable elephant known for his impressive physical attributes and strong personality. Standing about 350 cm tall with a distinctive appearance including an opened forehead, a folded trunk placed beneath, large horns, and a robust body Kavalappara Komban was a symbol of strength and bravery.

Historical Significance

Admiration by Shaktan Thambran

Kavalappara Komban was highly esteemed, even by Shaktan Thambran, the founder of the Thrissur Pooram festival. Thambran admired the elephant's brilliance and strength, insisting that Kavalappara Komban should be honored with a sanctorum (sacred canopy) during processions.

Stubborn Nature

Known for his stubbornness, Kavalappara Komban was notorious for his uncompromising nature. If his demands were not met, he would react aggressively, including picking up and overturning any elephant with a sanctorum that was placed in his path.

Historical Monument

A notable historical artifact associated with Kavalappara Komban is a chain weighing half a ton, displayed at the Koodal Manikyam Temple in Iringalakkuda. This chain, encircling a pillar, was specifically made for Kavalappara Komban and serves as a monument to his legacy.

Conflict and Demise

Conflict with the King of Kochi

Kavalappara Komban's defiance led to conflict with the

local authorities. He insulted the king's elephant during an event at the Thiruvanchikulam Temple near Kodungallur, which angered the king of Kochi.

Order for Execution

As a result of this insult, the king ordered the British police to shoot Kavalappara Komban. The elephant met his end on Maha Shivaratri, February 24, 1924.

Kavalappara Komban's story is a vivid example of the interplay between tradition, authority, and animal majesty in the historical context of South India. His legacy continues to be remembered through the artifacts and stories that honor his role and impact in the region.

In the 17th century, Appukkuttan Nair was a renowned astrologer and poison doctor celebrated for his expertise in treatment and scholarship. His reputation earned him the favor of both the Zamorin of Calicut and the King of Cochin, who bestowed gifts upon him in recognition of his skill.

Notable Incidents

The Serpent Incident

A lord from Thripunithura Kovil, having encountered a fearsome serpent, was directed to the Kavalappara Palace by the King of Cochin. Appukkuttan Nair, known for his rituals and prayers, closed his eyes and prayed intensely. After about an hour, he opened his eyes to find a snake calmly beside him. It was believed that Nair was blessed by deities such as Dhanvantari and Naga Kanyak, akin to revered figures like Aryan Kavilamma and Antu Thevar.

The Zamorin's Stomach Ailment

When the Zamorin of Calicut suffered from persistent stomach pain, despite the efforts of many doctors, the astrologer Trivikraman Namboodiripad suggested consulting Appukkuttan Nair. Although Nair was known for his traveling and treatment practices, he initially hesitated, claiming he was fasting. However, he agreed to visit after a week.

Upon his arrival, Nair conducted a ritual and, guided by his deity, Naga Kanyaka, he discovered a remedy. He prepared a special pill from herbs, advised the Zamorin to ingest it, and performed prayers involving 101 loaves of bread, which were distributed as offerings to Naga Kanyaka. After three days of treatment at Kovil, the Zamorin experienced immediate relief from his long-standing pain.

Legacy

Recognition and Rituals

In gratitude, the Zamorin awarded Appukkuttan Nair a wallet of gold coins. Nair's treatment became legendary, and a tradition was established at Kavalappara. On the first day of the Malayalam month of Singam, rice bread was offered to the Naga virgin in the palace, and this practice continued for fifty years following his death. This ritual not only honored Nair's legacy but also became a part of the local cultural and religious observances.

Appukkuttan Nair's story reflects his significant contributions to both medicine and tradition in the region, demonstrating his revered status and the lasting impact of his healing practices.

Summery

The Kavalappara Swaroopam was a prominent Hindu Nair

feudal city-state in Malabar, South India, strategically located between the Kalladikkodan hills and the Ponnani-Purang seashore villages. Emerging from the political instability of the late 15th century during the Chera dynasty, the Kavalappara Nairs asserted their independence and sought support from Cochin against the Zamorin of Calicut. Claiming descent from the Brahmin saint Vararuchi through the mythical Karakalamma, they enjoyed relative autonomy while remaining under the Zamorin's overarching authority. Their alliance with Travancore in 1760 marked a brief period of independence, although they had to cede control of pepper production. During the colonial era, the Kavalappara Nairs' support for the East India Company during the Third Anglo-Mysore War led to their reinstatement as chieftains, but disputes with Cochin and the British altered their control and diminished their influence. By 1794, they faced a quinquennial lease arrangement with the East India Company, and by 1796, their political significance had waned. Despite this decline, their cultural and architectural legacy endured, notably through the Kavalappara Palace with its Nalukettu and Shiva temple, and the Eruppe Shiva Temple, famed for its unique architecture and divine revelations. Notable figures like Kavalappara Komban, a revered elephant executed for insulting the Kochi king's elephant, and Appukkuttan Nair, a celebrated astrologer and healer, left lasting impacts on local tradition and medicine. Ultimately, the Kavalappara Nairs' strategic maneuvers and shifting alliances transitioned them into symbolic landed aristocrats by the early 20th century.

Conclusions

- Emergence of Kavalappara Nairs during late 15th century political upheaval.
- Strategic alliances with Cochin kingdom to resist Zamorin's power.
- Claim of descent from Karakalamma, a figure with Brahminical and indigenous roots.
- Balance of autonomy maintained by aligning with regional powers to counter Zamorin's influence.
- Autonomy waned as British East India Company expanded influence in Kerala
- By 1796, Kavalappara Nairs were reduced to landowners under British colonial administration.
- Kavalappara Palace, Eruppe Shiva Temple, and local folklore heroes reflect the region's rich cultural heritage.
- Economic history influenced by fertile red soil and strategic location along the Nila River
- Agricultural practices, especially pepper production, were integral to the region's economic standing and political negotiations.

Implication of further studies

- A detailed analysis of the Kavalappara Nairs' political strategies during the late 15th century, focusing on their alliances with the Cochin kingdom to resist the Zamorin's expansion. This could explore the nature of these alliances and their impact on regional power dynamics.
- A study on how British colonial policies affected the autonomy and socio-political status of the Kavalappara Nairs. This could include an examination of landownership transitions and the decline of their

influence by 1796.

- An exploration of the Kavalappara Palace, Eruppe Shiva Temple, and associated folklore. This could include a study on the architectural styles, religious practices, and local legends that reflect the cultural identity of the region.
- A deeper investigation into the figure of Karakalamma, exploring her significance in local traditions and the dual influence of Brahminical and indigenous elements in the cultural evolution of the Kavalappara Nairs.
- A study focused on the agricultural practices, particularly pepper cultivation, and their influence on the region's economic standing. This could also examine how these practices were linked to political negotiations and regional stability.
- Research on the economic impact of the Nila River on the Kavalappara region, particularly how the fertile red soil contributed to agricultural productivity and trade.
- An investigation into how the geographic and environmental features, such as the Nila River and the fertile red soil, shaped the economic and social development of the Kavalappara region over centuries.
- A sociocultural study on how the Kavalappara Nairs balanced Brahminical traditions with indigenous practices, and how this blend influenced their identity and governance.

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