

Criminality and Legitimization in Seawaters: A Study on the Pirates of Malabar during the Age of European Commercial Expansion (1500-1800)¹.

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ABSTRACT:The maritime piracy included a wide variety of associated criminal activities including attack and confiscation of vessels and merchandise, imprisonment or torturing of merchants and rulers in sea-space in return for ransom money, attack and raiding of coastal trading centers and villages, creation of fear and terror in chief channels of navigation and attacking commercial competitors as a strategy to weaken the trading ability and the wealth-mobilizing ability of their rivals. All this applied to coastal south west India during the period under study. The merchant chiefs of Cannanore like Mamale Marakkar and later under Poca Amame (Pokar Ahamad) and Pocarallee (Pokar Ali) were some of the better known protagonists that the Portuguese had to deal with. But the Malabar corsairs had their corresponding English and Sicilian corsairs in the Mediterranean.

KEY-WORDS: India, Malabar, Cannanore, piracy, corsairs.

RESUMO: A pirataria no mar incluía variedade de atividades criminosas, tais como ataques e apreendimento de barcos e mercadoria, prisão e tortura de mercadores e governantes em troca de resgate, assaltos às zonas habitacionais e centros comerciais no litoral, rompimento das principais linhas de navegação e comércio dos rivais. Tudo isto se aplicava no sudoeste da península indiana durante o período aqui analisado. Os grandes senhores de comércio de Cannanore, tais como Mamale Marakkar e mais tarde Pokar Ahamad e Pokar Ali, eram os protagonistas mais conhecidos destas atividades que desafiaram os Portugueses. Mas os corsários do Malabar não eram exceções. Os corsários ingleses e sicilianos no Mediterrâneo faziam igual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Índia, Malabar, Cannanore, pirataria, corsários.

1 This is the revised version of an earlier paper presented in the Panel on *Piracy in Indian Ocean* in the *Second European Congress of World and Global History*, held at Dresden University, Germany, 3rd - 5th July, 2008. I thank very specially Prof. Dietmar Rothermund, Sebastian Prange, Patricia Risso and Giancarlo Casale for their insightful comments and interventions.

Introduction

Pirates, a term deriving from the Latin word *pirata* and meaning ‘attempt’ or ‘experience’ denoted principally the social segments trying ‘luck on the sea’ and represented different categories of people linked with various aspects of criminality committed in maritime space. With robbery at sea or on the shore as the central aspect, maritime piracy included a wide variety of associated criminal activities including attack and confiscation of vessels and merchandise, imprisonment or torturing of merchants and rulers in sea-space in return for ransom money, attack and raiding of coastal trading centers and villages, creation of fear and terror in chief channels of navigation and even attacking of the navigational lines of their commercial competitors as a strategy to weaken the trading ability and the wealth-mobilizing ability of their rivals. Very often in the context of coastal south west India the category of pirates comprised various segments of people who combined different aspects and strands of their trade with elements of corsairing, or guerrilla sea-fighting or privateering.²

Piratical attacks were common and frequent in zones of seas and shores where maritime trade was carried out with intensity and high frequency, but remained relatively outside the control of a strong legitimate political authority. Thus during the early centuries of Christian era, when trade was carried out in an intensified way in Roman empire and in its neighbouring economic zones, there was increasing piratical attacks on vessels plying in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.³ While the Cilician pirates went to the extent of capturing Julius Caesar on his voyage across Aegean Sea in 75 B.C. and holding him as a prisoner in the Dodecanese islet of Pharmacusa demanding twenty talents of gold as ransom, on the west coast of India, the pirates of Konkan coast posed severe threats to the Roman vessels conducting trade with Lymrike and Ariake. Ptolemy writing in second century AD refers to the region located between Ariake (Ariavartam) and Lymrike (Malabar) as region infested by pirates, whose threat was experienced from Mandagora till Tyndis (Ponnani).⁴ However Pliny says that the pirates operated as far south as Muziris (present day Cranganore of

2 For details on the different perceptions about corsairs and pirates of this period see M.N.Pearson, *Coastal Western India: Studies from the Portuguese Records*, New Delhi, 1981, pp.18-40; Luis Filipe Thomaz, “Portuguese Control on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal A Comparative Study”, in Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (ed.), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal*, Delhi, 1999 ; O.K.Nambiar, *The Kunjalis, Admirals of Calicut*, Delhi, 1963, pp.14-6; John Biddulph, *The Pirates of Malabar and an Englishwoman in India two Hundred Years Ago*, London, 1907 (republished by AES, New Delhi, 1995); Ana Maria P.Ferreira, *O essencial sobre o Corso e a Pirataria*, Lisboa, 1985.

3 The island of Lemnos was a haven for Thracian pirates who resisted Greek influence in classical antiquity. The Anatolian coast was infested by pirates who used to plunder the vessels conducting trade with the various economic zones of the Roman empire.

4 Ptolemy, *Geografia*, 7.1.7.

Kerala in south India),⁵ evidently suggesting the role of Malabar corsairs in the entire piratical operations along the coastal western India since early antiquity.

Later when Roman trade declined, the pirates did not disappear from the map of coastal south west India, as the expanding Sassanid Persian empire had already begun to attract a major chunk of India's maritime trade from mid-third century onwards. With the intensification of maritime trade of south West India with Sassanid Persia, sea pirates trying their luck on the sea began to appear in large numbers in the navigational channels to Persian Gulf, necessitating the Sassanid rulers to intervene in the matter urgently. Consequently, some time before 415 A.D, as the eleventh century chronicle of Seert mentions, a Christian Catholicos, a certain Ahai, was deputed by the Sassanid ruler Yasdigird I (399-421) to investigate the problem of piratical attacks on the ships returning from India and Ceylon to Persian Gulf. ⁶ It seems that the choice of the Church dignitary for the purpose of containing sea-piracy must have been made because of his ability to mobilize the support of Christian mercantile settlers of the west coast of India for countering the attacks of the pirates.⁷ By the end of thirteenth century Marco Polo had seen Malabari pirates who used to travel in large numbers along with their family members attacking and plundering merchant vessels as far as the coast of Gujarat.⁸ During the medieval period Ezhimala or Mount Eli near Cannanore was said to have been the haven for the Malabari pirates for a very long period of time.

However the geographical discoveries and the consequent intensification of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the entry of a large number of people, particularly from the coastal villages of Kerala, into the maritime space of Indian Ocean as sea pirates. While some of them seem to have been the descendants of the traditional pirate families, a good many of them were traditional merchants, who were displaced from the commercial world due to the monopolistic trading policies maintained by the Portuguese and the early European commercial companies. The displaced traditional merchants were either compelled to become corsairs or were so labeled and categorized by the European commercial powers in their attempts to legitimize their attempts to eliminate them from the world of commerce. However much greater was the number of people who turned out

5 Pliny, 6.103-5.

6 Addai Scher, *La Chronique de Seert in Patrologia Orientalis*, V, pp.324-6; B.E.Colles, "Persian Merchants and Missionaries in Medieval Malaya", pp.10-47, especially p.18; D. Whitehouse and A.Williamson, "Sassanian Maritime Trade", in *Iran*, 11, 1973, pp.29-47.

