Author’s Acknowledgement

I pay humble homage to my Guru, Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair¹, for inspiring me, and countless others.

Once, Dr. K. Bhaskaran Nair² and I were travelling together by car from Kannur by way of Pazhayangadi to Neeleswaram to attend a cultural event. On the way that great scholar wanted to know more about the places we were passing, a topic of exceeding interest to me. I spoke at length about Sankara Kavi’s Pallikkunnu, the palaces of the Kolathiris, Kalarivathukkal, Valapattanam, Madayi mosque, Thiruvirakatt Kavu, Payyannur and so on. On our return trip, Dr. Nair commanded me to write down all those stories and get them published. Every time he saw me after that he would enquire on the progress.

When I happened to mention this to Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair, he said he had had the same thought and wanted me to get on with the task, promising all help in this noble endeavour. Unfortunately I did not have the support of his priceless advice and store of information for long as he passed away shortly after that.

Kolathunad, in northern Kerala, is abundant in legends, myths and stories of historical events handed down over millennia by way of our age old oral tradition. Over generations, the universal appeal of these stories has not dimmed, and my earnest wish that such a record of our past be documented for the future resulted in this book.

None of these stories are mine, nor do they belong to anyone. What I have heard and read, I have collated, and it is possible that some of these stories might have been documented in some form or the other,

¹ Historian & folklorist Chirakkal T. Balakrishnan Nair (1907-1977), son of Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma Valiya Rajah of Chirakkal and Thayyil Kalyanikutty Valiya Kettilamma.

² Dr.K. Bhaskaran Nair (1913-1982), literary critic, science writer, member of the Kendra Sahitya Academy.
Foreword

Sri Vanidas Elayavoor is well known as a poet, writer, scholar, orator and historian but, by documenting and recording these stories and legends of northern Kerala, he has surpassed himself. His efforts at collating the oral traditions of the various regions like Kolathunad, a cultural entity by itself; of Kadathanad, the land of the northern ballads; and of Alladathu Swaroopam which was never free of the incursions of its neighbours, must be recognised for the important objective of preserving these intangible remnants of our heritage for generations to come.

If Kottarathil Sankunni had not taken the initiative of recording the centuries old legends of southern Kerala, handed down orally over generations and published them as the Aithihyamala, there is every possibility that this treasure trove from the past, that ‘archaeology of knowledge’, might have been lost to us forever. The radical changes brought about by the fast modernisation and urbanisation of present day Kolathunad might have resulted in the eventual loss of this aspect of our heritage if not for this monumental effort taken in documenting them.

There could be those who would question the relevance of such irrational and incredible stories and myths in this day and age; and (the perceived lack of) benefit to mankind. In addition to past records, traditions and beliefs handed down over generations help us understand and trace the roots of a race or a society and their gradual evolution and progress. A particular society did not manufacture myths and fables and hand them down to their progeny as myths and fables; neither did they manufacture such stories and beliefs with a far sighted and structured attempt at disseminating knowledge and function.

We have managed to evolve some theories now which help us understand the social background behind the origin of such myths, among them ‘functionalism’ propounded by Bornislav Malinowsky. Likewise, scholars like Levi Strauss have tried to explain the social beliefs
‘Next follow the Narœ\(^1\) enclosed by the loftiest of the Indian mountains ...
... The poorer king of the Charmœ\(^2\) has but 60 elephants, and his force is otherwise insignificant.’

**Megasthenes**

*Greek Ambassador to the court of the Emperor Chandragupta Maurya*  
*(before 298 or 297 BCE).*

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1 The Nayars of Malabar (Wigram).
2 The Kingdom of the Cheras.
The word *Aithihyam* refers to events of the past or *purvavritta*, part historical fact, part myth, and originates from the Sanskrit word *Itihasa* (*Iti Hi Aasa*) which roughly translates as ‘like this, it might have been’. Traditional lore, legend, myth - call them what you will, these manifestations of human culture, carried forward through millennia primarily in oral form, acquired different dimensions and perspectives across generations, and at each narration. As pointed out by the author, some of these stories may represent superstitious, irrational beliefs, and there could possibly be different versions for certain narratives.

Translators across the ages have run into difficulties finding the right word or phrase to accurately convey the precise meaning and subtlety of the original text. And in this particular work there have been innumerable such instances. For example, the phrase ‘onninu noorumeni vilayunna Kolathuvayal’ literally means ‘the field in Kolathunad that yields 100 grains of rice for every grain sown’. A *yakshi* is popularly depicted as a blood sucking vampire or a human flesh eating evil ghoul who lured her (invariably middle aged male) victims to their gory ends by disguising herself as a beautiful young seductress (there must have been a moral message here!). But in the Indian context this would be too simplistic, yakshis being both good and evil supernatural beings, semi-celestial even (many temples in Kerala have sub-shrines with yakshis as deities), guardians of hidden treasure, capable of granting boons; in short, closer to a form of elves in Germanic mythology. By way of translation as well as transliteration, I have tried my best to communicate the intended meaning and any shortcomings may be excused. Though diacritics were used at first, Dr. V.R.Prabodhachandran Nayar (see Acknowledgements) advised against it. Obviously, considering the nature of this work, a literal translation was and is not the solution, so, unlike the author, I have had to make minor corrections and deviate on certain aspects from the original text while trying to retain the essence of each story.
‘Rice is produced here (Babattan’) and is exported to Sarandib.?’

Abu’l-Qasim Ubaydallah ibn Abdallah ibn Khordadbeh
(820-912 CE)

‘Jurbatan’ is a populous town on a small gulf. It produces rice and grain in large quantities and supplies provisions to the markets of Serendib. There is much pepper cultivated in the mountains.’

Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani al-Sabti
(1099–1165 or 1166 CE)

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1 Valapattanam near Kannur.
2 Sri Lanka.
3 Srikantapuram near Kannur.