7 Pius Malekandathil, "The Sassanids and the Maritime Trade of India during the Early Medieval Period" *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Amritsar, 2003, pp. 156-173; For more details see Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, New Delhi, 2010, pp.2-4.

8 Marco Polo, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdom and the Marvels of the East*, edited by Henry Yule, vol.I, London, 1903.

to be pirates in their attempts to trying their luck on the sea against the backdrop of intensified maritime trade carried out by European powers. Though a good number of these pirates disappeared from the annals of history with their individual or collective defeats, a few of them made immense fortunes out of corsair activities, which they eventually translated into political assets, legitimately ensuring for them acceptability in the mainstream world order.

The central purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of piracy and different aspects of criminality that appeared in the coastal waters of south West India during the age of European commercial expansion and also to see the different mechanisms and devices by which some of these pirates secured legitimacy and sanction for their upward mobility in social, economic and political ladder. This is further analyzed by examining the nature and content of piratical activities of this period both as perceived by the Europeans and by the locals and also by looking into the extent of political ambitions that the leading corsairs were able to materialize for the purpose of ensuring justifiable entry into a legitimate world order.

The Portuguese Perception of Piracy and Criminality

The Portuguese who secured for themselves the supremacy and lordship over Indian Ocean initially because of the allocation of the eastern space of the world to the Portuguese by Pope in 1493 (by the treaty of Tordesillas)⁹ and later confirmed by way of the discovery of direct sea-route to India, constructed a certain set of norms and precepts by which the notions of legality and criminality were re-defined and re-drawn in coastal south west India and in other zones of Indian Ocean that were brought under their control. They maintained that Pope being the vicar of Christ was the legitimate authority on earth to divide and allocate world to the political powers (including the maritime space of Indian Ocean) and that the East and its sea waters conferred upon them by the Popes through papal Bulls and the treaty of Tordesillas, were exclusively under their jurisdiction and any activity carried out against their political and economic hold in the East was looked upon as criminality. The Portuguese viewed the waters of Indian Ocean as *mare clausum*, where only the Portuguese were to have the exclusive right to navigation, while it was to remain closed for others.¹⁰ No one was

9 Luis Adão da Fonseca and Jose Manuel Ruiz Asenzio(ed.), *Corpus Documental del Tratado de Tordesillas*, Valladolid, 1995, doc.75, 76, 77 and 99, pp.119-30; 137-9.

10 For details see C.H.Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East Indies*, Oxford, 1967; Cornelius van Vollenhoven, *Three Stages in the Evolution of International Law*, The Hague, 1919; Arthur Nussbaum, *A Concise History of the Law of Nations*, 2nd ed., New York, 1947; K.S.Mathew, "Portuguese Trade with India and the theory of Royal Monopoly in the Sixteenth Century", in *The Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Waltair, 1979, pp.389-96; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy*

allowed to ply in the maritime space of Indian Ocean without the Portuguese written permission given in the form of licences or *cartazes*.¹¹

As per the conceptualizations of *mare clausum*, legality meant only those activities and schemes that ultimately used to subserve the political and commercial interests of the Portuguese and anything that stood against the designs of the Portuguese was branded as illegal and criminal deed. Accordingly legal trade meant commerce carried out with the permission and licences or *cartazes* from the Portuguese, while any one conducting trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean without Portuguese permission was called a smuggler and any one challenging the supremacy of the Portuguese over Indian Ocean or the use of force to resist Portuguese intervention in pursuing their trading activities fetched for them the label of pirates and corsairs. Thus the Portuguese perception of Indian Ocean as *mare clausum* and their claims of navigational and commercial monopoly in this maritime space were highly instrumental in labelling a wide variety of sea-related activities of the local coastal people within the category of criminality and piracy. However this should not make one underestimate the dimensions of brutal and violent corsair activities that were equally rampant along the south west coast of India during this period.

Any venture or fight against the monopolistic commercial policies of the Portuguese, that left little outlet for the legitimate trade of the indigenous merchants was often categorized as “*cossarios*” or having engaged in “*cossairo*” activity, as in the case of Pate Marakkar,¹² Kunjali Marakkar¹³ and Ale Abraem.¹⁴ Some historians view these people who fought against the Portuguese as patriots and nationalists,¹⁵ while some others like M.N. Pearson regard them as something between pirate and privateer. He rightly points out that some of them were pirates, while some others were corsairs, or guerrilla warriors and many others were inoffensive traders.¹⁶ However the Portuguese, who registered their authority over the waters of Indian Ocean through the devi-

and Government: 1572-1651, New York, 1993.

- 11 Luis Filipe Thomaz, “Portuguese Control on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal-A Comparative Study”, in Om Prakash and Denys Lombard(ed.), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal*, Delhi, 1999; Luis Filipe Thomaz, “Precedents and Parallels of the Portuguese Cartaz System”, in Pius Malekandathil and Jamal Mohammed(ed.), *The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and European Bridgeheads*, Fundação Oriente, Lisboa/Tellicherry, 2001, pp.67-85.
- 12 João de Barros, *Decadas da Asia*, Lisboa, 1945, IV-viii-12.
- 13 Diogo do Couto, *Decadas da Asia dos feitos que os Portuguezes fizeram na Conquista e Descobrimto das Terras e Mares do Oriente*, Lisboa, 1975, V,-ii-4.
- 14 Ibid. For more details on the various aspects of fight between the two see Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, tom.III, Porto, 1975, pp.818-37; tom.IV, pp.77-84; Fernão Lopes Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, Coimbra, 1924, VIII, pp.173-6.
- 15 O.K.Nambiar, *The Kunjalis: Admirals of Calicut*, Delhi, 1963.
- 16 M.N.Pearson, *Coastal Western India*, New Delhi, pp.25-6.

ces of regular coastal patrolling and *cartaz* system, viewed everybody who challenged their navigational lines as corsair.¹⁷

Initially the Portuguese noticed criminal elements only among the *paradesi* al-Karmi Muslim merchants, who used to transship commodities to the eastern Mediterranean through Red-Sea route, challenging the commercial and maritime supremacy of the Portuguese and undermining the monopoly claims of the Portuguese crown.¹⁸ However, though these *paradesi* al-Karimi merchants were their commercial competitors and often referred to as “enemies of faith”, they were not described as corsairs or pirates. That they were not categorized as corsairs or pirates is suggestive of the fact that the Portuguese still considered them as traders and merchants, in spite of frequent attacks on them as enemies. However the local Muslim traders like the Makkars and the Mappilas were initially looked upon as commercial collaborators and supporters of the Portuguese, as they who used to procure food materials needed for their settlements and cargo for their Lisbon-bound vessels.¹⁹

From Traders to Corsairs

The Portuguese experienced increasing threat of piratical attacks from the second and third decades of the sixteenth century. It started initially with the entry of the

17 Though *cartaz* system was introduced from 1502 onwards, the traders who collaborated with the Portuguese initially were conceded greater amount of freedom in the movement of commodities within Asia, as a mechanism to ensure their co-operation. However, only after 1509 with the larger centralized imperial designs chalked out by Afonso Albuquerque that the coastal patrolling and rigorous checking of *cartaz* seem to have become frequent. Consequently all the native ships had to take *cartazes* which contained such details as the name of the vessel and of the captain, the nature of the cargo, its origin and destination as well as the name of the authority issuing the *cartaz*. For details see Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India:1500-1663* (A Volume in the South Asian Study Series of Heidelberg University, Germany), Delhi, 2001, pp.125-126;220-221; For more details on *cartaz* see Luis Filipe Thomaz, “Portuguese Control on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal: A Comparative Study”, in Om Prakash and Denys Lombard(ed.), *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal*, Delhi, 1999. For a much nuanced discussion on piracy during the age of Portuguese commercial expansion see Luis de Albuquerque, “Casos da expansão portuguesa”, in *Estudos de Historia*, vol.V, Coimbra, 1977, pp.278-95.

18 Pius Malekandathil, “Merchants, Markets and Commodities: Some Aspects of Portuguese Commerce with Malabar”, in Pius Malekandathil and Jamal Mohammed(ed.), *The Portuguese, Indian Ocean and European Bridgeheads: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. K.S.Mathew*, Fundação Oriente, Lisbon/MESHAR, Tellicherry, 2001, pp. 242-3; For details on *al-Karimis* see Walter J. Fischel, “The Spice Trade in Mamluk Egypt”, in the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol.I, Leiden, 1958; Eliyahu Ashtor, “The Venetian Supremacy in Levantine Trade: Monopoly of Pre-colonialism”, in *Journal of European Economic History*, vol.III, Rome, 1974; Pius Malekandathil, “From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs: The Role of Muslim Merchants in Portuguese Maritime Trade of the Portuguese” in *Portuguese Studies Review*(Canada), 12(1), 2004,pp. 77-80.

19 *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, tom.IV,Lisboa, 1964,p.132; R.A. de Bulhão Pato(ed.), *Cartas, de Afonso de Albuquerque seguidas de documentos que as elucidam*,tom.I, Lisboa, 1884, p.320;tom.II, p.361;tom.V,pp.503-504; Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, tom.I, pp. 430 - 431.

Portuguese for increasing movement of commodities through the main channels of navigation along the coast of south west India both for Asian trade as well as for Indo-European commerce. Many who wanted to draw easy wealth out of these navigational lines and out of the initial phase of Portuguese sea-borne trade began to resort to corsair activities in a significant degree during this period.²⁰ Eventually many of the local Muslim traders including the Marakkars and the Mappilas, on getting their relationship with the Portuguese strained by 1520, also started resorting to a package in which corsair activities formed an important component of their programmes of trade. In fact the commercial relationship of the Marakkar traders with the Portuguese had strained during the post-Albuquerquean period, when the Portuguese *casado* private traders began to emerge as the favoured merchant group for the official Lusitanians in the Indian Ocean. After the death of Affonso Albuquerque, the lobbying group of private traders among the Portuguese settlers of Cochin got upper hand, under whose pressure the Portuguese officials began to target at the Marakkar traders with a view to weakening the commercial strength of the latter and thus facilitating an easy emergence for the mercantile community of the *casados* in their stead.²¹

The documents say that by the beginning of the third decade of the sixteenth century a considerable number of the Portuguese-friendly Muslims from the Marakkar and Mappila clans turned out to be pirates and started attacking Portuguese vessels with vehemence following the Portuguese high-handedness in the waters of South West India.²² In fact the Marakkar traders, who were one time suppliers of spices and mercantile collaborators for the Portuguese, underwent radical transformation from 1513 onwards and particularly during the post-Albuquerquean period. The developments of 1513, when *paradesi* and al-Karimi merchants fled en masse from Calicut to the ports of Gujarat, Vijayanagara, Hormuz and the Red Sea, following the establishment of a Portuguese base in that city after having poisoned the reigning Zamorin and installed in Calicut a pro-Lusitanian ruler in his stead,²³ favoured the commercial activities of

20 The evident case is of Timoja who said to have engaged in corsair activities by Duarte Barbosa. For details see Maria Augusta da Veiga e Souza(ed.), *O Livro de Duarte Barbosa*(Edição crítica e anotada), vol.II, Lisboa, 2000, pp.36-7.

21 Cf. Vitor Luis Gaspar Rodrigues, "O Grupo de Cochin e a Oposição a Afonso de Albuquerque:", in *Studia*, 51, Lisboa, 1992, pp.119-144; Luis Filipe Thomaz, "Diogo Pereira, O Malabar", in *Mare Liberum*, 5, 1993, pp.49-64; Genevieve Bouchon and Luis Filipe Thomaz(ed.), *Voyage dans Les Deltas du Gange et de l'Irraouaddy. Relation Portugaise Anonyme(1521)*, Paris, 1988, pp.58-68; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500-1700: A Political and Economic History*, London, 1993, p.97; Maria Emilia Madeira Santos, "Afonso de Albuquerque e os feitores", in *Actas do II Seminario Internacional de Historia Indo-Portuguesa*, ed. by Luis de Albuquerque and Inacio Guerreiro, Lisboa, 1985, pp.201-20; Pius Malekandathil, "The Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade: 1500-1663", in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Millenium (61st) Session, Kolkata, 2001,pp.384-5.

22 João de Barros, *Decadas da Asia*, IV-viii-12; Diogo do Couto, *Decadas da Asia dos feitos que os Portuguezes fizeram na Conquista e Descobrimto das Terras e Mares do Oriente*, V,-ii-4.

23 ANTT, *Chancelaria de Manuel I*, liv.II, fol.83 "Capitulos de pazes entre Afonso de Albuquerque e o Samo-

the Marakkars who eventually started appropriating the trade of the al-Karimis and began to transship spices from Kerala to the ports of the Red Sea. The commercial vacuum created in the navigational lines of maritime Kerala and the ports of Red Sea by the exodus of the al-Karimis played a vital role in the transformation of the Marakkar Muslims from being coastal traders to long-distance traders linked with the Red Sea ports. The Ottomans, who occupied Egypt in 1516/7 displacing Mamluks and their commercial allies, the al-Karimis,²⁴ began to increasingly bank upon Marakkar traders for obtaining Indian spices.²⁵ However when the Portuguese officials started attacking the Marakkar vessels and confiscating their cargo destined to Red Sea ports with a view to protecting the royal monopoly trade and at times for facilitating the commerce of the emerging *casado* traders, the commodity movements of the local Muslim merchants began to get increasingly disturbed and blocked. It was against this background that one would understand the nuanced situation of the Marakkar merchant Kuti Ali who made arrangements to send pepper to Red sea with the help of Portuguese governor Diogo Lopes Sequeira was attacked by the governor himself and his cargo was confiscated.²⁶

Being dissatisfied with such Portuguese behaviour and seeing the prospects of trading with the Ottomans in a far better way through Calicut, the leading Muslim merchants of Cochin including Kunjali Marakkar, his brother Ahmad Marakkar, their uncle Muhammadali Marakkar and their dependents shifted their base of operations from Cochin to Calicut by 1524 and began to conduct trade with Red Sea ports, besides resorting to guerrilla warfare against the Lusitanians.²⁷ Not later, Pate Marakkar, who had been a great friend and collaborator of the Portuguese in their initial days of trade also turned out to be a corsair and went to Calicut to join his nephew, Kunjali Marakkar, when his two ships sent to Cambay were captured by the Portuguese officials.²⁸

rin de Calicut”, Lisboa, 26de Fevereiro de 1515; Genevieve Bouchon, “Calicut at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century””, in *The Asian Seas 1550-1800: Local Societies, European Expansion and the Portuguese*, *Revista de Cultura*, vol.I, 1987, p.46; R.A. de Bulhão Pato(ed.), *Cartas*, tom.I,p.126. The Portuguese factory of Calicut, set up in 1513, however, was allowed to remain there only till 1525, when the Zamorin pulled it down.

24 For details see Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, London, 1973; D.S.Richards(ed.), *Islam and the Trade of Asia*, Oxford, 1970.

25 Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, pp. 113-117.

26 R.S.Whiteway, *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India:1498-1550*, New Delhi,1989, p.196; Pius Malekandathil, “Portuguese Casados and the Intra-Asian Trade” p.387.

27 Faria y Souza, *Asia Portuguesa: The History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese*, tran.by John Stevens, vol.I, London, 1695,p.284; Shaykh Zaynuddin, *Tuhfat-ul-Mujahidin*, tran. by S.Muhammad Husain Nainar, Madras, 1942,p.66; A.P.Ibrahim Kunju, *Studies in Medieval Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1975,p.60.

28 *As Gavetas de Torre do Tombo*, vol.X, Lisboa, 1975,p.577; Genevieve Bouchon, “Les Musulmans du Kerala a L’Epoque de la Découverte Portugaise”,in *Mare Luso-Indicum*, II, Paris, 1973”, pp.52-53; Diogo Couto, *Da Asia dos feitos que os Portuguezes fizeram na Conquista e Descobrimto*, *Decada V*, parte 2, p.4.

Meanwhile the Zamorin, who realized that commercial and political relationship that he had been maintaining with the Portuguese since 1513 was detrimental to his kingdom, severed ties with the Portuguese in 1525 and began to bank upon the newly arrived Marakkar merchants for reviving the trade of Calicut. Subsequently, the Marakkar clan under the leadership of Kunjali, was entrusted with the task of restructuring the commerce of Calicut with the help of his naval power, who got eventually organized into a band of privateers, interestingly at a time when the Portuguese *casado* traders were fast penetrating into the principal trade centers of Asian waters.²⁹ Concomitantly commodities from Calicut started entering the Ottoman ports of the Red Sea rather significantly, as the Gaspar Correia mentions for 1526 and 1527.³⁰

The nature of historical processes suggests that though the Marakkar traders initially moved as corsairs-cum-traders to Calicut, under the compulsions of the historical exigencies they eventually got organized into a band of privateers by the Zamorin by incorporating their navigational and commercial expertise for his political purposes. Thanks to the intervention through the stately powers of Calicut, these Marakkars got eventually transformed from being quasi sea-robbers acting on their own accord to being privateers serving the cause of a state. Usually the privateers also used similar methods as those of pirates, however they held commission or letter of *marque* from a government or monarch authorizing the capture of merchant ships belonging to an enemy nation.³¹ Though the aspects of privateering were seen very much among their activities, the Marakkars seem to have operated as something between pirate and privateers. The type of corsair activities resorted to by Kunjali and his men during this period had two forms of operations: a) to patrol the west coast of India with the tacit or explicit consent of the Zamorin, blockading and plundering the vessels of the Portuguese: b) to integrate the native trade net-works for sending spices regularly to Red Sea- Venice route. Thus the corsair activity developed by Kunjali Marakkar's men turned out to be an alternative arrangement of trade, where plundering and confiscation of enemy vessels (evidently of the Portuguese) went hand in hand with parallel shipment of commodities to the destination of their choice.³²

Meanwhile, with the increasing concentration of the Portuguese on the west coast of India, Kunjali's men started focusing considerably on the Ceylon-Coromandel-

29 Pius Malekandathil, "Portuguese *Casados* and the Intra-Asian Trade", pp.387-8.

30 Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, tomo III, parte I, pp.274-5.

31 Luis Filipe Thomaz, "Portuguese Control on the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal", pp.2-3.

32 Pius Malekandathil, *Portuguese Cochin and the Maritime Trade of India, 1500-1663* (A Volume in the South Asian Study Series of Heidelberg University, Germany), New Delhi, 2001, pp.131-2. Pyrard de Laval states that "the Zamorin has an understanding with all the Malabar pirates and that they give him money and pay a tribute underhand". Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives*, p.357.

-Malabar trade, which was traditionally a Marakkar monopoly. They were meticulously aware of the need for keeping the Gulf of Manar and the coast of Coromandel for their commercial operations, that in turn were used as intermediary base for linking Malabar ports with those of Red Sea. Meanwhile the Mappila and Marakkar merchants of Cannanore initially under the leadership of Mamale (Muhammad Ali) Marakkar and later under Poca Amame (Pokar Ahamad), Pocarallee (Pokar Ali) also started diverting commodities to Red Sea ports evading the control systems of the Portuguese. They used to transship cargo first to Maldives, from where it was further sent along with the wares coming from South East Asia through the straits of Karaidu and Haddumati to the ports of Red Sea, controlled by the Ottomans.³³ The possession of bases outside Portuguese control in fact enabled the Muslims of Calicut and Cannanore to join hands to evade the Portuguese control systems and to divert commodities to the traditional Red Sea- Venice route much more effectively. The growing Portuguese presence in south west India appeared to be a major menace for their scheme of actions and hence the Kunjali's men began to target at the Portuguese vessels plying in this region in greater frequency along with their mercantile settlements of Nagapattinam, São Tome and Pulicat .³⁴ In 1527, Pate Marakkar captured near Pulicat a Portuguese ship coming from Malacca.³⁵

The frequent attacks by Kunjali Marakkar, Kuti Ali Marakkar and Pate Markkar posed serious challenges to the various navigational lines of the Portuguese. The Portuguese for all practical purposes viewed Kunjali's men as corsairs and their attempts to control the pearl trade of Fishery coast and the cinnamon trade of Kotte invited direct confrontations with the men of Kunjali and other Muslim traders, who had been conducting trade over there for years. The attribution of the generic label of corsairs to them conveniently gave a justifiable and legitimate reason for the Portuguese to wage a series of wars against them till these commercial competitors were exterminated. Finally in 1539 Kunjali and his Marakkar allies were chased and defeated by the Portuguese at Vedalai and Negombo and the first Kunjali and Pate Marakkar were beheaded, shattering temporarily the corsair and privateering networks of Kunjali and his allies.³⁶

33 Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea: Cannanore's Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507-1528*, trans.by Louise Shackley, Delhi, 1988, pp.119,142,161-2; See also Pius Malekandathil, "The Maritime Trade of Cannanore and the Global Commercial Revolution in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in *Cannanore in the Maritime History of India*, ed. by M.O.Koshy, Kannur University Publications, Kannur, 2002, pp.46-50.

34 João de Barros, *Decadas da Asia*, Decada IV, parte 4,p.25.

35 Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, tom.III,Lisboa, 1921, p.235.

36 João de Barros, *Decadas da Asia* , Decada IV, liv.8, pp.12-14; Diogo Couto, *Da Asia dos feitos que os Portuguezes fizeram na Conquista e Descobrimto*, Decada V, liv.2,pp. 4-6, 8.

Merchants, Corsairs and Rulers

The inability of the Portuguese to maintain trade monopoly followed by the intensification of private trade by 1540s made many social groups of maritime India get associated with different socio-economic and political processes stemming from the gains of commodity movements. Some of the leading merchants translated their mercantile wealth for setting up stately power structures in areas controlled by them under the guise of ventures to contain the commercial expansion of the Portuguese. The early moves towards this direction were taken by the merchant chief of Cannanore who began to accumulate a considerable amount of wealth and power by developing a parallel commercial network outside the Lusitanian control systems and by keeping Maldives as the base for diversion of merchandise to the Ottoman ports of Red Sea. The wealth that the merchant chiefs of Cannanore like Mamale Marakkar and later under Poca Amame (Pokar Ahamad) and Pocarallee (Pokar Ali) accumulated by exercising control over this route was translated into political assets and for creating a kingly status for himself at Cannanore. By the time when Ali Raja came to power (1545) following the murder of Pocaralle by Belchior de Sousa, the transformation process from being a merchant chief to the head of a state had become almost absolute and complete, giving crystallization and concrete shape to his state-formation ventures at Cannanore.³⁷ However, the other side of the picture was that with the creation of a small Muslim state entity with Cannanore as base, the raja of Kolathunadu who had earlier controlled the entire region was cornered to northern territories of Karsargode.³⁸ Meanwhile, the newly acquired political status earned for Ali Raja, to a great extent, the legitimization that he required for the anti-Portuguese activities of commercial and political nature. In the changed situation the new Kunjali and his men also began to collaborate with Ali Raja in his anti-Portuguese ventures, linking the corsair realm with the quasi-legitimate networks of Ali Raja,³⁹ besides the privateering ventures of Zamorin. .

The collaboration between Ali Raja of Cannanore and Kunjali of Calicut was also evident in their joint naval and commercial ventures, as in the case of their operations in 1564. In that year, when Ali Raja and his Muslim forces attacked the Portuguese

37 Diogo Couto, *Da Asia*, Decada V, parte II, pp.431-7; Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da India*, tom.I, pp.425ff; Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, pp.151-75; Pius Malekandathil, "The Maritime Trade of Cannanore and the Global Commercial Revolution", p.44.

38 Albert Gray (ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, vol.I, London, 1887 (AES reprint, New Delhi, 2000), pp.444-5; Genevieve Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, p.173.

39 K.K.N.Kurup, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore*, Trivandrum, 1975: See Pyrard of Laval who refers to Ali Raja as being honoured and respected by merchants and corsairs. Pyrard de Laval, *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, pp.352; .445.

fort of Cannanore, Kunjali and his men took elements of conflicts to other parts of the maritime zones, which came under their direct influence. Thus in the Bay of Bhatkal, the Portuguese force proceeding to Cannanore was attacked by Kunjali and his men for the purpose of delaying timely military assistance to the Portuguese who were confronted by the fighting force of Ali Raja.⁴⁰

Meanwhile Kunjali and his men had also begun to translate a great share of the wealth that was accumulated by way of privateering and corsair activities for the purpose of setting up various institutions and tools of power exercise and for creating a stately structure in their domain, as Ali Raja had done in Cannanore. For this purpose, Kunjali had set up a fortress at Pudupattanam with storehouse of ammunitions, which was eventually made to evolve into a symbol of his power and strength.⁴¹ The liberalization of spice trade in 1570⁴² and the consequent handing over of Indo-European commerce into the hands of German as well as Italian business houses and Portuguese private traders since 1575 reduced the rigour of coastal patrolling by the Portuguese on the west coast of India, causing the intensification of piratical activities in its coastal waters.⁴³ During this period, the entire coastal strip of western India stretching from Cape Comorin to Diu was under the control of Malabar corsairs, as is evidenced by the German eye-witness of 1588.⁴⁴ This shows that though Kunjali and his men kept Pudupattanam as their base, they extended spheres of their influence and boundaries of their power exercise up to the coast of Gujarat, implementing their law and justice in weak coastal zones, where the patrolling of the Portuguese was ineffective and irregular. The Portuguese tried to contain the increasing threat of pirates by making the vessels ply in cafilas (caravans) escorted by Portuguese armada.⁴⁵ However the advantage of cafila system was benefited chiefly by the Portuguese private traders, who used it to protect and safeguard the commodities brought from the eastern space of Indian Ocean to the Portuguese ports on the west coast of India.⁴⁶ Despite this protective arrangement, the thriving trade lines of the *casados* formed the chief target of Marakkar attacks during this period.

40 F.C.Danvers, *The Portuguese in India*, vol.I, New Delhi, 1988, pp.528-9.

41 See the picture of Kunjali's fortress in Luis da silveira(ed.), *Livro das Plantas, Fortalezas, Cidades e Povoações do Estado da India Oriental*, Lisboa, 1991, p.86.

42 Francisco P.Mendes da Luz, *O Conselho da India, Lisboa*, 1952, pp.73-4; Vicente Almeida d'Eça, *Normas Economicas na Colonização Portuguesa ate 1808*, Coimbra, 1921, chapter II.

43 Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, Münster, 1999,

44 Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Cod. 8961, fol. 891-2, letter dated 15-12-1588.

45 M.N.Pearson, *Merchant and Rulers in Gujarat, the Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1976, p. 46.

46 Pius Malekandathil, "The Mercantile Networks and the International Trade of Cochin", in *Rivalry and Conflict: European Traders and Asian Trading Networks*, edited by Ernst van Veen and L.Blusse, Leiden University, Leiden(The Netherlands), 2006,pp.160-3.

However it was the German and Italian merchant magnates like the Fuggers, the Welsers and the Rovallescascas (who took up the Indo-European trade from the Portuguese crown on contract basis)⁴⁷ who had to bear the major brunt of the corsair activities in the waters of coastal south western India from mid 1570s till the close of the century. The cargo and the vessels of the Italian-German syndicates moving from Kerala to Lisbon were frequently attacked by corsairs both near the places of origin and terminal points: While the Malabari corsairs raised threats to them from south western coastal India, the English and Dutch “corsairs” started looting them near the Gibraltar particularly from mid-1580s onwards.⁴⁸ In 1592 *Madre de Dios* one of the ships carrying a cargo of 7,101 quintals of pepper obtained by the agents of the Fuggers from Kerala fell into the hands of the English corsairs in Atlantic and was taken to England.⁴⁹ Despite the efforts of the German contractors of Indian spice trade and the special intervention of the German Kaiser, who wrote letters to Queen Elizabeth in 1595 and 1597,⁵⁰ the cargo and the vessel were retained by the English.

However, one of the major factors that differentiated the Malabari pirates from the English corsairs in the Atlantic or the Cilician corsairs in the Mediterranean was the ability of the former to build up state structures and instruments of power exercise out of the wealth accrued from their corsair activities. The amount of power that Kunjali wielded by this time was equivalent to that of a stately ruler and the Muslims of Malabar used to “recognize him almost like their king”.⁵¹ This was further evidenced by the various power denoting titles by which Kunjali used to project himself: “Lord of the Arabian sea”, “Prince of Navigation” and “King of the Malabar Moors”.⁵² These titles were woven not out of void but out of substance of power, which Kunjali accumulated by way of maritime trade and corsair activities. With increasing stately

47 For details see M.A.Hedwig Fitzler, “Der Anteil der deutschen an der Kolonialpolitik Philipps II von Spanien in Asien”, in *VSWG*, 28,1935,pp.243-281; Reinhard Hildebrandt, *Die “Georg Fuggerischen Erben”-Kaufmännische Tätigkeit und sozialer Status, 1555-1600*, Berlin, 1966, appendix, pp.191-196; Pius Malekandathil, *The Germans, the Portuguese and India*, pp.75-85.

48 See Joaquim Vessimo Serrao, *Historia de Portugal*, vol.IV, Lisboa, 1978, pp.37-8; Julian Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy, with an History of the Rise of England as a Maritime Power*, 2 vols., London, 1898; Immanuel Wallerstein, “Dutch Hegemony in the seventeenth Century World Economy”, in *Dutch Capitalism and World Capitalism*, ed.by Maurice Aymard, London, 1982, p.102.

49 Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Cod. 8964, fols.635-6, report from Lyon, dated 16-5-1591; R.Hildebrandt, *Die ‘Georg Fuggerischen Erben’: Kaufmännische Tätigkeit und sozialer Status, 1555-1600*, Berlin, 1966, p.162.

50 For details see G.Pölnitz, *Fugger und Hanse: Ein Hundertjähriges Ringen um Ostsee und Nordsee*, Tübingen, 1953, pp.222-6.

51 Antonio de Gouveia, *Jornada do Arcebispo*, Coimbra, 1603, p. 94; See its critical English edition Pius Malekanbdathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the sixteenth Century Malabar*, Kochi, 2003, p.110.

52 Danvers, *The Portuguese in India- Being a History of the rise and Decline of their Eastern Empire*, vol. II, p. 112.

powers being added to the person of Kunjali, ‘ambassadors from the Mecca and from the powerful Muslim royal houses of India including that of the Mughals’⁵³ were sent to his court and these wider diplomatic and political tie-ups were used by Kunjali for securing for himself the legitimacy and sanction needed for his political claims and for erasing the stigma of piracy being inscribed into his identity.

These developments sent messages of caution and alarm to the Zamorin, who feared that the moves of Kunjali were to wean the entire Muslims of Malabar away from him and to keep them under the control of Kunjali’s base at Pudukattanam,⁵⁴ which ultimately would undermine his suzerainty with an alternative locus of power. The Zamorin suspected that the Kunjali’s incipient state-building ventures with a pan-Islamic connections would in course of time dwarf the actual ruler, as it happened in Cannanore, where a full-fledged state was eventually created by the trader-cum-ruler Ali Raja at the expense of the Kolathiris. Apprehensive of these developments the ruler of Calicut himself, who was the mentor of Kunjali and his men for more than fifty years turned against them, joining hands with the Portuguese.⁵⁵ Finally, as a result of the joint operation of the Zamorin’s forces and the Portuguese, Kunjali was captured and later beheaded by the Portuguese in Goa in 1600.⁵⁶ With his death and the destruction of his base at Pudukattanam, the guerilla warfare and organized corsair activities of Kunjali and his men came to an end, causing an immense loss of wealth, being accumulated over decades by way of corsair activities but locked in various devices and structures denoting the power of Kunjali. It ultimately deprived these Muslims of the ability to undertake any large scale commercial activity requiring substantial capital and ultimately shattered their dreams to establish a stately power as well as political identity in the region for a considerable period of time.⁵⁷

53 Antonio de Gouveia, *Jornada do Arcebispo*, Coimbra, 1603, p. 94; Pius Malekanbathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*, p.110.

54 It is called Marakkar Kotta by Pyrard of Laval. See Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, vol.1,347. Diogo Couto calls it Ariole. Diogo Couto, *Da Asia dos feitos que os Portuguezes fizeram na Conquista e Descobrimto*, Decada XII, liv.i, cap.xviii; livr.ii, cap.v. King of Portugal perceives Ariole as a place where “*senhores vassallos poderosos, vezinhos de Cunhale*” live and “*que lhe podem dar socorro ou impedir lho que lho nao dem...*” J.H. da Cunha Rivara, *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, fasciculo 3, New Delhi, 1992, doc.76, p.245. This is being referred to as lying across the river of Kottakkal. Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, vol.1,349-51.

55 Pyrard of Laval gives a rather objective picture when he says that the Kunjali Marakkar refused to recognize the authority of Zamorin and rebelled against him, refusing to deliver up some vessels of his subjects that he had taken. Kunjali had already antagonized the Nair chief of Ariole by driving him away from the kingdom and appropriating power over Ariole and also by cutting the nose and breasts of this Nair prince’s queen. Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives*, p.352.

56 C.R.Boxer and Frazão de Vasconcelos, *Andre Furtado de Mendonça(1559-1610)*, Lisboa, 1956, pp.21-35; Pius Malekandathil, *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes*, pp.477-85.

57 Pius Malekandathil, “From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs: The Muslim Merchants of Malabar and their

Into the Wider World of Sea-Robbers

Kunjali Marakkar's death did not put an end, however, to the activities of Malabar corsairs. Instead it gave a drastic turn to the entire programme of corsairing, as a large number of Muslim sea-farers trained in coastal warfare as well as guerilla fighting and till then held together into a relatively disciplined corsair-cum-merchant band under Kunjali got scattered along the west coast of India with Kunjali's execution, causing many of them to emerge as full-fledged sea-robbers. They started attacking the Portuguese vessels rather frequently. Some of them, while continuing their corsair activities in coastal zones frequented by the Portuguese, started also to offer their service as sailors and trading intermediaries for the other European Companies, feeding their commercial ventures, as Musa Attale did for the English in 1615.⁵⁸ The friendship between the corsairs of Malabar and the English must have been a part of the tactics to forge a commercial partnership between the forces, which opposed the Portuguese trade system.⁵⁹

Meanwhile the Malabari corsairs, being released from the formats of an organized politico-economic activity with the disappearance of Kunjali,⁶⁰ intensified their attacks on the navigational lines of the wealthy Portuguese *casado* traders returning from the eastern space of Indian Ocean. They used to attack the vessels of *casados*, torture or execute them and take away all valuables from them, which they turned into cargo for their trading activities. Very often the robbed items from the Portuguese private traders and attractive wares obtained from their vessels were sold by these corsairs in the market of Calicut, as is testified by Pietro della Valle in 1624.⁶¹

The Malabar corsairs settled along the vast coastline stretching from Cangelotte(Kaniyiramkodu near Kasarkodu)⁶² to Calicut and their core area was around Kotta river. Muttungal, a port located in the midway between Cannanore and Calicut was one of the major havens for these corsairs, who were predominantly Muslims but ruled by a Nair chieftain.⁶³ Chombal and Vadakara were the other two major ports dominated by corsairs in the northern and southern parts of Muttungal.⁶⁴ The corsairs had to pay

Responses to Portuguese Maritime Trade Expansion(1498-1600)", in *Portuguese Studies Review*, vol.12, no.1, Winter-Spring, 200-5, pp.92-3.

58 William Foster(ed.), *The Voyage of Nicholas Downton to the East Indies:1614-1615*, London, 1939, p.25

59 Pius Malekandathil, *Maritime India: Trade, Religion and Polity in the Indian Ocean*, pp.138-9.

60 After the beheading of Kunjali Marakkar, nobody was appointed to that post of naval admiral by the Zamorin. However the son of Kunjali used to change his residence periodically between Pudukattanam (Marakkar Kotta) and Chombal. Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives*,p.357.

61 Edward Grey(ed.), *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1991, p.362.

62 Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, vol.I, p.344; *Livros das Monções*, II, p.352.

63 Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval*, vol.I, pp.336-7.

64 *Ibid.*, p.338.

a share of their booty appropriated from the Portuguese vessels to their local rulers of these regions, besides to Zamorin and Kunjali Marakkar, while the rest was equally divided.⁶⁵ Though the Portuguese repeatedly tried to conquer these four centres of corsair concentration in Malabar,⁶⁶ they still continued to be the havens for pirates for a considerable period of time because of the support that they used to get from the local rulers in return for the booty that they often shared with the latter.

Eventually with the entry of different European powers into the waters of Indian Ocean and consequent increase in the volume of maritime trade, the number of corsairs and their operations got considerably intensified. In the beginning of the seventeenth century Pyrard de Laval observed that ‘every year many thousand men used to leave the Zamorin’s country to do their robberies on the sea...’⁶⁷. Meanwhile the Malabari pirates also started traveling in caravans and in large numbers, probably for the purpose of effectively confronting the larger European vessels equipped with guns and artilleries. Jean Baptiste Tavernier says that these corsairs habitually sailed in squadrons of 10 to 15 with 200 to 250 men on board each. There were also occasions when the Malabari corsairs resorted to 25 to 30 vessels, as it happened when they attacked the English captain Clerc.⁶⁸ Abbé Carré who traveled along the coast of India during the period between 1672 and 1674 says that attacks from *Sangani* or the Malabar pirates were frequent in the Gulf of Cambay.⁶⁹

Abbé Carré says that Kotta, near Tellicherry was the headquarters of a considerable number of Malabari pirates.⁷⁰ From Kotta, they extended piratical activities to entire west coast of India with the northern terminal point being Gulf of Cambay.⁷¹ Abbé Carré also refers to the island of l’arrous (meaning land with thieves) which was located 7 miles south of Gogha and from where the inhabitants fled en masse to other safer places because of frequent raids of Malabari pirates.⁷² The depopulation and desertion of the island of l’arrous due to corsair attacks has parallel in the Mediterranean, where the island of Pianosa located near Corsica and Lisbos was totally depopulated and the edifices and castles demolished because of frequent attacks from Barbary corsairs during this period.⁷³ However, in the Indian Ocean Gogha seems to have occupied a singular position as being the major halting center for the Malabari pirates moving

65 Ibid., pp.345-6.

66 Ibid., p.349.

67 Ibid., p.357.

68 V.Ball(ed.), *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, vol.I, London, 1889, pp.177-8.

69 Abbé Carré, *The Travels of Abbe Carre in India and the Near East 1672 to 1674*, tran. By Lady Fawcett and ed.by Charles Fawcett and Richard Burn, New Delhi, 1990, p.130.

70 Ibid., p. 701.

71 Ibid., pp.130; 180;186;201.

72 Ibid., p.138.

73 Ibid., p.22.

between Malabar and Cambay. While referring to these Muslims of Gogha, Abbé Carré comments that they used to live haphazardly sometimes at war, sometimes as bandits and sometimes as sea men, without any rule to guide them.⁷⁴ This seems to epitomize the very nature of the corsairs in operation on the west coast of India during this period.

Vazhunnavar of Vadakara and Strategies of Legitimization

Abbé Carré states that Vadakara located about 13 miles south of Tellicherry was the home of the richest pirates on the Malabar coast,⁷⁵ which fact was further testified by several other European sources. He also refers to the Sheikh of Vadakara as having linkages with corsair activities.⁷⁶ However the many of the European sources including the Dutch writings refer to a local Hindu chieftain, Vazhunnavar of Vadakara, as the chief protector and lord of pirates in northern Malabar in the second half of seventeenth and first half of eighteenth centuries.⁷⁷

Both Vazhunnavar of Vadakara and Ali Raja of Cannanore used to compete themselves to control the activities of Mappilas of Dharmapattanam, who combined in themselves the roles of traders and pirates. However the Mappilas of Dharmapattanam, who were linked very much with the corsairs of Vadakara were bitter enemies of Ali Raja refusing themselves to be subjugated to the latter.⁷⁸ In 1682 Ali Raja tried to appropriate the title of Karthavu (chieftain) of Dharmapattanam, by assassinating the reigning chieftain, probably with a view to controlling the corsairs of Dharmapattanam for the purpose of feeding his trading networks.⁷⁹ However the rightful successor mobilizing help from his men and the pirates of Vadakara managed to expel Ali Raja from Dharmapattanam,⁸⁰ allowing it to remain as a terrain of corsairs as ever.

It was the increasing movement of commodities by various European commercial companies that intensified corsair phenomena on the coast of northern Kerala during this period. The chief reason for the emergence of Kotta, Dharmapattanam and

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., p.703.

76 Ibid., p.703.

77 Albert Gray(ed.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyard of Laval*, vol.I, pp.344-8; Abbé Carré, *The Travels of Abbe Carre in India and the Near East*, p.703; Alexander Hamilton, *A New account of the East Indies, Being the Observations and Remarks of Capt. Alexander Hamilton*, vol.II, New Delhi, 1995, pp.301-5; Vazhunnavar of Vadakara is equated with the raja of Kadathanadu.

78 Binu M.John, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore: Status and Identity at the Interface of Commercial and Political Expansion 1663-1723*, Unpublished Ph. D. thesis submitted to Department of History, Leiden University (the Netherlands), 2007, p.162.

79 Ibid., p.167 ; *English Factories(1678-84)*, p. 394.

80 Binu M.John, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore: Status and Identity at the Interface of Commercial and Political Expansion.*, p.167.

Vadakara as the havens of pirates was that these places were located on the main strategic points of the European navigational lines in Kerala. In fact these bases were situated in the close vicinity of the French factory of Mahe, English factory of Tellicherry and the Dutch factory of Cannanore. Vessels moving to these factories were attacked and looted by these corsairs with much ease, as the patrolling of the coast by European forces was very irregular and inefficient at this point of time.

With the increasing accumulation of wealth from corsair activities, Vazhunnanvar of Vadakara also wanted to have a social status and position corresponding to his wealth. He wanted to get the stigma of being the lord of pirates erased and to make himself acceptable before the world of law as a political ruler, for which he made strenuous efforts to keep himself associated with the Dutch, who represented the realm of legitimacy during those years. As a part of this attempt, Vazhunnanvar expressed his readiness to provide the Dutch company with a trade settlement and a fort built in his land (Vadakara) at his own cost. He realized that such a move would clear his land of pirates and would give a clean chit to his political credibility, besides putting forward a legal claim to the profit from regional trade.⁸¹ He had already emerged so much as a “man of prowess” in the region by this time that even Kolathiri requested Vazhunnanvar of Vadakara in 1687 to interfere in and settle the conflicts that appeared among the princes of Kolathunadu in matters of assertion of power in the region. In 1701 the commander Abraham Wink wrote to XVII Heren that the then Vazhunanar was a very respectable person and was very much different from his ancestors, who had earlier been patrons of pirates.⁸²

The foregoing discussions throw some light into the nature and content of the corsair activities attributed to the Malabari sea-farers, who combined in themselves the roles of pirates, corsairs, guerrilla warriors and traders. The Portuguese using the notions of *mare clausum* developed certain legal perceptions by which the nature of criminality in the waters of Indian Ocean was re-defined and everyone who conducted trade in the Indian Ocean resisting their supremacy was viewed as a pirate. Their perceptions of pirates included principally seafarers involved in privateering, or in corsairing or in corsair-cum-trading activities with elements of guerrilla fighting. With the shifting of commercial activities from Cochin to Calicut, the Marakkar traders combined in themselves elements of guerrilla fighting, making themselves fit for serving the privateering needs of the Zamorin. Under Kunjali Marakkar, the corsairs and Muslim traders were transformed into relatively organized and disciplined band of

81 Letter of Kunju Kurupp the *regedor* of Vazhunnanvar quoted by Binu M John, *The Ali Rajas of Cannanore: Status and Identity at the Interface of Commercial and Political Expansion*, p. 174.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

guerrilla fighters ready to execute the command of the Zamorin both for attacking the vessels of the Portuguese and to create space for transshipping cargo to Red Sea ports. Kunjali succeeded in linking their ventures with those of Ali Raja, who carved out a stately structure at Cannanore out of the wealth accrued by controlling the trade with Red Sea, channelized through Maldives. Eventually Kunjali Marakkar also transferred wealth accumulated out of corsair-cum-trading activities for setting up instruments and tools of power exercise at Pudupattanam, besides appropriating for themselves power-denoting titles.

The entire process seems to have been to appropriate a social and political status befitting their wealth. These political developments were meant to create a new identity for Kunjali Marakkar that would make him acceptable before the legitimate world and thus to ably resist the Portuguese commercial expansion. However the Zamorin suspecting the development of a parallel power center right under his nose, joined hands with the Portuguese to capture Kunjali and facilitated the Portuguese to carry out his execution, shattering the dreams of the Marakkar trading cum-corsair group to set up a state. The execution of Kunjali led to the loosening and scattering of the trader-cum-corsairs from the organizational frame controlled by a leader to different parts of coastal western India as disorganized guerrilla warriors, where they began to get engaged in full-fledged piracy. Despite the world of criminality, within which they operated, there was an increasing desire among these pirates to obtain acceptability and legitimacy by getting linked with legitimate rulers. Such a move made the pirates of Vadakara get linked with the Vazhunnavar, who in turn tried to legitimize his position as a man of prowess by getting himself associated with the Dutch. By offering political and commercial help to the Dutch, the Vazhunnavar tried to project himself as a legitimate ruler of the region and tried to erase the stigma that had fallen upon them for years as protector and lord of pirates of northern Malabar. We find that participation in political processes and involvement in state formation ventures were increasingly resorted to by the corsairs and pirates to legitimize their position and to project themselves before world of law including the European commercial companies in an acceptable and justifiable way. The legitimization processes resorted to by them seem to have secured the political acceptability and credibility that they desired for the restructuring of their new identities, and we find that prominent politico-economic players of the times like the Ottoman officials of Mecca and Mughal ruler Akbar sending ambassadors to the court of Kunjali by the end of sixteenth century while the Dutch eagerly seeking commercial and political partnerships with the former lord of pirates, the Vazhunnavar of Vadakara, by the end of the seventeenth century. Thus it was their ability to convert the wealth accumulated from corsair-

-cum-trading activities into political assets that helped them to get constructed for themselves an image by which they were de-linked from the world of criminality, but made acceptable to others as legitimate rulers or possessors and sharers of power in their respective areas of control.